

The Godwinian psychology of hope and its legacy in the work of Percy  
Shelley and Mary Shelley

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*Abstract*

This thesis examines the work of William Godwin in terms of a conjunction between secular Enlightenment optimism and the psychology of Christian hope. This conjunction produced his particular inflection of human perfectibility, where the idea of liberal improvement in society becomes a semi-fictional narrative of faith. This political philosophy is developed alongside a Dissenting literary theory that understands literature as discussion, locating the means of improvement in the written text's influence over the mind of the reader. Godwin's interest in altering the mindset of his readership as a means of political improvement sees him emphasise the idea of hope in his novels, seeking to sustain the progressive project through literature in the face of the rise of anti-Jacobinism and Malthusian political economy in the late 1790s.

Percy Shelley defined his literary project as an attempt to revive liberal hope in the wake of the 'failure' of the French Revolution, a definition initiated by his reading of Godwin. His reaction against Wordsworthian conservatism is framed in the terms of Godwinian psychology. Percy Shelley's theories on the poet as 'legislator' emerge from his encounter with Godwin's ideas on reader-response as the vehicle of improvement. However, there is also a reaction against Godwinian hope, which sees Percy Shelley explore a countervailing anti-humanist disappointment.

A key theme of Mary Shelley's novels is the persistence of Godwinian hope. She discusses Godwinian ideas on benevolence and the absence of innate disposition to crime as a means of reviving the progressive project. While Mary Shelley explores the collapse of liberal optimism, she makes a paradoxical attempt to sustain Godwinian hope through a disappointed lament for its demise.

The thesis contends that the work of these authors constituted a coherent debate on the liberal Enlightenment, forming an important presence in British literary culture from 1793 up to the verge of the first Reform Bill in 1832.

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## *Introduction*

### I

Early in the second volume of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), the reader encounters one of the dramatic centrepieces of the novel. Frankenstein, tormented by the death of his brother at the hands of the being he has created, attempts to find solace in the sublime landscape of Montanvert. Ascending to the summit of the glacier, he sees a shape moving toward him with 'superhuman speed', bounding over the crevices in the ice. As the shape draws nearer, Frankenstein realises that it is the being he had created. He sees that the Creature's 'countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes'.<sup>1</sup> Filled with rage, Frankenstein springs upon the Creature and cries that he wishes to trample him to dust and take vengeance against him for his diabolical murders. The Creature then speaks to his creator.

Throughout the first volume, Mary Shelley has worked within the traditions of the Gothic novel, offering the reader a tale of pursuit, murder and horror. The Creature has been glimpsed only briefly in the scene which details his creation. The reader knows him primarily through his terrible acts: the murder of young William, which leads to the execution of Frankenstein's sister, the innocent Justine. However, the Creature's first words mark a shift in the novel's tenor. His speech begins with a warning to Frankenstein, but then begins to engage the reader's sympathy, disrupting their perception of this character:

Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine; my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am

irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the first volume the Creature has repeatedly been pictured as a ‘monster’. Yet we now encounter an unexpected moral vocabulary. The criminal might be redeemed; he might be made ‘virtuous’. It was, the Creature claims, the circumstances of his life which made him wicked; he possessed no innate disposition to evil. He goes on to repeat that before his descent into crime: ‘I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity’.<sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley places great stress upon the notion that the Creature was originally ‘benevolent’, that the criminal once possessed an altruistic compassion for others. The encounter on Montanvert is crucial to the scheme of *Frankenstein*, entirely altering the moral outlook of the novel. It invites the reader to consider a set of arguments on humanity’s disposition to benevolence; on the absence of any disposition to selfishness or malevolence; and on the formation of character by social circumstance. A bleak tale of murder and criminality is suddenly interrupted when Mary Shelley introduces, in the Creature’s speech, a sense of liberal optimism.

The liberal, reformist character of *Frankenstein* was emphasised by Percy Shelley in a review of the novel intended for publication in Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner*. He referred to the Creature’s ‘original goodness’ and suggested that the work’s ‘direct moral’ was a clear and definitive one: ‘[n]or are the crimes and malevolence of the single Being, tho’ indeed withering and tremendous, the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow inevitably from certain causes adequate to their production’.<sup>4</sup> Percy Shelley proceeds to argue that such doctrines will influence the mind of the reader who encounters them, believing of the portrait of the Creature that ‘there is perhaps no reader [...] who will not feel a responsive string touched in his inmost soul’.<sup>5</sup> This interest in the response of the reader is echoed in the Preface to the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, also written by Percy Shelley, in which the author declares his concern with ‘the manner in which whatever moral tendencies exist in the sentiments or characters it contains shall affect the reader’.<sup>6</sup>

Mary Shelley’s description of the encounter on the summit of Montanvert and Percy Shelley’s review of the novel raise a set of important contentions. There is an emphasis on liberal, progressive theories of human nature and on the educative effect

these theories might have on the mind of the reader. In this key regard, the collaborative project of *Frankenstein* is heavily marked by the influence of the political and literary thought of William Godwin. The Creature's speech, with its use of terms such as 'justice', 'benevolent' and 'virtuous', makes overt Mary Shelley's debt to the moral theory set out in Godwin's philosophical treatise, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). The status of *Frankenstein* as a Godwinian work has been discussed by William St Clair in his essay 'The Impact of *Frankenstein*' and, most recently, in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*.<sup>7</sup> St Clair has returned to contemporary publishers' records to claim that the 1818 text was not widely available to the reading public and that its original reformist message was thus rapidly travestied by a slew of popular stage adaptations.

Critical interpretations of the work of Mary and Percy Shelley have often detached themselves from the context of the Godwinian theory of progress. Yet the manner in which Godwin translated the progressive hopes of the radical Enlightenment into a type of secular faith formed a crucial intellectual stimulus in the literary careers of both. Throughout Godwin's work, the word 'hope' is used with a specific ideological inflection; expressing a belief in the Enlightenment idea of human perfectibility, a conviction in humanity's inexorable progress towards a society of universal justice and equality. The stress laid upon this word 'hope' illustrates how he transposed external political concerns into the terms of interior psychological experience. The key dynamic in Godwin's literary project involves an attempt to foster this psychology of hope within the mind of the individual reader.

The first part of the thesis will discuss Godwin's intent to propagate the psychology of hope through philosophical and political treatise, novels, and essays. The psychology of hope is first a faculty encountered within Godwin's work, encompassing his attachment to a set of Enlightenment humanist doctrines: the formation of character by social circumstance; humanity's disposition to benevolence; and a consequent belief in the idea of human perfectibility, in the notion that growth in human knowledge brings gradual progress in politics and ethics. In *Political Justice*, Godwin set out his optimistic conviction in the process of human 'improvement', declaring that humanity is progressing towards an egalitarian anarchist society without government founded on individual benevolence, virtue and the universal apprehension of the general good. The psychology of hope is secondly a

faculty which Godwin seeks to stimulate within the reader. His writings constitute a series of educative addresses intended to secure the process of gradual improvement through the agency of literature upon the mind of the individual reader. The second part of the thesis will discuss the legacy of Godwin's psychology of hope in the work of Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley. Percy Shelley's poetic project, defined expressly against a contemporary mood of progressive disappointment engendered by the perceived failure of the French Revolution, shows a concern for literature as a means of directing readers towards a hope for improvement that derives directly from the example of Godwin. Many of Mary Shelley's novels, often interpreted as conservative warnings against the excesses of radical utopianism, are in fact nuanced and ambiguous studies of Godwin's particular strand of liberal optimism. While she remains sceptical of his conviction in the material effects of hope, her encounter with his brand of radical Enlightenment humanism provided the stimulus for her most important work.

This thesis takes a historicist approach to the work of Godwin and the Shelleys, viewing their engagement with contemporary philosophy and politics through the idea of hope as the most important aspect of their work. Historicist criticism of the literature of the Romantic Period has only relatively recently begun to confront the era's key intellectual context, the thought of the Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup> In discussing the Godwinian psychology of hope, it is sometimes necessary to speak of 'the Enlightenment', thus eliding the gulf in political and philosophical outlook between, for example, the Scottish and French Enlightenments. However, we might take Peter Gay's definition as a general guide. He characterises the Enlightenment as 'a family of intellectuals united by a single style of thinking', as a 'vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism, and freedom, above all, freedom in its many forms - freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade'.<sup>9</sup> This program is of crucial importance in the work of Godwin, Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley, being adopted and critiqued to varying extents by each. At points in their work, we see that radical Enlightenment political beliefs become a self-sustaining ideology which denies history in a similar manner to the Romantic Ideology identified by Jerome McGann.<sup>10</sup> Godwin and Percy Shelley in particular look to ideas of perfectibility and equality as offering a kind of transcendence which might act as a remedy for the present ills of practical politics.



## II

Before further mapping out the literary and political connections between Godwin and the Shelleys, we should consider in greater detail the nature of, and the intellectual roots of, the Godwinian psychology of hope. We must look in particular at Godwin's grounding in the traditions of Protestant Dissent and at his interest in the French Enlightenment. At an early stage of the first edition of *Political Justice*, we find Godwin's first discussion of his literary project as a contribution to the process of 'improvement'. His speculation that there may in the future be universal agreement on the science of government provides an insight into the purpose of his political treatise:

Men may one day feel that they are partakers of a common nature, and that true freedom and perfect equity, like food and air, are pregnant with benefit to every constitution. If there be the faintest hope that this shall be the final result, then certainly no subject can inspire to a sound mind such generous enthusiasm, such enlightened ardour and such invincible perseverance.<sup>11</sup>

Godwin strays into territory beyond that of the orthodox political treatise. Describing a state of 'true freedom and perfect equity', he dwells on the psychological effects to be gained from contemplating that state. The faculty of 'hope' is already positioned at the heart of his enterprise; his emphasis is on interior mental experience as much as external reality. The hope of improvement will stimulate in the 'sound mind' the states of 'generous enthusiasm', 'enlightened ardour' and 'invincible perseverance'. Implicitly, the purpose of *Political Justice* is seen to lie in its psychological effects. In his choice of vocabulary, Godwin equates the hope for progress towards a state of freedom and equality with Christian experience; specifically, the words 'enthusiasm' and 'ardour' are drawn from the vocabulary of Protestant Dissent.<sup>12</sup> 'Enthusiasm' in particular becomes a key term in his political vocabulary throughout his literary career, as we shall see. Often caricatured as an arch-rationalist, Godwin seems at this early stage of *Political Justice* to define the purpose of the treatise as that of stimulating an extra-rational 'enthusiasm' for justice. Through hope, he seeks to instil in the reader of 'sound mind' an 'invincible perseverance' in their attachment to notions of improvement.

This preoccupation with the psychology of reader-response is also evident in the Preface to *Political Justice*, in which Godwin speaks of being ‘desirous of producing a work, from the perusal of which no man should rise without being strengthened in habits of sincerity, fortitude and justice’.<sup>13</sup> He records his wish to create a work which will act directly upon the mind of the reader, producing a material effect upon their consciousness. The word ‘strengthened’ imagines the relationship between written text and reader as a physical one. The work’s effect on the reader is registered in the increase of republican ‘habits of sincerity, fortitude and justice’. For Godwin, the psychology of reader-response is always intimately associated with notions of political improvement. His phrasing in the Preface to *Political Justice* recalls his letter to Thomas Paine after the publication of the first part of *Rights of Man*, written two years earlier in 1791. There, he had praised Paine’s work by offering an idealised vision of reader-response:

It does not confine itself, as an injudicious answer would have done, to a cold refutation of Mr. Burke’s errors, but with equal discernment and philanthropy, embraces every opportunity of impressing the finest principles of liberty upon the hearts of mankind. It is perhaps impossible to rise from perusing it without feeling one’s self both wiser and better. The seeds of revolution it contains are so vigorous in their stamina, that nothing can overpower them.<sup>14</sup>

Again, Godwin’s emphasis is on the psychological effects of the written text and on the material benefits of those psychological effects.

The issue of reader-response was at the core of his venture into imaginative fiction. In the Preface to the 1832 edition of his novel *Fleetwood*, Godwin offered an account of the composition of his earlier novel *Caleb Williams; or, Things As They Are* (1794) which described the work’s projected impact upon the reader:

It must be admitted, however, that during the whole period, bating a few intervals, my mind was in a high state of excitement. I said to myself a thousand times, ‘I will write a tale that shall constitute an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it, shall ever be exactly the same man that he was before’. - I put these things down just as they happened, and with the most entire frankness.<sup>15</sup>

From the standpoint of 1832, Godwin cleanses any political intent from the creation of the novel. But he still retains some conception of the manner in which he had sought

to bring about a material change ‘in the mind of the reader’ through his fiction. The intent to irrevocably alter the mind of the reader remains consistent between political treatise and imaginative fiction.

Godwin’s concern with frankness, candour and the interior psychology of reader-response should be understood as evidence of his grounding in the culture of Protestant Dissent. The connection with the psychology of Dissenting religious experience is central to Godwin’s political philosophy and to the intellectual legacy which he passed on to the Shelleys. The relationship with Dissent has been fundamental to several analyses of *Political Justice*, with William Stafford the first to argue for its determining influence in his claim that the treatise was an expression of ‘dissenting religion translated into politics’.<sup>16</sup> Stafford asserts that Godwin’s concern for the benevolent motives of actions, rather than simply for the consequences of actions, derived from the Calvinist moralist Jonathan Edwards and distinguished the ethical theory of *Political Justice* from that of Benthamite utilitarianism. He also suggests that the general pattern of thought in the treatise, of pessimism over the present corruption of society contrasted with optimism for its future renovation, is a product of Godwin’s exposure in early life to the Calvinistic thought of Congregationalism and Sandemanianism, to Calvinism’s ‘sense of an infinite distance between divine perfection and corrupt, sinful nature’.<sup>17</sup>

Gregory Claeys also identified the culture of Dissent as a shaping influence on Godwin’s idea of political justice and his critique of democracy in two key essays published in the 1980s. He suggested that Godwin began *Political Justice* with the intention of assigning government a central role in the administration of justice, but was led, partly through the influence of Edwards, to argue that government can play no role in making men virtuous and that collective activity must be replaced by the principle of private judgement.<sup>18</sup> Godwin thus defines political justice, Claeys observes, as ‘the resumption by society of the positive role of government, the rewarding of virtue’.<sup>19</sup> In the later discussion of how *Political Justice* anticipated elements of socialist theory in its criticisms of representative democracy, Claeys cites Godwin’s interest in both classical republicanism and contemporary Dissenting notions of moral government set free from the usual mechanisms of state power. He emphasises the latter strand of thought:

If, for example, one of the Dissenters' most essential principles was the exclusion of government from interference in matters of religious conscience, Godwin can be understood as having extended this principle to include a proscription of interference in *all* forms of thought (and this indeed is the real basis of his 'anarchism').<sup>20</sup>

Positioned at the crossroads of Dissenting and republican thought, Godwin saw large-scale democratic republics as incapable of stimulating virtue in their participants. The individual conscience was likely to be overshadowed by mass opinion and the authority of the state. Sincerity, openness and justice could only be maintained through personal relations, through reciprocal moral supervision between individuals, and thus only through a small-scale nation state.

Mark Philp built upon the arguments of Stafford and Claeys in one of the most influential accounts of *Political Justice*, claiming that Godwin's upbringing and later immersion in the social circles of Dissent produced the anarchistic tenets of his political thought.<sup>21</sup> He asserts that the influence of the culture of Dissent, one which disavowed subjection to the external authority of priesthood and prized the individual's inner relationship with God, led Godwin to situate private judgement as the supreme criterion of political justice; that his grounding in Protestant thought caused him to define the ultimate goal of political improvement as an anarchist society in which self-determining individuals with an apprehension of justice exist without the external coercion of government. Philp explains Godwin's faith in the omnipotence of truth when revealed to the individual mind by equating it with the Dissenting notion of the individual revelation of God's light. The Dissenting emphasis on the education of the individual through debate and discussion is the animus for the political principles of *Political Justice* in Philp's summation: 'it is through the practice of private judgment and public discussion that we come to recognise and act upon moral truths'.<sup>22</sup>

While Philp and Claeys have valuably discussed how the culture of Dissent shaped the substance of Godwin's political philosophy, there remains a need to acknowledge that the presentation of political in argument in *Political Justice* and the novels is shaped by the particular psychology of Dissenting religious thought. Though Godwin had lost his religious faith by the time he attained success in his literary career, the Calvinist structures of thought developed in early life persisted, and came to

determine the manner in which he expressed his political beliefs. The progress towards a society of benevolence, equality and justice foreseen in the treatise involves the reader in a psychology of hope similar to that found in Calvinist discussions of salvation. The experience of Calvinistic Puritan and Dissenting doctrine, with its binary division between election and reprobation, led the individual believer to seek the psychological assurance that would guarantee he was one of the elect.<sup>23</sup> Assurance of salvation was not to be found externally in good works or the ministrations of clergy, but within the soul of the individual. Hope was a necessity for the believer, for Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* had cited doubt and weakness of faith as evidence of reprobation. But while orthodox Calvinism understood grace and faith as arbitrary gifts from God, seeing the believer as passive, moderate Calvinists asserted that salvation might be won through active faith. Godwin, trained as a minister in an academy which based its curriculum around the moderate thought of the great Dissenting educationalist Philip Doddridge, introduced secularised notions of hope and psychological assurance into his discussion of politics, often seeking to confirm the reader in progressive faith by asserting the strength of benevolence as a motive in human behaviour and the consequent inexorable nature of progress toward a society of equality.

In an autobiographical fragment written in 1831, Godwin discussed the 'external causes' that had shaped his character. 'First, I was born a Calvinist', he declared, before recalling that 'one of the earliest dogmas I received was, that our life here below is a state of preparation and probation for a life everlasting which is to follow'.<sup>24</sup> He read several times in early life one of the key works of seventeenth-century Nonconformism, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>25</sup> Bunyan's work restates the inner journey undertaken in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, in the form of a Calvinistic allegory on the nature of election, faith and salvation. The psychological journey undergone by Christian on the road to the Celestial City in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is mirrored in Godwin's attempt to convert the reader to faith in his ideas of improvement. *Political Justice*, for the most part a sober treatise, relies on a narrative structure whereby the reader is transported through corrupt modern society to the imagined advent of a secular paradise of equality and justice. The psychological dynamic of the work derives from the psychological dynamic of Calvinistic theology, from works such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* and

Richard Baxter's *The Saints Everlasting Rest*. These works illustrate the forceful presence of a utopian impulse in Puritan and Nonconformist writing. In the face of legal repression and the defeat of the Commonwealth, the world to come became an object of intense desire for writers like Bunyan and Baxter, promising freedom from persecution. This strand of utopianism recurs in Godwin's work, given application to modern political strife and persecution, to the perceived suffering of Dissenters and radicals at the hands of government and anti-Jacobins.

The close relationship between Godwin and the culture of Dissent can also be seen when we consider how the traditions of Puritan and Nonconformist spiritual autobiography inform his narrative style. Spiritual autobiographies were published narratives which dealt with the author's religious experience, often emphasising the moment of conversion, covering all or part of the author's life and presented in coherent form from a viewpoint in later life.<sup>26</sup> Emerging in England in the sixteenth century, they were a feature of popular Protestantism, giving expression to the introspective tradition that was a particular feature of Puritan doctrine. Again, Godwin maintains the psychological framework of Puritanism in the absence of religious faith, using it to articulate his political beliefs. His novels evidence a debt to spiritual autobiography in their use of first-person narrative to describe the growth of a vivid 'enthusiasm' for benevolent, libertarian ideals in their protagonists. The secular development of the individual conscience is described in the terms of religious experience, following a familiar pattern of conversion and vacillations between hope and despair. Godwin's heroes, recording in their narratives their lonely psychological torments and their defiant endurance of persecution, recall the militant Puritanism of Bunyan's heroes.

This lineage connects Godwin's works of fiction with the origins of the novel. Critics have long recognised spiritual autobiography as a vital stimulus in the emergence of the novel as a genre, particularly through its influence on the writing of Daniel Defoe, a Dissenter educated at Newington Academy.<sup>27</sup> Ian Watt argues that Defoe's description of the inner moral and emotional life of an imagined individual in *Robinson Crusoe* was modelled on 'the autobiographical memoir which was the most immediate and widespread literary expression of the introspective tendency of Puritanism'.<sup>28</sup> Though self-scrutiny in written form predated the rise of Protestantism, he observes, it was Calvinism which reinvigorated this form, giving the exploration of

the inner self spiritual value as the means of discovering evidence of election. Watt suggests that Calvinist spiritual autobiography, in its insistence that God's favour was not reliant upon position in earthly hierarchy, provided a fundamental spiritual egalitarianism that allowed the novel to focus on the inner life of ordinary heroes and heroines – a notable deviation from the traditions of romance, with its socially-elevated protagonists. The first-person narratives of *Caleb Williams*, *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* echo the proto-novelistic spiritual autobiographies of Bunyan, Fox and Baxter by showing the inner life of solitary protagonists persecuted, imprisoned, tormented by doubt. In their focus on persecution, these models allowed Godwin to mark his writing with a strand of hope. Marginalised by Malthusian political economy and popular anti-Jacobinism in the late 1790s, he responded with the *Reply to Parr*, an essay that overtly follows the course of Nonconformist spiritual autobiography and that of his own novels in picturing its author as a lonely, defiant advocate of equality, his persecution evidence of the just nature of his cause.

Understanding the nature of Godwin's immersion in the culture and heritage of Dissent can lead us to recognise that his entire conception of the psychological effects of literature stemmed from the Puritan influence. Through authorial prefaces and interventions he is insistently present in his own texts, determined to measure and direct the psychological response of his reader. As Puritan preachers had sought in their sermons and autobiographies to influence the collective mindset of their audience, to set them on the road to faith and salvation, so Godwin, trained as a Dissenting minister, seeks to bring his reader towards faith in improvement. Rooted in Dissenting experience even after his loss of religious faith, he saw literature as a means of transforming the consciousness of the reader, and saw this education of the individual as the means of gradual progress towards justice and equality.

Appreciating the influence of Dissent on Godwin's thought should not, however, exclude other intellectual contexts. For his psychology of hope was formed by an overlap between the secular ideas of human perfectibility set out by the thinkers of the French Enlightenment and the concern with assurance and encouragement handed down by Calvinistic Dissent. The extent to which Godwin's philosophy can be considered to derive from that of the *philosophes* has been a subject of debate for several critics. Philp, in working to situate Godwin within the indigenous English tradition of Dissent, has simultaneously sought to dissociate him from the thought of

the French Enlightenment.<sup>29</sup> While he is right to stress that English radicalism was not a passing trend generated by events in France, he does, consequently, detach Godwin from a key nexus of ideas. Other critics have located him firmly within the tradition of the *philosophes*. Isaac Kramnick suggests that his writings ‘exemplified the characteristic intellectualism of the French Enlightenment’,<sup>30</sup> while Seamus Deane observes that ‘few Englishmen were as well versed in the writings of the French Enlightenment’.<sup>31</sup> It is possible to join together the two strands of analysis of Godwin’s philosophy and recognise that he blended the notion of unceasing liberal improvement put forward by the *philosophes* with the psychological dynamic of Calvinism.

The idea of perfectibility described by Godwin expresses the fundamental assumptions of Enlightenment humanism, asserting that growth in human knowledge (scientific, technological and otherwise) will be accompanied by political, social and moral progress. Godwin drew the idea from his encounter with the thought of the French Enlightenment, with the work of Rousseau, Turgot and Condorcet, as I demonstrate in Chapter One of this thesis. He declared the intellectual heritage of his idea of perfectibility in the *Reply to Parr*, in which he discusses *Political Justice* as a text devoted to the idea of progress:

The great doctrine of the treatise in question is what I have there called (adopting a term I found ready coined in the French language) the perfectibility, but what I would now wish to call, changing the term, without changing a particle of the meaning, the progressive nature of man, in knowledge, in virtuous propensities, and in social institutions.<sup>32</sup>

The French idea of perfectibility had played a key role in creating the intellectual climate of the Revolution. In Godwin’s analysis of the origins of the Revolution in the *New Annual Register*, a journal aimed at a Dissenting audience for which he wrote entries on British and foreign politics between 1784 and 1791, he asserted that the ‘intellectual heroes of France, a Rousseau, an Helvetius, and a Raynal’ had accelerated political progress:

From hence we are to date a long series of years, in which France and the whole human race are to enter into possession of their liberties, when the ideas of justice and truth, of intellectual



independence and everlasting improvement, are no longer to remain buried in the dust and obscurity of the closet [...] but to be universally received, familiar as the light of day.<sup>33</sup>

The *philosophes*, with their ideas of ‘everlasting improvement’, are held to have fathered a new age of enlightenment.

If we return to the early chapters of *Political Justice*, we can see the manner in which Godwin’s idea of hope drew on the idea of perfectibility as defined by the thinkers of the French Enlightenment. Immediately after the discussion of the intended psychological effects of his liberal political philosophy in the second chapter, he moves on to define the principle doctrines of the treatise. Having established his concern with ‘hope’, with the intent to generate ‘generous enthusiasm’ and ‘invincible perseverance’, he outlines the political and philosophical arguments through which he seeks to achieve these psychological effects. Godwin returns to the concept of ‘improvement’ in human affairs:

The probability of this improvement will be sufficiently established, if we consider, FIRST, that the moral characters of men are the result of their perceptions: and, SECONDLY, that of all the modes of operating upon mind government is the most considerable. In addition to these arguments it will be found, THIRDLY, that the good and ill effects of political institution are not less conspicuous in detail than in principle; and, FOURTHLY, that perfectibility is one of the most unequivocal characteristics of the human species, so that the political, as well as the intellectual state of man, may be presumed to be in a course of progressive improvement.<sup>34</sup>

These optimistic doctrines of improvement are the foundations on which Godwin establishes his psychology of hope. Through the doctrine of environmental determination, he challenges the notion that intractable human nature should be considered as a factor in political discussion. Throughout *Political Justice* Godwin contends that if external circumstances and government can be reformed, then the character of humanity will be reformed. This susceptibility to moral reform is the basis for Godwin’s fourth tenet: the notion of human perfectibility. If human nature is malleable through the reform of external circumstance, then humanity can be supposed to be in a continual and ceaseless ‘course of progressive improvement’.

In the second edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin conceded that the idea of human perfectibility required ‘some explanation’ and defined it thus:

By perfectible, it is not meant that [humanity] is capable of being brought to perfection. But the word seems sufficiently adapted to express the faculty of being continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement; and in this sense it is here to be understood. The term perfectible, thus explained, not only does not imply the capacity of being brought to perfection, but stands in express opposition to it. If we could arrive at perfection, there would be an end to our improvement. There is however one thing of great importance that it does imply: every perfection or excellence that human beings are competent to conceive, human beings, unless in cases that are palpably and unequivocally excluded by the structure of their frame, are competent to attain.<sup>35</sup>

Godwin's conception of human perfectibility is pivotal to the psychology of hope developed in *Political Justice*. It is central to our understanding of the intellectual legacy he passed on to Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley. The idea of perfectibility was so integral to Godwin's thought that he declared in *The Enquirer* that it may be 'set down as an axiom that the enlightened advocate of new systems of government, proceeds upon the establishment or assumption of the progressive nature of man, whether as an individual, or as the member of a society'.<sup>36</sup> Throughout his work, perfectibility refers to progress towards a society of equality. The idea expresses an attachment to the egalitarianism enshrined in the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, that important crystallisation of the radical thought of the *philosophes*. We will see that Godwin's treatment of this French Enlightenment concept was notable for the way he adapted such liberal optimism to the patterns of utopian thought he inherited from the culture of Dissent. Religious hope persists as a key influence on his political thought; Enlightenment humanism blends with the psychology of Calvinism.

Set alongside perfectibility as a bolster in Godwin's psychology of hope is the idea of benevolence. He saw the possibility of disinterested behaviour, of purely altruistic concern for the good of others, as a guarantee of future progress beyond commercial self-interest to a society of equality without private property. Godwin's interest in this idea connects his work with important shifts in ethical thought set in motion by Dissenting thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Isabel Rivers' study of the interrelations between religion and ethics in this period, she shows how late seventeenth-century Anglicanism positioned virtue as a divine endowment, as a faculty which would be rewarded by God's grace.<sup>37</sup> Religion was thus profitable as a

motive to virtue, a thesis reflected in the ethical thought of Locke, where a system of divine rewards and punishments prompts the exercise of virtue. Rivers argues that Calvinistic Nonconformism and Dissent, with its stress on justification through faith rather than good works, played a key role in divorcing ethics from religious thought. Calvinism holds that individuals can attain salvation only through faith, itself a product of God's grace. Only the elect will be granted salvation and faith is the only justification, rather than good works. Rivers presents the hugely popular works of Bunyan, who emphasised grace and the gift of faith, as an important contribution to a new intellectual climate. She suggests that the manner in which Nonconformism detached ethics from religion prepared the ground for the work of Shaftesbury, who sought to locate the foundation of morals in the constitution of human nature rather than in divine endowment, as Locke had done.

Godwin's preoccupation with the hope afforded by benevolence stems from the culture of Dissent. Rivers argues that Shaftesburian and Hutchesonian ethical theory, with its claims on essential human sociability and disposition to sympathy for others, gained particular prevalence in the Dissenting academies of Ireland and England, as well as in the Scottish universities. Shaftesburian and Hutchesonian thought was not an intellectual force in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, where latitudinarianism and Lockean moral theory remained dominant.<sup>38</sup> Rivers' discussion of the diffusion of these ideas assigns some prominence to Philip Doddridge's *Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity* (1763).<sup>39</sup> This work was an outline of the course Doddridge taught at the Dissenters' academy at Northampton for twenty years, with the first four lectures given over to an examination of the foundation of morals in the human constitution. Godwin encountered Doddridge's lectures as a key part of the curriculum at the Dissenters' academy at Hoxton.

In placing the idea of benevolence at the heart of his political theory, Godwin followed contemporary trends. Evan Radcliffe has argued that of all the Enlightenment concepts reinvigorated in Britain by the French Revolution, 'none was more hotly debated and none became more politically charged than universal benevolence – the idea that benevolence and sympathy can be extended to all humanity'.<sup>40</sup> For supporters of universal benevolence, the thought of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson promised the possibility that selfish and narrow attachments might be

dispelled, which, in the modern era, might usher in the society of equality spoken of in the *Déclarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*. For its detractors, most notably Burke, the idea was a philosophical abstraction, evidence of the inhumanity of the revolutionaries and their British supporters. Universal benevolence would destroy the traditional ties of kinship that began in the family and ended in the nation, subverting hierarchy, order and human nature itself. The egalitarian ideal of altruism, given impetus in England by liberal Dissenters, continued as a presence in radical thought long after the revolutionary era. The influence of Godwinian thought ensures that it is central to Percy Shelley's theories of poetry and the imagination, as well as to Mary Shelley's discussion of human nature and society in the character of the Creature in *Frankenstein*.

My discussion of Godwin focuses on his representation of the psychology of hope from the publication of the first edition of *Political Justice* in 1793 up to the publication of *Fleetwood* in 1805. In this period, he helps to popularise radical Enlightenment optimism in Britain in the wake of the American and French Revolutions, before becoming a target for anti-Jacobin critics and satirists, and seeing his perfectibilist philosophy subjected to a systematic critique by Thomas Robert Malthus. In response to the changing balance of political debate over the course of the 1790s, Godwin restates the ideals of *Political Justice* in altered form in both novels and essays.

However, the works of the later 1790s and beyond are often interpreted as mapping a shift away from the principles of the political treatise. Evan Radcliffe sees even *Caleb Williams*, in its focus on the feelings of the individual dwarfed by society, as undermining 'one aspect of a distinctive philosophical system – a system [...] that was so unrelentingly impersonal and austere in its rationalism and utilitarianism that few radicals followed it in a thoroughgoing manner'.<sup>41</sup> Gary Kelly, in his important work on the coterie of 'Jacobin' novelists, understands Godwin's fiction as encompassing a move from the radicalism of *Caleb Williams* to 'depoliticized Romantic liberalism' in *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*.<sup>42</sup> Godwin's move to accommodate the domestic affections in the late 1790s is often viewed as negating his earlier philosophical and political positions, as in Gregory Claeys's claim that 'he conceded substantial ground to Burke in moving away from a reliance upon reason as the basis for voluntary action to the feelings'.<sup>43</sup> Rowland Weston has taken this argument further in suggesting not only

that Godwin was immersed in a Burkean conception of human nature as habitual instinct in works such as *St Leon* and the *Life of Chaucer* (1803), but that he ‘exchanges an Enlightenment universalism and essentialism, heavily tinted with Calvinist stoicism and immaterialism, for a more sceptical romanticism which foregrounds the contingency and corporeality of human nature’.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, I argue that Godwin’s work of the late 1790s, particularly *St Leon*, *Fleetwood* and the *Reply to Parr*, constitutes an attack on Burke’s model of feeling and a revised assertion of the ideal of universal benevolence set out in *Political Justice*; and that the image of the militant Puritan standing alone against a society of corruption and greed remained the principle means by which Godwin advanced these arguments. The influence of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, a definitively Calvinistic memoir which builds on the model of Bunyan’s writing, grows stronger still within his literary output in this period. While there is greater emphasis on the domestic affections in these works and less on the faculty of reason, Godwin seeks to reconcile Enlightenment ideals of benevolence and egalitarianism with this new current of ideas, rather than renouncing the scheme of hope set out in *Political Justice*.

This interpretation, focusing on the durability of Godwin’s optimism, has some critical antecedents. In Marilyn Butler’s survey of the period, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, she briefly alludes to the contemporary ideological significance of Godwin’s fiction by noting that: ‘[t]hrough the war years some vestige of the liberal tradition was in fact kept alive by William Godwin, who, though not a major novelist, is a minor one of real stature’.<sup>45</sup> As Butler demonstrates elsewhere, the Jacobin novel was extinguished as a literary force by the mid-1790s, pushed away from the centre of political debate by rigorous Government censorship and the rise of popular and literary anti-Jacobinism.<sup>46</sup> Godwin’s continuation of the ‘liberal tradition’ is of great significance, given that it takes him against the dominant ideological currents of the time. The durability of his hope is of immense importance to Percy and Mary Shelley, writing after the fall of Napoleon and the apparent final collapse of the progressive project.

### III

With an understanding of the polemics involved in the Godwinian idea of ‘hope’ in place, we can make some initial explorations of its role in the work of the Shelleys. At one point in Percy Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century* (1817), the poet offers a meditation on Godwin’s political legacy. The work tells the story of a failed revolution and is intended, as its Preface makes clear, to address the crisis of liberal disappointment produced by the failure of the French Revolution. In its evaluation of *Laon and Cythna*, the Tory *Quarterly Review* adopted a Burkean tone in accusing Percy Shelley of having ‘loosened the hold of our protecting laws, and supped the principles of our venerable polity’.<sup>47</sup> The reviewer, John Taylor Coleridge, correctly observed that the character of the old hermit was a cipher for Godwin. Coleridge thus uncovered evidence of the dangerous lineage of Shelley’s reformist politics. The ties perceived by *The Quarterly Review* are strongest in a stanza at the beginning of Canto IV, in which the Hermit addresses a great crowd:

[F]rom the lore of bards and sages old,  
 From whatsoe’er my wakened thoughts create  
 Out of the hopes of thine aspirings bold,  
 Have I collected language to unfold  
 Truth to my countrymen; from shore to shore  
 Doctrines of human power my words have told,  
 They have been heard, and men aspire to more  
 Than they have ever gained or lost of yore.<sup>48</sup>

The stanza centres on the Godwinian idea of hope and on the effect wrought on the audience by this optimism. The increased aspirations of humanity carry a suggestion of the immense scale of improvement envisioned in Godwin’s idea of human perfectibility. Shelley’s portrait of the Hermit also displays a detailed understanding of Godwin’s literary theory. The Hermit’s words ‘have been heard’ and as a consequence ‘men aspire to more / Than they have ever gained or lost of yore’. As his speech proceeds, Shelley continues to dwell on the reception of his words. We are told that ‘[i]n secret chambers parents read, and weep, / My writings to their babes, no longer blind’; that ‘[m]arriageable maidens’ who once pined with love, ‘warmer zeal, a nobler hope now find’.<sup>49</sup> Shelley offers an idealised vision of the reading audience’s

response to Godwin: '[e]very bosom thus is rapt and shook'. Once the teachings of the Hermit have spread, the 'tyrants' of the Golden City tremble and '[k]ind thoughts, and mighty hopes, and gentle deeds / Abound'. The established 'faiths' which have long held the world in awe now give way to 'the pure law / Of mild equality and peace'.<sup>50</sup>

Percy Shelley displays a fascination with the processes of reader-response, with the notion that Enlightenment hope might be propagated through literature. The passage revisits Godwin's own idealised visions of the reception of his work in the 1793 edition of *Political Justice*. This section of *Laon and Cythna* tells us much about the nature of Percy Shelley's preoccupation with Godwinian optimism. His use of the phrase 'doctrines of human power' in describing Godwin's thought is particularly significant. The phrase echoes Paine's humanist battle-cry in *Rights of Man*; that monarchy, aristocracy and even democracy are 'but creatures of the imagination', and thus, 'as there is but one species of man, there can be but one element of human power; and that element is man himself'.<sup>51</sup> The phrase also recalls Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'France: an Ode' (1798), a poem which publicly expressed the author's disappointment with the French Revolution and, ultimately, his recoil from the Enlightenment. Coleridge announced the French invasion of Switzerland as the moment at which he renounced all political hopes, offering an address to Liberty in which he claims that: 'thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever / Didst breathe thy soul in forms of human power'.<sup>52</sup> Henceforth, Coleridge declares, his faith will be in God in Nature, rather than in 'human power'. The description of the Hermit's 'doctrines of human power' returns significant echoes of the ideological clashes of the 1790s; the possible reference to Coleridge expressing dissatisfaction with the political agenda of the Lake School. We see Percy Shelley's interest in Godwin's thought as a manifestation of the hopes of Enlightenment humanism. The Hermit's doctrines express a radical humanism intended to inspire in his audience a faith in the notion of improvement towards a society of equality.

Percy Shelley's work is shaped by his encounter with the Godwinian psychology of hope in two crucial ways. On a philosophical level, poems such as *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Hellas* and the 'Ode to Liberty' all take their fundamental animus from the Godwinian idea of human perfectibility. Percy Shelley adopts wholesale Godwin's assumption that progress in human knowledge brings progress in politics and, crucially, in ethics. The notion that humanity can be supposed to be

involved in ceaseless improvement towards a society of justice, benevolence and equality is one that pervades his poetry and prose.

Godwin's ideas on the political impact of the psychology of reader-response are also a determining influence on Percy Shelley's literary theory. He draws from Godwin his understanding of the way in which hope might influence the reader and thus contribute to the process of improvement. From the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* onwards, Percy Shelley defines the purpose of his most explicitly political poetry in Godwinian terms. There, we see him emphasise the political significance of reader-response by speaking of his desire of 'kindling within the bosoms of my readers, a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever totally extinguish among mankind'.<sup>53</sup> There is an echo here of the 'generous enthusiasm' and 'invincible perseverance' which Godwin sought to stimulate in the reader through the encounter with *Political Justice*. Despite Percy Shelley's aristocratic Whig background, the influence of Godwin ensured that his theory of literature was moulded by the Dissenting practices of public discussion and private judgement.

The intellectual relationship between Godwin and Percy Shelley has been the subject of previous critical discussion.<sup>54</sup> But the manner in which Godwin's ideologically-loaded idea of hope shapes Shelley's entire apprehension of the political role of literature has not been adequately acknowledged. The conjectures on the role of the poet within improvement which we see in the *Defence of Poetry* (1821), along with the very particular conjunction between imaginative literature and the movement for Parliamentary reform we see in the *Philosophical View of Reform* (1819) and the volume of *Popular Songs* (1819), originate in Godwin's understanding of the material psychological effects of literature. Critics have often read Percy Shelley's ideas of imagination in terms of Romanticism; but the polemics of Godwinian hope are equally important to his understanding of the practical 'use' of fictions.

Historicist critics have often struggled to redeem Percy Shelley from charges of abstract idealism and naivety, with Paul Dawson speaking of the need to recover a sense of his 'political sobriety'.<sup>55</sup> Reconnecting his work with the traditions of Godwinian hope can bring recognition of the serious political intent of his poetic project. Percy Shelley's work is often isolated from its proper intellectual and political context; we should acknowledge that his imagined utopias are speculations on moral



and political progress that derive from his reading of Godwin and other popularizers of the French Enlightenment, such as Volney and Condorcet. Following Godwin's literary example, Shelley's most explicitly political work constitutes an attempt to further the process of improvement by involving his audience in a liberal psychology of hope.

Setting the novels of Mary Shelley within the context of Godwin's psychology of hope brings to the fore the ambiguities of their ideological concerns. Three of her works, *Frankenstein*, *Matilda* and *The Last Man*, offer a meditation on the hopes of Enlightenment humanism, specifically and directly involving themselves with ideas established by Godwin in *Political Justice* and his novels. Uncovering the Godwinian lineage of Mary Shelley's work can adjust the balance put in place by some important critical interpretations. The historicist readings of *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* given by Lee Sterrenburg in the late 1970s established that both novels were closely related to the political debates of the revolutionary era.<sup>56</sup> However, Sterrenburg also established an interpretation of Mary Shelley as a conservative, even anti-ideological novelist, that remains influential today. Kari Lokke has recently suggested that *The Last Man* attacks Enlightenment faith in the inevitability of progress'.<sup>57</sup> The nature of Godwin's influence was central to Sterrenburg's argument. Mary Shelley is notably less willing than Percy Shelley or Godwin to define her work within the boundaries of a particular literary 'project' with intended effects on political and social debate. But despite this reticence, her novels do centre on the same idea of 'hope' that drives the literary projects of Godwin and Shelley.

Mary Shelley's narrative style, that of the fictional first-person confessional, clearly draws on the Rousseauvian sensibility that we find in the fabric of Godwin's novels. Her narratives all replicate the style of unmediated transparency that characterises *Caleb Williams*, *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*; all replicate that fundamental appeal to the mind of the individual reader. In *Frankenstein*, this appeal invites a consideration of Godwinian theories of environmental determinism and benevolence, as suggested earlier. Her central protagonist, the Creature, is a lonely, alienated figure, the counterpart of Caleb Williams, St Leon and Fleetwood; his first-person narrative working against the persecution waged by society in communicating to the reader his essential benevolence and compassion for others. Mary Shelley thus revisits the central principles of Godwin's ideal anarchist society of equality, justice and

benevolence. Yet she balances these principles with an unremittingly bleak depiction of the corruptions of society, law and human brutality, a depiction which renders her ultimate argument on the possibility of improvement ambiguous.

The Godwinian idea of human perfectibility is also integral to *The Last Man*, a novel which apparently inverts progressive hope. Mary Shelley imagines the future of humanity as one in which growth in human knowledge is rendered immaterial by nature's destructive force. By describing the termination of the human race through a highly contagious plague, she deliberately questions her father's perfectibilist convictions. Dwarfing the delusions of human power, the plague diminishes humanity to one remaining being: the eponymous last man, the narrator Lionel Verney. When the plague arrives, Mary Shelley uses Verney's reflections on human marginality to apparently undermine the assumptions of Enlightenment humanism and Godwinian optimism:

What are we, the inhabitants of this globe, least among the many that people infinite space? Our minds embrace infinity; the visible mechanism of our being is subject to merest accident. [...] In the face of all this we call ourselves lords of the creation, wielders of the elements, masters of life and death, and we allege in excuse of this arrogance, that though the individual is destroyed, man continues forever.<sup>58</sup>

But though Mary Shelley undertakes a bleakly dystopic dismantling of Enlightenment utopia, she retains some vestige of Godwinian optimism. Even at the conclusion, the desire for unmediated communication with the reader is still present; Verney's first-person narrative is recognisably within the traditions of Rousseauvian confession. There remains a sense of Mary Shelley's connection to the methodology of Godwin's novels, to the educative practices of Dissent and the prospect of reform achieved by public discussion. Though the years between the publication of *Frankenstein* in 1818 and *The Last Man* in 1826 appear to chart Mary Shelley's increasing scepticism about the claims of Enlightenment humanism, even a turn toward conservatism, she never entirely renounces her connection to the fundamental tenets of Godwin's thought. Tracing the legacy of Godwinian hope allows us to challenge the critical conception of Mary Shelley as a conservative or anti-ideological novelist and achieve a revaluation which acknowledges the political complexities and ambiguities of her novels.

## IV

Throughout this thesis, the notion of disappointment forms an important counterpoint to hope. The work of Mary Shelley deals as much with the former as with the latter. Throughout her novels, she explores the psychology engendered by confronting the failure of, and the unreality of, the Enlightenment hopes of the radical 1790s. We find a similar current of ideas present beneath the surface of Percy Shelley's thought. In the work of both Shelleys, the Godwinian psychology of hope produces a series of contradictory anxieties. Though *Prometheus Unbound* seeks to retrieve the progressive ideals of the 1790s from the 'wreck of hope' that was the failure of the French Revolution,<sup>59</sup> it contains a powerful undercurrent of anxiety, evident most clearly in the passage in which the Furies torment the suffering Titan with a vision of humanity's innate disposition to malevolence. The Furies, describing themselves as 'the ministers of pain, and fear, / And disappointment, and mistrust, and hate', revel in the prospect of religious wars and the Revolution's collapse into bloodshed.<sup>60</sup> Percy Shelley's short conversational poem *Julian and Maddalo* shares this mood of anxiety over the fragility of Godwinian hope.

However, such anxiety is present at the very root of this intellectual tradition, in the work of Godwin. Throughout *Political Justice* and the *Reply to Parr*, he often appears to concede that perfectibility is merely a consoling narrative, rather than an objective theory on the progress of human societies, and even turns to anxiously consider the landscape of despair that lies ahead without that consolation. Similarly, *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* are disappointed laments over the marginalisation of liberals in the late 1790s at the same time as being defences of benevolence and equality.

Godwin's frequent excursions into the territory of despair again highlight the extent to which the psychology of Calvinism shaped his political outlook. John Stachniewski has argued that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination had a profound impact on post-Reformation English literature and culture by making the despair of reprobation a central facet of religious experience.<sup>61</sup> With Calvinism the orthodoxy of the Church of England until the advent of Laud, notions of election and reprobation were not confined to the Puritan and Nonconformist sects, he suggests. Countering the thesis of William Haller, who claimed that Puritan preachers saw their role as that of

encouraging congregations toward faith and salvation,<sup>62</sup> Stachniewski asserts that: ‘Calvinism and puritanism were conducive to despair and [...] this was both a widely recognized and widespread phenomenon in England at least from the late sixteenth century’.<sup>63</sup> The key to Calvinist salvation was a miraculous confidence in one’s own election; anxiety was evidence of reprobation. Works such as Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding* emerge as attempts to overcome the alienation and isolation fostered by fears of reprobation and God’s rejection. Stachniewski’s account of Calvinist despair, with its emphasis on the psychological conflict between election and reprobation, on ‘the binarism of the puritan account of experience’,<sup>64</sup> can inform our understanding of the crux between liberal optimism and anxiety evident in the work of Godwin, and consequently in that of the Shelleys. Godwin frequently spoke of the gloomy and despairing nature of Calvinist doctrine, particularly the Sandemanianism in which he was schooled by Samuel Newton,<sup>65</sup> and his anxious need to sustain his faith in perfectibility and benevolence displays a similar aversion to the political ‘despair’ that might arise without the promise of a future state of equality and justice.

The sense of disappointment and despair evident in the work of Godwin and the Shelleys often emerges most distinctly through their encounters with Malthus’s conclusive rejection of the idea of perfectibility. Indeed, Godwin’s recoil against the representation of inequality and poverty as inevitable conditions of human society in the *Essay on Population* might be understood in conjunction with his bitter attacks on the inequality embedded in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The manner in which all three authors negotiate with the philosophical and political position taken up by Malthus forms an important strand within this thesis. The *Essay on Population* was one of the most influential political texts of the period, proceeding through six different editions between 1798 and 1826.<sup>66</sup> Its intellectual presence was thus felt from the late 1790s through to the post-Napoleonic era in which the Shelleys wrote. The *Essay* shaped the burgeoning discourse of political economy and had a significant impact on practical politics through its influence on Parliamentary debates on the Poor Laws.<sup>67</sup> Crucially, Malthus defined his *Essay* specifically as a rebuttal of Godwinian perfectibility. His purpose is outlined in the full title of the work, which stood as: *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers.*

Malthus bases his principle of population in two laws of human behaviour which are taken as unalterable constants: a) the need for food and b) sexual instinct. These two laws combine in the core calculation of his theory, which states that population increases in the ratio of 1, 2, 4, 8, 16 etc., while subsistence is restricted to increases of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 etc. Without a balance between these two divergent ratios, a collapse in population due to inadequate subsistence will result. Malthus contends that these ratios have been balanced through the checks to population rise provided by 'misery' and 'vice'. His fundamental argument is that population increase is necessarily checked by illness, disease and a variety of sexual habits which avoid procreation. Malthus is very clear on the implications which the principle of population bears for Godwin's idea of perfectibility. The principle of population is, he claims, conclusive 'against the perfectibility of man, in the enlarged sense in which Mr Godwin understands the term'. Further, the principle proves the impossibility of Godwin's anarchist society of universal justice and equality, of 'any very marked and striking change for the better, in the form and structure of general society; by which I mean any great and decided amelioration of the condition of the lower classes of mankind'.<sup>68</sup> By asserting that Godwin's posited system of equality would create a disastrous increase in population, Malthus was able to claim that the only viable model of social structure was that of the 'society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present', namely 'a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love the main-spring of the great machine'.<sup>69</sup> In his model of political economy Malthus repeats the theory of self-interest put forward by Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, rather than the same author's analysis of sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.<sup>70</sup> He is careful to reject Godwin's theory of benevolence, asserting the primacy of self-interest and the inevitability of social inequality. On Malthus's rebuttal of Godwinian hope, a hugely influential political and economic thesis was established.

Though Godwin would formulate important responses to Malthus in the *Reply to Parr* (1801) and *Of Population* (1820), the *Essay on Population* eventually entirely marginalised his strand of perfectibilist optimism. Malthus may have adopted the methodology of Enlightenment social science, but his conclusions were entirely contrary to his opponent's Enlightenment humanist progressivism. He attacked

Godwin for claiming that inequality was produced by social institution, stating that irremediable causes ingrained in the material facts of human existence determine the conditions of society. Despite the protestations of Godwin, Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley, Malthus forms an important intellectual force in the work of all three authors. For them, the psychology of hope often becomes submerged in moods of disappointment and despair which register the power of Malthus's denial of human perfectibility.

The work of these three authors is highly significant in that it constitutes the most prominent and coherent literary engagement with the hopes of radical Enlightenment humanism in the Romantic period. From *Political Justice* in 1793 up to *The Last Man* in 1826, there existed an intellectually important literary discussion of 'hope' which involved key themes of human perfectibility, benevolence and equality. This discussion involved the idea that liberal optimism might be transmitted to individual readers through the agency of literature, thus securing the progress of improvement. To varying degrees, interior hope was understood by these authors to have a material political effect. Yet, as has been suggested, hope is often subjected to intense scrutiny in their work. A final fruitful context for this scrutiny is provided by the modern critique of the Enlightenment mounted by Isaiah Berlin and John Gray. Their work provides a useful critical framework for understanding the idea of hope discussed by Godwin and, in particular, the critique of progressive optimism seen at points of the Shelleys' work.

Throughout his career, Berlin principally discussed the 'search for political solutions' undertaken by the French Enlightenment, Marxists and the forerunners of the Russian Revolution.<sup>71</sup> He argued that Enlightenment universalism, the notion that ultimate and universal values of justice, liberty and equality will eventually be realised, is a 'fallacy' which has made possible 'the most destructive, social and political movements of this century, including right-wing authoritarianism, but particularly Lenin's application of Marxism'.<sup>72</sup> While Berlin's thesis on the modern political legacy of Enlightenment thought is not relevant to our purposes, his analysis of the psychology involved in the idea of perfectibility illuminates the assumptions and anxieties evident in the work of Godwin and the Shelleys. He discerns a common psychology in a variety of political outlooks: in Rousseau's critique of society and

inequality; in the Christian gospels and the Sermon on the Mount; in the Marxist theory of historical change; in the universalism of western liberal democracy:

What was common to all these outlooks was the belief that solutions to the central problems existed, that one could discover them, and, with sufficient selfless effort, realise them on earth. They all believed that the essence of human beings was to be able to choose how to live: societies could be transformed in the light of true ideals believed in with enough fervour and dedication.<sup>73</sup>

Berlin argues that the principal legacy of Enlightenment universalism has been an intellectual mindset in which history is interpreted as progress from ignorance to knowledge rather than as a series of purposeless events. He directly refers to Godwin in his analysis of utopian thought in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, where he suggests that all utopias rely on a notion of the universality of ‘truth’; ‘in the three pillars of social optimism in the west, namely that the problems of humanity are universal, soluble, and that the solutions form a harmonious whole’.<sup>74</sup>

Gray has continued this critique of what he terms ‘the Enlightenment project’, a phrase by which he refers to the ideal of universal civilisation supposedly put forward by this intellectual tradition and its modern inheritors, liberal as well as Marxist.<sup>75</sup> Like Berlin, Gray offers a hostile interpretation of the Enlightenment humanist idea of progress, arguing that it has given rise to the creeds of twentieth-century communism and fascism. However, he analyses the particular psychology of hope more closely, arguing that the idea of progress has come to perform the role of a secular religion. Gray contends that the Enlightenment idea of human perfectibility derives, despite its avowed secularity, from religious thought:

Humanists angrily deny harbouring the vast hopes of Marx or Comte, but still insist that the growth of scientific knowledge enables mankind to construct a future better than anything in the past. There is not the slightest scientific warrant for this belief. It is faith, pure and simple. More, it is Christian faith - the myth that, unlike other animals, ‘we’ can shape the future.<sup>76</sup>

His thesis on the sublimated Christian patterns of thought involved in Enlightenment humanist ideas of progress develops a thesis first set out by Carl Becker, who suggests in his critique of the French Enlightenment and Revolution that ‘the doctrine of

progress, of perfectibility, became an essential article of faith in the new religion of humanity', allowing the Revolution to be 'sustained by an emotional impulse, a mystical faith in humanity, in the ultimate regeneration of the human race' that was an adaptation of the Christian idea of salvation.<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere, Gray repeats this claim, stating that: '[h]umanism is the transformation of [the] Christian doctrine of salvation into a project of universal human emancipation. The idea of progress is a secular version of the Christian belief in providence'.<sup>78</sup> This thesis on the transposition of Christian hopes onto the progressivism of the Enlightenment provides an important critical framework for understanding the Godwinian psychology of hope.

At one point in *Enlightenment's Wake*, Gray specifically refers to Godwin as a purveyor of the idea of human perfectibility:

Enlightenment thinkers differed greatly in their degree of optimism and pessimism, with thinkers as different as Voltaire and Hume inclining to a pessimistic and cyclical interpretation of history, and others such as Paine and Godwin holding steadfastly to the conviction that the human future would be vastly different, and on the whole much better, than the human past.<sup>79</sup>

He rightly singles out Godwin as one of the most prominent exponents of Enlightenment perfectibilism. In contrast, Gray's own critique of the 'Enlightenment project' suggests that we should dispatch with the humanist belief that growth in knowledge is accompanied by moral, political and social progress. There can be no irreversible progress in ethics, he contends. Gray is hostile to the notion of humanist hope, arguing that there is a need to detach ourselves from the idea that 'the history of the human species can be told as a narrative of improvement or amelioration', a need of 'moderating the hopes that are bequeathed to us by Christianity and the Enlightenment'.<sup>80</sup>

The work of Berlin and Gray can lead us to an understanding of the manner in which the Godwinian psychology of hope was formed by translating Christian hope into the terms of secular humanist optimism. Indeed, this equation is often overtly stated in the work of Godwin and the Shelleys. Speaking of his desire for change in the 'system of society' in a letter to Leigh Hunt, Percy Shelley remarked that '[i]f faith is a virtue in any case it is so in politics rather than religion; as having a power of producing that a belief in which is at once a prophesy & a cause'.<sup>81</sup> The critique of



Enlightenment mounted by Berlin and Gray can sharpen our reading of the current of anxiety that is present in works as diverse as *St Leon*, *Julian and Maddalo* and *The Last Man*. Mary Shelley in particular might be understood to prefigure Berlin and Gray by undercutting the intellectual tendencies of Enlightenment humanism. But a strain of thought on the fragility of secular hopes for improvement is also clearly evident in the work of Godwin and Percy Shelley. The counterpart of the Godwinian psychology of hope is a profound anxiety over the assumptions of humanism; an ever-present scepticism about the capabilities of human nature and the possibility of moral and political progress.

*'Hope undefined and uncertain': the idea of perfectibility in An  
Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*

I

The principles of Godwinian hope spread to a large and diverse audience with the successful publication of the first edition of *Political Justice* in 1793. Whilst the work's circulation was undeniably limited in comparison with that of *Rights of Man*, the principles of Godwin's philosophy nevertheless diffused over a wide area of political debate in Britain, even spreading to the London Corresponding Society, the influential group of radical artisans active during the 1790s. Intellectual leaders of the LCS such as Joseph Gerrald and John Thelwall bore a heavy debt to Godwin's ideas of human perfectibility and universal benevolence.<sup>1</sup> *Political Justice* reached a working-class audience in the manufacturing towns through reading clubs and subscription libraries. Albert Goodwin draws attention to the information passed to the Home Office by the informer William Barlow, noting that if this source is to be believed, the book 'did much, along with Paine's *Age of Reason* and the translated works of Mirabaud, Helvétius and Volney, to promote the spread of atheism and free thought among the Sheffield cutlers'.<sup>2</sup> The young Reginald Heber, later to become Bishop of Calcutta, remarked in a letter of 1800 on the reading habits of 'young Bowler the baker' of Neasden. Examining the books in the baker's cart, Heber found that they were 'Volney, Voltaire, and Godwin'. 'These', he noted disapprovingly, 'are the fruits of circulating libraries'.<sup>3</sup>

E.P. Thompson has partially discounted Godwin's influence on contemporary political debate, suggesting that his audience was severely limited in number by its narrow class boundaries.<sup>4</sup> However, the accounts of the work's reception provided by other sources reveal that it was one of the period's most important texts. Mark Philp has argued against Thompson's treatment of *Political Justice*, objecting to the way in which he 'marginalises Godwin and the intelligentsia of the 1790s, giving priority to a plebeian movement which is seen as largely self-directing'.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Philp counters, there was a consistency between working-class polemics and Godwinian thought, with

the reform societies not importing the revolutionary ideology of the French, but espousing views on the gradual reform of institutions through changing opinion that paralleled Godwin's own. Sections of *Political Justice* were reprinted in working-class radical publications such as Eaton's *Politics for the People* and Spence's *Hog Wash*, he notes.<sup>6</sup>

The kinship between Godwin and the radicals was, in some respects, closer than Thompson allows. Indeed, a close reading of *Political Justice* shows that the work is grounded not just in high French Enlightenment thought, but also in the Dissenting tradition discussed at length in *The Making of the English Working Class*. For in his attempt to propagate in his readers the psychology of progressive optimism, Godwin relies heavily on a pattern of hope and despair familiar from Puritan spiritual autobiography and, notably, from *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Marilyn Butler has observed that analysis of *Political Justice* has often confined itself within philosophy and politics. She makes the case for an interdisciplinary approach, suggesting that: '[i]f the philosopher and the literary critic collaborated, their account of the book's meaning would be enriched by the need to relate its "perennial" matter to its method and manner, the text's subliminal ploys to win the reader's agreement'.<sup>7</sup> The method and manner of *Political Justice*, its literary tactics, have traditionally been neglected by critics. But these tactics are integral to Godwin's aim of diffusing his political principles through society, an aim ultimately sought by translating ideas of perfectibility, benevolence and social equality into the terms of an intensely optimistic secular faith. Thus *Political Justice* often relies on tactics more usually associated with a work of narrative fiction, most notably in the spectacular, epiphanic conclusion where Godwin imagines the future advent of a utopia of universal equality and human immortality. To a greater degree than has previously been recognised, *Political Justice* is intended to work up an 'enthusiasm' for justice in its readership. This attempt to influence the reader centres on the idea of hope.

## II

Godwin's preoccupation with the term 'hope' is evident from the very outset of *Political Justice*. Chapter three of Book I, which discusses the implications of the theory of environmental determinism, establishes the manner in which the treatise

seeks to involve the reader in a particular psychology through its representation of the Enlightenment idea of perfectibility. Godwin's emphasis is less on the status of his doctrines as fact than on the interior mental effects of those doctrines.

He sets out to prove the thesis that: '[w]e bring into the world with us no innate principles; consequently we are neither virtuous nor vicious as we first come into existence'.<sup>8</sup> His rebuttal of the notion of innate characteristics draws heavily on the work of Claude-Adrien Helvétius, who had argued in *De l'Esprit* (1758) that inequality among humanity was the product of differing 'education', a term by which he referred to all environmental influences on our development. He also positioned the character of government as a determining influence on human character.<sup>9</sup> Even Philp, who looks to dissociate Godwin from the French Enlightenment tradition, concedes that this section of the text 'follows Holbach and Helvétius'.<sup>10</sup> Anticipating the discussions of crime and criminality in Book VII of *Political Justice*, Godwin ascribes the 'depravity' of infants not to inevitable disposition, but to the behaviour of parents. Having established that we bring no innate characteristics with us into the world, he moves beyond philosophical doctrine to consider the attitude of mind engendered by these principles of environmental determinism. Here we see the particular psychology that he derives from the thought of the French Enlightenment, as the *tabula rasa* theory swells to become an idea which can provide sustenance and nourishment to the mind of the inquiring liberal:

From these reasonings it sufficiently appears, that the moral qualities of men are the produce of the impressions made upon them, and that there is no instance of an original propensity to evil. Our virtues and vices may be traced to the incidents which make the history of our lives, and if these incidents could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be extirpated from the world. The task may be difficult, may be of slow progress, and of hope undefined and uncertain. But hope will never desert it; and the man who is anxious for the benefit of his species, will willingly devote a portion of his activity to an enquiry into the mode of effecting this extirpation in whole or in part, an enquiry which promises much, if it do not in reality promise every thing.<sup>11</sup>

Godwin lays a stress on disproving the notion of the 'original propensity to evil' rather than on disproving the propensity to virtue. He uses the philosophy of Holbach and Helvétius to open up a vista of improvement, a vista which promises that 'vice' might

be entirely 'extirpated from the world' in the future. We see the French Enlightenment idea of human perfectibility, of ceaseless improvement in politics and ethics, begin to emerge. Having set out from his grounding in this doctrine, Godwin moves to discuss its psychological effects. With the notion of innate disposition to 'evil' disproved, the prospect of extirpating vice becomes a source of potent hope. The passage dwells on the word 'hope', emphasising not the practical details of the task of reform, but the interior optimism and encouragement that can be derived from the doctrine of environmental determinism.

Yet at the same time, Godwin expresses an equivocal attitude towards the radical Enlightenment notion of progress. He self-consciously reflects on his own work, the present 'enquiry', asserting that the promise of the reform of humanity remains of 'hope undefined and uncertain'. The *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* is envisaged as an examination of hope. But this hope is uncertain; it is a state of mind rather than a reliable guide to external reality. The next sentence of the passage discusses the possibility of attaining a state in which humanity is entirely reformed in highly ambiguous terms. Godwin's tentative syntax sees the sentence ebb and flow between an affirmation of the necessity of conceiving improvement and an admission of doubt. He suggests that 'hope will never desert' the task of reform, before concluding the chapter on the realisation that the enquiry into human progress cannot 'in reality promise every thing'. The phrase 'in reality' hints at a certain ambivalence about the idea of human perfectibility as regulative fact. Overall, the sentence intimates that while Godwin employed the liberal doctrines of the French Enlightenment as the foundation for a psychology of hope, he remained, to an extent, self-consciously aware of the deceptions involved in such a stance. Hope is distanced from 'reality' and put forward as an internal consolation. The passage establishes *Political Justice* as a work displaying tenacious attachment to the optimistic psychology engendered by notions of human perfectibility; but at the same time views that psychology from a critical distance.

It was the intensely optimistic character of *Political Justice* that distinguished it in British eighteenth-century political debate. Nowhere else was the idea of perfectibility, identified as a crucial concept in modern political thought by Berlin and Gray, advanced so fervently. The particular framework in which Godwin understood this idea deserves attention. While he first encountered perfectibility in his reading of

the militantly secularist French Enlightenment *philosophes*, he came to understand the notion of unceasing improvement in the context of Calvinist discussions of salvation and perfection.<sup>12</sup> The religious doctrine of the early part of Godwin's life gave rise to a particular mindset, as he noted in a fragment of autobiography written in 1831, where he states that Calvinism set him in a crux between pessimism and optimism by contrasting the fate of the reprobate against the glorious reward of the elect: '[t]here was no medium: blessedness inconceivable and everlasting, or fire and damnation for ever and ever'.<sup>13</sup> Indelibly marked by the psychology of Calvinism, Godwin came to see perfectibility as a means of offering to the reader secular assurance on the future progress of equality and justice, and of staving off anxiety. Godwinian perfectibility may describe unceasing improvement in opposition to the notion of reaching a perfect state, but at the climax of *Political Justice* the idea comes to mirror the Calvinist vision of heaven, which foresaw a change in the nature of the elect as they achieve unity with God and reach divine perfection.

Godwin's insistent attention to the psychological condition of the reader evidences the influence of Calvinism. Calvin had emphasised the individual's relationship with God unmediated by clergy and asserted that God's grace was an arbitrary gift given to the elect, rather than a reward obtainable through good works. Hence, Calvinistic religious writing – particularly of the moderate school – often focused on psychology, on the need to assure the individual anxious to discern whether his faith is true and thus evidence of his election. While *Political Justice* is of course a logical and rational treatise, it carries the subtext of a psychological journey, taking the reader from the self-interest and corruption of modern society to the future state of equality and benevolence, assuring the reader that the process of human perfectibility will come to fruition. The manner in which Bunyan uses Christian's journey to the Celestial City as a means of guiding his reader's response is a template for the psychological progression of *Political Justice*. Godwin was firmly attached to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, remarking in the autobiographical fragment of 1831 that: '[m]y first instructor was the Bible [...] The next was Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress'.<sup>14</sup> Another religious text at the heart of his psychological understanding of politics is Richard Baxter's *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650). Godwin records in his autobiographical fragment of 1831 that he read Baxter's work while studying at the Dissenters' academy at Hoxton.<sup>15</sup> Baxter, a Puritan minister, analysed scripture to argue that the

future state of rest and eternal life was a material reality. A moderate Calvinist, he saw faith as an active faculty, rather than simply an endowment from God, and sought to rouse his audience to faith through the contemplation of, and hope of attaining, a future state in which the saints achieve divine perfection. In a psychological dynamic which bore great influence on Godwin, Baxter stressed the agency of hope in salvation: ‘who would believe, or stay, or strive, or suffer, or do any thing for Heaven, if it were not for the hope he hath to obtain it?’<sup>16</sup> N.H. Keeble argues that *The Saints Everlasting Rest* was the direct product of its author’s disappointment over the collapse of republican political ideals. Baxter, a chaplain in Edward Whalley’s regiment in 1645 and 46, transferred the Puritan commonwealth to celestial utopia, seeking there ‘the prospect of a hope which would not disappoint’, he suggests.<sup>17</sup> Godwin looked to this model in describing his own polemical utopia.

The account of perfectibility in *Political Justice* is shaped, then, by the psychology of Calvinistic thought. Before considering further the sublimated religious element within Godwin’s treatment of perfectibility, we should look at the cast of the idea as he encountered it in his reading of various French Enlightenment texts. For by 1793, the concept of perfectibility had been in circulation for several decades and had gathered significant ideological weight. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Godwin’s *Reply to Parr* sees him refer to drawing the idea from French thought and characterise it as describing ‘the progressive nature of man, in knowledge, in virtuous propensities, and in social institutions’.<sup>18</sup> This definition derives from Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), widely regarded as offering the first use of the word ‘la perfectibilité’ in a published text. In speaking of the *Discours*, Jean Starobinski argues that ‘le mot perfectibilité est un néologisme savant’, stating that the word did not appear in any dictionary until it featured in the *Dictionnaire de Trevoux* in 1771.<sup>19</sup> The term occurs in Rousseau’s discussion of the difference between men and animals, in which it is stated that ‘il y a une [...] qualité très spécifique qui les distingue, et sur laquelle il ne peut y avoir de contestation, c’est la faculté de se perfectionner’.<sup>20</sup> Whereas an animal will be at the end of its life what it was at the beginning, human beings, as both individuals and as a species, possess the ability to develop. Godwin’s reading of the *Discours sur l’inégalité* inspires his similar claim in *Political Justice* that ‘[a]ll that in which the human mind differs from the intellectual principle in animals is the growth of

society'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, his journals reveals that he read the *Discours sur l'inégalité* in preparation for writing his own treatise.<sup>22</sup>

However, Rousseau is intensely sceptical about the effects of this faculty of improvement:

Pourquoi l'homme seul est il sujet à devenir imbécile? N'est ce point qu'il retourne ainsi dans son état primitif, et que, tandis que la Bête, qui n'i rien acquis et qui n'i rien non plus à perdre, reste toujours avec son instinct, l'homme reperdant par la vieillesse ou d'autres accidens, tout ce que sa *perfectibilité* lui avoit fait acquerir, retombe ainsi plus bas que la Bête même.<sup>23</sup>  
[emphasis in original]

Though humanity may possess a faculty of improvement, they sink lower than the beasts. Rousseau's essential claim in the *Discours* is that humanity has been corrupted by the development of political society. The idea of perfectibility was therefore at odds with the general tenor of his work. Though Rousseau was a leading member of the *encyclopédistes*, his scepticism about progress and improvement sets him apart from the intellectual tendencies of the French Enlightenment in an important way. Yet despite this scepticism, Godwin still regarded Rousseau as a genius who had been 'the first to teach that the imperfections of government were the only permanent source of the vices of mankind'. He noted that though Rousseau proposed that 'the savage state was the genuine and proper condition of man', it was 'by a very slight mistake that he missed the opposite opinion which it is the business of the present work to establish'.<sup>24</sup>

Godwin may have first encountered the word 'perfectibility' in his reading of Rousseau, but his broader intellectual apprehension of the terms stems from other sources. The concept was absorbed more thoroughly in the work of other French Enlightenment thinkers, most notably Turgot and Condorcet.<sup>25</sup> Starobinski suggests that the word was used in conversation between Turgot and Condorcet from 1750 onwards, roughly contemporaneous with Rousseau's *Discours*.<sup>26</sup> Turgot was the controller of finances for the French Government in the pre-revolutionary era. His ideas came to be of great significance in liberal thought. Godwin refers to the 'celebrated Mr Turgot' at one point in *Political Justice*.<sup>27</sup>

In 1750, Turgot delivered a speech at the Sorbonne, entitled *Tableau philosophique des progrès succesifs de l'esprit humain*. There, he defined humanity's history as a



narrative of progress, declaring that ‘la masse totale du genre humain par des alternatives de calme et d’agitation, de biens et de maux, marche toujours, à pas lents, à une perfection plus grande’.<sup>28</sup> In Turgot’s version of history, an age of barbarism had begun after the fall of Rome, and was followed by barren medieval feudalism. But then the rise of the universities had ushered in a period of wondrous enlightenment, of which the modern France of Louis XIV was the culmination. In the past, he states, human progress could have been halted by disease and natural catastrophes; but civilisation has now advanced to such an extent that further progress is inevitable. In the *Discours sur l’histoire universelle* (1751), Turgot asserts that every human society proceeds through a number of preliminary stages (hunting, pastoral, agricultural), before reaching an advanced stage in which the surplus of labour and materials allows for the development of cities and an educated élite, which in turn brings accelerated progress in a range of sciences and arts such as navigation, astronomy, geography, music, dance and poetry. Ronald L. Meek suggests that it was in this essay that ‘the idea of progress which we particularly associate with the second half of the eighteenth century was put forward for the first time’. He dubs Turgot ‘a pioneer perfectibilist’.<sup>29</sup> Through his speculations on progress, Turgot established the secular, optimistic notion of improvement that was to prove such an integral element in the intellectual legacy of the French Enlightenment.

His disciple Condorcet, the only *philosophe* to live to play an active role in the French Revolution, developed the political implications of perfectibility in greater detail. We find references to Condorcet’s *Vie de Turgot* and *Vie de Voltaire* in *Political Justice*, suggesting that Godwin was closely familiar with his work.<sup>30</sup> His journal notes that Condorcet’s *Vie de Voltaire* featured in the large amount of preparatory reading he undertook for *Political Justice* in autumn 1791.<sup>31</sup> Condorcet was a moderate revolutionary, a member of the National Assembly who collaborated with Lafayette on drafting the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*.<sup>32</sup> His most celebrated work, the *Equisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (1795), was published too late to have influenced the first edition of *Political Justice* but offers the most succinct expression of his progressive theory of human nature and politics. In it, Condorcet declares that he will demonstrate that ‘la nature n’a marqué aucun terme au perfectionnement des facultés humaines; que la perfectibilité est réellement indéfinie’.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, he divides human history into

nine stages, following humanity's progress from the first associations in tribes, through the invention of the alphabet, up to the foundation of the French Republic. The tenth stage of the piece involves a forecast on humanity's future improvement. Here we see Condorcet make a strong conjunction between growth in knowledge and progress in ethics and politics. He predicts that the principles of the new French constitution will spread throughout the world; that without the corruptions of established political institution the natural benevolence of humanity will flourish; that with vastly improved systems of education, extremes of poverty and excessive wealth will be eliminated. Man's physical condition will consequently improve, and the average length of human life will increase. Condorcet suggests that growth in knowledge will bring unimaginable improvements in medical science, improvements which may allow for the eradication of all disease. His question on future progress holds in common with Godwin's *Political Justice* an intensely hopeful Enlightenment humanism:

Serait-il absurde, maintenant, de supposer que ce perfectionnement de l'espèce humaine doit être regardé comme susceptible d'un progrès indéfini, qu'il doit arriver un temps où la mort ne serait plus que l'effet, ou d'accidents extraordinaires, ou de la destruction de plus en plus lente des forces vitales, et qu'enfin la durée de l'intervalle moyen entre la naissance et cette destruction n'a elle-même aucun terme assignable?<sup>34</sup>

Condorcet's vision of equality spreading across the globe, of human life stretched to extraordinary lengths, is a radical humanist utopia that draws its sustaining optimism from the idea of human perfectibility.

The work of Condorcet and Turgot provided a crucial animus for Godwin. There is also the possibility that Godwin derived his notions of progress and improvement from a British tradition. David Spadafora contends that the Enlightenment idea of progress originated in England in the 1740s, suggesting that 'the English had already discovered perfectibility before Turgot gave it a vogue in France'.<sup>35</sup> He locates the source of perfectibility in the writings of the Englishmen John Gordon, Edmund Law and William Worthington, and in those of the Scots Adam Ferguson and Lord Monboddo. This British tradition gives a version of progress different to that envisaged by Turgot and Condorcet. In the work of the writers Spadafora deals with, perfectibility is a divine program, and it moves toward a single point of perfection,

namely unity with God.<sup>36</sup> While Godwin presents his idea of perfectibility – superficially at least – as a secular one and asserts its derivation from the French Enlightenment, he maintains a submerged religious outlook which ties him to this British tradition.

