Shape-Shifters: Romantic-Era Representations of the Child in the Wollstonecraft-Godwin Family Circle

Malini Roy
Keble College
University of Oxford

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a study of the representations of childhood in the works of the family circle of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin and their intellectual inheritors, Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley. It argues that their literary representations of the child, as a group, form an index of their political resistance to the dominant cultures of their era.

The thesis situates these representations of childhood against the backdrop of the Romantic-era cultural celebration of childhood as established in works by historians and critics such as Philippe Ariés and James McGavran, Jr. It argues that the new sentimental category of the child established in the writings of Rousseau and Wordsworth, paradoxically, tends to marginalise the child from the socially powerful world of adults, even while establishing the child's new specificity. This ethical impasse is resolved by the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle through its literary representations of the child, where the child becomes a shifting metaphor for all socially oppressed groups. Moreover, the adult author invites the child to participate in the world of adult power, eschewing a totalising adult perspective that erases the child's specific concerns.

This thesis tracks the development of the versions of the child in the works of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle, from their early, discursive, political works such as Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Godwin's *Political Justice*, where they represent their late-eighteenth century ideals of political emancipation through the education of the child, to more imaginative versions of the

child in their later works. I locate a moment in each writer's career at which the adult-child divide observed in their early works collapses: their doubts about rationalist epistemology crystallise, and they switch to open-ended modes of discourse in literary genres such as novels, which allow more freedom for the coded expression of radical political ideas through the representations of the child. In their later works, especially in Godwin's radical publications for children, the adult-child hierarchy is dissolved: the child becomes a complex metaphor, representing the varied political concerns of disempowered adults and children. The discussion concludes with a sketch of the imaginative appropriation and transformation of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations by the Shelleys. Mary Shelley, and to a lesser extent, Percy Bysshe Shelley, adapt the radicalism of their predecessors' literary representations of the child to suit their own altered socio-political contexts.

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Of this infrastructure, the English Faculty Library has been a key element. I would like to thank the staff there, as well as the staff at the History and Social Sciences libraries and the Bodleian Library network, especially Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield. I also owe a debt to the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature at University of Florida, whose collection of Godwin's children's books set the cogs of this thesis running. The Oxford University Club provided a steady if slightly uncanny work space.

Sustaining a doctoral project would have been impossible without steady support from a range of sources, which includes Clarendon Fund, ORSAS, Charles Wallace Trust, Keble College, and Radhakrishnan Fund.

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Abbreviations

The following is a list of abbreviations for collections of primary works frequently cited in this thesis. They are listed alphabetically.

CWG….....*Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*. Ed. Mark Philp. Introd. Marilyn Butler & Mark Philp. 8 vols. London: William Pickering, 1992.

NSWMS…….*The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*. Gen. eds. Nora Crook & Pamela Clemit. Introd. Betty T. Bennett. 8 vols. London: William Pickering, 1996.

PPWG…… *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*. Gen. ed. Mark Philp. 7 vols. London: William Pickering,1993.

PJ…… *Political Justice* (1793), William Godwin's seminal text from Volume 3 of *PPWG*.

PS…….. *The Poems of Shelley*. Eds. Geoffrey Matthews & Kelvin Everest. London: Longman, 1989-. 2 vols. to date.

WMW……..*The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Eds. Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler. 7 vols. London: William Pickering, 1989.

For all other works cited repeatedly, the first citation is given in full, and successive ones are in a shortened, easily recognisable form.

Illustrations

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Frontispiece of Theophilus Marcliffe [William Godwin]. *The Looking-Glass. A True History of the Early Years of an Artist; Calculated to awaken the Emulation of Young Persons of both Sexes, in the Pursuit of every laudable Attainment: particularly in the Cultivation of the Fine Arts.* London,1805. Reproduced from Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 50……..250

Referencing Policy

Unless otherwise specified, the dates in parentheses refer to dates of first published editions of the works mentioned.

I have followed the format given in Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th ed. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003). Thus, for publishing details, names of publishers are only listed in publications after 1900.

In my footnotes I have included the life-spans of figures who were of some importance in the Romantic era, but may be unknown to modern critical readers. These dates are taken from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

Introduction. The Young Heart's Warfare

> What wert thou then? A child most infantine,
> Yet wandering beyond that innocent age
> In all but its sweet looks and mien divine;
> Even then, methought, with the world's tyrant rage
> A patient warfare thy young heart did wage [.]
> (856-60)[1]

In these lines from "The Revolt of Islam" (1818) by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), Laon remembers his lover Cythna as a "child." In his rhetorical question "What wert thou then?" he celebrates the young Cythna's looks as "innocent," "sweet" and "divine." But at the same time, he feels that she was "wandering beyond" the expected behaviour of the child, especially that of the conventionally passive female child. Cythna's visionary nature makes her an outsider to her culture. Her "patient" warfare ideologically resists the violent "rage" of the "world's" oppressors, expressing Shelley's political agenda of non-violent resistance.[2] Cythna's sweet looks co-exist with her active, independent, developed and radical political consciousness, as she tests the limits of the socio-cultural mores of her time. The key point here is that through Laon's voice, Shelley *represents* the child Cythna as a complex and rebellious figure, through the discrepancy between her conventional looks and unconventional interior self. The child Cythna defies easy categories of definition.

In this thesis I will argue that Shelley's representation of the child Cythna is typical of the innovative and radical explorations of childhood in the work of authors with whose works Shelley's writings were closely associated. These authors comprise the family circle of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), William Godwin (1756-1836),

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[1] Shelley, "Laon and Cythna," *PS* II 101. The editors of this edition retained the original, uncensored title of the publication.
[2] Art Young, *Shelley and Nonviolence* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 7-33.

and Mary Shelley (1797-1851), their daughter and Shelley's wife.[3] The authors in this family circle, particularly Wollstonecraft and Godwin, show a consistent and deep interest in the social and symbolic role of the child which they explore in their literary works. This thesis seeks to understand the conception of the child in these works, particularly those of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and its radical implications. It seeks to contextualise the Wollstonecraft-Godwin child against the ambient views of the child in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to consider the political and literary ideas that underpin it. It will map the child in these writings through close readings of selected texts by Wollstonecraft, Godwin and the Shelleys, and demonstrate the complexity and heterogeneity of their literary representations and their responses to contemporary ideas about the child in the Romantic era.[4]

Setting in Perspective: The "Romantic Child"

In order to appreciate fully the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle's radical break with culturally dominant ideas about the child, it is necessary to look at more well-known Romantic-era representations of the child. When modern readers think of the Romantic child, their perceptions are largely derived from readings of the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake, where the child is represented as an innocent figure, gifted with otherworldly wisdom. James McGavran, for instance, speaks for many critical readers, in his introductory essay to a volume of essays about Romantic-era children's literature. McGavran instances Coleridge's representation of his four-year old son Hartley, in the fragmentary "Conclusion" to the unfinished "Christabel"

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[3] Hereafter, these authors will be collectively referred to the "Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle" henceforth, or simply as "Wollstonecraft-Godwin."

[4] The term "child" will be used fairly interchangeably with the term "childhood," depending on context. Some critics have argued that the terms have different meanings: while "child" refers to a biological category, childhood signifies the idea of a child, which is a social construct. See Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2005) 22-30. This distinction is not relevant to this thesis, which is concerned with the idea of literary representation.

as a superior "faery Thing" that "always *finds*, and never *seeks*." Analysing Coleridge's eulogy to this otherworldly child, McGavran concludes that "Coleridge expresses sympathy with the child's intuitive way of knowing," that is, the wise child finds knowledge spontaneously without ever having to seek it with effort.[5] The child is seen as a natural, active and free spirit, instinctively in touch with kinds of wisdom that the adult has lost, a loss figured most memorably in Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." [6] The natural, spontaneous child of British Romantic poetics is also visible in German Romantic aesthetic theory. In his landmark essay, *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795-6), Friedrich Schiller glorified the child by its association with objects of "nature," that is, flowers, streams, stones, birds and bees. Schiller privileges children or adults with child-like qualities, who are not conditioned into cultural mores, and instead "act and think naively" even though they live within the "artificial circumstances of fashionable society." [7]

Critics of Romantic childhood have also observed, however, that the child is mainly represented in this way by male poets who have been long established in the canon of literary studies. Alan Richardson, for example, lists a useful set of competing cultural models of childhood in the Romantic era: in these models he observes the "transcendental" child in the poetry of Wordsworth. In Richardson's terms, in contrast to the "disembodied character" of the child in Wordsworth's poetry, female Romantic-era writers emphasise the materiality of the child in their "maternal

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[5] James McGavran, Jr. "Introduction," *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James McGavran, Jr. (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1991) 1-13.
[6] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984) 297-302.
[7] Friedrich Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795-6)," *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Harmann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe*, trans. & introd. H.B Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 177-232.

convention" of representation. Thus, in "To a little Invisible Being who is expected soon to become visible" by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, the expectant mother's voice stresses the occasionally unpleasant "earthier aspects" of the child.[8] Along similar lines Judith Plotz, in her extensive study *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, uses Wordsworth to talk about Romantic childhood with critical attention to Coleridge as well. For Plotz, the male Romantic poets "reify the Child," subsuming the differences of individual children under a universal and essential category, whereas female Romantic-era writers of children's literature, including Barbauld, envision children in communal contexts, enabling children to learn "life-lessons" that help them grow as adults.[9] Thus, criticism on the Romantic-era child has tended to be polarised along gender lines, with a majority of studies centred on the Romantic child of masculine poetry, while a minority (albeit increasing) explores the Romantic-era, feminine, pedagogic child.[10]

However, in this critical taxonomy, writers like Wollstonecraft and Godwin do not fit easily into either category. Thus there has been a relative neglect of extensive representations of childhood in their writings, as well as their intellectual inheritors,

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[8] Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 8-20.

[9] Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) xii-85.

[10] For criticism on childhood in Romantic poetry, see especially Mary Moorman, "Wordsworth and His Children," *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch,* ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1970)111-41; Lucy Newlyn, "The Little Actor in his Mock-Apparel." *Wordsworth Circle* 14 (1983) 30-39; Ross Woodman, "The Idiot Boy as Healer." *Romanticism and Children's Literature* 72-95; James McGavran, Jr.,"Wordsworth, Lost Boys, and Romantic Hom(e)phobia," *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations,* ed. James McGavran, Jr. (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1999) 130-52; Marilyn Gaull, "Wordsworth and the Six Arts of Childhood," *1800: The New Lyrical Ballads,* eds. Nicola Trott and Seamus Perry (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 74-94. For feminist explorations, see especially Mitzi Myers, "Little Girls Lost: Rewriting a Romantic Childhood, Righting Gender and Genre," *Teaching Children's Literature: Issues, Pedagogy, Resources*, ed. Glenn Sadler (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992) 131-42.

the Shelleys. Representations of the child in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake are so extensive that they are beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, this thesis looks primarily at representations in the prose writings of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, at Mary Shelley as an heir to their ideas, and performs a brief survey of the imaginative appropriation of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley. The focus on the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations, however, will inevitably include some critical discussion of Wordsworth (and some of Coleridge), for the sake of comparison and contrast. But these instances will also illuminate how the politicised Wollstonecraft-Godwin child shares some common features with Wordsworth's otherworldly child.

These representations of the child are tracked through several primary sources. These sources comprise the writings of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle, primarily their published works, but also their private writings and mutual correspondence where these illuminate the public record. These writings are examined against other contemporary philosophical, political, literary, visual, educational and medical works. Hence the thesis encompasses relevant original research into archival material, particularly children's literature written or published by Godwin, and late eighteenth-century medical literature (with a particular focus on child care books). Besides these readings of primary sources, I also build on the significant body of scholarship on the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle, particularly studies of their educational ideas and children's literature. The more significant ones are outlined below.

Particularly important to this thesis has been William St. Clair's biography, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, which offers a critical precedent by grouping the four

authors in this thesis together, and revealing their mutual connections.[11] For an appreciation of literary dialogues between these four authors as a family, Julie Carlson's *England's First Family of Writers* is particularly illuminating.[12] In terms of criticism specific to the authors examined in this thesis, it is important to note that Wollstonecraft and Godwin have been recognised as major writers only fairly recently.[13] Thus, in the existing criticism on Wollstonecraft, her representations of the child have been examined mainly through the feminist lens, that is, the education of the girl-child, discussions of maternity, or else through her children's literature. In these respects, Gary Kelly's *Revolutionary Feminism* and Barbara Taylor's *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* are particularly useful, together with the nuanced discussions of children's literature by female writers in the Romantic era, by Mitzi Myers and Matthew Grenby.[14] Analyses of Godwin's children's literature, by William St. Clair, Pamela Clemit and Brian Alderson throw light on Godwin's radical educational agenda, revealing the formal innovations of his children's books.[15] The present study supplements these critics' studies by relating Godwin's children's literature to his representations of childhood in texts written for adult readers. Critical receptions of childhood in Mary Shelley's works have focused on maternity and child

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[11] William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (London: W.W. Norton, 1989).

[12] Carlson, Julie A., *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2007.

[13] See Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 252-53.

[14] Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992) 58-67, 202; Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 110-13, 211-13, 233-45; Mitzi Myers, "Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames, and Moral Mothers: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Female Tradition in Georgian Children's Books," *Children's Literature* 14, ed. Margaret Higgonet and Barbara Rosen (1986): 31-59; Matthew. O. Grenby, '"Real charity makes distinctions" : schooling the charitable impulse in early British children's literature,' *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 25 (2002): 185-202.

[15] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 279-87; William St. Clair, "William Godwin as Children's Bookseller," *Children and their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, eds. Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 165-81; Pamela Clemit "Philosophical Anarchism in the Schoolroom: William Godwin' s Juvenile Library, 1805-25," *Biblion: The Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 9 (2000-01): 44-70; Brian Alderson, '"Mister Gobwin" and His "Interesting Little Books, Adorned with Beautiful Copper Plates,"' *Princeton University Library Chronicle* (1998) 159-89.

abandonment in *Frankenstein* (1818), and for these Anne Mellor and U.C. Knoepflmacher's contributions are particularly significant, especially as they trace literary interaction between Godwin and Mary Shelley.[16] Representations of childhood in Percy Bysshe Shelley have been traced from biographical perspectives by Timothy Webb in *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood*, while the ongoing work of Lisbeth Chapin reveals Percy Shelley's personal investment in the child as a cultural saviour.[17] I also draw upon general critical studies of Romantic-era childhood, which have dealt with the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle. Alan Richardson's *Literature, Education and Romanticism* is immensely helpful for appreciating the radical nature of Wollstonecraft and Godwin's educational ideas for the child in 1790s cultural contexts. Andrew O'Malley's *The Making of the Modern Child* helps ground Wollstonecraft and Godwin's educational ideas and conceptions of childhood in their contemporary middle-class cultural milieu.[18]

However, for a fuller appreciation of the radical import of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations of childhood, the literary understanding of the child needs to be enhanced by locating the Romantic-era child in the history of childhood. The relevance of this history will become clear as I outline how the eighteenth century becomes a turning-point for the culture of childhood, with new child-related discourses being generated through educational theory, child care, and children's literature.

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[16] Anne Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 38-140; U. C. Knoepflmacher, "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters," *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, eds. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 88-119.

[17] Timothy Webb, Shelley: A Voice Not Understood (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977); Lisbeth Chapin, "'And I will teach thine infant tongue': Shelley and the Child as Saviour," International Conference on Romanticism: "Romantic Metamorphoses and Transformations," Colorado Springs, 14 Oct, 2005.

[18] Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 49-70; Andrew O'Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 39-123.

The Cult of the Child: A Historical Sketch

The culture of childhood has been an important area of historical investigation, ever since Philippe Ariès's landmark French text of 1963, translated into English as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. According to Ariès, children were seen as miniature adults until the early modern period. This changed from the seventeenth century onwards, as the child was physically differentiated from the adult, through the new practice of special clothing, for example. Most remarkably, in the eighteenth century, the concept of childhood emerged as a special state of human existence.[19] Ariès's observation of the rising cultural importance of childhood, in early modern Europe, was confirmed by other historical studies in the 1970s, such as Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, *History of Childhood* edited by Lloyd de Mause, or Randolph Trumbach's *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*.[20] These scholars' work highlights that the cultural celebration of childhood in the era corresponds to a conceptual separation between childhood and adulthood, which is reflected in various texts in the eighteenth century. Drawing upon the "Ariès model," I will sketch out the celebration of the child in such texts, and wherever relevant, foreground the contributions of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle to the culture of a distinct childhood.

The role of the child was prominently discussed in the philosophical and educational texts of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, especially in the former's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), and in the latter's *Émile*, *or, On Education* (1762). In

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[19] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: J. Cape, 1962) 50-61.

[20] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1977) 66-82, 105-19, 159-77, 405-80; Lloyd de Mause, "The Evolution of Childhood," *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (New York: Psychohistory, 1974) 1-73; Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic, 1978) 165-292.

contrast to earlier, traditional Christian views of the child as a bearer of original sin, Locke and Rousseau presented more optimistic views of the child. For Locke, the child's mind was a *tabula rasa* or blank slate to be written over by experience: the child's education determined the kind of human that would emerge in adulthood.[21] Locke's psychological understanding of the child was further enhanced by the philosopher David Hartley. Hartley's *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (1749) put forth a theory of physiology, psychology and spirituality, where the positive association of ideas in the brain gradually makes the human ascend closer to God.[22] Hartley's associationist psychology, with its Christian dimension, deeply influenced Romantic poets including Coleridge who practically venerated the philosopher, and promoted his ideas in *Lectures on Revealed Religion* (1795) and other writings.[23] In fact, Coleridge admired Hartley so much that he even named his own child, the "faery Thing" mentioned above, after the philosopher.[24]

Rousseau, in *Émile*, outdoes Locke in his celebration of the child. For Rousseau, the child is allied to a redemptive Nature that would counterbalance corrupted human culture and civilisation. Rousseau's child is a powerful being, a very representative of human civilisation: he claims that "we fail to perceive that the race would have perished had not man begun by being a child."[25] Rousseau sees the socialisation of the child, therefore, as a grand and immense responsibility with mythical repercussions for the destiny of the human species.

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[21] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 1689 (London: Penguin, 1997) 59-74, 109.
[22] "Hartley, David," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, gen. ed. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 9-10.
[23] Samuel T. Coleridge, "Lectures on Revealed Religion," *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, Vol.1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969-2002) 16 vols.,150.
[24] Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) 124.
[25] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or Education,* trans. Barbara Foxley, introd. P.D. Jimack (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1974) 6.

Locke and Rousseau's works were widely read in the eighteenth century, and influenced a very large number of texts that featured childhood. Through their educational ideas, for instance, they criticised traditional teaching methods where children were routinely beaten into submission by physically coercive methods of punishment, such as whipping. Instead, Locke and Rousseau's texts asked adults to teach the child in a liberal atmosphere, where the latter would acquire knowledge of his own free will rather than have adults force it upon him. Rousseau, particularly, preached that children should play in the open air and not be forced to study indoors all the time.[26]

Such liberal ideas on education were integral to the pedagogical works, as well as institutions, of the Rational Dissenters of the Nonconformist Enlightenment, who saw the child's education as a force for political reform.[27] In accord with Locke and Rousseau, Dissenting Academies encouraged children to learn everything voluntarily without the constant fear of punishment. As the following chapters will show, both Wollstonecraft and Godwin, in their early careers, were heavily influenced by the Dissenters' liberal views towards the child, although they did not think these views liberal enough in their later careers.

These new, liberal ideas about the child's education and upbringing were manifest in relatively commercial forms in new kinds of texts spawned by the booming publishing industry of the eighteenth century. [28] Adults begin to cater to children through the emergent body of children's literature.[29] The significance of this

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[26] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 1693, ed. John & Jean Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 208-12; Rousseau 42-64.

[27] See Jennifer S. Uglow, *The Lunar Men: the Friends who Made the Future, 1730-1810* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) xiv,74.

[28] William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 274-5, 352.

[29] F.J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 1932, 3rd ed., rev. Brian Alderson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 1-8.

emerges once we consider that previously, most children had only had religious books to read, like the Bible, or morbid texts like James Janeway's *A Token for Children, being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children* (1671).[30] Janeway's book, as its ominous title indicates, sees children as being steeped in original sin. Since children "are not too Little to go to Hell," Janeway asks children to repent of their sins constantly, and pray lest they die young. Thus, Janeway catalogues the deaths of several holier-than-thou children who obtain divine grace through their early religious devotion.[31]

In contrast to Janeway's punitive, explicit religious education for the child, the Dissenter Isaac Watts, in his *Divine Songs for Children* (1715), addressed children in a moral, but nevertheless more genial tone.[32] This trend was continued and perfected in late-eighteenth century children's literature, by authors from politically liberal Dissenting circles like Anna Barbauld and John Aikin, and Richard and Maria Edgeworth, as well as the more conservative, evangelical Sarah Trimmer.[33] The works of these authors offered a whole new range of reading material to the child reader, with a recognition of the child's distinct needs: for instance, they had large print for the child's ease of reading.[34] Instead of fearful stories about religious damnation, they appealed to the child reader by stories about secular subjects like

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[30] See Jack Zipes, Lissa Paul, Lynne Vallone, Peter Hunt, Gillian Avery, eds. "Religion: Judeo-Christian Stories" *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature: The Traditions in English* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005) 503-10.

[31] James Janeway. *A Token for Children, Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children. By James Janeway, Minister of the Gospel. To which is Added, A token for the Children of New-England, or, Some Examples of Children, in whom the Fear of God was Remarkably Budding before they Died; in Several Parts of New-England. Preserved and Published for the Encouragement of Piety in Other Children. With new additions*, 1676, rev. ed. (Boston, 1771) 4, 23 Aug 2007 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>

[32] James McGavran, Jr., "*Catechist and Visionary*: Watts and Wordsworth in "We Are Seven" and the "Anecdote for Fathers," *Romanticism and Children's Literature* 54-71.

[33] I am referring to Anna Barbauld's brother John Aikin (1747-1822), and not their father John Aikin (1713-80).

[34] See Helen Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent: Joseph Johnson and the Cause of Liberty* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 30, 173.

domestic animals and families.[35] Wollstonecraft wrote a number of children's books in this vein which will be examined in Chapters 1 and 2. Very relevant to this thesis also is the children's literature written by Godwin, produced through his publishing and bookselling business "Juvenile Library," run by the author and his second wife Mary Jane Godwin. Exploiting the demand for children's books, Godwin ran his fairly successful publishing firm with the help of a talented team of authors like Charles and Mary Lamb, and illustrators like William Mulready.[36]

Godwin's production of children's books signals that Romantic-era children's literature was one of the many kinds of consumer products that addressed the child directly, in the context of the rising commodity culture of the eighteenth century. J.H. Plumb has observed that, over this period, upper and middle-class children were practically flooded with a new and vast choice of toys and books.[37] Toys had always formed an integral part of children's lives: however, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the increasing commercialisation of children's belongings by John Newbery and Rudolph Ackermann (to name just two of the many entrepreneurs) created an extraordinary range and variety of products in the early modern market economy.[38] This anticipation of modern consumer culture is evident in the variety of mechanical and scientific games and puzzles available in the market. Patricia Crown, noting the proliferation of texts for visual consumption over this period, observes the rise of shops for "children's goods with names like 'The Juvenile Library,' 'The Temple of Fancy' and 'Youthful Academy.' As she elaborates, illustrated books for children "were available cheaply and in large numbers from the 1770s through to the 1820s."

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[35] See Samuel F. Pickering, Jr., *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1981) 12-3.
[36] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 279-87; William Mulready (1786-1863).
[37] J.H. Plumb, "The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England," *Past and Present* 67 (1975) 64-95.
[38] John Newbery (1713-1767); Rudolph Ackermann (1764-1834).

In fact, the book-illustrators were usually highly talented artists, including members of the Royal Academy such as Henry Fuseli and Thomas Stothard.[39]

Historians have pointed out the negative side to this explosion of consumer products for children. For Crown, such catering to children's needs in the market economy demonstrates the early induction of children by adults into consumer culture: a "child who was seen to have everything, especially the newest of everything, shows its parents' success as parents and as members of a particular stratum of society." [40] This is one possible interpretation of the increase of commodities for children, but perhaps the innumerable options opened up by the market were less conformism-inducing than Crown argues. It is quite possible that at least a few children who encountered these commodities were not lulled into a consumer culture of mass conformism. Indeed in the case of a radically-minded publisher like Godwin, as Chapter 4 will show, writing and selling books was his way of propagating philosophical ideas to child readers. Although Godwin's children's literature is not often seen by literary critics in connection with his radicalism, capitalist culture, ironically, was the medium that enabled Godwin to reach out to a much larger audience than possible in earlier methods of book production. Godwin's harnessing of capitalist culture for his own radical ends also found fruit in his daughter Mary Shelley's literary talent, which was honed through the reading offered in the Juvenile Library books. [41]

The celebration of childhood in the commercial medium of the publishing industry is further visible in the emergence of mass-produced child advice literature,

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[39] Patricia Crown, "The Child in the Visual Culture of Consumption 1790-1830," ed. Anja Müller, *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: Age and Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) 63-79.
[40] Crown 63.
[41] See below, pp. 208-14.

usually written by doctors.[42] These ancestors of the modern Dr. Spock's *Baby and Child Care* were frequently reprinted and read over the period. They acquired the status of bestsellers, and mark the age's growing concern with the physical well-being of the child. Many of the child-care writers justified the writing of their books by citing the high infant mortality rates prevalent at the time, underlining the fact that beyond the cosy world of books and toys, there existed a dangerous realm of ill health where children were precariously poised between life and death.[43] By pointing out the grim statistics of child mortality, the child care writers carved out a space for themselves in the new commercial markets.

Indeed, the facts show that the doctors' fears were by no means unfounded, especially in the poorer sections of society: Jonas Hanway's *An Earnest Appeal for Mercy to the Children of the Poor* (1766), revealed a shocking survival rate of 1:70 for every child born alive amongst the parish poor. Figures in the London Bills of Mortality showed that 60% of baptised children were liable to die before the age of two.[44] In fact child mortality was an important public concern in eighteenth-century Britain, spurring many philanthropic ventures to save more children, like the establishment of the Foundling Hospital in London by Thomas Coram in 1739, a trend continued in the setting up of other foundling hospitals through the remaining part of the century.[45] Such ventures spawned new discourses around child health, making medical professionals starkly aware of the real need for

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[42] Adriana S. Benzaquén, "The Doctor and the Child: Medical Preservation and Management of Children in the Eighteenth Century," *Fashioning Childhood* 13-24.

[43] William Cadogan, *An Essay upon Nursing, and the Management of Children, from Their Birth to Three Years of Age* (London, 1748) 3-4; William Buchan, *Advice to Mothers, on the Subject of Their Own Health, and on the Means of Promoting the Health, Strength, and Beauty of Their Offspring* (London, 1803) 362-64.

[44] Jonas Hanway (1712-86); Christina Hardyment, *Perfect Parents: Baby-Care Advice Past and Present* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 12; see Buchan 362.

[45] Alysa Levene, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital 1741-1800: 'Left to the Mercy of the World'* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007) 3-12.

their intervention in saving children's lives.[46] The doctors' perception of child mortality as a needless waste of human life was often expressed in the standard religious vocabulary of the day.[47] Dr. William Buchan, for instance, one of the most popular child-care writers of the day, saw the unborn child as a "sacred deposit" in the mother's womb: the doctor, therefore, had a godly mission to save this "deposit" through the travails of birth and upbringing.[48] Buchan's missionary seriousness bears out Adriana Benzaquén's observation, in her study of child-care books, that over this period "the high mortality of children, a constant feature of western societies since antiquity, came to be seen, not as the way things are, but as a medical and cultural anomaly, an unacceptable phenomenon that warranted urgent attention and action."[49] Through child care books, medical writers let parents know that their monitoring of the child's health and development was necessary to preserve and nurture the child's life in a hazardous world.

The intervention of male medical professionals in the care of the child marks an important sociological development. Traditionally, child care had been largely a female activity, through oral knowledge transmitted from generation to generation of mothers and female midwives. Over the eighteenth century however, as Lisa Forman Cody's research has revealed, knowledge of reproduction spread outside the traditional female domain to the expanding domain of male doctors, apothecaries and even male midwives.[50] The latter popularised their expertise to a lay public by writing child care books that advised pregnant women how to look after themselves, what

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[46] Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 18-20.
[47] See Andrea K. Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity 1774-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 10-37.
[48] William Buchan (1729-1805); Buchan 25.
[49] Benzaquén 22.
[50] Cody 15-23, 84-119.

steps to take during childbirth, and how to take care of young children.[51] According to the male medical intelligentsia, traditional female methods of childbirth and child care failed to ensure the health and safety of most children (as well as the mothers). The medical profession claimed it knew better: male midwives, for example, boasted that they had reduced child mortality through medical advances such as the invention of forceps.[52] Adriana Benzaquén, in her study of the paediatric literature of the period, rightly observes that the male medical professionals presented themselves as enlightened opponents to the traditional methods practised by female nurses and midwives, and "saw themselves as courageous participants in the fight against ignorance, prejudice and superstition."[53] Whether more children actually survived, in terms of numbers, through the medical intervention remains doubtful, but the vocal paediatric discourse earmarks the growing cultural concern with the child's physical survival and welfare.[54]

The male doctors' professedly enlightened methods of child care largely coincided with the premises of Locke and Rousseau, who had discussed the physical upbringing of the child (taking the male child as the norm) in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and *Émile*.[55] They contrasted their own methods to the

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[51] A few examples: Cadogan, *An Essay upon Nursing*; William Buchan, *Domestic Medicine: or, a Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicines*. 2nd ed. (London, 1772); Hugh Downman, *Infancy; or, the Management of Children* (London, 1774); George Armstrong, *An Essay on the Diseases Most Fatal to Infants, including Rules to be Observed in the Nursing of Children, with a Particular View to Those Who Are Brought Up by Hand* (London, 1784); Buchan, *Advice to Mothers*.

[52] See Josephine M. Lloyd 'The "Languid Child" and the Eighteenth-Century Man-Midwife,' *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75 (2001) 641-79.

[53] Benzaquén 22.

[54] Despite the claims of eighteenth-century medical professionals, the actual reduction of child mortality remains questionable. See Edward Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies* (London: Allen Lane,1982) 103-38. Shorter discusses the unhygienic means used by obstetricians that caused fatal infections during childbirth. Mary Wollstonecraft was a victim of combined medical mismanagement by her female midwife and the male doctor, and died after giving birth to Mary Shelley. See Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000) 448-57.

[55] See Julie Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity and the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 16, 22-23.

traditional methods of female nurses and midwives, whose methods were elaborate and interventionist: they had swaddled the baby, kept the mother and baby in hot, enclosed rooms, and wrapped up the child in warm clothing. In contrast, the medical child-care writers prescribed simpler methods, such as keeping the mother and baby in airy rooms, and letting the child play outdoors in fresh, open air. In accord with Locke and Rousseau, who had rooted their ideas of child-rearing in the Spartan ideals of physical hardiness, the medical writers presented their own methods as more "natural" than the traditional female ones: Buchan, in *Advice to Mothers* (1803), for instance, quoted Rousseau approvingly to indicate that his manual was written with the socially serious purpose of supporting a natural, rather than a culturally corrupt, upbringing for the child.[56] At times, however, the medical writers dissociated themselves from Locke and Rousseau's ideals of hardiness for the child: Rousseau had advocated that the baby be given icy-cold baths to build up physical strength, in the figurative expression "Dip them in the waters" of the mythical river "Styx." [57] Locke and Rousseau were both theorists, and had not physically brought up children themselves. In response to Locke and Rousseau's occasionally extreme measures, the medical writers stressed the human body's fragility. They asserted the superiority of their knowledge to Locke and Rousseau, citing their practical experience with mothers and children, and accordingly revised Locke and Rousseau as occasion arose.[58] Chapter 2 will show that Wollstonecraft adds an additional dimension to these gendered debates on child care in the 1790s in an unfinished text on child care.[59]

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[56] Buchan, *Advice to Mothers* 213-14.
[57] Rousseau 15.
[58] See Benzaquén 24; see Richard Smith, "John Locke," *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education*: *from Confucius to Dewey*, ed. Joy Palmer (London: Routledge, 2001) 45-50. Smith observes that Locke had had medical training, and this must have contributed to his ideas on the child's physical upbringing in *Some Thoughts*. Thus, the eighteenth-century doctors' claims to practical knowledge of the child's body can be partly understood as a rhetorical move to advertise their own books.
[59] See below, pp. 115-21.

From the unconventional perspective of a female author, she justifies the writing of her text on the same basis as the male doctors, that is, the high infant mortality rates: "a third part of the human species, according to the most accurate calculation, die during their infancy, just at the threshold of life." Her anxiety rises from years of public debate on the contested area of child care, and sides with the male doctors in declaring "error" in "the modes adopted by mothers and nurses."[60] But as I will show, Wollstonecraft also radically unsettles the usual gendered categories of fashionable male doctors versus backward female child-carers.

As the doctors' texts became the new cultural authorities on the care of the child, they also chalked out new social roles for the adults who cared for the child. The doctors themselves largely belonged to the professional middle-classes, culturally ascendant in the eighteenth century, and they tried to instil their class-values in their readers, defining the child as the centre of the bourgeois family. They preached normative codes of behaviour to the parents in the nuclear family unit, as well as nurses and midwives. Traditionally, upper-class, and sometimes lower-class mothers had sent their babies out to a lower-class wet-nurse: instead, the middle-class doctors addressed their child-care books to parents and pointed out the horrors of the child being infected or malnourished through the wet-nurse's milk.[61] Quoting from Rousseau's *Émile*, Buchan expressed his humanitarian concern over the practice of wet-nursing, preaching that if every mother breastfed her own child the cumulative effect would be a general social reformation: [62]

> should mothers again condescend to NURSE THEIR CHILDREN, manners would form themselves: the sentiments of nature would revive in our hearts.[63]

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[60] Wollstonecraft, "Letters on the Management of Infants," *WMW* 4 459.
[61] See O'Malley 66-85.
[62] Rousseau 10.
[63] Buchan 213.

Thus, according to Buchan, the sheer act of a mother's breastfeeding her own child, and her rejection of the contemporary practice of wet-nursing, would hew away the artificial corruptions of culture (exemplified especially in the socialite lives of aristocratic mothers). Buchan's statement reflects the larger contemporary rising middle-class cultural idolisation of motherhood, identified by Ruth Perry, where women began to be defined chiefly in terms of their performance as mothers to their children, especially in novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740-1). The mother was expected to sacrifice all her own desires to serve those of the child.[64]

However, in yet another remarkable eighteenth-century sociological development, the medical writers also insisted that fathers play an active role in the care of the child, alongside the mother. In this respect their ideas coincided with Rousseau. In *Émile*, Rousseau had stated that a "father has done but a third of his task when he begets children and provides a living for them."[65] Unlike other animals, human

> children are feeble and helpless for so long a time, that mother and children could ill dispense with the father's affection, and the care which results from it.[66]

Similarly, time and again the child care books addressed fathers directly, stressing the role of the father in the child's nurture, with stress on his affective rather than economic contribution in the child's upbringing. This model of joint parenting included a greater domestic role for the father in the nuclear family unit. William Cadogan, whose *An Essay Upon Nursing* (1748) was one of the earliest child care books, urged "every Father to have his Child nursed under his own Eye, to make use

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[64]Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England," *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe*, ed. John C. Fout (Chicago: U of Chicago P Journals, 1992) 107-137.

[65] Rousseau 17.

[66] Rousseau 393.

of his own Reason and Sense in superintending and directing the Management of it."[67] Here, Cadogan asks the father to demonstrate the caring, emotional sides of his nature. However, gender hierarchies are preserved in this apparently enlightened scenario, as Cadogan figures the father's rational "Eye" in a role of surveillance, stressing that the mother's ignorance and irrationality have to be written over by the superior father's intellect. When William Buchan touches on the same theme in his 1803 work *Advice to Mothers*, he softens the terms of the gender divide: the father's "advice, his encouragement, his superintending *care*" (my emphasis) are desired to engage with the petty, "trifling concerns of the nursery."[68]

Eighteenth-century women perhaps felt threatened by the male intrusion into the little social space of child care where they had formerly possessed complete authority: indeed, Ruth Perry interprets this male participation in a formerly female domain as a coercive process.[69] In the context of traditional gender roles however, although men were participating in child care in a supervisory role, the involvement of the father with his children comes across as potentially progressive and enlightened. Overall, the participation of both fathers and male doctors in the traditionally feminine sphere of child care can be seen as the general softening of previously aggressive codes of masculinity. Historians have documented this social change as the disturbance of "sexual categories" in the eighteenth century, which occurred with the cultural privileging of discourses of sensibility, and the general adoption of polite codes of social behaviour.[70] In Chapter 4, I will highlight how Godwin picks up on of this softening of manners and realises its progressive potential as he gets closely involved with the upbringing of his growing children.