Godwin was an enthusiastic convert to the doctrine of perfectibility. In the *New Annual Register* of 1788, he intruded his authorial persona into a record of events in Parliament to announce that the recent debate over the existence of the slave trade was evidence of a decisive shift in modern politics and society. In the past, he asserts, philosophers had differed as to whether the human species was in a state of gradual progress, or whether ‘the vices and virtues of different ages be so nicely balanced, that no one deserves to be preferred to another’. The problem was decided now, as evidenced by Parliament’s moves to end slavery: ‘[l]iberty, humanity and science are daily extending, and bid fair to render despotism, cruelty and ignorance subjects of historical memory, not of actual observation’.<sup>37</sup>

In *Political Justice*, French Enlightenment notions of inexorable progress in knowledge and ethics towards a state of justice and equality become the dominant principles of the work. It is early in the treatise, in Chapter Six of Book One, that Godwin first explores the psychological and political implications of perfectibility in depth. The chapter, entitled ‘Human Inventions Capable of Perpetual Improvement’, is driven by the radical humanism he had encountered in his reading of the *philosophes* and invites the reader to develop a new understanding of human nature. It opens in Rousseauvian fashion by reminding us that ‘there is no characteristic of man, which seems at least so eminently to distinguish him [...] as his perfectibility’.<sup>38</sup> Godwin’s perfectibilism leads him to view the course of human history as evidence of humanity’s disposition to improvement:

Let us carry back our minds to man in his original state, a being capable of impressions and knowledge to an unbounded extent, but not having as yet received the one or cultivated the other; and let us contrast this being with all that science and genius have effected: and from hence we may form some idea what it is of which human nature is capable.<sup>39</sup>

Progress in knowledge is equated with improvement in the fundamental capacities of ‘human nature’. Godwin remained preoccupied by the implications of considering

humanity's progressive character throughout his career. In *The Enquirer* (1797), he contends that 'the progress which mankind has already made, is one of the most impressive arguments in proof of the progress he seems yet destined to make'.<sup>40</sup> In his unpublished essay 'Of History and Romance' (1797), a study of the way in which imaginative literature might direct the course of improvement, he states that '[i]t is curious, and it is important, to trace the progress of mankind from the savage to the civilised state'.<sup>41</sup> The very representation of perfectibility is seen to give rise to a beneficial state of mind.

Looking back to 'man in his original state' in *Political Justice*, Godwin narrates a version of human history which focuses on the development of language. He argues that basic speech originated in the involuntary cries of infants and was shaped into language as man developed the capacity for abstract thought. Lexicography, grammar, hieroglyphical and alphabetical writing gradually followed. Godwin describes the phenomenon of alphabetical writing as an 'invention' which is 'well calculated to impress us with a sense of the progressive nature of man'.<sup>42</sup> He invites us to marvel at the immensity of the task of breaking down the sounds of words into twenty-four elements, noting that Hartley was so baffled by the alphabet's development as to 'have recourse to miraculous interposition as the only adequate solution'.<sup>43</sup>

Though there are consonances between this progressive history of humanity and the work of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers Smith and Monboddo, the implications which Godwin draws from his narrative of improvement indicate his departure from this tradition and his kinship with the more radical political sensibilities of the French Enlightenment. While Smith described the development of technological innovation, Godwin extends the doctrine of progress to encompass the very substance of human nature. At the close of his miniature narrative, he broadens the issue and asks us to 'survey the earth covered with the labours of man, houses, inclosures, harvests, manufactures, instruments, machines, together with all the wonders of painting, poetry, eloquence and philosophy'.<sup>44</sup> Godwin then reveals that the purpose of his narrative has been to inculcate a radical humanist faith in 'improvement'. The doctrine of progress becomes the basis for a definition of political science which is far removed from the Hobbesian study of government, with its fundamentally conservative conception of human nature. In the chapter's concluding

paragraph, Godwin makes overt his intention to construct from the idea of perfectibility a particular state of mind and attitude to politics:

Such was man in his original state, and such is man as we at present behold him. Is it possible for us to contemplate what he has already done, without being impressed with a strong presentiment of the improvements he has yet to accomplish? There is no science that is not capable of additions; there is no art that may not be carried to a still higher perfection. If this be true of all other sciences, why not of morals? If this be true of all other arts, why not of social institution? The very conception of this as possible, is in the highest degree encouraging. If we can still farther demonstrate it to be a part of the natural and regular progress of mind, our confidence and our hopes will then be complete. This is the temper with which we ought to engage in the study of political truth.<sup>45</sup>

Again, he makes a conjunction between the growth of human knowledge and progress in ‘morals’. But the passage focuses on the particular mindset produced by these tenets. Godwin speaks of the ‘encouraging’ character of the idea of perfectibility; of the ‘natural and regular progress of mind’ we might derive from it; of how we might use it to complete ‘our confidence and our hopes’. State of mind, ‘temper’, is seen to be integral to ‘the study of political truth’. Godwin’s definition of human perfectibility hinges on the restorative and reviving mental effects of the idea. This concluding paragraph actively asks the reader to enter into this psychology, to read the study of political truth undertaken in the rest of the work in the temper of hope.

While the idea of perfectibility outlined here is declaredly secular, Godwin remains grounded in a Calvinistic psychology. As we have seen, the nature of Calvinist belief engendered sensitivity to the significance of interior mental states among many Dissenters. This passage of *Political Justice* seems to look back in particular to Baxter’s vision of heaven in *The Saints Everlasting Rest*. There, the idea of the future perfection of the saints in a world of everlasting life is prized for its psychological effects on the reader unsure of his faith or purpose. Baxter directly addressed his reader, bidding that the prospect of the future state should ‘kindle thy desires, and quicken thine endeavors’. He urged on his audience: ‘[u]p and be doing, run, and strive, and fight, and hold on, for thou hast a certain glorious prize before thee’.<sup>46</sup> In his attention to the ‘natural and regular process of mind’ of his reader, Godwin displays the legacy of his training as a Dissenting minister. Attentive to the need to

provide assurance and ward off despair, he asserts that the hope of perfectibility produces a beneficial mental outlook. His notion of readers newly confident in the study of ‘political truth’ through their progressive faith mirrors Baxter’s observation on morality and the future state: ‘[w]hat kinde of men doest thou think Christians would be in their lives and duties, if they had still this glory fresh in their thoughts?’<sup>47</sup> Godwin would have found a more recent source for this strand of theological thought on the necessity of encouragement in Doddridge’s *Course of Lectures*, a key part of the syllabus at all Dissenters’ academies, including Hoxton. Doddridge’s advice to prospective ministers dwells on the consolation and encouragement to be derived from the idea of a future state and asserts that mental outlook is crucial to belief: ‘faith is not any one act of the mind to be performed once for all, but it expresses the temper which a man is to carry along with him throughout his whole life’.<sup>48</sup> William Haller argues, in his analysis of Puritan religious teaching prior to the 1640s, that the primary duty of Puritan preachers was to build up ‘the courage and self-confidence of the people’ and thus avoid the devil’s temptations of confusion and despair: ‘[s]inners had to be helped out of the slough of despond and up the hill of difficulty before they could proceed upon the latter stages of their pilgrimage toward the heavenly city and the Puritan commonwealth’.<sup>49</sup> Puritan preaching located the root of salvation in psychological encouragement of the sinner, he suggests. Godwin’s declamation on ‘the temper with which we ought to engage in the study of political truth’ shares a sensibility with the strand of Puritan thought identified by Haller and embodied in Baxter and Doddridge’s work.

The idea of perfectibility outlined in *Political Justice* meshes then, secular French Enlightenment progressivism with English Puritan and Dissenting notions of the role of psychology in religious faith. Godwin could look to contemporaneous political writings for similar conjunctions. His use of the word ‘encouraging’ connects him with Richard Price’s sermon on ‘The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind’ (1787). Blending the Dissenting preoccupation with assurance and the idea of perfectibility, Price had spoken of ‘a progressive improvement in human affairs which will terminate in greater degrees of light and virtue and happiness than have yet been known’.<sup>50</sup> The promise of a ‘universal empire of reason and virtue’ gives, he suggests, ‘an expectation so animating amidst the variety of gloomy prospects with which this world, in its present state, is often presenting us, for

it is an expectation no less credible and probable in itself than it is encouraging'.<sup>51</sup> Price's final emphasis is on the mental invigoration to be drawn from the Enlightenment prospect of improvement.

Godwin's understanding of perfectibility positioned the idea of equality as the source of this psychological assurance. As the work proceeds, it becomes evident that Godwin employs the idea to describe future progress towards an anarchist society of equality in which self-determining individuals act benevolently for the general good without the external coercion of government. In the final pages of *Political Justice*, he suggests that '[i]t will not be difficult perhaps to trace, in the progress of modern Europe from barbarism to refinement, a tendency towards the equalisation of property'.<sup>52</sup> The Godwinian psychology of hope is firmly anchored in this conviction that improvement equates with the progressive advent of material equality. The egalitarian inflection of the idea of perfectibility set out in *Political Justice* is in keeping with its origins in the thought of the French Enlightenment.

The discussion of progress towards equality offered in Godwin's later collection of essays, *The Enquirer*, is illuminating in this context. In the essay 'Of Riches and Poverty', he laments that in the unequal society, 'the poor are condemned to a want of that leisure which is necessary for the improvement of mind'.<sup>53</sup> In the succeeding essay, 'Of Avarice and Profusion', Godwin offers a more detailed insight into his idea of equality. The communistic society, he argues, reduces the individual to 'a piece of mechanism, prompted by no personal motives'. Absolute equality being undesirable, we must accept a degree of inequality and see that 'it is the province of justice and virtue to counteract the practical evils which inequality has a tendency to produce'.<sup>54</sup> Godwin declares that 'a state of cultivated equality' in which all have the opportunity to improve their minds is the pinnacle of social progress and suggests that the contemplation of such a state might stimulate current political efforts:

It is reasonable therefore to take this state as a sort of polar star, in our speculations on the tendency of human actions. Without entering into the question whether such a state can be realised in its utmost extent, we may venture to pronounce that mode of society best, which most nearly approaches this state.<sup>55</sup>

Irrespective of whether the state of equality can be realised, the hope of it will serve to direct society nearer to that state. We can begin to understand the political intent behind Godwin's discussions of human perfectibility in *Political Justice*.

Having established perfectibility as a stimulus towards optimism early on in *Political Justice*, he relentlessly emphasises the progressive nature of humanity throughout the work. We are told that '[m]an is in a state of perpetual progress';<sup>56</sup> that the 'improvement of individuals and the melioration of political institutions are destined to mutually produce and reproduce each other';<sup>57</sup> that 'if science be capable of perpetual improvement, men will also be capable of perpetually advancing in practical wisdom and justice';<sup>58</sup> that 'it is the characteristic of mind to be capable of improvement'.<sup>59</sup> Speaking of revolutions, Godwin considers the difference between those in America and France which took place 'without so much as almost a dissentient voice' (matters changed as he was writing *Political Justice*), and that against Charles I in Britain, which involved a civil war. The difference occurred 'because the latter was the affair of the seventeenth century, and the former happened in the close of the eighteenth'.<sup>60</sup> If the American and French revolutions had happened still later, philosophy, political thought and civilization as a whole would have progressed, and perhaps there would not have been 'one solitary instance of violence and confiscation'.<sup>61</sup>

Godwin's gradualism and consequent scepticism about the long term implications of revolutions are produced in part by his encounter with the progressive faith of the French Enlightenment. As he makes clear in a chapter entitled 'Of the Species of Reform to be Desired', gradual improvement is the only path of development which avoids both despotism and anarchy.<sup>62</sup> The gradualist scheme of *Political Justice* has sometimes been read as an agenda for quietism; but Godwin specifically defines the role of the individual within perfectibility. He suggests that in the reform of opinion, discussion has a crucial agency: '[i]f we would improve the social institutions of mankind, we must write, we must argue, we must converse'.<sup>63</sup> The gradual process of perfectibility affords a crucial role to private judgement and public discussion. Once again, we can see the overlap between the culture of Dissent and the perfectibilist optimism of the French Enlightenment. This gradualism might be best understood in the context of events in France. *Political Justice* was written against a background of deepening anxiety among British liberals and radicals about the course of the French



Revolution. The September Massacres of 1792 had already introduced revolutionary violence into the British perception of the Revolution. Donald Winch usefully observes that *Political Justice* was an ‘attempt to provide a means of coming to terms with disillusionment by retaining hopes for future fundamental changes in society and human nature’.<sup>64</sup> This attempt needs to be understood in the context of anxiety about the failures of the progressive project in France. Godwin’s idea of perfectibility, with its strong undercurrent of Calvinistic assurance, becomes a means of negotiating the traumas of contemporary politics and focusing on the sustaining vision of a future egalitarian society.

### III

One of Godwin’s central perfectibilist claims is that morality will ‘improve’ as human knowledge progresses. The idea of benevolence is central to his psychology of hope, with the possibility of disinterested behaviour guaranteeing the possibility of progress towards a society of universal justice, common property and material equality in which individuals act for the good of others, rather than through self-interest. As suggested in the introduction, benevolence is an integral element in the intellectual legacy Godwin passed on to Mary and Percy Shelley. It is also a crucial distinguishing element within Godwin’s political thought, for his conviction in the possibility of benevolent acts separated him from the Benthamite utilitarianism which would rise to become the dominant ideology of middle-class reformism in the nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup> As Eric Hobsbawm has observed, Godwin, along with Robert Owen, adopted many of the arguments of Benthamite classical liberalism, then turned them against capitalism by separating ‘the pursuit of happiness from the assumptions of a selfish individualism’.<sup>66</sup>

While Bentham argued that self-interest was the principal motivation in human behaviour, Godwin’s insistence on benevolence meant that his work formed a more radical argument for the possibility of a society of disinterested equality. Yet his involvement with this set of ideas has often gone unacknowledged by critics who have mapped his career as a progression from attachment to reason, to attachment to feeling. It is important to acknowledge that Godwin’s ideas of rational benevolence involve him in the discourse of radical sensibility. In contrast to other critics, Chris

Jones has worked to correct the trend he identifies whereby ‘the majority have [...] concentrated on [Godwin’s] criticism of the passions and have neglected the affiliation of his dominating idea of universal benevolence with the Hutchesonian brand of moral sense’.<sup>67</sup> We cannot understand the nature of the psychology of hope without recognising that Godwin is preoccupied with egalitarian notions of benevolence from the first edition of *Political Justice* onwards.

It is likely that Godwin’s education at Hoxton was the source of his preoccupation with benevolence. Shaftesburian and Hutchesonian theories on the moral sense and the innate disposition to altruism were key elements in the curricula of Dissenters’ academies in the latter half of the eighteenth century, in contrast to their marginalisation at Oxford and Cambridge, as we saw in the introduction.<sup>68</sup> Shaftesbury had emphasised the human constitution as the source of virtue rather than God’s grace, defined virtuous acts as being distinct from those acts committed in the hope of divine reward, and thus countered trends in late-seventeenth century Anglicanism. Doddridge’s *Course of Lectures* offers several treatises on the Hutchesonian assertion that a moral sense is implanted in our natures disposing us to affection to others, stating that the ‘passions and affections of human nature are not in any degree to be ascribed to God’.<sup>69</sup> In 1783, in a plan for a prospective school curriculum, Godwin assigns a central position to moral education and states that it has been ‘fully demonstrated by that very elegant philosopher, Mr Hutcheson, that self-love is not the source of all our passions, but that disinterested benevolence has its seat in the human heart’.<sup>70</sup> In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment cosmopolitan notion of a universal benevolence that extended to all humanity came to separate English supporters of the French Revolution and its ideals from conservatives, as discussed earlier.<sup>71</sup>

This was the intellectual context in which Godwin approached the concept of benevolence. That *Political Justice* has the argument for the existence of altruism at its heart is suggested by the declaration in the conclusion that ‘it has been clearly shown in the course of the present work, that men are not so entirely governed by self-interest as has frequently been supposed’.<sup>72</sup> Benevolence is the pivotal concept in Godwin’s moral theory, as shown by his claim that ‘[i]f self love be the only principle of action, there can be no such thing as virtue’.<sup>73</sup> Late in his career, Godwin spoke of his contempt for ‘the grovelling principle, born in France, and which is the curse of

modern times, that all human motives are ultimately resolvable into self-love'.<sup>74</sup> He refers principally to two of the *philosophes*, Helvétius and Holbach. Though their theories of environmental determinism were influential on *Political Justice*, Godwin vehemently objected to the manner in which they ascribed a pivotal position to egoism in their models of behaviour. In this work, he displays an intense dissatisfaction with the modern manifestation of this tradition in the work of Bentham. Don Locke usefully evaluates Godwin's later remark by pointing out that the 'grovelling principle was born in England, in the writings of Hobbes, but its return home in Bentham's care was for Godwin the great disaster of contemporary thought'.<sup>75</sup>

The benevolist moral theory of *Political Justice* emerges as a rebuttal of Hobbes's model of politics, with its claim for the necessity of government in controlling recalcitrant human nature. Godwin's hope for improvement towards a society of justice, equality and anarchy is founded in his faith in the virtue of individual human nature above that of government. He draws his benevolism from a variety of sources. The rebuttal of self-interest certainly wears the influence of Rousseau's critique of Hobbes in the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*.<sup>76</sup> But Godwin also looks back to the authors who influenced Rousseau, namely Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, with their claim that private virtue is not possible without commitment to the public good and attacks on those – particularly Hobbes – who founded morality and society on self-love. Hutcheson's work had originated as a riposte to Mandeville's model of human nature, being an argument for the existence in human nature of a disinterested desire for the happiness of others, grounded in natural affection rather than reason – a contrast to Shaftesbury. His consequent arguments against slavery on the grounds of the natural equality of humanity through common feeling gave philosophical justification to the abolitionist movement.<sup>77</sup>

Throughout *Political Justice*, benevolence is prized as a powerful encouragement toward hope. The optimism expressed by this idea is first evident in Book IV, in a chapter entitled 'Of the Principle of Virtue' (a title changed to 'Of Self-love and Benevolence' in the second and third editions). At the outset of the chapter, Godwin maps out a conflict between 'two opinions' on humanity's moral nature:

By some it is supposed that the human mind is of a temper considerably ductile, so that, as we in certain instances evidently propose our own advantage for the object of our pursuit, so we

are capable no less sincerely and directly in other instances of desiring the benefit of our neighbour. By others it is affirmed, that we are incapable of acting but from the prospect or stimulant of personal advantage, and that, when our conduct appears most retrograde from this object, the principle from which it flows is secretly the same. It shall be the business of this chapter to prove that the former hypothesis is conformable to the truth.<sup>78</sup>

The chapter will ‘prove’ humanity’s capacity for pure altruism, and ‘prove’ the truth of what Godwin comes to refer to as ‘the system of disinterested benevolence’.<sup>79</sup> Immediately, he defines his moral theory in opposition to a philosophy of self-interest.

The example of the infant and his nurse is central to this attempt to prove the benevolist hypothesis. According to Godwin, an infant will have been led by its perceptions to conclude that his nurse is ‘a being possessed of consciousness and susceptible like himself to the impressions of pleasure and pain’.<sup>80</sup> This claim echoes Hume’s opinion in *A Treatise on Human Nature*, in which it is held that our ability to share in the emotions of others comes from perception of its outward signs in others, and thus from our knowledge of the similarity of all human expression and emotion.<sup>81</sup> Godwin is often understood by critics to have emphasised reason above the feelings at this stage of his career. However, his interest in an innate moral sense, which shows his kinship with the thought of Hutcheson and moral sense, suggests he saw benevolence as an intuitive faculty operating prior to the intervention of reason. Godwin then suggests that if the nurse should fall from a flight of stairs and break her leg, the infant will be moved by innate disposition to a sympathetic response:

He will probably feel some concern for the accident; he will understand the meaning of her cries, similar to those which he has been accustomed to utter in distress; and he will discover some wish to relieve her. Pity is perhaps first introduced by a mechanical impression upon the organs, in consequence of which the cries uttered by another prompt the child without direct design to utter cries of his own. These are at first unaccompanied with compassion, but they naturally induce the mind of the infant to yield attention to the appearance which thus impressed him.<sup>82</sup>

These claims on the disposition to sympathy would later shape Mary Shelley’s portrait of the Creature’s development in *Frankenstein*. Godwin asserts that benevolence begins in a mechanistic process, an ‘impression’ on the organs that operates prior to reason. Contrary to William Stafford’s claim that Godwin rejected Shaftesbury and

Hutcheson and asserted rational benevolence in the first edition of *Political Justice*, he does envision a moral sense here.<sup>83</sup> Through sense impressions we are led to the realisation that other people are like ourselves, with the result that bonds of sympathy develop. He goes on to dismiss two possible objections from proponents of the selfish hypothesis – a) that the child is actually gratifying himself through the ‘pleasures of benevolence’ (this is his first benevolent emotion, hence he could not know there would be pleasure attached to a benevolent act) – b) that the child is actually fearful that his own well-being may suffer as a result of the nurse’s injury (impossible, as the child is not capable of rational thought or calculation). Godwin has now ‘proved’ that individuals are disposed to act purely out of concern for the happiness of others and without any regard for their own interest.

Later in the same chapter, he dwells specifically on the psychological implications of this idea:

There is no doctrine in which the generous and elevated mind rests with more satisfaction, than in that of which we are treating. If it be false, it is no doubt incumbent upon us to make the best of the small remnant of good that remains. But it is a heartless prospect for the moralist, who, when he has done all, has no hope to persuade mankind to one atom of real affection towards any one individual of their species.<sup>84</sup>

Godwin describes in detail the interior mental response to benevolence, the manner in which the ‘generous and elevated mind’ can draw ‘satisfaction’ from it. Yet he then turns to countenance the possibility that his doctrine may be ‘false’. Even at the conclusion of this crucial chapter, Godwin’s assertions are laced with anxiety. At the moment of climbing to affirm the liberating possibilities of benevolence, he looks down into the chasm at the ‘heartless prospect’ which lies beneath if his moral theory is proved false. The dichotomy between hope and despair, familiar from Calvinist thought, is again evident. Benevolence is not proved; it is explicitly presented as a ‘hope’. This passage is a brief narrative of hope and disappointment, in which Godwin considers the radically diminished expectations that await without benevolence, before finally clinging to the consoling hope afforded by the notion that individuals might possess ‘real affection’ for others.

Hope is defined against specific proponents of the selfish hypothesis as the chapter proceeds. Without benevolence, Godwin laments, we ‘may be made indeed the

instruments of good, but in a way less honourable, than that in which a frame of wood or a sheet of paper may be made the instrument of good'.<sup>85</sup> If we adhere to the system of thought in which individuals can contribute to the general good by following their self-interest, we can admire the workings of the universe in which 'public utility results from each man's contempt of the utility', but we cannot admire the individuals who compose this universe. This refers in particular to Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits* (Godwin names Mandeville at a later stage in *Political Justice* in attacking his hypothesis that private vices are public benefits').<sup>86</sup> Doddridge also specifically objects to Mandeville in the *Course of Lectures*.<sup>87</sup> Mandeville's bees were motivated solely by greed and lust and yet the hive flourished: 't]hus every Part was full of Vice, / Yet the whole Mass a Paradise'.<sup>88</sup> Developing his thesis in express opposition to Shaftesbury's benevolism, he presented public utility somehow being produced despite the unrelenting private pursuit of self-interest, a theory which Godwin found repugnant.

This issue of motivation is the crux of the moral theory of *Political Justice*; at stake is the hope of an improved society of universal justice and equality. At moments such as Godwin's scornful reference to those who argue that '[w]hen we do the most benevolent action, it is with a view only to our own advantage, and with the most sovereign and unreserved neglect of that of others', we can see that Bentham is a key target in his critique of the philosophy of self-interest.<sup>89</sup> Critics such as Don Locke, J.P. Clark and Geoffrey Scarre have classified Godwin straightforwardly as a utilitarian.<sup>90</sup> By contrast, Philp has argued that he cannot be classified as a utilitarian of any form; that his conception of moral truth is concerned not with individual pleasure or pain but with the progressive improvement of humanity's intellectual and moral capacities.<sup>91</sup> The issue of benevolence provides the most pressing case for re-evaluating Godwin's status as a utilitarian in an age when that term invites a conjunction with Bentham. Seamus Deane rightly asserts that the 'major difference between Benthamite utilitarianism and the Godwinian system is that Bentham believes man to be naturally selfish, Godwin does not'.<sup>92</sup> Those who classify Godwin as a utilitarian often neglect his challenge, through the hope of benevolence, to the Benthamite alignment of happiness with selfish individualism.

Understanding the role of altruism in *Political Justice* involves considering Bentham's model of human behaviour. Bentham may have shifted his view of

benevolence to some degree over the course of his career, but overwhelmingly he maintained the view set out in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789):

The motives, whereof the influence is at once most powerful, most constant, and most extensive, are the motives of physical desire, the love of wealth, the love of ease, the love of life, and the fear of pain: all of them self-regarding motives.<sup>93</sup>

However, in isolation such a theory of motivation would envisage individuals as having no interest in the public happiness. Bentham's concept of 'the pleasures of benevolence' addressed this problem by forming a bridge between individual and social good. He defined these pleasures as 'the pleasures resulting from the view of any pleasures supposed to be possessed by the beings who may be the objects of benevolence'.<sup>94</sup> In essence, self-interest remained the fundamental motivation in Bentham's system of thought; benevolence is a source of pleasure to the individual who perpetrates it rather than a purely altruistic act. His psychological model is summed up in a memorandum he wrote forty years after the *Introduction*, in which he declares that 'if it be through the happiness of another, or others, in whatsoever number, that a man pursues his own happiness, still the direct and immediate, and nearest object is not the less his own happiness'.<sup>95</sup>

Godwin's repeated rebuttals of the argument that benevolence is in fact a form of self-interest evidence his reaction against Bentham. He specifically rebuts the 'pleasures of benevolence' thesis, using Bentham's own phrase, in his discussion of the infant and the nurse.<sup>96</sup> In the final section of this crucial chapter, Godwin explores the political implications of the idea of benevolence, most importantly its bearing on progressive hope. Having reached the close of his cataloguing of the philosophy of self-interest, Godwin declaims that '[i]t is no wonder that philosophers, whose system has taught them to look upon their fellow men as perverse and unjust, have been frequently cold, phlegmatic and unanimated'.<sup>97</sup> 'It is no wonder that Rousseau', he continues, 'the most benevolent of all those philosophers, and who most escaped the general contagion, has been driven to place the perfection of all virtue in doing no injury'.<sup>98</sup> The recognition of altruistic motivation is of vital political significance:

Neither philosophy nor morality nor politics will ever show like themselves, till man shall be acknowledged for what he really is, a being capable of justice, virtue and benevolence, and who needs not always to be led to a philanthropical conduct by foreign and frivolous considerations.<sup>99</sup>

Godwin's model of human nature is opposed to that of the Benthamite; man as 'he really is' is capable of disinterested desire for the happiness of others. He then proceeds to discuss the relation between the ideas of benevolence and human perfectibility, asserting that the destruction of the selfish hypothesis releases a potent hope:

The system of disinterested benevolence proves to us, that it is possible to be virtuous, and not merely talk of virtue; that all which has been said by philosophers and moralists respecting impartial justice is not an unmeaning rant; and that, when we call upon mankind to divest themselves of selfish and personal considerations, we call upon them for something which they are able to practise. An idea like this reconciles us to our species [...] and gives us reason to expect, that, as men collectively advance in science and useful institution, they will proceed more and more to consolidate their private judgment and their individual will with abstract justice and the unmixed approbation of general happiness.<sup>100</sup>

As the process of human perfectibility proceeds through collective 'advance in science and useful institution', so, given humanity's capacity for benevolence, moral progress will take place and individuals will act for the happiness of society as a whole. Through faith in benevolence, Godwin suggests, we might be 'reconciled' with 'our species'. We can believe that, progressively, individuals in the future will become more likely to act altruistically for the 'general happiness'. Godwin's anti-Hobbesian vision of a society of minimal government is founded on an anti-Hobbesian conception of the goodness of human nature. Later in *Political Justice*, he describes humanity in the current age as 'inveterate in selfishness, without sympathy and forbearance for the welfare of others'.<sup>101</sup> But 'reconciled' to humanity by faith in benevolence, Godwin invites the reader to consider a future state in which altruism is the rule of conduct.

His forecast of moral progress is set at the heart of his political theory:



What are the inferences that ought to be made from this doctrine with respect to political institution? Certainly not that the interest of the individual ought to be made incompatible with the part he is expected to take in the interest of the whole. This is neither desirable, nor even possible. But that social institution needs not despair of seeing men influenced by other and better motives. The legislator is bound to recollect that the true perfection of mind consists in disinterestedness.<sup>102</sup>

As he did earlier, Godwin briefly confronts a contrary psychological state. The virtue of the idea of benevolence lies in staving off the ‘despair’ which might surround our considerations of social institution.

Godwin specifically refers to the notion of ‘disinterested’ benevolence, meaning that the altruistic act is not motivated by any pleasure that accrues to the perpetrator as a result. It is ‘disinterestedness’ that lies behind the most notorious section of *Political Justice*, the Fénelon episode. Phrased in terms Godwin would come to regret later in his career, this passage allowed his detractors to characterise his model of human nature as a rationalist travesty of the reality of feeling. However, the Fénelon episode is actually intended as an exploration of the same ideas of individual benevolence and public happiness that are raised in the chapter ‘Of the Principle of Virtue’. The passage is best understood as a response to Burke’s *Reflections*, in particular his repudiation of universal benevolence and assertion that the bonds of family formed the limits of human feeling. The Fénelon episode is another expression of Godwin’s hope that individuals might act for considerations beyond self-interest. However, where the infant’s benevolent interest in his nurse’s welfare was described in the terms of a Hutchesonian or Humean instinct for affection, Godwin here employs the language of reason.

This key passage begins Book II, coming in a chapter entitled ‘Of Justice’. Godwin discusses morality and individual duties, stating that acts can only be judged right or wrong in so far as they contribute to the public good and defining the dictat of justice as stating that ‘I should contribute every thing in my power to the benefit of the whole’.<sup>103</sup> It follows that our relations with other individuals should be governed according to the worth and importance of those individuals in terms of public utility. Godwin states that if one were faced with a burning building and could save either the philosopher Fénelon or his chambermaid, then one should save the former, for this would be of greater benefit to ‘the happiness, the information and improvement of

others'. He continues by arguing that our action ought to be the same if the chambermaid happened to be 'my wife, my mother or my benefactor'.<sup>104</sup> The fact that they have a particular tie to us ought not to be a factor in deciding our conduct:

Justice would have taught me to save the life of Fenelon at the expence of the other. What magic is there in the pronoun 'my', to overturn the decisions of everlasting truth? My wife or mother may be a fool or a prostitute, malicious, lying or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine?<sup>105</sup>

The parable of Fénelon teaches that self-regarding motives and the public good are not commensurate, but that they can be entirely distinct. Any gratitude we may feel to our mother for bearing us and nursing us is immaterial, as it matters not whether benefit was bestowed on ourselves or on another. For Godwin, gratitude is not related to the benefactor's intrinsic moral worth, but is in fact another form of self-interest. Saving the wife or mother would be selfish. He follows the Dissenting definition of morality set out by Doddridge, which emphasises disinterestedness and holds that 'virtue teaches each to consult to consult the good of all, and to be willing to resign any private interest of his own to the interest of society, when it comes in competition with it'.<sup>106</sup> Reason, rather than a moral sense of affection for others, is in the ascendant at this point in *Political Justice*. The affections, the natural moral instinct which would see the individual rescue the member of their own family, are associated with weakness. In an autobiographical fragment of 1800, Godwin would assert that it was the influence of Calvinist thought at this stage of his career which led him to neglect domestic affection – Calvin having dismissed familial ties as an obstruction to the individual's relationship with God.<sup>107</sup> And as Stafford suggests, there is the particular presence of the Calvinistic thought of Jonathan Edwards, in which general benevolence is distinguished from, and opposed to, the private affections.<sup>108</sup>

The passage is a plea that political study should take account of ties which stretch beyond the bounds of family. In his perceptive reading of the Fénelon episode, Chris Jones suggests that: 'Godwin is attacking the partial affections which had been exaggerated into unthinking principles of action by conservative sensibility'.<sup>109</sup> The attempt to envisage the process of political improvement in *Political Justice* involved shattering Burke's concept of the natural affections. In the *Reflections*, our instinctive,

‘natural’ feelings bind us to our family and in turn to our social superiors, to our place in society, to the constitution of Britain: ‘we begin our public affections in our families’.<sup>110</sup> Burke dismissed the notion that the individual might be connected with other individuals beyond the limits of the family:

I have no great opinion of that sublime, abstract, metaphysic reversionary, contingent humanity, which in *cold blood* can subject the *present time* and those whom we *daily see and converse with* to immediate calamities in favour of the *future and uncertain* benefit of persons who *only exist in idea*.<sup>111</sup> [emphasis in original]

Burke’s later attack on Rousseau would focus on the dislocation between his treatment of his own children and his professed benevolent compassion for humanity in the abstract.<sup>112</sup>

Godwin’s intention in the Fénelon passage is to present a model of the very form of conduct Burke had rejected:

We are not connected with one or two percipient beings, but with a society, a nation, and in some sense with the whole family of mankind. Of consequence that life ought to be preferred which will be most conducive to the general good.<sup>113</sup>

While Godwin may be in conflict with Shaftesbury’s attention to the parental affections, he follows that author’s invitation to the individual to look beyond the immediate nexus of his relations and join with a higher polity. Burke’s notion of family affections is present, but Godwin inverts the terminology of the *Reflections* by insisting that our family is that of humanity in its entirety. The Fénelon episode is an articulation of the ‘system of disinterested benevolence’ that is placed as the summit of hope later in *Political Justice* in ‘Of the Principle of Virtue’. In response to Burke’s intense hostility to general benevolence, Godwin describes a perfect synthesis between what he terms the ‘individual will’ and ‘public happiness’.

The message conveyed by *Political Justice* is that future progress in morals can be expected; that as the influence of external institutions diminishes, the social feeling that is ingrained in the individual can be expected to thrive. In contrast to Bentham’s thought, happiness is not equated with self-interested ‘pleasure’, but with the pursuit of the good of others. However, there are variations within Godwin’s moral thought

and an understanding of his ethical principles should not be confined to the Fénelon episode. Even from the first edition of *Political Justice*, particularly in the Hutchesonian episode of the infant and nurse, we see arguments which anticipate later claims in *The Enquirer* that there is ‘no motive more powerful in its operations upon the human mind than sympathy’, that ‘the social affections are the chief awakeners of man’.<sup>114</sup>

Godwin’s theory of benevolence allows him to rebut Hobbes’s model of human nature and Bentham’s assertion of the primacy of self-interest, to put forward a radical new strain of political thought based on the belief in altruism. He asserts the prominent position of this principle in his thought in the latter stages of the work:

Mind without benevolence is a barren and cold existence. It is in seeking the good of others, in embracing a great and expansive sphere of action, in forgetting our own individual interests, that we find our true element. The tendency of the whole system delineated in this Book is to lead us to that element.<sup>115</sup>

The idea of benevolence is shown to possess a powerfully restorative psychological effect, staving off the threat of that ‘barren and cold existence’, reconciling us to humanity and providing hope for progress toward a just society. However, this is less a rational argument for the tendency to benevolence, more a demonstration of the need for the consolation offered by the possibility of altruism.

#### IV

The strands of thought on human perfectibility and benevolence are drawn together in the remarkable conclusion to *Political Justice*. Here, Godwin describes an anarchist utopia, an ideal ‘*simple form of society without government*’ in which each individual acts through their own private judgement for the public good, equality is absolute and there is no private property.<sup>116</sup> At no other point in the work is the projected impact upon the mind of the reader so clearly Godwin’s central concern. At one point in Book VIII, he concedes that the virtue of his political and philosophical principles lies not in their originality but in their cumulative psychological effect upon their reader:

These ideas of justice and improvement are as old as literature and reflexion themselves. They have suggested themselves in detached parts to the inquisitive in all ages, though they have perhaps never been brought together so as sufficiently to strike the mind with their consistency and beauty.<sup>117</sup>

Godwin reasserts his Dissenting conception of reader-response, stating his intention to ‘strike the mind’ with his ideas of ‘justice and improvement’, to endow his doctrines with ‘consistency and beauty’. In the concluding book of *Political Justice*, Godwin’s concern with the aesthetic form and reception of his political tenets ultimately leads him to embrace the techniques of imaginative literature. It is here that we find his most explicit statements on the political significance of the psychology of hope.

The egalitarian principles of Book VIII, ‘On Property’, follow on from the discussion of crime and criminality in Book VII. Godwin declares that ‘the period that shall put an end to the system of *coercion* and *punishment*, is intimately connected with the circumstance of property’s being placed upon an equitable basis’.<sup>118</sup> The present systems of government are described as producing an unequal distribution of property, which in turn produces the greatest evils of society: crime and the excess burden of labour upon the poor. Godwin’s first sketches of utopia originate in his proposal that private property should be eradicated. He depicts a state of plenty in which human nature would be seen in its true aspect:

The narrow principle of selfishness would vanish. No man being obliged to guard his little store, or provide with anxiety and pain for restless wants, each would lose his own individual existence in the thought of the general good.<sup>119</sup>

We see here the political implications which Godwin derives from the benevolist tradition of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. He foresees a society in which selfishness ‘would vanish’ and philanthropy would reign; a system of universal benevolence and equality in which the existence of each individual is dedicated to the welfare of others. It was this egalitarian vision of the future improvement of society that would prompt Malthus to offer his critique of perfectibility in the *Essay on Population*, to assert the dominance of self-interest and the impossibility of progress toward benevolence and equality.

From this consideration of the state of equality and benevolence, Godwin derives a powerful sense of hope. He suggests that the labour necessary to maintain the necessities of human life might be distributed equally. Then, he argues, ‘half an hour a day, seriously employed in manual labour by every member of the community, would sufficiently supply the whole with necessaries’.<sup>120</sup> The poor would then no longer be rendered ignorant by constant labour and the rich would no longer be indolent. Godwin suggests that this prospect is psychologically restorative:

Is it possible to contemplate this fair and generous picture of independence and virtue, where every man would have ample leisure for the noble energies of mind, without feeling our very souls refreshed with admiration and hope?<sup>121</sup>

Hope is envisaged as a ‘refreshing’ force. The study of the society of universal benevolence and equality, the very contemplation of improvement, carries a set of materially beneficial effects.

These hopes for future progress are the subject of the climactic passage of Book VIII, the speculation on human immortality. As Godwin builds up to this climactic moment of the text, he suggests that in the anarchist society to which we are slowly progressing, all forms of co-operation will become unnecessary, and each individual will live according to their own private judgement. There would be no cohabitation, no musical concerts and no theatre. To the objection that the necessities of labour demand co-operation, Godwin replies that whilst such things as forestry, the navigation of ships and the construction of canals require the work of many hands at present, it may not always be so. If we look at ‘various sorts of mills, of weaving engines, of steam engines, are we not astonished at the compendium of labour they produce? Who shall say where this species of improvement must stop?’<sup>122</sup> Godwin attracted much ridicule for his speculations on future technological progress, speculations which express in heightened form the optimism of Enlightenment humanism:

Hereafter it is by no means clear that the most extensive operations will not be brought within the reach of one man; or, to make use of a familiar instance, that a plough may not be turned into a field, and perform its office without superintendence. It was in this sense that the celebrated Franklin conjectured, that ‘mind would one day become omnipotent over matter’.<sup>123</sup>

The outlandish notion of the self-operating plough indicates that Godwin is beginning to use the idea of perfectibility to reach into the realms of fiction. He seems in part to refer to Benjamin Franklin's letter to Joseph Priestley, a letter which, as Isaac Kramnick puts it, 'articulates the quintessential Enlightenment utopian vision of science as the handmaiden of progress'.<sup>124</sup> Franklin too speculates upon future innovation:

The rapid Progress *true* Science now makes, occasions my regretting sometimes that I was born too soon. It is impossible to imagine the height to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the power of man over matter. We may perhaps learn to deprive large masses of their gravity, and give them absolute levity, for the sake of easy transport. Agriculture may diminish its labour and double its produce; all diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting even that of old age, and our lives lengthened at pleasure even beyond the antediluvian standard.<sup>125</sup>

Franklin expresses the secular hope of the Enlightenment, for life on earth transformed and made better by human reason and science. Progress and improvement extend, unceasing, into the future.

In the penultimate chapter of *Political Justice*, Godwin employs this Enlightenment optimism on science's potential to reform human society in conjunction with the hope for political improvement. Though perfectibility is a gradualist idea, set in opposition to revolution or sudden change, he puts forward the speculation on human immortality as an apocalyptic vision. This section of the text attracted much hostile criticism from contemporary reviewers. The anti-Jacobin *British Critic*, angered by *Political Justice* as a whole, reserved its sharpest disdain for the speculation, initiated by 'a colloquial rant of Dr. Franklin', that 'by the mere exercise of the powers of his own intellect, he may become *immortal!*'<sup>126</sup> For the *British Critic*, this passage acted as 'a complete refutation of Helvetius [and] Rousseau [...] by a fair *reductio ad absurdum*; by showing demonstratively, to what nonsense and extravagance their doctrines, when pursued, must lead'.<sup>127</sup> The *Critical Review* was more restrained, but shared a dislike for 'the wild and visionary principles which occur in different parts of the work [...] which we are very sorry to see multiply as we draw towards a conclusion'.<sup>128</sup> Even the liberal *Analytical Review* objected to

the way in which ‘ardent enthusiasm in favour of truth and liberty, with a sanguine anticipation of the perfection of human nature, have betrayed Mr. G. into a few extraordinary and chimerical positions’.<sup>129</sup>

Modern critics have also struggled to accommodate this section of the text within Godwin’s philosophy. Philp can only remark of the speculation on human immortality that: ‘it seems difficult to believe that [Godwin] was completely rational when he wrote the book’.<sup>130</sup> St Clair comes closer to grasping the significance of the passage when he observes that it possesses ‘a quality more often associated with the fantasies of William Blake than with the cold philosopher of rationalism’.<sup>131</sup> The speculation on immortality emerges from the theory of hope developed in *Political Justice*, being an address to the psychology of the reader rather than a ‘rational’ discussion of political principles. It is intended to stimulate an extra-rational enthusiasm for justice and to that end is formed as a piece of imaginative fiction. Perfectibility becomes a fictional narrative designed to propagate hope.

We might most accurately characterise this section of the text as science fiction. It bears parallels with Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s well-known *L’an deux mille quatre cent quarante, rêve s’il en fut jamais* (1771), which located utopia not in some undiscovered island but in the future, and gave expression to the Enlightenment’s ‘optimistic social ideals, and to the hopes beginning to be attached to the embryonic idea of progress’.<sup>132</sup> We can also situate Godwin’s venture into fiction in a broader tradition of British Enlightenment utopias, a tradition which Gregory Claeys has analysed as forming an important contribution to early socialism.<sup>133</sup>

The chapter on human immortality at the conclusion of *Political Justice* originates as a response to the theories of Robert Wallace.<sup>134</sup> According to Godwin, Wallace argued that a system of common property would be beneficial, but that society would collapse under the weight of the excessive population which such a system would necessarily create by diminishing poverty and infant mortality. His response is to articulate a vision of the fulfilment of equality, a vision specifically framed as a kind of fiction:

What follows must be considered in some degree as a deviation into the land of conjecture. If it be false, it leaves the great system to which it is appended in all sound reason as impregnable as ever.<sup>135</sup>



The signalling of a 'deviation into the land of conjecture' is highly significant. This semi-fictional type of writing is discussed further as the chapter proceeds. Having made a series of claims on the ability of the rational mind to master the body, even to the extent that sleep may be eradicated in the future (being a physical weakness rather than a necessity), Godwin points out that '[i]t would have been easy to have cast the present chapter in a different form, and to have made it a chapter upon health'. In which case, instead of speculating on immortality, he could have written of the improvements in health in the new egalitarian society, a chapter which 'would have assumed less the air of conjecture than of close and argumentative deduction'. But he goes on to add that 'it was perhaps better to give the subject the most explicit form, at the risk of a certain degree of prejudice'.<sup>136</sup> Again, Godwin stresses the fact that his writing here is outside the bounds of 'close and argumentative deduction', approaching a fictional character.

At this crucial point of *Political Justice*, the text leaves the territory of the rational political treatise for a type of utopian speculation seen in Dissenting and Puritan theological writing. The influence of Doddridge and Baxter's discussions of salvation is clearly displayed. Doddridge, in his *Course of Lectures*, stressed the material reality of a 'future state' of 'compleat happiness', and the utility of contemplating such a state. He advised his readership of Dissenting ministers that virtue should be understood as its own reward, but made a number of contentions on how virtue might be endowed with greater appeal:

That the support and comfort of a good man in his troubles, greatly depends on the expectation of a future state; and that this expectation being his greatest encouragement to persevere in virtue under its greatest disadvantages, we can hardly suppose that a wise, just, and good God would so order it, that the great foundation and support of virtue should be a false and vain expectation.<sup>137</sup>

Godwin, trained in Doddridge's programme for the education of Dissenting ministers, retains his interest in the notion of the 'encouragement' to be derived from the future state in his discussion of political improvement.

His vision of perfectibility also invokes the vision of heaven and the perfection of the saints set out by Baxter in *The Saints Everlasting Rest*. The prospect of the

lessening of human labour in *Political Justice* recalls the earlier work's description of everlasting rest in heaven as 'the end and perfection of motion' with 'the laborers called in, because the harvest is gathered'.<sup>138</sup> Particularly crucial to Godwin is Baxter's assertion that '[t]his rest containeth, the highest degree of the saints personal perfection; both of soul and body', that there will be 'an universal perfection of all our parts and powers, and a universal removal of all our evils'.<sup>139</sup>

These Calvinistic ideas of the future state employed by Baxter and Doddridge, intended as antidotes to the despair engendered by predestination, provide the impetus for Godwin's climactic vision. As these theological writings centred on the need to provide the believer with 'encouragement' in his faith, so *Political Justice* hinges on the desire to offer the reader a sure foundation in for progressive faith. The description of utopia begins with Godwin suggesting that in the future, men will overcome the physical desire which drives them to reproduce. When the population reaches its limit of sustainability, people will simply stop having children. Thus, in response to Wallace, the issue of population is held to offer no obstruction to a system of common property:

The men who therefore exist when the earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population, will cease to propagate, for they will no longer have any motive, either of error or duty, to induce them. In addition to this they will perhaps be immortal. The whole will be a people of men, and not of children. Generation will not succeed generation, nor truth have in a certain degree to recommence her career at the end of every thirty years. There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice as it is called, and no government. These latter articles are at no great distance; and it is not impossible that some of the present race of men may live to see them in part accomplished. But besides this, there will be no disease, no anguish, no melancholy, and no resentment. Every man will seek with ineffable ardour the good of all.<sup>140</sup>

In some respects, Godwin is close to the Enlightenment visions of extended life offered by Franklin and Condorcet. But the idea of perfectibility is extended beyond its rational limits. We are offered a utopian vision of the fulfilment of Godwin's idea of improvement, a vision of an anarchist society in which there is no crime, no external law and no government. Perfectibility was, as we have seen, a gradualist narrative in which a future of unceasing progress is projected. But Godwin alters that narrative here, appearing to bring improvement into the very near future by suggesting

that ‘some of the present race of men may live’ to see these aims come to fruition. Hope, he realises, cannot be endlessly deferred. The whole passage disrupts the narrative of perfectibility in describing a single apocalyptic moment in which utopia is realised. Godwin shows an awareness of the way in which the hope of the reader must be rewarded textually, drawing on the writings of Calvinistic Puritans and Dissenters for his vision of the redemptive future state. Baxter’s vision of bodily perfection is echoed in this speculation. *The Saints Everlasting Rest* describes the ending of all imperfections, physical and moral, as the saints attain the future state:

And doubtless there is not such a thing, as grief and sorrow known there: nor is there such a thing, as a pale face, a languid body, feeble joints, unable infancy, decrepit age, peccant humours, dolorous sickness, griping fears, consuming cares, nor whatsoever deserves the name of evil.<sup>141</sup>

Godwin may have defined perfectibility as a notion of unceasing improvement standing in express opposition to the idea of perfection in the second edition of *Political Justice*, but his prospect of the future development of human nature and society clearly overlaps with the Calvinist concept of the divine perfection of the saints. He recalls Baxter’s consolatory vision in his description of a society in which there is ‘no disease, no anguish, no melancholy, and no resentment’, moving away from the discussion of political principles to foresee the end of all psychological torment in the attainment of final perfection.

Godwin’s supposedly secular utopia also invites comparisons with another Calvinistic vision of heaven, namely the description of the Celestial City in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In Christian’s journey through tribulations and despair to the Celestial City, he affirms his belief that there is ‘an endless Kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given us; that we may inhabit that Kingdom for ever’. In this kingdom, ‘[t]here shall be no more crying, nor sorrow; for he that is the owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes’.<sup>142</sup> When Christian and his companion Hopeful reach the City, they are told by the Shining Ones that: ‘thou shall not see again such things as you saw when you were in the lower region upon the earth, to wit, sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death, *for the former things are passed away*’.<sup>143</sup> In Christian’s journey, life consists of a struggle between the powers of light and the

powers of darkness; salvation can be assured only through faith, and the temptations to despair of faith are frequent. Bunyan was, of course, rooted in Nonconformist culture and the plot of *The Pilgrim's Progress* enacts the psychological dynamics of Calvinism in its vacillations between hope and despair, as several critics have shown.<sup>144</sup> Christopher Hill has highlighted the polemics of the work's utopianism, suggesting that the vision of the new world to come in the Celestial City is 'submerged in the millenarianism of the English Revolution', sustaining the revolutionary radicalism of the 1640s after its political defeat.<sup>145</sup>

It is significant that *The Pilgrim's Progress* featured prominently in Godwin's early education. In a fragment of autobiography, he recalled that he had read the work six times by the age of five, absorbing the narrative as a literal reality: 'I set out upon more than one expedition in the neighbouring fields, with a hope to find the narrow wicket, and explore the road in which Pilgrim had travelled'.<sup>146</sup> Peter Marshall has characterised the significance of Godwin's reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in youth by referring to the work's 'gloomy Calvinist stress on human depravity and predestination'.<sup>147</sup> The conclusion of *Political Justice* suggests a different interpretation of Bunyan's work and of the psychology of Calvinistic Dissent, whereby the prospect of the future state and the Celestial City acts as a powerful source of hope. Godwin invites the reader to undertake a mental journey in *Political Justice*, a journey that, like Christian's, enacts the psychological tensions inherent in Calvinist belief. Moving through an analysis of the coercive power of government, the self-interest engendered by private property, the restriction of law on private judgement, the tendency of commercial society to produce crime, Godwin takes his reader from the corrupt modern world to the contemplation of a society of self-governing individuals organised according to principles of equality and benevolence, in which all the social ills of modern society will be remedied. As the psychological dynamic of Calvinism demanded perseverance in faith and warned against the terrible dangers of despair, so *Political Justice* asks its reader to share in the secular hope of improvement, often pausing to contemplate the bleak and desolate landscape that awaits without belief in the doctrines of perfectibility and benevolence. John Stachniewski argues that *The Pilgrim's Progress* responds to the psychological demands of Calvinist belief, seeking to overcome anxiety over election with a sustaining vision of the Celestial City: '[Bunyan's] dream answers the need to reify

the invisible world which sustained the dissenting counter-culture'.<sup>148</sup> As we have seen in the work of Baxter and Bunyan, the vision of the future state played a particularly important role in Puritan and Dissenting thought, promising an end to present persecution and social ills. Godwin's imagined society of equality, justice and eternal life is firmly rooted in this religio-political tradition, with human perfectibility standing in the role of divine providence to assure the reader that the future will bring unending improvement and earthly happiness.

His utopian speculation might also be understood, in its reliance on the moderate Calvinist theology of Baxter and Bunyan, which stresses that salvation might be actively sought through instrumental faith, as a reaction against the austere Calvinism of his upbringing. Godwin criticised orthodox Calvinism for dividing humanity into elect and reprobate in a later work, *The Genius of Christianity Revealed in a Series of Essays*, remarking that this doctrine does nothing 'to balance the striking inequalities that we find in the fortunes of mankind'.<sup>149</sup> From a later viewpoint, having rediscovered his religious faith, he suggests that the future state should offer compensation for the sufferings of this life, rather than seeing people punished for errors they could not avoid. The fortunes of the elect and the reprobate reproduce the pattern of social inequality; one 'walks in air', the other 'gropes like a blind man for the pillar on which he may repose his hopes'.<sup>150</sup> The climax to *Political Justice* is a precursor to this analysis of orthodox Calvinism, offering a future state which counteracts the divisions of elect and reprobate, wealthy and poor, by offering the consolation of equality.

That this future state is intended to answer the psychological needs of contemporary readers is revealed in one of the conditions of life in Godwin's imagined utopia:

Mind will be active and eager, yet never disappointed. Men will see the progressive advancement of virtue and good, and feel that, if things occasionally happen contrary to their hopes, the miscarriage itself was a necessary part of that progress.<sup>151</sup>

By crystallising hope in the speculation on immortality, he seeks to redeem the reader from 'disappointment', to focus the collective mind of his readership on the optimism afforded by the 'progressive advancement of virtue and good'. Godwin's reference to

the ‘miscarriage’ of hope is likely to refer to recent events in France. Throughout *Political Justice*, we see indications that the implications of revolutionary violence for liberal progress are prominent in the author’s mind. Even in 1793, he was aware of the threat to improvement posed by a mood of liberal disappointment produced by the failures of the Revolution. Though Godwin was firmly a gradualist, he sympathised enthusiastically with the ideals of the Revolution. An advance copy of *Political Justice* was despatched to the National Assembly, where the minutes recorded its receipt and reproduced in translation an accompanying letter from Godwin in which he revealed himself to be ‘one of the most eager admirers of the French Revolution; I am constantly looking at its results and have the greatest hopes’.<sup>152</sup> His reference to the ‘miscarriage’ of hope in *Political Justice* suggests that the speculation on immortality is driven in part by a desire to create in the reader an interior mood of intense perfectibilist optimism that will stave off the disappointments of practical politics. Such is the absolute nature of his conviction in the necessity of hope that Godwin pictures the ‘miscarriage’ as a ‘necessary part of that progress’. There can be no other approach to politics than that of the most ardent progressive faith.

The nuances of Godwin’s approach to perfectibility have traditionally been glossed over by critics and his use of the idea has often been seen as a manifesto for political disengagement. This is the approach taken by Paul Dawson in his study of the politics of Percy Shelley’s poetry.<sup>153</sup> Dawson rightly suggests that Godwin’s idea of perfectibility was of great significance to the poet, but adds that there is an important distinction between the two in their attitudes to this concept. Dawson argues that: ‘for Godwin perfectibility is a “constitutive” idea, [...] for Shelley it is a “regulative” idea, which gives no reliable information about reality but serves to guide men’s practical activity’.<sup>154</sup> However, after reading the immortality passage in *Political Justice*, Dawson’s distinction begins to appear unreliable. Though Godwin’s system of thought relies upon perfectibility, he is clearly prepared to stretch it until it becomes an outright fiction, a ‘regulative idea’. Dawson goes further in stating that: ‘Godwin uses the doctrine of perfectibility to underwrite his own reluctance to engage in or countenance any form of political action’. But perfectibility is not for Godwin ‘an invariable law, providing the grounds for predictions whose fulfilment was quite independent of human action’;<sup>155</sup> it is rather an idea that is intended to stimulate a

liberal hope for improvement in the reading audience and thus to further the progress of that improvement.

Significantly, the chapter on immortality closes with another reference to the semi-fictional status of the speculation:

Before we dismiss this subject it is proper once again to remind the reader, that the leading doctrine of this chapter is given only as a matter of probable conjecture, and that the grand argument of this division of the work is altogether independent of its truth or falshood.<sup>156</sup>

Godwin states that his theory of the omnipotence of the rational human mind is independent of his conjecture on human immortality. But by suggesting that the truth of his wider argument is independent of the ‘truth or falshood’ of the immortality speculation, he candidly acknowledges the possibility that the latter is false. The admission that a particular argument may actually be a fiction is startlingly unconventional in a political treatise. As we have seen, Godwin consistently and repeatedly draws attention to the fact that he does not necessarily believe himself to be writing the truth in this chapter. It is a ‘deviation into the land of conjecture’; he is sacrificing ‘deduction’ to give his subject ‘the most explicit form’; it is ‘probable conjecture’.<sup>157</sup> At a vital juncture in a work which prizes ‘truth’ above all else, Godwin chooses to draw attention to the fact that he is writing fiction. It is also significant that he should directly address the ‘reader’ and remind him of the spirit in which the text ought to be read. For this textual realisation of hope is entirely directed toward the mindset of the reader.

Yet as Godwin draws attention to the passage’s status as a piece of imaginative speculation, he emphasises the unreality of this future state. Stachniewski argues that Bunyan, by choosing the framework of an imaginative vision in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, can only draw attention to the illusory nature of his dream of the Celestial City. Finally, the work addresses its energies to the unacknowledged fear of reprobation as much as it does to substantiating the dream of everlasting life, he suggests.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, Godwin cannot fully exorcise his fears about human nature through his ideas of perfectibility and benevolence. His speculation on the future progress of equality and justice seeks to provide assurance to the reader, but its

undercurrent of anxiety about the illusoriness of ideals of progress would come to the surface in later works.

Godwin discusses the political impact of utopian writing in the final chapter of *Political Justice*, entitled, 'Of the Means of Introducing the Genuine System of Property'. The spread of the system of common property is assured, he contends, by the omnipotence of truth. When people begin to perceive the 'folly of luxury', the collective 'will' shall bring about a change in behaviour. To the self-proposed objection that if society tends inevitably towards the equalisation of property then there was no need to propose that equalisation as an object of consideration, Godwin responds by defining his purpose in writing *Political Justice* as one of familiarising his audience with 'truth' in order to accelerate the process of improvement:

It is a well-known principle of morality, that he who proposes perfection to himself, though he will inevitably fall short of what he pursues, will make a more rapid progress, than he who is contented to aim only at what is imperfect. The benefits to be derived in the interval from a view of equalisation, as one of the great objects towards which we are tending, are exceedingly conspicuous. Such a view will strongly conduce to make us disinterested now.<sup>159</sup>

The very act of presenting to the reader the concepts of equality and benevolence, as Godwin has done throughout *Political Justice*, is seen to contribute to moral improvement. Though, as he frequently concedes, self-interest dominates modern society, the existence of the idea of benevolence in representation is held to have political significance. By contemplating the advanced society of equality and justice we might be made 'disinterested now' and become disposed to acknowledge the 'truth' of the system of equal and common property.

Such reasoning again invokes *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, in which Baxter suggested that the contemplation of the future state would influence the character of the individual believer: '[i]ts our strangeness to heaven that makes us so dull: its the end that quickeneth to all the means: And the more frequently this end is beheld, the more vigorous will all our motion be'.<sup>160</sup> Towards the end of the work, he devotes a chapter to the agency of hope, suggesting that faculty sets in motion the wheels of belief. The emphasis on hope throughout *Political Justice* suggests that Godwin was profoundly influenced by this section of Baxter's famous book. There, Baxter asks who would strive to attain salvation without hope, who would preach without hope of



heaven. 'If the good so loved and desired do appear possible and feasible in the attaining', Baxter argues, 'then it excite the passion of hope, which is a compound of desire and expectation'.<sup>161</sup> All belief is vested in a good which cannot at present be beheld, thus it is 'not by sight, but by hope that we must be saved; and hope that is seen is not hope'.<sup>162</sup>

Godwin's belief that the 'view of equalisation' in the future will produce disinterest in the reader shows the lingering presence of a mindset produced by his training as a Dissenting minister. The prospect of equality will, he suggests, help the individual to transcend the corruption of modern society, teaching us to 'look with contempt upon mercantile speculations, commercial prosperity, and the cares of gain', and to 'fix our ambition' on the 'perfection' of humanity in equality and benevolence. Like Baxter, Godwin envisages hope as a self-generating, self-fulfilling faculty, which, when communicated to the mind of the reader, will have a material influence. The final sentences of *Political Justice* offer a succinct expression of the author's purpose:

Mind cannot arrive at any great and illustrious attainment, however much the nature of mind may carry us towards it, without feeling some presages of its approach; and it is reasonable to believe that, the earlier these presages are introduced, and the more distinct they are made, the more auspicious will be the event.<sup>163</sup>

The text involves itself with the act of making distinct these 'presages' to the reader; articulating hope in the belief that hope will itself accelerate the process of improvement.

## V

Godwin's preoccupation with the psychology of political belief, then, eventually takes him into the territory of utopian writing. Something of the reasoning behind the climactic passage of *Political Justice* is seen in an earlier digression on the role of imaginative literature in the process of improvement:

There is indeed no species of composition, in which the seeds of a morality too perfect for our present improvements in science, may more reasonably be expected to discover themselves, than in works of imagination. When the mind shakes off the fetters of prescription and

prejudice, when it boldly takes a flight into the world unknown, and employs itself in search of those grand and interesting principles which shall tend to impart to every reader the glow of enthusiasm, it is at such moments that the enquiring and philosophical reader may expect to be presented with the materials and rude sketches of intellectual improvement.<sup>164</sup>

Godwin's understanding of reader-response as part of the process of discussion, and thus of improvement, leads him to perceive the 'enthusiasm' communicated by imaginative literature as a vital energy. In the speculation on immortality, perfectibilist hope becomes a means of attempting 'to impart to every reader the glow of enthusiasm'. These theories of literature and improvement would come to be central to Godwin's career as a novelist.

In seeking to propagate a psychology of hope, *Political Justice* thus demonstrates the overlap between Godwin's attachment to French Enlightenment ideas of human perfectibility and his Dissenting conception of reader-response. We can begin to appreciate the distinct character of Godwinian optimism. Concepts of perfectibility, equality and benevolence are subsumed within the idea of hope. His optimism renders his work significant in several respects; introducing French doctrines of human perfectibility and environmental determinism into British political discourse while also marking off his thought from Benthamite utilitarianism by critiquing the tendencies of nascent capitalism in its model of benevolent behaviour.

Yet this political optimism is often expressed in a vocabulary which moves beyond rational discourse to examine the interior mental effects of the relevant doctrines. The work expresses a fervent conviction in the need to believe in human perfectibility, in the advent of a society of benevolence. The reader of *Political Justice* is invited to participate in a secular faith. However, this faith should not be seen in isolation, for Godwin located the means of political change outside political institutions, in the altering of opinion through the agency of literature and discussion on individual private judgement. There is thus, in his understanding, an important conjunction between his notions of the mental alteration wrought upon the reader by the written text and external political reality.

In making a conjunction between Puritan/Dissenting visions of the future state and the French Enlightenment idea of perfectibility, Godwin anticipates, without a critical element, Carl Becker's analysis of the parallels between the perfectibilist thought of

the *philosophes* and Christian ideas of salvation. Grounded in the psychological dynamic of Calvinism, Godwin is led to shape his secular vision of a just society in the frame handed down by Baxter, Bunyan and Doddridge. Becker's claim that the *philosophes* belied their militant secularism in their idea of perfectibility is particularly relevant to a consideration of *Political Justice*: '[t]he picture of salvation in the Heavenly City they toned down to a vague impressionistic image of a "future state", "immortality of the soul", or a more generalized earthly and social *felicité* or *perfectibilité du genre humain*'.<sup>165</sup> The French Enlightenment conviction that the past was a period of ignorance and unhappiness, that the future will be better, is for Becker a departure from the cyclical view of history prevalent in classical societies, displaying faith in salvation achieved not by God, but by man, 'by the progressive improvement made by the efforts of successive generations of men'.<sup>166</sup> Unwilling to leave behind the pattern of hope imprinted on him by his Calvinist upbringing, Godwin made the type of conjunction between secular and Christian faith identified by Becker as the defining characteristic of French Enlightenment thought.

While *Political Justice* presents the hope of improvement as carrying a clear practical purpose, as being a self-fulfilling vision which might stave off a growing sense of anxiety about the progress of the French Revolution, it also reveals a sense of doubt in its contrary attitude to hope as a consoling faith, rather than as a reliable guide to practical politics. Godwin is often driven to consider the state of affairs that waits if hope is proved false. This sense of the uncertainty of secular Enlightenment optimism would come to form an important presence in his novels and also in the work of Mary and Percy Shelley. Godwinian hope would soon be tested as the external political climate altered over the course of the 1790s

## CHAPTER 2

*'The enthusiasm of truth, liberty, and virtue': Caleb Williams and  
Godwin's narrative style*

## I

The plot of *Caleb Williams; or, Things As They Are* takes a gloomy path. Godwin develops the critique of government and social hierarchy begun in *Political Justice* by mapping out the effects of coercive power on the individual lives of his characters. Caleb, a young servant, discovers that his master, Falkland, once committed a murder. Falkland attempts to hold him prisoner but Caleb escapes, exposing himself to persecution and imprisonment as his wealthy master turns the law to his own purposes. This bitter pursuit becomes mutual as Caleb turns to the courts and law to reveal his secret and destroy the once admirable Falkland. Begun in February 1793 and published in May 1794, the novel sees Godwin apply his attack on government to Pitt's government, with the plot invoking, in its focus on trials and imprisonment, the prosecutions mounted against leading advocates of reform such as Paine and Joseph Gerrald.

But while the plot embodies Godwin's anxiety over the government's robust approach to discussions of reform, the novel's method of narration expresses a differing reflection on contemporary politics. By considering the novel's use of first-person narrative, we can see how Godwin intended it as a type of secularised and politicised spiritual autobiography, as an attempt to encourage the liberal reader. In the hands of Defoe, the novel had begun as a development on the techniques of Nonconformist spiritual autobiography. His attempt to realistically portray individual consciousness through fictionalised first-person narrative in *Robinson Crusoe* has been seen by Ian Watt as founded on 'the vestigial remnants of the Calvinist introspective discipline' of self-examination for the purposes of discerning evidence of election, giving us 'for the first time in the history of fiction [...] a hero whose day-to-day mental and moral life is shared by the reader'.<sup>1</sup> Watt draws on William Haller's

influential account of Puritan spiritual autobiography, which asserted the egalitarian, democratic, proto-novelistic character of such works. Haller claims that, through the diaries many believers kept as substitutes for the confessional, Puritanism ‘invested the individual soul, the most trivial circumstances of the most commonplace existence, with the utmost significance’.<sup>2</sup> Godwin, an admirer of Defoe,<sup>3</sup> acknowledges the religio-political context of the early novel by moulding his narrative style around that of Nonconformist spiritual autobiographies such as Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Grace Abounding*, and Fox’s *Journal*. His narrative style offers the reader a view of the hero’s interior psychological state, prizing the possibility of transparent communication offered by the first-person mode. Godwin chooses a protagonist who is not of high birth, seeking instead to address the circumstances encountered by ordinary members of society and follow the Calvinistic democratic orientation of Defoe’s novels. His choice of first-person narration allows him to present moments of revelation in which Caleb is seized by a joyous realisation of his own ability to exist independently of a corrupt social order, recalling the attention devoted to the experience of conversion in spiritual autobiographies and also the Quaker habit of depicting religious and social awareness as the product of a sudden infusion of the Inner Light. Godwin’s attempt to replicate the narrative style of Nonconformist spiritual autobiography broadens to include familiar subject matter. Caleb is a Dissenting or Nonconformist hero; he suffers persecution at the hands of social superiors and imprisonment at the hands of authoritarian state power just as Nonconformist literary heroes like Christian, Bunyan and Fox did.

In his choice of style, Godwin thus recalled an earlier era of political turmoil. N.H. Keeble, who argues that the literature of Puritanism was a dynamic presence in the Restoration, identifies several key characteristics of the seventeenth-century Nonconformist literary tradition. With its political ideals defeated in the collapse of the Commonwealth, Puritanism suffered legal discrimination in the Restoration. However, the penal religious legislation of the 1660s, most notably the Act of Uniformity, generated a new sensibility, Keeble suggests. In the face of persecution, introspective Nonconformist autobiographies became a means of sustaining the old idealism on the level of individual conscience. The Bible had shown that God’s faithful must expect persecution, providing a means for Nonconformists to psychologically overcome the ‘Great Persecution’ of 1660-8. Thus the reader is asked

to see the imprisonment of heroes such as Milton's Samson and Bunyan's Christian as evidence of rectitude and virtue. Keeble argues that Nonconformist writings to some extent replace the organised worship made so difficult by penal religious legislation, speaking directly to the reader with the immediacy of personal conviction and a commitment to a visionary element, a religio-political 'enthusiasm'.<sup>4</sup>

By transposing the Nonconformist literary response to the political repression of the seventeenth century into the 1790s, Godwin offers a comment on what he saw as the persecution waged against liberals and radicals, in particular those from Dissenting backgrounds. That he took a close interest in the history of Protestant suffering and the growth of Nonconformism is revealed by the catalogue of his private library, offered for sale after his death. Foxe's *Acts and Monuments Happening in the Church*, an account of Protestant suffering at the hands of Catholic persecutors, sits alongside works such as the *History of the Puritans, or the Protestant Nonconformists*, the *History of the Christian People called Quakers*, the *History of Independency*, the *History of the Presbyterians* and the *Memoirs, Sufferings, and Deaths of Noble and other Personages for the Protestant Religion, 1637-66*.<sup>5</sup> The enthusiasm Godwin encountered in his reading of Nonconformist spiritual autobiographies – there used as a means of sustaining defeated religious and political ideals through the individual conscience – becomes in *Caleb Williams* a similar source of hope in the face of modern 'persecution'. That word 'enthusiasm', brandished by Burke and the anti-Jacobin journals as they recalled the seditious activities of Puritan sects in the 1640s in their attacks on modern liberal Dissenters, becomes a key term in Godwin's vocabulary as he formulates a response to the political developments of the 1790s.

Historicist readings of *Caleb Williams* have established that the novel is intended to address particular contemporary political issues. The importance of the novel as a contribution to the Revolution controversy was established by Marilyn Butler, building upon earlier readings put forward by James Boulton and David McCracken.<sup>6</sup> Boulton was the first to assert that Godwin intended the character of Falkland, attached to aristocratic notions of honour, as a critique of the ideal of hierarchical chivalry Burke set out in his *Reflections*, and of the manner in which society produces moral corruption within individuals through its codes of behaviour. McCracken similarly discerned an attack on Burkean chivalry and suggested a historicist reading

which views the novel as ‘steeped in the political life of its time’.<sup>7</sup> Butler repeated these arguments on Burkean chivalry and suggested that the central relationship between Caleb and Falkland was intimately connected with the attack on monarchy and aristocracy in *Political Justice*. Butler also viewed *Caleb Williams* as a ‘scaling down of hope’ in its examination of the corrupting influence of government, as an acknowledgement of the failures of the French Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

Ronald Paulson developed this reading, arguing that the novel illustrates how ‘the orderly process of growing philosophical awareness - a passive process - was dangerously interrupted by the Revolution and perhaps diverted into the wrong channels’.<sup>9</sup> He sees the relationship between Caleb and Falkland as a quasi-sexual one which represents the latent guilt of the patricide/regicide undertaken in the Revolution. Paulson’s reading has proved influential, with *Caleb Williams* often primarily understood as a warning against precipitate attempts at radical change.

Gary Kelly, writing prior to Paulson, similarly asserted that the message of Godwin’s novel was that ‘the English Jacobins had destroyed the reasonableness of public debate’.<sup>10</sup> More recently Pamela Clemit has offered a balanced reading, following Butler by recognising the need to understand the novel in conjunction with *Political Justice*, and discussing the elements of liberative optimism within the narrative. However, she also sees a critique of enthusiasm in Caleb’s actions.<sup>11</sup>

It is crucial to recognise the vehement arguments against revolution Godwin sets out in *Political Justice*, and the undoubted presence of these arguments in *Caleb Williams*. However, the Paulson reading tends to over-emphasise this element of the novel and obscure its continued involvement with ideas on improvement and the educative effects of literature on the reader.

*Caleb Williams* might be interpreted not as critiquing the actions of its protagonist as a deviation from reason and gradual progress, but as intending to contribute to progress by sustaining the hope of reform in its representation of enthusiasm through the traditions of spiritual autobiography. We should set the novel in the context of recent developments in literary criticism of Godwin, which focus on enthusiasm and do not see a binary opposition between this faculty and that of reason in his work. Jon Mee’s discussion of enthusiasm as a vital force in Romantic writing has seen him offer a reading of Godwin which provides an unusually balanced account of the extra-rational elements of his writing:

Both Godwin and Thelwall recognized the power of enthusiasm in the broadest sense of its link with heroic acts, acknowledged Shaftesbury's enthusiasm for liberty and virtue, aligned their own enquiries with its ability to see beyond the present order of things, and accepted that it might be a necessary (precursive) feature of change, but they also feared that they themselves might not be able to regulate its infectious nature.<sup>12</sup>

Mee discusses *Political Justice*, but *Caleb Williams* is still more receptive to this argument on the political benefits of the psychology of enthusiasm. Gregory Dart's analysis of Rousseau's influence on British writers of the Romantic Period suggests that: 'Godwinian reason was always the product of an "enthusiasm" for justice. Even in 1793 it constituted itself through a channelling of the passions rather than a repudiation of them'.<sup>13</sup> Rousseau, who adapted the Calvinist introspection of spiritual autobiography for radical political purposes in his own memoir, becomes a key literary model for Godwin in *Caleb Williams*.

By following this strand of thought on enthusiasm, we can uncover the true nature of Godwin's contribution to the Revolution controversy. *Caleb Williams* can be read as a novel which grasps the politics of Nonconformist autobiography in defiance of Burkean anti-Jacobins, as a forthright articulation of the cultural attitudes of liberal Dissent. Shortly after the novel's publication, Godwin became involved in the treason trials of 1794, publishing his pamphlet *Cursory Strictures* in defence of the leading members of the London Corresponding Society prosecuted by the government.<sup>14</sup> *Caleb Williams* was part of the same political project, an attempt to educate society in the errors of government founded on coercive state power, law and hierarchy, and thus accelerate the progress of improvement towards the society of equality and justice foreseen in *Political Justice*.

## II

The politics of *Caleb Williams* are grounded in the Puritan and Nonconformist understanding of literature as a means of transforming the consciousness of the reader. The novel's subtitle, *Things As They Are*, highlights Godwin's desire to stimulate the reader toward an understanding of political 'truth'. He had used the phrase in an



important passage of *Political Justice*, in which aristocracy's hostility to democracy on the grounds of the inevitability of human imperfection is discussed:

There is no mistake more thoroughly to be deplored on this subject, than that of persons, sitting at their ease and surrounded with all the conveniences of life, who are apt to exclaim, 'we find things very well as they are', and to inveigh bitterly against all projects of reform, as the 'romances of visionary men, and the declamations of those who are never to be satisfied'. Is it well, that so large a part of the community should be kept in abject penury [...] made victims to the merciless laws which the rich have instituted to oppress them? Is it sedition to enquire whether this state of things may not be exchanged for a better?<sup>15</sup>

The word 'sedition' refers to the stringent measures being taken by the Government against radical and liberal authors, including Paine, during 1792 and 1793. In *Caleb Williams*, the phrase 'things as they are' is used to foster in the reader a conviction that 'this state of things' should indeed be 'exchanged for a better'.

That the novel was intended to propagate a reformist spirit in the mind of the reader is revealed in Godwin's response to a hostile review of *Caleb Williams* in the *British Critic* (for whom he was, after the publication of *Political Justice*, a prominent target as the most celebrated 'new philosopher' in Britain). He defines his object in the novel as one of gaining political influence over the mind of the reader:

It is to expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilized society; and having exposed them, to lead the enquiring reader to examine whether they are or are not, as has commonly been supposed, irremediable; in a word to disengage the minds of men from prepossession and launch them upon a sea of moral and political enquiry.<sup>16</sup>

The familiar Dissenting conjunction between reading, private judgement, education and political improvement recurs here. Hence, bearing out Godwin's wish to expose the 'evils' of society, *Caleb Williams* draws attention to the corrupt nature of the British legal system; to the barbarity of prisons as the embodiment of state power over the individual; to the manner in which crime is produced by hierarchical social arrangements. All of which is deemed to be useful only if it produces an effect upon 'the enquiring reader' and disengages 'the minds of men from prepossession'.

We see here one of the identifying characteristics of Godwin's theory of literature: his Puritan desire to alter the psychological outlook and consciousness of the reader

through his texts. As an author, he is intrusively present in his works, providing prefaces to treatise, novel and essay which urge the reader to discover a moral message; as well as impinging on the main bodies of his texts with directions of guidance. He constantly attempts to measure the response of his reader and ensure that this response is aligned with a correct moral path. The Nonconformist religious literature in which he immersed himself had as its principal aim the transformation of the reader's consciousness, as Keeble notes:

Nonconformist writing presupposed a reader. Its composition was not a private pursuit for personal ends [...] but a public service, and, furthermore, a service whose full performance demanded not only diligence in writing but an equal diligence in transmitting the text to potential readers and in persuading them to acquire it, read it and act upon it.<sup>17</sup>

Bunyan published *The Pilgrim's Progress* with nothing less than his readers' salvation in mind, promising them in his opening address that the book will 'direct thee to the Holy Land' and 'make the slothful active'; that his 'fancies' will 'stick like burrs' in their minds and be 'comforters' to the helpless.<sup>18</sup> Counsels to avoid despair and apostasy were recurring features in Nonconformist texts, as Keeble shows, being expressions of a desire to substantially alter the course of their readers' lives.

That Godwin's intended to have just such a material effect on the mind of his reader is revealed in the 1832 Preface to his later novel *Fleetwood*, in which he discusses the composition of *Caleb Williams* and recalls his desire to 'write a tale that shall constitute an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it, shall ever be exactly the same man that he was before'.<sup>19</sup> Godwin made another attempt to describe his state of mind in writing the novel later in his career in his autobiographical writings:

I said to myself a hundred times, the impression of my tale shall never be blotted out of the mind of him upon whom it has once been produced: he that reads it shall never again be as if he had not read it. I will not write for temporary effect: my purpose is, that what I say shall be incorporated with the very fibres of the soul of him who listens to me.<sup>20</sup>

He was convinced that narrative fiction had a unique capacity to materially alter the reader, to work its way into 'the very fibres of the soul'. Bunyan had pictured his

desire to influence the reader through the metaphor of the sticking burrs; Godwin goes still further, imagining his message absorbed internally within the being of the reader. The passage offers an astonishingly literal interpretation of the Nonconformist attitude towards literature and reader-response.

The most notable embodiment of these ideas in *Caleb Williams* comes with the spectacular moments of revelation which describe the hero's apprehension of the nature of society and his burgeoning desire to live outside the bounds of hierarchy. Godwin signals a connection with a Nonconformist heritage by his recurring use of the word 'enthusiasm' in these episodes. The first of these comes after the court scene, when Caleb first realises that Falkland was the murderer of Tyrrel and that the innocent Hawkinses were convicted unjustly. Wandering alone in the garden he describes how his 'thoughts forced their way spontaneously to my tongue' and how he is led to proclaim Falkland's guilt aloud 'in a fit of uncontrollable enthusiasm'.<sup>21</sup> Godwin proceeds to picture this realisation as a moment of mental revolution:

I felt as if my animal system had undergone a total revolution. My blood boiled within me. I was conscious to a kind of rapture for which I could not account. I was solemn, yet full of rapid emotion, burning with indignation and energy. In the very tempest and hurricane of the passions, I seemed to enjoy the most soul-ravishing calm. I cannot better express the then state of my mind, than by saying, I was never so perfectly alive as at that moment.<sup>22</sup>

This is, as Caleb proceeds to describe it, a 'state of mental elevation'. There is a religious terminology at work here, with 'rapture' going alongside 'enthusiasm'. Through the first-person narrative, Godwin relays to the reader a forceful overflow of feeling and desire for truth that is at odds with the corruption of society.

This enthusiasm is expressed again in the incident in which Caleb opens the trunk which conceals the evidence of Falkland's crime. His mind is at that moment 'raised to its utmost pitch' and he is seized by 'the energy of uncontrollable passion' as he forces open the trunk.<sup>23</sup> Interrupted in the act by his master, Caleb realises that his feelings have led him to transgress established boundaries:

Was it possible I could have forgotten for a moment the awe creating manners of Falkland, and the inexorable fury I should awake in his soul? [...] One short minute had effected a reverse in my situation, the suddenness of which the history of man perhaps is unable to surpass.<sup>24</sup>

By trespassing against the 'awe creating manners' and 'inexorable fury' of Falkland, Caleb forgets the hierarchy of their relationship and unwittingly makes himself the victim of an unrelenting persecution described throughout the remainder of the novel. As he observes a few pages later, he is 'trampling on the established boundaries of obligation'.<sup>25</sup> This rebellion forms the dramatic crux of *Caleb Williams* and Godwin expends much narrative energy in describing the 'enthusiasm', the mental 'revolution' which leads his protagonist to act in this way. He describes his hero's dawning social awareness as if it were a moment of conversion in a spiritual autobiography. These passages recall the transformations of consciousness undergone by Fox and Bunyan in their memoirs, transformations presented to the reader that he might emulate this conversion and benefit materially from the text. With regard to the secular conversion undergone in *Caleb Williams*, it might be objected, in line with the Paulson reading on the dangers of revolution, that Caleb's actions are recklessly precipitate and begin a mutually destructive pursuit between servant and master. But if we consider the heritage of these moments of epiphany, we can see that Godwin's attitude towards his protagonist's enthusiastic transformation is more complex than that of straightforward criticism.

It is highly significant that Godwin should draw his vocabulary not just from Puritan religious experience in general, but in particular from the political inflection of Protestant introspection he encountered in Rousseau's *Confessions*. The narrative style Godwin developed in *Caleb Williams* and maintained in all his novels, that of the fictional first-person confessional memoir, was in part an attempt to emulate the candid sensibility of the *Confessions*; the heroes of the tales, in their lonely wanderings and alienation from society, are all variations on the Jean-Jacques figure, itself derived from Puritan spiritual autobiography. Rousseau's style, that of rigorous Calvinistic self-analysis given radical impetus by an infusion of egalitarian sensibility and compassion, would form the core of Godwin's attempt to describe to readers of *Caleb Williams* the psychological journey and transformation in social consciousness undergone by his hero.

The nature of Rousseau's influence on Godwin's novels has received some critical attention.<sup>26</sup> Gary Kelly has drawn attention to the appeal which the confessional writings had for English Dissenters, and Godwin in particular, as an antidote to the

disappointments of the French Revolution. ‘Those who turned to his autobiographical writings’, Kelly argues, ‘found consolation in the possibility that Eden might still exist, not in the external world of society, politics, and power, but within’.<sup>27</sup> He suggests that the psychological journey undertaken in Godwin’s novels is a derivation from Rousseau: ‘in both Rousseau and Godwin the triumph of hope is made more affecting by the passage through despair’.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Gary Handwerk has read *Fleetwood* as an attack on both sentimental novels and the system of education laid out in Rousseau’s *Emile*.<sup>29</sup> Anne Chandler has also interpreted *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* as critiques of Rousseauvian educational theory.<sup>30</sup>

I focus on the *Confessions* as a dominant literary influence on *Caleb Williams*. Godwin maintained a fascination with Rousseau’s autobiography throughout his career. In an autobiographical fragment of 1798, he declared Burke and Rousseau to be his favourite authors among the moderns, praising the latter for possessing a mind ‘fraught with sensibility, and occasionally ardent and enthusiastic’.<sup>31</sup> In 1789, he agreed to translate the second part of the *Confessions* for George Robinson, the largest publisher in London, but for reasons unknown never did so.<sup>32</sup>

What he found in the *Confessions* was a model of how spiritual autobiography might be adapted to express a radical political message. Rousseau’s upbringing as a Calvinist in Geneva, the city where Calvin had driven out the Catholics and inspired a new constitution, undoubtedly shaped the psychological concerns of his memoir. Though he famously converted to Catholicism at the age of fifteen, the impulse toward introspection and the self-image of the lonely, persecuted pilgrim in a corrupt world persisted to the period in later life in which he wrote the *Confessions*.<sup>33</sup> Ian Watt is one of the few critics to discuss Rousseau’s debt to spiritual autobiography in his assertion that the *Confessions* shared a literary attitude with the emergent genre of the novel:

In later generations [after Bunyan] the introspective habit remained even where religious conviction weakened, and there resulted the three greatest autobiographical confessions of the modern period, those of Pepys, Rousseau and Boswell, all of whom were brought up under the Calvinist discipline; their fascination with self-analysis, and indeed their extreme egocentricity, are character traits which they shared both with later Calvinism in general and with Defoe’s heroes.<sup>34</sup>

Rousseau – like Godwin – was an enthusiastic reader of the Dissenter Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, raising the work to the 'highest celebrity' in France.<sup>35</sup>

At the heart of Rousseau's self-analysis lay a desire to employ memoir as societal critique. The *Confessions* expressed an aspiration to truth and sincerity which their author presented as a reaction against the corruptions of modern commercial society.<sup>36</sup> Rousseau dwells on this aspiration throughout, expressing his desire to 'rendre mon ame transparente aux yeux du lecteur',<sup>37</sup> to create 'un ouvrage unique par une véracité sans exemple, afin qu'au moins une fois on put voir un homme tel qu'il étoit en dedans'.<sup>38</sup> He contends that while what is laid bare may sometimes be distasteful or immoral to some minds, the expression of his personality ultimately reveals his essential goodness and compassion for others. Recognizably the counterpart of his more overtly political works, Rousseau's memoir emphasises his innate, egalitarian compassion. At the close, having suffered decades of torment and persecution, he still displays 'en toute chose la sincérité jusqu'au l'imprudence, jusqu'au plus incroyable desintressement'.<sup>39</sup>

The first part of the *Confessions* was published posthumously in 1782, the second in 1789. English translations of the two parts appeared in 1783 and 1790.<sup>40</sup> In Britain, the controversy which surrounded the work's supposed immorality, sexual and otherwise, intensified after the outset of the French Revolution. The French National Assembly's decision to erect a commemorative statue in honour of Rousseau in December of 1790 had a particular bearing on the *Confessions*' reception in Britain. With the author as political philosopher now publicly tied to the ideals of the Revolution, his scandalous autobiography became a weapon with which anti-Jacobins, most notably Edmund Burke, attacked both French and English Jacobinism.<sup>41</sup>

The reception from more politically sympathetic critics and readers was often one of embarrassment at the candour of the memoir. But there was another strand of radical thought which found a significant political impetus in Rousseau's autobiography. Godwin's close friend Hazlitt went on to delineate this impetus in his later essay, 'On the Character of Rousseau' (1817), in which he praises the author's 'extreme sensibility' and 'morbid feeling of all that related to his own impressions', noting that the 'best of all his works is the *Confessions*, though it is that which has been least read'.<sup>42</sup> The description of Rousseau's political influence focuses not on his theory of the social contract but on the egalitarian sensibility of his autobiography:

He owed the power which he exercised over the opinions of all Europe, by which he created numberless disciples, and overturned established systems, to the tyranny which his feelings, in the first instance, exercised over himself. [...] He did more towards the French Revolution than any other man. Voltaire, by his wit and penetration, had rendered superstition contemptible, and tyranny odious: but it was Rousseau who brought the feeling of irreconcilable enmity to rank and privileges, *above humanity*, home to the bosom of every man, - identified it with all the pride of intellect, and with the deepest yearnings of the human heart.<sup>43</sup>

Godwin's journal reveals that he read Part Two of the *Confessions* and the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, along with the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, while still at work on *Political Justice* in August 1792.<sup>44</sup> Though he owned Rousseau's seventeen-volume *Oeuvres complètes* in the original French,<sup>45</sup> and was proficient enough in French to have been contracted to translate the *Confessions* himself, it is my contention that *Caleb Williams* evidences his close familiarity with the translation of Part Two published by Robinson and Bew in 1790. This translation was undertaken by James Marshall, a close friend of Godwin's since their time at the Dissenters' academy at Hoxton. Accordingly, all quotations from the *Confessions* which follow refer to this edition.

In *Caleb Williams*, the description of the opening of the box discussed above is the novel's first display of Rousseauvian sensibility. The passage refers in particular to a key section from Book Nine of the *Confessions*, in which Rousseau describes how he returned to his literary career and became part of the coterie of *encyclopédistes*. He relates that he cannot contemplate this time of his life 'without enthusiasm'. Led into a new intellectual world, Rousseau remembers how he 'soon saw nothing but error and folly in the doctrine of our sages, and oppression and misery in our social order'.<sup>46</sup> He becomes a new person, no longer bashful and timid, but filled with 'contempt' for the 'manners, maxims and prejudices of the age'. 'I was really transformed', he says.<sup>47</sup> It is a 'revolution'. Rousseau looks back on it as a 'terrible and fatal aera, of a fate unparalleled amongst mortals'.<sup>48</sup>

Godwin similarly ascribes to his hero's change in situation a 'suddenness which the history of man perhaps is unable to surpass'. Caleb goes on to observe of the opening of the box that '[t]his epoch was the crisis of my fate'.<sup>49</sup> Slightly earlier,

when he first conceives his suspicion that Falkland is a murderer, he describes how he ‘felt as if my animal system had undergone a total revolution’.<sup>50</sup> Godwin seems to have had the pages of the *Confessions* open as he was writing. Rousseau recalls that in his newfound state of power he could dismiss the mockeries of those who followed the customs and prejudices of the age ‘as I would have crushed an insect with my fingers’.<sup>51</sup> Falkland warns Caleb that ‘I shall crush you in the end with the same indifference that I would any other little insect that disturbed my serenity’.<sup>52</sup> Godwin, though a proponent of gradualist perfectibility, was obviously fascinated by Rousseau’s vocabulary of revolution, by his dramatic depiction of a sudden mental transformation in which great social truths become clear with the force of revelation.

Godwin found such descriptions of epiphanies dotted throughout the *Confessions*. The most powerful comes when Jean-Jacques is travelling to visit Diderot in prison in Vincennes. While walking on the road, he becomes exhausted by the heat. Stopping to rest, he begins to read the *Mercure de France* and comes across an essay question put forward by the Dijon Academy: ‘[h]as the progress of sciences and arts contributed to corrupt or purify morals?’ Rousseau recalls that the question had an instant effect on him: ‘[t]he moment I had read this, I seemed to behold another world, and became a different man’.<sup>53</sup> This question initiated his first treatise, the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1751), an argument in favour of civic virtue and against enlightened self-interest and the pursuit of purely private good. The moment of reading it begins a period of enthusiastic agitation:

My sentiments became elevated with the most inconceivable rapidity to the level of my ideas. All my little passions were stifled by the enthusiasm of truth, liberty, and virtue; and what is most astonishing, this effervescence continued in my mind upwards of five years, to as great a degree perhaps as it has ever done in that of any other man.<sup>54</sup>

It is significant that in a letter to Burke in 1785, Godwin praised Rousseau for ‘the vivacity and warmth of his imagination, and the loftiness and dignity of his enthusiasm’.<sup>55</sup> Through the narrative of *Caleb Williams*, he seeks to recreate the self-described mental revolution through which Rousseau apprehended his egalitarian political beliefs - his enthusiasm - and consequently transform the consciousness of the reader.



The radical implications of Caleb's Rousseauvian sensibility are heightened when the hero finds that Falkland, knowing his secret is out, wishes to imprison his servant permanently. In keeping with the individualistic liberalism of the culture of Dissent, *Political Justice* had vehemently denounced all forms of coercion as restrictions upon private judgement. In *Caleb Williams*, Falkland becomes the embodiment of coercion, illustrating how the authoritarian and repressive 'spirit and character of the government' intrudes into relations between individuals, as the Preface puts it.<sup>56</sup> Imprisoned in his master's house, Caleb's reflections see Godwin attack the repressive tendencies of government in general, and modern British government in particular:

I was his prisoner: and what a prisoner? All my actions observed; all my gestures marked. I could move neither to the right nor the left, but the eye of my keeper was upon me. He watched me; and his vigilance was a sickness to my heart.<sup>57</sup>

This is the context in which Caleb's mental 'revolution' must be understood. Godwin pictures him as the victim of coercion and government, imprisoned just as men such as Joseph Gerrald, Thomas Muir and Thomas Palmer had been imprisoned for their advocacy of reform by the British Government over the course of 1793.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Falkland is later directly described as being 'a copy of what monarchs are, who reckon among the instruments of their power prisons of state'.<sup>59</sup>

Immediately prior to the passage which deals with the escape, Godwin emphasises Falkland's tyranny, having him warn Caleb that he must 'cease to contend with unsurmountable power'.<sup>60</sup> The servant then determines that he 'could no longer endure the vile subjugation that he imposed on me'. In what follows, the mental state of enthusiasm is seen to be liberative; it becomes a means of removing one's self from the psychological bondage demanded by 'tyranny'. After his escape, Caleb finds himself out on the road at night on his journey away from the house. In the passage that follows, Godwin represents to the reader a moment of transformative epiphany:

The night was gloomy, and it drizzled with rain. But these were circumstances I had scarcely the power to perceive; all was sunshine and joy within me. I hardly felt the ground; I repeated to myself a thousand times, I am free. What concern have I with danger and alarm? I feel that I am free; I feel that I will continue so. What power is able to hold in chains a mind ardent and determined? What power can cause that man to die, whose whole soul commands him to

continue to live? [...] I thought with unspeakable loathing of those errors, in consequence of which every man is fated to be more or less the tyrant or the slave. I was astonished at the folly of my species, that they did not rise up as one man, and shake off chains so ignominious and misery so insupportable. So far as related to myself, I resolved, and this resolution has never been entirely forgotten by me, to hold myself disengaged from the odious scene, and never fill the part either of the oppressor or the sufferer.<sup>61</sup>

The remarkable mental transformation undergone by this definitively ordinary hero recalls the pivotal experiences of conversion described in Puritan and Nonconformist spiritual autobiographies. Haller asserts that Puritan diaries expressed the notion that every man or woman ‘was either a convert or susceptible of conversion, and the inner life of any man, once converted, was fraught with daily possibilities for struggle and adventure’.<sup>62</sup> In the hands of seventeenth century Nonconformists reacting against a society which excluded them through legal persecution, such moments of conversion gave vent to social criticism. Caleb’s epiphany echoes scenes from George Fox’s *Journal*, in which the founder of the Religious Society of Friends describes his attempts to spread the truth of scripture in the face of bitter persecution, and relates how God spoke as an inner light within him in moments of revelation, allowing him to make powerful denunciations of oppression. Fox finds ‘an inward life did spring up in me, to answer all the opposing professors and priests’.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, he announces his belief that ‘being bred at Oxford and Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ’, and denounces a priest for refusing to allow women to speak in his church.<sup>64</sup>

Working in the tradition of Nonconformist spiritual autobiography, Godwin uses the first-person confessional to relay to the reader a radical sensibility, an image of individual feeling shattering the hierarchy imposed by social institution. The influence of Rousseau’s *Confessions* is clear; the transparent revelation of feeling acts as a critique of modern society. Godwin’s description of the revolution in his hero’s consciousness builds on the ‘enthusiasm of truth, liberty, and virtue’ articulated in the *Confessions*. Immediately after this passage, the hero describes how his mind ‘continued in this enthusiastical state [...] during the whole of this nocturnal expedition’. Like Jean-Jacques, Caleb suddenly and dramatically uncovers a loathing for the errors of the social order, for the circumstances which dictate that ‘every man is fated to be more or less the tyrant or the slave’. An Enlightenment paean to the

power of mind meshes with a forceful expression of individual feeling. Caleb's personal declaration, 'I feel that I am free', is the basis for his resolution to entirely disengage himself from the system of tyrant and slave.

The declaration recalls Rousseau's description of his visit to a peasant's cottage to ask for a meal on the road to Lyons in the *Confessions*. Having eaten the meal, Jean-Jacques attempts to pay, but finds the man mysteriously unwilling to accept any payment:

At last he tremblingly pronounced the terrible words 'excisemen' and 'cellar rats'. He gave to understand that he hid his wine on account of the excise and his bread on account of the duty, and that he would be a lost man if they suspected for a moment that he was not dying of hunger. All that he said to me on this subject, which was entirely strange to me, made an impression on me which will never grow dim. It was the germ of that inextinguishable hatred which afterwards grew in my heart against the oppression to which the unhappy people are subject, and against their oppressors.<sup>65</sup>

As this example of oppression makes an impression on Jean-Jacques which will 'never grow dim', so Caleb declares that his hatred for oppression 'has never been entirely forgotten by me'. Godwin's passage prefigures Hazlitt's analysis of the political influence of Rousseau's confessional writings, in which he argued that the author had 'brought the feeling of irreconcilable enmity to rank and privileges, *above humanity*, home to the bosom of every man'.<sup>66</sup>

Caleb's enthusiasm is again evident when he is thrown into jail after Falkland has made a false charge of theft against him. Reflecting on the doors, locks and bolts that government has set between him and liberty, he concludes that: 'this is the empire that man exercises over man'.<sup>67</sup> The prison episode continues Godwin's critique of state coercion and, more particularly, sees him attack the poor conditions endemic to British prisons. But he also represents Caleb's refusal to submit to state coercion, achieved through a state of inner fortitude. Turning away from gloomy reflections on the power of government, Caleb experiences another epiphany:

The mind is its own place; and is endowed with powers that might enable it to laugh at the tyrant's vigilance. I passed and repassed these ideas in my mind; and, heated with the contemplation, I said, No, I will not die!<sup>68</sup>

Caleb thus reaffirms his refusal to subject himself to the coercion of authority, finding his ‘faculties raised to a pitch of enthusiasm’.<sup>69</sup> As in spiritual autobiographies such as *Grace Abounding* and Fox’s *Journal*, the experience of imprisonment is the ultimate embodiment of state power and persecution. And as in those works, authority cannot suppress the individual conscience. Godwin uses the tropes of Nonconformist literature to dramatise an enthusiasm that is far removed from the sort of violent revolution that Paulson discerns in Caleb’s actions, but that looks back to an older indigenous tradition of radical social criticism that stretches back to the seventeenth century.

After Caleb’s successful escape from prison, Godwin represents to the reader another moment of epiphany, again looking to the *Confessions* for his model of how Calvinist introspection might grow into the expression of a radical consciousness. As Jean-Jacques was seized by ‘an enthusiasm of liberty, truth, and virtue’ on the road to Vincennes, so Caleb finds that his mind becomes ‘lively, spirited and enthusiastic’ on the road away from the prison. He forgets his hunger and the cold, transported by his freedom from coercion in a moment of inner revelation:

I recollected the confinement I had undergone and the fate that had impended over me with horror. Never did man feel more vividly than I felt at that moment the sweets of liberty. Never did man more strenuously prefer poverty with independence to the artificial allurements of a life of slavery. I stretched forth my arms with rapture, I clapped my hands one upon the other, and exclaimed, Ah, this is indeed to be a man!<sup>70</sup>

A parallel with the psychological dynamic of Christian experience is evident in the word ‘rapture’. Like Rousseau, Godwin argues that human nature is corrupted by social inequality. He develops a contrast between natural freedom and social slavery in comparing the imprisoned Caleb to a caged beast, and then having his hero describe how: ‘[n]ow I can run, fleet as a greyhound; and leap like a young roe upon the mountains’.<sup>71</sup> Through enthusiasm, Godwin seeks to convert the reader to knowledge of the errors of state power and to faith in the force of private judgement:

Strange, that men from age to age should consent to hold their lives at the breath of another, merely that each in his turn may have a power of acting the tyrant according to law! Oh, God! Give me poverty! Shower upon me all the imaginary hardships of human life! I will receive

them all with thankfulness. Turn me a prey to the wild beasts of the desert, so I be never again the victim of a man dressed in the gore-dripping robes of authority! Suffer me at least to call life and the pursuits of life my own! Let me hold it at the mercy [...] of barbarians, but not of the cold blooded prudence of monopolists and kings! How enviable was the enthusiasm which could thus furnish me with energy, in the midst of hunger, poverty and universal desertion.<sup>72</sup>

Caleb's breathless, excited exclamations bring a transparency to his narrative, the mirror of the transparency he desires in his social relations. In this psychological state, Godwin describes a hope for individual liberty beyond the trammels of social institution. Caleb's experiences on the road away from the prison bring us close to Godwin's statement of intent in the letter to the *British Critic*, where he declared his wish not just to 'expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilized society', but to 'read the enquiring reader to examine whether they are or are not, as has commonly been supposed, irremediable'.<sup>73</sup>

The influence of the enthusiastic narrative Godwin encountered in his reading of Rousseau's *Confessions* is crucial to our understanding of the politics of *Caleb Williams*. By setting Caleb's social critique alongside that mounted in the *Confessions*, we can begin to move beyond the Paulson reading of the novel as a warning on the dangers of revolution. One should not ignore the thorough analysis of the errors of revolution mounted in *Political Justice*, where the gradualist scheme of perfectibility is recommended as a course which avoids the chasm of revolutionary violence, demagoguery and reaction. However, though *Caleb Williams* may have been written against the backdrop of the Terror, it remains fundamentally progressive in its tenor. Its intimate connection with Rousseau, indicates that Godwin retained his faith in the ideals of the Revolution. In *Political Justice*, Godwin speaks approvingly of Rousseau's description of 'the enthusiastic influx of truth that first made him a moral and political writer'.<sup>74</sup> The influence of the *Confessions* also highlights the continued development of the ideas on reader-response Godwin had set out in *Political Justice*. Caleb's narrative not only expresses hope for a society of equality and liberty free from the impositions of government and social institution, but seeks, in the vein of Rousseau, to appeal to the reader through transparency of feeling. Godwin's desire to 'work within the very fibres of the [reader's] soul' sees him take up the narrative of Rousseauvian sensibility as a means of transforming the psychology and political outlook of his readership.

## III

As we have seen, Godwin carefully and deliberately places the concept of ‘enthusiasm’ at the heart of his narrative. It is set before the reader as the dominant psychological state in the novel. While the influence of the *Confessions* is crucial here, the term also resonates beyond this immediate context and takes us back to the religious heritage that inspired Rousseau in his use of the word. For the idea of ‘enthusiasm’ was intimately associated with the culture of radical Dissent, and by 1793, was at the heart of the Revolution controversy.

Enthusiasm in its original sense referred to direct personal revelation from God. In this state, the Hebrew prophets spoke the word of the Lord and the apostles spoke with many tongues at Pentecost.<sup>75</sup> The Dissenting sects, who fixed their faith in private revelation above their attachment to institution and ministry, were often characterised as ‘enthusiasts’.<sup>76</sup> After the tumult of the 1640s, when the Dissenting sects had played a prominent role in republican agitation, the word acquired significant political associations. Godwin’s treatment of enthusiasm in *Caleb Williams* should be understood in the context of Burke’s *Reflections*, a work in which the political memories inscribed in the concept had been reawakened.

In the opening section of the *Reflections*, Burke discusses the Dissenting minister Price’s sermon to the Revolution Society in November 1789. He makes a connection between Dissenting sympathisers with the French Revolution and those who had stirred up insurrection in the 1640s. Burke emphasises that Price is a Dissenter, describing him as ‘a non-conforming minister of eminence’, who gave his sermon ‘at the dissenting meeting-house of the Old Jewry’.<sup>77</sup> He likens the sermon to that given by Hugh Peters in 1648, in which the latter bade the people ‘to bind their *kings* with chains, and their *nobles* with fetters of irons’.<sup>78</sup> Burke proceeds to argue that Price is grossly mistaken in his belief that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 passed down a set of democratic laws on the principle of popular sovereignty. In that constitution, there is no talk of general rights, drawn up as it was ‘by great lawyers and great statesmen, and not by warm and inexperienced enthusiasts’.<sup>79</sup> Burke’s vocabulary is strikingly effective here. No other single word could have drawn such a tight knot between the political sensibilities of eighteenth and seventeenth century Dissent. Enthusiasm is an

ever present concern throughout the *Reflections*: Price speaks with a curious ‘zeal’;<sup>80</sup> the Revolutionists ignore the traditions of the British constitution, instead ‘they look abroad with an eager and passionate enthusiasm’.<sup>81</sup> After the infamous passage describing Marie Antoinette’s treatment by the revolutionaries at Versailles, Burke returns to the subject of Price’s sermon and its Dissenting audience:

Is this a triumph to be consecrated at altars? to be commemorated with grateful thanksgiving? to be offered to the divine humanity with fervent prayer and enthusiastick ejaculation? – The Theban and Thracian Orgies, acted in France, and applauded only in the Old Jewry, I assure you, kindle prophetic enthusiasm in the minds but of very few people in this kingdom.<sup>82</sup>

He then refers to the treatment the Church received at the hands of the Revolution and to the reaction provoked among British Dissenters:

I mean, the circumstance of the Io Paeon of the triumph, the animating cry which called ‘for all the BISHOPS to be hanged on the lampposts,’ might well have brought forth a burst of enthusiasm on the foreseen consequences of this happy day. I allow to so much enthusiasm some little deviation from prudence. I allow this prophet [Price] to break forth into hymns of joy and thanksgiving on an event which appears like the precursor of the Millennium, and the projected fifth monarchy, in the destruction of all church establishments.<sup>83</sup>

Through his use of the term ‘enthusiasm’, Burke seeks to persuade the reader that modern Dissenters possess the same fervent desire to transform society that their forefathers did in the era of the Commonwealth.

Godwin’s portrait of the enthusiastic Caleb is a response to Burke’s attack on the political sensibilities of Dissent. This state of mind is first glimpsed when Caleb realises that Falkland is guilty of murder and has condemned the innocent Hawkines to suffer for his crime; a revelation which causes him to experience a ‘fit of uncontrollable enthusiasm’.<sup>84</sup> The moments of epiphany which occur throughout the narrative answer Burke by picturing enthusiasm as a liberative psychological state in which ‘truth’ is revealed to the individual mind. The Dissenting faculty of private judgement, the faith in inner revelation, is seen in its secular application; it is held to be a means of discerning the mental bondage placed upon the individual by government and a means of declaring independence from that bondage. By raising his

mind to a ‘pitch of enthusiasm’, Caleb is able to revive himself in prison and resist state coercion. It is through this psychology of enthusiasm that Godwin makes his fundamental appeal to the reading audience; seeking through the dramatic moments of epiphany to proselytise the reader into a liberal, anti-Burkean view of society as a restriction upon individual liberty and as a system of relations susceptible to ‘improvement’.

Godwin deliberately frames Caleb’s escape from Falkland’s house so as to express a kinship between his hero’s experiences and the persecution suffered by Nonconformists in the seventeenth century. He flees through a concealed door ‘which had perhaps served as a refuge from persecution, or a security from the inveterate hostilities of a barbarous age’.<sup>85</sup>

Such a portrayal of the liberative possibilities of enthusiasm had precedents in the 1790s. Godwin would have been familiar with the notable passage in Paine’s *Rights of Man* in which the storming of the Bastille is described. There, the author attacks Burke for ignoring this incident in his history of the Revolution, hinging his argument on one of Burke’s own favourite terms:

That the Bastille was attacked with an enthusiasm of heroism, such as only the highest animation of liberty could inspire, and carried in the space of a few hours, is an event which the world is fully possessed of.<sup>86</sup>

Paine shared with Godwin a background in East Anglian Dissent. He too makes a connection between the psychology of enthusiasm and the pursuit of liberty.

That enthusiasm was closely associated with egalitarian republican social criticism is revealed in J.G.A. Pocock’s work on the subject. Discussing the Dissenting sects of the 1640s, Pocock argues that in the era of the Commonwealth the notion of God’s light being privately revealed to the individual conscience connoted a potent anti-authoritarianism:

Since under the conditions of a dissolution of government this entailed a rejection of successive kinds of authority, it had endowed often plebeian men and women with an articulate capacity for criticism and rejection of successive features of the social structure, the nearest thing to a revolutionary consciousness (it can be debated how near) to be found in English history; and this had been by no means forgotten a century and a half after 1649.<sup>87</sup>



Something of this Dissenting heritage persists in Caleb's narrative, in his radical rejection of what he terms 'those errors, in consequence of which every man is fated to be more or less the tyrant or the slave'.<sup>88</sup>

Yet as I have indicated, Godwin's treatment of enthusiasm is ambiguous. Given the crucial position he had assigned to reason in *Political Justice*, he can hardly be supposed to entirely endorse his protagonist's irrational flights of mind in *Caleb Williams*. This ambiguity can be traced back to the work of Hume, of whom Godwin was an avid student. In his *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, Hume included 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm'. This short piece begins by stating, in reference to the two objects of the title, that '*the corruption of the best of things produces the worst*', and that these two phenomena are 'the corruptions of true religion'.<sup>89</sup> Hume characterises enthusiasm as an ill-founded vanity:

[H]uman reason, and even morality, are rejected as fallacious guides; and the fanatic madman delivers himself over, blindly and without reserve, to the supposed illapses of the Spirit, and to inspiration from above. – Hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance, are therefore the true sources of Enthusiasm.<sup>90</sup>

But as he proceeds, he begins to contrast enthusiasm favourably against superstition. The latter is founded on fear, and the superstitious man appears to himself unworthy of approaching the divine presence. He entrusts himself to those supposedly more favoured by the Divinity, '[h]ence the origin of PRIESTS, who may justly be regarded as an invention of a timorous and abject superstition'.<sup>91</sup> In contrast, Hume notes, 'all enthusiasts have been free from the yoke of ecclesiastics, and have expressed great independence in their devotion'.<sup>92</sup> Enthusiasm is equated with the culture of Dissent. His final observation on the political significance of this psychological state prefigures Godwin's portrait of Caleb:

[S]uperstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it [...] enthusiasm, being the infirmity of bold and ambitious tempers, is naturally accompanied with a spirit of liberty; as superstition, on the contrary, renders men tame and abject, and fits them for slavery. We learn from English history, that, during the civil wars, the *Independents* and *Deists*, though the

most opposite in their religious principles, yet were united in their political ones, and were alike passionate for a commonwealth.<sup>93</sup>

Throughout *Caleb Williams*, the hero struggles to overcome his reverence for Falkland, who paints himself as the possessor of supernatural power. In the moments of epiphany, Godwin describes the desire to exist outside the relations of 'tyrant and slave' and realises what Hume terms the enthusiastic 'spirit of liberty'. However, as in Hume's essay, such rejection of reason is seen to unleash a potentially dangerous force.

By situating Godwin's study of enthusiasm as a riposte to Burke's attack on the Dissenters in the *Reflections*, we can achieve an understanding of *Caleb Williams* that moves beyond the Paulson reading on the 'dangers of revolution'. In keeping with the theory of literature and reader-response outlined in *Political Justice*, Godwin intended *Caleb Williams* as a vehicle for improvement. Through the moments of epiphany, he seeks to communicate to the reader, with all the fervour of private revelation, an enthusiastic hope for society's redemption from the coercions of government. Godwin's many reflections on the reader-response element of the novel, on its capacity to work upon the 'fibres of the soul' and materially alter the reader's mindset, evidence his continued interest in the nexus of relations between literature, psychology and liberal improvement. Like *Political Justice*, the novel expresses a faith in the self-generating capacity of hope; it implicitly asserts that by contemplating the liberative transformation of consciousness undergone by the hero, the reader will be led to similar political enlightenment.

#### IV

Much about the intended impact of *Caleb Williams* upon its audience is revealed by the close ties between the novel and the trial of Joseph Gerrald. Godwin found that he was unable to work on the novel for the time between January 2, 1794 and April 1, a hiatus which corresponds exactly with his involvement in the Gerrald affair.<sup>94</sup>

A wealthy lawyer, Gerrald was, along with Thelwall, the most prominent political theorist of the London Corresponding Society. He left behind him 'a legendary reputation as a fiery orator, scholarly custodian of the Anglo-Saxon radical tradition

and sympathetic champion of Irish constitutional liberties'.<sup>95</sup> In November 1793, a convention of reformers was held in Edinburgh under the title of 'The British Convention of the Delegates of the People, associated to obtain Universal Suffrage and Annual Parliaments'. Several English radical societies sent delegates, including the London Corresponding Society, for whom Gerrald acted as one of two delegates. In December, the convention was interrupted when the Scottish authorities arrested the leaders and charged them with sedition. Gerrald returned to London in the knowledge that he would soon have to make the journey to Edinburgh to stand trial.

It was while Gerrald was in London awaiting the start of his trial that Godwin broke off from the composition of *Caleb Williams*. He addressed Gerrald, whom he had met previously, in a letter which begins with an extraordinary claim:

I cannot recollect the situation in which you are in a few days to be placed without emotions of respect, and I had almost said of envy. For myself I will never adopt any conduct for the express purpose of being put on trial, but if I be ever so put, I will consider that day as a day of triumph.<sup>96</sup>

Godwin's relish at the prospect of being put on trial chimes with his interest in Nonconformist literature of the seventeenth century. In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan relates how he gratefully grasped the chance to challenge the judge and the law of the land in his own trial. Keeble analyses the persistence of prison and the threat of confinement as tropes in Nonconformist writing by remarking that: 'persecution becomes an evidence not of God's abandonment of his elect but of the fidelity of the faithful: suffering is the badge of the saint'.<sup>97</sup> Something of the attitude of the militant Nonconformism persists in Godwin's stance on the Gerrald prosecution.

Gerrald's trial was not the only one with which Godwin concerned himself at this time. In December 1793, he had taken up the cause of Muir and Palmer, two men convicted of sedition in a Scottish court for participating in another reformist convention. Godwin visited the pair in the prison hulks at Woolwich, as well as writing an unpublished letter of protest over their treatment to the *Morning Chronicle* in March 1794.<sup>98</sup> His involvement with Muir, Palmer and Gerrald highlights the particular polemical intent behind *Caleb Williams*, putting a modern gloss on the

descriptions of trials and imprisonment familiar from seventeenth-century Nonconformist writing.

The main purpose of the letter to Gerrald is to convince the reformer of the wider importance of his trial and to advise him on how he ought to conduct himself. The forthcoming trial is envisaged as a moment of epiphany which might act as a beacon of hope in English society and beyond:

Your trial, if you so please, may be a day such as England, and I believe the world, never saw. It may be the means of converting thousands, and, progressively, millions, to the cause of reason and public justice. [...] If you must suffer, do not, I conjure you, suffer without making use of this opportunity of telling a tale upon which the happiness of nations depends. Spare none of the resources of your powerful mind. Is this a day of reserve, a day to be slurred over in neglect - the day that constitutes the very crisis of your fate?<sup>99</sup>

For Godwin, the trial provides a means of accelerating the process of perfectibility, of ‘converting thousands’ to the cause of justice. It will be a form of politically-beneficial drama. ‘What an event’, he wonders, ‘would it be for England and mankind if you could gain an acquittal’.<sup>100</sup> Godwin describes the situation in terms which suggest a parallel with his own conception of author’s relationship with his readers. The defendant has the opportunity of ‘telling a tale’; he should not forget that juries are men and thus ‘made of penetrable stuff: probe all the recesses of their souls [...] Let every syllable you utter be fraught with persuasion’.<sup>101</sup> These remarks parallel Godwin’s comments on reader-response, on his wish to work upon the very fibres of his readers’ souls in *Caleb Williams*. His grounding in the culture of Dissent is shown in his belief that the trial will demonstrate the irresistible nature of truth when revealed to the individual mind. While describing the potential impact of Gerrald’s trial as a transformative moment, Godwin strays into describing the intended effect of his contemporaneous novel.

In his vision, the trial becomes a kind of collective Rousseauvian epiphany, a moment which might transform the consciousness of observers. Godwin tells Gerrald that ‘[n]ever, perhaps never, in the revolution of human affairs, will your mind be the same illustrious and irresistible mind as it will be on this day’.<sup>102</sup> In the passage cited above, he pinpoints the trial as ‘the day that constitutes the very crisis of your fate’. The vocabulary with which he pictures this event echoes Caleb’s narrative, making

similar use of the radical rhetoric of Rousseau's *Confessions*. Godwin's enthusiastic advice to Gerrald recalls Caleb's description of the opening of Falkland's trunk, in which he states that '[o]ne short minute had effected a reverse in my situation, the suddenness of which the history of man perhaps is unable to surpass' and that '[t]his epoch was the crisis of my fate'.<sup>103</sup>

However, the outcome of Gerrald's trial was not the favourable one for which Godwin had hoped. The trial took place in March 1794, with Justice Braxfield presiding, as he had done in the case of Muir and Palmer. Gerrald, representing himself, defended his legal right as a British citizen to agitate for reform. However, the jury returned a guilty verdict and he was sentenced to be transported to Australia for fourteen years. Godwin visited the convicted Gerrald in Newgate, even presenting him with a copy of *Caleb Williams*, which the prisoner read and enjoyed, although it can hardly have provided distraction.<sup>104</sup> Gerrald was transported to New South Wales in April 1795 and died within a year.

Godwin's journal records that he visited Gerrald in Newgate prison on March 28, 1794 and April 2.<sup>105</sup> He quickly found that the impetus for writing *Caleb Williams* had returned, working on the novel throughout April while making further visits to Gerrald throughout the month, completing his work on April 23. However, Godwin then devised what he termed a 'new catastrophe' between May 4 and 8.<sup>106</sup>

The original ending saw Falkland victorious in the final trial, with Caleb ending his days in prison, slipping into madness. The revised ending offers a complete reversal of fortune, with Caleb managing to convince the court that Falkland is guilty of murder and that he has been speaking the truth. Godwin's motivation in providing a revised conclusion has been the subject of some critical speculation.<sup>107</sup> Gerard Barker suggests that the published ending makes the novel an account of the hero's moral growth, turning 'Caleb's final confrontation into a moral triumph'.<sup>108</sup> For Kelvin Everest and Gavin Edwards, the two contrasting conclusions express a paradox between synchronic and diachronic thought that is connected to similar oppositions within radical thought; a tension between the desire to represent progress and the awareness of current social ills. The revised ending is an uneasy accommodation to optimism in their reading, belying Godwin's 'profound pessimism over the possibility of communicating truth in the present conditions of society'.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps the most nuanced interpretation is offered by Mark Philp, who asserts that the published

conclusion should not be understood as an enactment of Caleb's victory over law and the tyranny of Falkland, but as an indictment of both protagonists' failure to resolve conflict through discussion and the exercise of private judgement, of their decision to resort to law.<sup>110</sup> Reading within the framework of *Political Justice*, Philp suggests that the trial scene illustrates how society has driven Caleb and Falkland to each mistake the intentions of the other and show concern only for self-preservation. Caleb exposes as error his decision to resort to law and effectively destroy Falkland when he later expresses his regret and his admiration for his former master, coming to a sympathetic understanding which juxtaposes the legal realm against a higher realm of moral truth and justice.

The published ending undoubtedly continues the critique of legalistic justice begun in *Political Justice*. However, the description of the trial does not merely attack Caleb for recouring to law instead of political justice. As seen above, Godwin viewed Gerrald's trial as a means of converting 'thousands' to the cause of 'public justice' and relished the prospect of being tried himself. While he may have scorned the legal realm in his scheme of political philosophy, Godwin was immersed in a Nonconformist literary tradition in which trial scenes often showed individuals resisting government persecution with heroic fortitude. Clear parallels between the description of the trial in *Caleb Williams* and Godwin's letter to Gerrald reveal that the novel's published ending was in part an attempt to imagine the epiphanic triumph of truth over corrupt British law, a triumph which had failed to materialise in reality. As Gerrald is told by Godwin that this is the 'very crisis of your fate',<sup>111</sup> so Caleb reflects of his own trial that: '[t]his is a moment pregnant with fate'.<sup>112</sup> As the real defendant is instructed to make use of the opportunity of 'telling a tale',<sup>113</sup> so the fictional one determines to 'tell a tale!'<sup>114</sup> As Gerrald is advised that 'it is by calm and recollected boldness that we can shake the pillars of the vault of heaven',<sup>115</sup> so Caleb declares he will speak '[b]old as a lion, yet collected!'<sup>116</sup>

With the force of the enthusiast, Caleb declares: 'I will tell a tale-! The justice of the country shall hear me! The elements of nature in universal uproar shall not interrupt me! I will speak with a voice more powerful than thunder'.<sup>117</sup> His frank expression of regret at being forced to persecute Falkland, who was once a worthy man, wins over the court:

Such were the accents dictated by my remorse. I poured them out with uncontrollable impetuosity, for my heart was pierced, and I was compelled to give vent to its anguish. Every one that heard me was petrified with astonishment. Every one that heard me was melted into tears. They could not resist the ardour with which I praised the great qualities of Falkland; they manifested their sympathy in the tokens of my penitence.<sup>118</sup>

The rationalist doctrine of the omnipotence of truth blends into the language of Rousseauvian sentiment. Such is the force of Caleb's feeling that it counteracts hierarchy and law, asserting an equality of common sentiment that negates the coercive power of the state.

Though the final paragraph of the novel offers a bleak meditation on the 'corrupt wilderness of human society',<sup>119</sup> the trial scene provides an optimistic conclusion to *Caleb Williams*. Godwin had imagined Gerrald's trial as converting millions to the cause of justice and furthering perfectibility; he pictures Caleb's trial as the fulfilment of this vision. The trial is the culmination of the transformative epiphanies undergone by the hero throughout the course of the novel. Just prior to his final ordeal, he experiences 'an instantaneous revolution' of the mind.<sup>120</sup> Godwin once again returns to the vocabulary employed by Rousseau in evoking the 'enthusiasm for liberty, truth, and justice' he had discovered on the road to Vincennes. Read in the context of the letter to Gerrald, of the influence of Rousseau's *Confessions* and of Burke's attack on enthusiasm and Dissent, *Caleb Williams* can be understood as an attempt to transform the consciousness of the reader and achieve conversion to the cause of 'reason and public justice' through the force of enthusiasm. The work develops the strand of literary theorising begun in *Political Justice*, positioning literature's influence over the psychological state of the reader as an essential means of stimulating the process of perfectibility.

## CHAPTER 3

*Disappointment in St Leon, Fleetwood, and the Reply to Parr*

## I

Towards the end of Godwin's novel of 1799, *St Leon*, the eponymous hero is cast into a dungeon in the depths of a towering castle. St Leon is a philosopher in one of the older senses of the word, having inherited the secrets of alchemy and the *elixir vitae*. After attempting to use these gifts to improve the lot of his fellow men, he finds himself imprisoned by a cruel misanthrope. St Leon reflects bitterly on the failure of his benevolent scheme:

Why was I thus stopped in the commencement of a career so auspiciously begun, and to which an ardent fancy would prescribe no limits? Why was every power of the social constitution, every caprice of the multitude, every insidious project of the noble, thus instantly in arms against so liberal and grand an undertaking?<sup>1</sup>

St Leon's reflections resonate beyond the confines of this novel, being Godwin's lament on the balance of British politics in the late 1790s. The benevolent friend of humanity is thwarted in his hopes by the forces of reaction. The passage, with its sad acknowledgement of the defeat of a 'liberal and grand' undertaking, typifies the tenor of Godwin's literary output between 1799 and 1805. Reading the novels *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* alongside the important essay *Reply to Parr* illustrates how his work in this period emerged as a detailed response to trends in contemporary politics. St Leon's lament is significant, for it expresses the mood which comes to dominate Godwin's writing in this period: that of disappointment.

Many historians have discussed the late 1790s in Britain as a period in which popular anti-Jacobinism became a dominant political force, developing as a strand of resurgent patriotism produced by war with revolutionary France.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of the *Anti-Jacobin* journal in 1797, in the pages of which Godwin was frequently attacked, was the most prominent literary embodiment of this trend. As E.P. Thompson and Albert Goodwin have shown, the stringent legal measures taken by the



Government severely curtailed activity in both working-class and middle-class radical circles in this period.<sup>3</sup> This is the landscape surveyed by Godwin in *St Leon*, *Fleetwood* and the *Reply to Parr*, works in which a mood of disappointment is used to comment on the contemporary crisis of liberal hope. However, the pose of the disappointed liberal often becomes a means of defending the principles of *Political Justice* against the attacks of anti-Jacobinism and Malthusianism. Though these works discuss the apparent collapse of the Enlightenment project of improvement, they often refine disappointment into a paradoxical restatement of hope.

The context of the rise of anti-Jacobinism and Malthusianism in late-1790s Britain is crucial to an understanding of Godwin's novels of this period. *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* have often been understood by critics as staging posts on a retreat away from the principles of *Political Justice*.<sup>4</sup> Recently, Rowland Weston has suggested that the progress of Godwin's career saw him reject Enlightenment universalism, along with the 'excessive rationalism of his own puritan inheritance'.<sup>5</sup> *St Leon*, he argues, marks an important shift towards a Burkean model of the domestic affections. This reading overlooks the element within Godwin's thought which saw Enlightenment optimism in the form of an extra-rational enthusiasm, as I have suggested previously. In *St Leon*, we see a continued attempt to advance the arguments of *Political Justice* through an engagement with Nonconformist spiritual autobiographies, notably *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Rousseau's *Confessions*. It is a novel which remains immersed in the culture of Dissent, and which uses the psychology inherited from that culture to advance its political argument.

In keeping with Marilyn Butler's characterisation of Godwin as a novelist who maintained 'some vestige of the liberal tradition' through the war years,<sup>6</sup> we might reach a reading of *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* as problematic affirmations of the continued significance of the psychology of hope. Both novels are unwilling to renounce the optimism of Enlightenment humanism entirely, and both centre on discussions of the social significance of compassionate individual feeling. They demonstrate that benevolence, the defining virtue of the egalitarian anarchist society of *Political Justice*, the concept critiqued in such detail by Malthus in his affirmation of Smithian self-interest, remained a vital source of hope for Godwin. In his anguished fluctuations between hope and disappointment, we see an attention to the political significance of psychology that recalls the literary manifesto of *Political Justice*.

Throughout *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* it is possible to discern the Dissenting ethos of education effected through literature, public discussion and private judgement. Principally, Godwin's manipulation of the techniques of the sentimental novel makes an appeal to the reader which is intended to cultivate the ideal of benevolence. Though disappointed by practical politics, he employed the first-person confessional style as a means of expressing, in sublimated form, a continued attachment to republican virtues. The influence of Rousseau's *Confessions*, already evident in *Caleb Williams*, becomes yet more pronounced in *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*. The martyrdom of Jean-Jacques, lonely and persecuted yet steadfast in his compassion for others, plays a central role in Godwin's literary response to the collapse of progressive hope. Thus the attempt to achieve transparent communication with the reader through the mode of fictional autobiography displays, to a greater degree than has been acknowledged in critical interpretations of *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*, the intent to influence the mental outlook of the reader and contribute to the process of improvement. Reading these novels in close conjunction with the *Reply to Parr*, an essay which restates the idea of human perfectibility in the face of the disappointments of practical politics, can highlight the particular polemical approach taken by Godwin in this period.

## II

Planned as early as 1795, *St Leon* is avowedly a novel which responds to the dominance of anti-Jacobinism within political debate. The concerns of its plot manifest Godwin's direct concern with contemporary ideological currents. The central conceit of the novel is the connection it draws between the 'old philosopher', the alchemist and holder of the *elixir vitae*, and the 'new philosopher' of the radical 1790s. The connection has previously been elucidated by critics,<sup>7</sup> but a clearer understanding of the metaphor's roots in the particularities of contemporary political debate is needed. The link between old and new philosophies is suggested in the opening paragraph of the novel, in which St Leon observes of a previous age that 'one of the favourite topics of speculation was a perfect system of civil policy', citing Plato's 'imaginary republic' as an example. He then states that in his own time the subject which has attracted the greatest amount of study is the *opus magnum*, 'in its two grand and inseparable branches, the art of multiplying gold, and of defying the

inroads of infirmity and death'.<sup>8</sup> While no rational equation is made between the two concepts, they are placed together. In choosing the conceit of the old philosopher, Godwin drew on a number of sources. He writes in the Preface that the novel was initially inspired by a translation of a German work which had the title of *Hermippus Redivivus: Or, The Sage's Triumph over Old Age and the Grave – Wherein, a Method is laid down for Prolonging the Life and Vigour of Man*. Gary Kelly suggests that this book came to Godwin from Thomas Holcroft's library, and notes that it dealt with the notion that reason and a 'better disposed world' could prolong the life of man indefinitely.<sup>9</sup> Having been ridiculed for his use of comparable ideas in the conclusion of *Political Justice*, the connection between old and new philosophies would have appealed to Godwin.

The lineage of the 'old philosopher' character can also be traced back to Burke's attack on the French Enlightenment in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In the course of the work, Burke develops a conspiracy theory in which he suggests that the Revolution had been instigated by a shadowy 'cabal' set on undermining religious institutions and established government. In his first formulation of this idea, he speaks of those involved in the 'vast undertaking of the Encyclopaedia' as a 'literary cabal' which had 'some years ago formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion'.<sup>10</sup> By referring to the founding work of the French Enlightenment, the *Encyclopédie*, Burke implicates in the 'cabal' its chief writers, Diderot and d'Alembert, and also contributors such as Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau. He reinterprets the questioning of religious doctrine and clerical practices that this group undertook as a sinister plot intended to destroy Christianity. We are told that 'a spirit of cabal, intrigue, and proselytism, pervaded all their thoughts, words, and actions'.<sup>11</sup> As the *Reflections* proceed, Burke contends that this philosophic conspiracy is spreading like a contagion. The conspirators possess 'societies to cabal and correspond at home and abroad for the propagation of their tenets';<sup>12</sup> there are people in England who meet with them and 'receive from them tokens of confraternity, and standards consecrated amidst their rites and mysteries'.<sup>13</sup> At one point the agents of the Revolution are likened to alchemists; Burke notes of the French revolutionaries' project to coin money from the bells of churches: '[t]his is their alchymy'.<sup>14</sup> His 'cabal' theory associates the *philosophes* with bizarre occult practices, thus portraying Enlightenment reason 'as a form of dangerous magic', as

John Whale observes.<sup>15</sup> Burke's attack on the French Enlightenment posited a causal link between the undermining of 'natural' family and religious affections in the thought of the *philosophes*, and the inhuman barbarity of the Revolution. His imagining of Marie Antoinette's treatment at the hands of a revolutionary mob is an embodiment of this thesis.

Seamus Deane has discussed the pivotal role which the issue of feeling occupies in Burke's political thought. He suggests that the *Reflections*, the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* and the *Thoughts on French Affairs* form a 'composite account of Burke's defence of affection against the subversions of the Enlightenment and the attacks of the Revolution'. In his thought, Deane observes, there is a convergence between 'the atheistic cosmopolitan' and the 'Rousseauist disciple of benevolence'; both being figures whose 'natural alliance is not with those close to them but with strangers'.<sup>16</sup>

In the years immediately preceding the publication of *St Leon*, Burke's notion of an Enlightenment conspiracy intended to subvert traditional affections had been more fully developed by other writers, most notably Abbé Barruel in his *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797-8), and John Robison in *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Governments of Europe* (1797). Again, the French Revolution was presented as the work of mysterious secret societies, most notably the Illuminati of the University of Ingolstadt, who supposedly plotted against Church, State and the family.<sup>17</sup> *Memoirs* and *Proofs of a Conspiracy* met with some success. The arguments of Burke, Barruel and Robison had a profound impact upon the public consciousness in Britain; the conspiracy theory of the French Enlightenment and Revolution entered the mainstream of anti-Jacobin thought.<sup>18</sup>

Godwin read both Barruel's and Robison's works in 1798, and was already intimately familiar with Burke's *Reflections*.<sup>19</sup> By creating a character who turns his mysterious secret knowledge towards 'improvement', Godwin playfully acknowledges the anti-Jacobin conspiracy theory of the Enlightenment. However, *St Leon* positions the old philosopher as a heroic figure, thus inverting the Burkean thesis. Godwin specifically identifies his protagonist with the progressive impulses of the *philosophes*, making him a restless character who pines for 'every thing the reverse of my present condition' and who is 'eager for improvement'.<sup>20</sup> When St Leon inherits the secrets of the philosopher's stone from the mysterious stranger, he determines to

travel through Europe ‘spreading improvements, dispensing blessings, and causing all distress and calamity to vanish from before me’.<sup>21</sup> He speaks of the grand, reforming purpose open to a man of unbounded wealth and life such as him:

He possesses really the blessing which priestcraft and superstition have lyingly pronounced upon the charitable [...] He can assign to every individual in a nation the task he pleases, can improve agriculture, and establish manufactures, can found schools, and hospitals, and infirmaries, and universities.<sup>22</sup>

Godwin presents this enterprise problematically. In fixing his attention upon his own godlike powers, St Leon loses his family and consigns himself to loneliness and misery. Nevertheless, it is clear that Godwin intends to engage the reader’s sympathy for his hero’s benevolent project of improvement. Answering the work of Burke, Barruel and Robison, he suggests that the only conspiracy is that mounted by government and religious institution against the benevolent advocate of reform.

The desire to respond to Burke’s attack on the Enlightenment is evident in the discussion of feeling in *St Leon*. The novel is most frequently cited by critics for its important place in Godwin’s revaluation of the role of the domestic affections. This revaluation has been understood by Kelly and Gregory Claeys as forming a retreat from the principles of *Political Justice* and even from politics altogether, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. However, Godwin makes clear in his Preface to *The Enquirer*, published two years previously to *St Leon*, that his emphasis on what Kelly terms the apolitical moral amelioration of individuals is maintained alongside ‘as ardent a passion for innovation as ever’.<sup>23</sup> Godwin’s ‘turn to feeling’ actually involved him with ideas of sensibility that are closely connected with the central doctrines of *Political Justice*.

The Preface to *St Leon* demonstrates that, rather than conceding ground to Burke on the issue of ‘natural’ family feeling as Claeys asserts, Godwin was seeking to rebut the conservative caricature of the Enlightenment found in the *Reflections*. Here, the author states that he had long been anxious to modify some of the sentiments expressed in *Political Justice*, and sets out his revised position:

Not that I see cause to make any change respecting the principle of justice, or any thing else fundamental to the system there delivered; but that I apprehend domestic and private affections

inseparable from the nature of man, and from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind of him that cherishes them. [...] [T]he man who lives in the midst of domestic relations will have many opportunities of conferring pleasure, minute in the detail, yet not trivial in the amount, without interfering with the purposes of general benevolence. Nay by kindling his sensibility, and harmonising his soul, they may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and the public.<sup>24</sup>

The word ‘strangers’ is important and may refer to the opening section of Burke’s *Thoughts on French Affairs*. There it is argued that the Rousseauvian social contract of the new republic has demolished traditional civil and religious ties in favour of a relationship in which the individual citizen is sovereign. What is produced by this erosion of the bonds of feeling is a dangerous cosmopolitanism, a phenomenon which Burke likens to the legacy of that other great European revolution, the Protestant Reformation. Both provide instances, he suggests, ‘of that species of faction which broke the locality of publick affections, and united descriptions of citizens more with strangers than with their countrymen of different opinions’.<sup>25</sup> Godwin directly answers Burke’s attack on the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment by asserting that the social good is best served by such affection for ‘strangers and the public’. He proposes a reconciliation between ‘general benevolence’ and private sentiment, suggesting that the domestic affections are consistent with the principles of justice set out in *Political Justice*. Godwin implicitly concedes that the discussion of benevolence in the Fénelon episode had ignored the existence of important sentimental attachments of family. But crucially, he retains his conviction in the possibility of benevolence, of social feeling; we might harbour affection for our families while experiencing a Hutchesonian altruistic desire for the good of ‘strangers’.

The same sentence also contains another reference to Burke. The phrase ‘liberal and manly spirit’ suggests that Godwin had the *Reflections* in mind while writing the Preface to *St Leon*. In the midst of his encomium to the English nation, Burke declared that his countrymen have remained stubbornly resistant to the sinister innovations of the French Enlightenment. As a consequence, ‘natural’ feeling still reigns in the hearts of Englishmen:

In England we have not yet been completely embowelled of our natural entrails; we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors of our duty, the true supporters of all *liberal and manly* morals [...] We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility. Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is *natural* to be affected; because all other feelings are false and spurious, and tend to corrupt our minds, to vitiate our primary morals.<sup>26</sup> [my emphasis in first instance]

In the Preface to *St Leon*, Godwin makes it clear that he shares Burke's understanding of the importance of the domestic affections. However, he shatters the limits of Burkean sentiment in the highly significant assertion that feeling might take us beyond domestic ties and bind us to 'strangers and the public'. Godwin shapes his model of the domestic affections to accommodate a socialised 'general benevolence'. As Burke had made clear in his attack on Rousseau in the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, he abhorred the idea of social benevolence as the most inhuman offspring of the abstract system of thought developed by the *philosophes*. The Preface to *St Leon* is in part Godwin's apology for past errors; for the travesty of human feeling seen in the Fénelon episode and for what some observers saw as a similar travesty in his memoir of Wollstonecraft, published the previous year in a storm of anti-Jacobin outrage. But predominantly, it is a restating of the hope of *Political Justice*, in which the possibility that individuals will leave behind their attachment to private property in favour of devotion to the general good is held to offer powerful psychological sustenance to the liberal reader. Godwin's vision of an all-encompassing feeling for 'strangers and the public' is a direct riposte to Burke's critique of Enlightenment and repudiation of benevolence, to his espousal of a conservative model of sentiment bounded by family and hierarchy.

There are then, two overlapping themes at work within *St Leon*. There is the story of the old philosopher, an inversion of anti-Jacobin conspiracy theories of the French Enlightenment and Revolution; which proceeds alongside an exploration of sentiment and feeling that is also shaped as a response to anti-Jacobin arguments. The novel thus involves itself in a restating of progressive hope against the predominant climate of Burkean anti-Jacobinism. Understanding Godwin's treatment of these themes involves examining the way in which he worked under the influence of Rousseau's

*Confessions*. In a time of liberal retreat, he looked to the *Confessions*, specifically its bleak and paranoid final three books, as his primer. We know from Godwin's journal that he re-read the *Confessions* and the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* in 1797 and 1798.<sup>27</sup> The plot of *St Leon*, in which the hero wanders across Europe as a persecuted, alienated exile, has clear parallels with the final stages of Rousseau's autobiography.

Towards the end of the *Confessions*, Jean-Jacques becomes the victim of a reactionary conspiracy involving supposed friends, angry mobs, religious authorities and governments, all hostile to him on account of his fiercely republican political writings. He wanders through France and Switzerland in an attempt to escape their plots, but finds that he is '[p]ursued by the under-hand dealings of my secret persecutors to every place in which I took refuge'.<sup>28</sup> As Gregory Dart has shown, Rousseau's 'rhetoric of self-martyrdom' becomes a means of defending the civic virtues he had described in his more explicitly political works; the corruptions of modern commercial society cannot extinguish his natural sincerity and compassion for others.<sup>29</sup>

In *St Leon*, the *Confessions* are central to Godwin's analysis of contemporary politics and his attempt to maintain a liberal impetus within his literary project. At one crucial point in the novel, he employs the text as a means of articulating a sense of anguish at the frustration of the progressive cause and responding to the Burkean conspiracy theory of the Enlightenment. The climax of St Leon's persecution comes with the torching of his house by hostile villagers during his stay in Italy. Clemit and Kelly have argued that this episode is a direct reference to the anti-Dissenter Birmingham Riots of 1791, in which a 'Church and King' mob destroyed Joseph Priestley's scientific apparatus and library.<sup>30</sup> While this event, which remained present in the minds of liberals and radicals for many years, is undoubtedly invoked here, it is refracted through a passage from Book Twelve of the *Confessions*. There, we find Rousseau living in Môtiers, in fear of the local government and populace, whom he believes to be plotting against him. Just as Jean-Jacques finds himself 'in the midst of the hootings of the dregs of the people',<sup>31</sup> St Leon suffers the 'hootings and clamours of these infatuated peasants'.<sup>32</sup> When St Leon attempts to reason with the villagers, asking them the cause of their 'hatred and persecution', they tell him that he is 'a wizard, a necromancer, a dealer in the black art'.<sup>33</sup> The terms return us to the conspiracy theories of Burke, Barruel and Robison. The persecution of Rousseau



reaches its zenith one night when his house is attacked in a hail of stones which smashes all the windows and forces him to flee. St Leon and his family similarly escape their house at night before it is burnt to the ground by the villagers. From a distance, he watches the flames rise into the sky with his friend Filoanto, who is driven into a 'transport of misanthropy' by these events. The paranoia of Rousseau becomes a vehicle for Godwin to express his bitter disappointment at the thwarting of liberal improvement by popular anti-Jacobinism, both in the Birmingham riots and more generally:

He saw there was a principle in the human mind destined to be eternally at war with improvement and science. No sooner did a man devote himself to the pursuit of discoveries which, if ascertained, would prove the highest benefit to his species, than his whole species became armed against him. The midnight oil was held to be the signal of infernal machinations. The paleness of study and the furrows of thought were adjudged to be the tokens of diabolical alliance. He saw, in the transactions of that night, a pledge of the eternal triumph of ignorance over wisdom.<sup>34</sup>

The Burkean conspiracy theory is inverted; the true conspiracy is that mounted by 'ignorance' against Enlightenment. The *Confessions*, with their description of the life of a suffering, persecuted radical, afford Godwin the foundation on which to build a potent rhetoric of disappointment.

As *St Leon* progresses, this mood of Rousseauvian disappointment is refined to become a paradoxical restatement of hope. In the frequent confessional monologues, St Leon offers the reader the unrestricted flow of his feelings and sentiments. At one point, Godwin suggests that the significance of this memoir lies in its candour and transparency. The work thus stands in marked opposition to the surrounding society, which is founded on secrecy and obscurity:

Senseless paper! Be thou at least my confidant! To thee I may impart what my soul spurns the task to suppress. The human mind insatiably thirsts for a confidant and a friend. It is no matter that these pages shall never be surveyed by other eyes than mine. They afford at least the semblance of communication and the unburthening of the mind; and I will press the illusion fondly and for ever to my heart.<sup>35</sup>

The echoes of Rousseau's rhetoric are clear: the craving for 'transparency' through the written text, the attachment to feeling and the 'heart'. In his status as a Rousseauvian man of feeling, the hero is intended to restate the virtues of egalitarian compassion described in Godwin's political works. As the Preface makes clear, this novel seeks to demonstrate the overlap between 'sensibility' and a 'general benevolence' for 'strangers and the public'.<sup>36</sup>

As in the *Confessions*, torment and persecution are employed to heighten the reader's sense of the virtue of the benevolent affections. St Leon is a man of intense sensibility whose longing for transparent connection with others is frustrated by the cruelty and selfishness endemic to the societies he encounters. He often expresses his sense that 'I must have some one to sympathise with; I cannot bear to be cut off from all relations'.<sup>37</sup> The novel is littered with melancholic speeches in which the hero laments that he is 'destined by nature to wander a solitary outcast on the face of the earth'.<sup>38</sup> The *Confessions* similarly describe their author's fate as 'a fugitive upon the earth', as one obliged incessantly to wander upon the earth'.<sup>39</sup> Isolation and martyrdom become the badges of St Leon's attachment to a sensibility which is incongruous in modern society. The word 'monster' recurs several times in his self-analysis, as in his statement on solitude: '[h]ow unhappy the wretch, the monster rather let me say, who is without an equal; who looks through the world and cannot find a brother'.<sup>40</sup> At one of the points when St Leon reflects on how the possession of the secrets of alchemy has cut him off from his family, he laments that: 'I looked on myself as a monster that did not deserve to exist'.<sup>41</sup> The word 'monster' conveys a sense of the lonely alienation undergone by St Leon. Significantly, Godwin draws this term from the *Confessions*. At one point in his memoir, Rousseau declares that hostile authorities everywhere have sought 'to make of me such a monster as cannot in reality exist'.<sup>42</sup> He later describes how after the publication of the anti-clerical *Lettres écrites de la montagne*, 'it was a matter of astonishment at Geneva and Versailles, that such a monster as the author of it should be suffered to exist'.<sup>43</sup> Like Jean-Jacques, Godwin's man of sincerity and feeling is shunned by society as a 'monster'. The verbal echoes mark St Leon as a Rousseauvian hero who yearns for an ideal community bound together by social, public affection.

But the example of Jean-Jacques in the *Confessions* illustrates how the martyrdom of disappointment might be made heroic, how even the failure of compassionate

benevolence might be used to incubate the hope inscribed in that ideal. As St Leon wanders through Europe after being forced to detach himself from his family, his loneliness and isolation evoke the depth of his desire for sympathy and connection:

With boyish eyes, full of sanguine spirits and hope, we look round us for a friend; we sink into the grave, broken down with years and infirmities, and still have not found the object of our search. [...] [D]isparity of situation and dissimilitude of connections prove as effectual a barrier to intimacy, as if we were inhabitants of different planets.<sup>44</sup>

Though St Leon finds only disappointment, his lonely martyrdom endows his benevolence, his sympathy for others, with heroic grandeur. Through this representation of alienation and loneliness, Godwin seeks to describe the experience of contemporary liberal disappointment. The failure of St Leon's benevolent projects of reform and his attempts to find sympathetic connection provoke a psychological crisis. At one point he cries that his soul is tortured by 'the disappointment of every cherished hope'.<sup>45</sup> The word 'disappointment' carries significant psychological and ideological weight. The reader who had hoped to see society progress towards a state of equality and benevolence may have experienced such disappointment himself, Godwin implicitly suggests. The pose of the Rousseauvian martyr becomes a means of sustaining hopes of progress and benevolence in the face of disappointment.

Godwin's engagement with Rousseauvian sensibility is particularly evident in Chapter 28 of *St Leon*. There we see a staunch defence of social affection against the Burkean critique of benevolence. In his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), Burke had delivered a highly influential attack on Rousseau. This attack encompassed the 'new philosophy' and the entire enterprise of the French Enlightenment, resonating through British conservative thought for the rest of the decade and beyond. Peter J. Stanlis has suggested that 'Burke's criticism of Rousseau's sensibility is perhaps the most important single element in all his attacks on the French Revolution'. In Burke's view Rousseauvian sensibility provided, he argues, the 'emotional foundation' for the Revolution, setting private feeling above social authority.<sup>46</sup> In Chapter 28 of *St Leon*, Godwin returns to the particular passage of the *Confessions* which had attracted the force of Burke's opprobrium in the *Letter*. Having been separated from his daughters in the course of his life, St Leon abruptly

decides not to attempt a reunion with them and resolves never to see them again. At first sight, the episode seems out of place in a novel which carries in its Preface the stated aim of presenting the domestic affections in the warmest possible light. The hero justifies his actions as an attempt to spare his daughters from his own misery:

[M]y daughters were in the morning of life [...] the crime would probably have been greater, obstinately to have made them the partners of my misfortunes and disgrace. There are persons who will regard this passage in my history as culpable, and the testimony of a cold and unsusceptible heart. I contemplate it, even at this distance of time, as the noblest and most virtuous effort of my life; and a thousand circumstances have occurred since, to induce me to congratulate myself that I had the courage to achieve my purpose.<sup>47</sup>

St Leon stresses that this act is proof of the strength and purity of his family affections, of the warmth of his 'heart', rather than evidence of his lack of common human feeling. In this giving-up of children, Godwin refers directly to that notorious part of the *Confessions* in which the author reveals that he had abandoned all five of his children to a foundling hospital. There, Rousseau refers to his 'warmth of heart' and 'strong sensibility', protesting that he acted according to virtue and duty:

Never in his whole life could J.J. be a man without sentiment, or an unnatural father. I may have been deceived, but it is impossible I should have lost the least of my feelings [...] I will satisfy myself by observing, that my error was such, that in abandoning my children to public education for want of the means of bringing them up myself; in destining them to become workmen and peasants rather than adventurers and fortune hunters, I thought I acted like an honest citizen, and a good father, and considered myself as a member of the republic of Plato. Since then the regrets of my heart have more than once told me I was deceived; but my reason was so far from giving me the same intimation, that I have frequently returned thanks to heaven for having, by this means, preserved them from the fate of their father.<sup>48</sup>

Rousseau maintains, with some difficulty, that his forsaking of his children was entirely in keeping with his much-professed purity of feeling and compassion for others. Immediately prior to the statement on his children, he speaks of 'the innate benevolence I cherish towards my fellow creatures; the ardent love I bear to great virtues, to truth and justice'.<sup>49</sup>

Godwin's return to this episode is also a return to the treatment it had received in the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*. The key moment in the *Letter* comes when Burke remarks on the folly of the National Assembly in their decision to commemorate Rousseau with a statue. He claims that the vanity and vices of the man are clear to see, exposed as they are in his 'mad Confession of his mad faults'.<sup>50</sup> Burke juxtaposes the rhetoric Rousseau expends on 'the expression of universal benevolence' against the fact that 'his heart was incapable of harbouring one spark of common parental affection'. He sees Rousseau's abandonment of his children as an act of monstrous selfishness, an act which proves his doctrine of benevolence to be utterly inhuman and calls the entire enterprise of the 'new philosophy' into question:

Benevolence to the whole species, and want of feeling for every individual with whom the professors come into contact, form the character of the new philosophy. [...] [Rousseau] melts with tenderness for those only who touch him by the remotest relation, and then, without one natural pang, casts away, as a sort of offal and excrement, the spawn of his disgustful amours, and sends his children to the hospital of foundlings. The bear loves, licks, and forms her young; but bears are not philosophers. Vanity, however, finds its account in reversing the train of our natural feelings. Thousands admire the sentimental writer; the affectionate father is hardly known in his parish.<sup>51</sup>

Burke's lurid disgust at Rousseau's conduct sets up an opposition between 'natural' family affection and the benevolence invented by 'philosophers'. He is incredulous of Rousseau's affection for those 'who touch him by the remotest relation', rejecting the entire possibility of social feeling. The passage picks up the thread of thought begun in Burke's earlier attack on the atheists and disciples of Rousseauvian benevolence at the forefront of the French Enlightenment, on the pernicious nature of their alliance with 'strangers'.

It is highly significant that Godwin has his 'old philosopher' hero give up his children while maintaining the possibility of benevolence. The separation between parent and children is described as 'complete and dreadful'. But St Leon refuses to concede that his actions were 'the dictate of alienation or indifference', claiming that they were 'the pure effect of love, of a love so strong, complete, and uncontrollable, as inflexibly to refuse every thing that could be injurious to its objects'.<sup>52</sup> His benevolence is at one with his affection for his family, and both remain undiminished.

We might recall that in the preface to *St Leon* it is suggested that domestic affections might be synthesised with benevolence: ‘by kindling [a man’s] sensibility, and harmonising his soul, they [domestic affections] may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and the public’.<sup>53</sup> St Leon possesses affection both for his family and, in his philanthropic concerns, those who ‘touch him by the remotest relation’, as Burke terms it.

Chapter 28 demonstrates that Godwin’s revised apprehension of the value of the domestic affections was not a ‘concession’ to Burke or a retreat from the principles of *Political Justice*. In balancing the domestic affections with benevolence, the passage does seem to be a quiet exorcism of the infamous Fénelon episode. But far from being a retreat, Godwin’s attention to the domestic affections forms a means of returning to the idea of benevolence that formed such a notable source of hope in *Political Justice*, of restating the political significance of disinterested desire for the good of others. The passage is entirely anti-Burkean in its endorsement of social feeling. The episode again demonstrates how Godwin turned the pose of the Rousseauvian martyr toward a defence of benevolence in the face of contemporary critiques of Enlightenment.

The politics of feeling are again evident in the passage in which St Leon and his family are made homeless by a violent storm. In a state of abject poverty, the hero reflects on the selfishness endemic to modern commercial society:

The wanton eye of pampered pride pleases itself with the spectacle of cities and palaces, the stately column and the swelling arch. It observes at hand the busy scene, where all are occupied in the various pursuits of pleasure or industry; and admires the concert, the wide-spreading confederacy, by means of which each after his mode is unconsciously promoting the objects of others. Cheated by the outside of things, we denominate this a vast combination for general benefit. The poor and the famished man contemplates the scene with other thoughts. Unbribed to admire and applaud, he sees in it a confederacy of hostility and general oppression. He sees every man pursuing his selfish ends, regardless of the wants of others. He sees himself contemptuously driven from the circle where the rest of his fellow-citizens are busily and profitably engaged. He lives in the midst of a crowd, without one friend to feel an interest in his welfare.<sup>54</sup>

Godwin’s critique of commercial self-interest, with its reference to how the individual is supposedly ‘unconsciously promoting the objects of others’ by following his own

interest, seems to focus on Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. The Smithian idea of the 'invisible hand' which reconciles general good with individual self-interest is his target. Malthus had adopted the theory of motivation outlined in the *Wealth of Nations* for his own rebuttal of Godwinian ideas of benevolence and perfectibility in the *Essay of Population*, the first edition of which was published in 1798, one year previous to the publication of *St Leon*. In this passage, St Leon angrily objects to commercial society: the isolation of the 'poor man' parallels the lonely travails he himself undergoes in the novel. Without benevolence and the ties of human sympathy, Godwin suggests, society is undermined by a corrosive selfishness.

In its treatment of the old philosopher and the idea of benevolence, then, *St Leon* should be understood as a kind of displaced radical memoir. As in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin worked with Nonconformist spiritual autobiographies in mind. However, he discovered in his reading of these works not just a defiant adherence to defeated religious and political ideals in the face of persecution, but a deeper sense of anxiety. Lamenting the fact that he is destined to suffer an eternity of loneliness, that he can never feel kinship with any other living being, St Leon often sounds like the Bunyan of *Grace Abounding*, another wanderer living in agonised isolation. Undergoing a psychological flux over the course of the novel, he is pitched into the depths so memorably described by Bunyan as he confronts his sinful nature and doubts his faith:

And truly I did now feel myself to sink into a gulf, as an house whose foundation is destroyed. I did liken myself in this condition unto the case of some child that was fallen into a Millpit, who though it could make some shift to scrabble and spraul in the water, yet because it could neither hold for hand nor foot, therefore at last it must die in that condition.<sup>55</sup>

Like Bunyan, and like Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, St Leon suffers psychological torments and persecution. John Stachniewski, in his discussion of Calvinism's influence on post-Reformation English literary culture, suggests that the sense of persecution and alienation common to Nonconformist spiritual autobiography is produced not simply by the experience of legal discrimination, but by Calvinist anxiety over reprobation. In the face of rejection by the capricious and relentless God of Protestant imagining, the self became an object of discrimination, producing an all-pervasive mood of persecution and paranoia. Stachniewski argues that *Grace*

*Abounding* ‘emerges from the need to overcome the alienated individualism fostered by the doctrine of reprobation’.<sup>56</sup> Bunyan’s autobiography, he suggests, is intended to release its author from the crushing isolation and despair produced by the paranoid fear of God’s disfavour. Stachniewski’s analysis of spiritual autobiography sheds light on the paranoid sense of persecution seen both in *St Leon* and the *Reply to Parr*. Godwin interpreted the rejection of his ideas of perfectibility and benevolence by ideological opponents in a vocabulary similar to that employed by Nonconformist authors describing their fears of reprobation.