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[67] William Cadogan (1711-97); Cadogan, *An Essay Upon Nursing* 24.
[68] Buchan, *Advice to Mothers* 235.
[69] Perry 125-27.
[70] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992) xxviii.

This shift in adults' roles, through paediatric discourse, shows how extensively the new status of the child reoriented familial, and consequently, socio-political roles on a broader cultural level. As Benzaquén's study confirms, the "circulation of medical texts and medical knowledge called into being new roles, identities, relations and goals—for the doctor, the child, the nurse and the parents (especially the mother)."[71]

The rising cultural importance of childhood is also documented by the explosion of texts of visual arts that celebrate childhood. Children were represented prominently in the family portraits of Thomas Gainsborough or Joshua Reynolds, or even on their own.[72] In the paintings of the German artist Philip Otto Runge, children were depicted with a great deal of individuality and character.[73] Often, these paintings represented the child in a tenor similar to the natural, innocent child in Romantic poetry.[74] Portraits with child-sitters placed the individual child in settings such as open pastoral landscapes. The following portrait by Joshua Reynolds, *Lady Caroline Scott as 'Winter'* (1776), is a slightly unusual example of this kind of portrait, where the child's pastoral innocence is conveyed in a sophisticated mode. [75]

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[71] Benzaquén 15.

[72] For a study of the visual culture through this period, see James C. Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood*, 1730-1830 (U of California Berkeley: University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 1995). See especially Steward 117-20. Steward sees mother-and child portraits of the period, especially in the paintings of Benjamin West, as the transposition of Renaissance Madonna-and-Christ themes (in the paintings of Raphael, for instance) to secular and domestic contexts.

[73] See Robert Rosenblum, *The Romantic Child: From Runge to Sendak* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988)

[74] See above, pp. 2-3.

[75] Joshua Reynolds, *Lady Caroline Scott as 'Winter,'* 1776, Collection of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, Bowhill, Scotland, UK, 21 Jan 2008 <http://www.abcgallery.com/R/reynolds/reynolds3.html>



Here, the five-year old child is disconcertingly clad in sober black, as she stands against the harshness of the winter cold. Her cheeks glow crimson in the soft aura of the winter light. In a study of such paintings over the era, Dorothy Johnson observes that this painting gestures at the passage of the seasons, a popular literary and artistic theme in the eighteenth century, also exemplified in James Thomson's poem *The Seasons* (1730).[76] According to Johnson's persuasive reading, the painting depicts winter in the present, but supports future spring through the presence of the bird at the bottom right. Indeed, the child's surreal vitality overflows the sombre limits of her dark clothing, as she stands in a firm posture with symbols of animal life in the dog and the bird. The burst of light immediately behind her pushes out the leafless, bare boughs into the shadows.

[76] Dorothy Johnson, "Engaging Identity: Portraits of Children in Late Eighteenth-Century European Art," *Fashioning Childhood* 101-15.

In the case of a portrait like this, Reynolds was most likely painting Caroline in a way that would please her parents who were paying for the portrait. The artist was earning his own bread-and-butter by catering to rich patrons, and the representation of the child here probably reflects, to some extent, the patrons' tastes and not just the artist's creative expression. Still, even if such a painting reflects the commercial realities of the artist's life, the facts of composition do not invalidate the work: the natural child in Reynolds' painting is a visual text, whose meaning is constructed by both the artist and the audience. Such paintings, apart from their local circumstances of composition, confirm the larger cultural celebration of the natural, spontaneous childhood glimpsed above in Romantic poetry.

Ironically, seen against the cultural realities of the time, such paintings can be understood as sentimental modes of resistance to the increasing commercialisation of childhood in contemporary culture, and as an idealised retreat and refuge for both artists and audiences against the world of adult pressures. In real life, children were integral to the process of gentrification of manners that occurred in the eighteenth century, especially amongst the rising middle-classes.[77] Peter Borsay observes that, in circles of urban leisure, parents habitually took their children to fashionable spas and resorts: thus, "young people, children as well as adolescents" were commonly visible in such spaces. Borsay infers that the main reason children and adolescents entered such spaces "was to assimilate the ways of an adult world which they would eventually have to enter" at a practical level, so they could acquire socio-economic power in adulthood, since theoretical "formal education" could only take the children so far. Observing the struggles of parents to empower their children in an increasingly competitive economy, Borsay notes the "growing divergence between the *ideal* and

[77] See Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 59-121. Langford traces the "progress of politeness" in middle-class circles in eighteenth century England.

reality of childhood." Thus, in reaction to the artificial "cult of politeness," the cultural intelligentsia latched onto childhood as an escape route: the celebration of a natural, spontaneous childhood reflected "a new stress on the inner unpolished self and on childhood as the source from which this essential self flowed."[78]

Hence, both visual and verbal representations of the natural, spontaneous "Romantic" child can be understood as a countercultural move against the commercially created child glimpsed above in children's literature and medical treatises. Paradoxically, even though the celebration of the child is a phenomenon that develops out of the market economy, it also signals resistance to the market economy, as the child stands for a critique of commercial culture. This paradoxical aspect of the Romantic-era child is instanced in the appropriation of Rousseau's ideal of the natural child by the commercial child care books, as well as by poetry and painting. In different yet overlapping ways adults celebrated childhood as a special and separate state of existence.

The Trouble with Being Special

Before looking at the implications of the cultural separation of childhood and adulthood, I should point out that historians have questioned the Ariès model of the invention of childhood. One of the strongest challenges came from Linda Pollock in the 1980s.[79] She unearthed a large body of evidence, chiefly in letters and diaries, to show a continuity of attitudes towards childhood through the ages. Earlier historians like Lawrence Stone had asserted that the traditionally high incidence of child mortality had made parents apathetic to the death of a child and afraid to lavish

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[78] Peter Borsay, "Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society in Eighteenth-Century England," *Fashioning Childhood* 53-62.

[79] Linda Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children Over Three Centuries* (Hanover: UP of New England, 1987); *Linda Pollock, Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983).

affection on a living one, lest the child should die.[80] In contrast, Linda Pollock looked at pre-seventeenth century texts, and showed that parents had always cherished their children, and had always grieved at an untimely death.

Nevertheless, the visible explosion of texts privileging childhood, surveyed above, makes it hard for scholars to reject the Ariès model altogether. As Anja Müller claims: "the hidden master-plot of the great narrative that is told about childhood in Western European societies is still to a great extent shaped according to Philippe Ariès's thesis." Muller also stresses how this invention of childhood implies children's separation from adult life: "children" are "increasingly segregated from the world of adults and positioned in separate spheres."[81] This separation of childhood and adulthood has crucial implications in terms of the power exercised by adults over children, if they are considered as separate social groups.

In many ways, such a separation proves beneficial to the child, as adults become more sensitive to the distinct needs of children, and even privilege them. Through children's literature, toys and games, adults appear to cater directly to the desires of children. However, a closer examination of this cultural milieu reveals that this adult-child separation occurs in a way that gives children the illusion of freedom, rather than actually allowing free choice. The boom in publishing for children, for instance, appears to give children greater power to choose what they could read. But in practice, economics complicates ideals: the child's power is already limited by the lack of independent means and control, since it is adult parents who actually buy the book for the child. The child is not the original consumer or actual economic agent who decides what to buy and read. This fact is especially relevant to the impact of

[80] Stone 105-19.

[81] Müller, "Introduction," *Fashioning Childhood* 1. See also Dorothy Johnson, "Engaging Identity," *Fashioning Childhood* 101. Johnson concludes that Ariès's ideas have "been criticized and refined in recent scholarship but not superseded."

Godwin's children's books: as a bookseller Godwin had to address the child through the power of adult money. His dependency on this economic reality meant that he could not openly address politically radical messages to child readers in books that might be bought by conservative parents, even if children unconditioned by ideology might have been open to his views.

Moreover, as William St. Clair pertinently observes, parents who bought books for children at the turn of the nineteenth century had seldom read children's books in their own childhood.[82] Like parents who monitor their children's internet surfing today, their eighteenth-century counterparts would have been especially anxious about the new medium of children's books. This anxiety is especially evident in various texts where adults address children in a tone of regulation. Observers have long remarked upon the didactic attitudes towards the child reader in Romantic-era, mass-produced children's literature. Contemporaries of these children's writers themselves, such as Charles Lamb (who wrote books for children himself), were unimpressed by the overt moral baggage in many children's books, with their suppression of the supernatural and fantastic elements in folktale traditions. In a frequently quoted letter to Coleridge, he dismissed the do-gooder approach of the children's writers Anna Barbauld and Sarah Trimmer as "nonsense."[83] Lamb's homogenising of Barbauld and Trimmer's books (with their differing political orientations) speaks of male bias and has been challenged in recent scholarship, but as a children's writer himself he probably felt threatened by these writers' mainstream appeal.[84] Indeed, as William St.

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[82] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 281.

[83] Lamb, Charles and Mary Lamb. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs. Vol. II (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976) 81-82.

[84] See Norma Clarke, "'The Cursed Barbauld Crew': Women Writers and Writing for Children in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Opening the Nursery Door: Reading, Writing, and Childhood 1600-1900,* eds. Mary Hilton, Morag Styles & Victor Watson (London: Routledge, 1997) 91-103. However, expanding on Charles Lamb's dismissal of women educators would be beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Clair's archival research into the sales figures of books reveals, Barbauld and Trimmer's works for children were much more accessible to the reading public than the representations of wise children by the male Romantics.[85] Indeed, Chapter 1 will show how Wollstonecraft's early children's literature is strongly didactic, like that of her contemporaries. There is also a significant class dimension to the regulation of the child reader by adult authors in this era. Further examples in Chapter 1 will show how middle-class evangelical children's writers like Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More preached to lower-class children that they should not challenge their betters.[86]

The regulation of the child's freedom applies particularly to the girl-child. Here again, seemingly enlightened methods of bringing up girls in practice often imprison them further into stereotyped gender roles. Peter Borsay, for instance, notes the rise of genteel boarding-schools for "well off girls" in the era, which mark a crucial development in terms of girls "for the first time having access to some form of institutional schooling," exposing girls to the socially empowering possibilities of literacy. But as Borsay adds, such schools also worked to institutionalise stereotypical "female accomplishments such as sewing, drawing, music, deportment and dancing."[87] Indeed, this phenomenon translates to adults making girls consent to their own future imprisonment within stereotyped roles in the world of polite urban leisure. Borsay's historical observation is confirmed by literary texts of the era: the ironic novels of Jane Austen frequently caricature the superficial "accomplishments" that teenage girls acquire to win a husband in the marriage-market.[88]

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[85] See St. Clair, *Reading Nation* 567-68. I use the term "mainstream" for female writers like Barbauld and Trimmer with reason, since William St. Clair's analyses of sales figures indicate that many more people were reading Barbauld and Trimmer than Wollstonecraft and Godwin. See also St. Clair, *Reading Nation* 352. St. Clair shows the massive market impact of Hannah More's pamphlets for the Cheap Repository Tract Society (1795-98).

[86] See below, pp. 65-66.

[87] Borsay 57.

[88] See Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984) 172-207.

The apparently enlightened cultural inducement to girls to read books meant that they were also ripe subjects for indoctrination into standard gender roles through texts. Such texts include the rising genre of conduct-book literature, which preaches traditionally feminine virtues for girls, like silence and submissiveness. Examples of such conduct-books include the popular *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1771) by John Gregory or *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) by James Fordyce, which are both attacked for their sexism by Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).[89] Such texts have led scholars to allege that the much-touted celebration of childhood in the Romantic era applies basically to the male child. Brigitte Glaser, for instance, observes that female children are often, in effect, denied a state of childhood in eighteenth-century "religious or educational treatises, periodicals, sermons, poetry or fiction." Thus, "they are frequently not taken notice of in their present state as children but are rather perceived of as future women."[90]

The above contradictions in the apparent celebration of childhood show how adults progressively impose normative codes of behaviour upon children through gentle means: adults discipline children less through coercion and more through consent.[91] This new political relation increases the power differential between the socially separated groups of adults and children: Chapters 1 and 3 will show that Wollstonecraft and Godwin, particularly in their educational texts, are sorely troubled by the adult's increased ideologically-enforced power over the child.

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[89] See St. Clair, *Reading Nation* 274-75; John Gregory (1724-73) ; James Fordyce (1720-96); Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. & introd. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 173-82.

[90] Brigitte Glaser, "Gendered Childhoods: On the Discursive Formation of Young Females in the Eighteenth Century," *Fashioning Childhood* 189-98.

[91] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977) 135-227; Gillian Brown, *The Consent of the Governed: the Lockean Legacy in Early American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2001) 3-35.

This cultural adult-child divide is also expressed in aesthetic texts of the period, especially Romantic poetry, which purport to celebrate childhood explicitly in their representations, but often end up reinforcing the divide with troubling implications. This is instanced in Wordsworth's short poem "My Heart Leaps Up": this poem is particularly significant because Wordsworth uses its last three lines as the epigraph to his more well-known celebration of childhood in the Immortality Ode:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I grow old
> Or let me die!
> The Child is father of the Man;
> I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.[92]

Here, the line "The Child is father of the Man" is a paradox through which Wordsworth provocatively unsettles his adult audience's usual, condescending attitude towards the child. In Wordsworth's logically absurd representation, although the "Man" or the generic adult human produces the child, the child is the producer of the human adult, since childhood is the beginning of human identity. Like Rousseau, Wordsworth's child possesses primal, original power as the creator of the generic human, and the puny child's "natural piety" invokes a sense of vast, ethereal wonder that the nostalgic adult wishes to retain.[93]

In Wordsworth's deliberate shock to the reader, he privileges the child's philosophical purity and power over that of the corrupted adult, but this is predicated upon the child's lack of any political or social power in the real, adult world. The child, in Wordsworth's representation, oscillates between immense power and no power. Oddly, Wordsworth's reversal of the adult-child power relation remains

[92] Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth* 246.
[93] See above, pp. 9-10.

imprisoned by the binary logic of the adult-child divide: if the adult is not the source of truth, the child must be. The child's fictitious, semi-divine power in the aesthetic representation uncomfortably deflects attention from the child's lack of real power.

Wordsworth's child obviously represents an ideal, and not the real situation of most children. A number of scholars of Romantic-era childhood have been struck by the sheer unreality of such aesthetic representations of the child, where the lives of real, lived children appear so very distant from their aesthetic counterparts. This phenomenon has led Carolyn Steedman, for instance, to comment that "it is helpful to make an analytic separation between real children, living in the time and space of particular societies, and the ideational and figurative force of their existence."[94] This distance between the lived reality and the ideal of the Romantic-era child informs Judith Plotz's critique of the Romantic child, briefly mentioned above. In Plotz's reading, the Romantic child is a state that the reality-corrupted, worldly-wise adult can only aspire to

> What is most striking about the new embrace of childhood is the de-contextualizing of the child. It is as a being outside of the social and familial net that this Romantic child is prized. Childhood is a valorized state, associated with timeless immutability rather than change and history [.][95]

In Plotz's formulation, the idealistic representation of the child pretends that this state of childhood is available to every child, whereas the reality of childhood was very different for many actual children in the Romantic era, who lived in poverty and deprivation.[96] Hugh Cunningham's extensive study of the children of the poor, for instance, highlights the developing phenomenon of child labour, which was one of the

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[94] Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (London: Virago, 1995) 5.
[95] Plotz 39.
[96] See Ludmilla J. Jordanova, "Conceptualizing Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: The Problem of Child Labour," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10 (1987): 189-99.

more unpalatable results of the rise of industrialisation over the era.[97] In a social context where most (lower-class) children actually worked in fields or factories, the ideal of a normative "childhood," created in aesthetic representations such as Wordsworth's, was only available to the limited number of upper and middle-class children.[98] Moreover, this ideal was usually associated with male children: girls were often seen as women from an early age, as discussed above.

Such critiques of the Romantic child have identified stark ethical problems in representations of the child--since representation was in the hands of adults, as it has always been. Here, as in all cases where one social group tries to represent another, there arises the implicit problem of the ethics of representation, especially since the socially powerful group of adults tries to represent the weaker group of children.[99]

These ethical problems are particularly visible in aesthetic representations where the Romantic child is constructed through the adult's nostalgia, as in Wordsworth's "My Heart Leaps Up," examined above. The adult Wordsworth claims that his "heart" used to jump up when his "life began" as a child. Now, as readers we should note that this is not the child Wordsworth's voice speaking: this is the adult Wordsworth claiming to tell the truth about his childhood self. Since he speaks about himself and not anyone else, the reader readily accepts his adult authority. While the powerful adult's memory represents childhood, it obscures the child's voice, troublingly appropriating it. Thus, the reader accepts the adult Wordsworth's word even when he recounts his childhood in a morally ambivalent light, for instance, in Book I of *The Prelude* (1805) where he confesses that he stole a boat that belonged to

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[97] Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 36-47.
[98] Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 16.
[99] See Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997) 13-62.

someone else.[100] Anja Müller explores the negative implications of such nostalgic reconstructions of the child, in her tracing of the genesis of Wordsworthian representations of the child in eighteenth-century periodicals. According to Müller, when childhood experience serves as adult memory,

> Its quality does not consist in itself, but in its otherness to adulthood which will, later in life, assert the adult's presence in contrast to a memorable past.[101]

This otherness of childhood, for Müller, implies that childhood becomes the "target of a memory subservient to the adulthood it highlights, explains and defines."[102]In the nostalgic sentimental glorification of childhood by the adult, therefore, there exists an implicit devaluation, which is reinforced by the cultural separation of childhood and adulthood.[103]

The political problems of aesthetic representation are highlighted by the fact that there are very few texts of the period where children express themselves directly. In fact this situation is not unique to the Romantic era, but a potentially problematic situation that recurs in every age, since powerful adults usually write about or for weaker children and not the other way round. Even in the culturally important field of children's literature, the voice heard is that of the adult author. The didacticism of eighteenth-century children's literature, especially, begs the classic ontological question about "children's literature" raised by Jacqueline Rose: Rose asks whether

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[100] William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 22-25.

[101] Anja Müller, "Fashioning Age and Identity: Childhood and the Stages of Life in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals," *Fashioning Childhood* 91-100.

[102] Ibid.

[103] See also Linda M. Austin, "Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy," *Studies in Romanticism* 42 (2003): 75-98. See also Steedman 4-5. In Steedman's study of the adult's nostalgic reconstruction of the Romantic child, the child is a sign for the interior subjectivity of the adult.

such a medium is possible at all or not, given that such works are produced by adults, with their own ideas of what a child should read.[104]

Modern researchers more or less agree that very few texts produced by Romantic-era children are available for examination. As Peter Borsay writes: "We will never properly understand what it was like to be a child. Virtually all our sources are those produced by adults."[105] Borsay's observation highlights the difficulty of finding any kind of authentic creative expression by children of that time. In fact, the few surviving texts produced by children bear too many marks of adult interference for researchers to receive them without suspicion. Even children's diaries were usually closely monitored by adults.[106] As A.O.J. Cockshut observes, the examiner of children's diaries has to acknowledge the "unrepresentative character of the material" available and that "it is possible, or even probable, that the best children's diaries have not been preserved, or if preserved, lie unread." [107]

Nevertheless the Romantic era placed much emphasis on the originality of the child's voice. The Romantic era is marked by the rise of child prodigies like Marjory Fleming, or writers talented from a young age. As Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster's recent collection of juvenilia shows, many important authors wrote a lot during their childhood: these authors include the young Jane Austen as well as Byron.[108] The eleven-year old Mary Shelley is also said to have collaborated on a children's book published through Godwin's firm, called *Mounseer Nongtongpaw*

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[104] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993) 1-11.
[105] Borsay 62; see also Müller, "Introduction," *Fashioning Childhood* 1-10.
[106] See Steward 138-39. Instances of such diaries would be those of the Wynne sisters, Elizabeth and Eugenia, and that of Marjory Fleming.
[107] A.O. J. Cockshut, "Children's Diaries," *Children and their Books* 381-98.
[108] Christine Alexander & Juliet McMaster, eds. *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) ; see also Jane Austen, *Juvenilia,* ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006).

(1808).[109] The precocious experiences of these young authors underwrites their adult careers, highlighting the Romantic view of the exceptional status of the child. However, the writings of these exceptional individuals do not negate the fact that powerful adults usually wrote for or about weak children rather than the other way round (and in fact still do). The articulated voices of these few exceptional children are not typical of the vast majority of children or their experiences.

The Wollstonecraft-Godwin Representations of the Child:

In a Different Way

From the discussion above, it is evident that there are potential ethical problems whenever adults write for or about children. This is particularly acute in the case of the Romantic era, given the disciplinary imperative in its mainstream children's literature. In this thesis, I show that the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle is troubled by the status of the child as a marginalised category. I suggest that these writers negotiate, and attempt to resolve the ethical problems of writing for or about the child through their distinctive representation of the child, where they highlight the child's disempowered status in society and explicitly show the problems faced by children. Here, under the rubric of representation I include the children's literature produced by the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle, since writing for children (where the child plays an active role through the act of reading) is informed by many of the same ethical issues that underpin adults writing about children (where the child serves a passive role for adult readers).

In Chapter 4, for instance, I will discuss how Godwin vividly depicts the exploitation of child labourers in the rising industrial economy, through the voice of

[109] See Mellor, *Mary Shelley* 10-11. For a questioning of Mary Shelley's authorship, see Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley* (New York: Grove, 2000) 55.

the character Ruffigny in his novel *Fleetwood* (1805) in an inset narrative.[110] In this case, the exploited child also represents the woes of adult, exploited labouring classes. In such instances, the child is a metaphor for all socially oppressed groups, doubly representing the problems of disempowered adults and actual physical children.

Often, the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle represents the neglected child as a metaphor for unrecognised adult visionaries in a philistine cultural environment, or for women sidelined in patriarchal society. Wollstonecraft, for instance, often projects her own memories as a disempowered girl-child into her female visionary characters, as Chapter 2 will show. Wollstonecraft's extensive use of memory to represent the child is reminiscent of Wordsworth, but her representations are significantly different from his. This difference is best illustrated by a counter-example from Wordsworth: in much of his poetry, somewhat unusually for his time, Wordsworth celebrates several girls as emblematic children rather than miniature women, unlike the culturally dominant conduct-book literature. His character "Lucy Gray" is an obvious example, but his challenge to conventional images is especially evident in the poem "We are seven." Here, a slightly pompous adult narrator tries to teach a young girl the painful reality of death, telling her that when she counts her siblings, she should not include her dead siblings who lie buried in the graveyard. But the resistant child makes no separation between life and death, as she happily keeps mental company with her dead siblings. [111] Through her voice, Wordsworth rejects the rational adult sceptic and privileges the child's intuitive vision, as she teaches the adult a lesson. Significantly, she is a female child, in contrast to the persona of the

[110] See below, pp. 217-18.

[111] See McGavran, Jr. "*Catechist and Visionary*," *Romanticism and Children's Literature* 65. McGavran discusses the child's lack of awareness about the rational life-death boundary in Wordsworth's "We Are Seven."

male narrator, and she invokes the sympathy of the reader, with her charming, pastoral "rustic, woodland air."[112]

Wordsworth's gentle and charming girl-children resist, but do not appear to seriously threaten the powerful male adult. In contrast, as I will show, Wollstonecraft's girl-children often become angry visionaries to escape the pressures of a male-dominated society. The layer of violence in Wollstonecraft's representations specifies the problems of girl-children and adult women, instead of pretending that such social problems do not exist. Wollstonecraft's feminist discourse is imaginatively appropriated by Percy Bysshe Shelley's character Cythna, as exampled in the opening to this chapter. In the female figure of Cythna, Shelley also appropriates the wild, wandering nature of the usually male child in Wordsworth's *Prelude*.[113] The unconventionally active, politically conscious female child Cythna represents the unsettling of gender categories, as well as Shelley's general political agenda of steady, non-violent resistance to injustice. Shelley's complex, many-faceted child is not merely a cute object in terms of cultural stereotypes, but a privileged term, invested with a wide range of meanings.

By building upon the examples above, this thesis will show that in the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations, the child changes shape according to the polemical message conveyed to the reader, serving as a many-faceted, protean metaphor in diverse socio-political contexts. These writers very often project their radical ideas on the represented child in texts addressed to adults, bringing the marginalised child's concerns to the centre of adult attention. In such representations, the child conceptually pervades the adult world everywhere: the child is not ghettoised into a separate sphere, but is instead a representative human, whose

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[112] Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth* 83-85.
[113] See above, pp. 31-32.

interests are shared by the adult and vice versa. As the protean child-metaphor resists the cultural boundaries established elsewhere between adult and child, it dissolves the binaries of the adult-child power relation, enabling the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle to represent a wide range of radical discourses that concern both the adult and the child.

The trump-card in such representations of the child is that the adult author does not erase the child, but attempts to bring the child into the adult world and thus empowers the child. The adult author acknowledges the child's or disempowered adult's common human identity with the dominant adult, and yet recognises his or her difference without submerging him or her in a totalising, essentialist human identity with the dominant adult. Godwin's child-friendly writing for children illustrates this point. As mentioned above, Godwin had to address his child readers through the power of the adult's money and approval, within the exciting commercial landscape opened up to children by the newly-developing eighteenth-century market economy. Yet, as I will show in Chapter 4, he works through the limitations of the adult-controlled market economy to address his radical messages to the child reader, in language that specifically caters to children's tastes. Though Godwin works in a capitalist medium, he does not trap the child in naïve, hypnotised wonder at the charms of his illustrated books. But through his language, he envisions the child as a thinking, active reader who can challenge the world-views imposed by dominant adults. The child reader's position is analogous to that of disempowered adults who can recognise and challenge the hegemony of the socially powerful (uncannily like the child in Wordsworth's "We are seven").[114]

[114] See above, p. 35.

Godwin's anomalous position, as a radical producer of goods for children in a developing capitalist economy, can be read in the light of the ambivalence of the twentieth-century cultural theory of Walter Benjamin. Over 1929-32, Benjamin produced a series of scripts for a children's radio programme in Berlin. One of his scripts is based on the traditional fairy tale "Schwester Tinchen," where an evil magician lures away the girl Tinchen's brothers with promises of charming toys. Tinchen embarks on a quest to save her deluded brothers, and must cross through "the enchanted land" of the newly set up "commercial galleries of Berlin," "bravely without tarrying." These "galleries," says Benjamin, addressing his child-auditors directly,

> you have all crossed through bravely without tarrying. And sometimes, when your mother had time, while tarrying. You see what I'm getting at, I think; you know where to find those long galleries of toys without either fairy or magician. In department stores.[115]

Here, Benjamin represents the child as an active-minded consumer, who consciously resists the visual extravaganza of the "department stores" on a leisurely walk, when the child's "mother" has "time" to spare. Yet, Benjamin's Marxist scepticism towards commodity culture is, at the same time, laced by his vivid awareness of the fascinating, "fairy or magician"-like possibilities that are opened up in newly-developing sites of this culture.[116] Benjamin's pinpointing of the complex charms of capitalist culture parallels Godwin's exploitation of this culture for his own radical ends, in his children's books. In fact, as Chapter 4 will show, Godwin's negotiation of commercial pressures to address the child reader often invests a greater radicalism and richness in his children's books than his works for adults. Politically speaking, his

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[115] Quoted from Jeffrey Mehlman, *Walter Benjamin for Children: An Essay on his Radio Years* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 67.

[116] See Susan Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1989) 212-13, 222, 238, 255-56. Buck-Morss discusses Walter Benjamin's own intellectual debt to Romanticism.

radicalism admits the difference of the child reader from the adult and yet invites the child into the world of adult concerns.

The Child as Protean Metaphor: Its Significance

From the existing scholarship on childhood in Romanticism, as Plotz's criticism of Wordsworth shows, it would appear that writers represent children by passively reproducing certain pre-existing realities, as though female children's authors write to nurture physical children, while male poets ignore physical children and cater to adult readers by portraying ideal children.[117] Even in Julie Carlson's excellent and detailed treatment of Wollstonecraft, Godwin and Mary Shelley's attempts to empower the child through their children's literature, she considers the represented child in a fairly mimetic relation to the physical child: there is little sense that the children these authors were writing about might be slightly different from the children they were actually bringing up.[118] Currently, there appears to be little space in literary studies of childhood for an appreciation of the mediating role of metaphor, where metaphor, as in the case of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations, can illumine some disturbing aspects of reality. My use of the term "metaphor" is in the broad sense defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as "Something regarded as representative or suggestive of something else, esp. as a material emblem of an abstract quality, condition, notion, etc." [119] The term "metaphor" can of course be a contested term in literary or linguistic theory, but these debates are not relevant here to an understanding of the child as consistently representative of politically radical ideas.

The child's metaphorical role has been paradoxically recognised in sociological or psychoanalytical studies of the child. As an example of how

[117] See above, pp. 30-31.
[118] See Carlson 212-56.
[119] *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oed.com>10 Aug 2008.

interdisciplinary perspectives can enrich the literary study of the child's metaphorical role, we can look at Wordsworth's celebration of the primal child in "My Heart Leaps Up," which can be read as an evasion of the concerns of the physical child. But it can be equally interpreted, in the terms of the psychoanalytical theory of Carl Jung, as the universal child-archetype. In Jung's terms, the child, in the myths of different cultures, serves as a metaphor for new beginnings in human activity, recalling Wordsworth's representation of the child as the father of the man. In Jung's theory, different myths commonly feature child-gods who are unaware of their immense developing powers. These mythical children play on a cosmic scale with established structures of authority and overturn them, functioning as rebellious trickster figures.[120] Jung's universalising of the child-metaphor does not illuminate specific historical contexts. But his cross-cultural, universal model can be narrowed down to the particular historical era of British Romanticism (especially as Jung himself has been often considered to be a neo-Romantic). Considered in these terms, the represented child possesses a mythical power that brings about new social beginnings, a discourse particularly relevant to the activities of radicals in 1790s Britain, with their immersion in the values of the French Revolution. In fact, the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations of the child, particularly those by Percy Bysshe Shelley, repeatedly draw upon the radical, archetypal aspect of the child-metaphor, sharing this aspect of representation with Wordsworth.[121] Through the use of the child-metaphor in coded

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[120] C.G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child-Archetype," *Science of Mythology: Essays on the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, by C.G. Jung & C. Kerenyi (London: Ark, 1949) 70-100. See also Ross Woodman, "Jung and Romanticism: The Fate of the Mythopoeic Imagination," *Sanity, Madness, Transformation: the Psyche in Romanticism*, ed. Joel Faflak (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005) 23-46. Woodman discusses Jung's inheritance of Romantic thought, which illuminates my connection of Romantic representations of the child with Jung's conception of the child-archetype.

[121] See John Milton, "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," *The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1968) 101-68. It is likely that Wordsworth echoes the archetypal power of the Christ-child in Milton's politically loaded "heaven-born child."

and indeterminate literary genres, they show what could not openly tell their readers through discursive argument in the conservative and repressive 1790s socio-political atmosphere. This thesis aims to show that the Wollstonecraft-Godwin literary representations of the child are not a curious, auxiliary element of their writings, but integral to a fuller understanding of their political radicalism.

Methodology

Given these theoretical implications of an extensive exploration of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations of the child, I would like to outline here the key concepts that will be reiterated through this thesis. Attention must be paid here to the term "child," as its definition can be an area of contest. In her article on the role of memory in Romantic constructions of childhood, Linda Austin observes that during the late eighteenth century, by "child" or "childhood," "writers might have meant any period from infancy through young adulthood" in the life-cycle of a human being. Indeed, as she notes further, "Our modern precision about age, established through law and reinforced through medical regulation," conceals the arbitrariness of modern definitions of childhood, and pretends that this is a natural category.[122] Given the fluidity of the term "child" through different histories and cultures, this thesis will adhere to a consistent definition of the term, in order to make the discussion relevant to a modern audience. Thus, this thesis follows the age-based definition of a child as a human below the age of twenty-one, that is, an age by which young people reach the "age of licence" today in most countries, and are expected to be fully responsible for their behaviour as adult citizens (though this complicates the idea of child writers expressed above, since Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* in her late teens).[123]

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[122] Austin 75-98.
[123] See above, pp. 33-34.

The awareness of the metaphorical nature of the represented child dictates the kind of engagement with the texts investigated in this thesis. This is a study of representations, which are not undiluted reality. It is not a historical study of the lives of real children, although it draws upon historical records (if, indeed, real people's lives are ever recoverable through historical reconstructions). With the theoretical interest in literary representations that negotiate the concerns of the real child, this thesis avoids the partitioning of the child as either real or ideal, followed by scholars mentioned above.[124] Hence, attention is focused on the (chiefly literary) texts themselves, rather than on biographical records of the authors' negotiations with their own children--especially their performance as parents, except where comparisons are highly relevant (as in Godwin's case).

In terms of the politics of gender, this thesis focuses upon a group of authors, both male and female, with common radical concerns. Their representations of the child illustrate a meeting-point which eludes the gendered binary in existent critical discussions of Romantic-era childhood mentioned above, between male canonical Romantic poets and female Romantic-era authors. Moreover, as their works develop within the network of their mutual family relationships, their representations of the child illustrate their processes of collaborative creation.

Here I would also like to outline the key methods followed in this thesis. The argument of the thesis is built upon close readings of those texts that feature the child significantly. These readings are examined against the background of the entire text to identify what ideas the child-metaphor represents. The meanings of the child will be tracked in each text through close attention to the language used by the author, including instances where this language contradicts what the text professes to say.

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[124] See above, pp. 30-32.

This approach remains alive to literary ambiguities and consequent nuances within the texts, since these authors' radical intentions often had to be cloaked against the conservative socio-political atmosphere of their milieu.

The readings from (chiefly literary) texts are set against broader contexts, against the historical background of contemporary philosophical, educational, religious and medical texts sketched out above. The historical contextualisation is fleshed out with relevant perspectives from sociology, developmental psychology and mythography, in order to moor the representations in the larger field of childhood studies.[125]

This thesis will trace the evolution of the child as a metaphor by developing a roughly chronological narrative, from the early writings of Wollstonecraft and Godwin in the 1780s, concluding with the works of the Shelleys in the early nineteenth century. With the awareness that the works of these authors are not homogeneous, the chapters are divided according to each author's individual representations of the child. This approach will reveal the particular literary or political concerns for which they deploy the child as a metaphor, while remaining alive to the occasional ambiguities of their representations. Thus, two chapters are devoted to Wollstonecraft's early writings and later writings each, and the method is repeated for Godwin's early and late writings respectively. The concluding chapter shows the continuing influence of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin tradition in their successors, with a focus on Mary Shelley. This chapter is followed by an epilogue on Percy Bysshe Shelley, charting his imaginative response to Wollstonecraft and Godwin's path-breaking representations of the child, thus demonstrating the

[125] See Jenks 9-12. Jenks, in his extensive study of childhood as a social construct, has observed the cultural uses of the child in terms of growth metaphors representing the future adult.

continuing importance of their works in the post-revolutionary period.

Chapter 1. "Childish Trifling" to Flying Spirits:

Wollstonecraft's Early Representations of the Child

In this chapter I show how Wollstonecraft develops her representations of the child over her early to middle writing career. Wollstonecraft's early representations of the child are fairly restrictive and moored in the culture of her contemporaries. But as her career progresses, she begins to develop distinctive, individual representations of the child as she adopts more open-ended, multivalent modes of discourse in her writing. The chapter is divided into chronological phases, corresponding to Wollstonecraft's acceptance of her contemporary culture (1787 to 1791), and her radical breakaway from that culture, as she develops her individual voice (1792 through 1797).

The Early Years

The years 1786-1791 constitute the earliest part of Wollstonecraft's writing career. This phase can be considered as a "probationary period" of her career in which she developed a public voice as one of a sizeable number of professional middle-class women writers who played, as Anne Mellor documents, an influential role in the late-eighteenth-century public sphere.[1]

In this phase, Wollstonecraft's representations of the child do not appear to be particularly distinctive. She followed the late eighteenth-century cultural trend of separating the adult and the child in her works, representing the child as an inferior being to be governed by the adult. The early sections of this chapter, therefore, investigate and contextualise how Wollstonecraft enacts the adult-child divide in her early years, in order to gauge how she breaks away from it in her later career. This

[1] Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000) 1-12.

early phase of Wollstonecraft's is also significant because it foregrounds certain themes that work into her later representations of the child.