These parallels become clear in the episode of *St Leon* which describes the hero’s time in prison. As Christian and Hopeful are imprisoned in Doubting Castle by the Giant Despair in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, so St Leon is imprisoned by the misanthropic Bethlem Gabor. It has been suggested that Bunyan was describing in this episode the pilgrims’ doubt over the reality of the invisible world of salvation, which exposes them to the torments of despair.<sup>57</sup> St Leon’s imprisonment, enforced by a man disgusted at his ‘daily efforts for the dissemination of happiness’ and his ‘senseless liberalities’,<sup>58</sup> produces, in secularised terms, a sense of despair modelled on that experienced by Christian and Hopeful. The hero reflects that his attempts to bring about improvement have been wasted and he himself is doomed to suffer eternally: ‘I am nothing to any human being: I am alone in the boundless universe; I have no tie to existence’.<sup>59</sup> As Bethlem Gabor relishes the opportunity to see him ‘daily wither in disappointment’, St Leon is left to doubt the reality of his own invisible world of future improvement: ‘in this wretched vision of the philosopher’s stone, have I not tried it enough? have I any hopes from it? is it not time that I should throw away that and existence together?’.<sup>60</sup>

Yet at the same time, the fluctuating psychological progression of the novel sees this Nonconformist literary heritage used to express a defiant adherence to apparently defeated ideals. This purpose is notably evident in the finest section of the novel, that which relates St Leon’s imprisonment by the Spanish Inquisition. Here, Godwin uses his hero’s narrative to describe an enthusiastic resistance to oppression, commenting explicitly on what he saw as the repressive anti-Jacobinism of the late 1790s. Having attracted the attention of the Inquisition during his time in Spain, St Leon is thrown into jail on suspicion of an attempt to undermine the authority of the Catholic Church. Godwin makes effective use of the novel’s historical setting here, using the clash



between the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Church to describe the contemporary political situation. In his resistance to persecution, St Leon becomes, like Caleb, a pattern of the militant Dissenter. It was common for Nonconformists and Dissenters to compare their persecution to that waged against Protestants by the Inquisition, a body which, to their minds, revealed Catholicism's status as an authoritarian religion which sought to repress individual conscience and private judgement.

When the Inquisitor addresses St Leon in prison, he justifies his institution by describing the evils of its opponents. This speech sees Godwin return to the principal themes of the novel, the apparent defeat of Enlightenment and the politics of feeling:

It might answer well enough the purpose of the vain-glorious theorist, to suppose that man was a rational animal; but they who had regarded human society with an observing eye knew that it was otherwise. [...] The passions of mankind were on the side of falsehood; man, unrestrained by law, was a wild, ferocious, and most pernicious beast, and, were it not for the wholesome curb of authority, would speedily throw off all ties and limitations, human and divine. Nothing could more clearly prove, that the heretical followers of Luther and Calvin, who had lately sprung up for the plague of mankind, whatever they might pretend, were in reality the determined enemies of all revelation, than their continual demand, that the cause should be tried by discussion, and that every man should be defended in the exercise of his private judgment.<sup>61</sup>

Godwin has several targets in mind here. The Inquisitor's words call to mind the persecution waged against Dissenters and liberals in modern Britain. In February 1793, Godwin had warned in a letter to the Attorney General, Sir Archibald Macdonald, that the government's measures to suppress sedition threatened 'the revival of all the principles of the inquisition'.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the Inquisitor's reference to the 'vain-glorious theorist' also gestures towards Burke's critique of the French Enlightenment in the *Reflections*. In that work, the projects of the *philosophes* to remodel society according to principles of reason are often referred to by the derogatory term 'theory'. The Inquisitor's declaration on the necessity of law as a restraint upon human 'passions' recalls the appraisal of Hobbes put forward in *Political Justice*. The character is Godwin's amalgam of what he saw as reactionary conservative thought. As the speech proceeds, it invokes the contemporary anti-

Jacobin conspiracy theory. The Inquisitor observes of opponents to the Inquisition that they ‘concealed an inveterate hostility against property, religion and civil society’. Enlightenment’s defeat in Britain at the hands of Burke, Barruel and Robison is unmistakably Godwin’s theme:

There was a spirit at work, that aimed at dissolving all the bonds of civil society, and converting mankind into beasts and savages. Who had not heard of the levellers, millenarians, and fifth-monarchy men, who, under the specious guise of disinterestedness and an universal love of mankind, had nothing in view but the most sacrilegious and unprincipled depredations.<sup>63</sup>

The Inquisitor shares with Burke a firm belief in the seditious propensities of Dissenting sects. As in the *Reflections* and the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, social feeling, the ‘universal love of mankind’, is viewed as a sinister invention intended to dismantle the ties of ‘natural’ feeling and thus of ‘civil society’.

St Leon responds to the Inquisitor by making a Rousseauvian speech founded on the virtues of sincerity and feeling:

Shame on your institution! May infamy overtake the system of your proceedings! That religion which is supported by such means is viler than atheism. That civilisation which has its basis in despotism, is more worthless and hateful than the state of savages running wild in their woods. Do you not perceive that the language I am now holding to you is the exclusive privilege of conscious innocence? The indignation I express is no artificial rage, studiously contrived to overbear accusation. You have it, as it flows spontaneously to my tongue, warm from the promptings of an honest heart.<sup>64</sup>

The hero speaks in the traditions of Rousseauvian enthusiasm, making an appeal against the corruptions of government through transparency of feeling. In its vision of a repressive institution almost overpowered by the force of truth, this trial scene recalls Godwin’s letter to Joseph Gerrald.

Like *Caleb Williams*, *St Leon* stands as a kind of secular *Pilgrim’s Progress* in tracing its hero’s adventures as a psychological narrative. Just as Christian is put on trial at Vanity Fair, so St Leon is put on trial by the Inquisition. The former’s imprisonment by the Giant Despair is paralleled in the latter’s imprisonment by the misanthrope Bethlem Gabor. It is during this imprisonment that St Leon expresses his

psychological torment most clearly: ‘hope! beautiful as are thy visions, in how much anguish and agony do they clothe the terrors of disappointment!’<sup>65</sup> Such speculations unmistakably resonate with Godwin’s own sense of anguish at the frustrations of practical politics and the apparent collapse of the progressive cause. Once secular hope has given way, a terrifying chasm of disappointment and despair opens up. But as in Bunyan’s psychological narrative, hope is never entirely relinquished, despite the ‘terrors of disappointment’. The residue of Godwin’s Calvinism is present in his determination to retain some vestige of the hope of *Political Justice*. Faith is of absolute importance and must be maintained against temptations to despair.

The novel has commonly been understood as a gloomy reflection on contemporary politics. Peter Marshall suggests that *St Leon* demonstrates that ‘Godwin increasingly despaired of major social changes’,<sup>66</sup> while Pamela Clemit argues that it displays a ‘heightened scepticism about the fulfilment of progressive ideals’.<sup>67</sup> While *St Leon* does express a far greater degree of disillusionment than Godwin’s earlier works, we must acknowledge the manner in which its plot concerns, the twin themes of the old philosopher and of the affections, are responses to anti-Jacobin critiques of Enlightenment which actively seek to cultivate the hope of improvement. The novel’s tone of disappointment is expressive not simply of disillusionment about social change, but also, in its Rousseauvian lineage, of an attempt to sustain the progressive optimism embodied in the idea of benevolence. Marshall travesties the polemics of the novel in suggesting that it ‘shows how the great rationalist philosopher of the English Enlightenment was succumbing with his contemporaries to the new cult of sensibility’.<sup>68</sup> The discussion of sensibility in *St Leon* returns to the Rousseauvian point of origin, consequently being a staunch defence of Enlightenment notions of social feeling familiar from *Political Justice*. With its attack on the Burkean caricature of Enlightenment, novel occupies a unique position within the literary fiction of the late 1790s, a time when the anti-Jacobin novel was at the height of its dominance.

### III

The intimate nature of the connection between *St Leon* and the contemporary crisis of liberal hope is made explicit by a reading of Godwin’s next major work, the polemical essay *Reply to Parr*. The essay is a defence of the principles of *Political Justice*

against attacks launched by prominent anti-Jacobins and by Malthus. The publication of *St Leon* was perhaps too close chronologically to that of the *Essay on Population* for the novel to absorb Malthus's critique of the egalitarian anarchist system of *Political Justice*. However, by 1801, Godwin had formulated a response, with his essay labouring under the full title of: *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, Preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800; Being a Reply to the Attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the Author of an Essay on Population, and Others*. The work sees Godwin articulate a sense of his own marginalisation in the face of resurgent anti-Jacobinism and nascent Malthusianism. The immediate provocation for the essay, Samuel Parr's *Spital Sermon*, had been a Burkean attack on the doctrine of universal benevolence. Without naming Godwin directly, Parr had made his rebuke to 'modern reformers' very specific by focusing on benevolence as a sinister brand of amoral cosmopolitanism intended to undermine the natural affections of family, neighbourhood, nation and religion.<sup>69</sup> In a letter to Godwin, he suggested that he was moved to pen his sermon by the fact that the opinions expressed in *Political Justice* had taken a dreadful effect upon three young men. In particular, Parr referred to the fate of Joseph Gerrald, a former pupil of his.<sup>70</sup> The most remarkable element of the *Reply to Parr* is not the substance of the response to these individual attacks, but the self-portrait through which the analysis of contemporary political debate is channelled. Godwin follows on from *St Leon* by picturing himself as a Nonconformist martyr remaining true to his faith and standing alone against a rising tide of reaction.

The *Reply to Parr* relies on the techniques of Nonconformist literature, looking back to the binary opposition between hope and despair familiar from Calvinist thought. Like *St Leon*, the Godwin imagined here is a solitary, persecuted figure. He dwells on his suffering at the hands of anti-Jacobins, describing 'the flood of ribaldry, invective and intolerance which has been poured out against me and my writings'.<sup>71</sup> Yet he did not deserve such persecution, he believes: 'I wrote my Enquiry Concerning Political Justice in the innocence of my heart'.<sup>72</sup> Later in the essay, Godwin invokes comparisons with *St Leon*'s plight in referring to James Mackintosh's attacks as being delivered in a style 'that could do honour to a Dominican or an inquisitor'.<sup>73</sup> As we saw previously, the Inquisition was for Protestant Dissenters the ultimate embodiment of Catholic tyranny over the individual conscience and of state power in general. The

connections with Nonconformism become stronger as the essay proceeds, as we see when Godwin describes the rejection of his political theories as a bitter personal attack, lamenting that: 'no man, who, after having meditated upon philosophical subjects, gives the result of his reflections to the world, believes that, for having done so, he deserves to be treated like a highway man or an assassin'.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, he draws his vocabulary and psychological attitude from *Grace Abounding*, in particular from a section in the work's latter stages in which Bunyan describes the persecution that heralded his imprisonment: '[i]t began therefore to be rumoured up and down among the People, that I was a Witch, a Jesuit, a Highway-man, and the like'.<sup>75</sup>

Bleak as the outlook may seem, Godwin, the lonely victim of a 'tremendous war against philanthropy',<sup>76</sup> follows Bunyan by using the pose of the persecuted martyr to mount a defence of his ideals. This technique was a key element of the literature of Nonconformism during the Great Persecution of 1660-88. We might again note N.H. Keeble's observation on the psychological outlook of that period's literature: 'persecution becomes evidence not of God's abandonment of his elect but of the fidelity of the faithful: suffering is the badge of the saint'.<sup>77</sup> With the weight of this Nonconformist heritage behind him, Godwin is able to view his own marginalisation as evidence of the rectitude of his political beliefs. Most fundamentally, he returns to the notion of hope defined in *Political Justice*, using the consolation of perfectibilist optimism as a way of responding to the changing ideological climate. The *Reply to Parr* begins by recalling the response of liberals to the outset of the French Revolution:

Where was the ingenuous heart which did not beat with exultation, at seeing a great and cultivated people shake off the claims of one of the most oppressive political systems in the world, the most replenished with abuses, the least mollified and relieved by any infusion of liberty?<sup>78</sup>

Godwin looks back to the animating 'exultation' experienced as the hope of progress appeared to come to fruition. He then describes the mental trauma undergone in the wake of the Terror and the rise of Napoleonic imperialism: 'these expectations and this sagacity have been miserably disappointed'.<sup>79</sup> Godwin claims he remained immune to such anguish as he was always sceptical of revolution as a deviation from

the path of gradualism. After his initial reservations about precipitate change, he now stands alone against those disappointed liberals who condemn anyone who continues to support the progressive cause:

Many persons censured me for this lukewarmness; I willingly endured the censure. Several of those persons are now gone into the opposite extreme. They must excuse me; they have wandered wide of me on the one side and on the other; I did not follow them before; I cannot follow them now.<sup>80</sup>

Godwin imagines himself as a solitary who endures persecution but remains steadfast in his faith. Like Bunyan in his autobiography, or Christian on the road to the Celestial City, the censure of society cannot divert him from the true path.

In treating endurance as an essential virtue, the *Reply to Parr* comes close to Calvinist doctrine, which holds that perseverance is an emblem of election. The elect can never fall away in their faith; only the reprobate turn apostate. Throughout the essay, Godwin reserves his greatest scorn for former liberals who have now become anti-Jacobins. Discussing Mackintosh, he declares that he has attempted to ‘delineate the history of apostacy’; in reference to France he speaks of the ‘general apostacy from the principles of her revolution’.<sup>81</sup> If we look to *The Pilgrim’s Progress* we find an important Calvinist precedent for Godwin’s attack on apostasy and praise of perseverance. At one point of that work, Christian and Hopeful’s journey to the Celestial City is interrupted when they see a man being dragged away by seven devils. Christian wonders if the man is ‘one Turn-away that dwelt in the town of Apostacy’. Hopeful sees on the man’s back the inscription: ‘*wanton professor, and damnable apostate*’.<sup>82</sup> The *Reply to Parr* asserts that, like Christian, the perfectibilist must endure in his faith through persecution. At the close of the essay, Godwin declares that we should not be led by misanthropists to ‘blaspheme against the cause of virtue’ and makes his own declaration of faith: ‘[f]or myself I firmly believe that days of greater virtue and more ample justice will descend upon the earth’. Through the idea of hope, he pictures himself in the rhetoric of Calvinist belief, refusing to yield to the temptations of despair wielded by ‘apostates’.

Having established his own enduring hope as an act of heroic defiance, Godwin responds to the attacks of Parr, Mackintosh and Malthus individually. He answers Parr

by repeating the claim made in *St Leon* that the domestic affections, those affections which Parr sees as ‘natural’ compared with the sinister affection for ‘strangers’ posited by the ‘philanthropic system’, can be commensurate with devotion to the general good. Stressing the vital agency of feeling, Godwin states that an individual would be more virtuous ‘in proportion as he endeavoured to elevate philanthropy into a passion’. In the face of a distinctly Burkean attack on the notion of social feeling, he staunchly restates the model of Hutchesonian moral sense on which the ideal anarchist society of *Political Justice* was founded:

I would desire to love my children; yet I would not desire so to love them, as to forget that I have what we were accustomed to call, before the hoarse and savage cry of Jacobinism! had frightened all moral language from its propriety, *higher duties*. I would wish so to employ a portion of every day, as to qualify me for being a benefactor to the stranger and the man whom I know not; and I would have men, in proportion to the faculties they possess, not omit to devote part of their energies to the natives of distant climates, and ages yet unborn.<sup>83</sup>

We can clearly see that Godwin’s ‘turn to feeling’ was not part of a gradual retreat from ideology but an articulation of principles of justice entirely consistent with those set out in 1793. He specifically objects to the notion of a partial affection for family which excludes ‘*higher duties*’ to society, offering a more nuanced rephrasing of the central message of the Fénelon episode. The circle of feeling is expanded beyond that of Burke’s ‘traditional affections’, connecting the benevolent individual with ‘the stranger and the man whom I know not’, even with beings of ‘ages yet unborn’. As in the Preface to *St Leon*, the word ‘stranger’ directly refers to Burke’s *Thoughts on French Affairs*. Burkean anti-Jacobinism is held to have disconnected the individual from the benevolent affections, and Godwin determines to make a reconnection.

This attempt to restate the hopes of *Political Justice* continues in the essay’s key section: the response to Malthus. The *Reply to Parr* sees Godwin claim that the shift in ideological climate in Britain was not a result of the Terror or any event in France; rather, it was the *Essay on Population* which led many to recoil from the reformist optimism of the Enlightenment. He asserts that he approaches ‘the author of the *Essay on Population* with a sentiment of unfeigned approbation and respect’.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, he views the principle of population, with its claim that the reform of social institution

can never address the immutable fact of inequality, as being inimical to all hope of improvement:

The author very truly says, that his inferences are in a state of open war against every 'extraordinary improvement in society'. Not only what Mr Mackintosh styles the 'abominable and pestilential paradoxes' of Political Justice, but every generous attempt for any important melioration of the condition of mankind, is here at stake. The advocates of the old establishments and old abuses, could not have found a doctrine, more to their hearts content, more effectual to shut out all reform and improvement for ever.<sup>85</sup>

Though Godwin did not at this stage of his career regard Malthus as a reactionary, he argues that the principle of population may be employed by reactionary conservatives. Malthus's critique of human perfectibility is understood to be of pivotal significance. Struggling against this ideological current, Godwin goes on to invite the reader, the 'ardent and philanthropical friend to the best interests of mankind', to consider the defects of Malthus's thought. The word 'ardent', a favourite term of both Godwin and Price, expresses the psychological fortitude needed by the liberal optimist confronting the principle of population.

The central objection to Malthus outlined in the *Reply to Parr* is that against the morality of 'vice' and 'misery' as valid elements of political science. In any case, Godwin asserts, men and women will practice moral restraint and withhold from procreation if society is ever threatened by collapse from an excess of population over subsistence. While Malthus's model of political economy had positioned Smithian self-interest as the primary agent in social interaction, Godwin retains his faith in disinterested altruism. He declares that the principal difference between himself and the author of the *Essay on Population* lies in his belief in 'a condition of society in which a great degree of equality and an ardent spirit of benevolence are assumed to prevail'. In such a state, individuals will act to stem population increase as a result of their apprehension of the general good. In a passage which approaches the utopian enthusiasm of the conclusion to *Political Justice* in its vision of a future society, Godwin sets before the reader the promise of equality and benevolence as an antidote to Malthusian pessimism: '[s]uch regularity and equity will prevail, as to enable every man to see a vast way before and around him. [...] He will love his brethren. He will conceive of the whole society as one extensive household'.<sup>86</sup> He proceeds to directly



comment on the agency of hope on the mind of the reader in a passage which recalls the progressive, educative impulse of the Dissenting theory of literature:

I trust I have put down such hints of what must be in the highest degree gratifying to every lover of virtue and of man, as to convince the majority of impartial readers, that there is no such 'obstacle in the way to any extraordinary improvement in society', as should oblige us to sit down from every under the whole mass of existing moral evils, and to deprecate every generous attempt to improve the condition of mankind, as leading, under specious appearances, to the reality of great and intolerable mischief.<sup>87</sup>

Malthusian theory is viewed as a temptation to despair. Godwin responds to Malthus's anti-humanist, anti-Enlightenment argument on the ineradicable nature of social inequality by reasserting the principles of perfectibilist faith. St Leon's ardent attachment to philanthropy and benevolence takes on greater polemical impetus when in the context of the *Reply to Parr*.

Yet the essay cannot be said to constitute a coherent philosophical or political response to Malthus. The *Essay on Population* had been a landmark in the new science of political economy, taking a macro-economic view of society and presenting its argument on subsistence and population through the rigours of ratio and calculation. Entirely less systematic than *Political Justice*, the *Reply to Parr* displays Godwin's anxiety over progressive political writing post-Malthus. It makes its argument principally through the extra-rational techniques of Rousseauvian confessional writing and often seems to present the psychology of hope in terms of purely private consolation. This anxiety is evident in the discussion of the crucial idea of human perfectibility. The essay sees Godwin restate the central principle of *Political Justice*:

The great doctrine of the treatise in question is what I have called (adopting a term I found ready coined in the French language) the perfectibility, but what I would now wish to call, changing the term, without changing a particle of the meaning, the progressive nature of man, in knowledge, in virtuous propensities, and in social institutions.<sup>88</sup>

He makes the familiar equation between progress in knowledge, politics and morality. This prospect of ceaseless improvement can reassure us, Godwin claims, that the

‘progress of knowledge will render familiar to every mind the criterion of virtue, or, in other words, this terrible doctrine of universal philanthropy’. But in response to the pessimistic views of human nature put forward by Parr, Mackintosh and Malthus, he can only position perfectibility as an interior psychology without external relevance:

I do not envy them their feelings. I love to contemplate the yet unexpanded powers and capabilities of our nature, and to believe that they will one day be unfolded to the infinite advantage and happiness of the inhabitants of the globe. [...] But if my own doctrine is an error, and I am fated to die in it, I cannot afflict myself greatly with the apprehension of a mistake, which cheers my solitude, which I carry with me into crowds, and which adds somewhat to the pleasure and peace of every day of my existence.<sup>89</sup>

This passage expresses much about the political positions taken up in the *Reply to Parr*, *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*. Godwin’s perfectibilist faith now looks inward; it is an attitude which he carries ‘with me into crowds’, cut off from those around him. Once again, the Rousseau of the later books of the *Confessions*, the lonely victim of reactionary persecution who maintains an intense egalitarian compassion for others, is the motive force behind this self-portrait. The type of systematic philosophical justification of liberal reform seen in *Political Justice* breaks down, rendered impossible by the collapse of the French Revolution and the advance of Malthusian political economy. Where in *Political Justice* there had been a belief that hope might be diffused through society and transform the external world, perfectibilist faith is now a purely private consolation.

Godwin is even prepared to concede that his entire system of thought may be ‘an error’. The essay’s confrontation with Malthus’ rejection of perfectibility leads, at times, to a pronounced sense of anxiety. At times retreating into isolation, at times fervent in his enthusiasm for the optimism of the radical Enlightenment, Godwin veers between hope and despair. Again, he looks back to the literary traditions of Calvinist Nonconformism in which he was immersed, transposing the psychological opposition between the hope of election and the despair of reprobation into his own work. As in a spiritual autobiography such as *Grace Abounding*, Godwin constantly seeks an elusive psychological assurance, all the while fearing that his faith is groundless. On one side is the utopian prospect of future improvement offered by perfectibility and benevolence; on the other Malthus’ laws of ratio and proof of the

immutable nature of social inequality. Indeed, we might understand Godwin's criticisms of the population principle as related to his attacks on the orthodox Calvinist doctrine of election and reprobation, as suggested earlier. There is a consonance between his scorn for the manner in which Malthus established inequality as an ineradicable economic law and his denunciation, in a later essay on religion, of orthodox Calvinism for failing 'to balance the striking inequalities that we find in the fortunes of mankind' in condemning the majority of humanity to eternal punishment in the future state.<sup>90</sup> The principle of population aroused in Godwin a sense of despair over the future state that recalled the gloomy Sandemanianism of his upbringing. His understanding of the *Essay on Population* might usefully be set in the context of Stachniewski's analysis of the mindset produced by the doctrine of predestination, in which he notes the congruence between the Calvinist God who divided humanity into elect and reprobate, and arbitrarily discriminatory market forces. He suggests that many in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came to conflate religious doctrine with the new commercial relations in society, seeing the poor as devoid of God's grace. Godwin's essay on religion was written at a time at which he had recovered his religious faith to some extent, but it nevertheless sheds light on his understanding of Malthus in the 1790s. Asserting that one of the most unhappy elements of human existence is 'the unequal distribution of the good things of this life', he attacks the doctrine of predestination for condemning most to punishment for errors they could not avoid, and for failing to address the inequalities of society by offering the compensation of a beneficent future state.<sup>91</sup> Godwin reacts against Malthus just as he reacts against orthodox Calvinism. The *Essay on Population*, he believed, condemned a large portion of society to material reprobation.

In registering the impact of Malthus more thoroughly than *St Leon*, the *Reply to Parr* expresses a greater degree of anxiety about the possibility of liberal improvement. That Malthus's arguments were advanced in the methodology of the new science of political economy increased their impact. Godwin, who had since the days of *Political Justice* confined himself to a pre-economic analysis of society, could offer no meaningful response to the pressures of political economy. He would make his bitter dissatisfaction with this discourse plain in his later unpublished essay, 'Reply to the Economists' (1821). In Donald Winch's discussion of the growth of

political economy, the *Essay on Population* is held to have exercised a vital influence over liberal and radical schemes of improvement:

Malthus's attack on the different 'systems of equality' produced by Godwin and Condorcet required him to define and defend some indefeasible features of modern commercial societies that could be applied as criticism to all egalitarian and communitarian schemes which promised an escape from market imperatives.<sup>92</sup>

Confronted with an intellectually rigorous and well-received justification of private property, inequality and self-interest in the terms of political economy, Godwin was forced further back into the territory of Nonconformist martyrdom and persecutory imaginings that recalled the Calvinist reprobate's awareness of God's disfavour. The *Reply to Parr* articulates a sense of the marginalisation of his own strand of political analysis. Hope remains an important presence, but stands as a problematic and purely private consolation for the changes in external political discourse brought about by Malthus's laws of ratio.

#### IV

Godwin's next novel, *Fleetwood; Or, the New Man of Feeling* (1805), also took its character from this nexus of relations around anti-Jacobinism, Malthusian political economy and the collapse of British liberalism. *Fleetwood* is overtly a novel of disappointment, one concerned with the failure of ideals. With the first flush of progressive fervour now a fading memory in Britain, Godwin offered the pertinent story of a man who begins life with a liberal view of the benevolence of human nature, but who retreats into disillusionment and misanthropy when events contradict his elevated ideals. The work also illustrates how his reformist literary project, predicated on the Dissenting principles of public discussion and private judgement, had been placed under strain by contemporary developments. Godwin's apprehension of the educative capacity of literature through its influence over the mind of the reader seems now more tentative in the wake of the erosion of the culture of literary radicalism.

While *Fleetwood* is a post-revolutionary novel of disappointment, it displays a continued engagement with ideas of radical sensibility. The novel's subtitle, *The New Man of Feeling*, is hugely significant. Godwin's readership would have recognised the very obvious reference to Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1770). Mackenzie's novel had made a founding contribution to the status of sensibility as a philosophical concept in Britain, showing 'a compassionate, sensitive Shaftesburian soul in a materialistic, callous and Hobbesian world'.<sup>93</sup> John Mullan observes that *The Man of Feeling* 'does not so much recommend correct conduct to its readers as assume virtue in their capacity to understand the sentimental text', as well as suggesting that it becomes 'almost impossible to separate the ideal of sentimental susceptibility from a lament for the sheer unlikeliness of that resource'.<sup>94</sup> *Fleetwood* follows Mackenzie's work in echoing this sense of disappointment while emphasising the overlap between the philosophical outlook of the sentimental novel and the Hutchesonian idea of benevolence discussed in *Political Justice*.

The preparatory reading he undertook in writing the novel included *A Simple Story* (1791), by his old friend Elizabeth Inchbald.<sup>95</sup> Her tale of the passion between Miss Milner and her guardian, Dorriforth, used the conventions of the sentimental novel to show equality of feeling conquering a divisive and unequal social relationship. *Fleetwood* is similarly educated in the affections through his relationship with his wife. Yet more significant than the influence of Inchbald is that of Rousseau, though. The egalitarian compassion described in the *Confessions*, the ideal of a community bound by social feeling, continues to form a vital presence within Godwin's work.

The return to sensibility mounted in *Fleetwood* should be understood in the context of the critique of 'Jacobin' sentimentalism being waged in the literary culture of the time. Radical sensibility was a frequent target in anti-Jacobin satire and had consequently passed out of currency by the late 1790s, as Chris Jones has shown.<sup>96</sup> The literary climate in which *Fleetwood* was produced was radically altered from that of the early 1790s. The coterie of radical novelists which had influenced the production of *Caleb Williams* had disintegrated. Bage was dead, Holcroft had emigrated to Germany, and Inchbald's best work was long behind her. M.O. Grenby has shown how conservatism gained the ascendancy in the literary culture of the time, observing that between the years 1797 and 1804, 'a flood of sophisticated anti-Jacobin productions deluged the market'.<sup>97</sup> He argues that in the late 1790s, the vibrancy and

popularity of journals such as the *British Critic* and the *Anti-Jacobin*, along with its successor the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, ensured that ‘literary criticism was being used as a vehicle for censure of the politics of Jacobin fiction’, for the promulgation of ‘the premise that Jacobinism and good literature were simply incompatible’.<sup>98</sup> In returning to the anachronistic idea of sensibility, one that had long been ridiculed in anti-Jacobin satire, Godwin expresses a desire to travel against the prevailing literary current.

However, Gary Handwerk has focused on the pessimistic aspect of *Fleetwood*, reading it as a critique of the benevolist model of human nature, as ‘a rewriting of sentimental fiction that amounted to a fundamental attack upon both the genre itself and its attendant philosophy of sympathy’.<sup>99</sup> The novel is also interpreted as ‘a detailed response to the system of education laid out in Rousseau’s *Emile*’ in its supposed depiction of Fleetwood as a Rousseau-like misogynist.<sup>100</sup> Anne Chandler follows Handwerk in seeing Rousseau’s educational works as central to an understanding of *Fleetwood*, discerning a critique of the tutor and pupil relationship set out in *Emile* in the Ruffigny-Fleetwood relationship.<sup>101</sup>

I will discuss the role of Rousseau in *Fleetwood* at a later stage. But that the discussion of feeling in the novel is recognisably part of Godwin’s reformist literary project and part of the argument for Hutchesonian benevolence, a reading rejected by Handwerk and Chandler, is suggested in the novel’s Preface. Here, we see a declaration of the intent to maintain the vestiges of the liberal tradition through fiction. Godwin closes the Preface by invoking the idea of perfectibility, along with the Dissenting ethos of education effected through literature:

The author of Political Justice, as appears again and again in the pages of that work, is the last man in the world to recommend a pitiful attempt, by scattered examples to renovate the face of society, instead of endeavouring by discussion and reasoning, to effect a grand and comprehensive improvement in the sentiments of its members.<sup>102</sup>

Godwin continues to engage with the notion of liberal ‘improvement’ achieved through ‘discussion and reasoning’. As indicated by his *Life of Chaucer*, published two years previously in 1803, he remained convinced of the intimate connection between literature and the gradual process of perfectibility.

This educative impulse sees Godwin seek to work upon the psychology of the disappointed liberal reader. The status of *Fleetwood* as a novel of disappointment is evident from its very title. As always in his fiction, Godwin carefully chose the names of his protagonists, placing them as signposts for the historically aware reader. The initial title of the novel was *Lambert*. Both Lambert and Fleetwood were allies of Cromwell who featured prominently in the rise of the Commonwealth and then ‘unsuccessfully opposed the Stuart Restoration’.<sup>103</sup> Fleetwood was in fact Cromwell’s son-in-law, and his house, Irmingland Hall, was only a few miles from Guestwick in Norfolk, where Godwin had grown up.<sup>104</sup> The ‘Cromwell chair’ in the Guestwick Independent chapel came from the Fleetwood family home.<sup>105</sup> Godwin marks his hero with a Commonwealth lineage on two occasions in the novel. In the first, Fleetwood describes how he would sometimes visit the House of Commons to hear a debate, on which occasions his imagination would revive the scenes of years gone by and ‘that parliament again filled the benches in which Pym and Hampden, and Falkland and Selden, and Cromwell and Vane, sat together, to decide, perhaps for ever, on the civil and intellectual liberties of my country’.<sup>106</sup> Later in the novel we are told that Fleetwood’s ancestral home ‘had been erected by one of the leaders in the commonwealth of Cromwell’.<sup>107</sup> Through the allegorical name of its protagonist, the novel declares its interest in those who live on after the frustration of their ideals, and looks back to an age of radicalism in which Puritanism and Nonconformism played a central role.

Godwin’s interest in the key figures of this age was maintained throughout his career. In 1818, he wrote to Shelley discussing his desire to begin a work putatively entitled ‘The Lives of the Commonwealth’s Men’. Declaring his wish to rescue men such as Sir Henry Vane and John Milton from ‘abuse and scurrility’, he argued also that there were ‘great and admirable personages among the presbyterians, Hampden and Pym, for instance’. All were united, in Godwin’s view, by the fact that they had ‘devoted themselves in heart and soul, with all their powers, to a purer creed’.<sup>108</sup>

Godwin’s discussion of disappointment takes place primarily through a representation of the alienation experienced by the man of feeling in modern commercial society. From the very outset of the novel, sensibility is the central theme. The portrait of the hero’s childhood which begins *Fleetwood* establishes him as a being of heightened sentiment. Godwin depicts a youth who is shaped by his

upbringing amidst the sublime landscape of Merionethshire, whose sensibility is raised to a pitch by constant converse with nature. Fleetwood is an idealistic boy who engages in philanthropic ventures - he is 'fond of penetrating into the cottages of the poor'<sup>109</sup> - and uses the wealth passed on to him by his father to relieve the wants of the lower orders in the surrounding villages. His youth is filled with incidents which illustrate the depth and virtue of his feelings. At one point, Fleetwood saves a young shepherd from drowning and in a moment heavy with the language of sentiment, both the saved boy and his decrepit father lean on the hero as he takes them back to their cottage. When, soon after his arrival in Oxford, the pet dog whom he left behind in Wales miraculously appears to meet him after prayers, he feels 'a most powerful impulse of affection toward the brute who has shown so distinguished an attachment'.<sup>110</sup>

Fleetwood feels the strongest impulses of compassion for those around him. In this portrait, Godwin makes clear that the sensibility of his hero should be understood in the context of liberal benevolent moral theory. Fleetwood's analysis of his philanthropy invites the reader to consider the doctrine of disinterested benevolence at the heart of the egalitarian anarchist society pictured in *Political Justice*:

Far be it from me to assert, with certain morose and cold-blooded moralists, that our best actions are only more subtle methods by which self-love seeks its gratification. My own heart, in every act of benevolence I ever performed, gave the lie to this execrable doctrine. I felt that it was the love 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 whether I had been concerned in producing it; and, when the season of retrospect arrived, I exulted in my own benevolence, from the divine consciousness that, while I had been most busily engaged in the task, my own gratification was forgotten.<sup>111</sup>

Fleetwood asserts the existence of pure, disinterested altruism. He is determined to counter the argument that benevolence is in fact a form of self-interest. The passage directly recalls the objections to Bentham outlined in *Political Justice*, echoing the vehement manner in which Godwin had critiqued the theory of the 'pleasures of benevolence'. It is thus difficult to claim, as Kelly does, that *Fleetwood* shows how 'Godwin had bid farewell to political controversy with his *Reply to Parr*'.<sup>112</sup> This passage demonstrates that Godwin was still keen to propound his idea of hope, to



further diffuse the doctrine of universal benevolence which had attracted the scorn of Burkean anti-Jacobins. Fleetwood's disinterested desire for the happiness of the local villagers recalls the love of public good described in the Fénelon episode of *Political Justice*. This is the desire for the good of 'strangers' that was denounced by Burke as the sinister invention of the *philosophes*, the compassionate impulse that is posited as the principal human motivation in the thought of Hutcheson and Rousseau. *Fleetwood* clearly displays its 'Jacobin' lineage.

Yet Godwin quickly introduces a degree of complexity to his plot, making the hero's heightened capacity for feeling a source of bitter disappointment. Fleetwood describes how he 'shrunk from the society of man in general; and foresaw, in the intercourse of my species, something for ever prepared to thwart my sensibility, and to jar against the unreal world in which I lived'.<sup>113</sup> The dispositions of the students with whom Fleetwood associates in Oxford disgust him. The bullying and consequent suicide of the bookish Withers shows him that sentiments sometimes reveal not humanity's goodness, but its cruelty. Then in Paris, Fleetwood takes a series of mistresses and finds that the exercise of the passions can lead to a life of dissipation. He declares that he took on a new character: 'I was a misanthrope'.<sup>114</sup> But he was never, he argues, a cynical misanthrope who met evidence of human 'worthlessness' with glee. Fleetwood's misanthropy is a conclusion about the world he bears unwillingly and which does not affect his fundamental ideals:

I felt what I was, and I pined for the society of my like. It was with inexpressible sorrow that I believed I was alone in the world. My sensibility was not one atom diminished by my perpetual disappointments. I felt what man ought to be, and I could not prevent the model of what he ought to be from being ever present to my mind.<sup>115</sup>

Godwin returns to that loaded word 'disappointment'. Like Godwin himself in the *Reply to Parr*, remaining steadfast against anti-Jacobinism and Malthusian political economy, Fleetwood retains his faith. The hero becomes another Rousseauvian solitary, whose disappointment acts as an expression of the enduring hope of benevolence. In a brief digression in the first edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin had recognised a tendency to disappointment within sensibility:

Individuals of exquisite feeling, whose disgust has been excited by the hardened selfishness or the unblushing corruption which have prevailed in their own times, have recurred in imagination to the forests of Norway or the bleak and uncomfortable Highlands of Scotland in search of a purer race of mankind. This imagination has been the offspring of disappointment, not the dictate of reason and philosophy.<sup>116</sup>

From the standpoint of 1805, Godwin is more accommodating to the psychology of disappointment. Where earlier he had critiqued this mental outlook, his own later marginalisation and ‘disgust’ with the progress of practical politics prompts him to revalue disappointment as a means of articulating hope in inverted form.

With his ‘sensibility’ undiminished by his experiences, Fleetwood is a hero intended to stand out against contemporary anti-Jacobin novels, deeply hostile to ideas of radical sensibility. There is a line of development that can be traced from Burke’s attack on Rousseauvian benevolence in the *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, through the *British Critic* and the *Anti-Jacobin*, to the anti-sentimental plots of Jane West and Jane Austen.<sup>117</sup> The plots of West, Elizabeth Hamilton and George Walker, of Austen’s later *Mansfield Park*, all portray sensibility as tending toward selfish individualism and position it as a threat to the social stability produced by proper regard to the domestic affections. Those characters associated with sensibility, who profess their capacity for intense feeling, are customarily the villains of these novels, subverting the traditional ties of familial affections. By contrast, Godwin’s man of feeling is a sympathetic character; he is the moral centre of a novel which attacks the selfishness of commercial society. The discussion of sensibility in *Fleetwood* seeks to rebut the Burkean politics of the anti-Jacobin novel by representing the fusion of social feeling with domestic affection.

In the later stages of the novel, Fleetwood begins to renounce his misanthropy and becomes the ‘new man of feeling’. He is influenced by three characters in this progress. He meets with Ruffigny, then with Macneil, and the latter encounter leads to his marriage to Mary. The first of these characters, Ruffigny, tells the story of his life, of how he was rescued from a childhood of extreme hardship and poverty by the hero’s grandfather, Ambrose Fleetwood. He describes their first meeting in the language of sentiment, recalling that evening was falling and ‘there was that sadness in the air which wakes up the tone of sensibility in the soul’. In such circumstances, ‘[t]he first word that Ambrose Fleetwood uttered went to my heart’.<sup>118</sup> Fleetwood

senior takes the young Ruffigny to England, and the latter glowingly recalls how it was the first time he had heard a voice ‘that tells you by implication that the speaker is interested that you shall go right in the road of happiness and life’.<sup>119</sup> When the old man bequeathes a large sum of money to his protégé, the latter is unwilling to accept it, but is told that he should in words affirm the virtue of philanthropy and social feeling:

[Ambrose Fleetwood] expatiated upon the uses of wealth; and observed that [...] I ought by no means to forget the great public works which an opulent man might forward for the benefit of his species, or how extensive was the power of [...] supplying the means of improvement to those who panted for, but could not obtain them, and of removing the innumerable difficulties which often surrounded the virtuous and the admirable, that impeded their progress, and struck despair into their hearts.<sup>120</sup>

Fleetwood senior’s sentiments are connected to an interest in ‘improvement’. Ruffigny’s story is about the kindness that righted his life and about socialised feeling that moves beyond the limits of feeling. He attempts to embark upon a similar scheme with regard to the younger Fleetwood in the present.

This scheme seems to have some effect, as by the midway point of the novel, Fleetwood begins to renounce his misanthropy. Chapter eleven of the second volume opens with him declaring: ‘I saw that I was alone, and I desired to have a friend’.<sup>121</sup> In this short chapter, Godwin embarks upon a kind of miniature essay defining a ‘principle of sentiment’ which asserts that emotional sympathy is central to human existence. Contrary to the pessimistic appraisal of innate sentiment put forward by Burke and the anti-Jacobin novelists, the feelings are held to be conducive to harmonious social relations. In this essay, Fleetwood states that experiences of pleasure or pain impact upon the mind and produce sensation. Each individual desires to share these sensations: ‘I do not wish to stand alone, but to consider myself as part only of a whole. If that which produces sensation in me, produces sensation no where else, I am substantially alone’.<sup>122</sup> A shared sensation brings the knowledge that there is ‘a being of the same species or genus of myself’. But Fleetwood wishes for a connection through which another being will experience his sensations as if they were their own: ‘if there is a being in whom my sensations are by a kind of necessity echoed and repeated, that being is a part of myself’. This yearning for sympathy is

echoed by the Creature of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* before he is led into crime by the inhumanity of society. Sympathetic connection is presented as being essential to human life in *Fleetwood*:

Every reasoning and sensitive creature seems intuitively to require, to his perfectly just and proper state, this sort of sympathy. It is inconceivable how great an alleviation is in this way afforded, how it mitigates the agony of every kind of distress.<sup>123</sup>

Godwin speaks in a moral vocabulary drawn from Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, rather than the same author's *Wealth of Nations*. Implicitly, this argument stands against the psychology of self-interest envisaged by Malthus. Indeed, Godwin's attack on the dehumanising tendencies of industrialism in Ruffigny's description of child labour in the silk factory invites the reader to set socialised sympathy against the philosophy of political economy.<sup>124</sup>

Over the course of the rest of the novel, Godwin has his forlorn and disappointed hero seek out the consolation of such a sympathetic connection. Fleetwood travels to the Lake District, where he hears of a man named Macneil, who is famed for his friendship with Rousseau and for his spectacularly happy family. The episode sees Godwin fuse benevolence with the domestic affections, continuing his dialogue with Burke. Fleetwood visits Macneil and becomes a close friend to the family, finding himself greatly impressed by the happiness in which husband, wife and three daughters live together: 'so much harmony of interest, yet each member of the family [has] a different pursuit'. He terms the family a 'little commonwealth'.<sup>125</sup> Fleetwood then embarks on a series of discussions with Macneil. The former describes to the latter 'the sickly sensibility of my temper, the early disgust I had taken at the world, and the miserable sense of desolation which preyed upon my life, in my detached and isolated situation'.<sup>126</sup> Macneil resolves to cure him of this malady. Fleetwood sums up their discussions as revolving around the 'different ideal standards' which they respectively held: 'I estimated mankind with an eye to the goal which it is ardently to be desired they might reach; Macneil estimated them, with an eye to the starting-post from which they commenced their career'.<sup>127</sup> For Fleetwood, the nobility of man 'in the abstract' makes it difficult for him to contemplate 'man as he is', a creature he finds to be ignorant, selfish and brutal. Macneil argues for a more pragmatic view, in

which one should seek out small acts of goodness. He cites the example of even the lowest man's relations with his children, observing of his care for them 'how disinterested a sentiment burns in his heart!' Macneil repeats the word 'disinterested' and scorns the 'sophism' that would call 'the impulse from which they spring a selfish one'. He finds the love of an Englishman for his son as pleasing as if that love were directed towards a Japanese child: 'it is equally affection, and equally beneficent'.<sup>128</sup> This speech seems like another quiet exorcism of the Fénelon episode, of Godwin's earlier argument that affection given to the members of our family purely on the basis of kinship was an act of self-interest. But there is also a crucial challenge to Burke's rejection of affection for 'strangers'.

As Macneil's speech proceeds, Godwin makes overt his return to the substance of the hope he had articulated in *Political Justice*. Macneil speaks glowingly of the simple sentiments which lead people to assist a stranger whose carriage has broken down or whose horse has deserted them. Those who argue that man is innately selfish are unable to convince him:

For my part, instead of joining in the prevailing cry of the selfishness, the wickedness, the original sin, or the subsequent depravity of mankind, I feel my heart swell within me, when I recollect that I belong to a species, almost every individual of which is endowed with angelic virtues. I am a philanthropist, in the plain sense of the word. Whenever I see a man I see something to love.<sup>129</sup>

It is significant that Macneil should have been a friend of Rousseau, for this speech recalls the discussion of innate *pitié* and critique of Hobbes found in the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*. As Macneil feels 'his heart swell within me' and affirms his belief in the virtue of the sentiments, Godwin summons up the intense optimism of the discussion of benevolence in *Political Justice*. Despite the disappointments that had intervened between 1793 and 1805, the marginalisation of his strain of Enlightenment radicalism in British political discourse, Godwin still wishes to engage the reader with the concept of compassionate benevolence. Fleetwood cannot be won over by this hope, finding that 'though I wished to be a philanthropist, [I] was a misanthrope still'. But he adds that: I hope my reader will be convinced by the arguments of Mr Macneil. What a blessed state of mind was that, to which he appears to have attained!<sup>130</sup> Ideas of reader-response and psychology remain present.

As the plot proceeds, Godwin portrays Macneil's Rousseauvian philanthropy working at one with the domestic affections. Macneil puts his arguments into practice by permitting the marriage of Fleetwood to his daughter, Mary. He tells his future son-in-law that the 'discipline which arises out of the domestic charities, has an admirable tendency to make man, individually considered, what man ought to be'.<sup>131</sup> Godwin then presents a study of the marriage in which his new realist style is particularly apparent. When the wife is stricken by grief after her parents and sisters are lost at sea in a shipwreck, the husband tenderly nurses her through her bereavement. Godwin also discusses the wider social significance of the domestic affections. In helping Mary after her bereavement, Fleetwood dissuades her from the temptations of suicide with the prospect of the useful role that is open to her, telling her that she 'might maintain a household of temperate and happy individuals. She might relieve the wants of multitudes, might unfold talent, encourage industry, and multiply around her the class of sober and honourable citizens in the state'.<sup>132</sup> The vision of the stable family as the basis for a liberal society echoes Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

The language of sensibility is an important factor in the description of the marriage. When the married couple find that they share an appreciation of the landscape, Fleetwood realises that his marriage has fulfilled his desire for sympathetic connection: 'I perceived, with inexpressible pleasure, that mine was no longer a morose and unparticipated sensation, but that another human creature, capable of feeling all my feelings, rejoiced and trembled along with me'.<sup>133</sup> The ties of feeling allow complete understanding: '[w]e communicate with instantaneous flashes, in one glance of the eye, and have no need of words'.<sup>134</sup> Mary has, he tells her, 'brought me back from the very dens of despair'.<sup>135</sup> The society which Fleetwood has encountered may be predicated on atomised self-interest and have driven him to misanthropy; but educated by Macneil in the goodness of sentiment, he finds in his domestic relations a means of cultivating the Rousseauvian virtues of sincerity and sympathy. This discovery is seen to be psychologically restorative.

But as in all Godwin's works, there is a cycle of hope and despair. Fleetwood is later duped by Gifford into believing his wife has been unfaithful with his friend Kendrick. The jealousy Gifford incites in his victim is irrational and all-consuming. Given Godwin's close attention to names, it can be no coincidence that the malevolent

Gifford suggests both William Gifford, editor of the *Anti-Jacobin*, and John Gifford, editor of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Finding his consolation snatched away, Fleetwood loses his faith in human nature, crying that, ‘never again will I confide in the integrity of a human creature!’ He declares that ‘half my confidence in the human species is subverted for ever’.<sup>136</sup> There is some parallel with the loss of religious faith. The novel’s most dramatic moment embodies the force of Fleetwood’s bitter disappointment. In a compelling passage, he constructs a bizarre mock-wedding between the effigies of Mary and Kendrick. Fleetwood chatters with the models, before a frenzy of jealousy takes hold of him and he smashes the models with a chair and tears the table-cloth with his teeth.

Godwin does not leave Fleetwood in the slough of despond for long, though. The reconciliation effected in the conclusion of the tale again represents the ties of sympathy as a consolation and completes the hero’s progress towards becoming the ‘new man of feeling’. In a scene which might have disturbed West, Austen and other anti-Jacobin critics of sensibility, sheer force of feeling triumphs. When Fleetwood has driven his wife away with his groundless suspicions, others reveal to him his mistake. After a series of letters unsuccessfully entreating his wife to return, he makes out a settlement granting all his wealth and possessions to her and his child, and determines to retreat from society. Fleetwood chooses to ‘retire to a strange, wild, despairing situation, which had formerly left a deep impression on me, in the midst of the Pyrenees’.<sup>137</sup> One evening, as dusk falls and Fleetwood sits alone in his hotel waiting to depart, a veiled lady enters the room. In his despairing state, he makes no attempt at conversation, preferring to lose himself in his thoughts. But eventually Fleetwood does begin to look at the lady. In the description of the reconciliation that follows, Godwin invites anti-Jacobin scorn by employing the anachronistic language of sensibility:

I felt my heart thump at my bosom, and my sight grew dizzy. – She wrung her hands, and put them to her head. She rose as if to go, and leaned on Miss Scarborough. Her legs tottered, and she sat down again upon another chair. ‘Fleetwood!’ said she. – Oh, that voice! Contending emotions, hope, fear, transport, and shame, held me motionless.<sup>138</sup>

Throwing back the veil, Mary reveals herself. She looks to steady herself on her husband: “Take my hand!” she said; and stretched it out. “Take my heart”. She fell into my arms”.<sup>139</sup> The reconciliation directly parallels the climactic scene of Inchbald’s novel of radical sensibility, *A Simple Story*. In describing the reconciliation between Matilda (Miss Milner’s daughter) and Dorriforth (or Lord Elmwood as he is by then), Inchbald turns to the vocabulary of swoons and tears of which sentimental novelists were so fond. As Matilda descends the stairs one day in the ancestral home, she first lays eyes upon Lord Elmwood, her estranged father. Recognising him from his portrait, she is overcome by emotion and, tumbling down the stairs, ‘fell motionless into her father’s arms’.<sup>140</sup> Acting on ‘impulse’, Lord Elmwood reaches out to catch her. Finding her in his arms, he presses the daughter he had rejected to his bosom:

At length, trying to escape the snare into which he had been led, he was going to leave her on the spot where she fell, when her eyes opened and she uttered, ‘save me’. – Her voice unmanned him. – His long restrained tears now burst forth – and seeing her relapsing into the swoon again, he cried out eagerly to recall her.<sup>141</sup>

As her mother, Miss Milner, had done before her, Matilda effects a union with Elmwood by appealing to his innermost sentiments. Godwin’s passage lacks the explicit social application of sensibility described in Inchbald’s novel (Miss Milner brings about an equality of feeling between her and a man who is both her social superior and a priest), but he was clearly impressed by his friend’s portrait of the triumph of common feeling. When Mary falls into Fleetwood’s arms, his rescue from misanthropy is complete. The message of the entire novel is repeated: faith in human virtue and benevolence can bring redemption from despair.

*Fleetwood* was the last novel in which Godwin directly sought to maintain the liberal tradition by diffusing through literature the hopes of *Political Justice*. It demonstrates that Godwin’s intellectual relationship with Burke on the issue of the politics of feeling did not take the form of a concession. In reality, he sought to make a continued argument for the possibility of a socialised benevolence which sees individuals united with both family and ‘strangers’ through the bonds of common sympathy. The novel’s use of the idea of benevolence in critiquing a society founded



on self-interest would directly influence Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and perhaps even Percy Shelley's discussion of poetry and the sympathetic imagination as antidotes to the self-interest of capitalist society in *A Defence of Poetry*.

After *Fleetwood*, Godwin would show little interest in disappointment as a means of continued engagement with the Enlightenment humanist hopes of *Political Justice*. His reference to Rousseau in the novel, as the friend of Macneil, shows that he was beginning to detach himself from the pose of the Rousseauvian solitary. Macneil describes his infamous friend as ending his life in the midst of a paranoid delusion:

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 [...] He lived, however, toward the close of his life in a world of his own, and saw nothing as it really was; nor were his mistakes less gross, than if he had asserted that his little cottage was menaced by a besieging army.<sup>142</sup>

Godwin seems less convinced than in the *Reply to Parr* of Rousseauvian sensibility's capacity for political critique. Rousseau's disappointment, even, was a delusion.

However, *Fleetwood* remains a significant novel within its literary context. Godwin's defence of benevolence and denunciation of commercial self-interest has the air of a reaction against Malthus, but is never expressly stated as such. The work expresses Godwin's awareness of his own marginalisation, but is connected with the fundamental principles of the perfectibilist thought of *Political Justice* to a greater extent than most critics have allowed. The discussion of sensibility in *Fleetwood* belies the commonly held perception of a 'turn to feeling' later in Godwin's career, for the hero's philanthropy is overtly presented as a refinement upon the doctrine of Hutchesonian benevolence set out in *Political Justice*. Critics such as Kelly and Marshall have sought to discuss the increased attention to feeling in *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* in terms of a Romanticism which proceeds at the expense of the ideals of *Political Justice*. I have argued that benevolist moral theory and Burke's critique of Rousseau and the Enlightenment, rather than Romanticism, is the most helpful context for understanding Godwin's discussion of feeling in these novels. They recognisably continue the project of literary reformism begun in 1793 by seeking to diffuse liberal hope through their reading audience. *St Leon*, *Fleetwood* and the *Reply to Parr* are altered in tone from the works of the early 1790s, *Political Justice* and

*Caleb Williams*. I have suggested that this shift was a result of the rise of Malthusianism within political debate and of anti-Jacobinism within literary culture. *Fleetwood* in particular strikes up a very interesting relationship with the dominant anti-Jacobin novelists and their intellectual forefather, Burke.

These works recognisably continue within the tradition of the literary manifesto outlined in *Political Justice*. The psychological impact of literature upon the reader remains at the centre of Godwin's literary theory. There is an implicit belief that the disappointments of practical politics might be counteracted by sustaining the process of liberal improvement through education and discussion. *St Leon* and *Fleetwood* come to form important influences over Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley. Both read the works frequently, and these novels of disappointment provided key models for their own attempts to engage with literary reformism in the post-Napoleonic era. Percy Shelley in particular understood the durability of Godwin's hope to be of great significance, and these novels of Rousseauvian disappointment came to stimulate the development of his poetic project.

## CHAPTER 4

*'The shipwrecked hopes of men': Enlightenment humanism and  
the disappointments of the Revolution in Laon and Cythna and  
Prometheus Unbound*

## I

The intellectual relationship between Godwin and Percy Shelley begins with the correspondence begun by the latter in January 1812. Here, the characteristics of Shelley's preoccupation with Godwin's philosophy become evident. His first letter to the author of *Political Justice* declares his delight on learning of 'your existence and your dwelling', having previously 'enrolled your name on the list of the honourable dead'.<sup>1</sup> By this point in time, Shelley was familiar with the doctrines of *Political Justice*. His letters record an order for the book in November 1810.<sup>2</sup> The correspondence makes clear that Shelley's interest was stimulated by the image of Godwin as a stoic. Godwin is addressed as 'a veteran [...] in the years of persecution'.<sup>3</sup> In Pamela Clemit's discussion of the intellectual relations between the two, she remarks that this image 'takes us straight back to the politics of the 1790s: Godwin's initial importance to Shelley lies in the sheer fact of his having survived the years of disillusion and persecution which followed the French Revolution'.<sup>4</sup> Preoccupied as Shelley was with the liberal disappointment engendered by the Revolution, he was attracted to Godwin by the endurance of his hope.

The correspondence also evidences Shelley's interest in Godwin's ideas on literature and perfectibility, ideas which would come to be central to his own literary theory. He describes his reading of *Political Justice* in terms that evoke Godwin's Dissenting conception of reader-response as private judgement:

It is now a period of more than two years since first I saw your inestimable book on 'Political Justice'; it opened to my mind fresh & more extensive views, it materially influenced my character, and I rose from its perusal a wiser and a better man.<sup>5</sup>

Shelley imagines himself as the ideal reader pictured in the Preface to *Political Justice*, where Godwin describes himself as being ‘desirous of producing a work, from the perusal of which no man should rise without being strengthened in habits of sincerity, fortitude and justice’.<sup>6</sup> He has absorbed the Godwinian notion that the written text might materially alter the psychology of the reader. Shelley positions this idea in the context of his own literary career later in this early correspondence when he asks Godwin if he himself might ‘improve my own powers, and diffuse true and virtuous principles’. The Dissenting vocabulary of *Political Justice* is evident in the concept of diffusion, as well as in the question that follows: ‘[d]oes not writing hold the next place to colloquial discussion in eliciting and classing the powers of the mind’.<sup>7</sup> Shelley already situates literature as a means of ‘discussion’, a way of educating the individual through reader-response. His entire understanding of the role of poetry is founded in this intellectual relationship with Godwin and his psychological theory of literature. Shelley saw as the embodiment of a particular psychological attitude, noting in 1812 that ‘the unmoderated enthusiasm of philanthropy still characterizes him’.<sup>8</sup>

From his reading of *Political Justice* and the novels, Shelley derives an attachment to the Godwinian notion of hope. The political and philosophical outlook of much of his poetry is shaped by his encounters with Godwin’s idea of human perfectibility. The optimistic Enlightenment humanism behind *Political Justice* becomes the unifying concept of poems such as *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*. Theoretical works such as *A Defence of Poetry* and the *Philosophical View of Reform* express the belief that humanist hope can be transmitted through reader-response, thus positioning literature as an essential contribution to the improvement of society. The Dissenting psychology and theory of literature explored by Godwin comes to form a crucial element of the dynamics of Shelley’s poetry. We see a direct interest in political psychology throughout his major works. Shelley often situates his poetry as a response to the liberal crisis which followed Napoleon’s defeat and the final collapse of revolutionary France. To some extent, he replicates Godwin’s reaction to the rise of popular anti-Jacobinism and Malthusianism in the 1790s, seeking to turn the literary tide against the ‘apostacy’ of the Lake School by constructing a psychology of liberal hope.

Shelley's interest in the material political influence of hope should be understood as stemming directly from the influence of Godwin. As we have seen in the first three chapters, Godwin translated the hopes of the French Enlightenment into the psychology of British Protestant Dissent; he marked his treatises and his novels with a secular optimism about humanity's progressive nature that explicitly paralleled the Christian hope of salvation. In poems such as *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, external political concerns are similarly translated into a language of interior psychological experience. Shelley looks to Godwin's Enlightenment vision of inexorable improvement toward a universal society of equality, liberty and justice as a psychological antidote to the disappointments of the post-Napoleonic era in Britain. The injunction from Demogorgon which closes *Prometheus Unbound*, to 'hope, till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates',<sup>9</sup> is a manifestation of the particular faith delineated in *Political Justice* and Godwin's novels.

We have observed how the opening correspondence between the two saw Shelley position himself as the ideal responsive reader Godwin had visualised in the Preface to *Political Justice*. The Godwinian theory of literature and reader-response is a crucial element within Shelley's psychology of hope. The interior psychological dramas described in his work are intended to communicate directly with the consciousness of the reader. Godwin's immersion in the Dissenting ethos of education achieved through public discussion and private judgement led him to make the argument, most succinctly described in his Preface to *The Enquirer*, that 'the cause of political reform, and the cause of intellectual and literary refinement, are inseparably connected'.<sup>10</sup> Through his reading of Godwin, Shelley discovered a political and philosophical justification for his career as a poet. His major works and his prose discourses on imagination are founded on a Godwinian supposition that literature might augment the process of improvement by involving the individual reader in an educative psychology of hope.

The nature of Godwin's influence on Shelley has been discussed by several critics.<sup>11</sup> But the political aspirations of his poetry have never been discussed as a product of Godwin's conviction in the transformative power of Enlightenment hope. Considering Shelley's poetry and prose in the context of Godwinian psychology, as a sustained attempt to alter the political mindset of a collective readership through literature, can help to clarify some of the problematic issues within Shelley criticism.

The historicist work of Kenneth Cameron, Paul Dawson, Michael Scrivener and Stephen Behrendt has illuminated the serious intellectual context of his work, and pointed to the ways in which he might be understood outside the trammels of the definition of Romanticism established by earlier critics.<sup>12</sup> But historicist interpretations have sometimes proved misleading in picturing Shelley's poetry as a reaction against the utilitarianism which was dominant in middle-class reformist circles. Raymond Williams has read *A Defence of Poetry* as an embodiment of the image of the 'Romantic Artist', an entity produced under what he characterises as the twin forces of industrialism and Benthamite utilitarianism.<sup>13</sup> More recently, Philip Connell's discussion of the development of 'Romanticism' as a critical concept has examined the *Defence of Poetry* and the *Philosophical View of Reform* and highlighted the 'complex, and often congenial relationship that existed between Benthamite utilitarianism and the "literary" radicalism of Shelley and the Hunt circle'.<sup>14</sup> The literary project in which Shelley engaged was broadly utilitarian in its character; he defined his literary project in Godwinian terms as an essential means of effecting the moral improvement of individuals and reforming society. Godwin needs to be acknowledged not just as an influence on the substance of Shelley's political beliefs, but as an influence on his theories of poetry and literature. Recognising the Godwinian lineage of his poetry, the attempt at practical reform through literature, can bring a sense of the undervalued 'political sobriety' spoken of by Dawson.<sup>15</sup>

Shelley's meditations on hope, his imagined utopias, should be understood as expressions of Enlightenment humanist optimism, rather than examples of the abstract nature of his idealism. *Prometheus Unbound* is his most direct attempt to restate the ideals of Enlightenment humanism in the face of the failures of France; and at its heart is the Godwinian idea of perfectibility, of ceaseless improvement towards a society of equality. The poem's climactic passage in Act III returns to the utopian conclusion of *Political Justice* and to the philosophy that had originally stimulated Godwin; to the egalitarian, secularist, internationalist ideals of the French Enlightenment. Through *Political Justice*, a work written in the intellectual tradition of Rousseau, Helvétius and Holbach, Shelley came to an awareness of the stimulus afforded to the French Revolution by the work of the *philosophes*. The work of Volney and Condorcet, key popularizers of the French Enlightenment in 1790s Britain, is integral to Shelley's psychology of hope. Seamus Deane goes so far as to suggest that '[n]o English writer

of the period 1789-1832 absorbed the thought of the French Enlightenment more deeply than Percy Bysshe Shelley'.<sup>16</sup>

Godwin's principal legacies to Shelley were, then, the attachment to radical Enlightenment humanism as an interior psychology of hope, and the belief in literature's capacity to effect improvement by impressing this psychology upon the reader. From Godwin, Shelley inherits an apparently absolute conviction in the necessity of hope, in the notion that individual faith will somehow contribute to moral and political progress. An important aspect of his work is the manner in which his sensitivity to the political significance of psychology produces a critique of post-revolutionary disappointment. This critique largely focuses on the 'apostacy' of Wordsworth and Coleridge, on their disappointed recoil from the Enlightenment. There is an intimate connection between Shelley and the reformist literary agenda of the *Examiner*; the attacks on the Lake School mounted by Hazlitt and Hunt throughout 1816 and 1817 have a crucial bearing on the development of his aesthetic.

## II

Shelley's first coherent definition of a literary manifesto takes place in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* (1817). The earlier *Queen Mab* (1812) had articulated a millenarian vision of the triumph of equality and justice, and was thoroughly grounded in the philosophy of the radical Enlightenment, as was made clear in the poem's extensive notes. In a pirated version, the poem went on to achieve a wide circulation among working-class radicals in the 1820s, later coming to hold a central position in the literature of Chartism.<sup>17</sup> Shelley disowned *Queen Mab*, possibly fearful that the poem might expose him to prosecution by the Government. Inadvertently, the work came to be the most effective realisation of his project of literary reformism.

However, it was not until the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* that Shelley set out his poetic manifesto in Godwinian terms, as an attempt to effect political improvement by retrieving the reader from the disappointments of the post-revolutionary era. It is here that he begins to employ the word 'hope' as a central term within his aesthetic, as a term with a specific ideological inflection. The poem originally appeared under the title of *Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century in the Stanza of Spenser*. It was published as the *Revolt of Islam*

after Charles Ollier insisted on alterations to the poem.<sup>18</sup> The poem describes an idealised version of the French Revolution through the tale of the sibling revolutionaries Laon and Cythna. Their incestuous love affair registers their wish to undermine established codes of opinion and the power of ‘tyrants’. The work’s portrait of a tragic failed revolution manifests Shelley’s continued preoccupation with the political and psychological implications of the French Revolution, first evidenced in the letter to Godwin with the plan for ‘Hubert Cauvin’. In an illuminating reading, David Duff has discussed the poem as a quest narrative formed within the traditions of romance.<sup>19</sup> He points out that the work is particularly concerned with interior mental states, being a ‘progressive alternative’ to the remedy for depression proposed in Wordsworth’s *Excursion*; suggesting that like *The Prelude* and the ‘Prospectus’ to *The Recluse*, the theme of *Laon and Cythna* is ‘the fate of apocalyptic hope’.<sup>20</sup> The parallel which he draws with *The Excursion* offers a useful starting point for understanding the politics of the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*. Defining his own poetic manifesto against Wordsworth’s conservative renunciation of progressive politics in the face of the disappointments of the Revolution, Shelley sets out to articulate the manner in which poetry might respond to this psychological crisis by reviving Godwinian hope.

His concern with the interplay between reader-response and political psychology is evident from the opening paragraph of the Preface:

I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality, and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers, a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever totally extinguish among mankind.<sup>21</sup>

The mechanisms of poetry are directed to arousing a politically beneficial state of mind in the reader. Significantly, Shelley locates the purpose of *Laon and Cythna* in stimulating the reader to a ‘faith and hope in something good’. Immediately, hope is situated at the centre of his aesthetic. It is also figured in explicitly religious terms, used in conjunction with ‘faith’. Hope is the ‘virtuous enthusiasm’ referred to earlier in the sentence, envisaged as an active and materially influential faculty. There are



some important connections with Godwin's work here. The claim for the poem's stimulus towards a 'liberal and comprehensive morality', refers back to the Preface to *Political Justice*, where Godwin had declared 'politics to be the proper vehicle of a liberal morality'.<sup>22</sup> In noting the parallels between the two Prefaces, William St Clair observes that the word 'liberal' is a significant one, being still synonymous with Jacobinism in the vocabularies of some in 1817.<sup>23</sup> Later in the preface, Shelley refers to the time in which the poem was composed as a 'period [...] devoted to the task with unremitting ardour and enthusiasm'.<sup>24</sup> Godwin had observed of the sixteen months in which *Political Justice* was written that 'this period was devoted to the purpose with unremitting ardour'.<sup>25</sup> Shelley declares himself to be animated by the same enthusiasm for justice that had characterised *Political Justice*. As he speaks of 'kindling' this enthusiasm 'within the bosoms of my readers', it becomes clear that he deeply imbibed Godwin's politicised theory of reader-response and the material psychological effects of literature. Just as Godwin had sought in *Political Justice* to produce a work 'from the perusal of which, no man should rise without being strengthened in habits of sincerity, fortitude and justice',<sup>26</sup> so Shelley seeks to alter the mental outlook of the reader who encounters his work.

Shelley's intense interest in the prospective audiences for, and reception of, his work has been discussed by Behrendt.<sup>27</sup> But his notion of reader-response has not been registered as part of the Godwinian inheritance. Shelley's reading of *Political Justice* and the novels exposed him to the culture of Dissent, allowing him to envisage literature as public discussion, as an educative force. He isolates one of the key terms of Godwin's literary vocabulary in describing his wish to turn the techniques of poetry towards arousing a 'virtuous enthusiasm'. Redolent both of the tumultuous political heritage of the Dissenters and of Rousseau's *Confessions*, the word 'enthusiasm' firmly ties this Preface to Godwin's theory of the psychological and political impact of literature.

Shelley proceeds to situate his new poetic manifesto, his attempt to stimulate that 'faith and hope in something good', against a post-revolutionary background of liberal disappointment and anti-Jacobin reaction. *The Quarterly Review* lamented of *Laon and Cythna* that the poet had 'borrowed from that store-house of cast-off mummeries and abominations, the French Revolution'.<sup>28</sup> Shelley had indeed borrowed heavily, but sought to articulate an alternative understanding of the legacy of France. He focuses

on the particular psychology that spread through society in the wake of the Revolution's collapse:

[O]n the first reverses of hope in the progress of French liberty, the sanguine eagerness for good overleapt the solution of these questions, and for a time extinguished itself in the unexpectedness of their result. Thus many of the most ardent and tender-hearted of the worshippers of public good, have been morally ruined by what a partial glimpse of the events they deplored, appeared to show as the melancholy desolation of all their cherished hopes. Hence gloom and misanthropy have become the characteristics of the age in which we live, the solace of a disappointment that unconsciously finds relief only in the wilful exaggeration of its own despair. Metaphysics, and enquiries into moral and political science, have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those of Mr. Malthus, calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a security of everlasting triumph. Our works of fiction and poetry have been overshadowed by the same infectious gloom. But mankind appears to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following Poem.<sup>29</sup>

Disappointed hope has shaped the dominant political and literary trends of the age, Shelley argues. In its treatment of post-revolutionary disappointment and the collapse of liberal optimism as psychological trauma, the passage is intensely reminiscent of Godwin's *St Leon* and *Reply to Parr*. Indeed, Shelley's reference to the 'desolation' of 'cherished hopes' recalls that section of the *Reply to Parr* in which it is lamented that men who once welcomed the spread of liberty now 'profess their conviction that the hope of melioration in human society must be given up; and, not contented with that, virulently abuse those by whom the hope is still cherished'.<sup>30</sup> Shelley follows Godwin's essay by positioning Malthus, who had comprehensively rejected the idea of human perfectibility, as a purveyor of 'disappointment' and a tool of reaction.

This thesis on the political influence of post-revolutionary disappointment becomes the basis for the entire enterprise of the poem. Prompted by his reading of Godwin's discussions of the nexus between literature, psychology and politics, Shelley undertakes an attempt to retrieve the French Revolution as a symbol of hope. He had long been convinced that the Revolution exercised an immense influence over contemporary politics, noting of his visit to the royal palaces at Versailles and Fontainebleau in 1816 that it called to his mind 'some of the most interesting events of what may be called the master theme of the epoch in which we live – the French

Revolution'.<sup>31</sup> In *Laon and Cythna*, the 'master theme' is reinterpreted in the terms of the radical Enlightenment humanism of the 1790s. The Godwinian idea of perfectibility, the supposition that human history can be read as a narrative of moral and political improvement, becomes central. Shelley's Preface offers a synopsis of the poem in which a definitively liberal narrative of the Revolution is advanced:

[The poem] is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind; its tendency to awaken public hope and to enlighten and improve mankind; the rapid effects of the application of that tendency; the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery and degradation to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom; the bloodless dethronement of their oppressors, and the unveiling of the religious frauds by which they had been deluded into submission; the tranquility of successful patriotism, and the universal toleration and benevolence of true philanthropy; the treachery and barbarity of hired soldiers; vice not the object of punishment and hatred, but kindness and pity; the faithlessness of tyrants; the confederacy of the Rulers of the World, and the restoration of the expelled Dynasty by foreign arms; [...] the temporary triumph of oppression, that secure earnest of its final and inevitable fall; the transient nature of ignorance and error, and the eternity of genius and virtue.<sup>32</sup>

Three years earlier in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth had pictured events in France as a narrative of disappointment, bringing knowledge of the futility of seeking to improve society through political endeavour. In direct contrast, Shelley's liberal narrative returns to the thesis that the Revolution was the beneficial product of progressive intellectual enlightenment. Godwinian doctrines on crime and punishment, on philanthropy and benevolence, are prominent in this synopsis of the Revolution in the Golden City. As the failures of France are attributed to external influences, we are returned to the narrative of human perfectibility. In *Political Justice*, Godwin had put forward perfectibility as an attempt to stave off the disillusionment engendered by revolutionary violence; Shelley similarly looks to retrieve the sense of constant, gradual improvement from the wreck of France.

In a letter to a prospective publisher, he had described *Laon and Cythna* as picturing 'the *beau ideal* as it were of the French Revolution', a revolution in a European nation 'acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously I think) the modern philosophy, & contending with antient notions & the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them'.<sup>33</sup> Mirroring the letter, the

synopsis of *Laon and Cythna* is a celebration of the Revolution as the flowering of the French Enlightenment. Burke had of course made the same connection in his conspiracy theory on the ‘cabal’ of *philosophes*. But Shelley’s narrative is a restating of Paine’s claim in *Rights of Man* that an event which ‘apparently burst forth like a creation from chaos’ was actually ‘no more than the consequence of a mental revolution priorly existing in France’.<sup>34</sup> Hence he emphasises the casting off of religious despotism produced by the militantly atheist and anti-clerical works of the *philosophes*, and stresses the growth of republicanism as a similarly intellectual movement. Seamus Deane has suggested that Shelley’s work as a whole evidences a desire to reinvigorate contemporary politics through a revival of French Enlightenment theory:

He sought a means by which the potency of the governing ideas of the French Enlightenment might be restored to a Europe and an England that had come to regard the Holy Alliance and Tory administration as necessary guardians against not only Napoleon, the Luddites, and the Radicals but also against those Revolutionary principles of which these factions seemed, or were said to be, the inevitable consequence.<sup>35</sup>

Deane overstates the breadth of Shelley’s audience somewhat, but nevertheless we can begin to see the narrative of Revolution advanced in *Laon and Cythna* as part of this process of reviving ‘the governing ideas of the French Enlightenment’.

In its attempt to recover a sense of the Revolution as evidence of humanity’s progressive nature, the synopsis proffers a composite of liberal Enlightenment historiography of the Revolution. Shelley’s reading of J.P. Rabaut Saint-Etienne’s *Précis historique de la Révolution Française* (1792) during the time of the poem’s composition is likely to have been important in this context.<sup>36</sup> Rabaut was a prominent Girondin and provided a type of detailed history of the Revolution unavailable in British commentary. Shelley notably steers his readership away from any suggestion that the violence of the Revolution was produced by any innate disposition to ‘vice’ on the part of humanity. It has, he declares, ‘ceased to be believed, that whole generations of man ought to consign themselves to a hopeless inheritance of ignorance and misery, because a nation of men who had been dupes and slaves for centuries’ succumbed to violence ‘so soon as some of their fetters were partially loosened’.<sup>37</sup> The bloodshed of the Revolution is attributed to the oppression of the populace under

the system of monarchical government, an argument Shelley would have encountered in *Rights of Man* and in Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794). An *Examiner* leader in September of 1816 similarly declaimed against those who would use the recent sporadic outbreaks of violence among the poor at Spa Fields as justification for staving off Parliamentary Reform. The piece, written by Leigh Hunt, quoted Sheridan's speech in the Commons in February 1790, delivered in response to Burke's claim that the crimes of the Revolution were the offspring of the National Assembly's republican principles:

What is the striking lesson, the awful moral that is to be gathered from the outrages of the people? What? but a superior abhorrence of that accursed system of despotic Government, which had so deformed and corrupted human nature, as to make its subjects capable of such acts.<sup>38</sup>

Like Sheridan, Shelley views the violence of the Revolution as the product of the errors of society, leaving human nature untouched.

The narrative of the Revolution presented in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* recalls a digression in Shelley's earlier pamphlet on Ireland, *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists* (1812). There, he discusses the intellectual leaders of the French Revolution as symbols of hope, suggesting that a similar group in Ireland might stimulate improvement in the public mind in a manner not achievable by any form of state legislation:

Their genius penetrated with a glance the gloom and glare which Church-craft and State-craft had spread before the imposture and villainy of their establishments. They saw the world - , were they men? Yes! They felt for it! They risked their lives and happiness for its benefit! – Had there been more of these men France would not now be a beacon to warn us of the hazard and horror of Revolutions, but a pattern of society, rapidly advancing to a state of perfection, and holding out an example for the gradual and peaceful regeneration of the world.<sup>39</sup>

There is some inconsistency between Shelley's simultaneous advocacy of revolution and gradual change. But the wish to revalue the Revolution, to place it within the scheme of perfectibility as an example of humanity's progressive ability to reform its institutions, is already evident.