The key texts by Wollstonecraft covered in the following section are those that feature childhood significantly. These include her conduct-book manual, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), her anthology, *The Female Reader* (1789), her children's fiction, that is, *Original Stories* (1788), her translation from the German of Christian Salzmann's text, *Elements of Morality* (1790), her translation from the Dutch of Maria de Cambon's text, *Young Grandison* (1790), and her book reviews for the periodical *Analytical Review*, published by Joseph Johnson, from 1788 onwards. Her correspondence is also referred to where relevant.

As indicated above, Wollstonecraft's early representations of the child are highly derivative of contemporary cultural sources. The discussion below sketches an outline of these sources and their influences upon her representations. The sources are divided into three groups for ease of comprehension: however, in practice, the sources did not influence Wollstonecraft's representations in a mutually exclusive way. Generally, they reflect Wollstonecraft's exposure to late-Enlightenment intellectual circles, especially that of the Rational Dissenting Circles of the Nonconformist Enlightenment. [2]

The educational writings of both John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were cultural staples in eighteenth-century Britain: these writings comprise the first group of influences on Wollstonecraft's early writing.[3] Wollstonecraft's adherence to Locke's theories in terms of child-rearing practices and textual representations is revealed in her pedagogical text *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. Her very

[2] Kelly 23-28.
[3] See above, pp. 9-10; Pickering 3-12; Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 10-11.

title echoes Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* and she professes, in the introduction to her work, "to follow Mr Locke's system."[4]

Wollstonecraft was introduced to Rousseau's *Émile* during her stint as a governess in Ireland (1786-87), at the library of the aristocratic Kings, and she announced as much in a letter to her sister Everina in early 1787.[5] Most likely, Wollstonecraft had read W. Kenrick's translation *Emilius and Sophia* (1762), the version best known to her contemporary English readers.[6] As I will show later, although Wollstonecraft is frequently known by literary critics as an attacker of Rousseau in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she also appreciates his ideas profoundly, especially on the child's upbringing, and often appropriates them.

However, Wollstonecraft was influenced by Locke and Rousseau not only through her primary reading of these two authors, but also through secondary sources. There were many appropriations of Locke and Rousseau's works in the late eighteenth century: at the Kings' library, for instance, Wollstonecraft read Rousseau as well as writings by the popular educational writer, Stephanie de Genlis.[7] Moreover, Locke and Rousseau were highly influential on the Dissenting circles of the Nonconformist Enlightenment.[8] Wollstonecraft came in contact with the intellectually vibrant circle of the Dissenters when she worked as a schoolteacher at Newington Green (1784-86). Her friendship with the leading Dissenter Richard Price blossomed into an intellectual mentorship for her.[9] When Godwin wrote a memoir of his wife

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[4] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts on the Education of Daughters," *WMW* 4 9; Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 76.
[5] Caroline Franklin, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 26-27.
[6] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Allen Lane, 2003) 114-15.
[7] Stephanie de Genlis (1746-1830).
[8] See above, pp. 9-10.
[9] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 59-61.

over a decade later, he would characterise this mentorship as a mutual "spirit of the purest attachment." [10]

The Dissenters, like Wollstonecraft herself, largely belonged to the professional middle-classes: as practising schoolteachers and performing parents themselves, they attempted to implement the theoretical approaches of Locke and Rousseau in practice, and occasionally chalked out distinctive approaches to childrearing and pedagogy. The Dissenters willingly experimented with Rousseau's methods of child-rearing: however, they did not follow Rousseau's advocated method of educating Émile in isolation from the rest of society. Instead, the Dissenters preached that the child should be educated within the contexts of parental nurture and community.[11] The Dissenters' deep interest in education was related to their own outsider status in English society: they were excluded from full civil rights because they did not subscribe to the Anglican Church. They believed in education as a political force for democratic change, and had a missionary urge to empower the general population by spreading literacy to the underprivileged. The Dissenter Joseph Priestley, for instance, opened Sunday Schools to educate the children of the poor. Moreover, the Dissenters' pedagogical methods were often fresh and iconoclastic. At Priestley's schools as well as at the Dissenting academies, new curricula were brought in, and open discussion was encouraged in classrooms. Both the Dissenting leaders Priestley and Richard Price encouraged the habit of scientific enquiry amongst the young, by letting them play and experiment with new electrical and mechanical devices such as microscopes.[12] Some of the key Dissenting figures whom Wollstonecraft knew included Anna Barbauld who wrote children's books of which

[10] William Godwin, "Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798)," *CWG* 1 96.
[11] See Uglow xiv.
[12] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 59; Uglow 72-74, 407.

the best known is *Evenings at Home* (1792-96) with her brother John Aikin.[13] Barbauld ran a boys' school, and herself came from a family of Dissenting educators: her father John Aikin taught at the Warrington Dissenting Academy. This was the same academy where Priestley taught.[14] Children's education was also a prime interest amongst the Dissenters' friends amongst the contemporary "Lunar Society" of scientists. This group included the scientists Erasmus Darwin and James Watt, as well as the writers of children's books Thomas Day and Richard Edgeworth, who wrote books with his daughter Maria.[15]

Through her initial acquaintance with the Dissenters, from 1787 onwards Wollstonecraft obtained regular work as an author, editorial assistant and translator to the liberal Dissenting publisher Joseph Johnson, whose immense contribution to the late-eighteenth intellectual landscape has been mapped out by Helen Braithwaite.[16] This association is a third source of influence on Wollstonecraft's early representations of the child. While working as a governess in Ireland, Wollstonecraft published *Thoughts* under the aegis of Johnson. After she began working with him regularly in later 1787, she produced her children's fiction, which includes *Original Stories*, *Elements of Morality* and *Young Grandison*. The reviews she wrote for Johnson's *Analytical Review* responded, as Caroline Franklin notes, to the Dissenters' call for the tolerance of all denominations: consequently, it consisted of reviews on an eclectic selection of newly-published books, including works on travel, science,

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[13] Aikin, John and Anna.L. Barbauld, *Evenings at Home: or the Juvenile Budget Opened: Consisting of a Variety of Miscellaneous Pieces for the Instruction and Amusement of Young Persons*, Vol. 1 (London, 1792) 6 vols, 16 Jan 2008 <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>

[14] See Anne Janowitz, "Amiable and radical sociability: Anna Barbauld's 'free familiar conversation,'" *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain*, *1770–1840*, eds. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 62-81.

[15] Braithwaite 30, 60; Uglow 316.

[16] See Braithwaite 3-29.

sentimental fiction, and children's literature.[17] These reviews indicate the range of Wollstonecraft's reading and awareness of her contemporary cultural milieu.[18] The child reader figured large in the discourse of the *Analytical Review*: educational books and fiction for children made for a large proportion of the books Wollstonecraft reviewed, and her recommendations or dismissals of these texts throw light on how far she agreed with, or departed from, her contemporaries' representations of the child through this part of her career.

Wollstonecraft's literary journalism for Johnson helped her earn her own living (an impressive achievement for a woman in her times). But her deep immersion in such activity also explains why she produced little original work during this period, and why her representations of the child are not remarkably different from those of her contemporaries. Godwin, in his *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft, observed that the drudgery of her "miscellaneous literary employment" with Johnson appeared "to damp and contract, than to enlarge and invigorate, the genius."[19] According to Godwin, the demands of the literary market, and the fever of immediate publication made the early Wollstonecraft a hack-writer, with little scope for expressing a literary voice of her own (and Godwin knew what he was talking about, having started out his own early career in London in similar ventures).[20] Godwin claims that the early Wollstonecraft's creative abilities were stultified by the demands of her professional life: "nothing which Mary produced during this period, is marked with" aspiring, "daring flights."[21]

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[17] Franklin 61; Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 138-9. See Braithwaite 87-9.
[18] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 139-40.
[19] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 105.
[20] See below, pp. 141-42.
[21] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 105.
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Wollstonecraft wrote for the *Analytical Review* in two main phases. The first extends from 1788 to December 1792, when she left for France. She reviewed again briefly in 1795, between her return to England and departure for Scandinavia. Her final phase of reviewing was done between March 1796 and May 1797.[22] For the sake of chronological coherence, I examine only Wollstonecraft's reviews through 1788 to 1792 in the following sections about Wollstonecraft's early representations of the child. I look at her later reviews in my examination of the middle phase of her representations (1792-97).

The Child as Social Inferior

In the Introduction I have discussed the dual aspects of the culture of childhood in the eighteenth century, where the apparent celebration of the child also involves adults' urge to control the child in more subtle ways than before.[23] This phenomenon is most directly evident in Wollstonecraft's children's literature over this period, where the adult voice addresses the child reader in an admonitory tone, generally coinciding with mainstream didactic children's literature of the late eighteenth century. Here I focus on representations of childhood in Wollstonecraft's children's literature, comparing her other childhood-related texts (that is, the pedagogical texts *Thoughts*, *Female Reader* and the literary reviews) where relevant.

The superior position of the adult's voice is frequently reiterated in the plentiful conversations in Wollstonecraft's early children's literature. Below is a typical example from the bluntly-named *Elements of Morality*, where the child Charles converses with an adult curate. The curate has just been welcomed home by his family.

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[22] See Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 14-18. All the reviews in *Analytical Review* were anonymous, and this practice lends confusion as to which reviews precisely were written by Wollstonecraft. On the basis of internal textual evidence, Todd and Butler assign the reviews signed "M" to Wollstonecraft, and I follow their lead.

[23] See above, pp. 24-33.

> *Curate*. Were you pleased, my dear, to see my children run with so much joy to meet and kiss me?
> *Charles*. O yes! If my father were now to meet us I should do so too, I should be so glad.
> *Curate*. You should be glad, and why?
> *Charles*. Why? Sir, I do not understand you; he is very good to me, and loves me dearly; how can I help being glad when I see him again?
> *Curate*. Do you know then what joy is? We feel it when something agreeable suddenly occurs. My wife and children rejoiced to see me again, because they love me, and know that I have their good at heart, and you would on the same account rejoice to see your parents.
>
> But believe me, my dear child, that even joy, when it is too strong, does as much harm as violent fear. It disturbs the operations of the understanding to such a degree, that a man is no longer directed by reason, and in this confusion often hurts himself.[24]

And so the Curate's preaching goes on, with a list of punitive incidents illustrating that emotional rapture leads to distress. He ends his repressive injunctions to control the passions by "reason" with a *tour-de-force*: "Guard then against immoderate joy," and in response, the child Charles accepts the Curate's logic. Power evidently rests with the adult is in the above conversation, which is hardly a mutual exchange between two people but a Socratic dialogue, where the adult party gently steers the child to his point of view, proving that he is right through the power of logic. Wollstonecraft apparently represents the child's voice in Charles's, as he questions the Curate as to why he should not express his joy when he sees his father. What seems instinctively right and natural to him is swept away, however, by the Curate's adult reasoning. The adult interlocutor possesses authoritative knowledge and has the final say on any issue that engages or interests the child, and the power relation is hardly masked by the fact that the adult uniformly addresses the child in affectionate terms, interspersing his lecture frequently with the address "my dear." Wollstonecraft's texts *Elements of Morality*, *Young Grandison* and *Original Stories* are all written in this style. These books are structured in the form of catechistic or

[24] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 29-30.

homily-like speech-patterns, where adults instruct children or supply confident, ready-made answers to their questions.[25] Although the Socratic method used here encourages the child to question the adult, and seems liberating to the child, answers always rest with the socially powerful adult in Wollstonecraft's narrative sequences.

Scholars like Samuel Pickering have convincingly traced this didactic tendency in the conversations within Wollstonecraft's early children's writing, together with her late-eighteenth-century contemporaries, to Locke's overarching influence.[26] In *Some Thoughts*, Locke had advised that adults should not impose complete silence upon children, but be admitted occasionally into the "serious Discourses" that adults deemed worthwhile.[27] Wollstonecraft's pedagogy, in the text of *Thoughts*, is structured similarly. She advises that the child should adopt a style of conversation that is regulated and approved by adults: "Children should be permitted to enter into conversation; but it requires great discernment to find out such subjects as will gradually *improve* them" (my emphasis), where "improve" means the adult's approval. [28] Through the rhetoric of mutual affection between the adult and the child, the adult easily obtains the child's consent to stay subservient to the adult.

Such didactic conversations in the early Wollstonecraft's children's books are not individual, isolated instances of random adult-child duos, but represent a collective reality desired by adults. In Wollstonecraft's prefatory note to *Elements of Morality* , that is, the "Introductory Address to Parents," she clearly conceives of adults and children as separate social groups. Explaining her reasons for omitting "a few subjects" in her narrative, she states that she has not

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[25] See Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 64-77. Richardson discusses the catechistic method of education in the late eighteenth century. See also Rose 9. Rose sketches the Enlightenment logic of adult control over the child.
[26] Pickering 194-97.
[27] Locke, *Some Thoughts* 159.
[28] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 10.

> inserted any tale to represent the usefulness of magistrates, because children are not in any immediate connexion with them, and during their infancy ought to consider their parents and schoolmasters in that light.[29]

Here, Wollstonecraft represents parents and schoolteachers as adults in collusion, who are naturally entitled to exert authority on children collectively, and to regulate them, like "magistrates." This sense of a mutual understanding amongst adults emerges strongly in *Young Grandison*, where the adult Lady Grandison tells young William that he must confide secrets in his adult mother:

> A young person ought never to promise to keep any secrets from an indulgent parent, till their reason enables them to govern themselves, and they are no longer children.[30]

Lady Grandison's portrayal of the adult, "indulgent parent," is couched in a vocabulary of kindness. Her rhetoric of the "reason" that enables an individual to "govern" oneself belongs strictly to the adult, and hence the child must internalise the adult's authority until he or she grows up. Alan Richardson has traced such disciplinary logic in late-eighteenth-century children's books to Locke and Rousseau's conceptions of the governance of the child by the adult, observing the sinister implications of a paradigm where the child was not to be granted any autonomy whatsoever, and was to be regulated at all hours by affectionate adults. In fact, Richardson sees Rousseau as more authoritarian than Locke in this respect: the child Émile appears to have no friends of his own age, and remains constantly "under the eye of a tutor even more vigilant and seemingly omnipresent than that of Locke."[31]

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[29] Wollstonecraft, "Young Grandison," *WMW* 2 9.
[30] Wollstonecraft, "Young Grandison," *WMW* 2 219.
[31] Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 49.

In the early Wollstonecraft's children's books, even when adults do not speak directly to children, the authoritative adult voice is represented by child characters. In *Young Grandison*, the narrative is structured in an epistolary form, as young William writes letters to his mother in Holland from his cousins' home in England. William's cousin Edward is a proverbial naughty boy who nearly gets himself drowned in a river, and does not complete his homework on time. William disdainfully reports Edward's persistent resistance to adult authority: "He is always disobedient; he was never taught to obey when he was not in the presence of those who had a right to command him."[32] The child's voice here simply works as a surrogate for the corrective adult voice.

Accordingly, Wollstonecraft represents good children as silent and submissive beings. The village schoolchildren in *Original Stories* implicitly earn the narrator's approval with their shyness: on observing Mrs. Mason and the girls approach the village school to visit the school-mistress, and they meet the schoolchildren who have just been let off. The narrator relates that

> the swarm came humming around Mrs Mason, endeavouring to catch her eye, and obtain the notice they were so proud of. The girls made their best curtsies, blushing; and the boys hung down their heads, and kicked up the dust, in scraping a bow of respect.[33]

These highly deferential schoolchildren form an anonymous swarm with no individuality. As they try to catch the attention of the superior, adult Mrs Mason, they are represented as social inferiors desperate to give her visual proofs of their "respect."

In her children's books the early Wollstonecraft shows a strong concern that her authority as adult author should not be undermined by her child

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[32] Wollstonecraft, "Young Grandison," *WMW* 2 223.
[33] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 430.

readers in the reception of the texts. In the "Introductory Address to Parents" in *Elements of Morality*, she addresses this concern to "Parents and Teachers":

> I must say a few words to you concerning the right use of it. I do not think that it will have much effect, if you give it to them to read just as they please, for they will naturally be so eager to come to the end of the tales, that the truths which they contain would be passed slightly over; they will suck off the sugar, and leave the medicine which it concealed behind.[34]

Wollstonecraft fears that the child reader would be too entranced by the "sugar" of narrative appeal to pay attention to the morals, which is the really useful "medicine" in the text. Even the child's reading of the text, therefore, must be monitored by the vigilant adult. Wollstonecraft's anxiety that unregulated children will invariably do "just as they please," if left to themselves, voices her adult concern that the child might subvert the adult's practical world-view. This stance is expressed further in Wollstonecraft's positive review of a book of tricks of physics, entitled *Philosophical Amusements; or, Easy and Instructive Recreations for Young People* (1790). Here, Wollstonecraft is highly approving of "every endeavour to render the amusements of young people useful." The "experiments," she says, "are arranged with judgment."[35] With her immersion in the vocabulary of "judgment" or reason, she disapproves of *Le petit sorcier; or the Little Wizard* (1792), where the "play" involved was "a mere waste of time" akin to the children's games of "tee-totum and push-pin." Wollstonecraft asks for games with educative value, instead of such "childish trifling."[36]

In these views Wollstonecraft follows the advice of Locke, who had suggested that children should be given games, with a definite set of rules, that subtly educated

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[34] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 10.
[35] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 344.
[36] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 415.

young minds even while they thought they were merely playing freely.[37] Pickering's study of Locke's influence on late-eighteenth-century children's culture shows the practical manifestation of this advice in the representative example of the pioneering publisher John Newbery, whose toys and books flooded the market from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.[38] In these structured, educative games the child's energies were not to be dissipated in sheer amusement or useless play, but channelised into paths that powerful adults had deemed worthwhile.[39]

This stress on usefulness dictates the content of Wollstonecraft's children's stories. Her children's books have narratives in realistic late-eighteenth-century settings, within upper or middle-class homes with servants. Animals are injured and often saved by the child-protagonists. Poor people undergo economic distress. Families assemble at social gatherings like weddings and funerals and have everyday conversations. Wollstonecraft advertises her method of social realism as her trump-card as she introduces *Elements of Morality*: "All the pictures are drawn from real life, and that I highly approve of this method, my having written a book on the same plan, is the strongest proof."[40] The book on the "same plan" is *Original Stories*. Wollstonecraft echoes these views in *Thoughts*: in a chapter on "Moral Discipline," she states that children "are mostly fond of stories." Hence, "proper" stories for children are those that "improve them even while they are amused." According to Wollstonecraft, the stories usually circulated to children instead were tales of fantasy: "improbable tales, and superstitious accounts of invisible beings." These were often

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[37] Locke, *Some Thoughts*, 208-12. See Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood,* trans. C. Gattegno & F.M. Hodgson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951) 89-168. See Piaget's distinction between unregulated "play" and the regulated "game."
[38] Pickering 70-71.
[39] See Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 145-46.
[40] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 6.

told by lower-class servants, breeding "strange prejudices and vain fears" in the "minds" of upper or middle-class children.[41]

Wollstonecraft's acerbic criticism of tales of fantasy can be understood through the late-eighteenth century position of rationalist educators such as the women writers who wrote children's literature, who dismissed fairy tales and other forms of literature bordering on fantasy from the oeuvre of children's reading. The reading of fairy and folk tales by children at the end of the eighteenth century was a site of ideological warfare.[42] In conscious opposition to the rationalist educators, the canonical Romantics bemoaned the dismissal of fairy tales from children's reading. Fairy tales upset the rationalist educators because they appealed to the imagination rather than to reason, and had plots that offered the possibility of transforming a given reality. The tales included literary forms like puns and riddles that initiated potentially subversive kinds of semantic play. Moreover, the tales were derived from lower-class forms of oral culture like folk tales and chapbook literature (the "improbable tales and superstitious accounts" that Wollstonecraft inveighs against in *Thoughts*), and did not sit well with the values of the professional middle-classes, to which Wollstonecraft herself belonged. In *Some Thoughts*, Locke had warned parents to protect children from the company of servants who purveyed "early impressions of Goblins, Spectres and Apparitions"(on the grounds that they frightened children into compliance by these stories).[43] Gary Kelly, who has contextualised Wollstonecraft's works through the eighteenth-century bourgeois cultural revolution in England, observes that "chapbooks were seen as the print form of lower-class culture." Many fairy tales "were known to be courtly appropriations of popular culture": Charles Perrault's

[41] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 10.
[42] Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (London: Heinemann, 1979) 12-13; Pickering 40-42; Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 110-21. See also Kelly 58-59.
[43] Locke, *Some Thoughts* 246.

retelling of Little Red Riding Hood, in France, is a typical example of the appropriation of an oral folktale in a written medium for the courtly elite.[44] According to Kelly, late-eighteenth-century middle-class educators routinely inveighed against tales of fantasy, because they were spun by the "lottery mentality" of the subjugated lower classes, who had little realistic hopes of bettering their lot, and hence told tales that purveyed dreams of worldly success through magic and fortune. In contrast, the middle-classes believed in a bourgeois ideal of success through plodding hard work, and aimed to instil an "investment mentality" into children.[45] Not surprisingly, middle-class children had to be guarded from the "corrupting" influence of tales of fantasy. The world-view of one class was applied to all through the medium of print culture, the tool of the professional bourgeoisie: hence, the literary marketplace was flooded by "serious," realistic stories for children.[46] Wollstonecraft was therefore writing her stories for children according to the received wisdom of the times, and the demands of the market.

Legitimising the Adult-Child Divide

Like her contemporaries, the early Wollstonecraft represents children as a social group whom adults must dominate. However, for any ideology to work in practice, the dominant social group has to make the ideology appear natural and self-evident, that is, pretend that such is the right state of things. Hence I trace how Wollstonecraft naturalises the adult-child hierarchy, in the same group of texts discussed above.

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[44] Kelly 58; see Zohar Shavit, "The Concept of Childhood and Children's Folktales: Test Case—"Little Red Riding Hood," ed. Maria Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales: Texts, Criticism* (London: Norton, 1999) 317-31.

[45] Kelly 58-59. See also Pickering 42-43.

[46] See Gillian Avery, *Childhood's Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children's Fiction 1770-1950* (London: Hodder and Stoughton,1975) 3-10.

First, Wollstonecraft shows the child reader that both humans and non-humans are naturally grouped in a hierarchical system. In *Original Stories,* Mrs Mason gives the children a book to read: this book is Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories, designed for the Instruction of Children, respecting their treatment of animals* (1786).[47] The book teaches children to be kind to animals. Pickering notes, as per Locke's injunction, that eighteenth-century didactic children's writers very often encourage children to behave well with pets or unthreatening creatures in the wild.[48] Mrs. Mason elaborates: "It is only to animals that children *can* do good; men are their superiors."[49] Children, in this schema, are inherently inferior to adults. In *Thoughts*, Wollstonecraft states that altruism towards lowly animals will make the child, in later life, a lover of God who is superior to man: "Stories of insects and animals are the first that should rouse the childish passions, and exercise humanity; and then they will rise to man, and from him to his Maker."[50]

To understand Wollstonecraft's vertically structured, hierarchical logic, one must consider the terms in which the early Wollstonecraft apprehends late-eighteenth-century biology. In her early career Wollstonecraft understood biology through the predominant doctrine of the Great Chain of Being, which placed all living creatures in a vertical, hierarchical chain.[51] This theory cited Biblical authority to claim that God had created every creature independently. Thus the theory emphasised strict categories within creation, as well as the fixity of all species, and resolutely resisted newly-emergent evolutionary theories in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.[52]

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[47] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 371.
[48] See Locke, *Some Thoughts*, 180-81; Pickering 12-13.
[49] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 372.
[50] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 44.
[51] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1942) 195.
[52] Lovejoy 292-3; see Sophie Thomas, "The Fragment," *Romanticism: an Oxford Guide*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 502-20.

The early Wollstonecraft's leanings are evident in her review of William Smellie's *The Philosophy of Natural History* (1790).[53] Discussing Smellie's analogies between plants and animals, she says that Smellie ought to have given a complete picture by adopting the "sexual system" in the plant classification of the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, the father of taxonomic classification.[54] Wollstonecraft recommends Linnaeus's taxonomy as absolute truth, admitting of no dispute, "as a system strongly fenced round by facts as any disputed one in natural history;--and facts are stubborn things." As Ernst Mayr observes, Linnaeus's scientific approach stressed the existence of strict, rigid categories in Nature, with little possibility of species changing themselves through evolution.[55]

The Chain of Being was a strongly anthropocentric construct that placed man at the apex of earthly creation. This is expressed in Wollstonecraft's *Young Grandison,* where the moral arbiter of the text Charles defends the existence of caged birds on the principle that "No, they are not unhappy in their confinement; God has created them for our pleasure, though we displease him when we treat them with cruelty." Kindness to animals is thus exercised because the regulating eye of God (who presides over the Chain of Being) desires thus, not because humans desire to be kind to animals of their own volition. According to Charles, birds cannot be compared to rational humans: "They cannot reason as we can."[56] Similarly, the evangelical Sarah Trimmer warned child readers against excessive kindness to animals, lest they should collapse the vertical order of the Chain.[57]

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[53] The encyclopaedist William Smellie (1740-95).
[54] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 294.
[55] Ernst Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution and Inheritance* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1982) 260.
[56] Wollstonecraft, "Young Grandison," *WMW* 2 230.
[57] Pickering 36-37.

Keith Thomas has elaborated on the theological context surrounding writings like Trimmer's, observing that "anthropocentrism was still the prevailing outlook" in the eighteenth century. Most writers who claimed that God did not make the world "for man alone usually moved on quickly to demonstrating that, even so, it had been remarkably well designed to receive humanity."[58] In the nineteenth century anthropocentrism led to public outrage at the evolutionary discoveries of Erasmus Darwin's grandson, Charles Darwin.[59]

In Wollstonecraft's text, Charles explains the anthropocentric logic to his sister Emilia: "If William and I set the butterflies on a needle, only for our amusement, it would be wrong; but we do it to instruct ourselves."[60] His speech expresses no ethical qualms whatsoever about killing animals for the sake of scientific knowledge. Use-value overrides all ethical issues with the treatment of beings lower in the hierarchy of creation, since they cannot voice their objections. The study of biology serves as a pretext to silence the potentially troublesome child reader, who might well question the naturalness of the human-animal boundaries decreed by the adult, and by implication question the human adult's seemingly natural authority over the child. [61]

The early Wollstonecraft also naturalises the idea of a hierarchy through the class-ideology that she attempts to imprint on the child reader. From her own middle-class perspective, she expresses, as Gary Kelly observes, the premises of the

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[58] Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983) 169.

[59] See David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2003) 22. Perkins has observed that conservative children's authors like Trimmer held fast to human-animal boundaries in the face of late-eighteenth-century biological evidence that contested the special place of man.

[60] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 2 236.

[61] See Lovejoy 205. Lovejoy shows the social conservatism and anti-egalitarian implications of the Chain of Being.

bourgeois cultural revolution.[62] Hence her children's books express a rhetoric of egalitarianism that operates on double standards: the middle classes are allowed cultural ascendancy over the upper classes, but the lower classes must be kept in their places and accept the values of the middle-classes. The examples below illustrate how Wollstonecraft shows middle-class cultural ascendancy over the lower classes.

In *Elements of Morality* the aristocratic Leonora is caricatured for silly boasting of her fine lacy dress, her flowers, her accomplishments in singing and in her smattering of foreign languages. The caricature of Leonora makes it easy for the child reader to dismiss her points-of-view. The world-view of the professional middle-classes, who had to make do upon a limited income, is the ideal and the norm. Leonora is ridiculed for her taste for finery and ladylike "accomplishments."[63] The middle-class Mrs. Jones, on the other hand, is praised for not being "fond of dress" and for frugally dressing herself "in a neat becoming manner."[64] To teach the child reader the middle-class habit of regularly saving money for the sake of future subsistence and comfort, Wollstonecraft introduces the cautionary tale of Mr. Noel, reduced to destitution by irresponsible spending habits.[65] Thus Wollstonecraft's expresses a rhetoric of egalitarianism in the service of the rising professional middle-classes, so that they can consider themselves equal to the aristocracy. On the other hand, aristocratic self-indulgence is strongly censured: the village schoolmistress has been reduced to straightened circumstances because of her father's prodigality: "He never did a mean action; but sometimes an ostentatious pride tarnished the luster of very splendid ones."[66]

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[62] Kelly 1-22.
[63] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 114.
[64] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 90.
[65] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 82. See Kelly 59 for the bourgeois "investment mentality."
[66] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 425.

When it comes to the lower classes, Wollstonecraft's strictures are subtly informed by the strict hierarchies decreed by the Chain of Being and its implications of social conservatism. In *Original Stories*, the class-system is decreed to be divinely sanctioned: it is "wisely ordered by our Heavenly Father, to call forth many virtues."[67] Such "virtues" are often based on the middle-classes' feeling of resentment towards the superior comforts of the upper classes, and the lower classes are included in this egalitarianism. In *Young Grandison* Dr. Bartlett works as a tutor in an upper-class family and does not live in economic hardship. He valorises the myth of happy poverty, and is an apologist for the class-system: "A labourer in his low station, and in his poor cottage, is often happier than those who are exalted to high offices; and reside in noble palaces."[68]

This seemingly unmaterialistic attitude pretends that real differences of property and privilege do not exist between the middle and the lower classes. In *Young Grandison*, the narrator's mouthpiece, the child Charles, delivers a homily to other children where he preaches egalitarianism. Attacking the usual respect paid to aristocratic property as well as lineage, he states that for the possessor of wealth is

> indebted for the gold and silver to the poor miners, who, at the expence of health, dig it out of the mine—and we possess it by mere chance.—And our birth, of which we are apt to boast so much, is equally accidental.[69]

Here, the acknowledged debt to "poor miners" validates and obscures the possession of property, which is the key factor differentiating class-positions, despite the lip-service paid to the dignity of the labourer. This difference of property and privilege becomes explicit in *Elements of Morality*. Here, the middle-class Mrs. Jones and her

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[67] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 432.
[68] Wollstonecraft, "Young Grandison," *WMW* 2 4, 249.
[69] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 2 281.

friend and daughters offer a sick worker's hapless wife moral support, and more importantly, a little money to succour her. The worker's wife is overwhelmed with gratitude:

> God for ever bless you all, and give you back a thousand-fold, what you have given me.—May he pour the same peace into your bosoms I now feel! [70]

Mrs. Jones's kindness earns her not only the gratitude of the worker's wife, but also the latter's consent to be kept in her station. The middle-classes are entitled to get "back a thousand-fold" what they spend on charity. Through God's approval, they are legitimised as a meritocracy who deserve the money that they earn. But because this is divinely sanctioned, the lower-class worker and his family are not entitled to feel resentful of the Jones family's superior material comforts.

Here, Mrs. Jones practices the eighteenth-century middle-class ideal of benevolence, which helped the middle-classes feel good about their generosity, while it kept class distinctions intact. Similarly, in *Thoughts*, girls are taught to give up a portion of their allowance for "charitable purposes."[71] Wollstonecraft, like other eighteenth-century children's writers, shows her fear that the lower classes could subvert the bourgeois world-view, and believes in the middle-class ideal of personal benevolence as a solution to potential class conflict arising from inequality of property.[72] Wollstonecraft's faith in benevolence as a cure to socio-economic problems led her to support the philanthropy of the evangelical pedagogue Sarah Trimmer. From the 1780s, Trimmer (who was also published by their mutual acquaintance Johnson) sought to educate the children of the poor through her charity-

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[70] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 2 99.
[71] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 43.
[72] See Locke, *Some Thoughts* 127; Pickering 2-12.

school movement.[73] Sarah Trimmer's Sunday School Movement had been set up to impart literacy to lower-class children who worked for a living everyday and had a holiday on Sunday for religious Sabbaths.[74] As Hugh Cunningham observes, Trimmer's was part of a larger contemporary middle-class movement to regulate the activity of lower-class street children, and induct them into habits of work and schooling (based on the assumption that habits of idleness uncorrected in childhood led to poverty and crime in adulthood).[75] Wollstonecraft's support for this movement is evident in her review of *Verses on the benevolent Institution of the Philanthropic Society* (1790) by W.L. Bowles. Here she approves of the society's aim to prevent "*crimes*, by seeking out, and training up to virtue and industry, the children of the most abject and criminal among the vagrant and profligate poor."[76]

Wollstonecraft's support for middle-class benevolence is further expressed in her approving review of Trimmer's *A Comment on Dr Watts's Divine Songs for Children, with Questions; designed to illustrate the Doctrines and Precepts to which they refer; and induce a proper Application of them as Instruments of early Piety* (1789).[77] Trimmer's commentary is based on Isaac Watts's children's hymns, popular with adults in the eighteenth-century for the religious education of children.[78] Wollstonecraft appraises Trimmer thus:

> This comment is a fresh proof of her discernment; children too often only learn a lesson by rote; but when they expect to be called to answer questions, they must think[.]

Wollstonecraft approves the text from a Lockean viewpoint, insisting that by rejecting passive rote-learning and answering questions instead, children were actively learning

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[73] Franklin 39; Braithwaite 70-71.
[74] Franklin 37.
[75] Cunningham 36-38, 44.
[76] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 224; W.L. Bowles (1762-1850).
[77] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 123.
[78] See above, pp. 10-11.

through their own experience.[79] However, a brief examination of Trimmer's text shows that Wollstonecraft misreads Trimmer, forcing a Lockean reading on a text that does not warrant such an interpretation. In Song I, for instance, Trimmer's comments explain Watts thus:

> By our *Heavenly King* is meant God; *Glorious* signifies *wonderful to behold*; *Above*
> *the Sky* means *Heaven*.

Towards the end of the Song, there is a list of "Questions":

> Who is your *Heavenly King*? What is the meaning of the word *Glorious*? What is *Majesty*?[80]

The answers to the above questions are already presented within Trimmer's text. Unlike Wollstonecraft's claim, Trimmer's text only pretends to ask the child reader questions "to think" about. In fact, Trimmer dictates ready-made answers to child readers of both middle and lower-classes, as she reveals unabashedly double standards with respect to class. According to her preface, "children of the Poor," were supposed to read the hymns and the comments within the classroom, and be examined by the teacher to see if they had learnt their lessons correctly.[81] But "in schools of a higher denomination" children would not read the Comment to their teachers, but over the week "*study by themselves.*" According to Trimmer, lower-class children could not be trusted to work diligently on their own, but middle-class children could. This text is an example of the eighteenth-century catechistic method of education outlined by Richardson: adults would school children, especially lower-class children, into a set of preordained questions and answers, closing off potential avenues for resistance.[82]

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[79] Locke, *Some Thoughts* 59-74, 109.
[80] Sarah Trimmer, *A Comment on Dr. Watts's Divine Songs for Children, with Questions; Designed to Illustrate the Doctrines and Precepts to which they Refer; and Induce a Proper Application of them as Instruments of Early Piety* (London, 1789)1-4,
16 Aug 2007<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>.
[81] Trimmer, *A Comment* iii-iv.
[82] Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 64-70.

As the early Wollstonecraft imposes the bourgeois world-view on all child readers, she also represents the lower-classes as children, needing education by the bourgeoisie. In *Thoughts*, she advises that the "same methods we use with children" might be used with servants.[83] The early Wollstonecraft's imposition of the bourgeois world-view on the lower classes is analogous to her general adult policy of taming the child into submission.

Doubting the Old Dispensation

Despite the early Wollstonecraft's generally restrictive representations of the child, there are times when she liberate the child from the adult's control (and indeed the basis for this challenge is implicit in Enlightenment ideas of liberating children).[84] Even at this early stage, Wollstonecraft's writings foreshadow her later breakaway from the mainstream as her early certainties were challenged. I explore these hints below, focusing on Wollstonecraft's children's books but also on her other texts, where she began to express unconventional ideas about the child that she repressed in her direct addresses to child readers.

. Despite her general support for social realism in this early phase of her career, Wollstonecraft begins to valorise the "imagination" in a strain that anticipates the later writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge and other Romantic writers, as she encourages her child reader to venture beyond the limits of everyday, rationally verifiable knowledge. In her review of *The Oriental Moralist, or, the Beauties of the Arabian Nights Entertainment* (1791) by Revd. Cooper, she moves close to an interest in tales of fantasy that is more familiar to literary critics from Charles Lamb's oft-quoted letter

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[83] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 38.