The Preface to *Laon and Cythna* uses the idea of perfectibility to invite the reader to participate in a certain type of mental outlook. Following the example of Godwin, Shelley expresses the progressive principles of the Enlightenment in the form of a secular faith. The promise of a society in which monarchical and religious despotism are dispelled and humanity is governed by reason and justice offers a sustaining hope in the Preface. Shelley envisages Godwin's idea of human perfectibility as offering a durable narrative of progress, through which the psychological traumas of the present can be overcome:

The panic which, like an epidemic transport, seized upon all classes of men during the excesses consequent upon the French Revolution, is gradually giving place to sanity. [...] There is a reflux in the tide of human things which bears the shipwrecked hopes of men into a secure haven, after the storms are past. Methinks, those who now live have survived an age of despair.<sup>40</sup>

The terminology of 'panic', 'hopeless', 'hope' and 'despair' illustrates how Shelley once again translates external political events into interior mental experience. Emerging from the tempest of the disappointments of France, the 'shipwrecked hopes of men' are borne into the 'secure haven'. Metaphors of survival and endurance abound. Shelley figures the liberal traumas of the time as a narrative of redemption. Through a period of 'despair', hope has endured and is now ready to flower once again. There is some continuity with the psychology of *St Leon*, *Fleetwood* and the *Reply to Parr*, in all of which suffering hope survives in the face of despair. The phrase 'shipwrecked hopes of men' is an important one. It again reveals Shelley's interest in hope as an ideological concept, as a progressive idea. Conjoined with 'men', it suggests a particular humanist inflection. As suggested earlier in his earlier correspondence with Godwin, Shelley was preoccupied by the stoical attitude expressed in the Godwinian interpretation of Enlightenment hope.

The exact polemical intent of this hope is made clearer by considering one of Shelley's key sources in his decision to offer a *beau idéal* of the French Revolution: Volney's *Les Ruines; ou, méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (1791). Kenneth Cameron has established that this work was a major influence on *Laon and Cythna*, remarking that Shelley's debt to Volney 'is of so extensive a nature that it is clear that he must have reread it shortly before, or even during, the composition of that poem'.<sup>41</sup>

Though this connection has been neglected by more recent critics, Volney's own idealized vision of the Revolution as the apocalyptic triumph of Enlightenment rationalism over religious and political 'mystery' is vital to an understanding of Shelley's psychology of hope. Mary Shelley had an equal regard for *Les Ruines*. In *Frankenstein*, Felix De Lacey teaches French to Safie (and inadvertently to the listening Creature) by using 'Volney's *Ruins of Empire*' as a text book.<sup>42</sup> The work is a key component in the Creature's liberal education.

The influence of *Les Ruines* on Percy Shelley's work overlaps with that of Godwin. Volney's political agenda may be that of Rousseauvian popular sovereignty rather than philosophical anarchism, but his transposition of perfectibilist principles into a rationalist faith takes him close to the tenor of *Political Justice*. Volney was a prominent Girondin in the revolutionary era, a protégé of Holbach and Helvétius who served as a deputy in the National Assembly and was later an adviser to Napoleon.<sup>43</sup> *Les Ruines* presented all religion and 'priestcraft' as the product of human superstition, viewing the growth of religious despotism in conjunction with the growth of political despotism. It was first translated into English in 1795 by James Marshall, Godwin's old friend from Hoxton, also the translator of Rousseau's *Confessions*.<sup>44</sup> Curiously, given the overlap between their apprehension of the political significance of psychology, Godwin despised Volney's work, finding it 'bombastic' and 'inflated'.<sup>45</sup> *Les Ruines* stood alongside Paine's *Age of Reason* as a dominant influence on English freethought in the period. It was available in cheap pocket-book form and had a profound impact on radical artisan circles, as E.P. Thompson has observed.<sup>46</sup> An extract from *Les Ruines* was published as a tract by the London Corresponding Society.<sup>47</sup> While Paine remained a deist, Volney urged his readers towards atheism and towards a faith in human reason as the sovereign principle of government.

*Les Ruines* begins with the eponymous ruins of Palmyra provoking a gloomy meditation on human affairs from Volney's narrator, the Traveller. When a phantom appears in the shape of the Genius, the Traveller tells him that: 'despair has taken hold of my heart [...] the depravity of governors, and the abjectness of those who are governed, [...] have given me a disgust to life'.<sup>48</sup> The Genius then decides to revive the Traveller with a vision of the new age that has been begun by the French

Revolution. In Volney's discussion of psychology, we can see a precursor to Shelley's speculations on the political significance of hope in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*:

Here, oppressed with sorrow, my heart deprived me of utterance. The Genius made no reply; but in a low tone of voice I heard him say to himself: 'Let us revive the hope of this man; for if he who loves his fellow creatures be suffered to despair, what is to become of nations? The past is perhaps but too much calculated to deject him. Let us then anticipate futurity; let us unveil the astonishing age that is about to rise, that virtue, seeing the end of its wishes, be animated with new vigour, and may redouble its efforts to hasten the accomplishment of it'.<sup>49</sup>

The revival of the disappointed Traveller is conjoined with the fate of 'nations', claiming a grand purpose for the individual psychology investigated here. The discouraging past is rejected in favour of a semi-fictional account of the French Revolution. The act of disclosing a fictionalized vision of 'the astonishing age that is about to rise' is seen to have a tangible result by exciting a wish to attain that age in reality. What is developed here is a dynamic of desire in which the idealised, almost utopian, depiction of the Revolution acts as an instrument to stimulate republican 'vigour'. An image of survival similar to those which are found in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* occurs when the Traveller reacts to the Genius's vision of the Revolution:

A sight like this, so full of sublimity and energy, so interesting by the generous emotions it implied, melted me into tears; and addressing myself to the Genius, I said: "Now may I live! for after this there is nothing which I am not daring enough to hope".<sup>50</sup>

Looking back to *Les Ruines*, Shelley finds a version of the Revolution entirely opposed to the master narrative of disappointment that became established in British culture after the fall of Napoleon. His Volneyesque *beau ideal* seeks to redeem the symbolic value of the French Revolution as a beacon of hope.

Shelley's interest in promulgating the radical humanism of the Enlightenment endows his work with great intellectual significance within its contemporary milieu. Though his audience was limited in numbers, his poetic project involved him in a conflict with the dominant literary figures of the age. In the second sentence of the Preface, he invites comparisons with an earlier poetic manifesto:



It is an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live.<sup>51</sup>

There are parallels between this second sentence and the second sentence of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), in which the author describes the intent of the first edition:

It was published, as an experiment which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.<sup>52</sup>

The echo appears to be deliberate, which is curious as any comparison between *Lyrical Ballads* and *Laon and Cythna* could only be unfavourable to the latter. Why then does Shelley choose to invoke the memory of Wordsworth's famous Preface so early in his own?

The politics of the Lake School are a determining factor in the poetic manifesto of *Laon and Cythna*. Two Wordsworth poems attracted Shelley's particular attention at this stage of his career: 'The French Revolution, as it Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement' (1809/1815) and *The Excursion* (1814). A stanza from Canto V of *Laon and Cythna* refers to the former:

To hear, to see, to live, was on that morn  
Lethean joy! so that all those assembled  
Cast off their memories of the past outworn.<sup>53</sup>

This is an echo of Wordsworth's proclamation, later to be incorporated in *The Prelude*: 'bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!'<sup>54</sup> The Godwinian 'virtuous enthusiasm' which Shelley intends to 'kindle' in the bosoms of his readers emerges in specific contrast to Wordsworth's melancholy detachment from his own youthful enthusiasm. The deliberate reference to early Wordsworth in the second sentence of the Preface is perhaps an invitation to consider the 'apostacy' he undertook in later works. Shelley's attitude thus chimes with the attack on the Lake

School mounted in the *Examiner* throughout 1816 and 1817, in which the articles of Hunt and Hazlitt were punctuated with frequent references to ‘literary prostitution’ and ‘modern apostates’.<sup>55</sup> The fashion for describing Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey as apostates was perhaps initiated by the religious vocabulary Godwin had used in attacking James Mackintosh and describing his own stoical faith in the *Reply to Parr*.

The Preface sees Shelley position Wordsworth’s later poetry as a key element of the ‘age of despair’, an argument in which *The Excursion* is of particular significance. Mary Shelley noted in her journal that a reading of the poem had caused great sadness to her and her husband in 1814: ‘Shelley [...] brings home Wordsworth’s “Excursion”, of which we read a part, much disappointed. He is a slave’.<sup>56</sup> Book III of *The Excursion*, entitled ‘Despondency’, pictures the experiences of the Solitary as mental trauma in its synopsis: ‘Roused by the French Revolution. – Disappointment and disgust. – Voyage to America. – Disappointment and disgust pursue him’.<sup>57</sup> Book IV of the poem represents a remedy for the Solitary’s condition, namely that of religious truth. The Preface to *Laon and Cythna* shows that Wordsworth’s disappointed renunciation of the hope of political improvement registered profoundly on Shelley’s consciousness.

The sense that he was defining his aesthetic against the conservatism of Wordsworth was expressed by Leigh Hunt in his review of *Laon and Cythna* for the *Examiner*. Hunt found the work’s obscurities not to his taste, but understood it in the context of a fresh current of literary reformism. He praised in particular the passage of the Preface in which Shelley analyses the characteristics of the ‘age of despair’, stating that: ‘[i]f the Lake School, as they are called, were not as dogmatic in their despair as they used to be in their hope, we should earnestly recommend the passage to their attention’.<sup>58</sup> Hunt, too, displays his awareness of the political significance of the psychological progression undertaken by the Lake School.

Shelley seeks to return to the poetics set out in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. The Preface to *Laon and Cythna* discusses how the poem’s ‘story of human passion’ is designed to appeal ‘in contempt of all artificial opinions and institutions, to the common sympathies of every breast’.<sup>59</sup> As in *St Leon* or the *Confessions*, a literary narrative of sensibility is intended to counteract the opacity of ‘artificial’ political institution by involving the reader in an egalitarian correspondence of ‘natural’

feeling. Ronald Tetreault has remarked on the significance of this aesthetic in *Laon and Cythna*, suggesting that through these ‘affective powers’ the aim of the poetry is ‘less to convey ideas than to engage the reader in an act of the sympathetic imagination’.<sup>60</sup> Here, aesthetics and politics are in perfect synthesis: ‘I would only awaken the feelings, so that the reader should see the beauty of true virtue, and be incited to those inquiries which have led to my moral and political creed’.<sup>61</sup> Again, the political significance of the reader’s response is emphasised. After the synopsis of the liberal narrative of the French Revolution, Shelley returns to the politics of sympathy and affective poetics, suggesting that the poem will ‘excite in the reader a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence’. It is, he argues, ‘the business of the Poet to communicate to others’ his own ‘pleasure’ and ‘enthusiasm’.<sup>62</sup>

From 1817, Shelley moves forward with a Godwinian understanding of literature as an agent of improvement. Rather than being an index of abstract idealism, ‘hope’ is a term integral to his poetic manifesto, referring to an affective psychology through which the radical humanism of the Enlightenment might be sustained in a time of crisis. We can see that Godwin is influential on Shelley in terms of his idea of perfectibility and in terms of his Dissenting theory of private judgement and reader-response. From his reading of Godwin, Shelley draws a conception of political change which positions the reform of opinion through literature and discussion as the vital agent, rather than institutions or government.

### III

But throughout his career, Shelley also expressed a pronounced sense of anxiety about Godwinian hope. *Rosalind and Helen*, a narrative poem begun at Marlow in 1817 and published in 1819,<sup>63</sup> returns to the theme of post-revolutionary disappointment discussed in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* but sets it in a more fraught context. The poem describes the suffering endured by the two eponymous protagonists in their romantic and family lives. At the centre of Helen’s woes is her former lover Lionel, a man traumatised by the collapse of the French Revolution. Her sense of despair in the present of the poem deepens when she contemplates earlier times:

Alas! all hope is buried now.

But then men dreamed the aged earth  
 Was labouring in that mighty birth,  
 Which many a poet and a sage  
 Has aye foreseen - the happy age  
 When truth and love shall dwell below  
 Among the works and ways of men;  
 Which on this world not power but will  
 Even now is wanting to fulfil.<sup>64</sup>

Helen proceeds to recall how the vision of liberty offered by the Revolution struck Lionel and ‘filled him, not with love, but faith, / And hope’.<sup>65</sup> Lionel is a poet whose speeches wield tremendous influence over the great crowds who gather before him:

Joyous he was; and hope and peace  
 On all who heard him did abide,  
 Raining like dew from his sweet talk.<sup>66</sup>

Shelley offers another idealised vision of the reception of his own poetry as the audience find themselves transformed by these words. But when the Revolution slips into violence, Lionel suffers a terrible transformation: ‘[s]tricken deep / With some disease of mind,’<sup>67</sup> he becomes a rootless wanderer who is eventually imprisoned by tyrannical priests before his early death. Where in *Laon and Cythna* the traumas of the Revolution could be surmounted through hope, *Rosalind and Helen* represents the destruction of Lionel through disappointment:

Ah, smiles and joyance quickly died,  
 For public hope grew pale and dim  
 In an altered time and tide,  
 And in its wasting withered him,  
 As a summer flower that blows too soon  
 Droops in the smile of the waning moon,  
 When it scatters through an April night  
 The frozen dews of wrinkling blight.  
 None now hoped more.<sup>68</sup>

Shelley retreats into a profound sense of melancholy in *Rosalind and Helen*. His own personal disappointment is registered in the lines on 'public hope' growing dim in 'an altered time and tide'. Shelley's interest in the radical literature of the 1790s, in Godwin and Paine, Volney and Condorcet, renders his politics primarily retrospective and acknowledges that his own time was irrevocably 'altered' in its intellectual and political character. The poem is the first of his to explore the underside of Godwinian hope. Perfectibilist faith in the advent of reason and equality here gives rise to a profound and catastrophic sense of disappointment when the individual is confronted by the practical failures of progressive politics.

The roughly contemporaneous *Laon and Cythna* and *Rosalind and Helen* express a psychological duality in their approaches to the legacy of the Revolution. Shelley's most substantial poem, *Prometheus Unbound*, emerges from the same duality. The dominant reading of the poem has been Earl Wasserman's, establishing it primarily as an exploration of skepticism, the philosophical belief Shelley drew from his reading of Hume and Berkeley that the external world is in some sense a function of the mind.<sup>69</sup> Wasserman's reading of Prometheus as 'The One Mind' has tended to fence off the poem from the contemporary specifics of Godwinian hope. In his interpretation, the poem's utopianism relates to philosophy of mind. There is a need to reconnect the skepticism discussed by Wasserman with the work's polemical aspect. The idea of hope comes to form a crucial part of Shelley's conception of the relationship between the mind and the external world.

A historicist reading of *Prometheus Unbound* must return to its Godwinian heritage, for it is in ideas of hope and reader-response that Shelley locates the poem's potential influence over its contemporary political milieu. The work is the fullest realisation of the Godwinian project of literary reformism outlined in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*. The Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* similarly situates the poem's significance in the psychological response of the reader:

My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life, which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness.<sup>70</sup>

These ‘beautiful idealisms’ echo the imaginative *beau ideal* of the French Revolution proffered in *Laon and Cythna*. With regard to the poem itself, no work of Shelley’s displays a more thorough engagement with Godwin’s endorsement of Enlightenment perfectibilism as a materially beneficial faith. The central protagonist of the poem is a defiant martyr who defends threatened ideals in a manner familiar from Godwin’s Rousseauvian novels and essays. Yet at the same time, *Prometheus Unbound* is marked by the type of anxiety seen in *Rosalind and Helen*, by a sense of the fragility of the humanist hopes inherited from Godwin.

The poem originates as a definitively humanist text. Returning to Shelley’s adaptation of his source, Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*, can illuminate the original impulse behind the work. Cameron has usefully observed that ‘[s]ome commentators have missed Shelley’s meanings by not seeing that he is in places echoing or developing ideas from Aeschylus’.<sup>71</sup> *Prometheus Bound* had itself offered a significant development on the myth of the Titan inherited from Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Where in earlier versions of the story Prometheus had acted as a cunning trickster in his theft of fire from the gods, Aeschylus made him a deliberately defiant figure who bequeathed humanity not just fire, but science, art and wisdom.<sup>72</sup> Punished by Zeus for his sympathy with humanity, Prometheus is fixed to a rock and subjected to an eternity of torment.

The political implications of the myth were given further definition in the first published English translation, made by Robert Potter and appearing as one of *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* in 1777. Zeus/Jupiter becomes a despot; he is ‘the tyrant of the skies’, a ‘new-made monarch’ opposed only by Prometheus in his ‘rising power’ and ‘empire o’er the gods’.<sup>73</sup> The Titan, half-god and half-man in classical myth, is pushed closer to humanity, described as being punished ‘[t]hat he may learn to reverence the pow’r / Of Jove, and moderate his love to man’.<sup>74</sup> It is his sympathy with humanity which causes him to send ‘blind Hope t’inhabit in their hearts’.<sup>75</sup> Shelley follows Potter’s interpretation, describing the Titan in the Preface as ‘the Champion [...] of mankind’.<sup>76</sup> By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, a fashion for using the Prometheus myth to comment on contemporary affairs was well established among liberal and radical writers, as Stuart Curran has shown.<sup>77</sup> Shelley found that Potter’s rhetoric of tyrants and monarchs overlapped with the vocabulary of the Paineite republicanism of the 1790s. And crucially, the Titan’s sympathy for humanity

and opposition to the Gods overlapped with the paeans to human reason, with the critiques of superstition and state religion offered by Volney in *Les Ruines* and Paine in *The Age of Reason*.

In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley extends the tale of how the Titan kindled the sparks of knowledge and improvement within primitive humanity further into the territory of Enlightenment humanism. Throughout the poem, Prometheus is closely associated with the Godwinian idea of human perfectibility. This association is first made clear in Asia's conversation with Demogorgon in Act II, where the former gives a lengthy speech on the improvements humanity has undergone through the ages.<sup>78</sup> She describes how, under the rule of Saturn, men lived in a primitive state, being denied 'the birthrights of their being, knowledge, power'.<sup>79</sup> Then Prometheus helped Jupiter to power, bidding him to '[l]et man be free'.<sup>80</sup> But Jupiter betrayed the Titan's trust and established a reign which saw humanity left to the mercy of famine, disease and war. Out of pity for humanity, Prometheus 'waked the legioned hopes'<sup>81</sup> and endowed them with a series of gifts:

And he tamed fire which, like some beast of prey,  
Most terrible, but lovely, played beneath  
The frown of man; and tortured to his will  
Iron and gold, the slaves and signs of power,  
And gems and poisons, and all the subtlest forms  
Hidden beneath the mountains and the waves.  
He gave man speech, and speech created thought  
Which is the measure of the universe;  
And Science struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven,  
Which shook, but fell not.<sup>82</sup>

Shelley proceeds to give a detailed narrative of improvement. Prometheus's gifts begin a process of development which brings to humanity knowledge of music, sculpture, medicine, astrology and navigation. He blends Aeschylus into the traditional Enlightenment theory of the stages of human development, a theory which ran, with varying ideological inflections, through the work of writers from Adam Smith to Condorcet. The interest in the origins of language which is evident in the writings of Smith, Hume, Kames, Monboddo and others is echoed in Asia's claim that

‘[h]e gave man speech, and speech created thought / Which is the measure of the universe’. In describing the blows dealt by science to ‘the thrones of Earth and Heaven’, the narrative tends toward a radical humanist faith in the reforming capacity of scientific knowledge characteristic of Volney, Condorcet and Godwin. To understand the politics of Asia’s speech, we need only recall Godwin’s claim in *The Enquirer* that it ‘may be laid down as an axiom that the enlightened advocate of new systems of government, proceeds upon the establishment or assumption of the progressive nature of man’.<sup>83</sup>

Prometheus comes to symbolise what we might term ultra-humanism; an Enlightenment faith in human nature and human reason which is opposed to the established authorities of religious and social institution. As the poem proceeds, Shelley gives full expression to the knowledge of radical humanism he had built up through his reading over the years. His firm grounding in this intellectual tradition is exemplified in a letter of 1812 in which he places orders for Erasmus Darwin’s *The Temple of Nature* (1801), Lord Monboddo’s *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-92) and Condorcet’s *Oeuvres* (1804).<sup>84</sup> These works all describe secular ideas of progress. Darwin, the great natural philosopher of the British Enlightenment, used *The Temple of Nature* to set out in verse his proto-evolutionary theory of humanity’s organic development from other species. Monboddo, one of the marginal figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, posited language as the purely human product of the combination of innate faculty and learned behaviour. He diverged from other theorists of language development such as Smith and Kames, who assigned divine intervention a role. Monboddo also put forward a proto-evolutionary theory in which humanity was held to have developed from other species of life.<sup>85</sup> Within Condorcet’s complete works, Shelley would have found his best known work, the *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (1795). This work has been called the clearest unified expression of the thought of the *philosophes*, ‘of the universalist dreams of the Encyclopaedists’.<sup>86</sup> As we saw in Chapter One, the *Esquisse* divided human history into ten stages of improvement, with the ninth stage being the present age of the French and American Revolutions, and the tenth that of future development. It is a work of forceful anticlericalism, depicting history as an epic battle between enlightenment and religious obscurantism. Condorcet declared that the fact of human perfectibility guaranteed enlightenment and progress towards a



universal society of equality: 'nature has indissolubly united the advancement of knowledge with the progress of liberty, virtue, and respect for the natural rights of man'.<sup>87</sup> Thomas Medwin, Shelley's friend and biographer, refers to the *Esquisse* as a work which Shelley read and discussed frequently.<sup>88</sup>

This humanist context is crucial to our understanding of the psychology of hope put forward in *Prometheus Unbound*. The fourth and final act of the poem, added in December of 1819, offers a particularly forceful statement on the optimism afforded by ultra-humanism. Act IV is an extended depiction of the utopian new age which arises after the fall of Jupiter, dwelling on the transformation of the natural world. Shelley draws on a vast array of reference to contemporary scientific knowledge.<sup>89</sup> The act celebrates the natural world in the context of humanity's burgeoning knowledge and enlightenment, rather in the terms of religious response, thus developing the message on the reforming capacity of science contained in the Prometheus myth. Science becomes a bolster to the ultra-humanist ethos of the poem. Act IV sees Shelley engage with the proto-evolutionary theories of Darwin, theories in which he was well-versed, having purchased *The Botanic Garden* (1791) and *Zoonomia* (1794), as well as *The Temple of Nature*.<sup>90</sup> Darwin's influence on *Prometheus Unbound* has been discussed by Grabo, King-Hele and Everest and Matthews,<sup>91</sup> but without uncovering the ideological context in which Shelley sets his theories of organic development.

Darwin was a key figure in middle-class freethought in the 1790s, as Martin Priestman has shown in his study of poetry and atheism in the Romantic period.<sup>92</sup> Priestman's observations on Darwin's poetry illustrate how Shelley found a fruitful connection between his work and the progressive impulse of the Prometheus myth:

Consistently hostile to religious 'superstition' as an ally of political reaction, these poems also articulate [...] an increasingly organized assault on the biblical account of creation, firstly by allying it with other 'myths' derived ultimately from Egypt, and secondly by displacing it with a wholly materialist account of the birth of the universe from a primal explosion, and the evolution of man from a primitive 'filament' through a series of experimental adaptations.<sup>93</sup>

Shelley understood Darwin in conjunction with the attack on religious despotism mounted by Volney and Paine. A member of Birmingham's progressive scientific Lunar Society alongside Priestley, Boulton, Watt and Wedgwood, Darwin was a

prominent liberal. In his *Economy of Vegetation* he acclaimed the American and French Revolutions, and praised political and scientific heroes such as Priestley and Franklin.<sup>94</sup>

The idea of Darwinian organic development quickly comes to the fore in the final act of *Prometheus Unbound*. The Semichorus of Hours heralds the arrival of the Chorus of Spirits by saying that the ‘figured curtain of sleep’ has been drawn back, ‘[w]hich covered our being and darkened our birth / In the deep’.<sup>95</sup> These Spirits, announcing themselves as representatives of the human mind, give a cryptic account of their movements:

We join the throng  
Of the dance and the song,  
By the whirlwind of gladness borne along;  
As the flying-fish leap  
From the Indian deep,  
And mix with the sea-birds half asleep.<sup>96</sup>

The Spirits go on to speak of the human mind; of its capacities for thought, love, wisdom, art and scientific knowledge. They have journeyed on a path of development, they say:

Years after years,  
Through blood and tears,  
And a thick hell of hatreds, and hopes, and fears,  
We waded and flew,  
And the islets were few  
Where the bud-blighted flowers of happiness grow.<sup>97</sup>

Shelley describes some kind of human development from birth in the deep; to fish; to wading animals; to birds; and finally to a more advanced creature: ‘[w]e are free to dive, or soar, or run’.<sup>98</sup> The process has unfolded through ‘years after years’. The passage derives from Darwin’s denial of the biblical account of creation; from his theory that all natural life evolved from one original, organic cause. Shelley seems to refer in particular to the summary of this theory we are given at one stage of *The Temple of Nature*:

Organic life beneath the shoreless waves  
 Was born and nurs'd in ocean's pearly caves;  
 First forms minute, unseen by spheric glass,  
 Move on the mud, or pierce the watery mass;  
 These, as successive generations bloom,  
 New powers acquire and larger limbs assume;  
 Whence countless groups of vegetation spring,  
 And breathing realms of fin and feet and wing.<sup>99</sup>

Shelley's Spirits undergo just such a process, beginning beneath the waves and moving through 'fin and feet and wing'. The notion that the study of the natural world provides evidence of human improvement was clearly one which he wished to ingrain within the reader's mind, as Act IV contains another lengthy sequence of evolutionary theories in Panthea's vision of subterranean remains.<sup>100</sup>

The ideology of the ultra-humanism of Act IV is further defined in the duet of Earth and Moon. The former delivers a hymn of praise to 'man' which focuses on future technological innovation:

The lightning is his slave; heaven's utmost deep  
 Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep  
 They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on!  
 The tempest is his steed, - he strides the air;  
 And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,  
 'Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none'.<sup>101</sup>

The Earth depicts humanity mastering the natural world and developing skills in electricity, astronomy, aviation and submarine travel. The stanza overlaps with the Darwinian science fiction of the Spirits' vision of the colonisation of space. But it is actually a paraphrase of a passage from Volney's *Les Ruines*, a passage which occurs after a lengthy section establishing the fact that 'man vainly attributes his misfortunes to obscure and imaginary agents'.<sup>102</sup> We begin to see that Shelley understood Darwin's secular theory of organic development in the context of the atheism and absolute faith in scientific knowledge he encountered through his reading in radical Enlightenment humanism. In the relevant section of *Les Ruines*, Volney depicts the

Genie attempting to prove to the Traveller that all religion is human projection. He argues that it is the agency of humanity, rather than that of mythical divine beings, which produces good and evil:

True, mortal creator! I pay thee homage! Thou has measured the extent of the heavens, and counted the stars, thou hast drawn the lightning from the clouds, conquered the fury of the sea and the tempest, and subjected all the elements to thy will. But, oh! how many errors are mixed with these sublime energies.<sup>103</sup>

Shelley selects only the optimistic element of this passage for the Earth's speech, repeating Volney's argument on humanity's capacity for improvement through scientific innovation. Throughout Act IV, his selective account of Darwin's natural philosophy, with its denial of the biblical account of divine creation, is blended with other strands of Enlightenment humanism, intended to emphasise by repetition the secular optimism of the Prometheus myth. In the portrait of the Hermit in *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley had described Godwin's ideas of human perfectibility as 'doctrines of human power'.<sup>104</sup> This section of *Prometheus Unbound* offers a thorough discussion of such doctrines.

The source material of the Prometheus myth proved apposite for Shelley, then, allowing him to explore the overlap between the proto-humanist hero described by Aeschylus and the traditions of the radical Enlightenment. However, the opening act of *Prometheus Unbound* is dominated not by the idea of human perfectibility, but by the powerful image of the Titan fixed to the rock in agony. Act I sees Shelley use the Prometheus myth to explore a mental landscape of torment and disappointment, a landscape with clear contemporary relevance. The Titan's address to Jupiter, with which the poem opens, describes the suffering he has endured at the hands of the King of the Gods:

Monarch of Gods and Daemons, and all Spirits  
 But One, who throng those bright and rolling worlds  
 Which Thou and I alone of living things  
 Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth  
 Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou  
 Requistest for knee-worship, prayer and praise,  
 And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,

With fear and self-contempt and barren hope.<sup>105</sup>

Prometheus's situation, and that of humanity, is portrayed as unremittingly dismal. The Titan suffers in agony, crying that there is '[n]o change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure!'<sup>106</sup> The Act follows Aeschylus closely in conforming to the traditions of tragedy by depicting intense mental suffering. The chief torment here is the absence of hope.

The central dramatic episode of the Act is the visit of the Furies, sent by Jupiter to tempt Prometheus into despair and giving up his secret. Here, Shelley deviates from the source material of *Prometheus Bound*. The Furies derive, Everest notes, 'from the Erinyes of Greek myth, avenging spirits of punishment which worked by disturbing the mind'.<sup>107</sup> Shelley draws them from Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, he suggests. In *Prometheus Unbound*, the Furies work to deepen the psychological agony suffered by the Titan, mocking him for his sympathy with humanity. They descend on their prey by sardonically addressing him as 'Champion of Heaven's slaves',<sup>108</sup> inverting the description of him as 'the Champion [...] of mankind' in the Preface. The Furies wield despair as their weapon:

We are the ministers of pain and fear,  
 And disappointment, and mistrust, and hate,  
 And clinging crime; and as lean dogs pursue  
 Through wood and lake some struck and sobbing fawn,  
 We track all things that weep, and bleed, and live,  
 When the great King betrays them to our will.<sup>109</sup>

A notable stress falls upon the first syllable of the word 'disappointment', the word invested with such particular political significance in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*. The Furies become a means for Shelley to explore the anxiety about Enlightenment optimism he had first discussed in *Rosalind and Helen*, their words inverting every article of the perfectibilist faith relayed in *Political Justice*. Their speech shows that while Shelley had thoroughly absorbed the Godwinian psychology of hope, he had also absorbed some important contemporary critiques of the Enlightenment.

The Furies attempt to end the defiance of Prometheus with two twin visions of human misery. Though not declaredly stated as such, Shelley obviously intends these

two visions to refer to the misuse of the teachings of Christ and the descent of the French Revolution into violence. The Chorus of Furies introduces the visions by taunting the Titan for his sympathy with humanity:

The pale stars of the morn  
Shine on a misery dire to be borne.  
Dost thou faint, mighty Titan? We laugh thee to scorn.  
Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou wakend'st for man?  
Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran  
Those perishing waters; a thirst of fierce fever,  
Hope, love, doubt, desire – which consume him for ever.<sup>110</sup>

The progressive hope expressed in the Prometheus myth is denied. The Titan's gifts of knowledge doomed humanity, rather than beginning its progress, the Furies claim. They then depict the coming of Christ, one who 'came forth of gentle worth / Smiling on the sanguine earth',<sup>111</sup> and see his ghost despairing at the carnage of the religious wars waged in his name. The Furies see Prometheus's futile martyrdom on behalf of humanity as an echo of the fate of Christ:

Past ages crowd on thee, but each one remembers;  
And the future is dark, and the present is spread  
Like a pillow of thorns for thy slumberless head.<sup>112</sup>

Humanity's history of brutality guarantees that 'the future is dark', offering no hope of improvement.

The Furies' mocking of the 'Champion [...] of mankind' reaches its climax with their vision of the failure of the French Revolution, trumpeted as the ultimate disappointment for those who boast of humanity's progress:

*Semichorus I*  
See, a disenchanted Nation  
Springs like day from desolation;  
To Truth its state is dedicate,  
And Freedom leads it forth, her mate;  
A legioned band of linkèd brothers  
Whom Love calls children –

*Semichorus II*

`Tis another's –  
 See how kindred murder kin!  
 `Tis the vintage-time for Death and Sin:  
 Blood, like new wine, bubbles within;  
     Till Despair smothers  
 The struggling World – which slaves and tyrants win.<sup>113</sup>

The short lines and chiming rhymes give the Furies' words an insistent, chant-like quality. Shelley replicates the sting of disillusionment by having the first Semichorus recall the benevolent ideals of the Revolution, its dedication to 'truth', 'freedom' and brotherhood, only to be suddenly interrupted at a caesura by the second Semichorus, who gleefully rebut those ideals with references to the horror of revolutionary violence and the Napoleonic Wars. This miniature narrative of the Revolution ends with a return to the natural condition of fallen humanity; the cementing of the inequalities of 'slaves and tyrants' offering a bitter echo of the rhetoric of 1790s radicalism.

Shelley returns to the mood he had identified in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, to the particular psychology engendered by the apparent failure of the Revolution. The Furies torment Prometheus with a narrative of disappointment. Shelley's preoccupation with the violence of the Terror may seem somewhat abstract, but that event was integral to many contemporary evaluations of the Revolution. It was central to the broadly contemporaneous work of Joseph de Maistre, in which revolutionary violence was viewed as divine recompense for the subversions of the Revolution, playing an important role in his conservative critique of the rationalism of the *philosophes*. Shelley is not known to have read Maistre, but the latter displays a fascination with the inevitable degeneracy of human nature that prefigures the speech of the Furies. Maistre finds nothing in nature to confirm the optimistic rationalism of a thinker such as Condorcet. Like the Furies, he employs blood as a metaphor for malevolence in his vision of the human condition: '[l]a terre entière, continuellement imbibé de sang, n'est qu'un autel immense où tout ce qui vit doit être immolé sans fin, sans mesure, sans relâche, jusqu'à la consommation des choses'.<sup>114</sup> Isaiah Berlin views Maistre as a key figure in the history of ideas for his sustained criticism of the universalism of the French Enlightenment:

In place of the ideals of progress, liberty and human perfectibility, he preached salvation by faith and tradition. He dwelt on the incurably bad and corrupt nature of man, and consequently on the unavoidable need for authority, hierarchy, obedience and subjection. [...] In place of the ideals of peace and social equality, founded on the common interests and the natural goodness of man, he asserted the inherent inequality and violent conflict of aims and interests as being the normal condition of fallen man and the nations to which he belonged.<sup>115</sup>

Maistre offered a critique of perfectibility which denied every assumption in Godwin's psychology of hope. Something of his anti-humanist philosophy is absorbed into the Furies' speech.

While there is no stated reference to Maistre, Shelley does undoubtedly invoke Coleridge's 'France: an Ode' in this section of *Prometheus Unbound*. That poem had traced the progress of its author's sentiments from joy at the outset of the Revolution to final renunciation of sympathy in the wake of imperialist war. Recalling his initial burst of enthusiasm, Coleridge had described how the monarchies of Europe joined forces 'to whelm the disenchanted nation, / Like fiends embattled by a wizard's wand';<sup>116</sup> a line recalled in the Furies' vision of a 'disenchanted Nation'.<sup>117</sup> He had referred to the Terror as a time of 'fierce and drunken passions';<sup>118</sup> a phrase echoed in the Furies' blood/wine metaphor. In abbreviated form, Shelley mirrors precisely the progress of Coleridge's political disappointment in the Furies' narrative of the Revolution.

Records of Shelley's reading suggest that he was particularly fascinated by 'France: an Ode'.<sup>119</sup> Medwin recalls that 'of all the Odes in our language, he most preferred Coleridge's on the French Revolution, [...] which he used to thunder out with marvellous energy'.<sup>120</sup> This remark indicates that Shelley's attitude to the poem was far more nuanced than that of straightforward dislike for its expression of 'apostacy'. The liberal disappointment of 'France: an Ode' was a mood which he comprehended thoroughly.

Coleridge had made his poem a public statement, originally publishing it in the liberal *Morning Post* under the title of 'The Recantation: an Ode'.<sup>121</sup> The political implications of his disappointment at the progress of the Revolution were exemplified in the author's note on the fifth stanza (a set of notes was attached to the poem in all its published versions):



*Fifth Stanza.* An address to Liberty, in which the Poet expresses his conviction that those feelings and that grand *ideal* of Freedom which the mind attains by its contemplation of its individual nature, and of the sublime surrounding objects (see Stanza the First) do not belong to men, as a society, nor can possibly be either gratified or realised, under any form of human government; but belong to the individual man, so far as he is pure, and inflamed with the love and adoration of God in Nature.<sup>122</sup>

In the face of the disappointments of practical politics, Coleridge looks to ‘God’ and ‘Nature’ as the true embodiments of ‘Liberty’, denying the possibility that freedom might be administered by ‘any form of human government’. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, the coinciding stanza of the poem addresses Liberty by claiming that it never ‘breathed’ its ‘soul in forms of human power’.<sup>123</sup> Coleridge offered not just a recantation of sympathy with revolutionary France, but a dramatic rejection of Enlightenment humanism in its entirety.

This rejection is evoked in the words of the Furies. Just prior to their twin visions of human misery, they ask Prometheus: ‘[d]ost thou boast the clear knowledge thou wakend’st for man?’<sup>124</sup> Everest and Matthews do not gloss this as a reference to ‘France: an Ode’, but it echoes the fourth stanza of the poem, in which Coleridge reflects bitterly on the invasion of Switzerland:

O France, that mockest Heaven, adulterous, blind,  
 And patriot only in pernicious toils!  
*Are these thy boasts, Champion of human kind?*  
 To mix with Kings in the low lust of sway,  
 Yell in the hunt, and share the murderous prey[?]<sup>125</sup> [my emphasis]

Looking back to ‘France: an Ode’ while writing his own poem, Shelley found some fruitful connections in Coleridge’s Promethean description of France as the ‘Champion of human kind’ which ‘mockest Heaven’. His description of the Titan in the Preface as the ‘Champion [...] of mankind’ was perhaps produced by his reading of the ‘Ode’. The taunts which the Furies direct at Prometheus are intended to express Coleridge’s anti-humanist, anti-Enlightenment belief that ideas of freedom ‘do not belong to men, as a society’.

Their speech may also be an embodiment of Shelley's thoughts on Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which had appeared earlier in 1818. In a letter to Peacock he described how he had remonstrated in vain with Byron 'on the tone of mind from which such a view of things arises'.<sup>126</sup> At one point in the canto, Byron (having all but abandoned the character of Harold) gloomily reflects on the state of Europe after Napoleon's defeat:

But France got drunk with blood to vomit crime,  
And fatal have her Saturnalia been  
To Freedom's cause, in every age and clime.<sup>127</sup>

This provides another precedent for Shelley's blood/wine metaphor of the Terror, being another example of the corrosive disappointment produced in the minds of some liberals by the failures of the Revolution.

The psychological crisis depicted in this key section of *Prometheus Unbound* provides the animating energy for the entire poem. Michael O'Neill observes that the Furies passage 'stages the inner conflicts of a generation of disillusioned liberals', but claims that it is written in 'a language of hectic statement and political shorthand'.<sup>128</sup> The judgement is unfair, as it fails to acknowledge the specificity of the language in its references to Coleridge and the direct nature of Shelley's relationship with critics of the Enlightenment.

The psychological agony undergone by Prometheus after hearing the words of the Furies is vividly evoked. Looking on, Ione asks of Panthea: '[d]arest thou observe how the fiends torture him?' She speaks of the 'low yet dreadful groan' which 'is tearing up the heart / Of the good Titan'.<sup>129</sup> For the Furies this agony is the natural product of faith in humanity:

Behold, an emblem: those who do endure  
Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap  
Thousandfold torment on themselves and him.<sup>130</sup>

However, this crisis forms the crux of the poem. Having examined disappointment, Shelley affirms the necessity of hope. Prometheus defies Jupiter and refuses to be moved to despair by the visions of the Furies:

For though dread revenge,  
 This is defeat, fierce King, not victory!  
 The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul  
 With new endurance, till the hour arrives  
 When they shall be no types of things which are.<sup>131</sup>

The words of the Furies torture; the pain and suffering caused by their vision of human degeneracy is acknowledged. But the iambic pentameter breaks down in the third line of this extract, with an unexpected stress falling on 'gird', and with 'soul' forming an extra eleventh syllable in the line. This unusual scansion makes the phrase 'gird my soul' stand out in relief. With its biblical and Miltonic resonances, the emphatic 'gird' suggests the force of Prometheus's resolution. The final line of the extract is, by contrast, a perfect iambic pentameter made up of single-syllable words, giving a flowing harmony to the Titan's declaration that the time will arrive when the visions of the Furies 'shall be no types of things which are'. There may be a trace here of the old English Jacobin phrase employed by Godwin, 'things as they are'.

Paradoxically, the torture of the disappointment contained in the memory of the Revolution's collapse becomes a source of redemption. This 'new endurance' is a vital element of the symbolic potential Shelley saw within the Prometheus myth. At no other point of the poem is the Titan's defiance, bound to the rock yet maintaining his rebellion against Jupiter, expressed with such force. This representation of Prometheus might be understood to derive in part from Godwin's literary reaction to the shifting centre of political debate in the 1790s. In his lonely defiance, the Titan is reminiscent of the particular delineation of character seen in *Caleb Williams*, *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*. The persona of the persecuted Rousseauvian solitary was a notable feature of all these novels. To some extent, Godwin's protagonists registered the persecution suffered by the Dissenters, along with the influence of Bunyan's depiction of the militant Puritan in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. But they were also intended to express the endurance of progressive hope in the face of the disappointments of the 1790s. Such an intent was made evident when Godwin imagined himself as a solitary, alienated Jean-Jacques figure in the *Reply to Parr*; one who retained his faith in perfectibility, benevolence and equality even while persecuted by anti-Jacobins and the advocates of Malthusian policy. The 'new endurance' discovered by Prometheus,

his determination to maintain his faith in humanity despite the torments of the Furies, evidences Shelley's interest in the Godwinian protagonist as an expression of hope. Like the Dissenting heroes of Godwin's novels, the solitary Titan experiences bitter suffering, but finds in that suffering a redemptive stoical attachment to threatened ideals. Scrivener, perhaps the only critic to suggest that the novels formed an important literary example for Shelley, partially discounts their significance by claiming that: '[i]n Godwin's novels, there is not even a hint of possible utopian community'.<sup>132</sup> As was suggested in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, the novels are expressions of hope in their representations of Rousseauvian sensibility, despite their gloomy appraisals of society. Shelley's Prometheus builds on this example, being firmly established as a study of enthusiasm.

The Titan's 'endurance' is crystallised in his reaction to the Furies' vision of France. Against the narrative of disappointment, Shelley sets a different interpretation of events:

Names are there, Nature's sacred watchwords – they  
 Were borne aloft in bright emblazonry;  
 The nations thronged around, and cried aloud  
 As with one voice, 'Truth, Liberty, and Love!'  
 Suddenly fierce confusion fell from Heaven  
 Among them – there was strife, deceit, and fear;  
 Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.  
 This was the shadow of the truth I saw.<sup>133</sup>

The revolutionary principles of 'Truth, Liberty, and Love' remain intact, in contrast to the renunciation enacted in the Furies' narrative. We see here a Volneyesque, idealised description of how the 'nations thronged around' in universal brotherhood. The failure is attributed to the 'fierce confusion' which falls 'from Heaven' and to the agency of 'tyrants'. The collapse of the Revolution becomes a product of the intervention of established authority, rather than of human degeneracy. As Prometheus edges in pain toward 'endurance', we see the older liberal narrative of France reasserted against Coleridge's narrative of disappointment.

The drama of torment and disappointment that we see in Act I defines the Titan's endurance as a heroic act. The virtues of the Godwinian protagonist are revived in a

new era. That *Prometheus Unbound*, as much as Godwin's novels, is preoccupied with the durability of hope is confirmed in the conclusion to the poem, where Shelley returns to the symbolic heroism of the Titan. The final stanza, spoken by Demogorgon, meditates on the nature of Promethean suffering and suggests that hope can carry a material agency over reality:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
 To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night;  
     To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;  
 To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates  
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
     Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent:  
 This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be  
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.<sup>134</sup>

After the reader has witnessed the coming of utopia, they are returned to the imagery of torment and pain with which the poem begins. We are given a litaneutical reminder of the woes to be endured in the five successive injunctions beginning with 'to'. Even while celebrating the Promethean faculty of endurance, Shelley turns to acknowledge fallen reality. From the symbol of the suffering Titan, he draws his injunction on the need 'to hope, till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates'. This elliptical statement appears to grasp at some sort of Enlightenment, Godwinian power of mind to create what it conceives. The 'wreck' of hope recalls the 'shipwrecked hopes of men' to which Shelley referred in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* when speaking of the collapse of progressive optimism which followed the failure of the Revolution. This stanza of the poem also seems to carry a similar message on the virtues of humanist hope as an antidote to post-revolutionary disappointment. Shelley also seems to draw on Godwin in his reference to the 'wreck'. In particular, his notion that the very 'wreck' might strengthen hope recalls the concluding description of utopia in *Political Justice*, in which it is suggested that disappointment will be dispelled by faith in perfectibility:

Mind will be active and eager, yet never disappointed. Men will see the progressive advancement of virtue and good, and feel that, if things occasionally happen contrary to their hopes, the miscarriage itself was a necessary part of that progress.<sup>135</sup>

Even while acknowledging the ‘wreck’, Shelley follows Godwin in being driven to an absolute conviction in the necessity of hope. Though this secular faith may appear false, it cannot be relinquished, Demogorgon’s speech warns. The visions of the Furies are in the background to this speech; such is the power with which Shelley represents disappointment and despair, their warnings on human frailty are never be dispelled.

Despite the ambiguities of Act I and even the concluding stanza, much of the main body of the poem does offer a more straightforward affirmation of perfectibilist hope. In the scheme of the poem, regeneration begins to gather pace in Act II, the springtime imagery of which contrasts with the wintry landscape of Act I. In Demogorgon’s responses to Asia’s questions, there are hints at humanity’s responsibility for evil and at religion as human projection. As we have seen, Asia then relates her Enlightenment progressivist history of humanity. The encounter with Demogorgon is central to the poem’s radical humanist message, and the landscape discovered by Asia and Panthea on their journey to his lair is in keeping with that message.<sup>136</sup> Asia describes the mountains as a testament to the power which animates them: ‘[f]it throne for such a Power! Magnificent!’<sup>137</sup> Shelley’s depiction of the mountain and the avalanche expresses a faith in the triumph of enlightenment over obscurantism:

Hark! the rushing snow!

The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,  
Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there  
Flake after flake: in Heaven-defying minds  
As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth  
Is loosened, and the nations echo round,  
Shaken to their roots: as do the mountains now.<sup>138</sup>

Through the metaphor of avalanche, Shelley describes the accumulation of knowledge and the spread of atheism. This passage, an important expression of the poem’s humanist ethos, originated in Shelley’s reaction to the attack on his atheism mounted

by *The Quarterly Review*, as Timothy Webb has shown.<sup>139</sup> Above the draft version of the passage, it is written that ‘this was suggested by the Xterly Review’.<sup>140</sup> Shelley suspected the article in question, a review of Leigh Hunt’s *Foliage*, to have been written by Southey; although it is now thought that John Taylor Coleridge was the author, continuing with the criticisms he had begun in his review of *Laon and Cythna*.<sup>141</sup> *The Quarterly Review* had drawn attention to Shelley’s habit of signing himself, in Greek, as ‘atheist’ in visitors’ albums in the Chamonix area in 1816.<sup>142</sup> The clash with *The Quarterly Review* throws into relief the ideological battles involved in the secularism of *Prometheus Unbound*. In the margin of the original manuscript, he wrote: ‘[t]he avalanche of ages’.<sup>143</sup> Shelley’s avalanche is a paean to human perfectibility and gradual progress through knowledge. The intellectual sensibilities of the passage are summed up by Webb:

The culmination of Asia’s speech is, in fact, an audacious alternative interpretation of mountain scenery, a reading of the mountain and the avalanche which deliberately invokes the very terms of orthodox response and redeploys them not for the greater glory of God but in tribute to the powers of the human mind. The inexorable and irresistible progress of the avalanche becomes not an awful sign of the workings of Divine Providence but a joyful warning of the ultimate triumph of free intellectual inquiry.<sup>144</sup>

The Promethean vocabulary of ‘heaven-defying’ specifically hints at the militant atheism popularized by Volney and Condorcet.

The expression of hope in *Prometheus Unbound* reaches a climactic pitch in Act III with the description of the new world which arises after the defeat of Jupiter and the unbinding of the Titan. In the Spirit of the Hour’s description of the changes that take place in humanity, Shelley imagines the rise of utopia. The speech forms the conclusion of Act III and was originally intended as the conclusion to the entire poem.<sup>145</sup> In its representation of Enlightenment hope, this section of *Prometheus Unbound* is very close in tenor to the conclusion of *Political Justice*, in which Godwin describes an anarchist utopia of universal justice and equality. The two passages carry in common an assumption that a universal society in which a stable ‘truth’ is apprehended is achievable, an assumption identified by Berlin as a key legacy of Enlightenment thought in his discussion of utopias.<sup>146</sup> Shelley’s utopia demonstrates his belief in the Godwinian notion that once the external corruptions of political

institution are removed, human nature will be revealed in its true benevolent character. This section of *Prometheus Unbound* thus emulates the dynamic of hope enacted in the conclusion of *Political Justice*; a fictive Enlightenment utopia is put forward as a means of stimulating the reader towards hope. Shelley's study of the new society also evidences the influence of the French Enlightenment utopias of Volney and Condorcet. E.P. Thompson remarks, in discussing Blake's reading of Volney, that the narrative of *Les Ruines* 'carries the reader forward on a wave of enthusiasm [...] to the vision of a "New Age" in which men will shed their warring religions and attain brotherhood in clear-eyed self-knowledge'.<sup>147</sup> The perfectibilist utopia of *Prometheus Unbound* has a similar design, intended to instil the reader with an enthusiastic faith in humanity's ability to progress towards a society of equality and justice.

In the Spirit of the Hour's speech, Shelley suggests that the fall of 'tyranny' will bring moral progress. The Spirit finds that the true nature of humanity is no longer obscured by constructed institutions once Jupiter has fallen:

thrones were kingless, and men walked  
 One with the other even as spirits do:  
 None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain, or fear,  
 Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows  
 No more inscribed, as o'er the gate of hell,  
 'All hope abandon, ye who enter here';  
 None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear  
 Gazed on another's eye of cold command,  
 Until the subject of a tyrant's will  
 Became, worse fate, the abject of his own,  
 Which spurred him, like an outspent horse, to death.  
 None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines  
 Which smiled the lie his tongue disdained to speak;  
 None, with firm sneer, trod out in his own heart  
 The sparks of love and hope, till there remained  
 Those bitter ashes, a soul self-consumed.<sup>148</sup>

Cameron rightly points to the serious intellectual heritage of this passage, suggesting that Shelley is raising ideas which go back 'to the contentions of Rousseau and the French encyclopedists that [...] social evil arises from the "institutions" of society'.<sup>149</sup>



We should extend this lineage to include Godwin's restating of these ideas. The sentences beginning with the repeated 'none' describe a state of transparency and equality. The fall of Jupiter, the God and King of Heaven, ushers in a psychological transformation. Humanity is redeemed from its fallen state, from the damnation described in Christian doctrine and the reactionary pessimism of Maistre. One might tie Shelley's claims on human goodness to Condorcet's conjecture that a system of universal education might in the future render common 'those habits of an active and enlightened benevolence, of a fine and generous sensibility which nature has implanted in the hearts of all and whose flowering waits only upon the favourable influences of enlightenment and freedom'.<sup>150</sup> As the Spirit of the Hour proceeds through the new world, we are told that 'women, too, frank, beautiful, and kind' are now free from 'custom's evil taint' and are speaking 'the wisdom once they could not think'.<sup>151</sup> Shelley's long-held beliefs on female emancipation coincide with Condorcet's argument that amongst the issues most important to the general good, 'we must number the complete annihilation of the prejudices that have brought about an inequality of rights between the sexes'.<sup>152</sup>

This utopia represents the fruition of the social progress envisioned by radical Enlightenment thinkers. Shelley then proceeds to picture the fall of institutions by imagining the ruin of their representative objects. What he represents here is an accelerated version of progress, in which the reader is afforded a glimpse of the demise of the 'superstition' through which humanity had enslaved itself:

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons – wherein,  
 And beside which, by wretched men were borne  
 Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes  
 Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance –  
 Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,  
 The ghosts of a no more remembered fame,  
 Which from their unworn obelisks look forth  
 In triumph o'err the palaces and tombs  
 Of those who were their conquerors, mouldering round.  
 These imaged to the pride of Kings and Priests  
 A dark yet mighty faith, a power as wide  
 As is the world it wasted, and are now  
 But an astonishment.<sup>153</sup>

Shelley's rhythmic litany recalls the power of the objects representative of the old institutions, only to dismiss them as mere memories in this utopia, as 'monstrous and barbaric shapes', as 'ghosts'. The pervasive Gothic imagery pictures the institutions of Jupiter's rule as antiquities superseded by rational progress. The battle between enlightenment and obscurantism is at an end. Like Godwin in the conclusion of *Political Justice*, Shelley speeds over the ceaseless progress through generations foreseen in the idea of perfectibility to allow the reader to contemplate the fruition of improvement.

Implicitly, the passage thus acknowledges the unsatisfactory nature of perfectibility in its deferral of hope. Shelley realises that the reader must experience textually the fulfilment of this social optimism. In using the trope of ruins to picture the end of tyranny, he recalls his earlier sonnet 'Ozymandias', which had appeared in the *Examiner* in January 1818. There the inevitability of the overthrow of imperial oppression is embodied in the ruin of the proud emperor's statue. Both 'Ozymandias' and this passage share a common debt to *Les Ruines*.<sup>154</sup> In his Preface, Volney addresses the ruins of Palmyra by claiming that they demonstrate the truth of the principles of the *Déclaration des droits*: '[by] mixing the dust of the proudest kings with that of the meanest slave, you called upon us to contemplate this example of EQUALITY'.<sup>155</sup> From Volney, Shelley draws the idea of using ruins to stage the apocalyptic moment when the institutions of monarchy and priesthood are destroyed. Yet as Brian Rigby remarks of *Les Ruines*, 'the very notion of the millennium is in many ways fundamentally at odds with a rationalist perception of history'.<sup>156</sup> Shelley's dramatisation of perfectibility must disrupt gradual progress with a vision of apocalypse. He also employs imagery of ruin, decay and death, imagery which is the antithesis of the idea of progress. Shelley attains the vantage point of history from which is possible to see the end of 'tyranny', but at the same time disrupts his own narrative of improvement. This troubled mediation between perfectibility and ruination would later be taken up by Mary Shelley in *The Last Man*.

This curiously uneasy section of the Spirit's speech gives way to the final climactic vision. Here we see how the idea of perfectibility came to occupy a central position in Shelley's political thought. The prospect of future social improvement is put forward in the most ardent terms:

The painted veil, by those who were, called life,  
 Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,  
 All men believed and hoped, is torn aside –  
 The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains,  
 Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed: but man:  
 Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,  
 Exempt from awe, worship, degree, - the King  
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise: - but man:  
 Passionless? no – yet free from guilt or pain,  
 Which were, for his will made, or suffered them,  
 Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,  
 From chance, and death, and mutability,  
 The clogs of that which else might oversoar  
 The loftiest star of unascended Heaven,  
 Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.<sup>157</sup>

Taking up the thread of human perfectibility begun in Act II with Asia's progressive history of humanity, the passage forecasts the future renovation of society. It is notable that Shelley describes the new state through negatives such as 'unclassed' and 'nationless'. Timothy Webb has remarked on the preponderance of negative suffixes and prefixes in *Prometheus Unbound*, suggesting that the terms recognise present limitations while implying a transcendent reality which the reader must try to approach. 'The *via negativa* is the road not of despair but of hope', he asserts.<sup>158</sup> The negatives show Shelley addressing himself 'to the process of reclamation, never ignoring the force of the negative but seeking where possible to replace it with the positive which lies behind'.<sup>159</sup> The 'potentiality' Webb discerns in these negatives makes them the ideal terms with which to picture the progress of perfectibility. Shelley's negatives are the counterpart of Godwin's vision of secular salvation at the close of *Political Justice*, a means of bringing the reader close to the fruition of hope. We might recall that Godwin described his utopia in negatives, developing on language found in the visions of heaven in Revelation, *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Saints Everlasting Rest*.

This language of negatives describes in particular humanity's ability to remove the limitations to which society is currently subject and progress toward a state of equality

and justice, thus providing the summation of the radical humanism of the Prometheus myth as interpreted by Shelley. In this new world, the old codes are torn away but ‘the man remains’ as ‘the King / Over himself’. The repeated claim that he is still ‘but man’ punctuates the passage. We might recall that Paine had described in *Rights of Man* how monarchy, aristocracy and democracy were ‘but creatures of the imagination’ and that ‘as there is but one species of man, there can be but one element of human power; and that element is man himself’.<sup>160</sup>

The description of humanity as ‘[e]qual, unclassed, tribeless and nationless’ is particularly significant, demonstrating Shelley’s preoccupation with equality as the principal criterion of a just society. Godwin had remarked, in his essay ‘Of Avarice and Profusion’ in *The Enquirer*, that ‘a state of cultivated equality, is that state which, in speculation and theory, appears most consonant to the nature of man, and most conducive to the extensive diffusion of liberty’.<sup>161</sup> Shelley also returns to the root of Godwin’s conjunction between equality and justice, showing a thorough familiarity with the universalist, internationalist, secularist, egalitarian principles of the French Enlightenment. Carl Woodring rightly observes that this utopia is ‘the heavenly city attributable to the *philosophes*, a cosmopolitan, supranational brotherhood of man’.<sup>162</sup> In particular, the passage displays an awareness of French discourse on rights. Shelley had produced his own *Declaration of Rights* in 1812 and seems to have continued his interest in the model of the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* (1789), which he would have found reproduced in full in Paine’s *Rights of Man*.<sup>163</sup> Here in *Prometheus Unbound* there appears to be a rendering of the first article of the *Déclaration des droits*, that ‘[m]en are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights’.<sup>164</sup> Shelley’s word ‘uncircumscribed’ seems a fair translation of the ‘imprescriptibles’ quality of the ‘droits naturels’ described in the original French. Shelley may have been driven back to the *Déclaration des droits* by his reading of Condorcet’s *Esquisse*, in which utopia is brought about by the spread of the principles of the French constitution. Condorcet, a theorist of natural rights, had collaborated with Lafayette on the drafting of the *Déclaration des droits*, the work ‘which proved to be such a spectacular feature of the rhetoric of the French Revolution’.<sup>165</sup> This interest in theories of rights, in the agency of government in augmenting the general good of society, sees Shelley distinguish the substance of his own political vision from the philosophical anarchism of Godwin to some degree.

His radical humanism achieves its most forceful expression in the fantastical science-fiction image of humanity soaring over the stars of the 'intense inane'. The influence of Condorcet is again an illuminating factor here. In describing man 'nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves, / From chance, and death, and mutability', Shelley directly refers to the section of the *Esquisse* in which it is predicted that perfectibility will bring improvements in medicine and greatly expanded life-spans:

Serait-il absurde, maintenant, de supposer que ce perfectionnement de l'espèce humaine doit être regardé comme susceptible d'un progrès indéfini, qu'il doit arriver un temps où la mort ne serait plus que l'effet, ou d'accidents extraordinaires, ou de la destruction de plus en plus lente des forces vitales, et qu'enfin la durée de l'intervalle moyen entre la naissance et cette destruction n'a elle-même aucun terme assignable?<sup>166</sup>

For Condorcet, physical perfectibility was proof of humanity's capacity for infinite improvement in government and the 'social art'. Shelley's statement on the limitations of 'chance, and death, and mutability' is directly lifted from Condorcet's argument that man will not become immortal and will remain subject to 'accidents extraordinaires' and 'destruction de plus en plus lente des forces vitales'. Medwin recalls Shelley reading aloud to him this exact section of the *Esquisse* in the context of a debate over Benjamin Franklin's theory of the omnipotence of mind.<sup>167</sup> In *Prometheus Unbound*, Condorcet's famous progressive paean to humanity is crafted into the ultra-humanist climax of the entire poem. But Shelley adapts his source-material by switching the emphasis onto what cannot be achieved. The argument presented in these lines is that 'chance, and death, and mutability' preclude man's flight through the stars. But the flow of the verse places the final emphasis not on the rational notion of limits, but on the fantastical image of humanity soaring in the 'intense inane'. The dactyls of '[p]innacled dim in the' build up to the emphatic spondees of 'intense inane', leaving the final word as an apt summation of the limitless human progress envisioned in the idea of perfectibility.

In its utopian nature, the Spirit of the Hour's speech strikes up an interesting relationship with an article published by Hazlitt in the *Examiner* in 1816. Hazlitt's review of Robert Owen's *A New View of Society* (1816) had pronounced Enlightenment utopia as 'dead and buried', as 'superannuated'. Owen's New Lanark was, Hazlitt declared, not new but old: 'as old as the *Political Justice* of Mr. Godwin,

as the *Oceana* of Harrington, as the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More, as the *Republic* of Plato'.<sup>168</sup> Having witnessed the disappointments and persecutions of the 1790s, he sourly rejected excesses of hope such as the 'doctrine of Universal Benevolence, the belief in the Omnipotence of Truth, and the Perfectibility of Human Nature'. These ideas 'are put into the catacombs at Paris', Hazlitt declared. *Prometheus Unbound* attempts to reinvest the utopian tradition with political force, to redeem the value of hope. Contrary to Hazlitt's essay, it asserts the continued relevance of Godwinian optimism.

We should understand Shelley's perfectibilist utopia in the context of Malthusian thought. By 1820, the year of the publication of *Prometheus Unbound*, the *Essay on Population* had proceeded to a fifth edition.<sup>169</sup> That year, Godwin's final reply to Malthus, *Of Population*, appeared. Malthus had, of course, used his rejection of Godwinian perfectibility as the basis of his argument for the inevitability of inequality. *Prometheus Unbound* has the air of a response to the *Essay* in its espousal of radical humanism. Shelley remarks in the Preface to the poem that he would 'rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus'.<sup>170</sup> C.E. Pulos has suggested that the reference to Jupiter's 'fatal child, the terror of the earth',<sup>171</sup> draws on the very first page of Hazlitt's *Reply to Malthus* (1807), in which the author remarks of the reform of the Poor Laws that: 'the reputation of Malthus may, I fear, prove fatal to the poor of this country. His name hangs suspended over their heads, *in terrorem*, like some baleful meteor'.<sup>172</sup> The attempt to rekindle humanist optimism which we see in the utopia of *Prometheus Unbound* emerges as a challenge to the political dominance of Malthus's denial of the Enlightenment doctrines of perfectibility and equality.

The conclusion to the poem illustrates Shelley's debt to the Godwinian idea of hope. Exactly as Godwin did in *Political Justice*, Shelley prizes the psychology engendered by perfectibility above its status as fact. It was the relentlessly optimistic humanism of the concept which attracted both. As Godwin proclaimed at an early stage of *Political Justice*, the notion that 'social institution' might be carried to 'a still higher perfection' produces a significant psychological outlook:

The very conception of this as possible is in the highest degree encouraging. If we can still farther demonstrate it to be a part of the natural and regular process of mind, our confidence and our hopes will then be complete.<sup>173</sup>

The utopia which closes *Prometheus Unbound* is intended as just such an address to the liberal reader's 'natural and regular process of mind'. We might understand the climactic passage of *Prometheus Unbound* as the culmination of the Godwinian literary project Shelley had first outlined in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*. There, he had referred to the necessity of redeeming the public psyche from the disappointments of the French Revolution and from a consequent hopelessness about the possibility of improvement.

Shelley clearly wished to emphasise ideas of progress and human perfectibility to his readership for they are also the theme of two other poems which appeared in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume, 'Ode to the West Wind' and 'Ode to Liberty'. Examining his work in terms of its discussion of the practical effects of Godwinian hope can lead us to a reappraisal of Shelley, one which moves away from the image of the entirely solipsistic poet of the Romantic Imagination put forward by Raymond Williams. The unacknowledged presence of Godwin in Shelley's idea of hope can contribute to the understanding of the poet's intellectual and political seriousness begun by historicist critics such as Cameron and Dawson. We can begin to understand his interest in hope not as an index of abstract idealism, but as evidence of his engagement with Godwin's politics and with his theory of reader-response. The utopianism of *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound* has a clear ideological underpinning.

But at the same time, we see in *Rosalind and Helen* and the speech of the Furies that Shelley's engagement with the Godwinian psychology of hope was a critical one. He is aware of countervailing critiques Enlightenment thought and often hints at a sense of the delusions of Godwinian hope, at a sense that disappointment is the inevitable result of progressive optimism.

## CHAPTER 5

*'The moral improvement of man': Percy Shelley, perfectibility  
and the utility of poetry*

## I

In May 1820, Shelley wrote to Leigh Hunt proposing a series of poems occasioned by the violent suppression of a meeting of campaigners for Parliamentary reform in Manchester a few months previously. The wording of his proposal expresses much about the development of his theories of the poetic imagination:

I wish to ask you if you know of any bookseller who would like to publish a little volume of *popular songs* wholly political, & destined to awaken & direct the imagination of the reformers.<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis upon poetry's agency on the mind of the reader, along with the perception of this agency as politically significant, evidence the influence of Godwin's literary theory. This prospective volume was a bold departure for Shelley, seeing him experiment with the genre of the popular ballad in an attempt to reach a working-class audience far removed from the select group of literary liberals to whom he customarily addressed his work. His proposal is notable for the manner in which it positions 'imagination' not simply as a faculty of the poet, but as a reciprocal one shared with the reader. The verbs used to describe the 'destined' impact of the poems, 'awaken' and 'direct', evoke the sense of a material influence over the mind of the reader. This is no abstract process - literature is seen to potentially possess a direct influence over the course of the movement for Parliamentary reform. It is possible to trace in detail the legacy borne on Shelley's theories of poetry and imagination by Godwin's ideas on literature, reader-response and improvement.

There is a line of thought on literature's role in the process of perfectibility that runs through *A Philosophical View of Reform*, the aforementioned volume of *Popular Songs* and the theory of the moral imagination developed in *A Defence of Poetry*. The Godwinian idea of perfectibility is central to the outlook of all these works. The



particular connection Godwin had envisaged between the written text and the psychological condition of the reader becomes crucial to Shelley's literary theory. Critical awareness of the manner in which Shelley's theorising on the imagination, rather than just the substance of his political philosophy, was influenced by Godwin has been limited. Michael Scrivener is one of the few critics to point out that *A Defence of Poetry* offers a social and political aesthetic situated in a line of progressive development that begins with *Political Justice*.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to Shelley's Godwinian sense of the contribution made by literature to the gradual reform of social institution through the enlightenment of opinion, we can gain a fresh apprehension of his relationship with two key intellectual currents: the movement for Parliamentary reform and Benthamite utilitarianism. Shelley's involvement in the movement for Parliamentary reform, the principal vehicle for British liberal and radical politics in the post-Napoleonic period, has been the subject of informative discussions in the work of Gerald McNiece and Paul Dawson.<sup>3</sup> However, there remains a space for a more exact examination of Shelley's attempt to wield influence through poetry, to inspire his readership with faith in a gradual, peaceful movement for reform. His interest in the campaign for Parliamentary reform needs to be viewed in conjunction with his literary theory. The connection between poetry and improvement is at the heart of the negotiations with Benthamite utility that Shelley conducts in *A Philosophical View of Reform* and *A Defence of Poetry*. In both essays, the theory of utility is explicitly evoked alongside ideas on imaginative literature's effects. Shelley's Godwinian theory of literature allowed him to respond to utilitarianism, at that time becoming the dominant intellectual force among middle-class reformers, by asserting the practical contribution to progress made by poetry. Critics have recently begun to focus on the connections between literary reformers and utilitarianism. Jeffrey Cox has shown that Bentham had close personal ties with the liberal circle centred on Hunt and the *Examiner*; while Philip Connell has suggested that Shelley's work was at the centre of a debate within the Hunt circle 'sparked by Bentham's growing influence as a legislator and a radical, and centred on the relationship between the literary culture of poetry and the practicalities of political and constitutional reform'.<sup>4</sup> Shelley hoped to justify his literary project in the face of Bentham's dismissive lack of interest in imaginative literature. His perception of his work's material impact upon the reader becomes central to his sense of the practicality

of his career as a poet. Consequently, Shelley comes to define the imagination as the principal agent of moral progress.

This nexus of relations around reform and the utility of poetry produces several illuminating statements on the value of imaginative speculations, in which we can begin to grasp Shelley's understanding of the political dimensions of the psychology of hope. In the same letter in which he proposed to awaken 'the imagination of the reformers' in his volume of *Popular Songs*, he announced his belief that 'the system of society as exists at present must be overthrown from the foundations with all its superstructure of maxims & of forms'. Shelley declared himself to be convinced of the necessity of pursuing this aim, despite the aim appearing unattainable: '[i]f faith is a virtue in any case it is so in politics rather than religion; as having a power of producing that a belief in which is at once a prophesy & a cause'.<sup>5</sup> This is the type of belief in the self-generating capacity of optimism that characterises *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*. In this letter to Hunt, hope becomes bound up with the desired influence over 'the imagination of the reformers'. This conjunction between imagination and the optimistic faith in progress is integral to Shelley's entire theory of poetry.

## II

We see the first emergence of the notion that the imagination might be an agent of progress in the fragmentary *Speculations on Morals* (1817). Shelley not only embarks on a definition of virtue that displays the influence of Godwin's moral theory, but conjoins this definition with a tentative thesis on the progressive capacity of the imagination. The essay sets out from the contention that virtue arises 'when a human being is the active instrument of generating or diffusing happiness'.<sup>6</sup> The word happiness registers Shelley's familiarity with Bentham's felicific calculus. But this emphasis on the active motivation for good follows the moral theory of *Political Justice* in distinguishing itself from the theory of Bentham, in which the general good is not entirely separated from individual self-interest. Shelley fixes on the notion that human nature can be supposed to be actively altruistic: 'benevolence, or the desire to be the author of good, united with justice, or an apprehension of the manner in which that good is to be done, constitutes virtue'.<sup>7</sup> He remarks of benevolence that it

‘remains to be stated [...] what is the probability of persuading mankind to adopt it as a universal and systematical motive of conduct’.<sup>8</sup> In the manuscript, Shelley had originally written of ‘the hopes of persuading mankind to adopt it’, before cancelling ‘hopes’ as inadequate.<sup>9</sup> But we can see that, as in *Political Justice* and Godwin’s novels, the idea of benevolence is intimately associated with progressive hope.

Having established benevolence as a fundamental principle of morality, he then proceeds to align this faculty with the imagination and poetry. Here we see an attempt on Shelley’s part to further narrow the gap between Godwin’s vision of moral progress towards a state of selfless equality and his use of literature as an educative tool. In a chapter entitled ‘Benevolence’, Shelley directly lifts from *Political Justice* the exemplum in which the infant is prompted to sympathy through his nurse’s cries of pain.<sup>10</sup> But he then suggests that the mind of a very young infant or ‘savage’ will be unable to receive such information about pain in ‘beings resembling itself’. What follows is the first intimation in Shelley’s work that the imagination can be supposed to be benevolent, progressive faculty:

The inhabitant of a civilised community will more acutely sympathise with the sufferings and enjoyments of others, than the inhabitant of a society of a less degree of civilization. He who shall have cultivated his intellectual powers by familiarity with the finest specimens of poetry and philosophy, will usually [sympathise more] than one engaged in the less refined functions of manual labour.<sup>11</sup>

Poetry is put forward as a means of refining the social affections, of stimulating in the individual the ability to sympathise and empathise with the feelings of others. It is thus aligned with ‘civilisation’ and progress. Importantly, Shelley conjoins poetry with the virtues of Godwinian benevolence, with the altruistic sympathy that had been the basis for the society of equality described in *Political Justice*.

He then proceeds to further delineate the overlap between imagination and egalitarian altruism:

The only distinction between the selfish man, and the virtuous man, is that the imagination of the former is confined within a narrow limit, whilst that of the latter embraces a comprehensive circumference. [...] Selfishness is thus the offspring of ignorance and mistake; it is the portion of unreflecting infancy, and savage solitude, or of those, whom toil or evil occupations [have

blunted and rendered torpid;] disinterested benevolence is the product of a cultivated imagination, and has an intimate connexion with all the arts which add ornament, or dignity, or power, or stability to the social state of man.<sup>12</sup>

Godwinian benevolence is defined as an act of the imagination and thus claimed as a province of the arts. It is likely that Shelley made use of the link between benevolence and the moral imagination he found in Hazlitt's *Essay on Human Understanding*.<sup>13</sup> That essay was itself a Godwinian work, denying self-interest and making a claim for innate disposition to benevolence in its argument that imagination, the act of entering into the feelings of another, was an act of altruism. Hazlitt did not position imagination in relation to literature, merely asserting its moral capacity. Even self-interest, he suggested, by which we imagine the future situation of ourselves, was a going out of self. In the *Speculations on Morals*, Shelley extends these ideas and begins to articulate the substance of his claim that poetry in particular might bring about the moral improvement of humanity through its agency on the reader. We can also glimpse the first traces of an opposition between the values of poetry and those of commercial, industrial society in the reference to the selfishness engendered by 'toil' and 'evil occupations'.

Outside of the direct relationship with poetry, Shelley makes a clear connection between benevolence and humanist ideas of progress. The concept of altruism is set down as a crux:

All the theories which have refined and exalted humanity, or those which have been devised as alleviations of its mistakes and evils, have been based upon [the elementary emotions of] disinterestedness, which we feel to constitute the majesty of our nature.<sup>14</sup>

Benevolence is identified as a fundamental source of hope, as an idea closely conjoined to progressivism. We can see this benevolist moral theory embodied in Shelley's poetry in the moment in *Prometheus Unbound* at which the Titan renounces his curse against Jupiter by declaring: 'I wish no living thing to suffer pain'.<sup>15</sup> The *Speculations on Morals* demonstrate that Shelley had thoroughly imbibed the moral theory of *Political Justice*, in which Godwin displays a fixation with the disposition to benevolence and repeatedly attacks systems of thought which situate self-interest as the primary motivation for human behaviour. Shelley follows Godwin by placing

benevolence as the ultimate criterion of virtue and also makes an implicit argument for the utility of poetry by conjoining benevolence with the imagination.

The essay also evidences another strand of thought on imagination's contribution to the process of liberal improvement. Shelley suggests that utopian hope is an element of imagination, one with immense significance within the scheme of perfectibility: 'imagination or mind employed in prophetically [imaging forth] its objects is that faculty of human nature on which every gradation of its progress, nay, every, the minutest change depends'.<sup>16</sup> In line with the perfectibilist doctrines of *Political Justice*, Shelley insists that progress can be made in fundamental 'human nature'. Importantly, imagined visions of hope are held to expand the audience's sense of human potential. This definition of the imagination sheds light on the literary reasoning behind the utopianism of *Prometheus Unbound* and *Laon and Cythna*; Again, Shelley offers an implicit argument for the utility of poetry as a means of exercising the imagination. Imagination is held to be commensurate with 'progress', with the perfectibilist hopes of the Enlightenment.

The *Speculations on Morals* are fragmentary, but they nevertheless represent the first expression of Shelley's theory of imagination as a progressive faculty. They also reveal that Godwinian hope played an integral role in the development of his ideas on imagination and the utility of poetry. We can see the animus provided by Godwin's vision of an egalitarian society in which each individual acts for the good of others and the self-interested pursuit of private property has ended. Shelley appears to locate his purpose as a poet in the representation of the hope of benevolence, in the attempt to stimulate his readership towards the exercise of the moral imagination. By yoking Godwin's hope together with the progressive literary theory outlined in *Political Justice*, he makes a forceful justification of the contribution made to liberal improvement by poetry and the imagination. The theorising on the role of poetry Shelley undertook over the course of the rest of his career recognisably derives from this point of origin.