[84] See William Wordsworth, "Preface of 1815," *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. W.J.B. Owen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) 175-91; Samuel T. Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria: Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions" (1817), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, Vol.7 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969-2002) 16 vols. 304-5. See above, pp.8-10.

to Coleridge.[85] "We do not think," Wollstonecraft declares, "the Arabian Nights Entertainments an improper book to be put into the hands of youth." In fact, Wollstonecraft is sceptical of the "moral remarks" inserted "awkwardly and affectedly" into the text: "what is gained in stale morality, is lost in interest."[86] Here, Wollstonecraft expresses her scorn at story-collectors with double standards, who banked on the contemporary taste for exotic tales and then tried to endear themselves to contemporary, rational moralists by introducing didactic statements into the imaginative stories. Indeed, Wollstonecraft departs from rationalist mores by insisting that the text's aesthetic appeal need not be balanced by its use-value: "the beauties, as they are termed, may afford pleasure, and cannot do harm; but why, unless to sound prettily, this publication is called the Oriental Moralist, we cannot guess." Even the early Wollstonecraft thought that the child's consciousness ought to be exposed now and then to the transformational possibilities of imaginative literature.

A similar stance emerges in Wollstonecraft's generally approving review of *Letters on Education: with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (1790) by the historian Catherine Macaulay.[87] She expresses reservations about Macaulay's rational bias in the latter's recommended reading list of novels for young readers. Wollstonecraft differs with Macaulay thus: "we are of opinion, that we should not so widely deviate from nature, as not to allow the imagination to forage a little for the judgment." [88] Wollstonecraft's double negative hedges in the disruptive "imagination" with the vocabulary of "judgement" and culturally dominant, seemingly self-evident "nature." Yet her verb "forage" encourages the child reader to

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[85] Richard Johnson [Revd. Cooper], trans. *The Oriental Moralist, or the Beauties of the Arabian Nights' Entertainment* (London, 1800); Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 112-27. See above, pp. 26-27.
[86] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 415.
[87] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 144, 312; Catherine Macaulay (1731-91).
[88] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 313.

explore spontaneously, without being hemmed in by adult authority. Wollstonecraft's representation of the child reader here confirms Caroline Franklin's observation that Wollstonecraft's intellectual apprenticeship with Joseph Johnson immersed her in the "passionate voices of the emerging Romantic movement."[89]

Earlier I have discussed how the early, conventional Wollstonecraft reinforces the adult-hierarchy through biological anthropocentrism. However, this does not invariably hold true in her addresses to the child reader: in *Young Grandison* for instance, the child William dislikes spiders because he thinks they are ugly, but his tutor Dr. Bartlett advises him to get rid of his arachnophobia precisely because the spider is disagreeable to his human sight:

> Now a spider, that insect so odious in your eyes, is of great service to us by his diligence. At the time that the grapes and other fruits begin to ripen, he spins a curious web to cover them from the flies and other insects, without doing the fruit any injury. And from this slight circumstance we may conclude with reason, that most things in the earth are serviceable, though we know not their particular use.[90]

In this world-view, man's perspective is not central.[91] Further on, Dr Bartlett asks William to draw the spider: the insect is welcomed precisely because it is "different," and does not conform to normative human notions of beauty. Here, the spider's existence is defended because it is useful to cycles of nature, even if the human cannot perceive these, and has a God-given purpose. In *Original Stories* Wollstonecraft goes further in dissolving preordained boundaries. The narrator's mouthpiece Mrs. Mason allows the girls to pick up injured birds only because "an accident has rendered them helpless; if that had not been the case, they should not have been confined."[92] The idea that animals might have feelings similar to humans signals that they should not

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[89] Franklin 60.
[90] Wollstonecraft, "Young Grandison," *WMW* 2 246.
[91] See Perkins 38.
[92] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 369.

invariably be treated differently from human beings. Wollstonecraft's loosening of the human-animal divide gestures at a universalism that perceives common qualities in all creation. Wollstonecraft's progressive position here is allied with Dissenters: as Pickering has shown, although evangelical pedagogues like Trimmer consistently insisted upon the human-animal hierarchy in their children's books, rational children's writers, like Thomas Day, and the Dissenters Barbauld and Aikin often did not.[93]

Wollstonecraft generally insists in her early work that children should not challenge adults, but her reviews of pedagogy approve of a learning method that encourages the child not to listen passively to the adult. In her positive review of David Williams's *Lectures on Education*: *Read to a Society for Promoting Reasonable and Human Improvements in the Discipline and Instruction of Youth* (1789), Wollstonecraft endorses his anti-authoritarian habit of using the *Transactions of the Royal Society* to focus the "volatile curiosity" of children, "not as courses of reading, but as assistants in *enquiries* or difficulties." The teacher's task, Williams says, "must be to create those difficulties, and imperceptibly to guide the *enquiries*"(my emphases).[94] There are irreverent digs by Williams at the institutionalisation of science in the late eighteenth century: "Societies in general subsist by fictitious reknown; and none more remarkably than those denominated philosophical."[95] Under cover of "amusements for children," Williams's pupils mocked "puerile, improbable, or foolish papers and proposed sending the queries to the Royal Society":

> The Transactions containing an account of its having rained mice in Iceland, we wish to know, whether they had any qualities or properties

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[93] Pickering 31.
[94] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 144.
[95] See Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, Peter J. Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 2-3.

> different from earthly mice, whether they had the same pilfering disposition, and the same predilection for cheese?[96]

With phrases like "we wish to know," the children mocked the formal language of academic papers, as well as their air of scientific method in their own logically ordered and patterned sentences, repeating and strategically positioning the words "whether" "different," and "same." Unconditioned by adult ideology, the anarchic consciousness of these children questioned the pseudo-scientific showers of mice and frogs in Iceland. Wollstonecraft records these activities faithfully in her review. Here, Wollstonecraft captures the philosophical, neoplatonic tradition of "skeptical enquiry" discussed by Terence Hoagwood.[97] In *Some Thoughts*, Locke had said that a child's "busie Inquisitiveness" ought to be encouraged, because it is "an appetite after knowledge."[98] Among the Dissenters, intellectually indebted to the Cambridge Platonists themselves, Joseph Priestley had worked on the same methodology.[99]

Despite her usual bourgeois superiority to the lower classes, the early Wollstonecraft sometimes questions the hierarchies of the class-system. This can be traced to Wollstonecraft's personal experiences of economic hardship from her childhood, despite her own middle-class upbringing.[100] Her father had been a gentleman-farmer, who had spurned trade and taken to farming, but his farms made heavy losses and his family grew into a sense of steady social and economic decline.[101] Wollstonecraft herself, an unmarried woman, had to make her way into the professional literary market as an autodidact, without enough money or social status

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[96] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 144.
[97] Terence A. Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology: Shelley's Political Prose and its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1988) 4-5.
[98] Locke, *Some Thoughts* 182-83.
[99] Hoagwood 72-73; see Taylor 111 for the influence of the Cambridge Platonists on the Dissenters.
[100] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 3-42.
[101] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 8-11.

to help her.[102] Moreover, near the end of her early phase, she published the radically egalitarian *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, before the more well-known Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791). Therefore, it is not surprising that the class ideology that Wollstonecraft imparts to the child reader is occasionally fissured, articulating her growing disaffection with bourgeois values.

Fissures in the early Wollstonecraft's class-ideology are evident in her children's books, in subversive passages where Wollstonecraft expresses an egalitarianism that emphatically includes the lower classes. In *Original Stories*, the author's middle-class resentment towards the upper classes makes the latter receive a raw deal. The Welsh harper plays in the Gothic ruins of the castle he once owned.[103] In the narrative, he is viewed sympathetically as he relates his ill-treatment at the hands of his son-in-law. But Wollstonecraft also emphasises that his class does not count as a real socio-political force any more: "The descendant of those who had made the hall ring with social mirth now mourned in its ruins, and hung his harp on the mouldering battlements. Such is the fate of buildings and of families!"[104] Although Mrs Mason's stance towards the harper eschews judgement, her *sic transit gloria mundi* illustrates that the social change has ultimately been for the better. As the harper plays, the peasants' dances begin: "It was not the light fantastic toe, that fashion taught to move, but honest heart-felt mirth." In Wollstonecraft's echo of Milton's "L'Allegro" (1645), the individual tragedy of the once-wealthy Welsh harper signals inevitable socio-cultural change.[105]

Within the text of *Elements of Morality,* there are encoded radical messages where personal benevolence is not enough to repair misfortune that arises from socio-

[102]Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 26-27.
[103] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 420.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Milton, "L'Allegro," *Complete Shorter Poems* 138.

economic causes. In Salzmann, a labourer had lost the use of one of his hands in war. But Wollstonecraft intensifies the labourer's sufferings by saying that he lost the use of both hands while working at a white lead factory, thereby shifting the focus of her critique to the ills of emergent modern industrial capitalism.[106] In *Original Stories* Wollstonecraft's mouthpiece Mrs. Mason teaches the children to empathise, rather than condescendingly pity the labouring poor. When Caroline finishes her pocket-money, Mrs. Mason contrives to teach her a lesson:

> she looked round for an object in distress; a poor woman soon presented herself, and her meager countenance gave weight to her tale.—A babe, as meager, hung at her breast, which did not seem to contain sufficient moisture to wet its parched lips.
>
> On enquiry they found that she lodged in a neighbouring garret. Her husband had been out of employment a long time, and was now sick. The master who had formerly given him work lost gradually great part of his business; for his best customers were grown so fond of foreign articles, that his goods grew old in the warehouse. Consequently a number of hands were dismissed, who not immediately finding employment elsewhere, were reduced to the most extreme distress. The truth of this account a reputable shopkeeper attested; and he added [that] many of the unhappy creatures, who die unpitied at the gallows, were first led into vice by accidental idleness.[107]

Mrs. Mason and the children learn the true story after "enquiry," the pedagogic method valorised by Dissenting thinkers--thus she asks the child reader to look into the causes of poverty rather than dismiss it as the sheer "idleness" perpetually lambasted by eighteenth-century philanthropists. [108] Here, Wollstonecraft's aside on the growing consumer economy of the eighteenth century are accompanied by a revision of the term "idleness." An excess of imports leaves the labourer stranded amongst socio-economic phenomena beyond his control. His poverty does not simply arise from laziness. The middle-class motto of "hard work" and consequent success is

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[106] See editorial note in Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 135.
[107] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 444-45.
[108] Cunningham 44-47.

simply irrelevant in his situation. Caroline finds, to her dismay, that she has no money to succour the family. Mrs. Mason teaches the girl to think of the community's welfare rather than herself: "Œconomy and self-denial are necessary in every station, to enable us to be generous, and to act conformably to the rules of justice."[109] The child reader is asked to seize upon the contradiction in the text: although the words "economy" and "self-denial" recall bourgeois virtues, the debate on class-oppression is couched in terms of "justice," not charity, marking Wollstonecraft's departure from the tradition of late-eighteenth-century pacifist philanthropy. Janet Todd, in her biography of Wollstonecraft, suggests that under the influence of the radical atmosphere at Johnson's, from 1787 onwards, Wollstonecraft gradually moved away from the idea of benevolence as a social cure, despite some of her fellow-Dissenters clinging on to it.[110] Indeed, the example quoted above from *Original Stories* appears to ratify Todd's observation of Wollstonecraft's growing disaffection with bourgeois values.[111]

Due to Wollstonecraft's alignment with the politically progressive values of the Dissenters, Wollstonecraft believed that education should be available to everyone. Largely middle-class themselves, most Dissenters objected to the exclusive nature of aristocratic public schools.[112] Wollstonecraft had personally observed Eton schoolboys in 1786, while staying with the family of John Prior, Eton's undermaster. She had been disillusioned with the Etonians' elitist airs, ostentatious wit and assiduous cultivation of social graces.[113] In *Thoughts* she preached against boarding-school education for girls, dismissing it as superficial and incapable of fostering a

[109] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 444-45.
[110] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 166.
[111] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 374-79.
[112] See Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 81-82. Richardson notes the explosion of middle-class critiques of elitist public schools in the later eighteenth century.
[113] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 80; Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 82.

child deeply and intellectually: "few things are learnt thoroughly, but many follies contracted."[114] Her reviews praised works which advocated similar values, such as Macaulay's *Letters on Education*.[115] She endorsed Macaulay's position that the purpose of an education was not to create a Machiavellian "man of shrewd abilities, calculated to rise in the world" by encouraging the child to "mix with his superiors, and form early connections, that may possibly be useful to him in life." Macaulay claimed that the child would learn an ambitious ethic of networking by attending an exclusive "public school." However, the education that Macaulay advocated and Wollstonecraft endorsed was a rejection of aristocratic glitter for middle-class solidity and moral worth:

> But, if you are more anxious to fix just principles in his mind, on a grand scale, than to see him dazzle by the brilliancy of his achievements; if you wish him to have a sound mind in a sound body; and have sufficient resolution not to make a little *gentleman* of him [.]

Such an uncorrupted childhood was best built up, Macaulay advised, by educating the child at home, so as to let the child "feel the comfort flowing from the exercise of domestic affections and duties."[116]

The Dissenters too advised that the child should be reared in the context of the family, in tune with the eighteenth-century cult of bourgeois domesticity. In their schools, the Dissenters placed children with other children to learn "universal benevolence" or sociability, an eighteenth-century construct of social relations that stressed the values of conversation, co-operation and community over competition and individualism, in contrast to the aristocratic culture of self-aggrandisement.[117]

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[114] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 22.
[115] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 144, 312.
[116] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 310-11.
[117] See Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite, "Introducing Romantic Sociability," *Romantic Sociability* 1-23.

The Dissenters' schools, as Anne Janowitz observes, were structured as extended families, with teachers and students (ideally) sharing a common, harmonious space.[118] In this the Dissenters departed from Rousseau's theory in *Émile*, as they rejected the mode of private education where a single child would be under adult supervision all the time.[119] The Dissenting ideal of sociability had an intrinsically egalitarian angle, where children were not supposed to learn through adult authority alone, but by forming affective bonds with other children and adults like teachers or family members. In fact, as Daniel White has stressed in his exploration of the Dissenting nonconformist legacy on Wollstonecraft and other writers of the period, students at Warrington Academy were encouraged to exercise their "private judgment" as their ultimate source of authority and challenge their teachers as occasion arose.[120] The vertical structure of hierarchy was replaced, partly at least, by horizontally structured social networks.

Such values are echoed in Wollstonecraft's reviews, as she endorses Macaulay's statement that teachers should not show favouritism to any student and negate egalitarianism: "Let no capricious partialities, no ill founded preference set them the example of a departure from the strict principles of equity."[121] In Wollstonecraft's strong endorsement of Williams's *Lectures on Education*, she approvingly quotes Williams's injunction to teach the child "by repeated experience that every pleasure is multiplied by the participation of others."[122]

This double emphasis on egalitarianism and sociability is intertwined with the early Wollstonecraft's occasionally anti-authoritarian position with respect to the girl-

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[118] Janowitz 64-67.
[119] See Kelly 12-13.
[120] Daniel E. White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 24-26.
[121] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 312.
[122] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 144.

child, in contrast to the conduct-book morality of her age whose insistence on womanly submission and modesty was generally endorsed by the public.[123] As a child herself Wollstonecraft had felt resentful of the restrictions imposed on a girl's physical activities. As Godwin recorded in his memoirs of his wife:

> Dolls and the other amusements usually appropriated to female children, she held in contempt; and felt a much greater propensity to join in the active and hardy sports of her brothers, than to confine herself to those of her own sex [.][124]

Indeed, Wollstonecraft translates her abiding resentment into her address to the child reader in *Elements of Morality*, where the girl Mary wants to be dolled up for a wedding, in accordance with her culture's mores of prettiness, and subsequently experiences discomfort in her finery. She feels "bound like a prisoner" in her tight clothes and contorted hairstyle, and cannot run and play freely like the boys. Indeed, her discomfort is not merely physical but extends to social humiliation by the other, privileged sex: "Nay, the boys tread on my train on purpose to make me look foolish."[125] Mary's is not an individual malaise, but a general problem of the girl-child: as Wollstonecraft elaborates, most girls at the wedding experience the same discomfort, "for they were all loaded with ornaments."

Here Wollstonecraft aligns herself with the reformist element of Rousseau's pedagogy, where he had advocated a certain degree of physical freedom for both sexes (although in *Vindication* she would attack much of his thought).[126] For Wollstonecraft, the education of the girl-child meant a replacement of the cultivation of the body by that of the intellect: her mouthpiece Mrs. Mason advises the girls Mary and Caroline in *Original Stories* to cultivate the "active mind" in preference to

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[123] See above, pp. 27-88.
[124] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 91.
[125] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 110-13.
[126] Rousseau 330.

"*bodily* beauty." [127] Wollstonecraft, from her early career itself, supported an education for women that aimed to make them independent subjects instead of ornamental creatures, and did not encourage them to get stereotyped into conventional gender roles.

Thus, in her positive review of Catherine Macaulay's *Letters on Education*, Wollstonecraft wholeheartedly approved of her ideal of ungendered education, and quoted Macaulay: "the same rules of education in all respects are to be observed to the female as well as to the male children."[128] Macaulay's support for female education was shared by the Dissenting community, although they did not envisage a radical change in women's gendered roles as home-makers.[129] However, given the Dissenters' belief in austerity of lifestyle, they tried to educate girls so that they would not grow up into adult women obsessed with fashion.[130] The Dissenting academies allowed women to attend lectures informally.[131] Erasmus Darwin, who mingled socially with the Dissenters, and was also published by Johnson, wrote *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools,* where he supported a wider curriculum for girls than was normal at the time, including physics and botany in the syllabi.[132]

From this early phase itself Wollstonecraft expresses doubts about the adult enterprise of controlling and subjugating the child through the process of socialisation. Towards the beginning of *Thoughts*, she validates her own text by stating that it is based on the educational theories of the cultural authorities Locke and Rousseau, following the standard rhetorical procedure of her contemporaries.

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[127] Wollstonecraft, "Original Stories," *WMW* 4 390.
[128] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 313.
[129] Uglow 313-14.
[130] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 60-61.
[131] Taylor 44.
[132] Uglow 313-14.

However, to understand the context of Wollstonecraft's invocation of Locke and Rousseau, it helps to briefly review the differences between the positions of both theorists on education. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke portrayed the child's mind as a *tabula rasa* or "white paper," devoid of "innate principles." For Locke, the child's mind is a passive entity to be gradually written over by experience.[133] But Rousseau's child in *Émile* is an active agent, possessed of a presence of characteristics at its birth that the Lockean child lacks. Jonathan Jones, in his study of the construction of the Romantic-era child, notes that Rousseau anticipates modern child psychology in describing "the newly born infant as an unformed and undirected mass of impulses."[134] Wollstonecraft gestures at these differences when she invokes both Locke and Rousseau in the text of *Thoughts*:

> It has been asserted, 'That no being, merely human, could properly educate a child.' I entirely coincide with this author; but though perfection cannot be attained, and unforeseen events will ever govern human conduct, yet still it is our duty to lay down some rule to regulate our actions by, and to adhere to it, as consistently as our infirmities will permit. To be able to follow Mr Locke's system (and this may be said of almost all treatises of education) the parents must have subdued their own passions, which is not often the case in any considerable degree.[135]

The first sentence in the above passage is a reference to Rousseau's *Émile*: Wollstonecraft is probably quoting W. Kenrick's translation *Emilius and Sophia* (1762). "How can a child be properly educated by one who has not been properly educated himself? But where is such an extraordinary mortal to be found? I confess I am ignorant."[136] Wollstonecraft vaguely quotes these sentences, saying that Rousseau has "asserted" that the education of a child is so grand an enterprise that no

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[133] See above, pp. 8-9.
[134] Jonathan Jones, "Orphans: Childhood Alienation and the Idea of the Self in Rousseau, Wordsworth and Mary Shelley" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis U of Warwick, 2003) 4.
[135] Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 9.

adult human could confidently attempt it. Her vocabulary emphasises the sheer unpredictability in such an enterprise, so as to render it nearly pointless:" *though* perfection cannot be attained, and *unforeseen* events will *ever* govern human conduct" (my emphases). Hedged in with so many ifs and buts, however, she invokes "Mr Locke's system," and the rationalist imperative of subduing "passions." This apparent confidence, however, has an air of bravado that evaporates as she concludes that parents are themselves fallible, not having conquered their own passions "in any considerable degree."

In the extract from Kenrick's translation of Rousseau, the text is not as sceptical about the power of education as Wollstonecraft would have one believe. The fault of the adult educator is that he or she "has not been properly educated himself." Rousseau expresses doubts about finding the rightly-educated person, but not doubts about the very efficacy of education. Wollstonecraft's misreading of Rousseau reveals more about herself than about Rousseau. In her interpretation, a child is so powerful and wayward an object, and the process of socialisation so unpredictable, that it may be entirely useless for the adult even to try. Indeed, having read *Émile* in March 1787, Wollstonecraft confessed to her sister Everina that the text had addressed her own scepticism about childrearing. Reporting her life in the King household, she wrote:

> I am now reading Rousseau's , and love his paradoxes. He chuses a *common* capacity to educate—and gives, as a reason, that a genius will educate itself—however he rambles into that *chimerical* world in which I have too often wandered—and draws the usual conclusion, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit.[137]

According to Wollstonecraft, Rousseau's appeal to his audience lies in the fact that he discusses a subject applicable to the majority of humanity, and does not take an elitist

[137] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 114-15.

position. The sense of the "vanity and vexation" of the grand cultural enterprise of education undercuts the highly confident tone of the early Wollstonecraft's thought, and voices her subconscious anxiety that the child may elude adult prescription altogether.

Wollstonecraft's early representations of the child ought not to be simply dismissed as uninteresting in terms of radical content. Even in texts where the adult addresses the child in a voice of unremitting authority, such as her children's literature, her ideas about the child often respond to a real cultural need for the child's socialisation if the child is to survive at all. Wollstonecraft is not simply being draconian in *Elements of Morality*, when young Charles and his parents are travelling in a moving carriage, and Charles wants to stand up in order to get a better view of the pastoral "sweet fields." His parents forbid him: his dangerous heedlessness deservedly earns him a reprimand from his father.

> You must, said Mr Jones, always obey when I or your mother desire you to do any thing, if you cannot guess why we bid you do it; for we are older than you, and must know better what will be useful or hurtful to you. As you grow up and acquire more sense, by attending to our instruction, and observing what men do, you will know the nature of things yourself; and instead of commanding, I shall reason with you. At present, you must trust us when we tell you, that a thing is not good for you.[138]

For all of Mr. Jones's denial of present freedom to Charles, he is promised independence and autonomy in the future. Wollstonecraft asks the child to wait until he has developed "sense," that is, learnt what is good or bad through experience, in terms of Lockean psychology. Until the child has the requisite physical and mental ability to make realistic decisions, he must "trust" to his adult carers.

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[138] Wollstonecraft, "Elements of Morality," *WMW* 2 79.

Wollstonecraft shows the realistic need to regulate and discipline the child at certain points, and illustrates that since the human adult is biologically responsible for the child's care, the socialisation of the child involves an inevitable element of discipline. In fact, although the argument of this thesis hinges upon the problematic representation of one social group by another, more powerful group—namely, children by adults in the present case--children cannot be totally analogised to social *adult* groups, such as women, disempowered through their gender, class, ethnic minority status, or sexual orientation. Alan Richardson makes an excellent point when he observes that children, as a social group, are distinct from other disempowered adult groups, as children "*are* in legitimate need of protection and guidance."[139] The trouble with the early Wollstonecraft, and the late-eighteenth century dominant cultural milieu, is that this inevitable disciplinary element in socialisation is carried too far.

Altogether then, Wollstonecraft's ideas about the child in her early career reflect that she is a product of her cultural age, but also subliminally aware of the contradictions within that milieu, and bent upon exploring those contradictions. It is crucial to locate her within her historical context, as Barbara Taylor has pointed out elsewhere. Taylor observes that Wollstonecraft has been claimed by twentieth-century avant-garde thinkers, especially feminists, as an honourable forerunner, but seeing her in isolation from her times seriously distorts her intellectual contribution.[140] Therefore, without claiming Wollstonecraft to be a complete detractor from her early conceptions of the child, I will highlight below how Wollstonecraft uses these

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[139] Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the End of Childhood," *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations ,* ed. James McGavran, Jr.(Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1999) 23-43.

[140] Taylor 10-12.

conceptions fruitfully to inform her own iconoclastic, revolutionary politics in her later career.

The Child Liberated

Through1792 to early 1797 Wollstonecraft begins collapsing the culturally constructed adult-child divide, even as the child, in her texts, begins to function as a metaphor within various radical discourses she adopted at this time. The texts where the child features importantly include *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794), *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), and her reviews for Joseph Johnson through 1795 to 1797. None of these texts are addressed to child readers: the child is represented as a metaphor for adult readers.

Wollstonecraft's breaking away from her early representations of the child can be traced to a number of biographical factors. Over these years, Wollstonecraft became much more immersed in radical politics than before. By this time, she had published *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, and the text had promoted her from a hack-writer to the status of an important political spokesperson for the British Jacobins.[141] Indeed, Wollstonecraft's own voice bespeaks a new self-confidence in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Here, enthused with hope for the future, Wollstonecraft rejects both Rousseau's nostalgic primitivism and the quietism of 1790s political conservatives like Edmund Burke. Instead, Wollstonecraft charts her own teleological agenda for the future: "Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all *was* right originally: a crowd of authors that all *is* now right: and I, that all will be right."[142] Wollstonecraft's boldness is remarkable as she takes issue with cultural

[141] See Ashley Tauchert, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Accent of the Feminine* (New York: Palgrave 2002) 55.
[142] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 82.

authorities like Rousseau and contemporary intellectuals, expressing a new confidence in herself.

In December 1792, Wollstonecraft travelled to France and lived there until 1795. Witnessed first hand, the Revolution shocked Wollstonecraft: as Godwin recorded in his *Memoirs*, the event made the "prejudices" of the early Wollstonecraft suffer a "vehement concussion." Her "respect for establishments was undermined," marking her anti-authoritarian venture into new political and literary territory.[143] Wendy Gunther-Canada has contextualised these developments in Wollstonecraft's writing career with the observation that the French Revolution "marked the explosive end" of earlier modes of thinking. Former truths and certainties were lost: Wollstonecraft was deeply affected by a historical phenomenon that "indicated a break with the past, a rupture in normal time and space that formed an environment vibrating with conflict and experimentation."[144]

Wollstonecraft's public as well as her private life underwent sea-changes over this period. During her residence in France, Wollstonecraft fell in love with the American businessman and ex-army officer Gilbert Imlay. Their daughter Fanny was born in 1794: Wollstonecraft's motherhood and personal experience of bringing up a child enhanced her sense of a child's reality and significance to adults.[145] The growth of Fanny impressed Wollstonecraft with a sense of the child's preternatural vitality: in her letters to Imlay she evinced amazement at her daughter's perpetual readiness to "fly away with spirits."[146] In contrast to her former, condescending, adult attitudes towards the weak child, baby Fanny made Wollstonecraft marvel at the child's

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[143] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 107.
[144] Wendy Gunther-Canada, "Mary Wollstonecraft's "Wild Wish": Confounding Sex in the Discourse on Political Rights," *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft,* ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996) 61-85.
[145] See Tomaselli, "Principal events in Wollstonecraft's life," *Vindication* xxxi.
[146] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 262-63.

strength and powers of rejuvenation: after her daughter had recovered from a bout of small-pox, Wollstonecraft reported to Imlay that their "little Hercules" was quite recovered."[147] Wollstonecraft also observed that there was no strict intellectual divide between the adult and the child: in her letters to her sister Everina, she remarked upon the child's autonomous consciousness, expressed in Fanny's "astonishing degree of sensibility and observation."[148] This private experience of the developing powers of the child influenced Wollstonecraft's representations of the child as well as the adult in her public texts. The child in Wollstonecraft's texts over this period very often represents adults in a state of revolutionary upheaval.

Here I examine Wollstonecraft's representations of the child as she develops them within 1790s radical discourses. This examination is performed in a chronological sequence through the texts produced through this period. This chronological approach helps trace the evolution of Wollstonecraft's representations of the child, from her increasingly liberal attitudes towards children from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* onwards, and further in her ontological collapse of adult-child identities in her texts until 1797. Concurrently, I trace Wollstonecraft's reworking of her earlier beliefs, and the effect of this on her representations of the child.

A Vindication: the Child as Developing Adult

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman is a feminist text on the political rights of women, but Wollstonecraft's thought is concretely moored in the education of the child (of either sex) as a developing, future adult. Wollstonecraft's particular vision of social reformation is represented through the child's education, and begins to question the seemingly natural authority that the adult exerts over the child.

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[147] Ibid.
[148] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 267.

The baseline for Wollstonecraft's writing of *Vindication* was that women, in the state that she saw them, were silly and superficial creatures. This phenomenon she ascribes, however, not to women's innate natures, but to their faulty "education" (where education refers to not merely formal schooling but to the larger, comprehensive sense of a person's upbringing). In her chapter, "Observations on The State of Degradation to Which Woman is Reduced by Various Causes," Wollstonecraft bases her argument on the assertion that woman has not been accepted in her larger human role but limited and stereotyped into her sexual role, "to be the solace of man." According to Wollstonecraft, this logic structured the education of the girl-child in her contemporary circles:

> Into this error men have, probably, been led by viewing education in a false light; not considering it as the first step to form a being advancing gradually towards perfection; but only as a preparation for life. On this sensual error, for I must call it so, has the false system of female manners been reared [.][149]

In Wollstonecraft's conception the girl-child's "education" ought not to serve the "sensual," temporary purpose of making her an ornamental woman subservient to men. Instead it ought to prepare her for the grander vocation of "advancing towards perfection." Wollstonecraft's sense of a grander vocation, in *Vindication*, is informed by the Jacobin political doctrine of perfectibility, which was based on the Enlightenment progressivist model of universal history according to which all human cultures would inevitably grow towards perfection over time, with the spread of "Reason."[150]

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[149] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 127.

[150] See Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 85-86; Taylor 151-55; P.J. Marshall & Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: J. M. Dent, 1982) 301; Wollstonecraft's belief in universal history is evinced in her review of William Smellie's *Philosophy of Natural History* (see discussion above, pp.58-59) where she insists that man is sharply distinguished from animals because he possesses reason, and human civilisations consequently have an impulse towards bettering themselves. Considering Smellie's views on some

In Wollstonecraft's schema, education is integral to this process of advancement. The text of *Vindication* is a revision of *Émile*, where the education of the child expresses a political philosophy. Wollstonecraft refutes Rousseau's scheme of education for the girl-child Sophie, who is meant to serve as the ideal companion to Émile when they both grow up. Espousing gender equality, Wollstonecraft rewrites Rousseau's text, rejecting his representation of the male Émile as the human norm. Wollstonecraft centres Rousseau's sidelined, forgotten Sophie, offering her own scheme of education for the girl-child, so that instead of depending on men, women might

> discharge the important duties of life by the light of their own reason. 'Educate women like men,' says Rousseau, 'and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us.' This is the very point I am at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves.[151]

Using Rousseau's political philosophy to overturn Rousseau's misogynistic fear of educating women, Wollstonecraft argues that female children should receive a meaningful education. Thus as adult women they can exert power "over themselves," functioning as autonomous, self-regulating beings who participate in the general process of political emancipation.

To understand Wollstonecraft's investment in the child's education, one has to appreciate that education, for her, meant a grand transformative enterprise with broad cultural implications. Wollstonecraft's anti-authoritarian stance in *Vindication* as she challenges conventional views on women is echoed in her views on the education of the generic human child. From her own experiences as a schoolteacher and governess

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animals' propensity for building their own habitations , she observes: "If in the earlier stages, human architecture was extremely rude—that is inferior to the first essays of the beaver, bee, etc. it is natural to infer that reason and instinct are essentially different. The human species, considered collectively, appear to have an infancy, youth, etc. –Has any thing similar ever been observed in the brute creation?"

[151] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 138.

Wollstonecraft would have known, realistically, that education presupposes a relationship where authority is vested in the teacher. In pedagogical contexts, the voice of authority belongs to the adult, who exercises power over the child-addressee. In *Vindication* however, Wollstonecraft scrutinises the exercise of such authority. She uses the privileged term "Reason" to argue for an education for children not predicated on the arbitrary, despotic and unrestricted exercise of power. She rejects the Locke-Rousseau model of closely-regulated governance of children by adults over children, claiming that this model is simply ineffective in developing children into thinking, active citizens:

> Many of those children whose conduct has been narrowly watched, become the weakest men, because their instructors only instill certain notions into their minds, that have no other foundation than their authority.

Such cowardly and conformist children, Wollstonecraft asserts, develop through an education where

> without allowing a child to acquire judgment itself, parents expect them to act in the same manner by this borrowed fallacious light, as if they had illuminated it themselves [.][152]

Wollstonecraft here uses the metaphor of "reason" as a self-generated light, a long-established metaphor from the Cambridge Platonists (who influenced Wollstonecraft's mentors the Rational Dissenters). According to her, adults educate children so that they act, even when they grow up, through the "borrowed fallacious light" of internalised adult authority, rather than the light of their own reason or "judgment." Given such arrangements of adult power, it is only natural for Wollstonecraft to consistently represent powerlessness through images of childhood. Silly women are bred "as if they were in a state of perpetual *childhood*, unable to

[152] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 198.

stand alone."[153] Discussing the limits that ought to be imposed on authority in a civil polity, Wollstonecraft states that the unbounded power of monarchs is corrupting to the state, since kings are addicted to "the stupid routine of *childish* ceremonies."[154]

With her emphasis on the child's autonomy, Wollstonecraft trusts to the child's innate capabilities. In her pedagogy, the child learns through independent thinking and group work in a horizontal social network rather than through the vertical chain of adult authority. Explicating her scheme of state-sponsored education through day-schools, Wollstonecraft says that the child would get rid of that "benumbing indolence of mind" that occurs "when he only asks a question instead of seeking for information, and then relies implicitly on the answer he receives." In an environment where the adult would not dictate to the child all the time, the child could successfully learn with "his equals in age." [155]

Wollstonecraft's scheme of education is moored, like that of the Dissenters, in the concept of egalitarian sociability. [156] However, as Anne Janowitz notes, by the 1790s the concept of sociability especially in the radical circle surrounding Joseph Johnson was linked to political analysis and debate.[157] To this end Wollstonecraft rejects the exclusivity of public school or private education, insisting that day-schools will provide an environment where children can build meaningful relationships with their families as well as friends, leading in later life "to more expansive benevolence."[158] In the day school, where rich and poor children would study

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[153] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 76.
[154] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 83.
[155] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 251.
[156] See Taylor 211-13. Taylor situates Wollstonecraft's rejection of individualism as a Jacobin eschewal of classical masculine heroic republican virtues in the late eighteenth century. For the cultural values of masculine individualism and feminine community, see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978) 166-67; see Virginia Sapiro, "A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft* 33-45.
[157] Janowitz 62.
[158] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 252. See Kelly 12. As Kelly observes, Wollstonecraft's stress on

together, children could "spend great part of their time, on terms of equality, with other children."[159] School uniforms would minimise overt class-distinctions. Wollstonecraft's programme of universal education in the *Vindication* is underscored by a strongly Jacobin democratic agenda, where it "is not for the benefit of society that a few brilliant men should be brought forward at the expence of the multitude."[160] The goal of education is the emancipation of the common man or the "multitude."[161] Childhood education is a way of empowering the masses. The education of the girl-child is a part of this revisionist cultural enterprise. For this Wollstonecraft builds on the arguments of Catherine Macaulay, whom she celebrates as the "woman of the greatest abilities, undoubtedly, that this country has ever produced."[162] Like Macaulay, Wollstonecraft insists on co-educational schooling.[163]

However, Wollstonecraft's scheme for state-sponsored education is not *quite* egalitarian:

> After the age of nine, girls and boys, intended for domestic employments, or mechanical trades, ought to be removed to other schools, and receive instruction, in some measure appropriated to the destination of each individual, the two sexes being still together in the morning; but in the afternoon, the girls should attend a school, where plain-work, mantua-making, millinery, & c. would be their employment.
>
> The young people of superior abilities, or fortune, might now be taught, in another school, the dead and living languages, the elements of science, and continue the study of history and politics, on a more extensive scale, which would not exclude polite literature.
>
> Girls and boys still together? I hear some readers ask: yes.[164]

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domesticity recalls the premises of the bourgeois cultural revolution, providing "authentic social relations for the subjective self, in contrast to what were seen as the vitiated, self-intereste, exploitative social relations of a courtly society."

[159] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 252-53.
[160] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 256-57.
[161] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 146.
[162] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 188.
[163] Alan Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 24-41.
[164] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 264.