### III

In late 1819, Shelley forged a link between his theory of the progressive nature of the imagination and the political issues of the day in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. The

status of the essay as a literary manifesto has received less recognition than the specifics of its plan for Parliamentary reform. However, the work makes a definite claim for synthesis between these two discourses. Shelley is led to make some very direct remarks on the political significance of hope, remarks that illuminate the practical intent of the imaginative utopianism that is so often present in his poetry. Indeed, in a bracketed passage from the manuscript which does not appear in published versions of the essay, he remarks that his purpose in the work is to ‘awaken, from a consideration that the present miseries of our country are nothing necessarily inherent in the stage of civilization at which we have arrived, foresight and hope’.<sup>17</sup> The work is directed towards addressing the psychological crisis brought by events in Manchester and the stalling of the movement for Parliamentary reform.

Reaffirming the idea of perfectibility to its readership, the essay involves itself in a dynamic of hope by setting the campaign for Parliamentary reform against a scale of liberal improvement that stretches back to the Greek republics. This emphasis on historical progressivism gave the essay a unique status within reformist polemics, as several critics have observed. Claiming the *Philosophical View* to be ‘the most advanced work of political theory of the age’, Cameron draws attention to the fact that: ‘[w]hile other reform pamphlets of the period are taken up almost entirely by details of program, Shelley places the movement in its historical perspective and sketches its economic background’.<sup>18</sup> Behrendt remarks that ‘Shelley’s essay proceeds from an evolutionary view of historical development that applies the essential meliorism of Godwin and, to a lesser extent, of Owen and Bentham, to a practical program for social, economic, and political reform’.<sup>19</sup>

The entire opening chapter of the *Philosophical View* is concerned with relaying an Enlightenment narrative of history which stresses humanity’s inevitable tendency toward the development of liberal democracy. We are taken through biblical times and the corrective which the opinions of Jesus Christ offered to the tyranny of the Roman Empire; through the Republics of Italy; through the Reformation and its intellectual assault on the power of ‘priests and kings’; through the English Commonwealth; through the Glorious Revolution and the limited sovereignty granted to the English people in 1688; through the system of representative democratic government developed in the United States of America; through the French Enlightenment and Revolution; before arriving at the movement for Parliamentary reform in Britain and

the ‘crisis’ provoked by events in Manchester.<sup>20</sup> We see once again in this progressive narrative, described as a ‘slight sketch of the hopes and aspirations of the human race’,<sup>21</sup> the intent to instil the reader with a liberal faith in human perfectibility.

The narrative also reveals Shelley’s interest in Benthamite utility, an interest which shapes the theory of poetry that emerges as the essay proceeds. The narrative of progress gives great prominence to Bentham as the modern exemplar of the intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment. In Shelley’s history of philosophy, Locke and his school are understood to have undermined civil and religious despotism, and to have produced the ‘political philosophers of our own age, Godwin and Bentham’. Shelley situates utilitarianism at the zenith of philosophy:

The result of the labours of the political philosophers has been the establishment of the principle of Utility as the substance, and liberty and equality as the forms according to which the concerns of human life ought to be administered.

Benthamite utility is pictured as the continuation of the radical Enlightenment, as a vehicle for expounding the principles established in the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*.

The *Philosophical View* acknowledges Benthamite utilitarianism as the dominant intellectual force within middle-class reformism. But this acknowledgement did not sit easily with Shelley’s sense of his vocation as a poet. Though there was an intimate connection between Bentham and the Hunt circle which centred on the *Examiner*, Bentham possessed a ‘notorious lack of interest in the literary preoccupations of Hunt’s society’.<sup>22</sup> The *Philosophical View* sees Shelley forced into reconciling his own poetic project with his interest in Benthamite utility, into defining the political agency of poetry in the terms of utility. His apprehension of Godwin’s literary theory on the conjunction between literature, discussion, private judgement and perfectibility affords him the basis to justify poetry in this context.

Throughout Chapter One there is an argument on the utility of poetry at work. We are told that after the Reformation, ‘the exposure of a certain portion of religious imposture [...] was attended with an extraordinary exertion of the energies of intellectual power’. Shelley places poets at the heart of this new intellectual climate: ‘Shakespeare and Lord Bacon and the great writers of the age of Elizabeth and James I

were at once the effects of the new spirit in men's minds, and the causes of its more complete development'. This mutual interplay conducted the nation to the Commonwealth with its 'temporary abolition of aristocracy and episcopacy'.<sup>23</sup> Shelley's insistent desire to emphasise the practical role of the poet within the process of improvement reaches a pitch in the final paragraphs of the chapter, in the description of England's current condition and the 'crisis in its destiny'. The 'literature of England', Shelley observes, 'an energetic development of which has ever followed or preceded a great and free development of the national will, has arisen, as it were, from a new birth'. This claim for literature's contribution to the nation's collective 'will' sees the strands of the progressive history come together in the claim that 'we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared in our nation since its last struggle for liberty'.<sup>24</sup> The pairing of 'philosophers and poets' constitutes an explicit claim for regarding literary activity as a vital stimulus towards perfectibility.

Shelley proceeds to further define his notion that transformations in political consciousness are produced principally by the reform of 'opinion' through imaginative literature:

For the most unfailing herald, or companion, or follower, of an universal employment of the sentiments of a nation to the production of beneficial change is poetry, meaning by poetry an intense and impassioned power of communicating intense and impassioned impressions respecting man and nature.<sup>25</sup>

This tentative and ambiguous statement remains unsure of the exact nature of the connection between poetry and 'beneficial change'. But imaginative literature is nevertheless held to be an agent capable of moulding 'the sentiments of a nation'. Poetry is defined as 'an impassioned power of communicating intense and impassioned impressions'. As in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, an early- Wordsworthian vocabulary of transparent sentiment is used to describe the political effects of poetry. Expanding on the nature of literature's agency upon the reader, he declares that it is 'impossible to read the productions of our most celebrated writers [...] without being startled by the electric life which there is in their words'. The poet is here envisaged as a Promethean figure giving animation to the minds of his readers.



That Shelley's negotiation between the poetic imagination and Benthamite utilitarianism was founded on an understanding of Godwin's literary theory is suggested by his famous claim that '[p]oets and philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind'.<sup>26</sup> This famous phrase derives from a passage in Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*, in which the poet is described as 'the legislator of generations and the moral instructor of the world'.<sup>27</sup> At the end of Chapter One of the *Philosophical View*, a narrative of human perfectibility, we find this curiously positioned argument on the status of poets as 'unacknowledged legislators'. Immediately after this sentence, a memorandum appears in the manuscript: '[b]efore the F.R. a better state of public mind - The panic-giving arrows - All the great writers full of hope'.<sup>28</sup> Returning to his preoccupation with the psychological legacy of the French Revolution, Shelley suggests that the legislative power of the poet lies in their ability to stimulate liberal hope.

He thus justifies the role of poetry against the demands of Benthamite utility. Critical misapprehension of his relation to Bentham can be addressed by recognising that, of the latter's works it was the *Plan for Parliamentary Reform* (1818, 1819) that exercised the greatest hold over Shelley at this time. In a letter to Hunt, he described the *Philosophical View* as 'a kind of standard book for the philosophical reformers politically considered, like Jeremy Bentham's something, but different & perhaps more systematic'.<sup>29</sup> The philosophical case for reform made by Bentham in the *Plan* is particularly important to the psychology of hope Shelley constructs in his essay. Arguing that radical parliamentary reform (meaning the immediate introduction of universal suffrage for men and women) was 'the country's only hope', Bentham demonstrated how monarchic and aristocratic interests had constructed an alliance 'against the people and their interests'.<sup>30</sup> Taking the system of representative democracy developed in the United States as his model, he suggested that participation in democracy ought to be extended universally, to 'the poor suffering and starving people'.<sup>31</sup> The simplified edition published by Wooler in 1819 with Bentham's support was intended to bring the *Plan* to a wider audience and subtly shifted its argument into an urgent, almost Paineite, rhetoric of democracy. Particularly important to Shelley was the manner in which Bentham made a moral case for reform, using the felicific calculus to demonstrate the necessity of universal suffrage:

In all eyes but those to which tyranny is the only enduring form of government, what principle can be more impregnable than universal suffrage?

1. Who is there that is not susceptible of discomfort and comfort, of pain and pleasure?
2. Of what is human *happiness, felicity, well-being, or welfare* composed, but comfort, and absence of discomfort, pleasure and exemption from pain?
3. What greater or less part of the universal happiness and unhappiness is the happiness or unhappiness of any one member of the community, high or low, rich or poor, in comparison with any other?<sup>32</sup>

Bentham's argument for universal suffrage on the egalitarian grounds of 'human happiness' is central to the *Philosophical View*, affording Shelley the basis for his own moral case for the advancement of reform.

In the influential *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams identifies utilitarianism as the philosophy of nascent industrialism.<sup>33</sup> His understanding of the 'Romantic Artist' is thus based on a binary opposition between utility and literature. However, this opposition is not borne out in the *Philosophical View*, as Connell observes:

[F]ar from identifying philosophic radicalism with industrialisation and the iniquities of capitalist society, the *Philosophical View* suggests that, at least in 1820, Shelley considered Bentham's philosophy to offer an important corrective to economic inequality and the spirit of commerce.<sup>34</sup>

From the nexus of connections between reform, utility and poetry emerges the final chapter of the *Philosophical View*, a discussion of the 'Probable Means' of achieving Parliamentary reform. Here, Shelley's frequent explorations of the self-generating capacity of hope connect with the context of the theory of the imagination set out in the *Speculations on Morals* and the utopian climax of *Prometheus Unbound*. The chapter begins by defining Parliamentary reform according to Rousseauvian theories of the social contract and popular sovereignty, and Paineite notions of equal rights. As in *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley displays his Godwinian heritage by locating the ultimate goal of progress as the achievement of a state of equality. The hope for such a society is seen to have an essential role in directing reform in the present:

Equality in possessions must be the last result of the utmost refinements of civilization; it is one of the last conditions of that ultimate system of society, towards which with whatever hope of ultimate success, it is our duty to tend. We may and ought to advert to it as to the elementary principle, as to the goal, unattainable, perhaps, by us, but which, as it were, we revive in our posterity to pursue. We derive tranquillity and courage and grandeur of soul from contemplating an object which is, because we will it, and may be, because we hope and desire it, and must be if succeeding generations of the enlightened sincerely and earnestly seek it. We should with sincere and patient aspiration <...> But our present business is with the difficult and unbending realities of actual life, and when we have drawn inspiration from the great object of our hopes it becomes us with patience and resolution to apply ourselves to accommodating our theories to immediate practice.<sup>35</sup>

Elements of this passage adapt Godwin's comments on the 'state of cultivated equality' in his essay 'Of Avarice and Profusion' in *The Enquirer*:

It is reasonable therefore to take this state as a sort of polar star, in our speculations upon the tendency of human actions. Without entering into the question whether such a state can be realised in its utmost extent, we may venture to pronounce that mode of society best, which most nearly approaches this state.<sup>36</sup>

Shelley's passage offers a clear demonstration of how Godwin's psychology of hope came to be central to his political theory. The Enlightenment hope for progress and equality set out by Godwin can not only offer psychological sustenance, bringing 'tranquillity and courage and grandeur of soul' to the individual mind, but can materially influence reality. Hope is an embodiment of the Godwinian notion of the omnipotence of the mind, a self-generating and self-fulfilling faculty which might create the very state of equality which it contemplates.

Yet at the same time, Shelley represents this hope as a fiction. Godwin suggests that the state of equality should act as a 'polar star' to guide our conduct, regardless of the ultimate possibility of the fulfilment of this goal. In the *Philosophical View* this sentiment topples over into uncertainty and anxiety. We see this in the claim that it is our duty to tend towards a society of equality 'with whatever hope of ultimate success'; in the observation that this goal may be 'unattainable, perhaps, by us'. Hope is a kind of fiction. This view is expressed when Shelley speaks of contemplating an object 'which is, because we will it, and may be, because we hope and desire it, and

must be if succeeding generations of the enlightened sincerely and earnestly seek it'. This sentence is unsure of the relation between hope and reality, fluctuating between 'is', 'may be' and 'must be'. The exact relationship of causation between interior psychology and external political matters is left entirely uncertain.

The manuscript peters out at the significant word 'aspiration', resuming as Shelley returns to the 'unbending realities of actual life' and dispels the fictions of hope by contemplating the act of 'accommodating our theories to immediate practice'. This contradicts the claims of the previous sentences, which had denied any distinction between interior hope and external reality. Shelley eventually comes to state that there is a distinction between practical reform and the fictions of hope.

This anxious defence of equality and the hope of improvement demands to be seen in the context of Malthus. Shelley's theorising on hope derives in part from Hazlitt's earlier defence of equality in his *Reply to Malthus*. In one particular passage, Hazlitt describes how he is 'as little sanguine in my expectations of any great improvements to be made in the condition of human life either by the visions of philosophy, or by downright, practical, parliamentary projects, as Mr. Malthus himself can be'. But he then declares himself to be nevertheless implacably opposed to the psychology of the *Essay on Population*:

Take away the hope and the tendency to improvement, and there is nothing left to counteract the opposite never-failing tendency of human things 'from bad to worse'. There is therefore a serious practical reason against losing sight of the object, even when we cannot attain it.<sup>37</sup>

Shelley's vocabulary is very close to Hazlitt's, referring to the duty of 'contemplating an object' which may be 'unattainable'. Something of Hazlitt's dissatisfaction with 'visions of philosophy' is accommodated in the uneasy meditations on improvement we see in the *Philosophical View*.

Yet any response to Malthus remains at the level of putative psychology rather than definitive argument. A few pages on in the essay, Shelley continues his discussion of hope as fiction in the midst of setting out his detailed plan for Parliamentary reform. Adhering to the gradualist principles of Godwinian perfectibility, he rejects the possibility of immediately establishing universal suffrage, claiming that it might provoke an immature and precipitate attempt at a Republic, with a consequent descent

into violence and reaction. Setting out his plan, Shelley argues for an acceptance of partial reform at first (involving the dismantling of the rotten boroughs; the transference of suffrage to unrepresented cities; the initial extension of voting rights to male property owners) by invoking the scale of human perfectibility. In this plan, Shelley has sometimes been credited with anticipating the gradual extension of suffrage through the successive Reform Bills of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We can see here the faith which Shelley placed in Godwin's idea of perfectibility as a fruitful middle-ground between despotism and revolutionary violence. However, when he defends partial reform against those who would reject it in favour of radical reform, his Enlightenment optimism is laced with a sense of doubt:

We might thus reject a Representative Republic, if it were obtainable, on the plea that the imagination of man can conceive of something more absolutely perfect. Towards whatsoever we regard as perfect, undoubtedly it is no less our duty than it is our nature to press forward; this is the generous enthusiasm which accomplishes not indeed the consummation after which it aspires, but one which approaches it in a degree far nearer than if the whole powers had not been developed by a <delusion.> – It is in politics rather than in religion that faith is meritorious.<sup>38</sup>

The word 'delusion' is intensely significant. Shelley is discussing the idea of human perfectibility, of ceaseless improvement. Wavering over his exact commitment to this idea, he crossed out the word 'delusion' in the manuscript. The observation on the merits of political 'faith' makes explicit the connection between secular and religious hope that was always implicit in Godwin's work. He appears to state that he understands the secular notion of improvement as a transposition of religious faith. Furthermore, he understands this secular faith to be a 'delusion'. This passage amplifies the thought evident in the earlier reflection that the society of equality is 'unattainable, perhaps, by us'; that it is a state towards which we must strive 'with whatever hopes of ultimate success'. That Shelley has Godwin in mind here is suggested in his reference to the 'generous enthusiasm which accomplishes not indeed the consummation after which it aspires'. This recalls the opening chapter of *Political Justice*, which speculates on the possibility that humanity might one day attain a state of 'true freedom and perfect equity'. Godwin regards the contemplation of such a state

as psychologically beneficial: '[i]f there be the faintest hope that this shall be the final result, then certainly no subject can inspire to a sound mind such generous enthusiasm, such enlightened ardour and such invincible perseverance'.<sup>39</sup> Shelley's implicit suggestion is that Godwin's 'generous enthusiasm' was generated by a delusory faith in moral progress and equality that can never achieve fulfilment.

The *Philosophical View* at once articulates a perfectibilist faith and expresses intense scepticism about that faith. It puts forward a conviction in literature's capacity for aiding reform while appearing to deny the material significance of fictions. Towards the end of the final chapter, Shelley revives his idea on the combined contribution to improvement made by 'poets and philosophers'. Some of the leading authors of the age might group together, he suggests, using literary and philosophical endeavour to provide a beacon of liberal opinion which will guide the course of progress:

The poets, philosophers and artists ought to remonstrate, and the memorials entitled their petitions might shew the diversity of convictions they entertain of the inevitable connection between national prosperity and freedom, and the cultivation of the imagination and the cultivation of scientific truth, and the profound development of moral and metaphysical enquiry. Suppose these memorials to be severally written by Godwin, Hazlitt, Bentham and Hunt, they would be worthy of the age and of the cause; these, radiant and irresistible like the meridian sun would strike all but the eagles who dared to gaze upon its beams, with blindness and confusion.<sup>40</sup>

The passage posits a series of links, tying the highly significant 'cultivation of the imagination' to 'national prosperity and freedom'. This group of authors sets Bentham alongside the prominent literary reformers of the *Examiner* circle, the poet and essayist Hunt and the critic Hazlitt; as well as Godwin, who had of course combined philosophical and literary endeavour in his career. Describing the effect of their writings on what he elsewhere describes as 'public opinion', Shelley offers an idealised projection of reader-response that unites the passage with his earlier argument on the positive material effect of hopeful fictions. The works of these authors are pictured as 'radiant and irresistible like the meridian sun', and their direct impact upon the public mind is represented in the forceful word 'strike'. The

metaphor of beams of light is suited to what is an enactment of the rational Enlightenment ideal of the progressive reform of opinion.

Thus Shelley closes the essay by reaffirming the conjunction between the ‘cultivation of the imagination’ and the process of reform. Imagination and poetry are seen to have an impact measurable in terms of the utilitarian calculus of the greatest good. Yet the *Philosophical View* is far from conclusive in this thesis. The claims for poetry’s direct effect on practical reform are somewhat ill-defined, their indistinct nature perhaps an index of the fraught territory into which Shelley was pushed by his desire to measure poetry against the pressures of Benthamite utilitarianism. He finds himself on the verge of making a claim on the worth of imaginative fictions in terms of their expression of progressive hope, but sheers back from this prospect because of his scepticism over the ‘delusions’ of Enlightenment optimism. The *Philosophical View* sets out to argue for the manner in which poetry might enlighten its readership and effect political improvement through communicating Godwinian hope, but is led into questioning the very substance of Godwin’s optimism.

#### IV

Before beginning the *Philosophical View* in 1819, Shelley was engaged in writing the poems which made up the putative *Popular Songs*. The volume is his most coherent practical articulation of his Godwinian ideas on the material effect of the imagination, on reader-response as a means of political change. Written in the midst of the ‘crisis’ in the Parliamentary reform movement, the argument on the necessity of hope put forward, in problematic fashion, in the *Philosophical View* is once more apparent. Addressing his audience with the intent of staving off the alternative threats of despair and a destructively violent revolution, Shelley attempts to instil a faith in the peaceful, gradual process of reform by working on ‘the imagination of the reformers’. The fact that the *Popular Songs* are aimed at a working-class audience entirely distinct from Shelley’s usual audience has led some critics to view the poems as separate from the main body of his work. Yet the immediacy of the relationship with the reader which these poems foster makes them the most direct expression of Shelley’s preoccupation with the reception and material effect of his work.

It is this interest in reader-response, derived from Shelley's reading of Godwin, which accounts for the unique demotic style of the *Popular Songs*. The importance of William Cobbett as a source for Shelley's economic theory is well established, but his stylistic influence on the poet has not been so readily recognised. The *Popular Songs* seek to emulate the example of the *Political Register*, employing the demotic style as a means of working directly upon the mind of the reader. In his reading of the *Political Register*, Shelley encountered an example of literature exercising enormous political influence over a mass working-class audience. The *Examiner*, which remained somewhat sceptical of Cobbett, nevertheless recognised him as the single most significant voice in modern politics.<sup>41</sup> Examining Cobbett's influence on the *Popular Songs* reveals much about the volume's literary and political intent, about its attempt to mould the psychology of the reader.

The direct nature of Shelley's appeal to his audience in this collection is evident in the title of 'Song to the Men of England' and in the second part of 'The Mask of Anarchy', which takes the form of an address to 'The Men of England'. At such moments we see the poet directly address his reader as 'thou'. These direct addresses clearly stem from the example of Cobbett's *Political Register*, most notably from his famous editorial of 1816, 'An Address to the Journeymen and Labourers of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland'.<sup>42</sup> The *Political Register* was regularly headed by such articles, addressed 'To the Men of Kent', 'To the Weavers and Apprentices of Lancashire' and as 'A Letter to all True-Hearted Englishmen'. The political implications of Cobbett's demotic style can be seen in the 'Address to the Journeymen and Labourers of England', in which he declaims against a Parliamentary proposal to reduce poor rates (a scheme which he believed to have been conceived under the influence of Malthus) by arguing that the nation's wealth is produced by the labour of the poor. This primitive labour theory of value forms the basis for a direct appeal to the reader:

With this correct idea of your own worth in your minds, with what indignation must you hear yourselves called the Populace, the Rabble, the Mob, the Swinish multitude; and with what greater indignation, if possible, must you hear the project of those cruel and insolent men, who, now that you have been, without any fault of yours, brought into a state of misery, propose to narrow the limits of parish relief, to prevent you from marrying in the days of your



youth, or to thrust you out to seek your bread in foreign lands, never more to behold your parents or friends?<sup>43</sup>

An insistent 'you' punctuates this passage. Though Cobbett addressed a mass audience, his essential literary tactic was to cultivate an intimacy between author and reader, an intimacy here intended to rouse 'indignation' against Malthusian policy. Shelley adopts this style of direct address in 'Song to the Men of England', as the opening stanza demonstrates:

Men of England, wherefore plough  
For the lords who lay ye low?  
Wherefore weave with toil and care  
The rich robes your tyrants wear?<sup>44</sup>

Well-schooled in Godwin's theories of reader-response and the progressive effects of imaginative literature, Shelley looks to Cobbett as his literary model in engaging his new working-class readership.

Through this immediate connection with the reader, the *Popular Songs* attempt to propagate an enthusiasm for certain reformist doctrines. Shelley constructs a rhetoric of popular sovereignty, distilling Rousseau's ideas on the general will and Paine's theory of universal rights into the form of the popular ballad in an attempt to augment the gradual enlightenment of opinion. The centrepiece of his address to the reformers is 'The Mask of Anarchy', which imagines an irresistible movement for democracy arising from the crisis of St Peter's Fields in Manchester. The poem is driven by its psychological effects, by a pronounced strand of radical millenarianism. Earlier I observed that in the same letter in which Shelley had outlined his wish to mould 'the imagination of the reformers' in *Popular Songs*, he had spoken of the dynamics of hope, remarking that '[i]f faith is a virtue in any case it is so in politics rather than religion; as having a power of producing that a belief in which is at once a prophesy & a cause'.<sup>45</sup> We have seen that this sentiment on the conjunction of secular and religious hope recurs in the *Philosophical View*, where it is treated more sceptically. 'The Mask of Anarchy' directly renders these ideas on hope's capacity to shape the external world. The poem evidences powerfully the influence of Godwin - not in the substance of its politics of popular rights and democracy, concepts critiqued in the

anarchist philosophy of *Political Justice* - but in its conviction in the practical effect of hope communicated through literature.

‘The Mask of Anarchy’ possesses a structure broadly similar to that of *Prometheus Unbound*. In the latter poem, we proceed through the crisis of the Titan’s torment, through the fall of Jupiter, to the rise of egalitarian utopia. The shorter ballad makes a comparable progression through the crisis of contemporary England under the repressive rule of Lord Liverpool’s cabinet, to the imagined triumph of reform and the rise of a vast popular ‘Assembly’. Despair gives way to redemption and hope in both instances. The opening section of ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ presents us with a ‘ghastly masquerade’ in which the leading members of Liverpool’s cabinet are disguised as Murder, Fraud and Hypocrisy. Alongside the skeletal King, Anarchy, they form a quartet intended to invoke the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. This vision of England as the Babylon of Revelation is directly aimed at the sensibilities of the poem’s working-class audience, an audience associated with millenarian political fervour since the 1640s.<sup>46</sup> The biblical phrasing affords the narrator a visionary power. This visionary state is also registered as a product of the imagination in the opening stanza of the poem:

As I lay asleep in Italy  
There came a voice from over the Sea,  
And with great power it forth led me  
To walk in the visions of Poesy.<sup>47</sup>

This stanza represents the poem as a dream-vision and as an act of the poetic imagination. The ‘voice’, relaying the news of St Peter’s Fields, is seen to stimulate the ‘visions of Poesy’. Shelley begins the poem by depicting its genesis in the imagination, stressing its status as a creative act.

Through the dream-vision, he describes a nightmarish world in which Anarchy governs, wielding state violence over his helpless subjects. After the procession of Murder, Fraud and Hypocrisy, there is a Godwinian critique of government and institutions in the vision of Anarchy riding by like ‘Death in the Apocalypse’:

And he wore a kingly crown,  
And in his grasp a sceptre shone;

On his brow this mark I saw –  
 ‘I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!’<sup>48</sup>

The ‘mark’, part of the vocabulary of Revelation, reveals Anarchy’s status as the embodiment of governing institutions.

The poem’s dramatic crux occurs when the masquerade is interrupted by a figure with the name of Hope. The word Shelley had used with such specific inflection since 1817 to refer to a liberal humanist faith in perfectibility recurs at the pivotal stage of ‘The Mask of Anarchy’. As Anarchy proceeds to his ‘pensioned Parliament’, he is suddenly interrupted:

When one fled past, a maniac maid,  
 And her name was Hope, she said:  
 But she looked more like Despair,  
 And she cried out in the air.<sup>49</sup>

As ever, interior psychological states are integral to Shelley’s portrayal of contemporary politics. This stanza suggests that Hope can barely be distinguished from Despair under the dismal rule of Anarchy. Shelley then describes a curious series of events. When Hope lies down in the street before the procession of Murder, Fraud and Anarchy, she expects to be crushed. However, a ‘mist’ rises up, which is ‘small at first, and weak, and frail / Like the vapour of a vale’. The mist grows into a ‘shape’ which is able to move through the air:

As flowers beneath May’s footstep waken  
 As stars from Night’s loose hair are shaken  
 As waves arise when loud winds call  
 Thoughts sprung where’er that step did fall.<sup>50</sup>

The ‘prostrate multitude’ looking on then find that ‘Hope that maiden most serene / Was walking with a quiet mien’, and ‘Anarchy, the ghastly birth, / Lay dead upon the earth’. The destruction of the ‘ghastly masquerade’ then gives way to the second section of the poem, in which the ‘indignant Earth / Which gave the sons of England birth’ addresses the Men of England’. Shelley’s belief in the capacity of liberal hope to create what it contemplates, expressed in *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*

and the *Philosophical View*, is enacted here in 'The Mask of Anarchy'. Suddenly, the rule of 'GOD, AND KING, AND LAW' is dispelled through the agency of hope.

That this process of redemption is intended to be read in terms of Christian experience is suggested in the parallels with *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The figure of Hope recalls the character of Hopeful who accompanies Christian through his pilgrimage to the Celestial City in Bunyan's work. 'The Mask of Anarchy' is peopled with allegorical figures of Murder, Fraud and Hypocrisy who resemble the allegorical figures of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Indeed, one of the figures whom Christian discovers in the act of taking a short cut over the Wall of Salvation is named Hypocrisy.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the opening lines of 'The Mask of Anarchy', in which the narrator introduces a dream-vision that came to him '[a]s I lay asleep in Italy', are similar to the opening of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in which the narrator introduces a dream-vision: '[a]s I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place, where was a den; and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and as I slept I dreamed a dream'.<sup>52</sup> *The Pilgrim's Progress* was a text established in working-class consciousness to a degree surpassed only by the Bible;<sup>53</sup> 'The Mask of Anarchy' suggests that Shelley saw it as a useful tool in his attempt at reaching a new audience. I suggested in Chapter One of this thesis that the work had carried the psychological dynamic of Calvinism into the heart of Godwin's political thought. *The Pilgrim's Progress* took its reader through trials, tribulations and despair; through the Slough of Despond and the Giant Despair's Doubting Castle on a voyage toward the Celestial City. 'The Mask of Anarchy' might be understood as an attempt to recreate this cycle of religious despair and hope in a political context.

Elsewhere in the *Popular Songs*, the sonnet 'England in 1819' relies upon a similar cycle, its first twelve lines gloomily detailing the condition of the nation before the sudden dramatic reversal of the final couplet. Shelley describes England in the grip of a parasitic governing class of 'rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know, / But leech-like to their fainting country cling'.<sup>54</sup> The sonnet continues with a view of the aftermath of St Peter's Fields which sees '[a] people starved and stabbed in the untilled field'. The final prospect is of the unreformed and unrepresentative Parliament, the crisis to which the entire volume of *Popular Songs* was ultimately directed: '[a] Senate – Time's worst statute unrepealed'.<sup>55</sup> This indignant litany offers a fresh image of corruption in each end-stopped line, working up a rhythm which is

only interrupted by the final couplet, in which present ills are revealed to be: ‘graves, from which a glorious Phantom may / Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day’.<sup>56</sup> The sonnet’s single instance of enjambement leads the reader into the climactic plosive of ‘burst’, placed at the beginning of the final line. The ‘shape’ that arises in the wake of Hope in ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ is close to the ‘Phantom’ who figures in ‘England in 1819’.

Both these attempts to embody the triumph of hope owe much to the character of the Genius in Volney’s *Les Ruines*. The Traveller first sees the Genius as ‘a pale apparition, enveloped in an immense drapery’.<sup>57</sup> In the original French it is described as ‘un Fantôme’.<sup>58</sup> We might recall that Volney’s ‘Fantôme’ had revived the Traveller from despair at humanity by offering him an ultra-humanist vision of the French Revolution as secular apocalypse. The Fantôme had declared his intention to ‘revive the hope of this man; for if he who loves his fellow creatures be suffered to despair, what will become of nations?’ The statement on the self-generating capacity of hope which Volney gave to the Fantôme would prove crucial to Shelley’s theory of the political significance of imaginative literature:

The past is perhaps but too much calculated to deject him. Let us then anticipate futurity; let us unveil the astonishing age that is about to rise, that virtue, seeing the end of its wishes, be animated with new vigour, and may redouble its efforts to hasten the accomplishment of it.<sup>59</sup>

The Phantom-like shapes that appear in ‘England in 1819’ and ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ both herald visions of the regeneration of society. They embody Shelley’s attempt to communicate enthusiasm to the reader, to, in Volney’s terms, animate the reader with ‘new ardour’ for the new age.

‘The Mask of Anarchy’ constitutes an attempt to transmit this optimism to the reader as a means of bringing about Parliamentary reform. After the first section of the poem has represented the transformation brought by Hope, the second offers a more practical discussion of the process of effecting Parliamentary reform. It begins with a Cobbett-like address to the readership:

“Men of England, heirs of Glory,  
Heroes of unwritten story,

Nurslings of one mighty Mother,  
 Hopes of her, and one another;  
 Rise like lions after slumber  
 In unvanquishable number  
 Shake your chains to Earth like dew  
 Which in sleep had fallen on you –  
 Ye are many – they are few’.<sup>60</sup>

The democratic ethos of the *Popular Songs* is encapsulated in the final line, which offers a concise statement of basic popular sovereignty. Again, the demotic address strives to achieve an immediate connection with the audience and a consequent influence over their collective psychology.

Shelley then repeats the lesson he had learned from the liberal histories of the French Revolution, imploring the ‘Men of England’ to disavow violent revenge:

“Then it is to feel revenge  
 Fiercely thirsting to exchange  
 Blood for blood – and wrong for wrong –  
 Do not thus when ye are strong’.<sup>61</sup>

In August of 1819, the *Examiner* had published a letter from Henry Hunt, the radical orator who had addressed the crowd at St Peter’s Fields, in which he blamed the Government for the violence that had erupted that day and for the likely consequences of that violence: ‘the blood of the poor murdered people sits heavy on their heads. [...] I fear it will never be forgiven, and that there will be “blood for blood”’.<sup>62</sup> Adopting Henry Hunt’s vocabulary, Shelley warns the reformers against revenge.

The poem’s indignant tone has led some critics to regard it as a rallying-cry for revolution.<sup>63</sup> But its urgent, Cobbett-like register is in fact intended to stimulate a faith in gradual reform that will avoid violent revolution. Underlying the address to the ‘Men of England’ are the gradualist principles of perfectibility found in *Political Justice*. Shelley’s definition of Freedom crystallises his ideal of gradual improvement. In a moment which expresses an Enlightenment faith in the power of the rational mind, he asserts that if ‘slaves’ were able to define freedom, then ‘tyrants would flee / Like a dream’s dim imagery’.<sup>64</sup> The theorising of the *Philosophical View* on the

necessity of the hope for equality is given practical expression in Shelley's image of freedom as the happy home:

“For the labourer thou art bread,  
And a comely table spread  
From his daily labour come  
In a neat and happy home.  
Thou art clothes, and fire, and food  
For the trampled multitude –  
No – in countries that are free  
Such starvation cannot be  
As in England now we see”.<sup>65</sup>

The image of the ‘happy home’ is intended to convey to the reader in comprehensible terms the abstract notion of reform. The egalitarian emphasis on the happiness and comfort of all is reminiscent of Bentham's description of reform in his *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*.

The continuation of Shelley's definition of freedom returns to the ideals of Enlightenment humanism, seeing Freedom as encompassing Justice (meaning universal justice and the end of the corruption of laws by wealth), Wisdom (the freedom to think ‘untrue’ that which is stated by ‘priests’) and Peace (an end to expensive ‘liberticide’ wars which have proved responsible for the excessive taxation of the poor). Shelley's attachment to an ideal of gradual improvement through the diffusion of knowledge is made clear in the final definition of Freedom:

“Science, Poetry, and Thought  
Are thy lamps; they make the lot  
Of the dwellers in a cot  
So serene, they curse it not”.<sup>66</sup>

While ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ is addressed to an audience far removed from that of *Prometheus Unbound*, they hold in common a perfectibilist vision of ‘Science, Poetry, and Thought’ as the means of improvement. As in the *Philosophical View*, poetry is situated alongside other discourses as a vital agent of human progress. In this case poetry is seen to directly affect the happiness of ‘the dwellers in a cot’. ‘The Mask of

Anarchy' thus embodies the utilitarian definition of poetry we see in Shelley's contemporaneous essay.

The second part of the poem takes up the idea expressed in the *Philosophical View* that interior hope, the act of 'imaging forth' as it is described in the *Speculations on Morals*, might influence material reality. It was suggested in the *Philosophical View* that we 'derive tranquillity and courage and grandeur of soul from contemplating an objects which is, because we will it, and may be, because we hope and desire it'.<sup>67</sup> The succession of fictive images of reform which we see in 'The Mask of Anarchy' embody that theory. After picturing the 'neat and happy home', Shelley imagines a reform meeting, thus evoking one of the most potent images of British radical politics in the post-Napoleonic era. Since Spa Fields in 1816, mass meetings had become the principal means of expression for the popular democratic movement. The ultimate intention of 'The Mask of Anarchy' is to stimulate readers to engage in further peaceful reform meetings on the scale of that which took place in Manchester. This aim is expressed in the idealised image of a reform meeting:

"Let a great Assembly be  
Of the fearless and the free  
On some spot of English ground  
Where the plains stretch wide around.  
Let the blue sky overhead,  
The green earth on which ye tread,  
All that must eternal be  
Witness the solemnity".<sup>68</sup>

The words 'English' and 'England' recur frequently in the *Popular Songs*. The invitation to meet on 'some spot of English ground' invokes the traditions of the freeborn Englishman, of the popular conception that the English were the inheritors of an ancient liberty stretching back to the days of Magna Carta. This tradition was entirely alien to Shelley's Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, but it was one to which he was willing to turn in the attempt to engage a working-class audience. The meeting is pictured as an 'assembly', a word which carries suggestions of a grand democratic purpose.



That such images are explicitly related to Shelley's idea of the utility of the imagination is suggested in the final stanza of the poem. Recalling the events at Manchester, there is an image of a meeting set upon by a bloodthirsty militia. Readers are enjoined to stand 'calm and resolute' in the hope of shaming soldiers and 'tyrants' into submission through passive disobedience. Such 'slaughter', claims Shelley, will be to the 'nation' like 'inspiration', a 'volcano heard afar'. However, the poem does not close with this famous image of the people standing in defiance of the military. The final lines suddenly switch their focus to the agency of the poet:

"And these words shall then become  
 Like Oppression's thundered doom  
 Ringing through each heart and brain,  
 Heard again – again – again –  
 Rise like lions after slumber  
 In unvanquishable number –  
 Shake your chains to earth like dew  
 Which in sleep had fallen on you –  
 Ye are many – they are few".<sup>69</sup>

Previously, it was the terrible 'slaughter' at the meeting which would stimulate outrage and bring about the fall of 'tyranny'. In a curious transposition, it is now Shelley's own 'words' rather than the slaughter which will act as 'oppression's thundered doom'. These final lines offer a self-referential vision of the poem's democratic refrain bringing political enlightenment to a mass audience. The poet imagines his own words stirring an insurrectionary response amongst his readership. In his projection of his poetry 'ringing through each heart and brain', Shelley offers another of his idealised, Godwinian visions of reader-response. Literature is at work within the very fibres of the reader's being. He envisions his words being 'heard again – again – again', providing a fascinated description of possible popularity. Here Shelley imagines achieving a consummate connection with a working-class readership.

The *Popular Songs* illustrate how the psychology of hope came to be central to Shelley's theory of poetry and the imagination. Poetry's capacity to convey the liberal hope of reform to the reader becomes the proof of its utility. This strain of thought is

again evident in ‘Ode to the West Wind’, a poem originally situated in the putative *Popular Songs* volume, though eventually published in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume. While the poem is not directed specifically to a working-class audience, it shares a literary sensibility with ‘The Mask of Anarchy’. The main body of ‘Ode to the West Wind’ imagines the wind heralding Spring and the advent of some immense political change. Shelley drew his metaphor of the changing seasons and political progress from the final paragraph of Paine’s *Rights of Man*.<sup>70</sup> The fifth and final section of the poem turns to consider his own role as a poet within this progress. The reception of his poetry, the hope he might awaken in a prospective audience, is the subject of his address to the wind:

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!  
And, by the incantation of this verse,  
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawakened earth  
The trumpet of a prophecy!<sup>71</sup>

Shelley’s vision of his words as the ‘trumpet of a prophecy’ recalls his remark in the letter to Hunt on ‘political faith’ being ‘at once a prophecy & a cause’.<sup>72</sup> The prophecy might herald actual transformation. These final lines of ‘Ode to the West Wind’ illustrate the ambition of Shelley’s literary project, offering a vision of the education of ‘the universe’ and ‘mankind’ through poetry. The poet is here at the centre of a group of enquiring readers, his words figured as glowing ‘ashes and sparks’ and carrying a powerful energy. The Godwinian notion of literature as discussion is clearly in evidence here. Imaginative literature is seen to act as a stimulus for social progress.

The conclusion to ‘Ode to the West Wind’ restates the literary theory behind Shelley’s vision of poets as the ‘unacknowledged legislators of mankind’ in the *Philosophical View*. As in the conclusion to ‘The Mask of Anarchy’, the poet’s communion with the reader carries a legislative potential. The *Popular Songs* represent an important development in Shelley’s literary theory by suggesting that poetry might contribute directly to the success of the peaceful movement for

Parliamentary reform. The poems envisage the practical political effect of the communication of the liberal hope through literature.

## V

Shelley's speculations on the utility of poetry would reach their culmination in 1821 with *A Defence of Poetry*. The essay has long been regarded as a vital document within the history of aesthetics, but its roots in the ideology of Godwinian hope have been neglected. In the *Defence*, Shelley discusses in greater detail than he had in the *Philosophical View* the means by which poetry might bring about the improvement of humanity. He does so by returning to the benevolent moral theory of *Political Justice*. The entire definition of imagination put forward here is founded in Godwin's ideas of moral progress toward a society of benevolence and equality.

The reading of the *Defence* given by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* has proved influential on critical interpretation of the work.<sup>73</sup> Williams situated the essay as being, ultimately, an exposition of the solipsistic Romantic Imagination in its reaction against utilitarianism and industrialism. He offered a historicist reading which saw the values associated with the poetry in the *Defence* (feeling, a conviction in the importance of art for its own sake) as being produced by a reaction against changes in the status of the artist in commercial society. While Williams makes important points on Shelley's anxiety about the literary marketplace, his perception of a straightforward reaction against Benthamite utilitarianism in the *Defence* has contributed to misapprehension of Shelley's theories of imagination and poetry. For the *Defence* emerges from the same set of ideas on the utility of poetry that produced the *Philosophical View*. There is a critique of Bentham within the essay, but it takes place in the context of utilitarianism's failure to account for any motivation beyond that of self-interest, rather than being an outright rejection of poetry's practical capacity.

The specific form of the *Defence* has received little critical comment, yet it is of great significance to the essay's political outlook. For once again, Shelley frames his argument within a Godwinian narrative of perfectibility; tracing the relationship between literature and liberal reform from the dramas of Athens, through the effects of the poetry of the Christian and Chivalric systems, to the verse of Dante and its

impact on the Reformation. From this narrative, Shelley proceeds to delineate the exact nature of poetry's beneficial effects, to reveal the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man'.<sup>74</sup> The word 'improvement' carries a weight of liberal ideology, recurring elsewhere in the essay in conjunction with poetry.<sup>75</sup> The notion of 'moral improvement' is also crucial. The possibility of progress in ethics was a central buttress in the meliorism of *Political Justice*. We might recall that John Gray identified the idea of moral progress as a defining principle of Enlightenment thought. Shelley makes an important conjunction in aligning poetry with 'moral improvement', hinting at a return to the idea of the moral imagination he had first discussed in the *Speculations on Morals*.

Within this context of moral progress and the 'use' of poetry, Shelley suggests that poetry provides the principle means of exercising the imagination. The imagination is defined as the going out of self, as the anti-Benthamite incarnation of Godwinian benevolence:

The great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and the pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.<sup>76</sup>

'Love', one of the terms in Shelley's vocabulary which often appears to be vague and abstract, is here revealed to refer to a particular strand of moral theory; one which derives from the school of benevolism established by Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, and followed by Godwin in *Political Justice*. As in Shelley's short essay of 1818, 'On Love', imagination and love are defined as coterminous, both referring to the faculty of intense sensibility which allows one to enter into the feelings of another. As we have seen, benevolence was at the heart of Godwin's anarchist thesis on humanity's ability to act for the general good without the external coercion of government. In what may have been, at least in part, a direct attack on Bentham's doctrine of self-interest, he had announced that:

Neither philosophy nor morality nor politics will ever show like themselves, till man shall be acknowledged for what he really is, a being capable of justice, virtue and benevolence, and who needs not always to be led to a philanthropical conduct by foreign and frivolous considerations'.<sup>77</sup>

Godwin had positioned the ability of individuals to act for the good of others as the most vital principle of morality and politics. Through benevolence it was possible to imagine a society of selfless equality. Shelley makes a significant development in aligning Godwinian benevolence with the imagination and with poetry. Following Godwin, he argues that an individual must experience a disinterested desire for the good of others in order to be truly virtuous. The act of entering into the feelings of another is envisaged as an act of imagination. Through the imagination an individual can, in the manner of the Fénelon episode in *Political Justice*, leave self-interest behind and become absorbed in the pursuit of general good, allowing 'the pains and the pleasures of his species' to 'become his own'. Thus poetry, through its expression of the imagination, is given clear utility in the context of moral progress. Shelley proceeds to observe that poetry 'strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same way as exercise strengthens a limb'.<sup>78</sup>

These ideas of imagination's utility as an agent of the 'moral improvement of man' lead Shelley to speculate further on the link between poetry and perfectibility. At the close of his benevolist definition of the imagination, he remarks that '[p]oetry is ever found to coexist with whatever other arts contribute to the happiness and perfection of man'.<sup>79</sup> In his thoughts on drama later in the essay, he asserts that the 'connection of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form' and that 'the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence'.<sup>80</sup> The phrase 'perfection of man' clearly connects Shelley's speculations on the poetic imagination with the Godwinian idea of human perfectibility. His benevolist definition of the imagination can be set in its proper ideological context by recalling Godwin's explanation of the progressive implications borne by the concept of altruism:

The system of disinterested benevolence proves to us, that it is possible to be virtuous, and not merely talk of virtue; that all which has been said by philosophers and moralists respecting impartial justice is not an unmeaning rant. [...] An idea like this reconciles us to our species

[...] and gives us reason to expect, that, as men collectively advance in science and useful institution, they will proceed more and more to consolidate their private judgment and their individual will with abstract justice and the unmixed approbation of general happiness.<sup>81</sup>

Progress in ethics proceeds alongside progress in knowledge. Faith in the possibility of benevolence gives rise to the hope for a state of justice and ‘general happiness’.

As the *Defence* proceeds, the particular ideology contained in Shelley’s theory of the imagination is made more explicit. The going out of self embedded in the processes of the imagination is overtly associated with material equality. Shelley offers an account of ‘the principle of equality’ established by Plato, in which he suggests that the poetry of Christianity produced the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of women.<sup>82</sup> ‘The abolition of personal slavery’, he claims, ‘is the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive’. The ‘poetry of sexual love’ then arose, with the poetry of the Provençal Trouveurs, of Dante, Shakespeare and Rousseau forming a celebration of Love, and lifting humanity ‘out of the dull vapours of the little world of self’.<sup>83</sup> Shelley claims that the relation between the sexes has become less misunderstood and that ‘if the error which confounded diversity with inequality of the powers of the two sexes has become partially recognized in the opinions and institutions of modern Europe, we owe this great benefit to the worship of which Chivalry was the law, and poets the prophets’.<sup>84</sup>

The imagination is identified with the ‘principle of equality’ found not just in Plato, but in the work of Condorcet, the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* and the novels and treatises of Godwin. Shelley develops this binary opposition between imagination and self-interest in the one of the key passages of the *Defence*, where he challenges the intellectual tendencies of utilitarianism and industrialism. It is well known that the essay was composed as a response to Thomas Love Peacock’s *Four Ages of Poetry*, in which a ‘deliberately provocative and extreme form’ of utilitarianism is put forward in dismissing poetry as an ornamental irrelevance which will pass away as society progresses and reason gains ascendancy over imagination.<sup>85</sup> Shelley paraphrases Peacock’s attack by observing that: ‘poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists. [...] It is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is most delightful, but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful’.<sup>86</sup> He then suggests that there are two distinct forms of

‘pleasure’ (Shelley uses Bentham’s vocabulary of good): one is universal and permanent, the other is transitory and particular. In the former sense, ‘whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense, is useful’.<sup>87</sup> However, Peacock’s definition of utility is a narrower one, one which Shelley identifies with the principles of self-interest: ‘banishing the importunity of the wants of our animal nature, [...] and the conciliating such a degree of mutual forbearance among men as may consist with the motives of personal advantage’.<sup>88</sup> With its emphasis on pleasure and pain as criteria of good, on self-interest, this definition of utility is clearly intended to refer the work of Bentham. The grounds of Shelley’s objections to Benthamite utility are very close to the territory of *Political Justice*. As Godwin had found that Bentham’s psychology of self-interest was incompatible with any satisfactory definition of moral good, so Shelley finds that the motive of ‘personal advantage’ provides a travesty of human behaviour which fails to account for the sympathetic going out of self enacted through the imagination. The *Defence* thus bases its definition of imagination in the benevolist moral theory of Godwin, who claimed in his veiled attack on Bentham that: ‘if self love be the only principle of action, there can be no such thing as virtue’.<sup>89</sup>

He responds forcefully to Peacock’s dismissal of poetry on utilitarian grounds by justifying the imagination as a vital moral faculty. Contrary to Williams’s reading of the *Defence*, he does not define art and the imagination in solipsistic terms, but continues to assert the practical ‘use’ of poetry by conferring on it what we might term a ‘higher utility’. Poetry and imagination contribute to the progress of humanity by administering to the faculty of benevolence, a faculty ignored by Bentham and Peacock. Though the gap between Shelley and Bentham is wider here than it was in the *Philosophical View*, the *Defence* continues to demonstrate how utilitarianism provoked a fruitful response from Shelley in his refinement of the Godwinian project of literary reform.

The exact utility of the imagination is seen to lie in its capacity to engender equality. It is thus opposed to the various contemporary manifestations of the philosophy of self-interest:

Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political oeconomist combines, labour, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to

the imagination, do not tend, as they have done in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. [...] The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of the state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty.<sup>90</sup>

This strand of reasoning refers back to the earlier argument on imagination as the ‘going out of our own nature’,<sup>91</sup> as an act of sympathy which takes us into the feelings of another. Critical focus on the aesthetics of the *Defence* has often neglected the manner in which Shelley explicitly connects aesthetics with ideology. Inequality, he suggests, arises through excess of self-interest, through ‘want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination’. Shelley expresses a moral judgement against the psychology of self-interest envisaged by the ‘mechanistic’ utilitarians, aligning them with the ‘political oeconomist’ as proponents of a corrosive ‘calculating faculty’. He picks up this strand soon afterwards, arguing that ‘[p]oetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God the Mammon of the world’.<sup>92</sup>

Shelley is on the verge of outlining an alternative political agenda for poetry here, one predicated on the exercise of the imagination as a means of urging the reader toward an apprehension of benevolence and equality. This is the definition to which he has been grasping in his speculations on poetry and reform in the *Philosophical View* and the *Popular Songs*. Shelley’s hostility to the perceived selfish individualism of nascent industrialism is pronounced. Excess commercial self-interest has meant that the ‘rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer’. Imaginative literature might act to counteract the ‘calculating’ tendencies of commercial society, bringing about the rise of an egalitarian society by strengthening collective disposition to disinterested altruism.

Shelley thus effectively clears a space for asserting the ‘higher utility’ of poetry and of his own poetic project in particular. He asserts that by strengthening and purifying the ‘affections’, poetry might contribute to improvement: ‘the production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense is true utility. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are Poets or poetical philosophers’.<sup>93</sup> He has redefined Bentham’s ‘pleasure’ in terms of Godwinian benevolence, but remains committed to a form of poetic utility. This defence of the sympathetic imagination allows Shelley to



use the final paragraph of the essay to restate the essential role of the poet in the process of liberal improvement: ‘the literature of England, an energetic developement of which has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free developement of the national will, has arisen as it were from a new birth’.<sup>94</sup> The Rousseauvian phrase ‘national will’ reveals the republican inflection of his theory of the interaction between imagination and reform. As with the first occurrence of these ideas in the *Philosophical View*, the relationship between literature and perfectibility is inexact but significant:

The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution is Poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature.<sup>95</sup>

The vocabulary of ‘opinion’ and ‘institution’ is unmistakably Godwinian. This vision of poetry altering society is firmly within the perfectibilist traditions of *Political Justice*, building on Shelley’s earlier treatment of imagination, benevolence and equality by seeing literature as the means through which the collective mindset will be pushed towards liberal reform. His encomium to poets and the political power they wield closes with the second, modified, instance of his claim that ‘[p]oets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World’.<sup>96</sup>

The *Defence* illustrates how Shelley’s argument for the utility of poetry culminated in a critique of the moral theory of Benthamite utilitarianism and a consequent argument for the benevolist imagination. In the light of this essay, it is difficult to countenance Dawson’s claim that ‘Shelley’s moral philosophy, like Godwin’s, is basically utilitarian’.<sup>97</sup> The *Defence* sets out an agenda for a current of literary reformism that would act as an alternative to utilitarianism by critiquing the self-interest and tendency to inequality produced by commercial society. However, Shelley’s lack of commercial success meant that he was a marginal figure in public debate. His vision of poets as ‘the unacknowledged legislators of the World’ expresses a desire to construct a new model of utility, but also perhaps registers a sense of the inadequacies of the reformist poet in its overstated claim.

The ambitious agenda of the *Defence* demonstrates that ultimately Shelley was never able to fully implicate in practice the literary project of reform which he had inherited from Godwin. He drew from Godwin's Dissenting theory of literature as discussion the ideal of materially altering the collective psychology of a community of readers; but his failure to adapt to the new literary marketplace undermined this project. Yet the *Defence* also shows that Shelley retained his conviction in Godwin's theory that literature might foster a psychology of hope. The essay expresses a continued attachment to ideas of human perfectibility and benevolence; the ideological substance of the work is still recognisably anchored in the Enlightenment hopes for moral progress and equality manifested in *Political Justice*. Though, as Williams suggests, the *Defence* may emerge from the period in literary history at which literature was reduced to the status of a 'self-pleading ideology',<sup>98</sup> its Godwinian impetus sees it struggle against that current by asserting the capacity of poetry to propagate the hope of equality through the connection with the mind of the reader. A historicist interpretation of the essay should recognise that its aesthetics, its conception of love or imagination as 'a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own',<sup>99</sup> are rooted in the politics of Godwin's theory of benevolence.

## CHAPTER 6

*Mary Shelley and the persistence of Godwinian hope*

## I

In Mary Shelley's novella *Matilda* (1819), unpublished in her lifetime, the eponymous protagonist is consigned to a life of despair by her father's suicide, which comes after he has confessed his incestuous desire for his daughter. The second half of the work describes the attempts by Woodville, an idealistic poet, to redeem Matilda from her despair and isolation. This section of the novella sees Shelley describe the potentially restorative effects of hope, demonstrating a close awareness of the particular psychological attitudes expressed in the work of Godwin and Percy Shelley:

Woodville for ever tried to lead me to the contemplation of what is beautiful and happy in the world. His own mind was constitutionally bent to a firmer belief in good than in evil and this feeling which must even exhilarate the hopeless ever shone forth in his words. He would talk of the wonderful powers of man; of their present state and of their hopes: of what they had been and what they were, and when reason could no longer guide him, his imagination as if inspired shed light on the obscurity that veils the past and the future. He loved to dwell on what might have been the state of the earth before man lived on it, and how he first arose and became the strange, complicated, but as he said, the glorious creature he is now.<sup>1</sup>

The novella ends bleakly, with Matilda dismissing Woodville's optimism and declaring her wish for death. But here, Shelley shows a very detailed understanding of the psychology of hope and an acknowledgement of its reviving capacity. Woodville offers a vision 'which must even exhilarate the hopeless', espousing an ardent humanism founded on a theory of humanity's progressive nature which clearly evokes Godwin's idea of perfectibility. We are close here to the progressive histories of *Political Justice*, to Godwin's observation in 'Of History and Romance' that '[i]t is curious, and it is important, to trace the progress of mankind from the savage to the civilised state'.<sup>2</sup> *Matilda* registers the possibility that Godwin's ideologically-loaded idea of hope might posit a practical effect. Woodville is driven by an apprehension of the immense significance of this mental state: 'we have been placed here and bid live

and hope. I know not what we are to hope; but there is some good beyond us that we must seek; and that is our earthly task'.<sup>3</sup> It is the prospect of 'future good' which leads him to 'cast aside selfishness' and adhere to benevolence:

I will do my best to extirpate evil and if the spirit who protects ill should so influence circumstances that I should suffer through my endeavour, yet while there is hope, and hope there ever must be, of success, cheerfully do I gird myself to the task.<sup>4</sup>

The word 'gird' occurs in Prometheus's heroic resolution not to despair after the visit of the Furies.<sup>5</sup> Shelley represents Woodville's attachment to hope as absolute, as a fervent conviction which promises the possibility of redemption.

Very specifically, she shows a close but critical engagement with the Godwinian psychology of hope. It is important to recognise that the plot of *Matilda*, which ends with a rejection of Woodville's optimism, places Godwin's idea of perfectibility under intense scrutiny. Critics have traditionally emphasised the novella's despairing nature. Tilottama Rajan argues that the lack of narrative, the fixation on a single mood, gives rise to an 'unusable negativity' which places *Matilda* at an 'oblique angle' to the Godwinian political novel.<sup>6</sup> Charlene Bunnell sees the work as focusing on the genre of melodrama, through which it stresses the dangerous consequences of introverted sensibility.<sup>7</sup> Robert Ready sees the novella as a reworking of the Demeter myth and thus as a discussion of women's experience of tyrannical male power.<sup>8</sup> Pamela Clemit looks at the progress undergone by *Matilda* from its earlier form as *The Fields of Fancy*, arguing that Shelley's changing conception of her novella shows her 'to be experimenting with and reevaluating a range of literary themes and techniques shared with Godwin and [Percy] Shelley'.<sup>9</sup> The overt didacticism of *The Fields of Fancy*, a progressive humanist piece which warns against despair, is absent from *Matilda*, she suggests. Clemit goes on to assert that Matilda's dangerous candour towards her father calls into question Godwin's faith in the unrestrained exercise of private judgement. Here, the revelation of inner feeling leads not to a new egalitarian relationship, but to sexual corruption and death.

The bleak first-person narrative of *Matilda* can indeed be viewed as pushing the traditional Godwinian mode of introspection all the way into despair, presenting a terminal isolation that offers no possibility of redemption through connection with

others. As Clemit points out, the novella emphasises ‘the traumatic nature of suffering’.<sup>10</sup> However, to see this as Shelley’s only message is to reduce her to the status of an entirely anti-ideological writer, when her precise and painstaking attention to Woodville’s humanist optimism and to Matilda’s despair suggests that she was aware of the psychological duality involved in Godwin’s works. Godwin had already staged the failure of his progressive scheme in several of his works, most notably *St Leon* and the *Reply to Parr*; Shelley’s return to the site of the failure in some sense registers her understanding of the nature of his faith. In a period when Malthusian political economy was widely held to have dispelled the Godwinian idea of perfectibility, even in liberal and radical circles, Shelley’s focus on such psychological trauma is significant. Godwin himself would go on to describe the collapse of his model of progress in the face of the population principle in *Of Population*, published the following year in 1820. While it is true to say that *Matilda* is far removed from the didacticism of *The Fields of Fancy*, the psychological trauma enacted in the discussions between the eponymous narrator and Woodville is far closer than that initial draft to the problematic ebb and flow of hope and despair seen in one of Godwin’s favourite works, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

This preoccupation with the substance and psychology of Godwinian hope is central to two of Shelley’s most important novels: *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and *The Last Man* (1826). Both novels are involved in a complex relationship with the humanist doctrines of *Political Justice*, speculating on Godwin’s concerns of benevolence and human perfectibility. Both combine bleak depictions of death and desolation with representations of the liberal idea of improvement, that consoling ‘prospect of future good’ held out by Woodville in *Matilda*. To understand the political complexities of these novels we must also situate them against Godwin’s own novels, for works such as *Caleb Williams*, *Fleetwood* and *St Leon* were a vital literary influence on Shelley.<sup>11</sup> Most immediately, Godwin’s politically-weighted narrative style of the fictional first-person confessional forms a crucial element of Shelley’s own literary project. It is important to set her novels in their original intellectual context; for an understanding of the complex and ambivalent nature of her relationship with the Godwinian psychology of hope can illuminate the political nuances of her work.

Shelley's relation to the perfectibilism of *Political Justice* is determined in part by her sense of herself as a writer of the post-Napoleonic, post-revolutionary era. Like Godwin and Percy Shelley, she was preoccupied by the disappointments of France and thus attuned to the impact of psychology upon political climate. In Shelley's first published work, the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), authored jointly with Percy Shelley, her travels through France and Switzerland provoke meditations on the continued significance of the French Revolution. At one point she refers to 'that revolution' which, 'notwithstanding the temporary bloodshed and injustice with which it was polluted, has produced enduring benefits to mankind, which all the chicanery of statesmen, nor even the great conspiracy of kings, can entirely render vain'.<sup>12</sup> Returning to the liberal optimist narrative of the Revolution, Shelley sets its violence on the broader scale of improvement in a manner that recalls Wollstonecraft's ardently progressive *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*. The overlapping reading lists for both Shelleys which we find in Mary's journal indicate that their travels through France and Switzerland in 1816 were supported by a programme of reading in the literature of the French Revolution. Mary Shelley was an equal participant in her husband's course of political study, as Pamela Clemit makes clear in observing that '[i]n their course of reading, the Shelleys sought an intelligible explanation of the reasons why the progressive ideals of the French Revolution had collapsed in despotism at home and abroad'.<sup>13</sup> Shelley looks back to the radicalism of the 1790s and to the liberal optimism of *Political Justice* after the demise of the progressive hopes embodied in the Revolution.

Examining Shelley's treatment of the Godwinian psychology of hope involves renegotiating some of the positions established in historicist criticism of her work. Critics have often asserted a connection between her novels and the ideological debates of the revolutionary era, but have sometimes presented Godwin's influence in reductive and limiting terms. Lee Sterrenburg's important essays on *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, both published in the late 1970s, established a political framework for interpreting the novels which remains influential to this day. He made a founding contribution to historicist criticism of Shelley by departing from the critical tradition which read her work primarily in the light of her personal relations within the Godwin circle to focus on her intellectual relationship with the radical polemics of the 1790s. In asserting that these two novels subvert progressive optimism, Sterrenburg took

Shelley's reading of Godwin as the central element of his thesis. He positioned *Frankenstein* as 'a critique of Godwin's philosophical ideas – particularly his schemes for regenerating the human race';<sup>14</sup> and suggested that *The Last Man* was a 'root-and-branch attack upon his utopian system'.<sup>15</sup> While Sterrenburg marked out new directions for Shelley criticism, his understanding of Godwin was confined to a basic reading of *Political Justice*, ignoring the novels of the 1790s. Even in more sophisticated later accounts of the politics of her novels, this reductive approach to Godwin's influence often persists.

However, the dialogue between Matilda and Woodville suggests that Shelley was far more sensitive to the redemptive potential of Godwinian hope than Sterrenburg allows. She understands the utopian element of Godwin's thought within the context of the mental sustenance afforded by Enlightenment meliorism. There is a need for a broader understanding of the significance of Godwin's liberal optimism and the narrative methodology of his novels within her work. By tracing Shelley's involvement with the Godwinian psychology of hope, we might uncover a more detailed and subtle understanding of the politics of her novels, an understanding which moves beyond the theory that she offers a straightforward critique of the radical aspirations of the 1790s.

## II

When first anonymously published in 1818, *Frankenstein* carried a dedication 'to William Godwin, *Author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, &c*'.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary reviews remarked on the apposite nature of this dedication, with the *Edinburgh Magazine* describing the novel as being 'formed on the Godwinian manner'.<sup>17</sup> Modern criticism has placed far less emphasis on the Godwinian foundations of the novel, causing much of its original animus to be obscured. By breaking the text down into its key constituent elements, the confessional narrative of Frankenstein and that of the Creature, we can retrieve a sense of the novel's polemical concerns. Readings in which *Frankenstein* has been understood as a critique of radical utopianism or of Romantic egoism have often focused exclusively on Frankenstein's narrative. We might adjust the balance of critical understanding by examining in greater detail Shelley's account of the Creature's life. Specifically, we might consider that section in

which she describes the education received by the Creature as he secretly observes the De Lacey family as the moral centre of the novel. It is here that the novel's Godwinian lineage is most clearly displayed.

*Frankenstein* is a novel rendered complex by its generic instability. Critics have frequently discussed it as a Gothic novel, and indeed much of Frankenstein's narrative does conform to the traditions of the genre, relaying a tale of pursuit, horror and murder. Yet there has been little discussion of the way in which the Creature's narrative is informed by the traditions of the sentimental novel. Shelley explicitly dwells on issues of sensibility and feeling in this section of the novel. She describes in detail the loneliness of the Creature; his yearning for human sympathy; his love for the De Laceys, whose expressions of domestic affection he joyously observes; his incomprehension when he rescues the little girl from drowning and is rewarded with hostility. The tropes of the sentimental novel are so pervasive that we might go so far as to describe Shelley's Creature as a displaced 'man of feeling'. Throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, the sentimental novel was aligned with the social and political liberalism of the Shaftesburian philosophical tradition, as has been shown in the work of Chris Jones, Janet Todd and John Mullan.<sup>18</sup> Shelley returns to the traditions of 1790s radical sensibility at this stage of *Frankenstein*, offering a narrative which sets individual feeling against the corrosive and corrupting codes of society. Her concern with the politics of the first-person confessional narrative style adopted by Godwin is prominent. The sentimental style becomes a means of accessing the concerns of *Political Justice* and the novels. The De Lacey episode is where the novel's Godwinian speculations on human nature and benevolence, on the origins of crime and the possibility of reform, are rooted.

Emphasis on Frankenstein's narrative has tended to produce anti-Godwinian interpretations of the novel. Sterrenburg viewed the novel's dedication as invidious, as a cover for a critique of the perfectibilism of *Political Justice* in Frankenstein's aspiration to create a new breed of human. The crimes of the Creature offer a cautionary political message on the excesses of radical optimism in his reading, being the product of Frankenstein's 'utopian hope'.<sup>19</sup> Anne Mellor's study of Shelley's work adopts the Sterrenburg reading in seeing *Frankenstein* as a fundamentally conservative novel which attacks the central protagonist's 'attempt to transform human beings into deities', suggesting that 'Frankenstein is a latter-day Godwinian



and his creation can be seen as the force of Jacobinism let loose in the land'.<sup>20</sup> The beginnings of a more sophisticated understanding are evident in Chris Baldick's attempt to dissociate later developments in the 'Frankenstein myth' from the 1818 novel. Baldick suggests that the work is declaredly the product of the Age of Reason in its 'impiously secular' character and that it displays a complex 'anxious liberalism' in its 'fearful revulsion and cautious sympathy for the monster'.<sup>21</sup> Baldick describes Godwin as 'the novel's intellectual begetter'.<sup>22</sup> Pamela Clemit has shifted the centre of debate further by situating *Frankenstein* in the context of the reformist Godwinian novel, making a case for 'both the intellectual stimulus provided by the Godwin school and [Shelley's] independent reevaluation of those concerns'.<sup>23</sup> Thus she stresses the manner in which *Frankenstein* continues the progressive literary impulse of *Caleb Williams* by making demands upon the private judgement of the individual reader; while also discerning 'an imaginative critique of Godwin's concerns'.<sup>24</sup> Though Clemit has rightly contrasted her reading against Sterrenburg's in her survey of Shelley criticism,<sup>25</sup> she does share something of his approach in characterising the tragic consequences of Frankenstein's attempt to create a new race as an expression of dissatisfaction with Godwin's 'speculations about a future rational Utopia at the end of *Political Justice*'.<sup>26</sup>

In a separate discussion, Clemit argues that Shelley's portrait of Frankenstein is a critique of Rousseauvian enthusiasm, the overlap with the events of Rousseau's life and narrative style establishing him 'as another disappointed egotist in the manner of St. Leon and Fleetwood, whose self-justifying narrative collapses into unwitting self-condemnation'.<sup>27</sup> David Marshall shares Clemit's notion of a debate with Rousseau, suggesting the Creature's encounters with unfeeling individuals undermine the egalitarian idea of *pitié* at the centre of works such as the *Disours sur l'inégalité* and the *Confessions*:

Mary Shelley uses Rousseau's writings to conduct a philosophical investigation of the failure of sympathy – a reading of Rousseau that focuses on the epistemology and the rhetoric of fellow feeling as it dramatises questions about identification, resemblance, likeness, difference, comparison, and the possibility of transporting oneself into the thoughts and sentiments of an other.<sup>28</sup>

Shelley depicts the Creature growing up in a Rousseauvian state of nature, Marshall argues, only to demolish Rousseau's theories by presenting the failure of fellow-feeling and asserting that there are insurmountable barriers which 'define one's ability to enter into the thoughts and feelings of someone else'.<sup>29</sup>

These readings have been challenged by Gregory Dart, who, in his account of Rousseau's influence on literary radicalism in the Romantic period, sets the first-person narrative of *Frankenstein* in a revolutionary tradition of confessional writing which had its roots in the *Confessions* and the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*.<sup>30</sup> Dart sees Shelley's portrayal of Frankenstein as a paean to Rousseauvian enthusiasm, thus rendering the novel a record of the secret survival of radical politics.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, William St Clair has returned to contemporary publishers' records to suggest that *Frankenstein* had a very limited print-run and that its lack of commercial success had a crucial bearing on its reception.<sup>31</sup> Going against the Sterrenburg interpretation, St Clair claims that the novel was written in accordance with Godwinian notions of literature and progress, but that the scarcity of the 1818 text meant that its fundamental 'reformist moral message' on the Creature's corruption by society was not widely available to the public.<sup>32</sup> He suggests that Shelley's liberal intent was quickly travestied by a slew of popular stage adaptations which manufactured a cautionary tale of a monster who turns on his creator.

Interpretations of the novel's exact relation to the political debates of the 1790s have varied widely. We might begin an examination of Shelley's treatment of Godwinian optimism by focusing on Frankenstein's narrative, often seen by critics as the site for a critique of the utopian aspirations of *Political Justice*. In his fiction, Godwin had based his urgent appeal to the individual private judgement of the reader on the style of the first-person confessional, a mode predicated on notions of radical transparency. In Frankenstein's narrative, Shelley employs a similar narrative mode to lay bare the mind of her protagonist and expose the 'enthusiasm' that drives him. Her portrait of Victor recalls the restless curiosity and desire for transparency we see in the character of Caleb Williams. Like Caleb, Victor commits a transgressive act which eventually leads him to become involved in a mutually destructive pursuit with an opponent. The creation of the Creature is the novel's central dramatic act, as Caleb's attempt to open the box is in *Caleb Williams*. But rather than presenting her

protagonist's actions as a critique of utopianism, Shelley seems to urge the reader toward sympathetic identification with the politics of his idealism through her Godwinian narrative style.

The novel hints at the nature of Frankenstein's 'enthusiasm' in several ways. As critics have pointed out, it is significant that his attempt to create a new man takes place at the University of Ingolstadt. In the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme*, that establishment is posited as the birthplace of the secret society of the Illuminati and thus, in Barruel's paranoid political fantasy, as the epicentre of a conspiracy directed at the overthrow of established civil and religious institutions which ultimately culminated in the French Revolution. In her choice of political geography, Shelley returns to the exact same territory charted by *St Leon*, in which Godwin had inverted the anti-Jacobin conspiracy theories of Burke and Barruel by portraying a benevolent 'old philosopher' schooled in the secret and mysterious arts of alchemy who finds himself the victim of reactionary persecution. Shelley makes a clear reference to *St Leon* in having Victor enter at one point into 'the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life'. He wishes to 'banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death', inviting additional comparisons with the utopia of immortality positioned as the zenith of human perfectibility in the conclusion to *Political Justice*.<sup>33</sup>

Crucially, Shelley follows Godwin in offering the portrait of Frankenstein as a record of Rousseauvian enthusiasm. Critics such as Mellor have tended to regard the character of Frankenstein as an attack on solipsistic Romantic idealism, a position also taken up by Marilyn Butler, who suggests in her influential survey of the literary politics of the Romantic period that the novel is a reaction against Wordsworthian narcissism; that 'everything Frankenstein does is evil, because it is egotistical'.<sup>34</sup> While the novel undoubtedly indicts Frankenstein for his selfishness and his neglect of the domestic affections, the creation of the Creature is represented as being more than a purely self-aggrandizing act. Here, we see echoes of Godwin's literary project; of his interest in communicating to the reader what he termed in *Political Justice* a 'generous enthusiasm' as a means of sustaining the hope of improvement.<sup>35</sup> Shelley's particular delineation of feeling in this section of the narrative is of great significance. The manner in which the *Confessions* had sought to use autobiography as a means of breaking down the barriers between author and reader, thus cultivating the republican

virtues of transparency and equality, becomes crucial to our understanding of *Frankenstein*.

Parallels between the life of Frankenstein and the events of the *Confessions* are evident from an early stage in the first volume of the novel. Frankenstein relates that he is ‘by birth a Genevese’ whose ‘father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation’,<sup>36</sup> offering a clear reference to the life of Rousseau as related in his autobiography. The political sensibilities bred by this upbringing are made clear in his later claim that: ‘[t]he republican institutions of our country have produced simpler and happier manners than those which prevail in the great monarchies that surround it. Hence there is less distinction between the several classes of its inhabitants’.<sup>37</sup>

But most notably, Shelley frames Frankenstein’s attempt to create a new man in the same terms of Rousseauvian enthusiasm that Godwin had used to describe Caleb’s opening of the trunk and escape from Falkland’s house. As Jean-Jacques had uncovered ‘an enthusiasm of truth, liberty, and virtue’ on reading the question set by the Dijon Academy on the road to Vincennes,<sup>38</sup> Frankenstein finds that his initial apathy on reading Cornelius Agrippa (the antiquated and forbidden proponent of primitive science) gives way to transformative power: ‘the wonderful facts which he relates, soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind’.<sup>39</sup> It is the dangerous scientific knowledge he discovers in his reading of Agrippa that leads Frankenstein to create the Creature. The moment of creation is referred to repeatedly throughout the novel, always figured as an act of transgression. Frankenstein variously describes himself as ‘animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm’; borne onwards ‘like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success’; driven by ‘a kind of enthusiastic frenzy’; seized by ‘a fit of enthusiastic madness’.<sup>40</sup> Very carefully and deliberately, Shelley describes the creation of the Creature in Rousseau’s own potent vocabulary of transgressive enthusiasm. If he had not uncovered such dangerous knowledge in his reading of Cornelius Agrippa, Frankenstein speculates, ‘[i]t is even possible, that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin’.<sup>41</sup> He later describes the night on which his labours culminated as ‘the fatal night’.<sup>42</sup> This is very close to Rousseau’s description of the mental ‘revolution’ he underwent after entering the intellectual circle of the *philosophes*, an episode figured as a ‘terrible and fatal aera, of a fate

unparalleled amongst mortals'.<sup>43</sup> Shelley draws from the *Confessions* and from *Caleb Williams* an explosive rhetoric of feeling.

Well-schooled in the techniques of the Godwinian novel, in the way in which Godwin had manipulated Rousseau's vocabulary to express the egalitarian, reformist impulse of his fiction in a hostile political climate, Shelley was acutely sensitive to the ideological import of tropes adopted from the *Confessions*. We see evidence of her interest in the politics of Rousseau's writings elsewhere in her work. Included within Shelley's *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* were her 'Letters from Geneva', the second of which saw her embark on a walk that invited important political considerations. Here we see the thoughts on France cited earlier. But her emphasis is on the intellectual and political stimulus afforded by Rousseau's work:

To the south of the town is the promenade of the Genevese, a grassy plain planted with a few trees, and called Plainpalais. Here a small obelisk is erected to the glory of Rousseau, and here (such is the mutability of human life) the magistrates, the successors of those who exiled him from his native country, were shot by the populace during that revolution, which his writings mainly contributed to mature, and which, notwithstanding the temporary bloodshed and injustice with which it was polluted, has produced enduring benefits to mankind, which all the chicanery of statesmen, nor even the great conspiracy of kings, can entirely render vain.<sup>44</sup>

The belief that Rousseau had been the progenitor of the Revolution was widely held in Britain throughout the 1790s, in both radical and conservative circles. It is to the events described in the *Confessions* that Shelley refers here, in her mention of his persecution at the hands of a reactionary conspiracy. We see her interest in Rousseau as a figure expressive of the original political ideals of the Revolution, as an enduring symbol of hope with which one might stave off the memory of the Terror. In 1817, the year of the publication of the *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, Shelley would find her interpretation of Rousseau supported when she read Hazlitt's *The Round Table*.<sup>45</sup> This collection of essays included his important piece, 'On the Character of Rousseau', referred to in Chapter Two of this thesis. There, Hazlitt praises the *Confessions* as Rousseau's greatest work, as the finest expression of that author's irresistible sensibility:

His interest in his own thoughts and feelings was always wound up to the highest pitch; and hence the enthusiasm which he excited in others. He owed the power which he exercised over the opinions of all Europe, by which he created numberless disciples and overturned established systems, to the tyranny which his feelings, in the first instance, exercised over himself.<sup>46</sup>

Hazlitt's observations on the influence borne by Rousseau's autobiographical 'enthusiasm' on European republicanism echo the thoughts related by Shelley during her walk in the Plainpalais. Traces of his portrait of Rousseau as a solipsistic 'enthusiast', deriving tremendous power from his immersion in his own feelings, find their way into Shelley's study of Frankenstein.