Wollstonecraft's provision of gender segregation by having girls learn needlework is conservative by modern standards. Her ideal of equality is limited to the very talented children, "of superior abilities," or those of upper and middle-classes, privileged by "fortune." As Gary Kelly rightly observes, the streamlining of older pupils into academic and vocational paths "preserves both class and gender distinctions, while aiming for the *embourgeoisement* of children of all classes."[165] Yet, what Wollstonecraft's recommendation of universal education was very forward-looking when there was no such scheme for universal primary education in England. Alan Richardson, contextualising Wollstonecraft's pedagogical ideas with those of her contemporaries, observes that she stood virtually alone in her support of a scheme of national education: contemporary radicals like Priestley, Paine and Godwin were concerned that a uniform code of education would hamper individuality and let the State hold unquestioned dominion over children's subjectivities.[166]

Notwithstanding such shortcomings, Wollstonecraft's radical views on the education of the child as a cultural investment for the future adult shows that the child had become an important term in her discourse.

A View of Revolutionary Children

An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution is a text where adults amidst the upheaval of the French Revolution are frequently represented in a child-like state. Wollstonecraft's historiography in this text hinges on the Jacobin reading of the French Revolution as the birth of a new age. Through her intellectual base in Enlightenment concepts of universal history, and human civilisation's constant impulse towards "perfectibility," she asserts that civilisation "has been in a state of gradual improvement, and has arrived at such a

[165] Kelly 133.
[166] Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 87; see also Braithwaite 9.

pitch of comparative perfection" that the French Revolution was an inevitable event.[167] Implicit in such a narrative of progress is the standard eighteenth-century metaphor of the cultural child, which represented adults in a child-like state. Wollstonecraft makes creative use of this standard trope, weaving it into Jacobin historiography.

The Revolution is represented as a child in an auxiliary sense as metaphors of new birth haunt Wollstonecraft's narrative throughout. The text figures the post-revolutionary, emancipated state of humanity as an energetic "embryo of freedom"[168] and the newly formed National Assembly is characterised as "liberty in the egg."[169] In fact, noting the many images of pregnancy and childbirth in the *View*, Ashley Tauchert reads the text as a "birth-phantasy," and the revolutionary body politic as a disruptive "potent, labouring, maternal body."[170] Tauchert's view offers insight into Wollstonecraft's feminist rupturing of earlier, male-centred certainties through the perspective of a female historian. Wollstonecraft's representation of a new world-order as the birth of a child, however, was not an original metaphor. As Alan Richardson documents, the metaphor refers to "an allegorical convention going back at least to Virgil's fourth Eclogue," and best known in the English tradition from Milton's "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," which celebrates a new world order through the Christ-child, but not revolutionary change in the modern sense."[171] Richardson traces descriptions of the French Revolution in Wordsworth's *Prelude*,

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[167] Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect It Has Produced in Europe*, 1794, introd. Janet Todd (New York: Delmar, 1975) 72, 220-21, 344.
[168] Wollstonecraft, *View* 140.
[169] Wollstonecraft, *View* 250.
[170] See Tauchert 88-95.
[171] See above, pp. 40-41.

and shows that the revolution/birth-analogy is standard in "Romantic representations of childhood" generally.[172]

More remarkable is the way *View* represents the revolutionary adults as active children, as Wollstonecraft uses a common eighteenth-century metaphor but changes and revitalises it in the context of the French Revolution. The *View* is a paean to the powers of common people: Wollstonecraft represents the people of post-revolutionary France as "hardened children of oppression," who have become politically conscious and therefore overturn the socio-political system.[173] The child operates as a privileged term in the text as Wollstonecraft praises post-revolutionary France's "vigour of youth," expressed in primal, creative energy.[174] However, Wollstonecraft does not consistently represent adults as children in this text in a positive light. Given Wollstonecraft's belief in the cultural child as a former state of human civilisation—to be rejected—it is hardly surprising that despite her occasional depiction of the *ancien régime* of pre-Revolutionary France figured as old and decrepit, she also paints it as a child engaged in trivial activity. Under Queen Marie Antoinette, Wollstonecraft says, the court passed its time in useless luxury: "the moments of languor, that glide into the interstices of enjoyment, were passed in the most childish manner; without the appearance of any vigour of mind." [175] In these many-faceted instances, Wollstonecraft plays upon the standard child-metaphor, charging it a with a new complexion.

Although Wollstonecraft hailed the French Revolution itself as a progressive phenomenon, she had to accommodate the aftermath, that is the bloodbath of the Terror, within her model of positive evolutionary history. She argued, therefore, that

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[172] Richardson, *Literature, Education and Romanticism* 36. See Wordsworth, *Thirteen-Book Prelude* 155-212 (Books IX-XI).
[173] Wollstonecraft, *View* 256.
[174] Wollstonecraft, *View* 19-20.
[175] Wollstonecraft, *View* 134.

the Revolution was premature: the Terror was a result of insufficient enlightenment amongst the general populace, so that the creative energy of the healthy body politic was corrupted into "enthusiasm."[176] Developing the birth-metaphor, Wollstonecraft states that as a reaction of the army's attempt to crush the revolution, or "liberty in the egg,"

> the shell was prematurely broken, and the enthusiasm of Frenchmen excited before their judgment was in any considerable degree formed.

Here the word "enthusiasm" is used in a derogatory way, in the sense of a sporadic outburst of revolutionary sentiment, one that Wollstonecraft characterises as "sudden and short-lived enthusiasm" in the Preface to the *View*.[177] The word "enthusiasm" is here used in the context located by Jon Mee, where 1790s radicals "often defined themselves as the true heirs of a process of enlightenment of which enthusiasm was the explicit antithesis."[178] Adults in a state of such enthusiasm are represented as unruly, naughty boys, who have not been sufficiently enlightened. As Post-revolutionary France revels in the carnivalesque energy of "unbridled liberty"--like "boys dismissed from school" the people exercised "their freedom by acts of mischief."[179] Thus, the Terror was "the effervescence" of individual "private anger, or the sport of depraved, uncultivated minds," who "found the same pleasure in tormenting men, as mischievous boys in dismembering insects."[180] The cruelty and thoughtlessness of the Terror is emphasised in Wollstonecraft's echo of King Lear's

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[176] Wollstonecraft, *View* 250-51.
[177] Wollstonecraft, *View* vii-viii.
[178] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 83.
[179] Wollstonecraft, *View* 103.
[180] Wollstonecraft, *View* 261. See Sapiro 38. Sapiro touches upon these metaphors to show that Wollstonecraft likens the Revolution to "young and untutored" children.

expression of his total helplessness, in the image of "wanton boys" who kill for their "sport."[181]

View is a text, therefore, where Wollstonecraft represents developments in adult society through the metaphor of the child so that she can articulate both her revolutionary hopes and disillusionment. To understand the further evolution of Wollstonecraft's representations, it helps to note how the Revolution made her earlier points-of-view crumble. Wollstonecraft had been more horrified by the Terror than she cared to admit in public. All that she concedes, in the text of *View*, is that the "revolutions of states ought to be gradual," so that the populace might not surrender to sporadic bursts of "enthusiasm."[182] To a public audience Wollstonecraft wrote *View* in order to celebrate the ideals of Jacobin radicalism. But as Adriana Craciun has observed, the *View* "limits itself to the early, less problematic years of the revolution, although it was written during the Terror."[183] In her private letters, on the other hand, Wollstonecraft revealed pessimistic attitudes about human progress through the Revolution. In a crucial letter to Joseph Johnson in 1792, she confessed that she shed tears on seeing King Louis XVI being taken to the guillotine. He was "sitting, with more dignity than I expected from his character, in a hackney coach, going to meet death." Her nerves were so shaken by the sight that she could not extinguish her candle at night.[184] For all of Wollstonecraft's democratic and republican principles and consequent demonisation of royalty, when faced with the brutal reality of a public execution she could not be her former judgemental self. Her emotional disturbance marks a significant departure from her former certainties.[185]

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[181] See William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, IV. i.
[182] Wollstonecraft, *View* 355-56.
[183] Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women in Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 72.
[184] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 216-17.
[185] See Tauchert 86. Tauchert observes that the Terror damaged Wollstonecraft's belief in the individual's self-regulating powers of reason.

Wollstonecraft's public coyness about the Terror, by 1794 (when the *View* was published), coincides with a generally enhanced stress, in her private writings, upon the role of the affections in human conduct. In her letters to Imlay she continually exhorted him to believe in the power of "imagination":

> Believe me, sage sir, you have not sufficient respect for the imagination—I could prove to you in a trice that it is the mother of sentiment, the great distinction of our nature, the only purifier of the passions [.][186]

Earlier I have discussed how Wollstonecraft validates her literary reviews through the measured, rational vocabulary of "judgement" and "reason" in her early career.[187] By contrast in the quote above, her passionate eulogies to the "imagination," in the context of the mid-1790s, foreshadow the privileging of powerful, unpredictable, spontaneous feeling in the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge (*Lyrical Ballads* would be published years later, in 1798).[188] This epistemological shift to the erratic, intuitive and indeterminate in Wollstonecraft's private writings is reflected in her representations of the child in her public texts henceforth, as I discuss in the following section.

Travels in Scandinavia and Beyond: the Protean Child-Metaphor

In *Short Residence* (1796) Wollstonecraft recapitulates the eighteenth-century trope of cultural childhood in her complex attitudes to the state of civilisation in Scandinavian nations. Here, in Wollstonecraft's schema, development generally fell short of the standards of western European civilisation.[189] They are regions where "the adventuring spirit, common to man, is naturally stronger and more general during the *infancy* of society"(my emphasis), as Wollstonecraft invokes the standard

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[186] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 264.
[187] See above, pp. 54-55.
[188] See also Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 297. See above, pp. 67-68.
[189] Taylor 168.

eighteenth-century metaphor of early civilisations as children.[190] Given these regions' child-like "adventuring spirit" or fearless, untamed, primal energy, Wollstonecraft cautiously notes their political status as breeding grounds for revolution. In Sweden, she observes that

> the French revolution has not only rendered all the crowned heads more cautious, but has so decreased every where (excepting amongst themselves a respect for nobility, that the peasantry have not only lost their blind reverence for their seigniors, but complain, in a manly style, of oppressions which before they did not think of denominating such, because they were taught to consider themselves as a different order of human beings [.][191]

Wollstonecraft observes that the aristocracy, insecure of its dominant status, obstinately clings on to its former privileges. Meanwhile, the peasantry has developed political consciousness "of oppressions." Through the underlying trope of cultural childhood, the peasants are positively characterised as "manly," mature forces of social change, showing how far Wollstonecraft had come from her early middle-class representations of the lower-classes as mere children to be tamed into submission. In this respect the lower classes are represented more positively than the commercial middle-classes. Although impressed by Norway in general, Wollstonecraft grimly notes the mercantilism of the sea-captains with "their indefatigable attention to the making of money" and affinity for "shew and good living."[192]

> They love their country, but have not much public spirit. Their exertions are, generally speaking, only for their families, which I conceive will always be the case, till politics, becoming a subject of discussion, enlarges the heart by opening the understanding.

Confined to the local, narrow sympathies of hearth and home, these sailors, Wollstonecraft elaborates, like to sing songs of "republican glee," but they are not

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[190] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.,* 1796, ed. Carol H. Poston (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1976) 44.
[191] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 29.
[192] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 63-64.

politically aware like the peasants. The source of cultural regeneration lies in the lower rather than the middle classes.

Wollstonecraft's sympathy for the poor peasants rather than the middle-class sailors in *Short Residence* is doubled in her sympathetic representations of underprivileged children, in her pieces for the *Analytical Review* over these years. This is manifest in her scathing criticism of child labour in the review of *A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Chester, on the Removal of poor Children from their respective Settlements to the Cotton and other Manufactories at Manchester* (1792), by "a Friend to the Poor." Wollstonecraft attacks the "principles of that commercial system, whose wheels are oiled by infant sweat" and the government that allows any "body of men to enrich themselves by preying on the vitals, physical and moral, of the rising generation!"[193] Through her support for the exploited lower-class children, expending their "infant sweat," and attack on the "commercial system" of industrial capitalism, Wollstonecraft protests against the rising phenomenon of child labour in the newly-developing capitalist economy. Here Wollstonecraft is ahead of her time in being disturbed by a phenomenon which would be recognised as a social problem only in the following century: later on I will highlight Godwin's contribution to the growing political awareness about child labour in the early 1800s.[194] As Taylor observes, such protests by Wollstonecraft "demonstrate a link between her thought and social radicalisms to come": Jacobin radicalism was a forerunner of the "socialist movement that emerged in Britain in the 1820s." [195]

In such statements Wollstonecraft indicates, as Kelly observes, a larger, growing disillusionment with the ethics of the commercial bourgeoisie.[196] This was

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[193] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 442.
[194] See below, pp. 216-17.
[195] See Taylor 173.
[196] See Kelly 56-57.

born partly of her estrangement with Imlay, as he gradually deserted her and their young daughter Fanny, pleading business trips for his long absences. Repeatedly, Wollstonecraft expressed her dislike of Imlay's business ethics. In her letters to him she claimed that he was "embruted by trade and the vulgar enjoyments of life." She did "not like" his "commercial face."[197]

Such sentiments work into Wollstonecraft's representations of the girl-child in *Short Residence*, since Wollstonecraft's trip to Scandinavia was undertaken at Imlay's request. The text is formally addressed to an absconding lover, that is Imlay, but content-wise it is structured, as Mary Jacobus has argued, as a mother's thoughts on the young Fanny.[198] Being a girl-child, Fanny frequently elicits her mother's anxiety, as Wollstonecraft contemplates the social oppression she will inevitably come to face in a male-dominated society: "I feel more than a mother's fondness and anxiety, when I reflect on the dependent and oppressed state of her sex."[199] The representation of her vulnerable young daughter Fanny lets Wollstonecraft articulate the gender-specific problems faced by a girl-child.

The general sense of melancholy in the text probably echoes not only Wollstonecraft's private worries, but also her failure of revolutionary hope after having witnessed the Terror of the French Revolution.[200] Seeing some German soldiers, Wollstonecraft views "with a mixture of pity and horrour, these beings training to be sold into slaughter, or be slaughtered." As she observes these human beings being professionally trained to exercise violence, Wollstonecraft expresses her

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[197] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 264-65.
[198] Mary Jacobus, *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 72. See also Janet Todd, *Death and the Maidens: Fanny Wollstonecraft and the Shelley Circle* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2007) 23-24. Todd observes that Fanny dominates the text of *Short Residence*.
[199] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 55.
[200] See Franklin 147-65.

disillusionment in a deeply cynical vision of the cyclical, remorseless patterns of Nature. Here the young offer no hope whatsoever for change:

> an old opinion of mine, that it is the preservation of the species, not of individuals, which appears to be the design of the Deity throughout the whole of nature. Blossoms come forth only to be blighted; fish lay their spawn where it will be devoured: and what a large portion of the human race are born merely to be swept prematurely away. Does not this waste of budding life emphatically assert, that it is not men, but man, whose preservation is so necessary to the completion of the grand plan of the universe? Children peep into existence, suffer, and die; men play like moths about a candle, and sink into the flame: war, and the "the thousand ills which flesh is heir to," mow them down in shoals, whilst the more cruel prejudices of society palsies existence, introducing not less sure, though slower decay [.][201]

The passage marks how far Wollstonecraft has left behind her early optimism and its certainties, even as her quote from *Hamlet* emphasises the dark, brooding struggle in Nature for the survival of the fittest, "the preservation of the species, not of individuals." [202] Wollstonecraft's vision of the human child, doomed "to be swept prematurely away" assembles it amongst the young of all living species, "Blossoms" or "fish." Wollstonecraft makes the human child's identity fluid and indeterminate: compared to her early anthropocentrism, the human is hardly less special amidst the "grand plan of the universe." War, natural disasters and the "cruel prejudices of society" stultify all hope for human progress.

The passage marks a decisive shift from Wollstonecraft's early belief in natural hierarchies, collapsing suffering and dying children and adults in a common human identity. Wollstonecraft's assembling of the human with all other living species shows that her early loyalties to the taxonomic, classificatory biology of Linnaeus had swerved to the methods of his contemporary, the scientist Comte de Buffon. Buffon's approach saw Nature in flux, emphasising continuity, dissolving categories and

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[201] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 179-80.
[202] Cf. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.i.62-63. Hamlet speaks of "the thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir to."

diversity, his approach heavily influenced Romantic-era science. [203] In the 1790s Erasmus Darwin, whose works were familiar to Wollstonecraft, published his botanic poetry including *The Botanic Garden* (1792) and *Zoonomia* (1794-6).[204] Darwin's translation of Linnaeus transformed his sexual system of classification into human analogies of riotous free love, emphasising the wholeness of Nature rather than its separate, constituent parts. This scientific approach worked well with the aesthetic values of Romantic-era universalism, emphasising the fluidity and protean quality of elements of Nature.[205]

As Wollstonecraft's evolutionary passage shows, by 1797 she represents the child as an all-inclusive, protean being, dissolving boundaries, and uniting discourses as divergent as revolutionary hope and revolutionary failure. In the next chapter I explore how Wollstonecraft uses the protean metaphor of the child to represent socially oppressed groups, particularly women, in her late career.

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[203] Mayr 260.
[204] See Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 176.
[205] Fulford, Lee & Kitson 80.

Chapter 2. "Wake her, ah! wake her": the Child-Metaphor in Wollstonecraft's New Horizons

In Wollstonecraft's late works, figures of children represent the social victimisation of women in a male-dominated society, or alternately, the possibilities of freedom from repressive power structures. Significantly, in this phase Wollstonecraft also returns to addressing the child reader specifically: the child is not just a metaphor to convey radical messages to adults, but also expresses Wollstonecraft's authorial urge to address her radical politics to children directly.

The child is represented in these forms in Wollstonecraft's final projects, which were cut short by her death in 1797 shortly after she gave birth to her second daughter Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (later Shelley). These projects were collected by Godwin, and published in their incomplete form by Joseph Johnson in *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798).[1] The texts, in this collection, where the child features as a major presence are "The Cave of Fancy," "Letters on the Management of Infants," *The Wrongs of Woman: or Maria. A Fragment*, and "Lessons for Children." The following discussion focuses on these texts.

As these accidentally incomplete texts do not represent Wollstonecraft's final intentions, they must be approached with caution. Of the four texts examined here, only *Maria* has received extensive critical attention to date through feminist treatments. The other three have been relatively neglected. Because they contain meagre and incomplete material, it is often hard to read consistent authorial messages in these texts. However, this inconsistency becomes a strength if one views these texts through the lens of childhood representation, opening up their many nuances. Each

[1] Franklin 73, 115.

text in *Posthumous Works* featuring the child is examined below individually in order to illuminate its inherent complexities and contradictions.

Given the general absence of criticism on the representation of the child in these texts, the individual examinations will include brief reviews of existing critical perceptions (if any), and then analyse what radical messages the child represents in each. The representations of the child thematically link these four texts. They enable Wollstonecraft to establish sympathetic bonds with her reader, and let her open up conversations with her readers about the problems and issues affecting her day.

The Cave of Fancy

The three texts "Letters," *Maria* and "Lessons" remain unfinished due to Wollstonecraft's untimely death, but "Cave" was begun in 1787 and never completed by the author. Chronologically therefore, "Cave" belongs with Wollstonecraft's early texts, but is examined in this chapter because it shows strong differences from the early texts, and is thematically aligned to Wollstonecraft's later texts published in 1798. It is a text-in-transition where Wollstonecraft seriously questions, but does not utterly reject, her early rationalist epistemology and the politics of adult control over the child, and foreshadows the later phase of her career, where her writing becomes more open-ended.

The differences between "Cave" and Wollstonecraft's early texts were marked by Godwin as he observed that "nothing which Mary produced" during her regular employment with Joseph Johnson over 1787-91, is marked by the "daring flights" evident in the "little fiction she composed just before its commencement." [2] "Cave" belongs to this group of "little fiction": as it turned out, the text was not written for

[2] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 105.

direct and immediate publication, and this process probably helped the early Wollstonecraft to express her independent voice in a private composition.

Critical treatments of "Cave" have been few. Yet, amongst the existing treatments, since "Cave" was written during Wollstonecraft's early career, it has most often been identified as an expression of rationalist discourse. Gary Kelly, for instance, reads the tale as a critique of the cult of eighteenth-century "Sensibility." [3] Caroline Franklin interprets the text as a creative imitation of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), that is, a philosophical, didactic tale cautioning the reader against indulgence in the eighteenth-century conception of "fancy" or fantasy.[4] According to Barbara Taylor's relatively sympathetic reading, "Cave" is the early Wollstonecraft's polemically feminist, although amateurish, attempt at unsettling the gendered aesthetic politics of the late eighteenth century, where creativity was assumed to be a male prerogative.[5] An analysis of the representation of the child in "Cave," instead, shows that this is a far more complex text than has been previously thought. The text is addressed to adult readers, but centred on the child-protagonist Sagesta.

Indeed, there is some justification for critical perceptions of "Cave" as a rationalist text. The plot of "Cave" warrants the interpretation of the text as a rationalist tale. The narrative relates the hermit Sagestus's discovery of Sagesta in a shipwreck, and his subsequent adoption and socialisation of the child. Wollstonecraft's opening lines closely echo those of Johnson's *Rasselas*, and advise caution and restraint in all human activity.[6] The romance elements of "Cave" include

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[3] Kelly 41-42.
[4] Franklin 73.
[5] See Taylor 64.
[6] Wollstonecraft, "The Cave of Fancy," *WMW* 1 191. Wollstonecraft's lines go thus: "Ye who expect constancy where every thing is changing, attend to the voice of experience, and mark in time the footsteps of disappointment; or life will be lost in desultory wishes, and death arrive before the dawn of wisdom." Cf. Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, eds. & introd. Frank Brady & W.K. Wimsatt (Berkeley: U of California P, 1977) 73-153: "Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will

a rationalist hermit, an isolated valley, a shipwreck, an orphan child, spirits, and a cave; in accordance with the generic conventions of the romance, the reader assumes the hermit to be a wise man or truth-teller.[7] Indeed, the hermit appears to be the moral centre of the tale when he observes the corpse of Sagesta's pretty, silly mother (the kind of woman Wollstonecraft loathed, educated in the way that she had criticised in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*).[8] From his observations the hermit concludes that the child "was not very unfortunate in having lost such a mother."[9] Subsequently, he begins correcting Sagesta's faulty socialisation by her mother, by imposing his own system of education within the "Cave of Fancy." The very name of the cave implies a space which calls for a rationalist dismissal of the enchanting visions found within.[10] Within this cave, the hermit appears to voice the author's opinion when he expresses his pedagogical views in rational terms: "the senses of children should be the first object of improvement," and the "passions" should be curbed by "judgment" or reason.[11] His rationalist agenda seems to be borne out by the spirit. At the hermit's behest, the spirit relates her autobiographical narrative to Sagesta, promising to offer the child "instruction."[12] The spirit's *moralia* appear to mirror those of the rationalist author of "Cave" since, in 1787, Wollstonecraft herself was writing instructive and didactic books for children in the tradition of late-eighteenth-century children's literature.[13]

However, Wollstonecraft introduces narrative elements in "Cave" that fissure the rationalist seam of the tale. When the reader first encounters the shipwrecked

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perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abyssinia."

[7] See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) 195.

[8] See above, pp. 85-86.

[9] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 198.

[10] See Taylor 111-12. Taylor notes the similarity of the Cave of Fancy to Plato's cave of shadows.

[11] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 198.

[12] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 205.

[13] See above, pp. 51-56.

Sagesta, she expresses herself in a "weak infantine voice," but is amazingly, the only being to survive the shipwreck: thus she has a dual nature, helpless and yet impossibly powerful. Her fairy-tale discovery on a sea-coast, by the hermit, echoes the plot of *The Winter's Tale*, where the baby Perdita is found by the shepherd who mythically deals with "things new-born."[14] The child in "Cave," unnamed at this stage of the narrative, is thus a symbol of cultural regeneration, invested with creative, primal energy.

At a more local, historical level, the child in "Cave" is a precursor of the orphan children frequently visible in eighteenth and nineteenth century works, as discussed by Nina Auerbach: fragile in appearance but gifted with enormous powers of survival.[15] As the child kisses her dead mother, and entreats the hermit to "wake" her parent, she seems heedless of the rational boundary that separates life and death.[16] Her mythical quality is underscored by the poetic rhythms of her speech: "Wake her, ah! wake her," she cried, "or the sea will catch us."[17] The child's speech has a natural eloquence, resonating on a wider cultural level as "spontaneous feelings and ideas" of early human civilisations that Wollstonecraft discusses in her essay "On Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature," also published in *Posthumous Works*.[18] This child is, then, not simply a realistic character but an allegorical embodiment of the creative imagination.

The hermit Sagestus's adoption of this orphaned child appears to be a generous action, but bespeaks a troubling discourse of rationalist, adult control over

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[14] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* III. iii. 109.
[15] See Nina Auerbach, "Incarnations of the Orphan," *ELH* 42 (1975) 395-419.
[16] See above, pp. 35-36. Wollstonecraft's representation of the child here coincides with Wordsworth's vision of intuitively wise children.
[17] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 193.
[18] Wollstonecraft, "On Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature," *WMW* 7 8. See Susan Wolfson, "Mary Wollstonecraft and the Poets," *Cambridge Companion* 160-88. Wolfson observes that Wollstonecraft, in her schema of universal history, considers poetry to be most natural in humanity's cultural infancy.

this free, imaginative child. Unable to detach the child from her dead mother by verbal persuasion, he accomplishes his purpose by administering a sleeping-powder to the child: "as soon as the fumes reached her brain, the powers of life were suspended."[19] The hermit's action recalls the power ominously exercised by Prospero over the hapless Miranda in *The Tempest*, as he sends her to sleep: Prospero rightly remarks that Miranda "canst not choose."[20] In "Cave," the hermit's action extinguishes the child's power of independent choice: subsequently he names her Sagesta, converting her into a mere derivative of himself. Tellingly, Sagesta does not say a single word in the narrative after the hermit adopts her: hinting that his actions of parental care mask the adult's unfair use of power over the child.

The adult hermit's education of Sagesta further underscores Wollstonecraft's doubts about the hermit's seeming generosity. Under the hermit's influence, Sagesta is progressively moved physically from the free, open coastline to the relatively enclosed space of his hut (which leads into a cavern). She is educated by the spirit in the confined space of the Cave of Fancy. The incompleteness of the text of "Cave" makes it hard for the reader to ascertain whether the Cave of Fancy is the same cavern that adjoins the hermit's hut, but in the first chapter of "Cave," Wollstonecraft signals that caves are sinister, claustrophobic spaces in the context of the tale.[21] The cavern adjoining the hermit's hut is inhabited by the spirits of the dead, one of whom is Sagesta's instructress. Within this cavern, the hermit, like Prospero, keeps the spirits perpetually under his control: the spirits are "confined" there, like Sagesta, but much more coercively so within the "very bowels of the earth." Some of the spirits, whom Wollstonecraft describes as "wearied," are imprisoned by the hermit, ostensibly "to

[19] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 193.
[20] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* I. ii. 186.
[21] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 198. Wollstonecraft merely says: "The last branch of the education of Sagesta, consisted of a variety of characters and stories presented to her in the Cave of Fancy, of which the following is a specimen."

purify themselves from the dross contracted in their first stage of existence," that is, to expiate their mortal sins. These spirits "sometimes rise, to catch the most distant glimpse of light, or taste the vagrant breeze." The better-behaved spirits are liberated for short periods of time by the hermit, and on their holidays they gladly traverse oceans and catch sunbeams.[22] Either way, all the spirits appear to dislike their confinement in the cave, and aspire towards the light and freedom of the great outdoors, the boundless open space which the hermit has denied Sagesta. By mirroring and magnifying Sagesta's situation in the imprisonment of the spirits, Wollstonecraft evidently expresses her discomfort with the arbitrary exercise of power by the adult hermit over the child Sagesta, and by implication, the rationalist mode of socialising the child in late-eighteenth-century mainstream culture.

This discomfort becomes explicit in the ending chapter of "Cave," where the narration of the tale is taken over by the voice of the spirit, as she tells her didactic story to educate Sagesta. Here the child Sagesta functions as a surrogate for the adult reader. Given the spirit's imprisonment in the cavern, she is one of the many who almost certainly resent the hermit's exercise of authority. Hence, even before she begins narrating her story, the reader is alerted to the probability that the spirit's story will mean exactly the opposite of what she says, and that she will deliver her *sententia* merely to please the hermit.

The spirit begins her story with a confession of her imaginative nature in her mortal existence, as she aspired towards freedom: she felt constrained by marrying a rationalist husband whose "religion was coldly *reasonable*," but found mental liberation in loving a different man. In contrast to the pettiness of her husband, the spirit's lover possessed "greatness of mind": with the latter she experienced resonant

[22] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 192.

"corresponding *feelings*" as they usually "*intuitively* discerned each other's *sentiments*" (my emphases).[23] Celebrating her emotional liberation with her lover, the spirit found expression for her feelings in the language of the boundless "sublime," the eighteenth-century aesthetic category that implied free imaginative grandeur (in contrast to the category of "beauty," confined to the delicate and pretty).[24] Tellingly, the spirit experienced the sublime whilst wandering amongst the great outdoors, amidst "wild and grand" scenery.[25]

In keeping with the hermit's controlling discourse however, the rest of the spirit's narrative formally attempts a discourse of rational confinement and closure: the end of her tale does a volte-face, condemning her imaginative search for sublimity. As her self-deprecatory dicta indicate, the hermit appears to have corrected her deluded opinions: her "passion *seemed* a pledge of immortality" and made her see "through a *false* medium"(my emphases). She ends her tale with an apparent epiphany:

> Worthy as was the mortal I adored, I should not long have loved him with the ardour I did, had fate united us, and broken the delusion the imagination so artfully wove. His virtues, as they now do, would have extorted my esteem; but he who formed the human soul, only can fill it, and the chief happiness of an immortal being must arise from the same source as its existence. Earthly love leads to heavenly, and prepares us for a more exalted state; if it does not change its nature, and destroy itself, by trampling on the virtue, that constitutes its essence, and allies us to the Deity.[26]

The spirit is referring here to a literary tradition that existed from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) onwards, which understood virtuous human love as a means of ascending to communion with God. The spirit's transgressive "imagination" moves beyond the

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[23] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 201-3.
[24] See Franklin 62, 83. Wollstonecraft probably knew the theory of the "sublime" best from her reading of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) by Edmund Burke, a text I will briefly discuss in Chapter 3.
[25] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 205; see Taylor 64, 110-13.
[26] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 201.

confines of "virtue" or married love and upsets the hierarchy decreed by the Chain of Being.[27] In the perspective of the spirit's earlier dismissal of her "coldly reasonable" husband, her rejection of her love for the "mortal I adored" has a forced, consolatory air, and her sermon on the rational containment of "ardour" fails to cancel out her erstwhile pursuit of sublimity. The spirit's tale to Sagesta or the adult reader thus works through a continual process of semantic play where the listener or reader keeps subverting her didactic injunctions against imaginative aspiration. Evidently, Wollstonecraft herself endorses the spirit's pursuit of sublimity, and this is foreshadowed in an earlier chapter of "Cave," where the omniscient narrator dismisses the aesthetic sensibility of the dead man who saved Sagesta: "he was most conversant with the beautiful, and rarely comprehended the sublime."[28] Thus the child-addressee, and the penetrating adult reader, guess that the apparently rational Wollstonecraft secretly supports the exercise of the aspiring, disruptive imagination.

Further support for such a reading of the spirit's tale (and Wollstonecraft's muted endorsement of the imagination) is provided by Wollstonecraft's novel *Mary: A Fiction* (1788), written at the same time as "Cave."[29] Here, the protagonist Mary's biography strongly resembles Wollstonecraft's own early life, as described in Godwin's *Memoirs* of his wife. Mary has a first name blatantly coincidental with Wollstonecraft's, and grows up as a neglected daughter in her family, who provide her with an indifferent education, but she nurtures herself as an autodidact.[30] The character Mary is thus, as commentators have argued, a self-projection of

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[27] Lovejoy 195; see Taylor 110-13. Taylor reads the female spirit as Wollstonecraft's mouthpiece, "a proto-feminist" who appropriates the label of the male Romantic genius.
[28] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 196.
[29] Representations of the child in *Mary: A Fiction* are interesting in terms of comparisons to "Cave" but not extensive enough for a closer look in this thesis.
[30] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 88-89; Wollstonecraft, "Mary: A Fiction," *WMW* 1 10.

Wollstonecraft.[31] Mary's life is beset by the same conflicts as the spirit: she disliked her husband, found intense sublime love with another man, and after her lover's death, retains "a heart" with "a void" that the calm rational inducements of "benevolence and religion could not fill."[32] Approaching her death at the end of the novel, Mary defiantly reaffirms her earthly, platonic bond with Henry in heaven, awaiting her journey to "that world *where there is neither marrying,* nor giving in marriage." Mary's unrepentant attitude, with its Biblical echo, parallels that of the resistant spirit's, who remains convinced of a place where "death-divided friends should meet, to part no more."[33] Both the spirit and Mary end up celebrating the breaking of rational, realistic limits through the aspirational, imaginative experience of sublimity (through transgressive human love, if necessary).

The imprisoned spirit tells her tale to Sagesta, then, to negate the hermit's controlling rationalist programme, and establish political fellowship with the disempowered child who was once an imaginative, articulate being like herself. Before the beginning of Sagesta's education, Wollstonecraft gives us two glimpses of her "sleeping profoundly," hinting that her imaginative self is simply waiting to burst forth and disrupt the hermit's rationalist adult framework.[34] One can infer therefore that the spirit's story is meant to catalyse the somnolent Sagesta into resisting and transforming the hermit's repressive power structures. Significantly, Wollstonecraft makes the hermit a man and the spirit female: she positions the hermit as culturally masculine, dominant and rational, and the spirit as culturally feminine, repressed, irrational, Other: the child Sagesta's femaleness underscores her ideological kinship

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[31] See Tauchert 30. Tauchert observes that Wollstonecraft consistently projects herself into the Marys and Marias of her fiction, first names that coincide with her own.
[32] Wollstonecraft, "Mary," *WMW* 1 73; Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 1 "Cave," 206.
[33] Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 1 202; cf. Gospel of St. Matthew 22:1-7, 24:38.
[34] Wollstonecraft, "Cave," *WMW* 1 193, 198.

with the spirit, implying that imagination is synonymous with political resistance in "Cave."

A comparison of "Cave" with *Mary* confirms Wollstonecraft's political investment in the figure of the imaginative child. The young fictional Mary is neglected at home: adults mock her by laughing at her secrets, but she ignores them, and "left to reflect on her own feelings," creates her idiosyncratic world-view. She lives in an alternative universe, composing music and singing to angels in the woods. As she wanders amidst Nature, "Sublime ideas" fill her mind. Wollstonecraft stresses that Mary is not inherently solipsistic: had her parents loved her, she would not have sought out "a new world" at this early age.[35] Mary's childhood creativity is thus an expression of resistance to adult authority and neglect.[36] The biographical similarities between Mary and Wollstonecraft have been mentioned above: thus the child Mary can be interpreted as a projection of the adult Wollstonecraft's memories and desires.[37] Such a reading is borne out by the fact that the child Wollstonecraft had always opposed her father's patriarchal tyranny over her family, as Godwin recounted in his *Memoirs*: she was "not formed to be the contented and unresisting subject of a despot."[38] Mary is thus an imaginative self-representation of the politically active child Wollstonecraft.

The analysis of "Cave" above shows that Wollstonecraft's authorial stance is imaginative and rebellious as she resists the rationalist values celebrated by her culture. Her choice of genre is significant for her politically subversive purposes: with its romance setting, "Cave" is sharply distinguished from all of Wollstonecraft's other narratives (early or late), which are written in the realist mode. The text's formal

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[35] Wollstonecraft, "Mary," *WMW* 1 10-12.
[36] See Kelly 48. Kelly discusses Mary's "alienation" that produces "resistance to the hegemonic order."
[37] See above, pp. 31-32.
[38] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 89.

idiosyncrasy allows Wollstonecraft to cloak her scepticism towards rationalism in allegory: the setting of an unknown valley provides an alternative, fantastic social space not to be judged by the rules of real life. Here Sagesta can be taught by the unconventional figure of a spirit, whose lip-service didacticism pre-empts possible criticism of Wollstonecraft's subversive educational strategy from her rational contemporaries. Wollstonecraft's valorisation of the creative child Sagesta extends her disingenuous claim about the unusually independent woman-protagonist of *Mary*: "in a fiction, such a being may be allowed to exist."[39] "Cave" remains a shadow-text to all of the early Wollstonecraft's texts (addressed to both child and adult readers) where the child is straightforwardly subjected to the adult's rational control.

However, Wollstonecraft does not tease out her questioning of adult control in "Cave" to its furthest extent, although Wollstonecraft subjects the mainstream culture of subjugating the child to severe scrutiny. The text ends abruptly with the spirit's tale, indicating that Wollstonecraft had strong doubts in her early career about articulating a discourse celebrating imaginative aspiration, through the representation of the creative child. Hence, she repressed this emergent imaginative discourse, and only articulated it in her later "Romantic" career. This repression probably stalls the narrative of "Cave," because, in 1787, Wollstonecraft was not able to satisfactorily resolve the text in favour of the rationalism favoured by the contemporaries she respected—and hence abandoned the writing of the text.

Thus, this text remains Wollstonecraft's unfinished closet-tale: it overtly supports rationalism, but covertly promotes the transgressive imagination with the active participation of the adult reader, through an embodiment of transformative political possibility in the child Sagesta. The text makes the adult question the use of

[39] Wollstonecraft, "Mary," *WMW* 1 5.

authority over the child, even as it collapses the identities of the child-addressee and the adult reader in the spirit's contradictory tale. Thus in its inconclusive way, "Cave" keeps staging an endless debate between two opposing views of the child—the controlled child and the child defying limits set by the superior, powerful adult.

Letters on the Management of Infants

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, child-care was a major subject of public discussion in the late eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft's "Letters on the Management of Infants" would have been a significant intervention in contemporary debates on the bodily nurture of the child.[40] The text would have been centred on the child, but addressed to the child's adult carers, especially mothers. Sadly, the material offered by the text of "Letters" is meagre: there are two pages, with a table of contents indicating seven projected "Letters" on various aspects of child care, and one short Introductory Letter where Wollstonecraft sets out her intentions in writing the text.[41] Yet, the following discussion will show why the text is a potentially revolutionary work on child care.

In this Introductory Letter Wollstonecraft signals that her textual contribution to child care is a broad cultural enterprise, as she self-reflexively positions herself in the literary marketplace, stating that she has "the public" in her "thoughts."[42] The ostensibly private medium of letters would have, in reality, enabled Wollstonecraft to address the large literate audience of late-eighteenth-century England, and "Letters" would have been a pioneering text in an age when few female authors wrote books on child care.[43] As I have mentioned earlier, in the late eighteenth century most child care books were written by male doctors, who were themselves heavily influenced by

[40] See Kipp 16-23.
[41] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," *WMW* 4 456-59.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

the reformist social visions of Locke and Roussseau.[44] Wollstonecraft draws attention explicitly to these doctors' books in her Letter:

> I know that some able physicians have recommended the method I have pursued, and I mean to point out the good effects I have observed in practice. I am aware that many matrons will exclaim against me, and dwell on the number of children they have brought up, as their mothers did before them, without troubling themselves with new-fangled notions [.][45]

As Wollstonecraft anticipates a storm of female protest at her questioning of traditional child-rearing practices, she aligns herself with the "new-fangled notions" of avant-garde "able physicians." Although she validates her text by appealing to male, medical, theoretical authority, she adopts an independent perspective: the reiterated "I" enforces the "good effects" she has seen in "practice." Further on, her double stress on "reason" or the theory of male doctors, and the "practice" of mothers is extended to the prospective readers of the text, that is, putatively performing mothers of the "rising generation." However, despite her appeal to the vocabulary of certain "reason," Wollstonecraft's voice adopts an open-endedness as she becomes relatively non-prescriptive about child-rearing practices:

> I may be mistaken in some particulars; for general rules, founded on the soundest reason, demand individual modification [.] [46]

Probably then, this modification of general theory by individual practice would have been enacted by Wollstonecraft through her occasional interrogation of the premises of the male doctors' child care books in the text of "Letters."

Wollstonecraft's polemical stance in the Introductory Letter warrants a reconstruction of the material of the letters listed in her table of contents: this is possible by drawing upon other late-eighteenth-century documents on child care. Of

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[44] See above, pp. 16-17.
[45] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," *WMW* 4 459.
[46] Ibid.

the seven letters listed, there are three directly related to the child rather than the pregnant or lactating mother, and I reconstruct these here.[47] Amongst the child care documents, I include Wollstonecraft's numerous pronouncements on child care in her other works, as well as the records of her own practices as a mother in her private correspondence and *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Norway, Sweden and Denmark*. A representative instance of the mainstream paediatric literature, invoked by Wollstonecraft in her Introductory Letter, are the works of her contemporary Dr. William Buchan, widely read in the late eighteenth century.[48] Another relevant source is the child-care book written by Lady Mountcashell, entitled *Advice to Young Mothers* (1823).[49] Mountcashell was a daughter of the aristocratic Kings, the family for whom Wollstonecraft as a governess through 1786-7.[50] Mountcashell remained attached to Wollstonecraft even after her dismissal and imbibed her progressive views: she was also a close friend later of Godwin and the Shelleys.[51] In the Preface to her treatise, Mountcashell, like Wollstonecraft, stakes her claim to knowledge of medical theory, having "read with attention most of the best books" by male doctors on child care. But she also valorises, in terms stronger than Wollstonecraft's, the effectiveness of her practical experiences as a mother, which is "a species of knowledge which professional men can derive only from the information of women."[52] Mountcashell thus stresses the female practice underlying male theory: indeed, her treatise deviates from the male doctors' child care books in some significant respects, which are dealt with below. Between the theoretical approach of Buchan and the practical one of Mountcashell then, there is a spectrum of attitudes

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[47] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," 4 457.
[48] See above, pp. 15-16.
[49] Margaret King Moore (Lady Mountcashell), *Advice to Young Mothers on the Physical Education of Children By a Grandmother* (London, 1823); Lady Mountcashell (1772-1835).
[50] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 95.
[51] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 115-16. See St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 281.
[52] Moore v-vi.

towards child care into which Wollstonecraft's opinions in "Letters" can be suitably fitted.

Wollstonecraft's Introductory Letter states that the faultiness of traditional child-rearing methods lies in their "deviation from simplicity."[53] Here, "simplicity" refers to the adoption of "natural" methods of child-rearing: the doctors' child care books followed the experimentalism of Locke and Roussseau in advocating the child's physical freedom from culturally-imposed restrictions, and an upbringing in tune with "Nature."[54] Young children were to be dressed in light and loose clothing, allowed to go barefoot, and frequently let outdoors to play. Buchan specified that babies were to be kept in well-ventilated rooms, and exposed to fresh air and sun from infancy.[55] Wollstonecraft concurred with the doctors on these counts: her private correspondence shows that she dressed her young daughter Fanny in loose clothes, and exposed her to plenty of fresh air.[56] Conversely, modes of intrusive child care in the Swedish countryside elicited Wollstonecraft's dismay, as she recorded in *Short Residence*: "A mistaken tenderness" made parents smother their children with flannels even in the summer, making them smelly and squalid. Wollstonecraft thought this arose from "the ignorance of the mothers" rather than "the rudeness of the climate."[57] Given her dismissal of the practices of ignorant mothers in the Introductory Letter of "Letters," Wollstonecraft would have advised that children be dressed lightly and loosely in the section on "Clothing" in the intended fourth Letter.[58] Her plea for the child's freedom would have probably been couched in explicitly radical terms: the protagonist of *Maria* fondly remembers her childhood play in the "healthy breeze of a

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[53] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," *WMW* 4 459.
[54] See above, pp. 16-17.
[55] Buchan, *Advice to Mothers* 114.
[56] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 254-62, 279-366.
[57] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 33-34.
[58] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," *WMW* 4 457.

neighbouring heath" as her only time of "freedom" from the "unnatural restraints" imposed by her severe father.[59]

As I have mentioned previously, since the "natural" ideals of Locke and Rousseau aimed to produce hardy and healthy children, their advice could occasionally turn draconian. The male doctors, writing from a more practical perspective than the theorists, advised some lenience.[60] Buchan revised Rousseau's advice to bathe the child in the mythically freezing Styx, and advised instead that the baby be bathed in warm water until the age of five or six months, and then only be habituated to cold baths.[61] Wollstonecraft expresses strong reservations about subjecting the child to harsh discipline at all: as a practising mother she notes that children are "as hard to rear as the most fragile plant."[62] Her awareness of children's vulnerability is echoed and developed by Mountcashell, who advises that the child's clothing, though loose, ought to be "warm or cool according to the season, and particular feelings and constitution of the child."[63] Mountcashell also forbids cold baths for the child before the age of two years.[64] Most likely therefore, Wollstonecraft would have stressed "natural" methods only as long as the child could function independently with a healthy body.

In the intended fourth Letter, Wollstonecraft promises a discussion of "Diet" for the child. Here, she would almost certainly have advised that the infant be breastfed by the mother.[65] By 1797 this would have been standard advice in a child care book. Following Rousseau's advice on child-rearing in *Émile*, child care books strongly insisted that mothers should breastfeed their children, in contrast to the

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[59] Wollstonecraft, "Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman," *WMW* 1 127.
[60] See above, pp. 16-17.
[61] Buchan, *Advice to Mothers* 123-38.
[62] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," *WMW* 4 459.
[63] Moore 95.
[64] Moore 100.
[65] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," *WMW* 4 457.

traditional practice of hiring wet nurses: according to the doctors, breastfeeding constituted a natural, biological bond between the child and the mother.[66] Wollstonecraft consistently supported the practice of maternal breastfeeding herself through her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and in her positive reviews of Hugh Downman's *Infancy, or the Management of Children* (1788), and Benjamin Lara's *An Essay on the injurious Custom of Mothers not suckling their own Children* (1791).[67] In Sweden, Wollstonecraft was unimpressed to see that upper-class women sent their babies to wet-nurses.[68] In *Maria*, the "cherished child" of the protagonist Maria is organically linked to her mother's "bosom bursting" with breast-milk.[69] In Mountcashell's treatise, maternal breastfeeding is a "duty respecting which there can be no difference of conscience, no speculative doubts."[70]

However, the strongly negative charge of Mountcashell's dictum indicates the extent to which breastfeeding became a cultural imperative for women over the turn of the nineteenth century. In the doctors' books, breastfeeding was portrayed as pleasurable to both the baby and the mother: Buchan painted this in the glowing terms of "the sweetest pleasure of which the human heart is susceptible."[71] The mother was expected to sacrifice all her needs to serve those of the baby: the child became an excuse to lock the mother into the household. [72] Wollstonecraft instead, in her experiences of breastfeeding the infant Fanny, had found that it was hardly the wholly pleasant activity that male doctors routinely portrayed.[73] Her reservations are reflected

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[66] Rousseau 11.
[67] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 244; Wollstonecraft, "Thoughts," *WMW* 4 7; Wollstonecraft, *WMW* 7 115, 385.
[68] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 33-34.
[69] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 85.
[70] Moore 27.
[71] Buchan, *Advice to Mothers* 210.
[72] See above, pp. 18-19.
[73] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 273; Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 157.

in *Maria*, where the protagonist wants to breastfeed her baby, but has a "burning" sensation in her milk-inundated bosom.[74] Mountcashell too acknowledges the breastfeeding mother's discomfort as the "fatigue attendant on nursing."[75] For Mountcashell, the child is not a demigod for whose sake the mother must efface her own identity, and confine herself to the household: "It is by no means necessary that a woman who is nursing should lead the life of a recluse."[76] Wollstonecraft would have probably anticipated this statement in "Letters": the child would not have been an excuse to enslave the mother.

At the end of the Introductory Letter, Wollstonecraft makes a statement that appears to sit oddly with her generally egalitarian politics: she states that her "advice will probably be found most useful to mothers in the middle-class, and it is from them that the lower imperceptibly gains improvement."[77] She assumes that "improvement" filters down from the middle towards the lower classes, showing that her theoretical belief in egalitarianism could comfortably coexist with her faith in the superiority of middle-class values. In the previous chapter I have shown that Wollstonecraft's faith in the middle-class had been revised by the mid-1790s. Yet, her middle-class stance in *Letters* can be explained by the fact that she shared the class-perspective of the middle-class doctors. In advocating breastfeeding by the mother, the child care books mainly attacked aristocratic mothers who sent their children out to wet-nurses: Buchan heaped scorn on "the polished, or rather the depraved circles of social life" where, according to him, the "sentiments" of motherhood were "either unfelt, or disregarded." [78] The doctors did not explicitly criticise lower-class mothers for not breastfeeding their own children, since lower-class mothers had to go out and earn

[74] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," 1 85.
[75] Moore 12.
[76] Moore 17.
[77] Wollstonecraft, "Letters," *WMW* 4 459.
[78] Buchan, *Advice to Mothers* 217.

their livings instead of attending to a baby the whole day. But in their middle-class attack on upper-class values, the doctors figured "hirelings" or wet-nurses as fearsome beings who killed babies by malnutrition or neglect. Indeed, given that the doctors were concerned about the high incidence of infant mortality, their views had some justification as even aristocratic babies were sometimes malnourished because the wet-nurse simply had too many babies to feed. Unfortunately, to reinforce their medical messages, the doctors' rhetoric represented the wet-nurses as unwanted class-others, defined in opposition to the loving and dutiful mothers of the bourgeois nuclear family.[79] In *Advice to Mothers*, Buchan announced his pride and relief at living in an emancipated age where the lower-class "mercenary nurse" had lost her power of disrupting the "natural" harmony of the nuclear family.[80] Similarly, in Wollstonecraft's egalitarian *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, handing over a child to a wet-nurse is injurious to the affective bonds within the nuclear family: "a child, though a pledge of affection, will not enliven it, if both father and mother be content to transfer the charge to hirelings."[81]

In Wollstonecraft's later career, her attitudes towards lower-class wet-nurses become more nuanced than those of the doctors. One of Wollstonecraft's major polemical points in *Maria* about the oppression of women is that the middle-class Maria wants to breastfeed her baby daughter, but is prevented from doing so by her tyrannical husband.[82] Correspondingly, Wollstonecraft shows that lower-class children, like the child Jemima and Venables' young illegitimate daughter, suffer malnourishment because their biological mothers have been unable to breastfeed them. Both these children are badly fed by wet-nurses, but Wollstonecraft attributes

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[79] See Kipp 22-23.
[80] Buchan, *Advice to Mothers* 141; see Jacobus 214. Jacobus observes that maternal milk ideologically cemented the nuclear family and gave it its seemingly "natural identity."
[81] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication* 244.
[82] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 85.

this neglect to the socio-economic phenomenon of the nurses' poverty, not—as the doctors' books usually claimed—to their individual hard-heartedness.[83]

Probably then in "Letters," the material subsequent to the Introductory Letter would have foreshadowed Wollstonecraft's discussion of women's political rights in *Maria*, across the class divide, which I examine in the following section. Through her representation of the body of the child in "Letters," Wollstonecraft would have reached out to a community of adult, reading mothers, and articulate discourses of political empowerment for both women and growing children.

The Wrongs of Woman: Or, Maria

According to Wollstonecraft's prefatorial notes arranged by Godwin, *Maria* voices Wollstonecraft's politics of protest against the "misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society." Accordingly, feminist critics have commented on the text as a searing indictment of patriarchal society, focusing upon the violence in the lives of the characters Maria and Jemima.[84] Examinations of Wollstonecraft's feminist agenda, however, are incomplete unless one registers her use of the child as a doubled-edged metaphor in her political critique of a male-dominated society. On one hand, representations of the victimised child shows up forms of gender and class oppression endemic to a patriarchal system, and on the other, the child is represented as a powerful figure, illuminating a way for oppressed adult women to act in a way that leads to "the improvement of the age."[85]

Wollstonecraft's preface indicates that *Maria* is written to depict "the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive," and these "wrongs" are concentrated in the representations of victimised girl-children throughout the text,

[83] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 107, 142.
[84] See especially Tauchert 103-16, Sapiro 42-3, Taylor 233-45.
[85] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 83.The quotes are from the prefatorial notes arranged by Godwin.

strategically placed to elicit the reader's sympathetic response.[86] Wollstonecraft's portrait of Maria's childhood shows that the girl-child is systemically disempowered within the inheritance laws of patriarchy. Maria's eldest brother, the "heir apparent" is unduly privileged by primogeniture: from an early age, he becomes a "despot" over his siblings, especially "his sisters".[87] Well into adulthood, Maria has to depend on the munificence of her uncle to protect the girls she is connected to: she makes him settle a thousand pounds on each of her young sisters after her marriage.[88] His will leaves the major share of his fortune to Maria's baby daughter, to prevent its appropriation by Maria's avaricious husband Venables.[89] Thus *Maria* shows that the status of the girl-child is always dependent on the goodwill of those in power, and confirms Ruth Perry's historical observation that from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, British property laws worked systematically to "concentrate wealth in the male line" in the family, depriving women of financial independence.[90]

In addition to inequitable property-rights, the child Maria suffers a repressive and loveless family atmosphere. Godwin's *Memoirs* reveals that this aspect of Maria's childhood is produced by Wollstonecraft's authorial self-projection:

> When, in the Wrongs of Woman, Mary speaks of 'the petty cares which obscured the morning of her heroine's life; continual restraint in the most trivial matters; unconditional submission to orders, which, as a mere child, she soon discovered to be unreasonable, because inconsistent and contradictory; and the being often obliged to sit, in the presence of her parents, for three or four hours together, without daring to utter a word'; she is, I believe, to be considered as copying the outline of the first period of her own existence.[91]

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[86] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 84.
[87] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 124.
[88] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 137.
[89] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 166.
[90] Ruth Perry, "Women in families: the great disinheritance," *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800,* ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 111-31.
[91] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 88-89.

Through the child Maria's discerning voice, Wollstonecraft rejects parenting methods based on the draconian and arbitrary exercise of adult authority. Coercive "continual restraint" imprisons the child within the illogical limits imposed by adults, needlessly embittering the "morning" of the individual's life.[92]

The representation of the child Maria is, however, the least upsetting of Wollstonecraft's tableaux of children as victims. That of Maria's rakish husband Venables' illegitimate daughter crystallises the evils of sexual double standards in a male-dominated society. Venables' utter disregard for his child repels Maria, and she concludes that "the heart of a libertine is dead to natural affection" and "regardless of the innocent fruit" of his actions. However, the sight of this daughter shocks Maria out of her sentimental vision of the "innocent" child: she is a "squalid object," and[93]

> She could hardly support herself, her complexion was sallow, and her eyes inflamed, with an indescribable look of cunning, mixed with the wrinkles produced by the peevishness of pain.

This sickly young child, a standing testimony to early physical neglect by an impoverished wet-nurse, embodies Venables' abdication of his fatherly responsibility.[94]

Maria's own baby daughter receives the same despicable treatment at her father Venables' hands. Venables abducts her when Maria attempts to escape with her to Italy.[95] When Maria sees the "house in the suburbs" where Venables sent their baby, "her heart grew sick" as she imagines the physical neglect borne by her daughter.[96] Maria's fears probably prove true in the shape of the "little creature, that, with tottering footsteps, approached the bed" in the part of the text that probably

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[92] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 124-25.
[93] See above, pp. 2-4.
[94] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 141-42.
[95] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 169.
[96] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 175.

concludes the novel. The recovery of her daughter leads Maria to a melodramatic declaration: "The conflict is over! I will live for my child!"[97] But one knows nothing of the child's early experiences in life: it is left to the reader to guess whether the child totters because she is "little," or because she has been physically abused. Rather ominously, the narrator states that Maria placed the child "gently on the bed, as if afraid of killing it."[98] Perhaps the child has already been too damaged, by this point, to be resurrected by Maria's maternal care.

Wollstonecraft's strongest indictment of an unjust society is reserved for the representation of Jemima, whose autobiographical narrative largely comprises reminiscences of her childhood years. Poverty and orphanhood make the child Jemima an outcast, "an egg dropped on the sand; a pauper by nature, hunted from family to family, who belonged to nobody—and nobody cared for me." Jemima attributes her ontological status as an outsider child largely to her illegitimate "birth," and it is never self-evident to her that an accidental fact of birth should cut her off from the human species: "ever called a bastard, a bastard appeared to me an object of the greatest compassion in creation".[99] Being a bastard, she inherently upsets the mores of traditional English society. As Josephine McDonagh observes, the bastard was a particularly incendiary figure in the 1790s to political conservatives like Burke, who were horrified by Revolutionary marriage laws that gave equal rights of inheritance to legitimate and illegitimate children.[100] The Jacobin radical Wollstonecraft, instead, treats a figure that stood for revolutionary disorder sympathetically, using Jemima's pained understanding of the "natural" child's destiny to attack the culturally constructed categories of legitimacy or illegitimacy.

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[97] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 184.
[98] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 183.
[99] Wollstonecraft, "Maria,"*WMW* 1 110.
[100] Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder and British Culture 1720-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 80-88.

Jemima's childhood oppression exacts its toll in her adulthood as she wages a Hobbesian struggle for survival with other women. A maidservant freezes to death as a result of Jemima's machinations, but the latter only "thought of her own" impoverished state, and justifies herself by claiming that she has simply repeated the oppression that was practised upon herself throughout her childhood.[101] The logic of her rhetorical questions to Maria and her lover Darnford is irrefutable:

> what should induce me to be the champion for suffering humanity?—Who ever risked any thing for me?—Who ever acknowledged me to be a fellow-creature?[102]

Jemima was too damaged in childhood readily to feel the empathetic Wordsworthian "still, sad music of humanity" in adulthood.[103] She is an alienated outsider, an abandoned child too traumatised to be ever successfully reintegrated into society. Wollstonecraft's representation of Jemima brings out the permanent violence wreaked on the orphaned and poor girl-child.

By provoking sympathy through the figure of the victimised child, Wollstonecraft instigates the reader's outrage at the patriarchal society that allows the existence of such injustice. But she also represents the healing of this society through representations of active, powerful children. Amongst these figures are the transgressor children who challenge the unjust constitution of society: they are, as Wollstonecraft puts it in the Preface, the "few who will dare to advance before the improvement of the age".[104] The poverty-stricken child Jemima is a transgressor who "continued to exist" despite adult "neglect": she survives her tribulations by an almost

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[101] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 117.
[102] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 119.
[103] William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, eds. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) 118.
[104] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 83.

unearthly vitality that resists and transcends class and gender oppression.[105] This transgressive energy has redeeming potential: when Jemima used to be sent outdoors on errands, she often "followed a ballad-singer, to hear the sequel of a dismal story, though sure of being severely punished for delaying to return." The child Jemima's wanderings beyond the limits of adult authority persists into her adulthood as a taste for the "polish of civilization," that is, the refinements of art and culture. As a kept mistress, Jemima passes her time in reading, "to gratify an inquisitive, active mind" and in literary debates--intellectual activities that Wollstonecraft prized as markers of an advanced state of civilisation.[106] Through the portrait of the wandering child Jemima, Wollstonecraft politically rejects the benevolent philanthropy of late-eighteenth-century middle-class evangelicals like Sarah Trimmer, whom she had supported in her early career.[107] As Hugh Cunningham has observed, the evangelicals' philanthropy was a means of exercising adult, middle-class authority over the children of the poor by regulating them into habits of work or education.[108] Wollstonecraft demonstrates instead that the child Jemima's wandering habits are an expression of creative play: the child's transgression of the limits of adult authority leads to personal and social progress.

Wollstonecraft prizes the lower-class child Jemima's transgressive quality, however, only as long as it implies political resistance: the quality lasts into Jemima's adulthood as a quality of "independence" that Wollstonecraft qualifies as "selfish."[109] Wollstonecraft does not presume, or invite the reader, to judge Jemima's "selfish independence": the quality eventually lets her help the middle-class Maria escape her

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[105] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 107-8.
[106] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 113; see Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 70.
[107] Franklin 39.
[108] Cunningham 47.
[109] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 91.

confinement in the asylum.[110] Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft is extremely wary of this transgressive quality's potential for runaway individualism: Jemima's "selfish independence" is closely echoed by Darnford's vocabulary as he describes the cultural child of the newly constituted American republic, whose adult citizens are characterised by a "resolution that led them, in pursuit of independence." This spirit of independence from English structures of authority, however, gradually loses its political valency: Darnford says that the country is corrupted into obsessive "commercial speculations" and a strongly capitalist "national character," which exhibits "a head enthusiastically enterprising, with cold selfishness of heart."[111] Darnford's changed opinion of America has parallels with Wollstonecraft's own perceptions of the country: like most 1790s Jacobin radicals, she had initially welcomed the birth of America in 1776 as a land of freedom and equality, but lost enthusiasm as she grew estranged from her American businessman lover Imlay, and correspondingly, grew increasingly critical of middle-class commercialism. Through the implicit trope of the cultural child which collapses adult and child identities, Wollstonecraft shows that transgressiveness for its own sake leads to the unregulated individualism of a divisive and fragmented society, divested of sociability, with its members merely "seated" on their "bags of dollars."[112] The representation of the transgressive child allows Wollstonecraft to rework old themes, while the transgressive quality of Jemima's childhood is shown not a sentimental ideal to be striven for, but simply a need-based means of resisting oppression.

Maria, as a child, is another transgressor who moves "before the improvement of the age."[113] Within the limits of her childhood home, her father enforces "passive

[110] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 174-75.
[111] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 101.
[112] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 102.
[113] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 83.

obedience" upon the family. But this repressive atmosphere cannot contain the young Maria's energy as she bounds amidst flowers and meadows in spells of Rousseauian play amidst Nature, revelling in moments of "open air and freedom."[114] Besides, Maria was fortunate enough to have a caring adult figure who schooled her into thinking and acting as a free agent. This surrogate parent was her uncle, who "inculcated" in her

> self-respect, and a lofty consciousness of acting right, independent of the censure or applause of the world; nay, he almost taught me to brave, and even despise its censure, when convinced of the rectitude of my own intentions.[115]

The child Maria's resistant consciousness persists into adulthood as a refusal to accept blindly her husband's tyrannical dictates: indeed, Venables characterises her resistance as "*childish* resentment" (my emphasis).[116]

In adulthood, Maria experiences her unhappy marriage as a sensation of being "bastilled," and her physical confinement in the madhouse cell can be read as a metaphor for her imprisonment in patriarchal power structures.[117] In turn, she projects her transgressive aspiration for freedom onto memories of her own child:

> Her infant's image was continually floating on Maria's sight, and the first smile of intelligence remembered, as none but a mother, an unhappy mother, can conceive. She heard her half speaking half cooing, and felt the little twinkling fingers on her burning bosom—a bosom bursting with the nutriment for which this cherished child might now be pining in vain.[118]

Maria's baby thus becomes the metaphor for freedom through which she is capable of transcending the physical limits of the madhouse. Her bursting breast-milk forms a natural, biological link with her baby: her memories of her baby's smiles and coos

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[114] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 124.
[115] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 126.
[116] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 162.
[117] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 86,146.
[118] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 85-86.

defy the limits of their physical separation, culturally created by Venables' patriarchal oppression. The child validates Maria's attempt to escape from the madhouse in order "to fly to the succour of her child, and to baffle the selfish schemes of her tyrant—her husband."[119]

The child thus certifies Maria's continued transgression against patriarchal confinement; in her memoirs, Maria paints the regenerative potential signified by her child in terms of the forces of Nature that transgress the bounds set by patriarchal culture. When "spring was melting into summer," Maria watched her baby's aspiring, "wakening mind" with pleasure. The baby was Maria's "tender blossom" and rejuvenated her mother, offering her relief from the incessant mental torture caused by her husband. While the baby grew, Maria "dreamt not of the frost--"the killing frost,"" to which her daughter was "destined to be exposed."[120] Here, the Shakespearean allusion of "killing frost," from *Henry VIII*, points to the constraints of the old patriarchal regime, which the child must inevitably encounter, and hopefully transgress with her budding, new, natural vibrancy.[121] In these images, as Claudia Johnson observes, Wollstonecraft's politicisation of Nature evokes the vocabulary of 1790s British radicals, like Paine's poem "Liberty Tree." Johnson notes that Wollstonecraft "feminizes the imagery of natural blossoming" with which "Paine used to characterize revolution as a natural and life-affirming process": the wintry, oppressive regime would give way to the "warmth and vitality" of the new,

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[119] Ibid.
[120] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 167.
[121] Cf. William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII* III ii. 352-55: "This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hopes; to-morrow blossoms
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost."

emancipated world-order.[122] Through her natural imagery, Wollstonecraft turns the organically developing child into a potent and powerful sign of revolutionary change.

The revolutionary politics associated with this biological child is enacted through the formal strategy of Maria's address to her daughter. Repudiating the strong parental control that she faced in her own childhood, Maria writes her memoirs to her daughter as an alternative narrative to those constructed by patriarchy. She does not wish to "influence" her daughter: her memoirs do not authoritatively dictate to her daughter how she must act. Rather, Maria hopes to "exercise" her daughter's autonomous "mind" through "counsel": her memoirs open up an ongoing, organic conversation with her child.[123] Maria offers her daughter the choice to act upon her mother's narrative, and to figure out her own solutions to the injustices of patriarchy, the "aggravated ills of life that her sex rendered almost inevitable."[124]

However, through the warning glimpse of Maria's daughter's "tottering steps" at the end of the novel, Wollstonecraft signals to the reader that the revolutionary power of this organically developing child does not inhere in her body. In fact, Maria's child is represented as an elusive absence through most of the novel, except for a guest appearance at the very end.[125] But throughout the narrative, she is a symbolic presence who triggers storytelling exchanges between Jemima and Maria. When Jemima witnesses Maria's grief at the loss of her baby in the asylum, her curiosity and sympathy are awakened, and she determines to "alleviate all in her power." Consequently, she procures for Maria the writing-materials to record her story.[126] Jemima reads the memoirs, & in turn tells Maria her own history: thus, the two women perceive the common social, patriarchal root of their apparently dissimilar

[122] Claudia Johnson, "Mary Wollstonecraft's Novels," *Cambridge Companion* 189-208.
[123] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 123.
[124] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 85.
[125] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 183-84.
[126] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 88-89.

personal problems. Jemima's narration makes Maria realise that despite her baby's higher class position, in the absence of maternal nurture, her daughter may well be subjected to Jemima's sufferings in a male-dominated society: "Thinking of Jemima's peculiar fate and her own, she was led to consider the oppressed state of woman, and to lament that she had given birth to a daughter." Therefore, Maria draws Jemima into a female subculture of co-operation to retrieve and protect her daughter, so that she gets "a mother's tenderness, a mother's care." She promises Jemima that she shall be the child's "second mother."[127] Thus, the child's power lies in her ability to dissolve class barriers amongst Maria and Jemima, and unite them in a plan for collaborative political action.

Throughout the narrative of *Maria*, women mercilessly compete with each other for the meagre benefits they get from a male-dominated system: Jemima's cunning, cruel stepmother and Maria's ungrateful landlady are only two of the innumerable women who survive by clinging on to the goodwill of their erratic husbands, and therefore keep patriarchal power structures steadfast.[128] By articulating her universalistic social vision through the cementing potential of Maria's child, Wollstonecraft asks disempowered women (inside and outside the text) to become politically conscious, move beyond the peripheries of their immediate self-interest through radical sociability, and join hands in feminist solidarity like Maria and Jemima. While Maria's memoirs are ostensibly addressed to her daughter, they also address the reader at large.[129] Virginia Sapiro rightly argues that in *Maria*, Wollstonecraft, like her protagonist in her memoirs, does not play the role of "authoritative reasoner" but asks her female readers to share their mutual histories, so

[127] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," *WMW* 1 120.
[128] Wollstonecraft, "Maria," WMW 1 108-9, 156-64.
[129] See Kelly 213. According to Kelly, Maria's narrative to her daughter belongs to the 1790s genre of Jacobin memoirs, where "personal apology" serves as "social protest."

that can find social solutions to their seemingly individual problems.[130] Maria's child facilitates the beginning of that political process of storytelling and action.

Lessons for Children

"Lessons" is thematically linked to *Maria* by virtue of being a mother's address to her daughter, a link confirmed by Godwin who placed "Lessons" at the end of *Maria.* He marked a resemblance between "the affectionate and pathetic manner in which Maria Venables addresses her infant, in the Wrongs of Woman" and the "sentiment with which the author originally bequeathed these papers, as a legacy for the benefit of her child."[131] Although directly intended for Wollstonecraft's daughter, "Lessons" is a text where Wollstonecraft returns, after an interim of seven years, to address the child reader with radical messages.[132] The text was meant as a primer, and intended to teach Wollstonecraft's two-year old daughter Fanny how to read.[133]

Godwin hails "Lessons" as a wholly original work, where "the author has struck out a path of her own, and by no means intrenched upon the plans of her predecessors."[134] Critical response to the work has been varied: Alan Richardson selects particular instances from the text to show how Wollstonecraft consciously encourages the child addressee to act as an autonomous agent: he therefore celebrates "Lessons" as a welcome departure from the didacticism of late-eighteenth-century children's literature.[135] Gary Kelly is less enthusiastic about the text's originality: he notes its heavy stylistic debt to the series of *Lessons for Children* (1778-88) by Anna Barbauld.[136] Indeed, the plan of Wollstonecraft's "Lessons" is not particularly original in the context of late-eighteenth-century children's books: the content is graded from

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[130] Sapiro 43.
[131] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons for Children," *WMW* 4 467.
[132] *Elements of Morality* and *Young Grandison* were published in 1790.
[133] Alan Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft," *Cambridge Companion* 38.
[134] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 467.
[135] Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft," *Cambridge Companion* 38.
[136] Kelly 202.

nouns and verbs to simple to complex sentences, and proceeds to abstract concepts like "thinking."[137] Thus the text caters to the cognitive needs of young readers, in tune with the practice of late-eighteenth-century children's books.[138]

These critical readings of "Lessons" at the level of content, however, do not yield insight into the political innovativeness of the text at the level of form: an analysis of the structure of the text demonstrates that the "narrative" of this primer formally enacts the progressive liberation of the child reader. Godwin was right to place the text after *Maria*: "Lessons" builds on the formal strategy of Maria's memoirs by having the child break out of discourses of confinement. The text opens up a conversation with the child reader.[139]

"Lessons" begins with the authoritative adult, that is, the mother, dictating single words to the child to be memorised. Then, the adult delivers the child a set of simple commands like "Look at the fly" or "Shut the door." With the child's growing mental powers, the adult initiates dialogue with the child: "What do you want to say to me?" Then, the child is asked for advice on what to feed "William," the baby Wollstonecraft thought she was carrying when she wrote the text.[140] In these instances, the text moves from the beginning statements into an increasing number of questions, marking the adult's swerve into a relatively non-prescriptive vocabulary with the child.

Meanwhile, the child addressee is asked to glory in her vital and organic growth: she is led into the Rousseauian pleasures of a "walk in the fields."[141] She is contrasted with her weak and helpless baby brother William: in four years the child

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[137] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 468-74.
[138] See above, pp. 11-12.
[139] See above, pp. 130-31.
[140] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 468-69; Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 416. Baby "William," fathered by Godwin, would eventually turn out to be Mary Shelley.
[141] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 469. See Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," *Cambridge Companion* 38.

has learnt to perform actions like eating, walking and talking. Most importantly, she has acquired, as Kelly notes, the abstract capability of "thinking."[142] The child is shown that growth is a natural and simple process of human development: the four-year old knows much, but her mother says:

> you do not know as much as the boys and girls you see playing yonder, who are half again as tall as you; and they do not know half as much as their fathers and mothers, who are men and women grown. Papa and I were children, like you; and men, and women took care of us [.][143]

In view of the child's association with organic growth, the mother's reiterated "do not know" theoretically opens up exciting realms of epistemological possibility for the child. The neighbouring "boys and girls," and their "fathers and mothers" situate the growing child in a network of social bonds, that is, within the expansive context of sociability where people take "care" of each other. The mother and "Papa" were once children, like the child-addressee: the adult and the child are simply on either end of the human spectrum rather than superior and inferior beings. But on a realistic level, since the adult has to take "care" of the child, and because the child still has much to know, her mother continues to deliver negative injunctions that aid the process of basic socialisation: the child is told not to eat unripe fruit or handle large knives.[144]

These injunctions, however, are grounded in reasonable explanations: the child is asked not to put pins in her mouth because she "cannot think what pain a pin would give you in your throat, should it remain there."[145] For these explanations to the child Wollstonecraft is probably indebted to the liberal influence and literary strategies of Richard and Maria Edgeworth: Wollstonecraft had reviewed their educational book *The Parents' Assistant* (1796) for Joseph Johnson's *Analytical*

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[142] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 471, 474; Kelly 202.
[143] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 471-72.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.