The first volume of *Frankenstein* offers the reader an ambiguous treatment of the character of the eponymous protagonist. The reader is invited to contemplate the horrific consequences of his endeavours, but also to sympathise with his enthusiasm for improvement. The echoes of the extra-rational elements of Godwin's political fiction of the 1790s see Shelley revive a politically-marginalised literary sensibility. That the 'enthusiasm' of Frankenstein is intended, like that of Caleb Williams and St Leon, to represent the survival of egalitarian, republican thought in individual feeling, is suggested in the final stages of the novel. There, we see the dying Frankenstein unburden his final confession to the listening Walton. As he expires, he looks back on his transgressive actions:

Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness and tranquillity, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed.<sup>47</sup>

The trite moral, that of the warning against excessive 'ambition', is subverted by Frankenstein's sudden turn to speculate on the possible fulfilment of the ardent 'hopes' that animated the act of creation. Enthusiasm is revived at the very moment at which it ought to be extinguished. Dart sees Frankenstein's final confession as offering grounds for reinterpreting the novel in terms of its Rousseauvian element:

Like Rousseau in his *Confessions*, Frankenstein finally succeeds in absolving himself of most of his former sins and errors, casting off the grime of history to reveal his fundamental virtue. Seen in this light, Shelley's novel looks less like a repudiation of radical politics than a record

of their secret survival, with Victor's last words offering encouragement to a whole new generation of Illuminati, inciting them to take up the revolutionary baton and bear it bravely into the future.<sup>48</sup>

Something of the revolutionary potential of Rousseau's expression of personality in the *Confessions* seeps through to *Frankenstein*, Dart suggests. After their first visit to France in 1816 both the Shelleys were, he argues, 'increasingly interested in the artistic potential of "enthusiasm" as an instrument of philosophical and political education'.<sup>49</sup> We see the legacy of Godwin's attempt to stimulate an enthusiasm for justice in the reader in *Political Justice* and the novels.

With Shelley's sense of the significance of 'enthusiasm' in mind, we might begin to apprehend the status of *Frankenstein* as a Godwinian novel. For in recording the persistence of republican sentiment, Shelley looks to act directly upon the mind of the reader, to continue to cultivate progress through literature. Her intent to wield the confessional narrative as an educative mode is revealed not just in Frankenstein's tale, but throughout the course of the novel. In the second volume, the Creature is deliberately situated in close proximity to the heroes of Godwin's novels. Like Caleb Williams, St Leon and Fleetwood, he is a lonely exile; one who is entirely alienated from society, subjected to the cruellest of persecutions and who must live a life of rootless wanderings. Shelley follows the Godwinian tradition in using this rhetoric of martyrdom to mount a defence of certain marginalised ideals. The portrait of the Creature is a forceful expression of ideas on benevolence familiar from *Political Justice* and Godwin's novels. With regard to this aspect of *Frankenstein*, it is useful to bear in mind the review of the novel composed by Percy Shelley. This review highlights the progressive element of the work in language which may surprise readers familiar with modern critical interpretations. Percy Shelley draws attention to the novel's 'affectionate' and 'innocent' 'sentiments', before stating that the Creature's circumstances corrupted a mind which was originally 'affectionate and full of moral sensibility'.<sup>50</sup> By emphasising the treatment of feeling, Percy Shelley asserts a connection with the sentimental techniques of the Godwinian novel and with the benevolist moral theory of *Political Justice*.

The Creature's status as a sentimental hero is most immediately signalled, paradoxically, in the recurring word 'monster'. Several critics have understood

Shelley's interest in monstrosity as a reference to the anti-Jacobinism of the 1790s. Sterrenburg has pointed to the way in which Godwin's detractors used demonism and the grotesque to attack his theories of the utopian regeneration of humanity;<sup>51</sup> Baldick has referred to Barruel's phrase 'Jacobin monster';<sup>52</sup> and Clemit has discussed Burke's depiction of the French Revolution as demonic spectre.<sup>53</sup> Yet there are other important precedents for the use of this term. Several critics have observed that the word 'monster' figures prominently in *St Leon*. Godwin uses it repeatedly as a term with which to describe the martyrdom undergone by his alienated, persecuted old philosopher hero as he wanders through Europe. As he had made clear in his Preface, that novel was intended to adjust the balance of *Political Justice* in its portrayal of the 'private affections' and 'sensibility', and also to restate the notion of 'general benevolence' that was at the core of his philosophical treatise.<sup>54</sup> The word 'monster' was an integral part of his defence of benevolence and social feeling, as was suggested in Chapter Three of this thesis, for it was Rousseau who had originally imagined himself as such. As Jean-Jacques falls victim to a reactionary conspiracy of governments, religious authorities and hostile mobs, the closing books of the *Confessions* describe his status after the publication of the fiercely anti-clerical *Lettres écrites de la montagne*: 'it was a matter of some astonishment at Geneva and Versailles, that such a monster as the author of it should be suffered to exist'.<sup>55</sup> The term recurs when he refers to the popular plot to portray him as 'an exception to Nature's laws, to make of me such a monster as cannot in reality exist'.<sup>56</sup> The Marshall translation of 1790, with which Godwin was familiar, offered a direct rendering of the original French, which sees Rousseau lament on both occasions his fate as 'un monstre'.<sup>57</sup> As discussed previously with reference to *St Leon*, his paranoid self-portrait of the 'monstre' afforded him the grounds to make a final, defiant restating of his virtues of compassion and benevolence.

In *Frankenstein*, the Creature first uses the word to describe himself *before* his descent into crime and murder, in the period in which he is still a virtuous and compassionate being. He first recognises that he is loathed when a group of villagers attacks him with stones (another reference to the *Confessions*). The first occurrence of the word 'monster' comes during the happy time he spends watching the De Lacey's in their cottage and secretly helping them. One day he discovers the reason for the violent antipathy of the villagers:



I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification.<sup>58</sup>

At this early point in the Creature's tale, we are returned to the time when he was innocent and compassionate. The reader is shown a painful contrast between his aspirations to join the De Lacey family and feel the warmth of human sympathy, and his sense of his own monstrosity. Shelley employs the word 'monster' sympathetically; it invites the reader to pity this sensitive, lonely figure who has suddenly been plunged from the warmest hopes to the 'bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification'. Similarly, when the Creature eventually approaches the blind old father of the De Lacey household, he observes that men are prejudiced against him, ignoring his profound sensibility: 'where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster'.<sup>59</sup> As he learns more of human society from his study of the De Lacey family, he again dwells on his monstrosity and loneliness:

And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome. [...] When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned?<sup>60</sup>

The Creature correctly foresees a life of persecution. But even while he reflects on his intense loneliness, the confessional narrative involves the reader in the act of sharing those feelings. Godwin's lonely protagonists, particularly his 'monster' St Leon, had all been expressive of a certain defiance, portraying benevolence and transparency of feeling maintained against the corruptions and persecutions of society. Shelley similarly fashions her 'monster' as a paradoxical statement of hope. Like Jean-Jacques, the Creature is a man of intense sensibility whose compassion for others is rebuffed by a selfish and unfeeling society, but whose disappointment and alienation are heroic acts, a record of the strength and persistence of his compassionate virtues.

We find evidence of Shelley's interest in the figure of the 'monster' elsewhere in her work. Towards the end of *Matilda*, the heroine laments, in another confessional narrative of intense sensibility, how 'fate drove me to become this outcast from human feeling; this monster with whom none might mingle in converse and love'.<sup>61</sup> Later in her career, Shelley undertook a series of projects for the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, one of which was a series of biographies entitled, *Lives of the Most Eminent Scientific and Literary Men of France* (1838-9). She chose Rousseau as one of her eminent Frenchmen and referred to his fate as a victim of reactionary persecution:

The quarrel between the citizens and council of Geneva, on the subject of the right of the latter to enact decrees without consulting the former, was attended with disturbances and bloodshed. The whole country was in tumults. The 'Letters from the Mountain' were more anti-Christian than any of his preceding works. The clergy were enraged: the peasantry of Neufchâtel were taught to regard him as a monster; from execration they proceeded to personal attack; stones were thrown at him during his walks – and at last, the ferment arriving at its height, his house was attacked in the night by the country people.<sup>62</sup>

The connection between Rousseau's autobiography and her own fictional 'monster' is made explicit here.

Shelley crafts the Creature, then, as a man of feeling. She uses this framework to explore a series of ideas associated with radical sensibility. In the section of *Frankenstein* which describes the Creature's encounter with the De Laceys, the words 'benevolence' and 'sympathy' recur so frequently that they act as markers for Shelley's involvement with notions of feeling expounded in the political debates of the 1790s. Specifically, she returns to the benevolist moral theory of *Political Justice*, where the notion of humanity's disposition to altruism had acted as a bolster to Godwin's perfectibilist vision of progress toward an anarchist society in which men and women act for the good of others without the external coercion of government. In the Creature's encounter with the De Laceys, we see a detailed treatment of the substance of Godwinian hope.

The Creature first discovers the family when he takes shelter from the 'barbarity of man' in a small shed adjoining a cottage.<sup>63</sup> A chink in the wood allows him to secretly observe the activities of the De Laceys, a family made up of a blind old man, his son Felix, and daughter Agatha. These observations shape the character of the Creature.

He quickly finds himself intimately involved in the lives of the family. When the old man plays a melancholy tune on his violin and causes Agatha to cry, the Creature is led to experience his first intense feelings:

[The old man] raised her, and smiled with such kindness and affection, that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions.<sup>64</sup>

By observing an act of kindness, by sympathising with the experiences of these individuals, the Creature discovers overwhelming depths of feeling within himself. His character is shaped by the process of sympathy: '[t]he gentle manners and beauty of the cottagers greatly endeared them to me: when they were unhappy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys'.<sup>65</sup>

The vocabulary with which Shelley describes the Creature's burgeoning sympathies is pregnant with meaning. He finds the old man has a 'benevolent countenance', a face 'beaming with benevolence and love'; and sees that he rewards every act of affection with 'benevolent smiles'.<sup>66</sup> No other term could connect *Frankenstein* so surely with Godwin's psychology of hope. For in *Political Justice*, the idea of benevolence had been seen to offer a set of redemptive psychological effects:

An idea like this reconciles us to our species [...] and gives us reason to expect, that, as men collectively advance in science and useful institution, they will proceed more and more to consolidate their private judgement and their individual will with abstract justice and the unmixed approbation of general happiness.<sup>67</sup>

Without benevolence, there could be no possibility of virtue, Godwin argued. The idea had been an essential element of his attempt to develop a strand of reformist thought which formed an alternative to Benthamite utilitarianism, with its felicific calculus founded on the good as individual 'pleasure'. Godwin recoiled from the notion of human nature as devoid of altruism:

Mind without benevolence is a cold and barren existence. It is in seeking the good of others, in embracing a great and extensive sphere of action, in forgetting our own individual interests, that we find our true element. The tendency of the whole system delineated in this Book is to lead us to that element.<sup>68</sup>

By focusing on the word ‘benevolence’ throughout the Creature’s narrative, Shelley invites the reader to consider his life within the framework of Godwinian hope.

From passive sympathy, the Creature progresses to active benevolence himself, forgetting his own individual interest and showing a desire for the good of others. He discovers that though apparently happy, the De Lacey family suffer poverty and hunger. The two children often give their food to their father, leaving none for themselves. Such selfless compassion affects the Creature powerfully: ‘[t]his trait of kindness moved me sensibly’.<sup>69</sup> He emulates this kindness by using his immense strength to secretly carry out Felix’s firewood-gathering duties during the night, surprising the family by leaving an enormous pile of wood outside their door one morning. When the De Laceys find the wood, the Creature observes their joy from his hiding-place and is delighted to hear of their belief that they have been visited by a good spirit. The Creature is a being motivated by Godwinian benevolence, his gift of the wood demonstrating a capacity for pure, selfless altruism.

Shelley’s account of the development of the Creature’s mind closely resembles key sections of *Political Justice*. Godwin had made the assertion, heavily influenced by Locke and Helvétius, that the mind is shaped by sense impressions received from the external world. This is the basis for his claim that human behaviour is determined by social circumstance. At the same time, Godwin had asserted the existence of a disposition to benevolence. As we saw in Chapter One, Godwin had discounted Bentham’s notion of self-interested ‘pleasures of benevolence’ by narrating the example of an infant experiencing its first act of sympathy.<sup>70</sup> The infant, with no knowledge of the world, would be unaware of any pleasure that might accrue, Godwin contended. This section of *Political Justice* is closely followed by Shelley in her account of how the Creature develops a capacity for sympathy through learned behaviour. The infant’s sympathy for his nurse is free from any trace of self-interest, Godwin suggests:

Before he can feel sympathy, he must have been led by a series of observations to perceive that his nurse, for example, is a being possessed of consciousness and susceptible like himself to the impressions of pleasure and pain. Having supplied him with this previous knowledge, let us suppose his nurse to fall from a flight of stairs and break her leg. He will probably feel some concern for the accident; he will understand the meaning of her cries, similar to those which he has been accustomed to utter in distress; and he will discover some wish to relieve her. Pity is perhaps first introduced by a mechanical impression upon the organs, in consequence of which the cries uttered by another prompt the child without direct design to utter cries of his own. These are at first unaccompanied with compassion, but they naturally induce the mind of the infant to yield attention to the appearance which thus impressed him.<sup>71</sup>

By a process of associations to which every individual is disposed, Smithian sympathy begets benevolence, the 'wish to relieve' the distress of the nurse. It is this same combination of sense experience and innate disposition to sympathy that leads the Creature to become a virtuous being, allowing him to seek the good of others without concern for his own self-interest. Shelley presents the reader with a narrative in which the principles of Godwinian hope are revived.

Yet in *Frankenstein*, ideals of sympathy and benevolence are seemingly undermined when they are tested. Having observed the compassionate De Laceys, the Creature eventually decides to reveal himself and try to enter into the family's affections. Contemplating their 'amiable and benevolent dispositions', he persuades himself that they will overlook his deformity and welcome him: '[c]ould they turn from their door one, however monstrous, who solicited their compassion and friendship?'<sup>72</sup> But when the Creature considers his appearance he is discouraged: 'I cherished hope, it is true; but it vanished, when I beheld my person reflected in water'. He is in a melancholic agony, daring to 'fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathizing with my feelings', but aware that his loathsome appearance makes this unlikely.<sup>73</sup> Shelley works the Creature's expressions of feeling to a pitch as he contemplates the prospect of the De Laceys looking upon him with affection. After months of agonizing, he finally ventures into the house when the blind old man is alone, hoping to persuade him of his good intentions before the son and daughter return. The Creature tells the old man that he is bound to claim the protection of some friends, but fears that 'if I fail there, I am an outcast in the world forever'. In an awkward piece of dialogue which demonstrates that Shelley was attempting to

investigate Godwinian moral theory, the old man responds: ‘the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by an obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity. Rely therefore on your hopes’.<sup>74</sup> Notions of benevolence appear to be borne out when the old man tells the Creature that ‘it will afford me great pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature’. The latter replies that: ‘[y]ou raise me from the dust by this kindness; and I trust that, by your aid, I shall not be driven from the society and sympathy of your fellow-creatures’.<sup>75</sup> But as the Creature reveals to the old man that the De Lacey family themselves are the friends whose protection he craves, the other members of the family arrive and are horrified to see such a monster in the cottage. The Creature is driven out under the blows of Felix, and is plunged into disappointment: ‘my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness’.<sup>76</sup>

Shelley describes in detail the sadness of the disappointed being; the dislocation between his tender sympathies, evident in his benevolent joy at secretly gathering wood for the De Lacey family, and the lonely fate to which he is condemned by his rejection from human society. The novel’s equivocal treatment of benevolence continues when the Creature, having begun his lonely wanderings, saves a young girl from drowning. Having performed this heroic act he is then shot at by ‘a rustic’ who mistakes him for a fiend. This is the blow which apparently destroys the last traces of the Creature’s moral sentiments:

This was then the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being from destruction, and, as a recompence, I now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound, which shattered the flesh and bone. The feelings of kindness and gentleness, which I had entertained but a few moments before, gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind.<sup>77</sup>

The society into which the Creature has been pitched is entirely inimical to the values of sympathy and benevolence he develops in his encounters with the De Lacey family. Social compassion is ground out by this unfeeling society.

While the course of the novel may express a degree of scepticism about benevolence, it reserves its strongest condemnation for the corruptions of society. In this societal critique, Shelley clearly expresses something of the liberal message of *Political Justice*, in which criminality and the ‘vices’ of mankind are attributed to the determining influence of external circumstance. At the early stage of his life at which

he observes the De Lacey's, the Creature 'looked upon crime as a distant evil; benevolence and generosity were ever present before me'.<sup>78</sup> While his external influences remain conducive to virtue, he is virtuous and compassionate. Shelley is keen to stress to the reader that the Creature possesses no innate disposition to criminality. This section of *Frankenstein* seeks to reinvigorate the liberal hope of improvement outlined in the discussion of crime in *Political Justice*.

In his early life, the Creature learns 'to admire their virtues, and to deprecate the vices of mankind'.<sup>79</sup> 'Virtue' and 'vice' were staple terms in the vocabulary of eighteenth-century moral theory. However, Shelley would have been intimately familiar with one particular instance in the early stages of *Political Justice*, where Godwin asserts that '[o]ur virtues and our vices may be traced to the incidents which make the history of our lives, and if these incidents could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be extirpated from the world'.<sup>80</sup> Though *Frankenstein* concludes bleakly, the moral centre of the novel, the Creature's narrative, is a coherent and favourable reflection on Godwin's liberal optimistic conception of human nature. It is difficult to countenance those critical readings which discern a critique of Godwin's 'utopianism' when Shelley's portrait of the Creature so clearly displays an attachment to the Enlightenment hopes expressed in the ideas of perfectibility and environmental determinism in *Political Justice*.

The novel's Godwinian intent is made overt in Percy Shelley's review, where the work is described as carrying a distinctly liberal moral:

Nor are the crimes and malevolence of the single Being, tho' indeed withering and tremendous, the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow inevitably from certain causes fully adequate to their production. [...] In this the direct moral of the book consists; and it is perhaps the most important, and of the most universal application, of any moral that can be enforced by example. Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn; - let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind - divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations - malevolence and selfishness.<sup>81</sup>

Little significance has been attached to Percy Shelley's review of *Frankenstein* in modern criticism. Mellor refers to the manner in which he 'misinterpreted' the work 'as a story of original goodness turned to misanthropy and revenge by social ostracism

and scorn, a story in which *both* Frankenstein and his creature are innocent victims'.<sup>82</sup> However, in St Clair's more recent article on the travesty of the original moral purpose of *Frankenstein*, he suggests that Percy Shelley's review was in close synthesis with the political impulse behind the novel:

In accordance with the Godwinian theory of progress, in which the author and her collaborator [Percy Shelley] both believed, *Frankenstein*, they hoped and intended, would help to change the perceptions, the knowledge, the understanding, and therefore ultimately the behaviour, of those individuals who read or otherwise encountered it. Their book, they hoped, would contribute, in its small way, to the general intellectual and moral improvement of society in its slow, much interrupted, but cumulative progress towards perfection.<sup>83</sup>

St Clair usefully situates the novel in the context of perfectibilist hopes, of 'the Godwinian theory of progress' and project of literary reform. He suggests that *Frankenstein* offers a continuation of Godwin's theories on education and the psychology of reader-response.

Significantly, Percy Shelley's observation that the crimes of the Creature are not 'the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow inevitably from certain causes fully adequate to their production' echoes the crucial passage from the opening of *Political Justice* in which Godwin sets out the implications of his belief in environmental determinism:

From these reasonings it sufficiently appears, that the moral qualities of men are the produce of the impressions made upon them, and that there is *no instance of an original propensity to evil*. Our virtues and vices may be traced to the incidents which make the history of our lives, and if these incidents could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be extirpated from the world. The task may be difficult, may be of slow progress, and of hope undefined and uncertain. But hope will never desert it.<sup>84</sup> [my italics]

This parallel in vocabulary provides support for St Clair's interpretation of *Frankenstein* in light of the 'Godwinian theory of progress'. Percy Shelley, intimately involved in the composition of the novel, locates its purpose in the propagation of Godwinian hope. In the portrait of the Creature, Mary Shelley returns to the psychology of Godwin's literary project. The portrait becomes the site for an intense engagement with the notion of reader-response, as the reader is urged toward



sympathetic identification with this sensitive being. After the horrors and crimes of the first volume, the reader is suddenly invited toward the realisation that the murderous Creature was originally a being possessed of a desire to act for the good of others.

This sense of hope first comes to the fore in the encounter between the Creature and Frankenstein on the glacier of Montanvert. There, the latter pleads for justice from his creator by recalling his original benevolence:

Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous. [...] Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone?<sup>85</sup>

The Creature holds out to Victor the hope that his criminality might give way to virtue, that he might again be benevolent if only his circumstances could be corrected and he were not alone. Later, in asking Frankenstein to create a female to act as his companion, the Creature refers to the moral principles of sociability. He speaks of 'those sympathies necessary for my being'; longs to 'excite the sympathy of some existing thing'; envisages a future in which '[m]y evil passions will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy'; and pleads that '[i]f any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them an hundred and an hundred fold'.<sup>86</sup> The Creature again speaks in a Smithian or Godwinian vocabulary of natural sociability. Despite the horrific nature of his crimes, he remains in some sense a man of feeling. Frankenstein is moved by these sentiments, finding that: 'I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him'.<sup>87</sup> The Creature offers Victor the opportunity to effect moral reform:

My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded.<sup>88</sup>

Though this desire for companionship is ultimately disappointed, Shelley raises the possibility that moral improvement might be effected. Hope is briefly revived.

Though the latter stages of the novel return to the traditions of Gothic horror, the Creature's sentimental narrative remains its moral centre. The need for a broader understanding of *Frankenstein* that moves beyond interpretations of a cautionary tale about the dangers of Romantic egoism, scientific discovery or radical utopianism is demonstrated by the novel's complex conclusion. With Frankenstein dead, the Creature offers his final confession to the listening Walton. Significant terms such as 'sympathy', 'virtue' and 'vice' are scattered throughout his speech.<sup>89</sup> The Creature does not rejoice in the death of the man he had pursued, whose family he has murdered. Instead, we see moral sentiment emerge once again, as he laments how '[n]o sympathy may I ever find'.<sup>90</sup> He recounts his horrific crimes and reflects on how his actions have caused this final death. Walton, like the reader, has heard the narratives of both Victor and the Creature. His initial sympathy for the miserable Creature quickly dissipates when he considers the death of his friend. The Creature, Walton cries, is a 'hypocritical fiend' for weeping over the corpse of the man he destroyed. It is not so, the Creature replies, asking Walton to consider his original goodness and its erosion through his life of misery. The speech he delivers urges the reader towards contemplating the sad dislocation between the Creature's original compassionate yearning for sympathetic contact with others and his terrible crimes. We see him again as a man of feeling:

Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings, who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of bringing forth. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now vice has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No crime, no mischief, no malignity, no misery, can be found comparable to mine. When I call over the frightful catalogue of my deeds, I cannot believe that I am he whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil.<sup>91</sup>

Shelley invites not outrage against his crimes, but pity for the plight of this sensitive being. As the speech proceeds, she urges the reader to consider the central tragedy of the novel as being that of benevolence corrupted by the injustice of society:

I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? Why do you not hate

Felix, who drove his friend from his door with contumely? Why do you not execrate the rustic who sought to destroy the saviour of his child? Nay, these are virtuous and immaculate beings! I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. Even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice.<sup>92</sup>

The Creature's words confirm him as the cultivator of sympathy and compassion, as one who was led into criminality only by the inhumanity of those around him. This clear emphasis on 'injustice', a word which figures twice in this speech, undermines Katherine Hill-Miller's claim that Shelley rewrites the social analysis of *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* 'to highlight individual paternal guilt rather than the social system Godwin emphatically indicts'.<sup>93</sup> In this final confession, Shelley suggests that her aim in *Frankenstein* has been to indict society for its hostility to the Godwinian principles of benevolence, so integral to his conception of a society of equality.

We can thus locate the novel within the framework of Godwin's reformist literary project. The novel's societal critique encompasses the portrait of Frankenstein, with its expression of radical enthusiasm; and the depiction of the Creature, which stands as a defence of benevolence and the liberal theory of crime as the product of social inequality and injustice. *Frankenstein* expresses, as St Clair suggests, an attempt to work upon the political psychology of its readership. In his review of the novel, Percy Shelley invoked the Godwinian notion of reader-response in asking of the portrait of the Creature: 'who will not feel a responsive string touched in his inmost soul?'<sup>94</sup>

### III

Later in her career, in *The Last Man* (1826), Shelley once again directly confronted the legacy of the Godwinian psychology of hope. A bleak and apparently hopeless novel, *The Last Man* depicts humanity driven to extinction by a deadly plague. Like *Frankenstein*, it recalls the novels of Godwin in its narrative style, that of the first-person confessional. The narrator, Lionel Verney, is recognisably a literary successor to the Creature; a lonely protagonist who cultivates benevolent and compassionate values even in the face of the bitterest disappointments. In portraying his fate as the last man on earth, Shelley offers the ultimate refinement on the solitary personae that

had formed such a crucial element of the political rhetoric of Godwin's novels and Rousseau's confessional works.

Crucially, *The Last Man* is preoccupied with Enlightenment notions of improvement and perfectibility. Though Shelley unfolds a darkly dystopic vision of the future, she fashions the character of Adrian, the optimistic Enlightenment perfectibilist, as the focal point of the novel. The character is a development upon the earlier Woodville of *Matilda*, a study of Godwin and Percy Shelley's intense attachment to hope. The progress of the plot, in which Adrian's utopian projections of future improvement are overturned by the advent of a plague which brings the degeneration of mankind, suggests that the novel inverts the idea of perfectibility set out by Godwin. We saw in the introduction to this thesis how Isaiah Berlin and John Gray have identified the idea of human perfectibility as the defining intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. Shelley might be understood to prefigure something of their critique by breaking down Godwin's psychology of hope and analysing the assumptions inherent within the prospect of secular salvation held out in *Political Justice*.

That *The Last Man* is directly and deliberately related to this intellectual context is suggested by Shelley's reading matter in the years preceding the composition of the novel. Her journal entries for one particular week of June 1821 record that she read both Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* and Godwin's most recent reply, *Of Population, an Enquiry into the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind: Being an Answer to Mr. Malthus's Essay on That Subject* (1820).<sup>95</sup> Malthus's *Essay* had of course been overtly stated as a denial of Godwin's idea of perfectibility. Shelley was intimately familiar with Percy Shelley's view, derived from his reading of Hazlitt's *Reply to Malthus* and *Political Essays* along with Cobbett's *Political Register*, that Malthus's discussions of poor-relief and the impossibility of social improvement had exercised a dominant and lamentable influence on practical politics in the years since the turn of the century. But *The Last Man* appears to acquiesce to the politics of the *Essay on Population*. Shelley's dystopic vision of human power dwarfed by that of nature, in the form of the plague, expresses something of Malthus's anti-humanist, anti-perfectibilist argument.

However, as suggested above, it is important to recognise the political significance of the novel's confessional framework. Shelley's study of the last man might be

interpreted as another displaced radical memoir in the mould of Godwin's novels. Her study of profound disappointment, of the collapse of hopes of improvement and the extinction of the human race, may actually retain some connection with the traditions of the Godwinian novel in its projected effect upon the reader. Traditionally understood as an anti-utopian, anti-Godwinian novel, its representation of the degeneration of the human race needs to be understood in the context of the liberal critiques of Malthus mounted by Godwin and by Hazlitt. Though *The Last Man* represents despair, it retains a very close connection with Godwinian hope.

The anti-Godwinian interpretation of the novel is well established. As with *Frankenstein*, historicist readings of *The Last Man* have been profoundly influenced by Sterrenburg. Retrieving a sense of the novel's political concerns, he suggested that it is marked by allusions to events from the era of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire and the Greek Revolution against the Turks in the 1820s. The work is, he contended, 'an anatomy or encyclopedic survey of a number of political positions, including utopianism, Bonapartism, and revolutionary enthusiasms of various kinds'.<sup>96</sup> Sterrenburg again perceived a reaction against Godwinian optimism, arguing that by representing Adrian's progressive theories alongside the onset of plague and the extinction of humanity, Shelley 'echoes her father's utopian speculations about the elimination of disease in order to reverse and negate them'.<sup>97</sup> Clemit finds that *The Last Man* is an anti-perfectibilist novel, that its 'vision of material decay and depopulation offers a grotesque parody of [Godwin's] projected rational future state'.<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, she views *The Last Man* as a rebuttal of the traditions of the Godwinian novel, its representation of the elimination of the human race destroying the imagined community of enquiring readers and making the reader a passive witness to humanity's destruction by forces beyond its control. Recently, Kari Lokke has followed the Sterrenburg reading by suggesting that *The Last Man* 'constitutes a profound and prophetic challenge to Western humanism'. She situates the novel against contemporary ideas of perfectibility and progress, arguing that Shelley 'obliterates the keystone of Enlightenment ideology in her symbolic annihilation of the human race'.<sup>99</sup> Fiona Stafford, reading the novel in the context of the theme of the 'Last of the Race' from Milton to Darwin, comments on the secularity of Shelley's apocalypse, in which the death of man is not envisaged as commensurate with the death of the earth. Diverging from other interpretations,

Stafford sees the final scenes, set in the ruins of Rome, not as a rejection of humanism but as a paradoxical attempt to represent the value of human endeavour through ‘a hymn to civilization’.<sup>100</sup>

Critical discussion of the novel has usefully established Shelley’s grounding in the political debates of the 1790s and her preoccupation with Godwinian optimism. However, the subtleties of the novel’s narrative framework have received less critical attention. The politics of narrative are central to *The Last Man*, as Verney’s persona and confessions make particular demands upon the reader.

As with the heroes of Godwin’s novels, the name of the central protagonist is significant. Jane Blumberg notes that the Verney family were prominent supporters of the Commonwealth during the English Civil War, pointing out that Lionel’s career recalls in a few details that of Sir Ralph Verney (1613-96), a republican, who became a wanderer on the Continent’.<sup>101</sup> Much like Godwin’s Fleetwood, named after one of Cromwell’s generals, Shelley’s protagonist recalls in his name the fleeting golden age of English republicanism.

She sketches this character in terms which would be familiar to readers of Godwin and Rousseau. Even from his early days Verney experiences, like the Creature, a ‘desire of human sympathy’.<sup>102</sup> When first he comes into contact with Adrian he experiences an epiphanic transformation. After hearing Adrian talk of the ‘Greek sages’ and ‘the power which they had acquired over the minds of men, through the force of love and wisdom only’,<sup>103</sup> he is converted to the cause of virtue:

I could not rest. I sought the hills; a west wind swept them, and the stars glittered above. I ran on, careless of outward objects, but trying to master the struggling spirit within me by means of bodily fatigue. ‘This’, I thought, ‘is power! Not to be strong of limb, hard of heart, ferocious, and daring; but kind, compassionate and soft’. – Stopping short, I clasped my hands, and with the fervour of a new proselyte, cried. ‘Doubt me not, Adrian, I also will become wise and good!’ and then quite overcome, I wept aloud.<sup>104</sup>

Shelley makes the religious overtones of this epiphany explicit. Verney discovers a deep compassion for others in his conversion to the cause of virtue and enthusiasm. Adrian invites him to participate in a potent faith. Verney later declares that ‘[s]ocial feeling and sympathy constituted a marked feature in my disposition’.<sup>105</sup>

His status as a man of feeling is confirmed during the happy time spent living in Windsor Forest. Under the influence of Adrian, Verney becomes an author, believing that ‘no man’s moral principle [could] be enlarged and liberal, without an extensive acquaintance with books’.<sup>106</sup> Verney thus finds ‘another and a valuable link to enchain me to my fellow-creatures’, and imagines himself contributing to intellectual improvement:

Let not these aspirations be attributed to vanity. They were not expressed in words, nor even reduced to form in my own mind; but they filled my soul, exalting my thoughts, raising a glow of enthusiasm, and led me out of the obscure path in which I before walked, into the bright noon-enlightened highway of mankind, making me, citizen of the world, a candidate for immortal honours, an eager aspirant to the praise and sympathy of my fellow men.<sup>107</sup>

The phrase ‘glow of enthusiasm’ recalls the important passage of *Political Justice* in which Godwin discusses the manner in which the work of ‘poets, divines and philosophers’ can teach us to disclaim subordination to ‘authority’:

There is indeed no species of composition, in which the seeds of a morality too perfect for our present improvements in science, may more reasonably be expected to discover themselves, than in works of imagination. When the mind shakes off the fetters of prescription and prejudice, when it boldly takes a flight into the world unknown, and employs itself in search of those grand and interesting principles which shall tend to impart to every reader the glow of enthusiasm, it is at such moments that the enquiring and philosophical reader may expect to be presented with the materials and rude sketches of intellectual improvements.<sup>108</sup>

Such ‘enthusiasm’, and its role within the process of improvement, remains an integral theme in *The Last Man*. We see in Verney’s career as an author, and in his general persona, an ideal of transparent communication achieved through the literary representation of feeling.

Shelley brings Verney’s status as an author to the fore at the points in the novel in which he specifically refers to his narrative as a written text. At such moments, the nature of Shelley’s own literary project begins to emerge. Clemit has read the bleakness of *The Last Man* as expressive Shelley’s of scepticism about the reforming possibilities of the Godwinian novel, as marking a ‘movement away from enabling dialogue’.<sup>109</sup> While this strand of thought is an importance presence in the novel, there

is also another strand at work in which the rhetorical possibilities of confession are emphasised. At the beginning of Chapter Six of the second volume, we see intimations that Verney is writing from a situation of despair (we are not yet aware that he will become the last man). Yet even here, great import is attached to the form of the sentimental confession:

Thus long, I have cradled my heart in retrospection of past happiness, when hope was. Why not for ever thus? I am not immortal; and the thread of my history might be spun out to the limits of my existence. But the same sentiment that first led me to pourtray scenes replete with tender recollections, now bids me hurry on. The same yearning of this warm, panting heart, that has made me in written words record my vagabond youth, my serene manhood, and the passions of my soul, makes me now recoil from further delay. I must complete my work.<sup>110</sup>

Shelley draws the reader's attention to the transparent relay of feeling, to the fact that this confessional narrative lays bare the 'warm, panting heart' of her protagonist. This transparency is again figured in sentimental language in Verney's later recollection of the time he spent in Switzerland with Adrian and Clara:

O days replete with beatitude, days of loved society – days unutterably dear to me forlorn – pass, O pass before me, making me in your memory forget what I am. Behold, how my streaming eyes blot this senseless paper – behold, how my features are convulsed by agonizing throes, at your mere recollection, now that, alone, my tears flow, my lips quiver, my cries fill the air, unseen, unmarked, unheard!<sup>111</sup>

By now the reader is aware that Verney is destined to become the eponymous last man; that his confession is delivered from a position of bitter isolation and desolation. Yet even in the midst of despair as the plague advances, Shelley employs the breathless style familiar from the novel of sensibility. Absolute transparency of feeling is attained as the narrator's tears blot the paper which records his life, paper which he believes to be 'senseless', but which, of course, the reader is reading. Such sympathetic connection between reader and author is alluded to directly when Verney is travelling through Italy with Adrian and Clara as his only remaining companions. Then he imagines the possibility that 'eyes read these pages'. He wonders if some 'tender offspring of the re-born world' will one day discover his confessions.<sup>112</sup>



Godwin had vested the psychological connection between author and reader with great political significance in his literary project; the agency of literature on private judgement was to drive the process of improvement. The shadow of his Dissenting theory of literature and reader-response is present here. Shelley maintains some engagement with the notion of educating a community of readers.

The Preface to *The Last Man* presents an artifice in which Shelley describes how she discovered the manuscript of the novel in a cave in Italy. Thus Verney's narrative is situated as the tale of some bygone catastrophe and also as an embodiment of hope through its survival. Shelley presents transparent communication taking place; Verney does eventually transmit his feelings to his readers. When the last of his companions finally dies, and he is left in a terrifyingly lonely situation as the last man alive on earth, he compares his fate to that of Robinson Crusoe, before observing that his own fate is worse for he can never be rescued: '[t]o none could I ever relate the story of my adversity; no hope had I'.<sup>113</sup> The artifice of the manuscript allows this communication to take place.

As in Godwin's novels, martyrdom confers heroic status on the man of feeling and his compassionate ideals. Even his expressions of disappointment act to confirm his virtues. Left alone, Verney longs for a companion, even the cruellest brute, for even he would have 'human blood' in his veins: 'a human sympathy must link us for ever'.<sup>114</sup> He reflects enviously on the existence of animals with their mates and young: 'I only cannot express to any companion my many thoughts, nor lay my throbbing head on any loved bosom, nor drink from meeting eyes an intoxicating dew'.<sup>115</sup> The climax to *The Last Man*, apparently a vision of desolation and despair, is actually a paean to the notions of radical sensibility that had lain dormant since the 1790s; a hymn to the egalitarian compassion of Rousseau, to Godwin's virtues of sympathy and benevolence. Through her study of the most absolute state of alienation and loneliness imaginable, Shelley invites her reader to participate in a community of feeling with her narrator. In his isolation, Verney describes how 'I stretched out my hand, and it touched none whose sensations were responsive to mine. I was girded, walled in, vaulted over, by seven-fold barriers of loneliness'.<sup>116</sup> But his confessional narrative incubates ideals of benevolence and compassion, even while it represents the frustration of these ideals.

The novel's confessional framework is directly relevant to its broader treatment of political issues. Shelley's discussion of perfectibility and Enlightenment hopes of progress needs to be situated within the context of the novel's melancholy espousal of the ideals of sensibility. The martyrdom of her man of feeling might be understood to inform her treatment of utopian optimism. Though *The Last Man* represents the termination of improvement, it might be understood as a lament for the passing of hope, rather than as a wholesale rejection of Godwinian perfectibility.

Much of the novel represents in detail the optimism of *Political Justice*, imagining the fulfilment of human perfectibility in its plot. By setting *The Last Man* in the years succeeding 2073, when a republic is established in England, Shelley allows herself the opportunity to speculate on future improvement. The work's early optimism is encapsulated in her description of the balloon-ride embarked upon by Verney (the novel depicts the balloon as the principal means of high-speed transport). In a futuristic vision of technological progress, Verney is transported from Windsor to Scotland in a matter of hours:

The pilot hardly moved the plumed steerage, and the slender mechanism of the wings, wide unfurled, gave forth a murmuring noise, soothing to the sense. Plain and hill, stream and corn-field, were discernible below, while we unimpeded sped on swift and secure, as a wild swan in his spring-tide flight. The machine obeyed the slightest motion of the helm; and, the wind blowing steadily, there was no let or obstacle to our course. Such was the power of man over the elements; a power long sought, and lately won.<sup>117</sup>

Through technological advances, humanity has wrought great improvements. The passage echoes the conclusion of *Political Justice*, with its futuristic speculations on the development of technological wonders such as the self-operating plough. Shelley specifically sets her novel at a utopian moment, a time in which we see the advent of 'the power of man over the elements', inviting the reader to witness the fruition of optimistic Enlightenment humanism.

Accompanying these advances in technology are advances in politics, in the shape of the new republic. The character of Ryland, Lord Raymond's rival for the Protectorship of England, offers an encomium to the modern form of government:

He described this republic; shewed how it gave privilege to each individual in the state, to rise to consequence, and even to temporary sovereignty. He compared the royal and republican spirit; shewed how the one tended to enslave the minds of men; while all the institutions of the other served to raise even the meanest among us to something great and good. He shewed how England had become powerful, and its inhabitants valiant and wise, by means of the freedom they enjoyed.<sup>118</sup>

Shelley imagines Paine's contentions on government realised. At this moment, the hopes of 1790s radicalism come to pass. At one point in the novel, Shelley offers an extended prospect of the rapid progress being made by this new government:

Canals, aqueducts, bridges, stately buildings, and various edifices for public utility, were entered upon; [Raymond] was continually surrounded by projectors and projects, which were to render England one scene of fertility and magnificence; the state of poverty was to be abolished; men were to be transported from place to place almost with the same facility as the Princes Housain, Ali, and Ahmed, in the Arabian Nights. The physical state of man would soon not yield to the beatitude of angels; disease was to be banished; labour lightened of its heaviest burden. Nor did this seem extravagant. The arts of life, and the discoveries of science had augmented in a ratio which left all calculation behind; food sprung up, so to say, spontaneously – machines existed to supply with facility every want of the population.<sup>119</sup>

What Shelley imagines here is the fulfilment of the utopia Godwin had described in *Political Justice*. There are very close parallels between this passage and Godwin's prospect of a society of equality, his speculations on the eradication of disease and the advent of human immortality. In the reference to the machines which supply 'every want of the population', perfectibility is seen to triumph over Malthus's theories. This point in time is, as Verney later observes, 'the spring-tide of the hopes of man'.<sup>120</sup> Shelley represents not just the rational Enlightenment notion of progress expounded by Franklin in his letter to Priestley, but the specific psychology of hope, the secular faith, articulated by Godwin.

Shelley's meditations on Godwinian hope find their principal expression in the character of Adrian, a character intended to resemble Percy Shelley. A man of 'sensibility' and 'benevolence', Adrian is a 'republican from principle'.<sup>121</sup> Verney is immediately drawn to his perfectibilist optimism: 'his discourse, whether it concerned his love or his theories for the improvement of man, alike entranced me'.<sup>122</sup> At one

point, Adrian and Verney take a walk in the woods and the former is moved to an enthusiastic transport by the beauty of the scene. Here, Shelley offers an accurate representation of the connection between her husband's theories of hope and of imagination:

Look into the mind of man, where wisdom reigns enthroned; where imagination, the painter, sits, with his pencil dipt in hues lovelier than those of sunset, adorning familiar life with glowing tints. What a noble boon, worthy the giver, is the imagination! it takes from reality its leaden hue: it envelopes all thought and sensation in a radiant veil, and with an hand of beauty beckons us from the sterile seas of life, to her gardens, and bowers, and glades of bliss. And is not love a gift of the divinity? Love, and her child, Hope, which can bestow wealth on poverty, strength on the weak, and happiness on the sorrowing.<sup>123</sup>

In simplified form, Shelley touches on her husband's conception of the transformative, self-generating capacity of hope; on the overlap between his optimism and his theory of the imagination's ability to create what it conceives. Adrian has a profound humanist faith in the progressive capabilities of the rational 'mind of man'. At this stage of the novel, before the advent of the plague, this strain of hope is not cast into doubt. As the speech proceeds, some clear references to a particular strain of utopian thought are made:

Oh, that death and sickness were banished from our earthly home! that hatred, tyranny, and fear could no longer make their lair in the human heart! that each man might find a brother in his fellow, and a nest of repose amid the wide plains of his inheritance! [...] The choice is with us: let us will it, and our habitation becomes a paradise. For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows of death, soothing the bed of disease, and wiping away the tears of agony.<sup>124</sup>

Once again, Shelley appears to have in mind Godwin's attempt to inspire the minds of his readers with hope in the speculation on immortality in *Political Justice*. Adrian's claim that the 'will of man is omnipotent' echoes the claim that Godwin derived from Franklin, that 'mind would one day become omnipotent over matter'.<sup>125</sup> This is an ultra-humanist argument which argues for humanity's potential to create an earthly 'paradise'. The word 'paradise' is significant, suggesting that Shelley perceives some parallel between this secular hope and the Christian hope of salvation. Indeed, at the

end of his speech Adrian is physically overcome in the manner of a religious transport: '[h]is voice trembled, his eyes were cast up, his hands clasped, and his fragile person was bent, as it were, with excess of emotion'.<sup>126</sup> He is seized by a fervent enthusiasm.

These early stages of *The Last Man* establish Shelley's engagement with Godwinian hope, but there is as yet little evidence of a straightforward critique of his principles. As discussed earlier, critics have tended to interpret the novel as a conservative denunciation of radical Enlightenment optimism. Kari Lokke typifies this reading in her description of the novel's attitude to perfectibility:

*The Last Man* attacks Enlightenment faith in the inevitability of progress through collective efforts, a faith that allowed thinkers from Condorcet and Kant to Wollstonecraft and Stael to retain confidence in the triumph of French Revolutionary ideals even after the debacle of the Terror.<sup>127</sup>

Lokke usefully discusses the ideology of the idea of progress and its relation to the disappointments of the Revolution, but her emphasis on the anti-Enlightenment character of *The Last Man* might be reconsidered.

Shelley's concern with issues surrounding progress, egalitarianism, and utopia, manifested in her reading of Malthus and Godwin's reply to Malthus in the 1820s, persisted to the latter part of her literary career. Her *Lives of the Most Eminent Scientific and Literary Men of France* does not convey the image of her as a writer who rejected the perfectibilist principles of the Enlightenment. Condorcet, one of the figures named by Lokke and a key influence on both Godwin and Percy Shelley, was one of her subjects in this work. In Shelley's discussion of Condorcet, she displays a sympathetic understanding of the prominent *philosophe* and his legacy. Speaking of his central doctrine, she observes that '[i]n his life of Turgot he details his theories of the perfectibility of the species'.<sup>128</sup> Condorcet's *Vie de Turgot* is referred to in *Political Justice* and it is likely that its definition of perfectibility was influential on Godwin, as suggested in Chapter One. Shelley's discussion of Condorcet's *Esquisse* registers her dislike for its militant anticlericalism, but also her appreciation of its intellectual significance:

It is full of error and even of intolerance; still the clearness of the views, the enthusiasm with which he develops them, the order, precision, and the originality of his theories, render it remarkable. He glances over the past, and argues that each succeeding epoch in the history of mankind has brought moral improvement and increase of knowledge.<sup>129</sup>

Like Rousseau, Condorcet is fired by 'enthusiasm'. Shelley rightly identifies the notion of concomitant progress in knowledge and ethics as being essential. She proceeds to argue that there have been no advances in poetry since the days of antiquity, but finds that: 'it cannot be doubted, on the other hand, that progress has been made in the general diffusion of knowledge and in the amelioration of society'.<sup>130</sup> She broadly assents to the idea of perfectibility here.

Shelley goes on to picture Condorcet as a heroic figure, developing his views on human perfectibility even while he falls victim to the Jacobin purges. He is described as a man whose 'unflinching war against royalty and aristocracy place him among those politicians who look on mankind as a species, and legislate for them as an equal whole, instead of dividing them into ranks and tribes'. Shelley appears to praise the universalist, egalitarian principles of the French Enlightenment. She then relates that Condorcet's last days before his death in prison were spent committing to paper his wish that his daughter should be educated in 'republican simplicity' and taught 'to crush every feeling of vengeance toward his destroyers'.<sup>131</sup> Shelley depicts Condorcet as a Jean-Jacques figure; though persecuted, despised and alone, he retains an ardent commitment to republican virtues: '[b]enevolence, justice, and attachment to the cause of freedom, remained warm in his heart to the end'.<sup>132</sup> Even while his perfectibilist principles are apparently contradicted by revolutionary bloodshed, Shelley endows his secular faith with a noble stoicism.

When read in conjunction with *The Last Man*, this intensely sympathetic account of the life and perfectibilist beliefs of Condorcet affords a more nuanced understanding of the portrait of Adrian. Shelley imbues the speculations of the latter with a degree of heroic fortitude. Throughout the novel, she frequently returns to his visions of humanist utopia:

'Let this last but twelve months', said Adrian; 'and earth will become a Paradise. The energies of man were before directed to the destruction of his species: they now aim at its liberation and preservation. Man cannot repose, and his restless aspirations will now bring forth good instead

of evil. The favoured countries of the south will throw off the iron yoke of servitude; poverty will quit us, and with that, sickness. What may not the forces, never before united, of liberty and peace achieve in this dwelling of man?'<sup>133</sup>

Shortly before this passage, Shelley first introduces the plague. The course of the plot ultimately rebuts Adrian's radical humanism by envisioning humanity crushed by the inimical force of nature. However, Adrian retains an attachment to perfectibilist hope throughout. Like Condorcet, his devotion to his secular faith, maintained even in the face of the bitterest disappointments, becomes heroic.

Shelley expresses her apparent scepticism about perfectibility most forcefully in her representation of the plague. The course of the plot involves the reader in a state of psychological flux. After depicting the fruition of political reform in the form of the new English republic, humanity's increasing power over the elements through technological advance and Adrian's fervent hopes for the end of disease and poverty, Shelley plunges her reader into a bleak vision of the eradication of the human race through disease. It is this contrast between utopia and dystopia which leads Lokke to argue that Shelley was 'disillusioned with [...] Enlightenment ideals'.<sup>134</sup> Sterrenburg suggests that *The Last Man* reverses the tropes of radical political writing in its depiction of the disease, noting that plagues were 'previously used as hopeful symbols of the revolutionary process'. He views the plague as a representation of the defeat of Enlightenment humanism in the face of nature: 'utopian hopes prove futile in *The Last Man* because nature is impervious to human will'.<sup>135</sup> Sterrenburg is right to highlight this opposition between nature and humanism. Shelley's first mention of the plague announces it as '[t]his enemy to the human race'.<sup>136</sup> Even before its advent, the reader is presented with ominous signs of nature's hostility; on dreary autumn days the wind howls and tears the leaves from the trees, the air inducing the 'decay of vegetation' and being 'hostile to cheerfulness or hope'.<sup>137</sup>

The central terror of the novel is this representation of human marginality. Shelley casts the hopes of Godwinian humanism into shadow by envisioning the triumph of inimical nature. When the plague does arrive, Verney offers an extended meditation on human frailty. The hostile elements are in turmoil, and he fears that 'the giant waves of ocean, and vast arms of the sea' will wrench England from its roots and cast

it into the Atlantic. His reflections on human marginality stand in express opposition to Adrian's ultra-humanism:

What are we, the inhabitants of this globe, least among the many that people infinite space? Our minds embrace infinity; the visible mechanism of our being is subject to merest accident. [...] In the face of all this we call ourselves lords of the creation, wielders of the elements, masters of life and death, and we allege in excuse of this arrogance, that though the individual is destroyed, man continues forever.<sup>138</sup>

The power of human reason is immaterial, Verney believes, given the immense power of nature. Shelley appears to invoke, as she does elsewhere in the novel, the passage of Volney's *Les Ruines* in which the Genius attempts to revive the Traveller from his despair at humanity's condition. Volney had closed the Genius's account of the progress of man from the savage to the civilized state with an encomium to human, as opposed to mythical divine, power:

True, mortal creator! I pay thee homage! Thou hast measured the extent of the heavens, and counted the stars; thou hast drawn the lightning from the clouds, conquered the fury of the sea and the tempest, and subjected all the elements to thy will!<sup>139</sup>

I suggested in Chapter Four that this same passage of *Les Ruines* was adapted by Percy Shelley in the humanist utopia of Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*. But here in *The Last Man*, Volney's radical humanism is bitterly undermined.

Clemit has referred to the novel's 'uncompromising secular stance', derived she claims from Shelley's 'saturation' in Godwin and Volney.<sup>140</sup> This secularity is crucial to the novel. In the first volume of the novel, Shelley takes up Godwin's notion of secular hope, following him by removing the prospect of salvation in the next world in favour of the prospect of an earthly 'paradise' of reason, justice and equality. But then after the arrival of the plague, this secularity becomes a source of fear. Verney's bitter reflection on the progressive humanist world-view, that 'though the individual is destroyed man continues forever', expresses a profound anxiety about Godwin's idea of perfectibility and his prospect of unceasing progress through the generations. As Verney contemplates the turmoil of the elements and the spread of the epidemic, he feels a 'painful sense of the degradation of humanity', believing that 'nature, our



mother, and our friend, had turned on us a brow of menace'. The notion that the rational power of the human mind might materially reform society finds no echo in his fearful apprehension of Nature's power, which might take 'all that man's mind could invent' and cast it into space: 'where life would be drunk up, and man and all his efforts for ever annihilated'.<sup>141</sup> The counterpart of the secular hope of the Enlightenment is a terrifying nihilism.

As the novel approaches its conclusion, Verney's reflections on the delusions of ideas of human power and improvement become more frequent. Once London has been reduced to a thousand inhabitants and weeds are growing in its streets, he declares that society no longer exists. That summer 'extinguished our hopes, the vessel of society was wrecked'. Humanity exists 'by twos or threes', as individuals who might 'perform the animal functions', but 'man, the queller of the elements, the lord of created nature, the peer of demi-gods, existed no longer'.<sup>142</sup> Again, Shelley rephrases the vital moment of *Les Ruines* at which the Genius revives the hope of the Traveller with his vision of human power. But now that vision only serves to heighten disappointment as humanity is reduced to the status of an animal. Like Volney's despairing Traveller, Verney is among ruins in London. He bids 'farewell to kingly pomp and warlike pageantry; the crowns are in the dust, and the wearers are in their graves!'<sup>143</sup> We are told that '[p]alaces were deserted'.<sup>144</sup> This secular apocalypse appears to have realised the republican hopes of the radical Enlightenment. Shelley moves very close to the utopia of *Prometheus Unbound*, in which the old institutions collapse after the fall of Jupiter:

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats and prisons; wherein  
And beside which, by wretched men were borne  
Sceptres, tiaras, swords and chains, and tomes  
Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance,  
Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,  
The ghosts of a no-more-remembered fame.<sup>145</sup>

But unlike the Spirit of the Hour's vision of ruins, the ruin of London is not accompanied by secular salvation. Shelley does represent the fulfilment of the equality for which Godwin, Percy Shelley and the *philosophes* had argued. However, the

equality achieved here, once luxury is afforded to all after the collapse of law, is insignificant:

We were all equal now; but near at hand was an equality still more levelling, a state where beauty and strength, and wisdom, would be as vain as riches and birth. The grave yawned beneath us all, and its prospects prevented any of us from enjoying the ease and plenty which in so awful a manner was presented to us.<sup>146</sup>

Shelley almost seems to mock the optimism of the Enlightenment, allowing the dream of equality to be realised and then exposing it as meaningless.

*The Last Man* thus expresses a duality in its attitude to Godwinian hope. At points, Shelley enters fervently into the prospect of human perfectibility unfolded in *Political Justice*; at others she undermines the Enlightenment humanist utopia described by Godwin. This duality needs to be set against the nexus of ideas surrounding Malthus's *Essay on Population*. That Shelley's examination of progress and degeneration, utopia and dystopia, is related to the ongoing population controversy is suggested early on in the novel, when the effect of the schemes of improvement undertaken by the republican government is described: '[t]he arts of life, and the discoveries of science had augmented in a ratio which left all calculation behind; food sprung up, so to say, spontaneously – machines existed to supply with facility every want of the population'.<sup>147</sup> As suggested earlier, this passage realises the egalitarian utopia imagined by Godwin in *Political Justice* and *The Enquirer*, in which every human is free from the demands of physical labour. The pointed references to 'ratio' and 'depopulation' deliberately invite the reader to set this utopia against the dystopia projected in Malthus's denial of perfectibility. But as *The Last Man* proceeds, its relationship with the *Essay* becomes more complex. Indeed, the entire scheme of the plot, in which a system of egalitarian government arises amongst hopes for the fulfilment of human perfectibility only to be crushed by a plague which diminishes humanity down to the last man, recalls the manner in which Malthus brandishes his own dystopia.

At one stage of the *Essay*, Malthus allows utopia to arise and bids: 'let us imagine for a moment Mr Godwin's beautiful system of equality realized in its utmost purity'.<sup>148</sup> There then follows a lengthy description of the society which would follow,

one in which '[w]ar and contention cease', '[a]ll men are equal', 'the necessary labours of agriculture are shared among all' and in which the 'spirit of benevolence, guided by impartial justice, will divide this produce among all the members of the society according to their wants'.<sup>149</sup> Yet, Malthus contends, the differing ratios of increase for subsistence and population would mean that, 'by the inevitable laws of nature', such a society would quickly be destroyed: 'if Mr Godwin's system of society was established in its utmost perfection, instead of myriads of centuries, not thirty years could elapse before its utter destruction from the simple principle of population'.<sup>150</sup> Malthus almost shows pleasure in depicting the collapse of this state of equality, describing the return of self-interest and the law of self-preservation: '[b]enevolence, yet lingering in a few bosoms, makes some faint expiring struggles, till at length self-love resumes his wonted empire and lords it triumphant over the world'.<sup>151</sup> Godwin's perfectibilist utopia is destroyed in a gleeful dystopic vision.

Shelley's own destruction of utopia often invites comparisons with the *Essay on Population*. There are references to 'the decree of population'; to 'these days of depopulation'; to 'an earth whose diminished population a child's arithmetic might number'.<sup>152</sup> In addition, the agent of Shelley's dystopia, plague, is referred to as a means of depopulation in Malthus's *Essay*:

The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction; and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and ten thousands.<sup>153</sup>

Malthus had articulated the principle of population specifically as a rebuttal of Godwin's idea of perfectibility, of the notions of benevolence and egalitarianism encompassed within that concept. At moments such as this, the vocabulary of that rebuttal extends beyond the terminology of social science and political economy into that of lurid dystopia.

Shelley's gestures toward the principle of population are significant, forming a synthesis with the anti-humanist arguments put forward by Verney. Malthus's own anti-humanist argument was defined in express opposition to the intellectual impulses

of the radical Enlightenment, as Donald Winch points out in his history of political economy: ‘a fixed law of nature was being invoked to prove why no remodelling of social and political institutions could alter the basic human condition’.<sup>154</sup> Shelley’s representation of human marginality in the face of the plague seems to take up this strand of thought. Improvement is halted by the law of nature. Thus *The Last Man* might be understood as a rejection of the entire optimistic ethic of *Political Justice*, as a rebuttal of Godwin’s theory that human errors are the product of social institution rather than immutable laws inscribed by nature or by God. The Malthusian element of the novel could be seen as marking the distance travelled by Shelley since embracing the Godwinian psychology of hope in *Frankenstein*.

But despite her clear engagement with the *Essay on Population*, Shelley’s exact position within the population controversy is unclear. Fiona Stafford has made an important contribution to critical understanding of *The Last Man* by observing that Godwin’s own reply to Malthus, *Of Population* (1820), provides a striking instance of contemporary polemical usage of the idea of plague. She draws attention to Godwin’s description of the new world in which Malthusianism is dominant as ‘a city under the severe visitation of a pestilence’, where ‘all philanthropy and benevolence are at an end’.<sup>155</sup> Stafford notes that, for Godwin, Malthus’s philosophy was one of despair which found an appropriate symbol in the plague’.<sup>156</sup> Godwin’s observations on the vast gulf between the world in which he was born and the new world of Malthusianism prefigure the psychology of Shelley’s novel. There is the same contrast between hope and despair that we see in her portrayal of the rise of the English republic, of the flowering of Adrian’s perfectibilist optimism, before the advent of the plague’s bleak ravages. Godwin describes an abrupt schism between the consoling hope of progress and anti-humanist despair:

In the Old World [...] there was something exhilarating and cheerful. We felt that there was room for a generous ambition to unfold itself. If we were under the cloud or the grief of a calamity, we had still something to console us. We might animate our courage with reflections on the nature of man, and support our constancy by recollecting the unlimited power we possess to remedy our evils, and better our condition [...] Mr Malthus blots out all this with one stroke of his pen. By a statement of six pages, or rather six lines, he undertakes to shew us what a fool the man is who should be idle enough to rejoice in such a world as this. He tells us that our ills are remediless, and that human institutions, and the resources of human ingenuity,

are feathers, capable of doing little harm, and no more competent to produce us benefit. We are fallen into the hands of a remorseless stepmother, Nature: it is in vain that we struggle against her laws.<sup>157</sup>

The tone of Godwin's objections to Malthus is no longer amicable, as it was in the earlier *Reply to Parr* (1801). Here we see his bitterness at his defeat in the population debate. Godwin reacts angrily to Malthus's dismissal of the effects of 'human institutions'; for in *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, institution was held to determine human character. The reform of institutions promised the possibility of progress toward a society of justice, benevolence and equality. In the termination of 'philanthropy and benevolence' promised in the Malthusian world, Godwin sees an end to optimism: '[t]o serve our fellow citizens is a hopeless undertaking. With hope, the very wish to serve them expires'.<sup>158</sup> The anti-humanist principle of population is thus a cover for the neglect of the poor and the toleration of excessive wealth, he contends.

There is a parallel between Shelley's characterisation of the plague as a force of nature and Godwin's thoughts on the limitations imposed by Malthus's idea of nature. This section of *Of Population* bitterly concedes that the idea of perfectibility is lost; that 'we' no longer believe that humanity possesses 'an unlimited power [...] to remedy our evils, and better our condition'. Once again, Godwin suggests that the significance of this idea was principally psychological, that it could 'console us' in times of hardship. With the destruction of this faith through Malthus's principle of population, the world is left desolate for him. Godwin undergoes a psychological crisis similar to that experienced in the loss of religious faith.

*The Last Man* is a novel preoccupied with psychology. In the light of *Of Population*, the despair which Shelley depicts might be characterised as a melancholy study of the demise of Godwinian hope, rather than as an endorsement of Malthus's anti-perfectibilist principle of population. Godwin had written to Shelley in 1821 discussing the poor sales of *Of Population* and the absence of reviews in the prominent journals (when a review did later appear in the *Edinburgh Review*, he found it to be 'scurrilous and abusive').<sup>159</sup> Significantly, the letter sees him acknowledge the dominance of the *Essay on Population* along with the fact of his own marginalisation. Malthus, he admits, 'has been in possession of the public mind for twenty years'. As a

result, ‘the persons calling themselves political economists, I believe to a man, still stick to Malthus, and refuse ever to look into my book [*Of Population*]’.<sup>160</sup> The principle of population, with its conclusive rejection of the ideas on equality and benevolence put forward in *Political Justice*, had begun a new science of political economy and ensured that Godwin could gain no foothold in that new science. Verney’s laments on human marginality as the plague takes hold are given a new impetus when read against Godwin’s disappointed critique of Malthusianism. When he tells his wife that they must leave England as they cannot survive another harsh winter, he warns that: ‘[a] mightier power than the human was at hand to destroy our plans’. Absence of hope is the principle tragedy in this world in which human power is dwarfed by that of nature:

The last blessing of humanity was wrested from us; we might no longer hope. Can the madman, as he clanks his chains, hope? Can the wretch, led to the scaffold, who when he lays his head on the block, marks the double shadow of himself and the executioner, whose uplifted arm bears the axe, hope? [...] Such hope as theirs, we also may entertain!<sup>161</sup>

Shelley then proceeds to narrate the fable of Pandora’s box, telling how Hope, ‘this gentle spirit’, sprung ‘from the box of Pandora, else crammed with evils’. This discourse on the death of hope closes the second volume of the novel:

[A]ll admired the inspiriting loveliness of young Hope; each man’s heart became her home; she was enthroned sovereign of our lives, here and hereafter. [...] But like all other gifts of the Creator to Man, she is mortal; her life has attained its last hour. We have watched over her; nursed her flickering existence; [...] even as we spend ourselves in struggles for her recovery, she dies; to all nations the voice goes forth, Hope is dead!<sup>162</sup>

As much as Godwin or her husband did, Shelley sees hope as an active, materially influential faculty. In envisioning its death, she leaves humanity adrift in a nihilistic void. This discussion invites comparison with Godwin’s thoughts on the collapse of the consoling hope of perfectibility after Malthus’s *Essay on Population*.

The status of *The Last Man* as a lament for the passing of, rather than a rebuttal of, Godwinian hope is evidenced in its third and final volume. Having passed through a stage of despair in which he reflected on the delusions of human power, Verney now

clings to the fragments of optimism left by the wreck of society. Each volume of the novel has a distinct character. While the second volume was a Malthusian portrayal of human frailty in the face of nature, the third passes through this phase of despair to dwell on the last vestiges of hope. The latter stages of the work describe the journey made by the last remnants of the human race through Europe to Italy. As the band of survivors makes its way through France, Verney reflects on humanity's sudden collapse and also on its earlier progress:

Were these miserable beings, who, worn and wretched, passed in sorrowful procession, the sole remnants of the race of man, which, like a flood, had once spread over and possessed the whole earth? [...] It had been the mere plaything of nature, when first it crept out of uncreative void into light; but thought brought forth power and knowledge; and, clad with these, the race of man assumed dignity and authority.<sup>163</sup>

Verney's speech, unexpected in its nature given the progression of the plot, revives radical humanism in transmuted form. In the midst of the bleakest of disappointments, he recalls the time when humanity, through 'power and knowledge', managed to improve itself from a state in which it had been 'the mere plaything of nature'. We are close to the optimism through which Woodville had sought to nurture Matilda back to health. As we have seen, similar narratives of humanity's development occur in *Political Justice* and *Prometheus Unbound*, enforcing the progressive hopes of the Enlightenment. Verney's words are ambivalent, acknowledging present despair, but recalling with intensity the achievements of human reason:

We must all die! The species of man must perish; his frame of exquisite workmanship; the wondrous mechanism of his senses; the noble proportion of his godlike limbs; his mind, the throned king of these; must perish. Will the earth still keep her place among the planets; [...] will beasts pasture, birds fly, and fishes swim, when man, the lord, possessor, perceiver, and recorder of all these things, has passed away, as though he had never been? O what mockery is this! Surely death is not death, and humanity is not extinct; but merely passed into other shapes, unsubjected to our perceptions.<sup>164</sup>

While the course of the plot may emphasise humanity's terrifying marginality, Verney is unwilling to countenance such a prospect. This speech has the air of an agonised

defence of the intellectual traditions of Enlightenment humanism, of the very hope of progress.

Such a defence had been mounted seven years earlier by Hazlitt in his *Political Essays* of 1819, the final five of which were all concerned with the *Essay on Population* and its political influence.<sup>165</sup> In these essays, Hazlitt repeated his objections (first stated in his *Reply to Malthus*) to the manner in which Malthus had propounded the belief that the poor were a separate species to be treated distinctly from the respectable classes and lamented his consequent influence upon changes in the Poor Laws. Significantly for Shelley, he also examined in one essay, ‘On the Principle of Population as Affecting the Schemes of Utopian Improvement’, Malthus’s travesties of the ‘grave, masculine genius of our Utopian philosophers, their sublime attainments and gigantic energy’.<sup>166</sup> Shelley’s characterisation of the perfectibilist Adrian and later portrayal of the reversal of civilisation echo the tone of this essay. Though Hazlitt always distanced himself from Godwin’s ambitious speculations on future improvement, the *Political Essays* reveal that he specifically objected to the anti-progressivism of the principle of population:

Its advocates are contented to make use of it as a lucky diversion against all Utopian projects of perfectibility, and against every practical advance in human improvement. But they cannot consistently stop here, for it requires not only a shrinking back from every progressive refinement, but a perpetual deterioration and retrograde movement from the positive advances we have made in civilization, comfort, and population, to the lowest state of barbarism, ignorance, and depopulation – till we come back to the age of acorns and pig-nuts, and reduce this once flourishing, populous, free, industrious, independent, and contented people, to a horde of wandering savages, housing in thickets, and living on dewberries, shell-fish, and crab-apples. *This will never do.*<sup>167</sup>

The *Political Essays* remind us that the population controversy remained an integral element within political debate in the post-Napoleonic era. Hazlitt’s anger at the manner in which the principle of population had been ranged against ‘every practical advance in human improvement’ takes the form of a projected dystopia of ‘depopulation’ and ‘wandering savages’, anticipating the latter stages of *The Last Man*.



Contrary to the suggestions of the Sterrenburg interpretation, the novel shares a sensibility with Hazlitt's defence of perfectibilist hope against the anti-progressivism of Malthus. In the conclusion to the work, set amid the ruins of Rome, Shelley completes her study of the reversal of civilization. Here, the methodology of the Godwinian novel, the transparent first-person confessional, is united with the discussion of perfectibility. As Verney becomes the last man, his persona is pushed to the fore; we are once again invited to contemplate the solitary, disappointed man of feeling as the heroic cultivator of threatened ideals. As the small band of survivors makes its way through Switzerland (the birthplace of Rousseau and always a significant location in the works of the Godwin circle), Verney is moved by the intoxicating spectacle of Mount Jura stretching its dark roots into the waters of Lake Lemman:

An enthusiastic transport, akin to happiness, burst, like a sudden ray from the sun, on our darkened life. Precious attribute of woe-worn humanity! that can snatch extatic emotion, even from under the very share and harrow, that ruthlessly ploughs up and lays waste every hope.<sup>168</sup>

Though in the midst of despair, Verney discovers a consoling enthusiasm.

By the time he reaches Rome, his companions are dead and he finds himself to be the last man. Verney sees the city as a symbol of the endurance of the old world that existed before humanity was subjected to nature's laws:

I will seek the towns – Rome, the capital of the world, the crown of man's achievements. Among its storied streets, hallowed ruins, and stupendous remains of human exertion, I shall not [...] find every thing forgetful of man; trampling on his memory, defacing his works, proclaiming from hill to hill, and vale to vale, - by the torrents freed from the boundaries which he imposed - by the vegetation liberated from the laws which he enforced – by his habitation abandoned to mildew and weeds, that his power is lost, his race annihilated for ever.<sup>169</sup>

The focus on the regression of civilization is shared with Hazlitt's essay 'On the Principle of Population as Affecting the Schemes of Utopian Improvement'. Verney seeks desperately for some human monument which will survive the encroachment of nature's monstrous growths. That Shelley dwells so specifically on 'man's

achievements', on humanity's 'power', suggests once again her concern with Enlightenment humanism and its rejection in the work of Malthus. Her protagonist becomes a sentimental hero in his defence of human power. Wandering through Rome, contemplating the verses of Horace and Virgil, the speeches of Cicero, he feels himself 'exalted by long forgotten enthusiasm'.<sup>170</sup>

In this section of the text Shelley again draws attention to the narrative as confession. Relating his lonely time in the libraries of Rome and on the banks of the Tiber, Verney describes how 'I streak this paper with the tale of what my so named occupations were' and how 'my hand trembles – my heart pants' in describing such woe.<sup>171</sup> The rhetoric of transparent confession employed by Godwin and Rousseau surfaces once more, as the reader is invited to compassionately contemplate the text as the unmediated expression of individual feeling. It is at this point that the reader discovers that Verney's entire narrative, stretching back to the novel's beginning in his early life, was initiated in his rambles through the ruins of Rome. One day he is moved to authorship after finding a manuscript scattered through a study: 'I also will write a book, I cried – for whom to read? – to whom dedicated?'<sup>172</sup> As the last man on earth, his narrative will be a futile one without any prospective readership, he fears. After first dedicating his book to the 'illustrious dead', Verney then wonders if the world might be 're-peopled' and if his narrative might serve as a record of the antepestilential race, of 'their achievements', their 'imagination infinite, and powers godlike'.<sup>173</sup> Verney moves away from his bitter reflections on the delusions of human power in the second volume to espouse an ultra-humanism that recalls *Political Justice*, *Les Ruines* or Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*. His account of the genesis of his narrative completes the artifice of the Preface, in which Shelley claims to have found the manuscript of the novel in a cave in Italy. The reader, then, is led to consider that Verney's hopes were fulfilled and to contemplate the narrative they are reading as constituting the transparent communication for which he had longed:

I will write and leave in this most ancient city, this world's sole monument', a record of these things. I will leave a monument of the existence of Verney, the Last Man. At first I thought only to speak of plague, of death, and last, of desertion; but I lingered fondly on my early years, and recorded with sacred zeal the virtues of my companions. They have been with me during the fulfilment of my task. I have brought it to an end – I lift my eyes from my paper – again they are lost to me. Again I feel that I am alone.<sup>174</sup>

Self-consciously, the passage refers to the act of writing. Shelley draws attention to the fact that this is not simply a narrative ‘of plague, of death, and last, of desertion’, but the confession of an individual life. The Godwinian persona of the alienated solitary is invoked again, but the reader’s own participation in the confessional autobiography counteracts the isolation. The principles of Godwin’s literary project are realised; transparent communication with a community of readers is achieved.

The conclusion in the ruins of Rome embodies Shelley’s use of the confessional narrative as a means of expressing sublimated progressive hope. While *The Last Man* may represent the demise of Godwinian perfectibility, it offers a hymn to humanism even in the representation of that demise. Though Shelley exposes the tensions and delusions inherent in Godwin’s Enlightenment optimism, the conclusion demonstrates that she is unwilling to renounce absolutely her attachment to the notion that humanity possesses some power to, as it is put in *Of Population*, ‘remedy our evils, and better our condition’.<sup>175</sup>

Her separation from Malthus can be seen in their differing appraisals of benevolence. In the *Essay on Population*, Godwin’s utopia of benevolence and equality had been portrayed as unsustainable; if established, the laws of nature would ensure that society quickly returned to a state of inequality with self-interest as its governing principle. While Malthus had sought to prove that the self-interest described by Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* was the only viable position in moral theory, Shelley leaves Godwin’s idea of benevolence untouched. Indeed, the final stages of Verney’s narrative crystallise the compassionate ideals described by Godwin in *Political Justice* and the novels, and by Rousseau in the *Confessions*. This fictional autobiography describes a man of intense sensibility and invites a sympathetic response from the reader, just as the narrative of the Creature, a notable defence of benevolence, had done.

*The Last Man* is, then, far more complex in its attitude to Godwinian ‘utopianism’ and Enlightenment perfectibilism than the dominant Sterrenburg reading suggests. Though sceptical about the possibility of improvement, Shelley remained preoccupied by the consoling psychology of hope she had first described in her portrait of Woodville in *Matilda*. The novel, along with *Frankenstein* and *Matilda*, demonstrates that the examination of Godwinian hope was the dominant intellectual concern of her

fiction. The ambiguity of *The Last Man* registers the circumstances of its production, in which any radical discussion of perfectibility would have been unsustainable. The possibilities for literary reformism were limited in 1826. Percy Shelley and Byron were dead; the liberal circle around the *Examiner* was disbanded; Godwin had been entirely marginalised by successive editions of the *Essay on Population*. But even in the mid-1820s, Shelley maintained a connection with the tenets of Godwin's reformist literary project; using the fictional confessional as a means of working directly upon the mind of the reader and expressing to them, albeit in transmuted form, a sense of progressive optimism. *The Last Man* may express a mood of disappointment, but this very disappointment sustains the vestiges of Godwinian hope by offering a melancholy lament for its demise.

## *Conclusion*

In 1837, John Stuart Mill wrote to Leigh Hunt in praise of his contribution to philosophical reform. Hunt had, he said, ‘suffered in the cause’ through the ‘badness’ of earlier times. Mill proceeded to discuss this period and the stimulus its liberal writers provided for modern reform:

[R]adical aspirations were an object of contempt to almost all persons of station & consideration [...] notwithstanding the exertions of a few persons, whose merits as *writers* even those same classes were constrained to allow: & it is not more than might have been said of Christianity after it had produced several generations of heroes & martyrs. It was not yourself only, & Hazlitt, & Cobbett; Godwin, & Bentham, & my father, & various others, had laboured for radicalism with more or less of acceptance, & had gained or were gaining reputation to themselves individually, but the cause had not yet profited much by them: it has since, & we are now benefitting by what was then done.<sup>176</sup>

From his vantage point after the first Reform Bill of 1832, Mill views radicalism principally in its middle-class manifestations. He situates Godwin as one of the most important intellectual ‘martyrs’ of the age, as one whose writings contributed materially to the cause of liberal improvement. It is notable that Mill figures the experience of radicalism in terms similar to those used by Godwin. Suffering and martyrdom finds its fulfilment in the process of perfectibility and gradual reform. Mill shares Godwin’s interest in the scale of hope, asserting a course of progress and affirming that ‘we are now benefitting by what was then done’.

The latter part of the twentieth century has seen Godwin fall from the position of prominence afforded to him by Mill. This shift in scholarship is to some extent attributable to the work of one of the most influential historians of the late twentieth century, E.P. Thompson. Thompson offered an unfavourable appraisal of Godwin, emphasising the limited middle-class readership of *Political Justice* and contrasting it with the broader appeal of Paine’s *Rights of Man*. In addition, he characterised Godwin purely as a utilitarian. This stance produces his remark in *The Making of the English Working Class* on ‘the peculiarly repressive and anti-egalitarian ideology of the English middle classes (Godwin giving way to Bentham, Bentham giving way to

Malthus, McCulloch, and Dr Ure, and these giving rise to Baines, Macaulay and Edwin Chadwick)'.<sup>177</sup>

Yet earlier in the twentieth century, Godwin's contribution to the course of progressive thought had been more readily acknowledged, notably in two major discussions of socialism. In Max Beer's *History of British Socialism* (1921), he takes his place as the purveyor of the materialism of Lamettrie and Holbach, of the environmental determinism of Helvétius.<sup>178</sup> In G.D.H. Cole's five-volume *History of Socialist Thought* (1953-8), Godwin forms the subject, alongside Paine, of a chapter in the first volume; though Cole rightly sees him as an 'anticipator' of certain concepts rather than as a 'socialist' in any meaningful sense.<sup>179</sup> Cole notes Godwin's attachment to the Enlightenment concept of human perfectibility and observes that he 'took over from the French philosophers of the Enlightenment the belief that environment was the main factor in the shaping of human conduct', thus providing Owenite socialism with one of its fundamental doctrines.<sup>180</sup>

But it is the Thompson reading which has had the most pronounced impact on Romantic criticism. Godwin has often been caricatured as an arch-rationalist, treated categorically as a utilitarian and understood purely as the author of *Political Justice*. Wordsworth's discussion of his reaction against Godwinian philosophy in Book X has also proved significant in establishing a binary opposition between Romanticism and the thought of *Political Justice*. The role played by Godwin in a particular strand of Romantic criticism is typified in Nicholas Roe's *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*. While Roe's attempt to recover the philosophical and political resonances of Keats' poetry makes the case for the influence of Godwin's 'system of disinterestedness', he also suggests that negative capability emerged as a reaction against *Political Justice*: '[i]n response to the mechanism of Godwinian reason, and its stubborn assertion of disinterest and benevolence, Keats intuited a Shakespearian - or "poetical" - susceptibility to other human beings, to nature, to the universe'.<sup>181</sup> Godwin thus becomes a negative stimulus in the development of Romanticism, as in *The Prelude*.