Review positively, quoting long extracts from the text to spread their messages to a wide reading public.[146] Hence in *Lessons*, the adult regulates the child, but does not exercise power arbitrarily: she takes the child's potential questions into account as the latter learns about the world. As the mother says to the child, the gardener knows when to put seed in the ground, but

> You cannot tell whether it should be in the winter or summer. Try to find it out. When do the trees put out their leaves? In the spring, you say, after the cold weather. Fruit would not grow ripe without very warm weather. Now I am sure you can guess why the summer is the season for fruit.[147]

In this introduction to elementary science lessons, Wollstonecraft does not play the part of authoritative teacher: the child is asked to "guess" the answer and not listen passively. The formal strategy of this science lesson mimics the liberal educative methods derived from the philosophical tradition of sceptical enquiry, valorised by Rational Dissenters and 1790s radicals like Godwin.[148] Translated into political terms, "enquiry" encourages the child to think independently of the adult, and become an autonomous agent.

Concurrently, the child is asked to recognise the autonomy of other beings. She is asked to extend empathy to animals, as her mother suggests that she save bread crumbs for birds when they cannot find food in the winter snow, because, as the mother explains to the child, in "the summer they find seed enough, and do not want you to think about them."[149] Thus, the birds have their share of intelligence too, and the child's kindness towards them, unlike that preached in mainstream late-eighteenth-century children's literature, is not rooted in condescending benevolence from superior humans to inferior animal species. Rather, this is universalism in

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[146] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 7 477.
[147] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 473.
[148] See above, pp. 70-71.
[149] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 473.

practice, where humans and non-humans are not strictly separated by boundaries and hierarchies, but instead share common characteristics.[150]

Towards the end of the text Wollstonecraft's stress on the child's independent thinking makes her question rationalist definitions of reality. Before going outdoors to play, the child tip-toes back to her mother, and her movements are described as follows:

> You were going out; but thinking again, you came back to me on your tip-toes. Whisper—whisper. Pray mama, call me, when papa wakes; for I shall be afraid to open the door to see, lest I should disturb him.
> Away you went.—Creep—Creep—and shut the door as softly as I could have done myself.[151]

The child slips beyond the textual boundaries of the page in the stealthy, repeated verbs of "Whisper" and "Creep" with their assonantal rhythms, and in the sibilance of "shut" and "softly." Moreover, the repeated verbs "Whisper—whisper" and "Creep—Creep" have an incantatory air that sits at odds with the generally realist mode of description in Wollstonecraft's text, representing the physical child as a disembodied sprite who slips away through a portal. I suggest that as Wollstonecraft's realistic register morphs into the language of the fantastic and supernatural, the rationalist mode of education in her primer begins to strain against genre boundaries, moving into the realm of the fairy tale. Wollstonecraft's switch in discourse is significant in the context of the cultural disputes surrounding children's reading in the late eighteenth century. As I have discussed earlier, rationalist educators (including Wollstonecraft in her early career) habitually discouraged children from reading fairy tales because they believed that these tales could lead children astray. In conscious opposition to the rationalist educators, the Romantic poets advocated that children

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[150] See above, pp. 99-100.
[151] Wollstonecraft, "Lessons," *WMW* 4 474.

read fairy tales for their imaginative and transformative possibilities: as Coleridge put it, he knew "all that has been said against" tales like "Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii," but he knew of "no other way" of giving children's minds "a love of "the Great," & "the Whole.""[152] Wollstonecraft's adoption of fantastic language at the end of "Lessons" anticipates Coleridge's pedagogy of imaginative liberation of the child.[153] In her text, the child addressee acts as an autonomous being, shutting the door "softly" and sensibly, skips out of adult guidance within the enclosed house, and emerges into open, free space—in order to *play.* Metaphorically, this child captures Wollstonecraft's willingness to play with the limits of rationalist reality, as she moves into a space of boundless imaginative and political freedom. By implication, Wollstonecraft invites her child reader to slip beyond the adult authority of the text.

In her posthumously-published texts, Wollstonecraft represents the child in a wide variety of forms, in radical countercultural contexts ranging from feminist politics, the education of the young child, to the artist's disruptive creative imagination. Through her persistent self-representation as a child, especially as a metaphor for imaginative subversion in "Cave" and *Maria*, Wollstonecraft works through her adult issues. In these instances she collapses her adult identity with her childhood.

Of the four texts examined above, "Cave" and *Maria* are fictional. The late Wollstonecraft jettisons her earlier rationalist, argumentative, direct addresses to the reader, and takes to relatively indirect, suggestive modes of address. She shows rather

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[152] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E.L. Griggs, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) 6 vols. 354.

[153] Beyond Wollstonecraft's hints in her reviews, examined in Chapter 1, I have not found any evidence to infer that Wollstonecraft explicitly encouraged the child reader to read tales of fantasy.

than tells, and avoids dictating final conclusions. The texts of "Letters" and "Lessons" are relatively discursive. But "Letters" is indirectly addressed to readers, while even "Lessons," a primarily educational text, banks its appeal on narrative elements and on the emotional bond between the adult speaker and the child-addressee. The child's education here operates on a much more liberal premise than in Wollstonecraft's early career (although she secretly interrogates her culture's rationalist modes of education in the early text of "Cave"). In these late representations of the child, Wollstonecraft gives up her own voice of adult authority, and invests her child or adult readers with authority instead.

Chapter 3. From Imbecile Spring to the Young Mountain Roe: the Child as Godwin's Challenge to Authority

In this chapter, and the next, I examine representations of the child in the writings of William Godwin, from the 1780s to the early 1800s, as they emerge as a metaphor within his radical literary and political discourses. Like Wollstonecraft's, Godwin's early work was initially aligned with that of his contemporaries in terms of childhood representation, but he departed from these representations in the later 1790s, as he struck out his own path.

Like Chapters 1 and 2 on Wollstonecraft, Chapters 3 and 4 develop a chronological narrative of Godwin's representations of the child. The present chapter explores Godwin's representations of childhood in his liberal pedagogy in the 1780s, his politically radical tracts in the 1790s, and his contemporaneous novels for adults until the turn of the nineteenth century. Like Wollstonecraft, the changing representations of the child in these texts reflect Godwin's early rationalism, as he follows the adult-child social divide in his contemporary culture, and his gradual collapsing of this divide as he switches to relatively open-ended forms of discourse and works his radical politics into his representations of childhood.

All the texts explored in the present chapter are addressed to adults. In the early 1800s, Godwin wrote a series of children's books. Chapter 4 explores Godwin's extension of his radical discourses, as he addresses child readers through these texts, and how these addresses to child readers correspond or differ from Godwin's addresses to adult readers. However, although these groupings are made for the sake of a linear coherence, they are not watertight categories. Like Wollstonecraft, certain consistent themes recur in the body of Godwin's work: hence I occasionally interpret childhood representations from Godwin's later works through his political and literary

philosophy, in texts written in an earlier period. The first section of this chapter covers Godwin's writings from the 1780s to the early 1790s, and the second includes his works from the mid-1790s to 1800.

Early Writings

During the 1780s, Godwin represents the child as a metaphor for the weaker party in social relationships of power, set in opposition to the powerful adult. The child, being weak, becomes an object of education and socialisation by adults. Through such polarised representations, Godwin enacts the culturally dominant adult-child divide. Yet, despite his abstract theory, owing to his personal experiences in his own childhood Godwin is also aware of the child's status as a socially disempowered group, in political terms,. Thus, even at this early stage of his career, Godwin is troubled by the misuse of adult authority, and his language shows his growing awareness of the problems in contemporary representations of the child. Having perceived ethical problems in the treatment of the disempowered child in eighteenth-century mainstream culture, as Godwin acquired power with adulthood, he uses his adult voice to initiate change in the treatment of the child. In this period, the texts by Godwin that feature significant representations of childhood include, chiefly, *An Account of the Seminary* (1783) and *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Comparisons, where relevant, are made with Godwin's "Autobiography 1756-72" (1772-9), and his miscellaneous political writings in the early 1790s.

Sources of Influence

The sources of influence for Godwin's early writings, and representations of childhood, are much the same as Wollstonecraft's, within the cultural milieu of the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The influence of Locke and Rousseau's writings was culturally paramount in the late eighteenth century, and like his

contemporaries, Godwin was profoundly affected by their writings. This influence overlaps with the intellectual traditions of the Rational Dissenters in which Godwin was even more deeply immersed than Wollstonecraft. Godwin was educated in the Dissenting Academy of Hoxton, from his teenage years until he was twenty-two. He had a good training in languages at Hoxton, which formed a solid base for his career as a writer in later life. Godwin was thoroughly moored in Dissenting thought in his early years: he even worked as a Dissenting minister towards the beginning of his career, from 1779 to 1782. Gradually, however, Godwin began to part ways with the Dissenters in terms of religious doctrine. In 1782 he resigned from his ministry, formally shed his Dissenting religion, and started a literary career in London in 1783.[1] A further influence upon Godwin's early writing career is the publisher Joseph Johnson's circle. Like Wollstonecraft, Godwin was published by Joseph Johnson in his early career, and belonged to the same circle of Dissenting intellectuals and Jacobin radicals. Although Godwin distanced himself from Dissenting religion, intellectually he continued to be shaped by their thought.[2]

Moreover, like Wollstonecraft, Godwin's heavy debt to his contemporary influences can be understood through his position as a hack-writer in his very early career. He wrote miscellaneous pieces in order to earn his bread, such as his literary reviews for *English Review*, and political pieces for the *New Annual Register*, and *Political Herald*, published between 1783-85.[3] Such journalistic writings were ephemeral in nature, but they gave Godwin a good understanding of the contemporary literary and political landscape. This knowledge was immensely useful

[1] See St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 8-16.
[2] See Braithwaite 3-29; Gary Handwerk, "Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education," *Studies in Romanticism* 41 (2002): 375-98.
[3] St Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 23-33.

for *Account of the Seminary* and especially *Political Justice*, where Godwin came into his own as a writer, and represented the child as a metaphor for his political theory.

Account: the Enlightened Adult's Kindness to the Child

Account of the Seminary (1783) is a prospectus of a school that Godwin proposed to set up at Epsom, Surrey. The plan never reached fruition; but the text nevertheless yields insight into Godwin's representation of the child over this period.[4] Godwin's educational ideas in this text are entrenched in those of Locke and Rousseau, as well as in the general iconoclasm of Rational Dissent. Compared to the educational texts of many of Godwin's late-eighteenth century contemporaries, unusually, he does not discuss the religious education of children, probably owing to his parting from Dissenting religious doctrine when he wrote the text.[5]

Godwin's early representations of the child, in *Account*, have to be appreciated in terms of his own childhood. He grew up in a strictly Calvinist household himself, and experienced a childhood steeped in the religious doctrine of original sin, with accompanying feelings of guilt.[6] He grew up in an age before the rise of mass-produced children's literature, in a time when most children had only religious books to read, like the Bible, or James Janeway's *A Token for Children.* Godwin spent his elementary school years in Samuel Newton's school, where physical punishment was a frequent and accepted method of disciplining the children. In Godwin's subsequent schooling years in the Dissenting Academy at Hoxton, he experienced a far more liberal educational atmosphere.[7] Thus, in *Account*, Godwin sheds the religious elements of Dissent, but retains the liberal elements of Dissenting pedagogy.

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[4] Godwin, "Introductory Note," "An Account of the Seminary," *PPWG* 5 5.
[5] See St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 17.
[6] See Godwin, "Autobiography," *CWG* 1 3-38.
[7] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 4-8.

In *Account*, Godwin's liberal pedagogy is based upon the proviso that the adult teacher or parent chooses not to exercise undue power arbitrarily over the weak child. Accordingly, into the uniform "government of youth," the adult should not exercise the unpredictable elements of "passion and caprice." The adult should not exercise power like a despot, just because he or she happens to possess power. Godwin compares the ideal adult educator with "republican government," stating that the exercise of power by such an educator "should be for ever unchangeable and independent of the character of him that administers it."[8] As Godwin sees the adult-child relationship in political terms, like the Dissenters he is wary of unlimited power vested in a single, possibly volatile person, as in a monarchy, and instead supports stable democratic governance by the ruling authority.

Specifically, Godwin represents the mutual relationship between parents and children in Lockean political terms, as a contract between "government" and the "governed" respectively. Here, the child stands as Godwin's metaphor for the latter, weaker party: "the inequality of parents and children is the law of our nature, eternal."[9] The superiority of the adult and the inferiority of the child is thus a self-evident "law" of "nature," universal and essential.

In his insistence on this adult-child hierarchy, Godwin seems unaware of the contradiction in his text, even as he puts forth arguments concerning the equality of all human beings, derived from discourses of liberal humanism amongst the Dissenters in the late-eighteenth century bourgeois cultural revolution in England.[10] Essentially, Godwin's arguments on education in *Account* are framed within Locke's liberal and progressive discourse of natural rights for all human beings.[11] Thus,

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[8] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 13-14.
[9] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 5.
[10] See above, pp. 73-75.
[11] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), ed. & introd. Peter Laslett (Cambridge:Cambridge

Godwin's premise for the general mass of humanity is egalitarian: "the power of one man over another must be always derived from convention, or from conquest; by nature we are equal."[12] All exercise of power is therefore, a cultural matter of "convention" or "conquest," not natural or self-evident. In Godwin's terms, although human adults are equal, the discourse of equal humanity does not extend to children. So, even as Godwin pleads for the limiting of adult authority in *Account*, his conviction in the adult-child hierarchy dictates his representation of the child as an inferior political being.

Godwin sees the child's mind here in terms of Locke's concept of the *tabula rasa*, the blank slate to be written over by experience. This creates a deep ambivalence in his representation of the child. From his own perspective as an adult, he sees the child's weakness in the social power equation as a cause for adult optimism, even as he represents the child as a powerful, regenerative force:

> Children indeed are weak and imbecile; but it is the imbecility of spring, and not that of autumn; the imbecility that verges towards power, and not that is already exhausted with performance. To behold heroism in its infancy, and immortality in the bud, must be a most attractive object. To mould those pliant dispositions, upon which the happiness of multitudes may one day depend, must be infinitely important.[13]

Children, with their "weak" and "imbecile" identities can attain "power" themselves only as they grow into adulthood. As Godwin represents the child in natural images of blooming "spring" and "in the bud," his metaphors of becoming are deliberately contrasted with the already formed, aging adult, whose life approaches the fag end of "autumn," satiated and "exhausted with performance." Godwin's spent adult does not earn accolades like John Keats's maturing fruits and mellowing sun in the ode "To

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UP, 1970) 335; Locke, *Some Thoughts* 112-14.
[12] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 5.
[13] Godwin, "Account," *PPGW* 5 5.

Autumn."[14] Instead, Godwin's admiration is reserved for the child bearing future promise. Like Rousseau in *Émile*, Godwin looks on overawed at the child's grand powers in a pool of endless possibility: the child displays "*heroism* in its infancy, and *immortality* in the bud (my emphases)." Yet, the child's powers in "infancy" and "in the bud" only exist in a potential state: actual power rests with the adult.

Conscious of the child's incipient powers at the presently powerful adult's disposal, Godwin legitimises the adult's control over children's "pliant dispositions," by stating that this is for a good purpose: the adult harnesses the child's powers to construct a better society in the future, for the "happiness of multitudes." Through the adult's education of the child, therefore, the adult makes the child internalise adult authority so that he or she will continue to function henceforth like clockwork, reproducing what the adult has deemed good and useful.[15] In advising this Godwin regurgitates standard views on the child's education.

This is enacted on a practical level, for instance, as Godwin shows the adult's harnessing of the child's powers, for human progress, in the teaching of the eighteenth-century value of "benevolence" to the child, popular from the vocabulary of Adam Smith in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Accordingly, "benevolent affections" "have the larger scope in youthful minds, as such as have not yet learned those refinements of interest, that are incident to persons of longer experience."[16] Through the teaching of benevolence, the *tabula rasa* of the child's mind, uninitiated into the ideology of self-interest, becomes a platform for the enactment of sociability, the eighteenth-century model of social relations, prevalent, amongst Godwin's contemporary cultural milieu of 1780s and 90s Dissenting circles, which encouraged co-operation, rather than conflict, in dealing with one's fellow-beings.

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[14] John Keats, *John Keats*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 324-25.
[15] See above, pp. 51-56.
[16] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 20.

Through such liberal discourses, Godwin establishes that the adult's domination over the child is a justified exercise of power. However, in the actual process of educating the child into good causes, Godwin advises the adult to be sympathetic to the child's needs in educational methods, even as he advertises the merits of catching them young:

> It is certain this pliability and facility are very liable to abuse. It is not easy to believe, that they were given to learn words without meaning; terms of art, not understood by the pupil; the systems of theologians, and the jargon of metaphysics.[17]

Given Godwin's concern here with ensuring limits to "abuse," that is, the adult's arbitrary use of power over the child. In a Lockean spirit, Godwin advises that children should know the meanings of the words they learn and use. Children should not simply parrot abstract "terms of art," "the systems of theologians, and the jargon of metaphysics," that adults teach. Godwin preaches that the adult should educate the child, with a recognition of the latter's specific needs: with younger children, who might not understand abstract thought, he is probably being realistic. But simultaneously, his plan condescendingly aims to withhold any kind of abstract thought from the "pupil" or older child. In Godwin's insistence that children learn "words" with their precise, pre-determined "meaning," there is an implicit anxiety that older children might misinterpret the "meaning" that adults give to art, theology or metaphysics. The adult must therefore control the child's potentially subversive reception of texts.

In all this, Godwin recapitulates Locke's liberal principle that children be treated with a minimum degree of respect, and that education be geared towards the "reason" of children, and not load them with "unintelligible jargon."[18] Underlying this

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[17] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 10.
[18] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 13-15.

liberal agenda, however (as indicated above), is the assumption that the child must remain subject to adult control. Accordingly, discussing what books children should read, Godwin insists that the "first books put into the hands of a pupil should be simple, interesting, and agreeable."[19] The child is not to read anything that should discomfort him or her, or interrogate or disturb the world-view imposed by the adult who writes books for the child.

In practice however, Godwin's liberal educational policy advocates a degree of freedom for the child from the adult educator's control, in advising that the child should learn of his or her own volition, and not because the adult teacher imposes a principle of fear: "The pupil should do nothing because he is seen or heard by his preceptor," since he or she "has nothing to conceal, and no need of falsehood." Overall, the adult teacher is asked to maintain a kind and friendly relationship with the child.

> The undesigning gaiety of youth has the strongest claim upon your humanity. There is not in the world a truer object of pity, than a child terrified at every glance, and watching, with anxious uncertainty, the caprices of a pedagogue.[20]

Here, Godwin addresses the adult reader, pleading with him or her to be kind to the child. The powerful adult is asked to exercise "pity" on the "undesigning gaiety" of the weak child. Here Godwin appears to invoke the eighteenth-century moral value of sympathy, which Burke had explained as a desirable cement of social relations, in his text *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Through sympathy, Burke had said, "we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer."[21] In Burke's conception, sympathy

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 12-13.
[21] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*

makes the powerful person understands the suffering of a weaker person. Godwin, similarly, asks the adult to sympathise towards the weak child, whom he constructs as an object of pathos.

Underlying Godwin's benign agenda, however, is the presupposition that while the quality of "humanity" belongs to the adult, the child is represented as an "object" rather than part of the adult human race, "terrified" by the "caprices" of a adult despot. While Godwin shows adult sympathy towards the child, the terms of his vocabulary recall the attitude of a social superior towards an inferior weakling. This seeming contradiction can be understood in terms of Markman Ellis's exploration of the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility as a "forum for political discussion." Ellis locates late-eighteenth century humanitarianism within his reading of Burke's concept of sympathy, showing that such sympathy is enacted not towards potentially intimidating vast numbers of people, but in one-to-one "scenarios," "so as not to threaten the position of the viewer." Thus, in late eighteenth-century novels, the person who exercises sympathy often exerts magnanimity towards the weak and grateful slave.[22] In such contexts, the cult of sensibility allows the social superior to affirm common humanity with an inferior, without disturbing social hierarchies. In a similar mode, Godwin shifts the ground of sympathy from the slave to the child, asking the adult to recognise common humanity with the child as he vividly represents the latter as a suffering individual who deserves the superior adult's kindness.

This use of language by Godwin, that is, his invoking of the cult of sensibility to represent adult-child relations, is key to an understanding of Godwin's changing

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and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 1998) 91.

[22] Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 72-84.

representations of the child through his writing career. His use of language in this context reveals both continuities and discontinuities between his early rationalist representations and his later more imaginative representations. Hence the following discussion briefly contextualises Godwin's language in his representations of the child in terms of the larger cultural implications.

In the passage from *Account* quoted above, Godwin directly addresses the adult reader through the adjectival pronoun "your." Through this rhetorical strategy, he convinces his adult reader to be humane by sentimentalising the child. Although the text of *Account* appears to address the adult reader in the discursive language of rational argument, in this instance Godwin clinches his point by the destabilising, disruptive appeal of emotion. This appears to be a contradiction, and sits at odds with common critical perceptions of Godwin as a rationalist thinker in his early career.[23] However, such a contradiction can be explained by contextualising Godwin's rhetorical strategy against late-eighteenth-century theories of language.

In the eighteenth century, it was common to conceive of language as the dress of thought. If language was but a superficial garment to deep, interior, true thought, it followed that the use of beautiful, persuasive language, namely, rhetoric (in the commonly used sense of the word) might mislead and detract from the truth. As Fiona Stafford and other commentators have observed, "the rejection of Rhetoric had a distinguished classical tradition."[24] In the texts of *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, Plato had criticised rhetoric as a false art that persuaded people by whipping up their emotions, and misleading them from rational truth. Plato's criticisms were countered by later writers like Aristotle, Quintilian and other classical writers, who insisted that Rhetoric used in the service of truth, or "right rhetoric" was an art worthy of

[23] See below, pp. 178-79.
[24] Fiona Stafford, "Hugh Blair's Ossian, Romanticism and the teaching of Literature," *The Scottish* Invention of English Literature, ed. Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 68-88.

cultivation. According to the defenders of the rhetoric, the use of rhetoric was perfectly acceptable as long as the user had a virtuous motivation in persuading the listener. Thus the use of emotion was valid as long as rhetoric did not detract from the truth (that is, a supposedly unitary truth). [25]

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the study of rhetoric acquired a new significance with the renewed respect for classical works amongst neoclassical writers. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke stressed that words should mirror thoughts, with straightforward, easy communication between the speaker and the listener.[26] The practice of right rhetoric, in eighteenth-century circles, meant persuading the listener through the reasonable language of plainness and simplicity, rather than colourful images or complicated sentence-structures. Passion was to be regulated by reason: emotional appeal in an argument was to be carefully directed and proportioned by the virtuous speaker. Adam Smith, George Campbell, and especially Hugh Blair's work, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), were instrumental to the privileging of right rhetoric. Rhetoric was actively cultivated in Scottish universities, in order to facilitate communication in the rapidly advancing disciplines of philosophy, history, chemistry and the physical sciences.[27] Clear and effective writing was conceived of as an acquired, rather than God-given art, and was perceived as a means of social and political empowerment, especially for the professional middle-classes who aspired to unsettle the monopoly of aristocratic privilege in the social set-up. In England, the study of rhetoric was a formal part of the curriculum in the Dissenting academies, where the scholarly milieu was composed of

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[25] See W.S. Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 259-98; Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 83-213, 294-339; James L. Kastely "Respecting the Rupture: Not Solving the Problem of Unity in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35 (2002): 138-52.

[26] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 361-465.

[27] Stafford, "Hugh Blair's Ossian," *Scottish Invention* 69.

rising middle-class professionals unlike the more traditional, aristocratic institutions of Oxford and Cambridge.[28] As a Dissenting Academy student, Godwin would have been familiar with the rhetorical strategies practised in these institutions.

In a discursive text like *Account*, Godwin appears to tread successfully a fine balance between reason and passion, in his use of right rhetoric to plead for the adult's clemency towards child. However, in a more personal, spontaneous text like his "Autobiography," written slightly earlier than *Account*, Godwin appears to falter in his rational balance. Here, Godwin's concern for adult liberalism towards the child acquires force from his own first-hand experiences as a child. As he states in a vivid anecdote, his recollections of his own childhood were tarnished by unpleasant memories of the strict discipline exercised by his aunt Mrs. Sothren, who otherwise possessed a genuine affection for her nephew. At meals, Mrs. Sothren habitually forced nutritious and tasteless foods down his throat, and Godwin believed that this had harmful effects in the long term, persisting into adulthood:

> I am sure that the disgust and repugnance thus produced in a youthful mind, is a much greater disadvantage than the vice which this sort of strictness was intended to cure.[29]

Godwin's adult self remained resentful, as well as sceptical, of the manner in which the adult carer exercised authority over the child, whilst believing that he or she had the child's best interests at heart in curing the "vice" of self-indulgence. As a rationalist philosopher, he uses measured phrases like "I am sure," and "is a much greater disadvantage" to express his objections to the usual treatment of the child. But his anger at how he used to be treated as a child add force to his tirade, which is barely contained by the rationalist seam of his vocabulary. Godwin's texts in the

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[28] Robert Crawford, "Introduction," *Scottish Invention of English Literature* 1-21.
[29] Godwin, "Autobiography," *CWG* 1 24.

1780s show that his early concern with the abuse of adult authority fuels his reformist social vision in the 1790s.

Political Justice: the Child as Text in Radical Politics

Enquiry Concerning Political Justice is a text that Godwin himself characterised as "the child of the French revolution," in his later work *Thoughts occasioned by the perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon* (1801).[30] Godwin's representation of his text, as a child, is an image that goes back to a literary convention as old as Plato's *Symposium*.[31] In Godwin's particular use of the metaphor of the child, his representation invokes the radical political values of the French Revolution.

Political Justice was written in the heat of 1790s British radicalism. After nearly a decade of being a hack-writer, Godwin proposed the idea of a political treatise in 1791 to the publisher George Robinson, who had radical sympathies and funded the project. As Mark Philp observes, *Political Justice* was shaped by the radical ferment in France and England. The text was conceptualised "in the early years of the French Revolution," deeply influenced by radical republican reactions in England to events in France, and published in 1793, "shortly after the trial and execution of the King of France," Louis XVI.[32]

The publication of *Political Justice* established Godwin as a major intellectual, and the text elicited much public attention.[33] The work was infused with Godwin's independent voice: as late as 1822, Godwin would reaffirm *Political Justice* as his *magnum opus,* as the germ of his political radicalism.

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[30] Godwin, "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," *PPWG* 2 163-65.
[31] See Mellor, *Mary Shelley* 52.
[32] Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986) 74-76.
[33] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 85-91.

> If any one be desirous, now or hereafter, to see what would be written on the most important questions, by a mind full of philanthropy, unshackled by the ordinary prejudices of age and country, and fearless of censure, he should read Political Justice. That is all I have to say of it.[34]

The force of Godwin's conviction, in these lines, signals that he self-consciously wrote *Political Justice* in a highly politically charged atmosphere. Radically opposing the "prejudices" of conservative camps, Godwin was dropping a "fearless" bombshell through his text, knowing that, in response, many polemical sparks would fly. This fearlessness is manifest in Godwin's representations of the child in this text in a dual way. As the following discussion shows, Godwin conceives of the child in a Lockean spirit as a weak being, a blank text available for the powerful adult to write upon. On the other hand, like many other eighteenth-century thinkers, Godwin represents his own politically radical ideals through the child, so that the child becomes a mythical representation of new social beginnings. The child's conditioning by the adult becomes a great socio-cultural transformative venture. In fact this is continuous with Godwin's perspective in *Account*. But I will also show that as Godwin expounds his anti-authoritarian political doctrines in *Political Justice*, his representations of the child show his developing awareness of the limits of rationalism.

There have been many critical examinations of Godwin's political theory in *Political Justice* so far, but these have not included an extended treatment of how the child works as a metaphor for Godwin's political radicalism in this text. In the present discussion, representations of the child in the text are mapped out, showing how these representations are moored in Godwin's political ideals. I map these contexts in some detail, as these ideals in *Political Justice* continue to be reworked in various ways in Godwin's later texts. Indeed, this critical method builds upon Godwin's own

[34] Godwin, "Of the Length of the Life of Man: A Confession," *CWG* 1 62.

perception of the abiding importance of *Political Justice* as a political document, instanced in the quote above from 1822.

Generally, Godwin's anti-authoritarian stance is evident in his conception of radically different structures of political organisation, as he demystifies the seeming naturalness of social constructs. Here, the enlightened, politically activist child mythically represents the emancipation of the human race

> Suppose a despotic nation by some revolution in its affairs to become possessed of a free constitution. The children of the present race will be bred in more firm and independent habits of thinking.[35]

The words "firm and independent" indicate Godwin's objection to all human relationships where one party holds unregulated power. Thus he attacks the indoctrination of the child into adult ideologies based on this logic. Generally, Godwin predicates his radicalism on the premise that "the species of government which prevails over nine tenths of the globe" is "despotism."[36] Here, Godwin argues that unregulated power is an endemically unnatural state of existence: "wherever despotism exists, there it will always be attended with the evils of despotism, capricious measures and arbitrary infliction."[37] Godwin's ideological discomfort with relationships of authority or "political coercion" is expressed in the comparisons he makes "between master and slave, and between parent and child."[38] Thus, Godwin is far less accepting of the power imbalance between the adult and the child in *Political Justice* than in *Account*, where such an imbalance was validated as a "law" of "nature."[39]

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[35] Godwin, *PJ* 44.
[36] Godwin, *PJ* 8.
[37] Godwin, *PJ* 223-24.
[38] Godwin, *PJ* 375.
[39] Godwin, "Account," *PPWG* 5 5.

As Godwin illustrates the social origins of "despotism," he shows that powerful adults corrupt the child, and make him or her a despot. According to Godwin, children are introduced to the dynamics of power from a very early age, and he insists that artificial "ideas of justice, retribution and morality" "are far from existing in the minds of infants." Here again, Godwin's explanation of the workings of power is predicated upon the Lockean *tabula rasa*, as he states that the child, "at the moment of his birth," "is totally unprovided with ideas," an ideological blank.[40] This theory provides Godwin with a basis for asserting that no adult idea is self-evident to the child's consciousness: acquired bodily responses, mental ideas, and an understanding of how power works are merely a result of the child's "experience" or social conditioning provided by the adult:

> Frowns will be totally indifferent to a child, who has never found them associated with the effects of anger. Fear itself is a species of foresight; and in no case exists till introduced by experience.[41]

Here, Godwin puts the adult reader in the perspective of an observer of the child, who learns emotions like "fear" only through the "experience" of adult conditioning. In Godwin's constructivist view of the human subject, his phrases "will be" and "in no case" signal his rather naïve, rationalist certainty that that a child has no instinctive appreciation of the frowning adult's body language. Through such doctrinaire statements, Godwin implicitly validates the adult's regulation of the child.

Developing his critique of the child's upbringing by the adult, in terms of power dynamics, Godwin echoes Rousseau's warnings against mollycoddling the young child in *Émile*. Thus, Godwin advocates limits to the child's dependence on adults: [42]

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[40] Godwin, *PJ* 11-13.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Rousseau 6-12.

> Assistance is necessary, conducive to the existence, the health and the mental sanity of the infant. Empire in the infant over those who protect him is unnecessary. If we do not withhold our assistance precisely at the moment when it ceases to be requisite, if our compliance or our refusal be not in every case irrevocable, if we grant any thing to impatience, importunity or obstinacy, from that moment we become parties in the intellectual murder of our offspring.[43]

Here, even as Godwin acknowledges the baby's realistic need for parental "assistance," he asks over-careful parents to stay wary, lest the "infant" should in turn exert "Empire" over helpless adults. In a series of characteristic (and slightly confusing) double negatives, Godwin alerts the adult against yielding to the tyrannical and ill-behaved "impatience, importunity or obstinacy" of the child. As Godwin warns the adult parent against the child's "intellectual murder," by damaging the child's potential to grow independently, in markedly strong language he subtly reverses the usual adult-child hierarchy and represents the child as a political despot.

Here, as Godwin preaches the child's independence, he creates ground for a different kind of social conditioning for the child, where coercive power equations of any kind are evened out. "In this case," he says, "we instil into them the vices of a tyrant." [44] Ironically, however, Godwin's liberal thinking remains imprisoned in the categories of adult/child power binaries. If the adult is not a despot, the child must be. Yet, the politically radical text of *Political Justice* is addressed to adult readers: by representing the child as a metaphor for a tyrant, Godwin tells adult readers that it is in their power to make or break tyrants.

In the above instances Godwin explains the social origins of power imbalances through his representations of the child. But he also preaches a number of specific political ideals through the metaphor of the child. The following parts of this

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[43] Godwin, *PJ* 12.
[44] Ibid.

discussion show what political ideals Godwin preaches, through representations of the child, to his adult readers so that they might be inspired to change the political organisation of their society. Godwin also represents these political ideals through the metaphor of the child.

In *Political Justice* Godwin develops the teaching of "benevolence" to the child, a maxim he had mentioned in his *Account*.[45] In *Political Justice* Godwin preaches this value by positing that benevolence is a natural human emotion, and he projects the quality on to the very young child: if a baby's nurse falls down a flight of stairs and breaks her leg, the former will inevitably learn to sympathise with the pain of the latter:

> 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.

This experience becomes the "first benevolent emotion" the child "has experienced."[46] In this mode of sympathetic identification, the child gains a moral education by understanding the pain of the nurse. If Godwin sounds quite unconvincingly doctrinaire here, this can be explained in terms of the language that he attempts to prove his point. The passage formally enacts the suppression of passion by reason: Godwin's rational argument is grounded in a rhetorical appeal to emotion. According to him, the child will "feel some concern" on witnessing the pain of the nurse, but this phrase is qualified by a slight hesitancy in the word "probably." This hesitation is waived aside, however, as Godwin hammers in a definitive "*will* discover"(my emphasis), to show that benevolence is the right state of things for humans to practise.

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[45] See above, pp. 145-46.
[46] Godwin, *PJ* 190.

As mentioned in the discussion of *Account*, Godwin's support of benevolence is moored in the value of sociability, where principles of individual self-interest were to be subsumed into those of the welfare of the community: "the great principle," as Godwin puts it in *Political Justice*, "that all private considerations must yield to the general good."[47] Progress, Godwin posits, occurs only in a sociable existence: "without society," he states,

> our improvements would be nearly useless. 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.[48]

The universalist politics expressed here gets represented through the rejection of biological parenthood, a fact of life which ceases to have any real significance:

> It is of no consequence that I am the parent of a child, when it has once been ascertained that the child will receive greater benefit under the superintendence of a stranger [.][49]

As Godwin works through the rationalistic lens, he sees biological parent-child ties merely as social constructs, and the child becomes Godwin's metaphor to express his rejection of consanguineous ties or the patriarchal system in social structures. Thus he challenges contemporary (especially aristocratic) concepts of a child as the heir of property, ripping apart the conventional associations of a child in his era. In Godwin's perfect society,

> It cannot be definitively affirmed whether it be known in such a state of society who is the father of each individual child. But it may be affirmed that such knowledge will be of no importance. It is aristocracy, self-love and family pride that teach us to set a value upon it as present.[50]

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[47] Godwin, *PJ* 94; see above, pp. 74-76.
[48] Godwin, *PJ* 456.
[49] Godwin, *PJ* 92.
[50] Godwin, *PJ* 454-55.

Once again, through his rationalist world-view, Godwin definitively affirms that "aristocracy, self-love and family pride" as the only reasons why parents may be attached to their biological children, unimaginatively boiling down complex emotional connections to simplistic, selfish motives. However, Godwin's apparently naive rationalism here needs to be understood in context, as a polemical expression of his political commitment to sociability. He is being deliberately provocative, knowing he will inevitably raise many of his readers' eyebrows in disbelief.[51]

While appreciating Godwin's individually brave voice in *Political Justice*, it is important to note that his text belongs to a series of responses to the Edmund Burke's politically conservative and highly influential text, *Reflections of the Revolution in France* (1790). As Marilyn Butler has observed, *Political Justice* is one of the many texts of the "Revolution debate," a debate that "represents in its totality" not just "discrete texts" and "the *oeuvres* of autonomous authors," but also "works" that "depend for their meaning upon one another, upon the historical situation which gave them birth, and upon the different kinds of reader for whom they were designed." [52] Viewed through Butler's inter-textual model, Godwin's text can be understood as a radical response to Burke's attack on the values of the French Revolution in *Reflections*, and especially Burke's politicisation of the parent-child relationship.

What is it about Burke's position that elicits such a strong reaction from Godwin? First, the radical camps of the 1790s saw Burke as a traitor.[53] The man who had publicly supported the American War of Independence had, in the radicals' eyes, forsaken those ideals altogether in his ranting against the French Revolution. Indeed, in *Reflections*, Burke, like the Dissenters, professes belief in the "principles" of the

[51] Later in this chapter I will show that Godwin himself later accepts the validity of a parent's biological ties towards the child. See below, pp. 180-81.
[52] Marilyn Butler, "Introductory essay," *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy*, ed. & introd. Marilyn Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 2.
[53] Braithwaite 92-99.