However, this thesis has argued that Godwin's treatises and novels sought to act on the reader and propagate improvement through an extra-rational notion of hope. Ideas on perfectibility and benevolence become detached from rational measurements of truth or falsehood, prized for their capacity to offer consolation and 'encouragement'.

Godwin rehearses a political psychology which locates the means of progress towards a society of equality and justice in hope itself. The idea of benevolence identified by Roe as an index of the 'mechanism of Godwinian reason' is sustained in *St Leon*, *Fleetwood* and the *Reply to Parr* through Rousseauvian sensibility, a mood of disappointment and alienation that nourishes an intense egalitarian compassion for others. Rather than being understood as the binary opposite of 'Romanticism', Godwinian benevolence can be viewed as providing a vital stimulus to Romantic notions of the sympathetic imagination through its profound influence on Percy Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*.

The reductive reading of Godwin, neglecting the extra-rational dynamic of hope enacted in *Political Justice* and the novels, has had a consequent effect on interpretations of the work of Mary and Percy Shelley. In the case of the former, *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* have been read as reactions against the arid travesty of human nature found in *Political Justice*. This thesis has argued that Godwinian hope is the single most important intellectual context for Mary Shelley's work. Yet the Sterrenburg interpretation, founded on a partial reading of *Political Justice*, has proved so pervasive that it is common to find *Frankenstein* discussed in terms of its author's 'essentially conservative instinct for anticipating certain unintended consequences of idealistic political theory and of the scientific experiment which often accompanied it'.<sup>182</sup> By appreciating the elements of Godwin's work, in both political treatise and novel, which rely on an extra-rational Rousseauvian enthusiasm for justice, it is possible to recover a sense of Mary Shelley as an author engaged in a problematic restating of Godwinian hope. *Frankenstein* is founded on the arguments for disinterested benevolence set out in *Political Justice* and *St Leon*; its alienated, compassionate central protagonist expresses Shelley's desire to sustain an egalitarian critique of modern society. The novel's discussion of criminality emphasises the hope that social problems might be solved by the reform of institution. It should be understood in the context of Owen's ultra-Godwinian *New View of Society*, published two years previously in 1816. There, Owen had argued that the disposition to crime is not innate:

Let it not, therefore, be longer said that evil or injurious actions cannot be prevented; or that the most rational habits in the rising generation cannot be universally formed. In those

characters which now exhibit crime, the fault is obviously not in the individual, but the defect proceeds from the system in which the individual has been trained. Withdraw those circumstances which tend to create crime in the human character, and crime will not be created.<sup>183</sup>

The Creature's narrative makes a similar plea to the readership, urging them to share in the hope that the circumstances which corrupted him might be reformed to allow the 'rising generation' to escape the iniquities of modern society.

The parallel with Owen's *New View of Society* highlights the extent to which *Frankenstein* was part of a second flowering of Godwinian thought rather than a critique of the perfectibilism of *Political Justice*. William St Clair traces the misreading of *Frankenstein* to its failure to find a politically-receptive audience, and thus to a quirk in the law of private copyright ownership which held the book back from potential readers:

A gripping tale with a reformist moral message, the book might have taken its place alongside *Queen Mab*, *Don Juan*, Volney's *Ruins*, Paine's *Rights of Man*, and the other famous works of the radical canon that helped to shape a new sceptical, reformist, urban culture.<sup>184</sup>

The work of Mary Shelley should be read in terms of a Godwinian notion of literature as the agent of liberal improvement, remaining fundamentally attached to Godwin's ideas on the material benefits of progressive optimism.

This attachment is evident in her short *Memoirs of William Godwin* (1831), a work produced for a new edition of *Caleb Williams*. At one stage of the *Memoirs*, in the course of a discussion of Godwin's *Of Population*, she makes clear her own position on the population controversy:

Fervently attached to all that is lofty, independent, and elevating in his speculations on human society, Godwin strenuously controverted the degrading, hard, and demoralising tenets of the author of the *Essay on Population*. His book, exact in logic, and powerful in eloquence, would probably have been considered as a complete answer to his adversary, did not Malthus's notions favour so memorably the vices of the great, and all that is rotten in our institutions.<sup>185</sup>

Mary Shelley displays great sympathy towards the enthusiastic optimism of Godwin, reserving her scorn for the 'demoralising' character of Malthus's *Essay on*



*Population*. The *Memoirs* see her proceed to claim of Godwin's *Thoughts on Man* (1831) that humanity might find 'upon the sentiments of that book the tower of their hope'. The work is praised for the manner in which it communicates 'such admiration and love for man as must elevate the desponding, confound the misanthrope, and add for ever dignity and grace to our species'.<sup>186</sup> This prizing of hope sheds much light on the psychological dynamic of *The Last Man*, on its disappointed lament for the demise of Godwinian perfectibilism in the face of Malthus' critique.

Mary Shelley's complex and often ambiguous relationship with Godwinian hope proceeded in conjunction with Percy Shelley's own evaluation of the psychological and political effects of enthusiasm communicated through literature. By understanding the way in which Percy Shelley's theory of poetry and political outlook took their fundamental impetus from Godwinian optimism, we can move beyond the binary opposition between Godwin and Romanticism established by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* and adopted in much Romantic criticism. Godwin's Dissenting conception of literature and reader-response was a key influence over Percy Shelley's theory of poetry, and his idea of benevolence directly produced the altruistic model of the literary imagination that is set in opposition to the self-interest of nascent capitalism in *A Defence of Poetry*. Percy Shelley followed Godwin's transposition of Christian hope into the experience of progressive politics, frequently representing to the reader the goal of liberal progress as a means of realising that very progress. However, he also sharpens the study of disappointment found in works such as *St Leon* and *Fleetwood*, matching the complexity of Mary Shelley's treatment of hope. Percy Shelley's final, uncompleted poem, *The Triumph of Life* (1821), offers a gloomy reflection on history and politics which takes the disappointed figure of Rousseau as its focal point. The work builds on the anxious disappointment that its author saw as the counterpoint of Enlightenment hope, seeing, in de Maistre-like fashion, improvement defeated by the fact of human irrationality.

Percy Shelley explores this psychological duality in close detail in the short poem *Julian and Maddalo; A Conversation* (1819), a piece which expresses his sense that Godwinian hope was an artifice. The Preface to the poem describes how the Byronic Count Maddalo possesses 'an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life', while Julian is established as a Godwinian perfectibilist, being 'passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind, and

the immense improvements of which, by the extinction of certain moral superstitions, human society may yet be susceptible'.<sup>187</sup> Over the course of the poem, Percy Shelley represents the dissolution of Julian's 'faith' (this significant word is used by the character himself in reference to his optimism<sup>188</sup>). Maddalo's contrary argument is proved in the tale told by the Madman who, driven insane by disappointed love, relays his knowledge of human weakness and the frailty of rationality. The psychological progression of the poem sees hope extinguished by despair. Julian's belief that 'we might be all / We dream of happy, high, majestic' is bluntly rebutted in Maddalo's claim that 'you talk Utopia'.<sup>189</sup> The optimistic imaginings of the conclusions to *Political Justice* and *Prometheus Unbound* are subjected to scrutiny as Maddalo offers a Burkean critique of Julian's perfectibilism, asserting that the Madman will prove to him '[h]ow vain are such aspiring theories'.<sup>190</sup> The fundamental assumptions of Godwinian hope are presented as baseless 'theory', with the despairing conclusion of the poem approaching a rejection of Enlightenment humanism.

*Julian and Maddalo* suggests that the fervent optimism of a poem such as *Prometheus Unbound* may be something of a rhetorical pose; that Percy Shelley's relationship with Godwinian hope is more nuanced than some critics have allowed. By undertaking an investigation of the underside of the psychology of hope, Shelley reveals a degree of what Dawson terms the 'political sobriety' he is often denied by critics, and exposes some of the tensions inherent in the philosophy and psychology of *Political Justice*. We need to acknowledge the way in which Percy Shelley defined his literary project against Wordsworth and Coleridge's recoil from the Enlightenment, as an attempt to sustain Godwinian hopes of perfectibility, benevolence and equality. However, the critique of Enlightenment humanism mounted in *The Triumph of Life*, *Julian and Maddalo* and the Furies episode of *Prometheus Unbound* illustrates that the Godwinian psychology of hope articulated in much of his work was not adopted uncritically, but as a rhetorical tactic with pointed application to the contemporary political and literary situation.

The influence of Godwin's literary theory on Percy Shelley's ideal of transparent communication with an audience of enquiring readers deserves more critical attention. Though that ideal was only fulfilled in Shelley's lifetime through pirated editions of *Queen Mab*, his later influence over the Chartist movement enacted his vision of the poet as legislator who conveys his readership towards liberal improvement. His

connection with the Chartists is arguably the fullest realisation of the Godwinian model of the reading experience as public discussion.<sup>191</sup>

In their discussions of hope, Godwin, Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley played a significant role in introducing the perfectibilist thought of the French Enlightenment into British political debate, as well as anticipating later critiques of the Enlightenment. Crucially for our understanding of Romanticism, their work identifies literature as the means of expressing a model of educative benevolence that stands in opposition to the psychology of self-interest set out by Malthusian political economy. This strand of thought achieved its apotheosis in *A Defence of Poetry*, where poetry is imagined as the vehicle for liberal progress through its expression of an altruistic egalitarianism which might counteract the influence of industrialism on individual behaviour.

By representing progressive politics in the terms of a psychology of hope, Godwin, Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley had a significant impact on political discourse, importing the dynamics of Christian hope into liberal thought. Thomas Sowell's discussion of Godwin is helpful in considering the extra-rational elements of this strand of political philosophy.<sup>192</sup> In his attempt to uncover the underlying psychological dimensions of modern ideological clashes, *A Conflict of Visions*, Godwin's philosophy is seen as a key influence on liberalism and socialism. Sowell argues that the key ideological conflicts in modern society are founded on two opposing 'visions' of human nature, given their most fundamental definitions by Godwin and Burke. The 'Unconstrained Vision' runs through the work of Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Isaiah Berlin, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, stressing the limitations of unchanging human nature (such as self-interest) and the need to acknowledge those limitations in political structure. The 'Constrained Vision' runs through the work of Rousseau, Condorcet, Paine, Harold Laski, J.K. Galbraith and John Rawls, arguing that elements of human behaviour are in fact determined by political structure, and that progressive changes in institutions have altered human behaviour. Sowell argues that this conflict of visions has shaped political thought in ways of which practical decision-makers are unaware. He positions *Political Justice* as the first treatise on the subject of social justice: '[w]hatever its mechanisms or details, social justice has been the dominant theme of the unconstrained vision from Godwin to Rawls'.<sup>193</sup>

For Godwin, Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley, the idea of hope becomes intimately connected with this concept of justice. At key points in the work of all three authors, politics becomes detached from rationality, expressing a heightened version of the type of 'Unconstrained vision' identified by Sowell. Responding to Dr Parr's rejection of universal benevolence in the *Reply to Parr*, Godwin urged that: 'it would be well for mankind and the generation of an accomplished moral character, that justice and philanthropy should be converted into a passion and made one of the stirring and living thoughts of our bosoms'.<sup>194</sup> Throughout his work, literary representation of the hope of improvement is seen as the means of transmitting this 'passion' for justice to the inner psychology of the reader, a notion which resounds through the novels and poems of Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley. The principles of hope are central to a work such as *Frankenstein*, with its benevolent protagonist raising the possibility that crime might be erased from human society. Godwin's 'passion' for liberal improvement is the fundamental element of the literary manifesto articulated by Percy Shelley in the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, where he reacted against Wordsworthian disappointment and declared his desire of 'kindling within the bosoms of my readers, a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence [...] nor prejudice, can ever totally extinguish among mankind'.<sup>195</sup> The work of these three authors thus constituted a coherent articulation of key ideas in liberal thought, forming an important presence in literary culture from the initial rise of radicalism in the early 1790s up to the verge of the first Reform Bill of 1832.

## Notes

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*Introduction*

<sup>1</sup> *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, ed. Nora Crook with Pamela Clemit, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1996), I, pp.73-4.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.74.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.75.

<sup>4</sup> *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E.B. Murray, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), I, p.283.

<sup>5</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prose Works*, I, p.282.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.8.

<sup>7</sup> William St Clair, 'The Impact of *Frankenstein*', in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, eds Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp.38-63; and St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.357-73.

<sup>8</sup> For discussions of English literature of the Romantic Period in terms of Enlightenment thought, see Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789-1832* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); and Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

A broader historicist approach to Romantic literature has been taken up after Jerome McGann's analysis of the touchstones of Romanticism - notions of the self and Nature - as attempts to deny and transcend history. More recently, James Chandler has responded to McGann by asserting that Romantic writing, particularly the work of Percy Shelley, displays a preoccupation with history and with literature's role in history, thus prefiguring the concerns of modern historicism. See Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983) and James K. Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), I, pp.xii and 3.

<sup>10</sup> See McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: An Investigation*, Chapter One.

<sup>11</sup> *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993), III, p.9.

<sup>12</sup> For associations between 'enthusiasm' and the faith in private judgement and revelation expressed by some Dissenters, see Susie Tucker, *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp.52-61; and Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.iii.

<sup>14</sup> Abinger MS, b 227/6. The letter is not dated. However, Godwin's journal notes that he borrowed a copy of *Rights of Man* on March 2, 1791, so the letter is likely to have been written soon after this.

<sup>15</sup> *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1992), V, pp.9-10.

<sup>16</sup> William Stafford, 'Dissenting Religion Translated into Politics', *History of Political Thought*, 1 (1980), p.280.

<sup>17</sup> Stafford, 'Dissenting Religion Translated into Politics', p.292.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory Claeys, 'The Concept of "Political Justice" in Godwin's *Political Justice: A Reconsideration*', *Political Theory*, 11 (1983), pp.565-84.

<sup>19</sup> Claeys, 'The Concept of "Political Justice"', p.580.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory Claeys, 'William Godwin's Critique of Democracy and Republicanism and its Sources', *History of European Ideas*, 7 (1986), p.258.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, p.170.

<sup>23</sup> For a thorough discussion of Calvinist doctrine, its influence on the psychological outlook of believers and manifestations of this outlook in sixteenth and seventeenth century literature, see John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Abinger MS, b 227/5.

- <sup>25</sup> See Chapter One of this thesis for Godwin's reading of Bunyan.
- <sup>26</sup> For this definition of spiritual autobiography, see Owen Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp.1-9. See also William Haller's discussion of the democratic tradition of diary-writing among Puritans and its psychological legacy in their religious thought in *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).
- <sup>27</sup> See G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). Starr goes against the current of ideas prevalent among the critics I discuss by suggesting that spiritual autobiography was commonplace in the English Protestant tradition, rather than being the specific product of a Dissenting milieu.
- <sup>28</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p.75.
- <sup>29</sup> Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, pp.38-57.
- <sup>30</sup> Isaac Kramnick, introduction to *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.53.
- <sup>31</sup> Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England*, p.74.
- <sup>32</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, pp.189-90.
- <sup>33</sup> *New Annual Register*, 1789, p.15.
- <sup>34</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.9.
- <sup>35</sup> Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1796 edition, ed. F.E.L. Priestley, 3 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), I, p.93.
- <sup>36</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.217.
- <sup>37</sup> Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991-2000).
- <sup>38</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, II, p.154.
- <sup>39</sup> Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, II, pp.192-3.
- <sup>40</sup> Evan Radcliffe, 'Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), p.221.
- <sup>41</sup> Evan Radcliffe, 'Godwin from "Metaphysician" to Novelist: *Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams*, and the Tension between Philosophical Argument and Narrative', *Modern Philology*, p.552.
- <sup>42</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.223.
- <sup>43</sup> Gregory Claeys, 'The *Reflections* Refracted: The Critical Reception of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* during the Early 1790s', in *Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. John Whale (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.51.
- <sup>44</sup> Rowland Weston, 'Politics, Passion and the "Puritan Temper": Godwin's Critique of Enlightened Modernity', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), p.446.
- <sup>45</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.158.
- <sup>46</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
- <sup>47</sup> *The Quarterly Review*, April 1819.
- <sup>48</sup> Percy Shelley, *Laon and Cythna*, IV.1515-21; *The Poems of Shelley*, eds Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1989-), II, p.127.
- <sup>49</sup> Percy Shelley, *Laon and Cythna*, IV.1522-8; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.127.
- <sup>50</sup> Percy Shelley, *Laon and Cythna*, IV.1529-43; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.128.
- <sup>51</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. Eric Foner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.62.
- <sup>52</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'France: an Ode', in *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.92.
- <sup>53</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.32.
- <sup>54</sup> For discussions of Godwin's influence on Shelley's political theory in terms of the substance of philosophical anarchism, see H.N. Brailsford, *Godwin, Shelley and Their Circle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); Kenneth Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (London: Gollancz, 1951), pp.61-70; P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp.76-133; Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp.5-34. Pamela Clemit has focused on the early correspondence between the two to suggest that Godwin shaped both Shelley's gradualist political theories and his sense of his vocation as a poetic

reformer. See Clemit, 'Shelley's Godwin, 1812-1817', *Durham University Journal*, 85 (1993), pp.189-201.

<sup>55</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p.3.

<sup>56</sup> See Lee Sterrenburg, 'Mary Shelley's Monster: Politics and Psyche in *Frankenstein*', in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, eds George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); and Sterrenburg, 'The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 33 (1978). See also Chapter Six of this thesis for his interpretation.

<sup>57</sup> Kari E. Lokke, 'The Last Man', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.128.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.182.

<sup>59</sup> See Demogorgon's final speech in *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.573-4; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.648.

<sup>60</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.452-3; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.504.

<sup>61</sup> Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*.

<sup>62</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, p.27.

<sup>64</sup> Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, p.88.

<sup>65</sup> See for example his comments on the 'gloomy and exclusive' nature of Sandemanianism in Abinger MS, c 663/4.

<sup>66</sup> See William Petersen, *Malthus* (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp.53-4.

<sup>67</sup> For an analysis of the political significance of the population debate, particularly its bearing on the idea of perfectibility, see Kenneth Smith, *The Malthusian Controversy* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1951), pp.275-83. For Malthus's influence on changes in the Poor Laws, see Donald Winch, *Malthus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.42-8. For his crucial role in the growth of political economy, see Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Anthony Flew (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.172.

<sup>69</sup> Malthus, *Essay on Population*, p.144.

<sup>70</sup> For Malthus's interest in Smithian self-interest see Winch, *Malthus*, p.31.

<sup>71</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'A Philosophical Self-Portrait', in *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Mautner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p.67.

<sup>72</sup> Berlin, 'A Philosophical Self-Portrait', p.68.

<sup>73</sup> Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London: John Murray, 1990), pp.3-4.

<sup>74</sup> For Berlin's reference to Godwin, see *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, pp.211-2.

<sup>75</sup> See John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.viii. See also Gray, *Endgames: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997); *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Granta, 2002); *Al-Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> Gray, 'The Myth of Secularism', *New Statesman*, 16-30 December 2002, p.70.

<sup>77</sup> Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp.139 and 155.

<sup>78</sup> Gray, *Straw Dogs*, p.xiii.

<sup>79</sup> Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.123.

<sup>80</sup> Gray, *Endgames*, pp.173-5.

<sup>81</sup> *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), II, p.191.

## Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> Godwin's condemnation of Thelwall's public lectures as a threat to rational progress in *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills* (1795) has tended to obscure his influence on the chief theoretician of the London Corresponding Society. By contrast, Gregory Claeys contends that Thelwall regarded Godwin as his 'philosophical father', drawing attention to the fact that the former praised *Political Justice* as 'the most extensive plan of freedom and innovation ever discussed by any writer in the English language', and to his faith in the doctrines of the inevitable progress of human reason and universal benevolence. See introduction to Claeys ed., *The Politics of English Jacobinism*:

*Writings of John Thelwall* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995), pp.xxvii-xxix. See also B. Sprague Allen, 'William Godwin's Influence upon John Thelwall', *PMLA*, 37 (1922), pp.662-82. For Godwin's influence on Joseph Gerrald, see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p.475.

<sup>3</sup> Amelia Heber, *The Life of Reginald Heber, D.D., Lord Bishop of Calcutta*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1830), I, p.13.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson argues that the influence of *Political Justice* was 'confined to a small and highly literate circle'. See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.107.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Philp, 'Thompson, Godwin, and the French Revolution', *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (1995), p.79.

<sup>6</sup> Philp, 'Thompson, Godwin, and the French Revolution', p.94.

<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.2.

<sup>8</sup> *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1996), III, p.13.

<sup>9</sup> See Ian Cumming, *Helvétius: His Life and Place in the History of Educational Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.74-93.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p.42.

<sup>11</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.13.

<sup>12</sup> William Stafford hints at this connection between perfectibility and Calvinist perfection in his reading of *Political Justice*. See his 'Dissenting Religion Translated into Politics', *History of Political Thought*, 1 (1980), pp.291-2.

<sup>13</sup> Abinger MS, b 227/5.

<sup>14</sup> Abinger MS, b 227/5.

<sup>15</sup> Abinger MS, b 227/5.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (London: Thomas Underhill and Francis Tyton, 1650), p.739.

<sup>17</sup> N.H. Keeble, *Richard Baxter: Puritan Man of Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.190.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Starobinski in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, eds Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), III, p.1317.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, p.142.

<sup>21</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.456. The many direct citations of Rousseau throughout *Political Justice* show that Godwin had a thorough knowledge of his work.

<sup>22</sup> Journal entries note 'Inégalité parmi les hommes' for September 14 and 22, 1791, as well as a transcription of a passage from the same work on September 24. Abinger MS, e 199.

<sup>23</sup> Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, p.142.

<sup>24</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.273n.

<sup>25</sup> For views on the significance and context of the progressive theories of Turgot and Condorcet see J.H. Brumfitt, *The French Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972), pp.155-60; an Maurice Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers: Political Theorists of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.140-56.

<sup>26</sup> Starobinski, in Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p.1317.

<sup>27</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.140.

<sup>28</sup> *Oeuvres de Turgot et documents le concernant*, ed. Gustave Schelle, 5 vols (Paris: Alcan, 1913-23), I, pp.214-35.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald L. Meek, introduction to *Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p.41.

<sup>30</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, pp.101 and 140.

<sup>31</sup> See Godwin's journal, October 22, 1791. Abinger MS, e 199.

<sup>32</sup> See Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers*, pp.140 and 148.

<sup>33</sup> *Oeuvres de Condorcet*, eds A. Condorcet O'Connor and M.F. Arago, 12 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot frères, 1847-49), VI, p.13.

<sup>34</sup> *Oeuvres de Condorcet*, VI, p.273.



- <sup>35</sup> David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p.246.
- <sup>36</sup> Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress*, p.248.
- <sup>37</sup> *New Annual Register*, 1788, p.108.
- <sup>38</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.27.
- <sup>39</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.27.
- <sup>40</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V, p.218.
- <sup>41</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V, p.291.
- <sup>42</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.29.
- <sup>43</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.29.
- <sup>44</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.30.
- <sup>45</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.30.
- <sup>46</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.133.
- <sup>47</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.133.
- <sup>48</sup> Philip Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity* (London: J. Buckland et al, 1763), p.248.
- <sup>49</sup> William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).
- <sup>50</sup> *Richard Price: Political Writings*, ed. D.O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.154.
- <sup>51</sup> Price, *Political Writings*, p.156.
- <sup>52</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.474.
- <sup>53</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.151.
- <sup>54</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.153.
- <sup>55</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.156.
- <sup>56</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.106.
- <sup>57</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.122.
- <sup>58</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.269.
- <sup>59</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.357.
- <sup>60</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.116.
- <sup>61</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.116.
- <sup>62</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.124ff.
- <sup>63</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.115.
- <sup>64</sup> Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.4.
- <sup>65</sup> For the rise of Benthamite utility, see Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. Mary Morris (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp.296-312 and 479-514.
- <sup>66</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe, 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), p.242.
- <sup>67</sup> Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.89.
- <sup>68</sup> Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991-2000), II, p.154 and pp.195-99.
- <sup>69</sup> Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures*, p.119.
- <sup>70</sup> See Godwin's *Account of the Seminary*, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V, p.20.
- <sup>71</sup> Evan Radcliffe, 'Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), pp.221-40.
- <sup>72</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.474.
- <sup>73</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.193.
- <sup>74</sup> See Godwin's *The Genius of Christianity Unveiled in a Series of Essays*, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, VII, p.209.
- <sup>75</sup> Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life of William Godwin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p.174.
- <sup>76</sup> For Rousseau's attack on Hobbesian self-interest, see *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.151-2.
- <sup>77</sup> See David Fate Norton, 'Hutcheson', in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, 10 vols (London: Routledge, 1998), IV, pp.588-94.
- <sup>78</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.186.

- <sup>79</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.195.
- <sup>80</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, pp.189-90.
- <sup>81</sup> See Annette Baier, 'Hume', in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, IV, p.550.
- <sup>82</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.190.
- <sup>83</sup> William Stafford, 'Dissenting Religion Translated into Politics', *History of Political Thought*, 1 (1980), p.280.
- <sup>84</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.194.
- <sup>85</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.194.
- <sup>86</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.435.
- <sup>87</sup> See Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures*, p.218.
- <sup>88</sup> Bernard de Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. F.B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p.24.
- <sup>89</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.194.
- <sup>90</sup> See Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason*, pp.171-3; J.P. Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.93-4; Geoffrey Scarre, *Utilitarianism* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp.66-72.
- <sup>91</sup> Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, pp.81-9.
- <sup>92</sup> Seamus Deane, *The French Enlightenment and Revolution in England, 1789-1832* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.73.
- <sup>93</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, eds J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (London: The Athlone Press, 1970), p.155. For Bentham and self-interest, see John Dinwiddy, *Bentham, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.22-5; and Scarre, *Utilitarianism*, pp.77-9.
- <sup>94</sup> Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, p.44.
- <sup>95</sup> *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring, 11 vols (Edinburgh: Tait, 1843), X, p.532.
- <sup>96</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.190.
- <sup>97</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.194.
- <sup>98</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, pp.194-5.
- <sup>99</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.195.
- <sup>100</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.195.
- <sup>101</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.390.
- <sup>102</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.195.
- <sup>103</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.49.
- <sup>104</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.50.
- <sup>105</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.50.
- <sup>106</sup> Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures*, p.218.
- <sup>107</sup> Abinger MS, b 228/9.
- <sup>108</sup> Stafford, 'Dissenting Religion Translated into Politics', p.291.
- <sup>109</sup> Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, p.91.
- <sup>110</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.315.
- <sup>111</sup> Burke to A.J.F. Dupont, March 1790, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland, 10 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78), VI, pp.104-9.
- <sup>112</sup> See Chapter Three of this thesis.
- <sup>113</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.50.
- <sup>114</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V, p.106.
- <sup>115</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.456.
- <sup>116</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.421.
- <sup>117</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.435.
- <sup>118</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.421.
- <sup>119</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.433.
- <sup>120</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.439.
- <sup>121</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.440.
- <sup>122</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.451.
- <sup>123</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.451.
- <sup>124</sup> Isaac Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p.73.
- <sup>125</sup> Benjamin Franklin, cited in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, pp.73-4.

- <sup>126</sup> *British Critic*, 1 (1793), p.315.
- <sup>127</sup> *British Critic*, 1 (1793), p.317.
- <sup>128</sup> *Critical Review*, 9 (1793), pp.149-54.
- <sup>129</sup> *Analytical Review*, 16 (1793), pp.388-404.
- <sup>130</sup> Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice*, p.6.
- <sup>131</sup> William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.82.
- <sup>132</sup> Simon Collier, 'Mercier's Enlightenment Utopia: Progress and Social Ideals', in Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova eds, *The Enlightenment and its Shadows* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.100.
- <sup>133</sup> Gregory Claeys, introduction to *Utopias of the British Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.vii-xxviii.
- <sup>134</sup> Wallace was a Scottish mathematician who discussed issues of population and anticipated many of Malthus's objections to Godwinian equality. For more detail on his theories, see Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason*, p.284.
- <sup>135</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.460.
- <sup>136</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.464.
- <sup>137</sup> Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures*, p.197.
- <sup>138</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, pp.6 and 21.
- <sup>139</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, pp.22 and 102.
- <sup>140</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.465.
- <sup>141</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.22.
- <sup>142</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.44.
- <sup>143</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, p.200.
- <sup>144</sup> See in particular Richard L. Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1969) and Roger Sharrock, *John Bunyan* (London: Macmillan, 1968).
- <sup>145</sup> Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factitious People: John Bunyan and his Church, 1628-1688* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.379.
- <sup>146</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1992), I, p.12.
- <sup>147</sup> Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1984), p.14.
- <sup>148</sup> John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.215.
- <sup>149</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, VII, p.112.
- <sup>150</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, VII, p.167.
- <sup>151</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.465.
- <sup>152</sup> Godwin to the National Assembly, cited in St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, p.103.
- <sup>153</sup> Paul Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).
- <sup>154</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p.100.
- <sup>155</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, pp.100 and 97.
- <sup>156</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.465.
- <sup>157</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, pp.460, 464 and 465.
- <sup>158</sup> Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, pp.215-6.
- <sup>159</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.476.
- <sup>160</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.618.
- <sup>161</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.726.
- <sup>162</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.741.
- <sup>163</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.476.
- <sup>164</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.101.
- <sup>165</sup> Carl L Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp.48-9.
- <sup>166</sup> Becker, *The Heavenly City*, p.129.

## Chapter Two

- <sup>1</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p.75.

- <sup>2</sup> William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).
- <sup>3</sup> Godwin's journal notes his reading of *Robinson Crusoe* in January 1797 and *Roxana* in October 1803. Abinger MS, e 203 and 206.
- <sup>4</sup> N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), pp.283-5.
- <sup>5</sup> For the catalogue of Godwin's library, see *Sale Catalogues of Libraries of Eminent Persons*, 12 vols, ed. A.N.L. Munby et al (London: Mansell and Sotheby, 1971-5), VIII, pp.277-318.
- <sup>6</sup> Marilyn Butler, 'Godwin, Burke and *Caleb Williams*', *ELH*, 32 (1982), pp.237-56. See also J.T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp.226-32 and David McCracken, 'Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: A Fictional Rebuttal of Burke', *Studies in Burke and his Time*, 11 (1969-70), pp.1442-1452.
- <sup>7</sup> McCracken, 'Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: A Fictional Rebuttal of Burke', p.1442.
- <sup>8</sup> Butler, 'Godwin, Burke and *Caleb Williams*', p.256.
- <sup>9</sup> Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution, 1789-1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p.231.
- <sup>10</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.205.
- <sup>11</sup> Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.35-69.
- <sup>12</sup> Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.83.
- <sup>13</sup> Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre, and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.89.
- <sup>14</sup> For Godwin's involvement in the Treason Trials, see John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.302-7.
- <sup>15</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993), III, p.265.
- <sup>16</sup> Godwin, letter in *British Critic*, 6 (1795), p.94.
- <sup>17</sup> Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, p.135.
- <sup>18</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.37.
- <sup>19</sup> *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1992), V, p.10.
- <sup>20</sup> cited in Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life of William Godwin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p.213.
- <sup>21</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.117.
- <sup>22</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.117.
- <sup>23</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.119.
- <sup>24</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, 120.
- <sup>25</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.124.
- <sup>26</sup> The briefer comments on the influence of the *Confessions* on Godwin's novels can be summarised. Marilyn Butler observes in her survey of the 'war of ideas' between radical and conservative novelists that: '[t]he English progressives were fascinated by the *Confessions*', and notes the plan made by Godwin and Inchbald to translate it [Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.51]; Edward Duffy's study of Rousseau's reputation among British writers of the Romantic period makes only a brief reference to a supposed critique of Rousseauvian sentiment in *Fleetwood* [Duffy, *Rousseau in England: the Context for Shelley's Critique of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp.50-1]; Jacques Voisine finds the traces of influence only to remark that '[n]i comme philosophe, ni comme homme, Rousseau ne nous paraît avoir marqué profondément Godwin' [Voisine, *J.-J. Rousseau en Angleterre à l'époque romantique: les écrits autobiographiques et la légende* (Paris: Didier, 1956), p.184]; Henri Roddier sees a connection between Rousseau's political works and the societal critique of *Caleb Williams*, and argues that the sensibility of the *Confessions* formed the impetus for *St Leon* [Roddier, *J.-J. Rousseau en Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle: l'oeuvre et l'homme* (Paris: Boivin, 1950), pp.366-8]. Gregory Dart has examined the profound influence of Rousseau's confessional writings on several British Romantic writers, including Godwin. Though he discusses *Caleb Williams* only in the context of its critique of Burkean chivalry, his work nevertheless offers a fruitful general context for understanding the connections between Godwin's novels and Rousseauvian sensibility [Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*]. He

briefly refers to the similarity between Rousseau's experience on the road to Vincennes in the *Confessions* and Caleb's mental revolution in prison (p.76).

<sup>27</sup> Gary Kelly, "'The Romance of Real Life': Autobiography in Rousseau and William Godwin", in *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, eds Roger L. Emerson, Gilles Girard and Roseann Runte (London and Ontario: Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, 1982), pp.93-101.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly, "'The Romance of Real Life': Autobiography in Rousseau and William Godwin", p.99.

<sup>29</sup> Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), pp.375-98.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Chandler, 'Romanticizing Adolescence: Godwin's *St Leon* and the Matter of Rousseau', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), pp.399-414; and "'A Tissue of Fables": Rousseau, Gender, and Textuality in Godwin's *Fleetwood*', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 53 (2004), pp.39-60.

<sup>31</sup> See Abinger MS, c 228/9.

<sup>32</sup> Godwin's journal entry for December 1, 1789 reads: 'Dine with Robinson seul. Undertake Rousseau's *Confessions*'. The entry for January 4, 1790 reads: 'Demêlé avec Robinson'. The argument may have related to the translation of the *Confessions*. Abinger MS, e 197.

<sup>33</sup> For Rousseau's Calvinist upbringing in Geneva, see Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-1754* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), pp.13-17. For his conversion to Catholicism, see pp.43-5.

<sup>34</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p.75.

<sup>35</sup> David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, from the Revolution in 1688, to the year 1808*, 4 vols (London: Williams and Smith, 1808-12), IV, p.501.

<sup>36</sup> See Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and Romanticism*, pp.50-1 on the *Confessions* as societal critique.

<sup>37</sup> *Les Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, eds Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-95), I, p.175.

<sup>38</sup> Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, I, p.516.

<sup>39</sup> Rousseau, *Oeuvres*, I, p.640.

<sup>40</sup> The translation of the first part was published by J. Bew, that of the second part by Robinson and Bew. See Roddier, *J.-J. Rousseau en Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle*, p.320 and Voisine, p.112 for dates of publication.

<sup>41</sup> For details of the reaction to the *Confessions* in Britain see Duffy, *Rousseau in England*, pp.32-54 and Roddier, *J.-J. Rousseau en Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle*, pp.321-9.

<sup>42</sup> *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 10 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-4), IV, pp.88 and 90.

<sup>43</sup> Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, IV, p.89.

<sup>44</sup> Godwin read Part Two of the *Confessions* to completion between August 24 and 28, 1792, followed by the *Rêveries* on August 28 and 29, and September 4 and 5. The *Lettre à d'Alembert* was read on August 30 and 31. Abinger MS, e 200.

<sup>45</sup> See Voisine, *J.-J. Rousseau en Angleterre à l'époque romantique*, p.182.

<sup>46</sup> *The Confessions of J.J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, Part the second*, trans James Marshall, 3 vols (London: G.G.J. Robinson, J. Robinson and J. Bew, 1790), I, p.316.

<sup>47</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, pp.318, 317.

<sup>48</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, p.320.

<sup>49</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, pp.120-1.

<sup>50</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.117.

<sup>51</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, p.318.

<sup>52</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.138.

<sup>53</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, p.170.

<sup>54</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, p.171.

<sup>55</sup> Abinger MS, c 526/3.

<sup>56</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.279.

<sup>57</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.306. This passage was added for the third edition of *Caleb Williams* in 1797.

<sup>58</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp.132-42.

<sup>59</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.157.

<sup>60</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.138.

<sup>61</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.140.

In reading this passage, it is interesting to consider a particular moment in the second section of *The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell. Looking back, Orwell locates his conversion to socialism in his return from Burma, where he served as an officer in the Indian Imperial Police. The memory of the prisoners and subordinates he had bullied in the name of the British Empire produced a reaction when he returned to England:

I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants. (*The Road To Wigan Pier* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989], p.138).

There are parallels between this passage and the Godwin passage on escaping the roles of tyrant and slave. When one considers that Caleb observes during his time in prison that '[t]his is the empire which man exercises over man', the possibility that Orwell may have been familiar with *Caleb Williams* begins to emerge. Orwell's friend George Woodcock was the author of *William Godwin: A Biographical Study*.

<sup>62</sup> Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism*, p.95.

<sup>63</sup> George Fox, *The Journal*, ed. Nigel Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), p.15.

<sup>64</sup> Fox, *The Journal*, pp.10 and 25.

<sup>65</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, p.159.

<sup>66</sup> Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, IV, p.90.

<sup>67</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.161.

<sup>68</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.167.

<sup>69</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.168.

<sup>70</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.187.

<sup>71</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.187.

<sup>72</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, pp.187-8.

<sup>73</sup> *British Critic*, 6 (1795), p.94.

<sup>74</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.273.

<sup>75</sup> See J.G.A. Pocock, 'Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment' in Lawrence E. Klein and Anthony J. La Vopa eds, *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1998), pp.10-11. See Susie Tucker, *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), for an account of the gradual shift in meaning.

<sup>76</sup> For the conjunction between enthusiasm and Dissent, see Tucker *Enthusiasm*, pp.52-61; Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, pp.27-37; and Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp.20-74.

<sup>77</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.93.

<sup>78</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.94.

<sup>79</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.100.

<sup>80</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.95.

<sup>81</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.148.

<sup>82</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.165.

<sup>83</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp.165-6.

<sup>84</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.117.

<sup>85</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.306. The passage was added for the third edition in 1797.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. Eric Foner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.56.

<sup>87</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, 'Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm: the Context as Counter-Revolution', in Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf eds, *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1989), pp.25-6.

<sup>88</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.140.

<sup>89</sup> *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, 4 vols (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), III, p.77.

<sup>90</sup> Hume, *Philosophical Works*, III, p.78.

<sup>91</sup> Hume, *Philosophical Works*, III, p.81.

<sup>92</sup> Hume, *Philosophical Works*, III, p.81.

<sup>93</sup> Hume, *Philosophical Works*, III, pp.83-4.

<sup>94</sup> Abinger MS, e 201.

- <sup>95</sup> Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p.294.
- <sup>96</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, January 23 1794, in Charles Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols (London: H.S. King, 1876).
- <sup>97</sup> Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, p.190.
- <sup>98</sup> Godwin's journal notes that he visited Palmer at Woolwich on January 17, 1794. Abinger MS, e 201. For the letter to the *Morning Chronicle*, see St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, p.533, note 12.
- <sup>99</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, p.126.
- <sup>100</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, p.126.
- <sup>101</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, p.126.
- <sup>102</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, p.127.
- <sup>103</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, pp.120-1.
- <sup>104</sup> For Godwin's visits to Gerrald and Gerrald's reading of *Caleb Williams* see *Collected Novels*, V, p.12; and St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, pp.126-7.
- <sup>105</sup> Abinger MS, e 201.
- <sup>106</sup> See Godwin's note on the composition of *Caleb Williams*, Abinger MS, f 66.
- <sup>107</sup> For the starting point of the discussion of the endings, see D. Gilbert Dumas, 'Things as They Were: The Original Ending of *Caleb Williams*', *Studies in English Literature*, 6 (1966), pp.575-97.
- <sup>108</sup> Gerard A. Barker, 'Justice to *Caleb Williams*', *Studies in the Novel*, 6 (1974), pp.377-88.
- <sup>109</sup> Kelvin Everest and Gavin Edwards, 'William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: Truth and "Things As They Are"', in Francis Barker *et al* eds, *1789: Reading, Writings, Revolution* (University of Essex Press, 1982), p.136.
- <sup>110</sup> Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp.113-7.
- <sup>111</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, p.126.
- <sup>112</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.267.
- <sup>113</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, p.126.
- <sup>114</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.267.
- <sup>115</sup> Godwin to Gerrald, p.128.
- <sup>116</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.267.
- <sup>117</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.267.
- <sup>118</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.275.
- <sup>119</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.276.
- <sup>120</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels*, III, p.266.

### Chapter Three

- <sup>1</sup> *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1992), IV, p.343.
- <sup>2</sup> See Clive Elmsley, *British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp.65-92; and David Eastwood, 'Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s', in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.146-68.
- <sup>3</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp.124-63; and Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), pp.359-416.
- <sup>4</sup> See for example Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.223; Peter Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p.205; and George Sherburn, 'Godwin's Later Novels', *Studies in Romanticism*, 1 (1962), p.67.
- <sup>5</sup> Rowland Weston, 'Politics, Passion and the "Puritan Temper": Godwin's Critique of Enlightened Modernity', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), p.456.
- <sup>6</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.158.
- <sup>7</sup> See Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, pp.212-5; and Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.91-2.
- <sup>8</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.13.
- <sup>9</sup> Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p.212.

- <sup>10</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.211.
- <sup>11</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.213.
- <sup>12</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.263.
- <sup>13</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.263.
- <sup>14</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.369.
- <sup>15</sup> John Whale, introduction to *Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.6.
- <sup>16</sup> Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789-1832* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp.9-10.
- <sup>17</sup> See J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972).
- <sup>18</sup> See Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment*, pp.1-28.
- <sup>19</sup> See Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p.213.
- <sup>20</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, pp.16 and 18.
- <sup>21</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.142.
- <sup>22</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.138.
- <sup>23</sup> Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p.223; and *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1996), V, p.79.
- <sup>24</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.11.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. P.J. Langford, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981-97), VIII, p.344.
- <sup>26</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p.182.
- <sup>27</sup> See Pamela Clemit, 'Writing a Revolutionary Life: Godwin's Memoirs of Wollstonecraft', <http://www.rc.umd.edu/features/features/chambermusic/clemit.html> note 12.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Confessions of J.J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, Part the second*, trans James Marshall, 3 vols (London: G.G.J. Robinson, J. Robinson and J. Bew, 1790), II, p.384.
- <sup>29</sup> Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.1-59.
- <sup>30</sup> Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p.210; Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.93.
- <sup>31</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, II, p.334.
- <sup>32</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, pp.231-2.
- <sup>33</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.232.
- <sup>34</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, pp.236-7.
- <sup>35</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.232.
- <sup>36</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.11.
- <sup>37</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.43.
- <sup>38</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.74.
- <sup>39</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, II, pp.259 and 377.
- <sup>40</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.176.
- <sup>41</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.294.
- <sup>42</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, II, p.371.
- <sup>43</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, II, pp.371 and 323.
- <sup>44</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.361.
- <sup>45</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.382.
- <sup>46</sup> Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and Revolution* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1993), pp.186-7.
- <sup>47</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.245.
- <sup>48</sup> *Confessions*, I, pp.183-4.
- <sup>49</sup> *Confessions*, I, pp.182-3.
- <sup>50</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, VIII, p.314.
- <sup>51</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, VIII, pp.314-315.
- <sup>52</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, pp.244-5.
- <sup>53</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.11.
- <sup>54</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, pp.103-4.
- <sup>55</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p.62.



- <sup>56</sup> John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.128.
- <sup>57</sup> Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, p.198.
- <sup>58</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, pp.324-5 and 338.
- <sup>59</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.334.
- <sup>60</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.334.
- <sup>61</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.257.
- <sup>62</sup> Abinger MS, 526/3.
- <sup>63</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.258.
- <sup>64</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.261.
- <sup>65</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, IV, p.347.
- <sup>66</sup> Marshall, *William Godwin*, pp.204 and 208.
- <sup>67</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.94.
- <sup>68</sup> Marshall, *William Godwin*, p.210.
- <sup>69</sup> See Samuel Parr, *A Spital Sermon: Preached at Christ Church, upon Easter Tuesday, April 15, 1800* (London: Mawman, 1801). See also Warren Derry, *Dr. Parr: A Portrait of the Whig Dr. Johnson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp.211-22.
- <sup>70</sup> See Derry, *Dr. Parr*, p.216; and Patrick O'Leary, *Sir James Mackintosh: The Whig Cicero* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), p.51.
- <sup>71</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.165.
- <sup>72</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.171.
- <sup>73</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.174. Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791) was one of the most important early liberal responses to Burke's *Reflections*. But in his lectures on the 'Law of Nature and Nations' at Lincoln's Inn in 1799, he announced publicly his repudiation of sympathy with the French Revolution. Mackintosh also delivered an attack on the extravagant perfectibilism of *Political Justice* which Godwin felt bitterly. See O'Leary, *Sir James Mackintosh*, pp.48-51.
- <sup>74</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.174.
- <sup>75</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, p.93.
- <sup>76</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.292.
- <sup>77</sup> N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), p.190.
- <sup>78</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.166.
- <sup>79</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.166.
- <sup>80</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.166.
- <sup>81</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, pp.176 and p.169.
- <sup>82</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.164.
- <sup>83</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.185.
- <sup>84</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, pp.194-5.
- <sup>85</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.198.
- <sup>86</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.204.
- <sup>87</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, pp.204-5.
- <sup>88</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, pp.189-90.
- <sup>89</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, pp.190-1.
- <sup>90</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, VII, p.112.
- <sup>91</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, VII, pp.112-6.
- <sup>92</sup> Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.229.
- <sup>93</sup> Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.90.
- <sup>94</sup> John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp.119 and 121.
- <sup>95</sup> See Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, pp.246-7.
- <sup>96</sup> Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.16-19.
- <sup>97</sup> M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.207.
- <sup>98</sup> Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel*, p.196.

<sup>99</sup> Gary Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002), p.377.

<sup>100</sup> Handwerk, 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education', p.378.

<sup>101</sup> Anne Chandler, "'A Tissue of Fables": Rousseau, Gender, and Textuality in Godwin's *Fleetwood*', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 53 (2004), pp.39-60

<sup>102</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.15.

<sup>103</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.83. See also Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, pp.253-4.

<sup>104</sup> See Marshall, *William Godwin*, p.263.

<sup>105</sup> See William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.273.

<sup>106</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.59.

<sup>107</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.193.

<sup>108</sup> Godwin to Shelley, June 8, 1818; Abinger MS, c 524.

<sup>109</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.22.

<sup>110</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.29.

<sup>111</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.22.

<sup>112</sup> Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p.237.

<sup>113</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.22.

<sup>114</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.64.

<sup>115</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, pp.64-5.

<sup>116</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.43.

<sup>117</sup> For the politics of anti-Jacobin novels, see Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), pp.95-111.

<sup>118</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.119.

<sup>119</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.119.

<sup>120</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.121.

<sup>121</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.148.

<sup>122</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.150.

<sup>123</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.150.

<sup>124</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, pp.86-9.

<sup>125</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.161.

<sup>126</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.162.

<sup>127</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.162.

<sup>128</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.163.

<sup>129</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.163.

<sup>130</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.164.

<sup>131</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.170.

<sup>132</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.181.

<sup>133</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.192.

<sup>134</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.199.

<sup>135</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.218.

<sup>136</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.246.

<sup>137</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, pp.289-90.

<sup>138</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.290.

<sup>139</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.290.

<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. J.M.S. Tompkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.274.

<sup>141</sup> Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, p.274.

<sup>142</sup> Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs*, V, p.159.

## Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, p.220.

<sup>2</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, p.220.

- <sup>4</sup> Pamela Clemit, 'Shelley's Godwin, 1812-1817', *Durham University Journal*, 85 (1993), p.191.
- <sup>5</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, p.227.
- <sup>6</sup> *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993), III, p.iii. Clemit remarks on the similarity between the two statements. See 'Shelley's Godwin', p.192.
- <sup>7</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, p.231.
- <sup>8</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, p.232.
- <sup>9</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.573-4; *The Poems of Shelley*, eds Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, 3 vols (London: Longman, 1989-), II, p.648.
- <sup>10</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V, p.79.
- <sup>11</sup> See introduction to this thesis.
- <sup>12</sup> Kenneth Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (London: Gollancz, 1951); P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980); Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Stephen Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).
- <sup>13</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), pp.30-48.
- <sup>14</sup> Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.214.
- <sup>15</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p.3
- <sup>16</sup> Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789-1832* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.95.
- <sup>17</sup> For the influence of pirated editions of *Queen Mab* on working-class radicalism, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp.211-21.
- <sup>18</sup> See note in *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.31.
- <sup>19</sup> David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.154-216.
- <sup>20</sup> Duff, *Romance and Revolution*, p.169.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.32.
- <sup>22</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.iii.
- <sup>23</sup> William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.431.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.45-6.
- <sup>25</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.iv.
- <sup>26</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.iii.
- <sup>27</sup> In *Shelley and His Audiences*, Behrendt places Shelley at a transitional point in the history of English author-audience relations, suggesting that he was particularly preoccupied with the reception of his works and often constructing ideal 'virtual audiences'.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Quarterly Review*, April 1819.
- <sup>29</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.37.
- <sup>30</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.168.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), I, p.504.
- <sup>32</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.33-4.
- <sup>33</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, pp.563-4.
- <sup>34</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. Eric Foner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.93.
- <sup>35</sup> Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England*, p.95.
- <sup>36</sup> Shelley was reading Rabaut's *Précis* and its continuation by Lacretelle at various points in 1816 and 1817. See *Mary Shelley's Journal*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947), pp.69, 73, 78-9, 81 and 90.
- <sup>37</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.35.
- <sup>38</sup> Richard Brinsley Sheridan, cited in the *Examiner*, September 1<sup>st</sup> 1816.
- <sup>39</sup> *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E.B. Murray, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), I, p.52..
- <sup>40</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.35.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Cameron, 'A Major Influence on *The Revolt of Islam*', *PMLA*, 56 (1941), p.175. For further evidence of Shelley's reading of Volney see Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, pp.53, 243-4 and 391. Cameron suggests that Shelley was familiar with the 1811 edition of *Les Ruines*, a reprinting of the Marshall translation of 1795. Accordingly, I use this edition for all quotations from Volney.

<sup>42</sup> *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, ed. Nora Crook with Pamela Clemit, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1996), I, p.89.

<sup>43</sup> See Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution* (London: Libris, 1989), p.xxvii. See also Brian Rigby, 'Volney's Rationalist Apocalypse: *Les Ruines; ou, méditations sur les révolutions des empires*', in Francis Barker *et al* eds, *1789: Reading, Writing, Revolution* (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1982), pp.22-37.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols (London: H.S. King, 1876), I, p.349.

<sup>45</sup> See Godwin's letter to Smart on the subject, cited in St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, p.529.

<sup>46</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp.107-8.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Thale ed., *Selections from the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792-99* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.327n.

<sup>48</sup> Constantin François Chassebeuf de Volney, *The Ruins; or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, trans. James Marshall (London: Thomas Tegg, 1811), p.59.

<sup>49</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, p.70.

<sup>50</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, p.79.

<sup>51</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.32.

<sup>52</sup> William Wordsworth, 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. W.J.B. Owen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.153.

<sup>53</sup> Percy Shelley, *Laon and Cythna*, V.2089-91; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.149.

<sup>54</sup> Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*, eds Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.165. Wordsworth's poem was first published in Coleridge's *Friend* in 1809, before appearing in the *Poems* of 1815. It also appeared, of course, in Book X of *The Prelude*. See also Duff, *Romance and Revolution*, p.163.

<sup>55</sup> *Examiner*, December 15<sup>th</sup> 1816.

<sup>56</sup> *Mary Shelley's Journal*, p.15.

<sup>57</sup> Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*, p.614.

<sup>58</sup> *Examiner*, March 1<sup>st</sup> 1818.

<sup>59</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.32.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p.100.

<sup>61</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.32-3.

<sup>62</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.34.

<sup>63</sup> See note in *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.266.

<sup>64</sup> Percy Shelley, *Rosalind and Helen*, ll.601-9; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.286.

<sup>65</sup> Percy Shelley, *Rosalind and Helen*, ll.621-2; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.287.

<sup>66</sup> Percy Shelley, *Rosalind and Helen*, ll.641-3; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.286.

<sup>67</sup> Percy Shelley, *Rosalind and Helen*, ll.741-2; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.290.

<sup>68</sup> Percy Shelley, *Rosalind and Helen*, ll.691-9; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.289.

<sup>69</sup> Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965); and *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971).

<sup>70</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.475.

<sup>71</sup> Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p.477.

<sup>72</sup> Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p.477.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Potter, *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* (Norwich: J. Crouse, 1777), pp.17 and 16.

<sup>74</sup> Potter, *The Tragedies of Aeschylus*, p.6.

<sup>75</sup> Potter, *The Tragedies of Aeschylus*, p.19.

<sup>76</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.472.

<sup>77</sup> Stuart Curran, 'The Political Prometheus', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25 (1986), pp.429-55.

<sup>78</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, II.iv.32-109; *The Poems of Shelley*, pp.559-63.

<sup>79</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, II.iv.39; *The Poems of Shelley*, p.560.

- <sup>80</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, II.iv.45; *The Poems of Shelley*, p.560.
- <sup>81</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, II.iv.59; *The Poems of Shelley*, p.560.
- <sup>82</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, II.iv.66-75; *The Poems of Shelley*, p.561.
- <sup>83</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V, p.217.
- <sup>84</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, pp.344-5.
- <sup>85</sup> See E.L. Cloyd, *James Burnett, Lord Monboddo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).
- <sup>86</sup> Raymond Tallis, *Enemies of Hope: A Critique of Contemporary Pessimism, Irrationalism, Anti-Humanism and the Counter-Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p.2.
- <sup>87</sup> Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. June Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955), pp.392-3.
- <sup>88</sup> Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p.251.
- <sup>89</sup> See the notes provided by Everest and Matthews in *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.612-49.
- <sup>90</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, I, pp.129 and 342.
- <sup>91</sup> Carl Grabo, *The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley's Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936); Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (London: Macmillan, 1986) and 'Shelley and Erasmus Darwin', in Kelvin Everest ed., *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), pp.129-146.
- <sup>92</sup> Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- <sup>93</sup> Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, pp.62-3.
- <sup>94</sup> See Maureen McNeil, *Under the Banner of Science: Erasmus Darwin and his Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) and Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: the Friends who Made the Future, 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).
- <sup>95</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.58-60; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.615.
- <sup>96</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.83-8; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.617.
- <sup>97</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.117-22; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.618-9.
- <sup>98</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.137; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.619.
- <sup>99</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *Temple of Nature*.
- <sup>100</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.270-318; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.629-33.
- <sup>101</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.418-23; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.640.
- <sup>102</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, p.19.
- <sup>103</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, p.23.
- <sup>104</sup> Percy Shelley, *Laon and Cythna*, IV.1519; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.127.
- <sup>105</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.1-8; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.477.
- <sup>106</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.23-4; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.479.
- <sup>107</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.496.
- <sup>108</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.443; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.503.
- <sup>109</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.452-7; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.504-5.
- <sup>110</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.539-45; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.510.
- <sup>111</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.546-7; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.510.
- <sup>112</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.561-3; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.511.
- <sup>113</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.564-77; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.511-2.
- <sup>114</sup> Joseph de Maistre, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 7 vols (Geneva: Slatkine, 1979), V, p.25.
- <sup>115</sup> Isaiah Berlin, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism', in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London: John Murray, 1990), pp.108-9.
- <sup>116</sup> Coleridge, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.89.
- <sup>117</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.567; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.511.
- <sup>118</sup> Coleridge, *Complete Poetical Works*, p.89
- <sup>119</sup> Mary Shelley's journal records that Shelley read aloud 'France: an Ode' on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1815.
- <sup>120</sup> Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p.251. See also p.344 for Shelley's admiration for 'France: an Ode'.
- <sup>121</sup> See Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.133.
- <sup>122</sup> Coleridge, *Complete Poetical Works*, p.89.
- <sup>123</sup> Coleridge, *Complete Poetical Works*, p.92.
- <sup>124</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.542; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.510.

- <sup>125</sup> Coleridge, *Complete Poetical Works*, p.90.
- <sup>126</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, II, pp.57-8.
- <sup>127</sup> George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, xcvi; *Selected Poems*, eds Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996).
- <sup>128</sup> Michael O'Neill, *The Human Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.99.
- <sup>129</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.582, I.578-80; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.512.
- <sup>130</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.594-6; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.513.
- <sup>131</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.641-5; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.515.
- <sup>132</sup> Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p.26.
- <sup>133</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.648-55; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.516.
- <sup>134</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, IV.570-8; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.648-9.
- <sup>135</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.465.
- <sup>136</sup> Geoffrey Matthews has discussed the volcanic landscapes of *Prometheus Unbound* as embodiments of synthesis between poetic imagery and radical politics in 'A Volcano's Voice in Shelley', *English Literary History*, 24 (1957), pp.191-228. The essay was an important development in Shelley criticism, focusing on the politics of imagery as an antidote to the charges of 'abstraction' levelled by F.R. Leavis.
- <sup>137</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, II.iii.11; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.548.
- <sup>138</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, II.iii.36-42; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.550-1.
- <sup>139</sup> Timothy Webb, "'The Avalanche of Ages': Shelley's Defence of Atheism and *Prometheus Unbound*", *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, 35 (1984), pp.1-39.
- <sup>140</sup> See Webb, "'The Avalanche of Ages'", p.11.
- <sup>141</sup> See Webb, "'The Avalanche of Ages'", p.14.
- <sup>142</sup> *Quarterly Review*, April 1819.
- <sup>143</sup> See Webb, "'The Avalanche of Ages'", p.11.
- <sup>144</sup> Webb, "'The Avalanche of Ages'", p.36.
- <sup>145</sup> See *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.459.
- <sup>146</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London: John Murray, 1990), Chapter Six.
- <sup>147</sup> E.P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.200.
- <sup>148</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, III.iv.131-46; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.605-6.
- <sup>149</sup> Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p.540.
- <sup>150</sup> Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, trans. June Barraclough (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955), p.192.
- <sup>151</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, III.iv.153-7; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.607.
- <sup>152</sup> Condorcet, *The Progress of the Human Mind*, p.193.
- <sup>153</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, III.iv.164-76; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.607-8.
- <sup>154</sup> The connection between 'Ozymandias' and *Les Ruines* is briefly suggested in Ralph A. Nablow, 'Shelley, "Ozymandias", and Volney's *Les Ruines*', *Notes and Queries*, 36 (1989), pp.172-3.
- <sup>155</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, p.ix.
- <sup>156</sup> Rigby, 'Volney's Rationalist Apocalypse', p.29.
- <sup>157</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, III.iv.190-204; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.610-11.
- <sup>158</sup> Timothy Webb, 'The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound*', in Kelvin Everest ed., *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), p.57.
- <sup>159</sup> Webb, 'The Unascended Heaven', p.60.
- <sup>160</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, p.62.
- <sup>161</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V, p.156.
- <sup>162</sup> Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p.303.
- <sup>163</sup> For the influence of the French declaration of 1789 on Shelley's *Declaration of Rights*, see Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, p.152. The French declaration is reproduced in Paine, *Rights of Man*, pp.110-2.
- <sup>164</sup> See Paine, *Rights of Man*, p.110.
- <sup>165</sup> Maurice Cranston, *Philosophers and Pamphleteers: Political Theorists of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.148.

<sup>166</sup> Condorcet, *Oeuvres*, eds A. Condorcet O'Connor and M.F. Arago, 10 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1847-9), V, p.273. I have used the French here as it is important to remain as close as possible to Condorcet's original meaning.

<sup>167</sup> Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p.50.

<sup>168</sup> *Examiner*, August 4<sup>th</sup> 1816.

<sup>169</sup> See William Petersen, *Malthus* (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp.53-4.

<sup>170</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.475.

<sup>171</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, III.i.19; *The Poems of Shelley*, p.577.

<sup>172</sup> C.E. Pulos, 'Shelley and Malthus', *PMLA*, 47 (1952), p.121.

<sup>173</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.30.

## Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), II, p.191.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p.247.

<sup>3</sup> See Gerald McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), Chapters 4 and 5; and P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon: 1980), Chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> See Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.45-6; and Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.223. For relations between Romanticism and utilitarianism see also John Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure, 1789-1832: Aesthetics, Politics and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, II, p.191.

<sup>6</sup> *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London: Julian, 1930), VII, p.73.

<sup>7</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.73.

<sup>8</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.74.

<sup>9</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.343n.

<sup>10</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.75.

<sup>11</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.75.

<sup>12</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, pp.75-6.

<sup>13</sup> See Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p.210.

<sup>14</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.76.

<sup>15</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.305; *The Poems of Shelley*, eds Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1989-), p.495.

<sup>16</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, pp.75-6.

<sup>17</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.338n.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp.149 and 128.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and his Audiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989), p.212.

<sup>20</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, pp.5-20.

<sup>21</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.336n.

<sup>22</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p.225.

<sup>23</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.7.

<sup>24</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.19.

<sup>25</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.19.

<sup>26</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.20.

<sup>27</sup> Godwin, *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 4 vols (London: R Phillips, 1804), II, p.71.

<sup>28</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.336n.

<sup>29</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, II, p.201.

<sup>30</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Plan of Parliamentary Reform, in the form of a catechism, with reasons for each article, with an introduction, shewing the necessity of radical, and the inadequacy of moderate, reform* (London: T.J. Wooler, 1818), pp.1 and 114.

<sup>31</sup> Bentham, *Plan*, p.10.

- <sup>32</sup> Bentham, *Plan*, p.32.
- <sup>33</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1993), pp.20 and 56-7.
- <sup>34</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p.219.
- <sup>35</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.43.
- <sup>36</sup> *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993), V, p.156.
- <sup>37</sup> *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 10 vols (London: 1930-4), I, p.214.
- <sup>38</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.46.
- <sup>39</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, pp.8-9.
- <sup>40</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, pp.51-2.
- <sup>41</sup> See the editorial in *Examiner*, August 1<sup>st</sup> 1819.
- <sup>42</sup> *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1816.
- <sup>43</sup> *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1816.
- <sup>44</sup> Percy Shelley, 'Song to the Men of England', ll.1-4; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.572.
- <sup>45</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, II, p.191.
- <sup>46</sup> For the political significance of the apocalyptic imagery see Morton D. Paley, 'Apocapoltics: Allusion and Structure in Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 54 (1991), pp.91-109.
- <sup>47</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.1-4; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.338.
- <sup>48</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.34-7; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.339.
- <sup>49</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.86-9; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.339.
- <sup>50</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.122-5; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.340.
- <sup>51</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.71.
- <sup>52</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, p.39.
- <sup>53</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp.34-8.
- <sup>54</sup> Percy Shelley, 'Sonnet: England in 1819', ll.4-5; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.575.
- <sup>55</sup> Percy Shelley, 'Sonnet: England in 1819', l.12; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.575.
- <sup>56</sup> Percy Shelley, 'Sonnet: England in 1819', ll.13-14; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.575.
- <sup>57</sup> Constantin François Chassebeuf de Volney, *The Ruins; or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, trans. James Marshall (London: Thomas Tegg, 1811), p.8.
- <sup>58</sup> Volney, *Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (Paris: Desenne, 1791), p.12.
- <sup>59</sup> Volney, *The Ruins*, p.70.
- <sup>60</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.146-55; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.341.
- <sup>61</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.193-6; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.341.
- <sup>62</sup> *Examiner*, August 29<sup>th</sup> 1819, p.559.
- <sup>63</sup> See for instance Paul Foot, *Red Shelley* (London: Bookmarks, 1984), pp.175-85.
- <sup>64</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.209-12; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.342.
- <sup>65</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.217-25; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.342.
- <sup>66</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.254-7; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.342.
- <sup>67</sup> Percy Shelley, *Complete Works*, VII, p.43.
- <sup>68</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.262-9; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.343.
- <sup>69</sup> Percy Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', ll.364-72; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.344.
- <sup>70</sup> See Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (London: Gollancz, 1951), p.59.
- <sup>71</sup> Percy Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind', ll.63-9; *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.579.
- <sup>72</sup> Percy Shelley, *Letters*, II, p.191.
- <sup>73</sup> See Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp.30-48.
- <sup>74</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), p.487.
- <sup>75</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.490.
- <sup>76</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.488.
- <sup>77</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.195.
- <sup>78</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.488.
- <sup>79</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.488.
- <sup>80</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.492.



- <sup>81</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.195.
- <sup>82</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.496.
- <sup>83</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.497.
- <sup>84</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp.497-8.
- <sup>85</sup> See Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p.290. See pp.286-94 for the debate between Peacock and Shelley over utilitarianism and poetry.
- <sup>86</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.500.
- <sup>87</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.500.
- <sup>88</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp.500-1.
- <sup>89</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.193.
- <sup>90</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.501.
- <sup>91</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.487.
- <sup>92</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.503.
- <sup>93</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp.501-2.
- <sup>94</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp.507-8.
- <sup>95</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.508.
- <sup>96</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.508.
- <sup>97</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p.225.
- <sup>98</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, p.47.
- <sup>99</sup> *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.488.

## Chapter Six

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- <sup>2</sup> *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering: 1993), V, p.291.
- <sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, II, p.59.
- <sup>4</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, II, p.59.
- <sup>5</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I.643; *The Poems of Shelley*, eds Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1989-), II, p.515.
- <sup>6</sup> Tilottama Rajan, 'Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*: Melancholy and the Political Economy of Romanticism', *Studies in the Novel*, 26 (1994), pp.43-68.
- <sup>7</sup> Charlene E. Bunnell, 'Mathilda: Mary Shelley's Romantic Tragedy', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 46 (1997), pp.75-96.
- <sup>8</sup> Robert Ready, 'Dominion of Demeter: Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 52 (2003), pp.94-110.
- <sup>9</sup> Pamela Clemit, 'From *The Fields of Fancy* to *Matilda*: Mary Shelley's Changing Conception of her Novella', *Romanticism*, 3 (1997), p.152.
- <sup>10</sup> Clemit, 'From *The Fields of Fancy* to *Matilda*: Mary Shelley's Changing Conception of her Novella', p.166.
- <sup>11</sup> Mary Shelley's journal reveals that she was engaged in reading and re-reading Godwin's works throughout her life. *Political Justice* and the novels are consistently within her intellectual frame of reference. For details of her reading see *Mary Shelley's Journal*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947). A few examples of her reading of Godwin will suffice. Shelley was reading *Political Justice* while correcting the proofs of *Frankenstein* in April 1817, and re-read *Fleetwood* and *St Leon* in 1815. See *Mary Shelley's Journal*, pp.47-8 and 78.
- <sup>12</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, VIII, p.46.
- <sup>13</sup> Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.146.
- <sup>14</sup> Lee Sterrenburg, 'Mary Shelley's Monster: Politics and Psyche in *Frankenstein*', in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, eds George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p.148.

- <sup>15</sup> Lee Sterrenburg, 'The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 33 (1978), p.335.
- <sup>16</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.5.
- <sup>17</sup> *Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (March 1818), p.253.
- <sup>18</sup> See Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).
- <sup>19</sup> Sterrenburg, 'Mary Shelley's Monster', p.160.
- <sup>20</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.70 and 81.
- <sup>21</sup> Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp.4 and 55.
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- <sup>23</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.141.
- <sup>24</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, pp.140-1.
- <sup>25</sup> Clemit, 'Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley', in *Literature of the Romantic Period: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.291.
- <sup>26</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.165.
- <sup>27</sup> Pamela Clemit, 'Frankenstein and Matilda: The Legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.34.
- <sup>28</sup> David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.181.
- <sup>29</sup> Marshall, *Surprising Effects of Sympathy*, p.215.
- <sup>30</sup> Gregory Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.1-15.
- <sup>31</sup> William St Clair, 'The Impact of *Frankenstein*', in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, eds Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp.38-63.
- <sup>32</sup> St Clair, 'The Impact of *Frankenstein*', p.55.
- <sup>33</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.26.
- <sup>34</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.141-2.
- <sup>35</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.9.
- <sup>36</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.21.
- <sup>37</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.45.
- <sup>38</sup> *The Confessions of J.J. Rousseau, Part the Second*, trans James Marshall, 3 vols (London: Robinson, 1790), I, p.171.
- <sup>39</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.25.
- <sup>40</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, pp.35, 37, 127, 165.
- <sup>41</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, pp.25-6.
- <sup>42</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.48.
- <sup>43</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, I, p.320.
- <sup>44</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, VIII, p.46.
- <sup>45</sup> For Shelley's reading of Hazlitt's *The Round Table*, see *Mary Shelley's Journal*, p.77.
- <sup>46</sup> *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-4), IV, p.89.
- <sup>47</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.166.
- <sup>48</sup> Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre and English Romanticism*, p.11.
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- <sup>50</sup> *Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E.B. Murray, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp.282-3.
- <sup>51</sup> Sterrenburg, 'Mary Shelley's Monster', p.146.
- <sup>52</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, pp.19-20.
- <sup>53</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.149.
- <sup>54</sup> *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin* (London: Pickering, 1992), IV, p.11.
- <sup>55</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, II, p.323.
- <sup>56</sup> Rousseau, *Confessions*, II, p.371.
- <sup>57</sup> See *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, eds Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 10 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), I, pp.623 and 645.

- <sup>58</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.85.
- <sup>59</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.100.
- <sup>60</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.90.
- <sup>61</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, II, p.61.
- <sup>62</sup> *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives*, ed. Nora Crook, 4 vols (London: Pickering, 2002), III, p.353.
- <sup>63</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.79.
- <sup>64</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.81.
- <sup>65</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.84.
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- <sup>67</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p. 195.
- <sup>68</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.456.
- <sup>69</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.83.
- <sup>70</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.190.
- <sup>71</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.190.
- <sup>72</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.98.
- <sup>73</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.98.
- <sup>74</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.100.
- <sup>75</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.100.
- <sup>76</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.101.
- <sup>77</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.105.
- <sup>78</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.95.
- <sup>79</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.95.
- <sup>80</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.13.
- <sup>81</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prose Works*, I, p.283.
- <sup>82</sup> Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p.69.
- <sup>83</sup> St Clair, 'The Impact of *Frankenstein*', p.41.
- <sup>84</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.13.
- <sup>85</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, pp.74-5.
- <sup>86</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, pp.108, 109, 109, 108.
- <sup>87</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, pp.109-10.
- <sup>88</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.110.
- <sup>89</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, pp.168-9.
- <sup>90</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.168.
- <sup>91</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, pp.168-9.
- <sup>92</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, I, p.169.
- <sup>93</sup> Katherine C. Hill-Miller, *My Hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), p.69.
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- <sup>97</sup> Sterrenburg, 'The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions', p.335.
- <sup>98</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.204.
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- <sup>100</sup> Fiona J. Stafford, *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.228.
- <sup>101</sup> Jane Blumberg, in *Mary Shelley, Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.23.
- <sup>102</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.14.
- <sup>103</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.24.
- <sup>104</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.26.
- <sup>105</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.138.
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- <sup>107</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.122.
- <sup>108</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, III, p.101.
- <sup>109</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.183.
- <sup>110</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.188.
- <sup>111</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.332.
- <sup>112</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.338.

- <sup>113</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.347.
- <sup>114</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.347.
- <sup>115</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.355.
- <sup>116</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.360.
- <sup>117</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, pp.58-9.
- <sup>118</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.49.
- <sup>119</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.85.
- <sup>120</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.180.
- <sup>121</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.28.
- <sup>122</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.31.
- <sup>123</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.62.
- <sup>124</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.63.
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- <sup>129</sup> Mary Shelley, *Literary Lives*, III, p.380.
- <sup>130</sup> Mary Shelley, *Literary Lives*, III, p.380.
- <sup>131</sup> Mary Shelley, *Literary Lives*, III, p.382.
- <sup>132</sup> Mary Shelley, *Literary Lives*, III, p.382.
- <sup>133</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.273.
- <sup>134</sup> Lokke, 'The Last Man', p.133.
- <sup>135</sup> Sterrenburg, 'The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions', pp.328 and 335.
- <sup>136</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.139.
- <sup>137</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.103.
- <sup>138</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.182.
- <sup>139</sup> Constantin François Chassebeuf de Volney, *The Ruins; or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, trans James Marshall (London: Thomas Tegg, 1811), p.22.
- <sup>140</sup> Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*, p.187.
- <sup>141</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.183.
- <sup>142</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.251.
- <sup>143</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.251.
- <sup>144</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.249.
- <sup>145</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, III.iv.164-9; *The Poems of Shelley*, pp.607-8.
- <sup>146</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.249.
- <sup>147</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.85.
- <sup>148</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. Anthony Flew (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp.134-5.
- <sup>149</sup> Malthus, *Essay on Population*, p.135.
- <sup>150</sup> Malthus, *Essay on Population*, p.144.
- <sup>151</sup> Malthus, *Essay on Population*, p.138.
- <sup>152</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, pp.237, 295, 304.
- <sup>153</sup> Malthus, *Essay on Population*, p.119.
- <sup>154</sup> Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.12.
- <sup>155</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.292.
- <sup>156</sup> Stafford, *The Last of the Race*, p.218.
- <sup>157</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.292.
- <sup>158</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.292-3.
- <sup>159</sup> Godwin to Mary Shelley, June 29, 1821 and June 10, 1821. Abinger MS, c 524.
- <sup>160</sup> Godwin to Mary Shelley, June 29, 1821. Abinger MS, c 524.
- <sup>161</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.243.
- <sup>162</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.244.
- <sup>163</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.319.
- <sup>164</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.320.
- <sup>165</sup> Shelley had read Hazlitt's *Round Table* in 1817; see *Mary Shelley's Journal*, p.89. It is likely that she or Percy Shelley had encountered the *Political Essays*.

- <sup>166</sup> Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, VII, 347.  
<sup>167</sup> Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, VII, 336-7.  
<sup>168</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.325.  
<sup>169</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.356.  
<sup>170</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.358.  
<sup>171</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.361.  
<sup>172</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.362.  
<sup>173</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.362.  
<sup>174</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, IV, p.362.  
<sup>175</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, p.292.

### Conclusion

- <sup>176</sup> *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), XII, ed. F.E.L. Priestley, p.359.  
<sup>177</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.888. See also Thompson's discussion of Godwin in *The Poverty of Theory and other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978).  
<sup>178</sup> Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism*, 2 vols (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1921), I, pp.113-120.  
<sup>179</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, 5 vols (London: Macmillan, 1953-8), I, pp.23-31. Cole states that neither Godwin nor Paine 'can properly be regarded as a Socialist save in a very wide sense of the word, though each, in his own way, was an important anticipator of doctrines that contributed to the making of the Socialist movement' (p.25).  
<sup>180</sup> Cole, *Socialist Thought*, pp.25-6.  
<sup>181</sup> Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.246.  
<sup>182</sup> Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), p.38.  
<sup>183</sup> Robert Owen, *A New View of Society*, ed. V.A.C. Gatrell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.125.  
<sup>184</sup> William St Clair, 'The Impact of *Frankenstein*', in *Mary Shelley in Her Times* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p.55.  
<sup>185</sup> *Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, ed. Nora Crook, 8 vols (London: Pickering, 1996), II, p.250.  
<sup>186</sup> Mary Shelley, *Novels and Selected Works*, II, p.251.  
<sup>187</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, eds Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, 3 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1989-), II, pp.661-2.  
<sup>188</sup> See *Julian and Maddalo*, 1.165; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.672.  
<sup>189</sup> Percy Shelley, *Julian and Maddalo*, ll.172-3 and 179; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, pp.672-3.  
<sup>190</sup> Percy Shelley, *Julian and Maddalo*, 1.201; *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.674.  
<sup>191</sup> See Bouthaina Shaaban, 'Shelley and the Chartists' in *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, eds Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 114-25.  
<sup>192</sup> Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: W. Morrow, 1987).  
<sup>193</sup> Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions*, p.191.  
<sup>194</sup> *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993), II, p.186.  
<sup>195</sup> *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p.32.

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