Glorious Revolution of 1688.[54] But in terms totally at variance with the Dissenters' egalitarian ideals, Burke valorises the English constitution's framework of "an inheritable crown," an "inheritable peerage" of aristocrats, and "people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors."[55] For Burke, "the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement." Burke's complacent faith in the virtues of "improvement" through a long line of ancestry reflects, as Josephine McDonagh rightly observes, the "idea of inheritance as the very basis of traditional society."[56] In Burke's schema, the desired state of political stability is achieved through the successful passage of values from generation to generation, through the system of primogeniture where the relationship of the father and the eldest son functions as the key conduit of political authority. This central tenet of Burke's political conservatism is intimately bound up with the concept of the (aristocratic) family as a preserver and owner of property: according to Burke, the "power of perpetuating" inherited "property" through "families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances" in his society.[57] Through "inheritance," Burke says, the family remains the ideal of social harmony, in consonance with State ideology: ties of "blood" help binding "the constitution of our country" with "our dearest domestic ties." The State's "laws" penetrate into "the bosom of our family affections."[58]

Burke reflects on the disruption of this older model of the socially conservative family through the bourgeois values of the French Revolution. In eloquent, elegiac language he laments that established socio-economic hierarchies have been levelled:

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[54] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, intro A.J. Grieve (London: Dent, 1910) 3.
[55] Burke, *Reflections* 31.
[56] McDonagh 81.
[57] Burke, *Reflections* 49.
[58] Burke, *Reflections* 32.

"a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal."[59] According to Burke, the death of the old order is accompanied by sexual anarchy: "the licence of a ferocious dissoluteness in manners."[60] Revolutionaries undermine the hallowed institution of the family, especially though the National Assembly (1791) which led to the liberalisation of divorce laws, and the relaxation of inheritance laws for illegitimate children.[61] For Burke, sexual anarchy signals social anarchy: Godwin's political critique engages with Burke's notions of the conservative family, disturbing and interrogating the idea of the child as the stamp of property.

In tune with Dissenting circle thought, Godwin's sociability is interwoven with his egalitarianism: adducing the "moral equality of mankind," he clinches his argument by insisting upon common human needs: "We are partakers of a common nature, and the same causes that contribute to the benefit of one contribute to the benefit of another."[62] Divisions of self-interest within the human race, he argues, are artificially constructed by existing conditions of property:

> The spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate growth of the established system of property. These are alike hostile to intellectual and moral improvement. The other vices of envy, malice and revenge are their inseparable companions. In a state of society where men lived in the midst of plenty, and where all shared alike the bounties of nature, those sentiments would inevitably expire. The narrow principle of selfishness would vanish.[63]

Thus in a society not riven apart by elements of competition, loyalties of family, race or country would ideally dissolve into nothingness: "We are not connected with one or two percipient beings, but with a society, a nation, and in some sense with the

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[59] Burke, *Reflections* 74.
[60] Burke, *Reflections* 35.
[61] McDonagh 82.
[62] Godwin, *PJ* 64; see above, pp. 74-75.
[63] Godwin, *PJ* 432.

whole family of mankind."[64] Godwin represents this discourse of common humanity through the child, who, according to the Lockean schema, is a sheer blank at birth in terms of physiognomy. Here, the child represents Godwin's political ideal of human equality:

> Examine the new born son of a peer and a mechanic. Has nature designated in different lineaments their future fortune? Is one of them born with callous hands and an ungainly form? Can you trace in the other the early promise of genius and understanding, of virtue and honour? [65]

The child is seen as a natural, generic human form who dismantles all culturally imposed constructs of social difference. Children at birth appear to be identical, or interchangeable carbon copies of each other. To prove that all children are equal, and that no human being is inherently inferior in capacity, Godwin invokes the child's mind as a *tabula rasa* that is nothing particular at birth, but becomes what it is in adulthood.

> Who is there in the present state of scientifical improvement, that will believe that this vast chain of perceptions and notions is something that we bring into the world with us, a mystical magazine, shut up in the human embryo, whose treasures are to be gradually enfolded as circumstances shall require? Who does not perceive that they are regularly generated in the mind by a series of impressions, and digested and arranged by association and reflexion? [66]

Godwin's invocation of "scientifical development" here indicates his alignment with the latest developments in eighteenth-century embryology, as Andrea Henderson has observed in her study of Romantic constructions of subjectivity. A short historical sketch of early embryology puts Godwin's egalitarian rhetorical questions in perspective. Debates in early embryology were centred on the contradictory theories of preformation and epigenesis. Preformation meant that the zygote, that is, the first

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[64] Godwin, *PJ* 50.
[65] Godwin, *PJ* 250.
[66] Godwin, *PJ* 11.

cell of a new human, developed by expanding in size into a foetus within the mother's womb. Epigenesis, which came into vogue towards the later eighteenth century, meant that the embryo developed by gradually differentiating into complex and specific anatomical features inside the mother's womb, propelled by a self-generating vitalistic force. In terms of the history of scientific ideas, preformation ratified the ideologies of conservative politics, as it implied that the identity of humans was fixed and determined from birth: thus class and gender hierarchies were supposedly natural to the social order. Epigenesis implied instead that the human subject had the endless capacity to develop further, and that the self was subject to constant change. Such a concept of self-development suited middle-class radicals like Godwin at the end of the eighteenth century, who were scientifically reassured that the subject constructs his or her own identity, rather than being pre-determined from birth. [67] The human unborn child represented the fluid development of the human subject in miniature.

In the passage quoted above, Godwin adopts a generally Lockean argument about the child's blank mind, which is supplemented by the Hartleyan view of "association and reflexion" that gradually constructs the child's mind through external circumstances.[68] Through the equality of children, the aristocratic idea of a distinguished family lineage simply becomes an irrelevant, faulty construct: "permanent hereditary distinction is a fiction of policy, not an ordinance of immutable truth."[69]

In all this the child's mind remains a passive identity, once again emphasising the adult's power in shaping the weak child. Not surprisingly, *Political Justice*, like many eighteenth-century works, is heavily invested in the education of the child as a political medium for the reformation of society. Even though the adult is the powerful

[67] See Henderson 60-62.
[68] See above, pp. 8-9.
[69] Godwin, *PJ* 227.

agent who moulds the child, Godwin expands on the liberal pedagogic framework in *Account*, to advocate that the adult should not unwontedly exercise power over the child. According to Godwin, when society is emancipated, it will then be thought "no more legitimate to make boys slaves, than to make men so."[70] The child would enjoy at least a degree of freedom, like the adult.

Buoyed by this liberal agenda, Godwin rejects any kind of education that stultifies the child's powers of independent thinking: on this account, he dismisses systems of state-controlled education. "Public education," he states, "teaches its pupils, not the fortitude that shall bring every proposition to the test of examination, but the art of vindicating such tenets as may chance to be previously established." [71] Such a system, according to Godwin, works to reinforce the ideology that the child is conditioned with, rather than to help the child see through it and think independently.

Contrary to Wollstonecraft's support for public education in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, for Godwin, a network of schools imparting "national education" "ought uniformly to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government, since the hegemony of government will prevail: "Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hands, and perpetuate its institutions."[72] Godwin fears that such a system has a "tendency" "to form all minds upon one model," suppressing difference and imposing a conformist uniformity. In his suspicion of institutions that encourage conformism rather than independent thinking, Godwin sounds very close, in terms of twentieth-century theory, to Louis Althusser's suspicion of State schools as ideological state apparatuses, where apparently

[70] Godwin, *PJ* 455.
[71] Godwin, *PJ* 357.
[72] Godwin, *PJ* 359.

innocuous, peaceful organisations continually propagate State ideology, closing off avenues for individuals to think in other, original ways.[73]

In fact the dangerously conformist tendency of state-run schools, Godwin argues,

> runs through every species of public establishment; and even in the petty institution of Sunday schools, the chief lessons that are taught, are a superstitious veneration for the church of England, and how to bow to every man in a handsome coat.[74]

The Sunday schools for the poor, run by evangelical philanthropists like Sarah Trimmer, asked lower-class children to be happy with their earthly lots and not challenge their social betters, thus perpetuating the class-system.[75] According to Godwin, the Sunday schools dictated to poor children that they should practise "obedience," that is, "a surrender of the understanding to the voice of authority." This "is a rule to which it can never be creditable to human beings to conform."[76] Here, the lower-class child becomes a representation of Godwin's own anti-authoritarian stance in the text.

According to Godwin, Sunday schools for lower-class children ally religion and property in politically conservative terms, as the religious establishment indirectly defends the unequal distribution of property. According to Godwin, "The doctrine of the injustice of accumulated property has been the foundation of all religious morality." Thus, religious teachers have

> taught the rich, that they hold their wealth only as a trust, that they are strictly accountable for every atom of their expenditure, that they are merely administrators, and by no means proprietors in chief. The defect of this system is, that they rather excite us to palliate our injustice than to forsake it.[77]

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[73] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation) (*January-April 1969*)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB,1971) 123-73. Cf. Wollstonecraft's views on public education, pp. 89-90.
[74] Godwin, *PJ* 357.
[75] See above, pp. 65-66.
[76] Godwin, *PJ* 123.
[77] Godwin, *PJ* 425.

Here, Godwin negates a socio-economic system based on the ethic of condescension, in this case that of the "rich." The "rich," according to Godwin, are taught by religious teachers to be kind rather than just and give up their excess wealth to the have-nots. The consequent denial of socio-economic opportunity to the less well-off is represented through children: "the established system of property may be considered as strangling a considerable portion of our children in their cradle."[78] Invoking the discourse of common humanity in the term "our children," Godwin elaborates upon his objections to the alliance of religion and property:

> But, while religion inculcated on mankind the impartial nature of justice, its teachers have been too apt to treat the practice of justice, not as a debt, which it ought to be considered, but as an affair of spontaneous generosity and bounty. They have called upon the rich to be clement and merciful to the poor. The consequence of this has been that the rich, when they bestowed the most slender pittance of their enormous wealth in acts of charity, as they were called, took merit to themselves for what they gave, instead of considering themselves as delinquents for what they withheld." [79]

Here, Godwin attacks the ethic of charity practised by the economically better off, who salve their consciences with religious sanction. His use of the traditional Christian terms "clement and merciful" gives them an ironic twist, emphasising how these terms can imply a sense of social superiority and condescension.

An ethic that justifies glaring inequities of privilege, according to Godwin, should be rejected as an unenlightened state of human society: "we should lay aside the instruction intended only for children in understanding."[80] Here, Godwin, like Wollstonecraft, invokes the common eighteenth-century trope of the child to signify an undeveloped state of human civilisation, in a sociological model where culture was forever advancing teleologically towards a better state in a pattern of

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[78] Godwin, *PJ* 434.
[79] Godwin, *PJ* 426.
[80] Ibid.

"perfectibility."[81] As Godwin revitalises the cliché of the cultural child by representing un-emancipated adults in such a state, he simultaneously devalues cultural childhood as a state to be rejected, for the enlightened adult order.

Godwin's political philosophy thus makes him voice objections to schools that stop lower-class children from questioning the validity of the socio-economic hierarchy. Institutions that do not encourage the child to question anything, according to Godwin, make the individual adopt a fatal political stance: "The instant in which" a person "shuts upon himself the career of enquiry, is the instant of his intellectual decease."[82] Godwin uses the word "enquiry" in terms of the long-established Western philosophical tradition of "enquiry" valorised by Dissenters.[83] In order to understand why "enquiry" is so important to Godwin's political philosophy, I will outline the concept of enquiry and inter-related concepts of his political theory in the following paragraphs. Although these concepts are sometimes only incidentally related to Godwin's representations of the child in *Political Justice* itself, they are integral to his representations in his later texts, and are thus sketched here in order to aid the chronological understanding of Godwin's works.

In Godwin's conception, enquiry is a political act natural to the human subject who has an inherent potential to break down artificial constructs: "There is a propensity in man to look farther than the outside; and to come with a writ of enquiry into the title of the title and the successful."[84] Thus, the act of enquiry inspires the socially oppressed to scrutinise the social constructs that are selfishly, artificially imposed by the socially powerful to serve their own interests.

> Men are weak at present, because they have always been told they are weak, and must not be trusted with themselves. Take them out of their

[81] Godwin, *PJ* 9.
[82] Godwin, *PJ* 357.
[83] See above, pp. 70-71.
[84] Godwin, *PJ* 26.

> shackles; bid them enquire, reason and judge; and you will soon find them very different beings. [85]

According to Godwin, the socially oppressed passively believe they have no power because the socially powerful have always told them so. Through the act of enquiry, the socially oppressed empower themselves, and transform their very identities by turning into active agents.

In fact, Godwin expresses the political valency of "enquiry" more explicitly in another text, the contemporaneous "Essay Against Reopening the War With France" (1793), a text that belongs to the corpus of anti-war literature published by Joseph Johnson and George Robinson in the1790s.[86] In the "Essay," Godwin allies himself with the radical values of the French Revolution, at a time when the British government had declared war against the new French republic. Speaking in support of "political enquiry," Godwin rejects the state imperative to make English citizens conform to the government's mobilising of troops for war: he refuses to "lend a cheerful and united support to the measures of government." [87] Attacking "treacherous and hypocritical statesmen," who "have in innumerable instances inveigled nations to their ruin," Godwin rejects their insistence that the public should not enquire into the measures of war: "They demand implicit confidence in the outset, and in the conclusion tell us, that enquiry is now useless, since a remedy is no longer in our power."[88]

In *Political Justice* Godwin argues that "Men" infused with potential for enquiry must be "trusted with themselves."[89] Enquiry has a missionary role in the propagation of "truth," a unitary ideal that, as Mark Philp persuasively argues, can be

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[85] Godwin, *PJ* 416.
[86] Braithwaite 135.
[87] Godwin, "Essay Against Reopening the War With France," *PPWG* 2 46-47.
[88] Godwin, "Against Reopening the War," *PPWG* 2 57.
[89] Godwin, *PJ* 416.

traced through Godwin's intellectual alignment with the Rational Dissenters. Godwin's intellectual roots in their traditions explain his "optimism, and his apparently naïve belief that moral truth" is "simple" and "easily communicated" and all-powerful.[90] Thus, for Godwin, political improvement occurs through the democratisation of knowledge, through the diffusion of Godwin's much valorised "truth": "the grand instrument for forwarding the improvement of mind is the publication of truth." Accordingly, Godwin makes a case for the State to allow "freedom of social communication."[91]

> the depositaries of government have a very obvious temptation to desire, by means of ignorance and implicit faith, to perpetuate the existing state of things. The only substantial method for the propagation of truth is discussion, so that the errors of one man may be detected by the acuteness and severe disquisition of his neighbours. All we have to demand from the officers of government, at least in their public character, is neutrality. The intervention of authority in a field proper to reasoning and demonstration is always injurious.[92]

This plea for freedom of speech is couched in terms of a socio-political economy of *laissez faire*: Godwin's doctrine of philosophical anarchism is expressed here in the imperative of the governed to enquire continually into the workings of State "government." Godwin asks the State to maintain a stance of non-interfering "neutrality," so that the conditioned ideology of "ignorance and implicit faith" can be torn apart through free speech.

Free expression is one of the ways in which, according to Godwin, the diffusion of truth is achieved through sociable "conversation," that is, the "collision of mind with mind." [93] Writing against the perspective of the post-French Revolutionary Terror, Godwin sets himself up against violent revolutionary activity. Instead, he conceives of "conversation" as a potent political opinion to induce social reform:

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[90] Philp 16.
[91] Godwin, *PJ* 121-22.
[92] Godwin, *PJ* 106.
[93] Godwin, *PJ* 15.

> The true instruments for changing the opinions of men are argument and persuasion. The best security for an advantageous issue is free and unrestricted discussion. In that field truth must always prove the successful champion. If then we would improve the social institutions of mankind, we must write, we must argue, we must converse.[94]

With the watchwords "argument," "persuasion" and "discussion" Godwin envisages a space for political dialogue, where the intelligentsia should "carefully distinguish between informing the people and inflaming them." With the armchair intellectual's snobbery towards, and wariness of the "mob," he preaches a strictly non-violent stance: "Indignation, resentment and fury are to be deprecated; and all we should ask is sober thought, clear discernment and intrepid discussion."[95] Godwin's subdued adjectives "sober," "clear" and "intrepid" savour of the rationalist discourse of controlled emotion, even as his agenda appears impossibly utopian. The ideal of "conversation," however, is in line with the internal logic of Godwin's political schema, based on an ethic of co-operation rather than agonistic conflict: "Conversation is a species of cooperation, one or the other party always yielding to have his ideas guided by the other."[96] Political "discussion," "undebauched by political enmity and vehemence" according to Godwin, has a "contagious" charm and is a step forward in the democratisation of knowledge: "Knowledge will be accessible to all."[97]

The political valency of enquiry works into Godwin's philosophical system, where truth is readily available to all, and is not obfuscated by ambiguous words. His creed of linguistic transparency becomes intertwined with a politics of resistance:

> The resistance I am bound to employ is that of uttering the truth, of censuring in the most explicit manner every proceeding that I perceive to be adverse to the true interests of mankind.[98]

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[94] Godwin, *PJ* 115.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Godwin, *PJ* 452.
[97] Godwin, *PJ* 122.
[98] Godwin, *PJ* 112.

Concomitantly, with the ideal of free speech Godwin lashes out at any policy of State surveillance, any attempt to discipline subversive "opinion":

> By what arguments will you persuade every man in the nation to exercise the trade of an informer? By what arguments will you persuade my bosom friend, with whom I repose all the thoughts of my heart, to repair immediately from my company to a magistrate, in order to procure my commitment for so doing to the prisons of the inquisition?[99]

Godwin's stress on frankness in *Political Justice* is topically relevant and finds practical expression in his letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* (1793) on the trial of Daniel Isaac Eaton for the use of "seditious and treasonable words," where he defends the accused, on the grounds that he would also adopt for the defence of the radicals Horne Tooke and John Thelwall in the Treason Trials of 1794.[100] Godwin's plea for free speech here probably also echoes Thomas Erskine's unsuccessful defence of Paine on similar grounds, in the infamous December 1792 trial where Paine was prosecuted and convicted (*in absentia*) as an attacker of King George III & Parliament.[101] Godwin, in another letter to the *Morning Chronicle* entitled "To such persons as may be appointed to serve upon juries for the trial and seditious and treasonable words," insists that "Liberty"

> consists in allowing every man, in the way of enquiry and argument, to speak what he thinks. It consists in delivering us from the empire of spies and informers in not subjecting to us to perpetual watchfulness and reserve [.][102]

Preaching that citizens should be activist thinkers and speakers, Godwin objects to government surveillance through "spies and informers." In all this Godwin evinces a

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[99] Godwin, *PJ* 331.
[100] Godwin, "Letter 2 to the Editor of the Morning Chronicle," *PPWG* 2 12-13; see Jon Mee, "'Examples of Safe Printing': Censorship and Popular Radical Literature in the 1790s," *Essays and Studies* Literature and Censorship, ed. Nigel Smith (1993): 81-95; Horne Tooke (1736-1812); John Thelwall (1764-1834).
[101] Braithwaite 125.
[102] Godwin, "Letter 2 to the Editor of the Morning Chronicle," *PPWG* 2 24-26.

strong faith in the power of words, working on the premise that if every one can "speak what he thinks," that is, if rational discourse is exercised by everyone political improvement will inevitably follow.

Clearly, Godwin assumes that every political issue can be verbalised rationally, and that everyone actually has the power to say what he or she thinks. This faith in the power of rational discourse can be understood in terms of Godwin's socio-political position in the early 1790s. Reared in the atmosphere of debate within the intellectual traditions of Rational Dissent, Godwin himself was an excellent debater, powerful and articulate. [103] Moreover, as Mark Philp has rightly observed, Godwin was chiefly addressing the text of *Political Justice* to a small, select middle-class intelligentsia, comprising mainly the Rational Dissenters, "whom he identified as the key to lasting social change." Intellectually powerful and articulate, this audience believed that political change was possible through "public debate and discussion."[104] Through the use of right rhetoric, they aspired to transform the socio-political order.[105]

Taking Stock: Godwin's Early Representations of the Child

The above sketch of Godwin's beliefs in the early 1790s gives a basis for Godwin's evolving representations of the child, as he recapitulates or deviates from the themes enumerated here. Godwin's important works during his early career were largely discursive, addressing his audience in transparent, magisterial discourse, with absolute conviction in the truth of his messages as he dictates to the audience how to read his text. Yet, Godwin was deeply concerned with the limitation of the adult's power over the child in political terms. This awareness, as the ensuing discussion

[103] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 8-10.
[104] Philp 74-75.
[105] See above, pp. 149-50.

shows, is developed and refined in writings of the later 1790s, as Godwin gradually parts ways with rationalist discourse.

Beyond Early Certainties

There is a perceptible change in Godwin's representations of the child through the later 1790s. Through this period, Godwin recognises the adult-child cultural divide in his contemporary culture, and attempts to counter it by empowering the child. This change in Godwin's representations of the child is indebted to larger changes in his thought-patterns as a whole: in fact he himself tracked this change in "Analysis of Own Character Begun Sep16, 1796." Here, Godwin mused on the "ductility" of his own mind:

> Every four or five years I gain some new perception, or become intimately sensible to some valuable circumstance, that introduces an essential change of many of my preconceived notions and determinations.[106]

1794 was the year that Godwin published *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, his first major literary work. I take this as a fulcrum point from which to map out this shift in his intellectual position. The texts selected from this period, featuring childhood, are the novels *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon* (1799), the essay-collection *The Enquirer* (1797), and miscellaneous writings, including Godwin's private correspondence. They are a representative sample of Godwin's works over a period in which he eschews his earlier affinity for discursive political tracts, and adopts more imaginative forms of address such as the novel, where he dramatises his political concerns in fictional form. Instead of addressing a select intelligentsia who would willingly read long treatises of political theory, Godwin turns to the imaginative medium of fiction. Fiction becomes his medium of reaching out to a larger late-eighteenth century reading public, who would willingly read novels for

[106] Godwin, "Analysis of Own Character," *CWG* 1 59.

entertainment value. At the same time Godwin moves away from an agonistic to a deliberative mode of rhetoric. He does not straightforwardly argue and try to persuade his reader from a conviction of the rightness of his own moral position, but through the text draws the reader into a conversation, letting him or her choose interpretations.[107] This switch, in forms of address, is significant for Godwin's changing representations of childhood. Over this period Godwin begins to represent the child not simply as a metaphor for his political theory, but as a far more rich, multidimensional figure, representing various radical literary discourses as well.

To what factors can these changes in Godwin be attributed? Firstly, the changes in Godwin's domestic life through the later 1790s contributed much to his shifting representations of the child in this period, and his intellectual transformation, from a rationalist philosopher to a relatively emotive thinker. Until the mid-1790s, he had lived singly as a bachelor. During 1796-7 however, he interacted with Mary Wollstonecraft, and fell in love. It is perhaps revealing that Wollstonecraft and Godwin did not strike up a mutual rapport when they first met in 1791, at a gathering where the publisher Joseph Johnson was introducing the radical Thomas Paine to other writers.[108] Given their mutually opinionated natures, and immersed in their own certainties in their early careers, it took until 1796 for Wollstonecraft and Godwin to form a close romantic partnership.

When Wollstonecraft and Godwin became friends, Wollstonecraft already had her young daughter Fanny, fathered by Gilbert Imlay, and to Fanny Godwin became a father figure.[109] Following Wollstonecraft's untimely death, soon after the birth of

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[107] See Pamela Clemit, "Holding Proteus: William Godwin in his Letters," *Repossessing the Romantic Past*, ed. Heather Glen & Paul Hamilton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 98-115.
[108] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 112-13.
[109] Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 27-30, 35.

Mary in 1797, Godwin was left with the responsibility of rearing two young girls.[110] Godwin's writings in this period suggest that he was deeply influenced by Wollstonecraft's intellectual credos; moreover, he appreciated the experience of family life, despite its ups and downs. Through his own children Godwin became more intimately involved with the education of the child, an interest he had shared with Wollstonecraft in her lifetime. This is evident in *The Enquirer* (1797), where he revised his manuscript according to Wollstonecraft's suggestions. When Wollstonecraft died, Godwin was so grief-struck that he could not attend her funeral. Instead he tried to divert himself with their shared interests in education:

> I took up a book on the education of children, but that impressed me too forcibly with my forlorn and disabled state with respect to the two poor animals left under my protection, and I threw it aside.[111]

Godwin's word "animals," figuring the two children as sheer biological entities, gestures at his sense of an immense responsibility in nurturing Fanny and Mary, so as to make them fit to live in human society.

Indeed, documentary evidence suggests that Godwin followed his role as a father faithfully over this period. His growing attention to the domestic sphere is evident in his personal correspondence, where, as Pamela Clemit's archival research has revealed, his correspondence with the young Fanny and Mary shows a deep sympathetic engagement with the interior consciousness of the growing child. As Clemit shows, many letters from his Dublin trip of 1800 were addressed to his friend and amanuensis James Marshall, but included passages to be read to Fanny and Mary. One letter, for instance, reassuringly responds to the children's unspoken anxieties

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[110] William Godwin, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, ed. C. Kegan Paul, Vol. I (London, Henry S. King, 1876) 2 vols. 281-83; Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 35-36.
[111] Clemit, "Holding Proteus," *Repossessing the Romantic Past* 104.

regarding their father's return to "England in a ship." [112] Then he vividly portrays his own return through the trees of their neighbourhood through their imagined vision, as he hopes "to see Fanny and Marshal and Mary sitting on the trunks of the trees."[113] Through this stark visual image Godwin adds force to his fatherly assurance that he will surely return to his children.

Apart from the change in Godwin's immediate circumstances, his swerve to fictional modes of address also probably owes to the fact that through the later 1790s he immersed himself in many more literary social circles and activities than before. Over 1794-95, Wordsworth and Coleridge, who had read and admired Godwin's *Political Justice*, sought out his acquaintance, and these associations developed into friendships.[114] In turn, Godwin read Wordsworth and Coleridge's pioneering text *Lyrical Ballads*, soon after its publication in 1798. In the later 1790s, Godwin also became friends with Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt. During 1799-1800, Godwin and Coleridge's friendship grew especially close; and later, Godwin attended Coleridge and Hazlitt's public lectures on Shakespeare. From 1799 onwards Godwin intensively read English poetry and drama, especially from the Renaissance.[115] Inspired by Elizabethan tragedy, he tried his hand at a number of plays himself, including the disastrous *Antonio; or, The Soldier's Return* (1800), and started going frequently to the theatre as well. Godwin took his playwriting as a fairly serious activity, as David O'Shaughnessy's archival research on Godwin's plays has revealed. [116]

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[112] Godwin, *William Godwin*, I 365, 373.
[113] Clemit, "Holding Proteus," *Repossessing the Romantic Past* 105; see Godwin, *William Godwin* I 365, 373.
[114] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 95-97.
[115] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 222-29.
[116] David O'Shaughnessy, "Theatrical Discourse in the Writing of William Godwin, 1790-1807" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis U of Oxford, 2007).

Godwin himself acknowledged that the changed circumstances of his life, (sketched above) altered his socio-political creed. *The Enquirer* indicates Godwin's altered conception of human motivation: "Man has not only an understanding to reason, but a heart to feel."[117] In Godwin's notes in "The Principal Revolutions of Opinion," he retracts the "errors" of *Political Justice* on the following counts: the "unqualified condemnation of the domestic affections" and "an inattention to the principle, that feeling, and not judgment, is the source of human actions."[118] Indeed, in Godwin's published works, his changed philosophy is reflected in his extensive revisions of *Political Justice*. The entire discussion of the text of *Political Justice*, in the section above, is from the 1793 version.[119] The 1793 edition was composed between 1791-93. This was significantly revised in 1795, and appeared at the end of that year (in Godwin studies, this version is usually referred to as the 1796 version). The text was again revised, and the third edition was published at the end of 1797 (conventionally referred to as the 1798 edition). Mark Philp has argued that in the revised editions, Godwin moves away significantly from the rationalism of the 1793 version.[120] Looking back on his great work in "The Principal Revolutions of Opinion," Godwin mentions his debt to David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) in the revisions of *Political Justice*, which sheds light on his turn towards emotion, rather than reason, as the motivating force for human activity.[121] In the 1796 revisions, as Philp observes, "Godwin's moral psychology now owes less to his Dissenting and rationalist heritage."[122] As he revised *Political Justice*, he began to explain morality through "the emotions and feelings of the individual—in the natural

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[117] Godwin, "The Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 214.
[118] Godwin, "The Principal Revolutions of Opinion," *CWG* 1 53.
[119] In *PPWG,* Volume 3 contains the 1793 text and Vol. 4 contains the revisions in 1796 and 1798. All quotes in this discussion are from Vol. 3.
[120] Philp 7-8.
[121] Godwin, "Principal Revolutions of Opinion," *CWG* 1 54.
[122] Philp 152.

sympathies rather than in reason."[123] Taken together, there appears to be a concurrence between Godwin's shifting circumstances in his private life, and his break with his earlier rationalist epistemology and adoption of genres that allow for more freedom of interpretation in his public writings. Correspondingly, the political meanings of his public representations of the child undergo changes: these are mapped out thematically below.

The Child as Family Bond

The early, rationalist Godwin represents the child, in his universalistic creed of sociability, as a being who belongs to the entire human race. Thus the upbringing of the child is a general human responsibility and not the narrow province of the child's biological parents. This rational universalistic creed gets modified in Godwin's writings of the late 1790s, in the representations of the child in his works—probably this change owes much to his own experiences with the young Fanny and Mary, as he grew into an appreciation of domestic, family ties, while he remained committed to the political ideal of sociability.

In Godwin's fiction, this change is most significantly expressed in the views of the protagonist of *St. Leon*. Through the upbringing of the child, Godwin voices his own middle-class rejection of the aristocratic codes of self-aggrandisement, expressing in fictional form what he had argued discursively before in *Political Justice*. As a child of aristocratic birth, Leon surmises, he was loved for his position in the property-system: "My mother loved my honour and my fame more than she loved my person." The words "honour" and "fame" represent Leon's mother's investment in patriarchal privileges: according to Leon, she cares less for Leon's "person," that is, to develop an affective bond with her son, for his own sake. Leon

[123] Philp 217.

also blames his mother's style of upbringing, for developing a nature of unregulated ambition in his childhood, which persists and scars all his adult life: "The whole tendency of my education had been to inspire me with a proud and restless desire of distinction."[124] Leon's rooting in courtly culture takes a particularly bad turn, manifested in an unceasing competitive instinct that dictates the tenor of his entire life as he glories in the possession of the alchemical wonder of the philosopher's stone. In Godwin's satire on individualistic Renaissance aspiration in this novel, the protagonist exists in lone splendour. He is "distinguished from the rest of mankind" by "Exhaustless wealth" and "eternal youth," divorced from the magic circle of domestic comfort and sociability.[125]

However, there are times when Leon perceives the vices of his own childhood upbringing and attempts to rectify them. He claims that his own children "are endeared to me by a better principle than pride."[126] These children are infused with a natural sense of the sociability that eludes Leon himself: the youngest one, Marguerite, for instance, instinctively empathises with the rest of the family when they must leave their pastoral home, without being rationally aware of the reasons for the family's mournfulness:

> The feelings, however, that they consigned to silence, did not entirely escape the notice of the lively little Marguerite. She sympathised with them, probably without being aware that they were sad. She came towards me, and, with much anxiety in her enquiring face, asked why we must go away from the cottage?"[127]

Whereas the wise child Marguerite displays unselfish "anxiety," for her family, the adult, over-ambitious Leon fails to appreciate domestic comforts. Godwin's positive counterpoint to his loneliness is symbolised especially by Leon's children (apart from Leon's

[124] Godwin, "St. Leon," *CWG* 4 34.
[125] Godwin, "Leon," *CWG* 4 13.
[126] Godwin, "Leon," *CWG* 4 104.
[127] Godwin, "Leon," *CWG* 4 146.

wife), whom he gradually loses one by one through the course of the narrative, through death or his own bad fatherhood. His misguided spiritual journey culminates in the fatal revelation that he is

> alone. The creature does not exist with whom I have any common language, or any genuine sympathies. Society is a bitter and galling mockery to my heart; it only shows in more glaring colours my desolate condition.[128]

Leon's lack of "common language" with any human shows a situation where language has lost its function as social communication: Leon's "desolate condition" shows up the happy sociability he could have retained through his domestic ties to his family, which he woefully neglects to the destruction of his own happiness.

In the above instance, Godwin leaves the reader to infer the importance of the child as a domestic bond in the fictional narrative of Leon. But he expresses this more explicitly in the discursive work *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon*:[129]

> I must be attentive to the welfare of my child; because I can in many portions of the never-ceasing current of human life, be conferring pleasure and benefit on him, when I cannot be directly employed in conferring benefit on others [.][130]

Here, Godwin justifies the parent's care of the child by arguing that one own child is the nearest available outlet for expressing one's sociability. Thus, the child becomes Godwin's representation of the integration of local domesticity into the larger creed of universalism for entire humanity.

An Egalitarian Education

Godwin discusses the education of the child extensively in *The Enquirer*. Here, like the early 1790s, he continues to think of education as a grand socio-cultural

[128] Godwin, "Leon," *CWG* 4 289.
[129] Godwin, "Thoughts Occasioned," *PPWG* 2 163.
[130] Godwin, "Thoughts Occasioned," *PPWG* 2 183.

endeavour for human progress: "he who is a friend to general happiness, will neglect no chance of producing in his pupil or his child, one of the long-looked saviours of the human race."[131] The acute discomfort with the excessive adult authority in the child's education, visible in the earlier texts, deepens in the late 1790s, where Godwin advocates a more equal power balance between teachers and children. The political ideals developed for adult readers in *Political Justice* are thus extended to education in *The Enquirer*.

As Gary Handwerk has observed, in *The Enquirer* Godwin begins with the premise that education is an implicit relationship of authority between the child and the adult teacher, a premise that Godwin phrases in terms of coercive power relationships: "All education is despotism. It is perhaps impossible for the young to be conducted without introducing in many cases the tyranny of implicit obedience."[132] Since Godwin cannot equalise the relationship between the adult teacher and the child, he tries at least to palliate the sufferings of the child in *The Enquirer*, and to even out the child-adult hierarchy. In doing so, Godwin rejects Rousseau's educational ideas in *Émile* as a "system of incessant hypocrisy and lying," where every educational experience for the child Émile is orchestrated and dictated by the adult tutor. According to Godwin

> His whole system of education is a series of tricks, a puppet-show exhibition, of which the master holds the wires, and the scholar is never to suspect in what manner they are moved.[133]

Here, Godwin is troubled by an educational system where the adult teacher exerts control over the child, without respite, and he sees this as the adult's misuse of authority over the child. A good teacher, according to Godwin, would use power over

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[131] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 87.
[132] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 107; Handwerk 386-88.
[133] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 131.

the child "with economy and diffidence." If the pupil does not willingly take the teacher into his or her confidence, the latter "may at least refrain from acting the spy or inquisitor upon his pupil." [134] In *Political Justice* Godwin had argued that the State should not govern its citizens through incessant surveillance: in *The Enquirer* Godwin extends this political ideal into the education of the child.

Godwin's troubled awareness of the power imbalance between the adult teacher and the juvenile pupil means that in *The Enquirer*, he revises the rejection of public, state-controlled education he had advocated in *Political Justice*. Wollstonecraft's views were crucial to this revision: she had herself expressed support for public education in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.[135] Moreover, as Janet Todd's research reveals, Wollstonecraft urged Godwin to revise his manuscript of "Of Public and Private Education," as she proofread his essays. Public education, she suggested would "enable children to converse with children," so that they could find some relief from adult authority.[136] Godwin appears to have taken Wollstonecraft's comments into account as he revised his essay. He expresses apprehension that in "private education there is danger," since the adult's unceasing "superintendence" perpetually disciplines the student: the tutor "watches the boy too narrowly, controls him too much, renders him too poor a slave." "In public education" on the other hand, "there is comparative liberty," because the child "knows how much of his time is subjected to his task-master, and how much is sacredly his own."[137] This unregulated space for the child marks, for Godwin, a corrective to the unremitting exercise of adult authority.

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[134] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 133-4.
[135] See above, pp. 89-90.
[136] Wollstonecraft, *Letters* 388n.
[137] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 107.

In Wollstonecraft's revision of Godwin's essay, she valorises early sociability by pointing out that children can interact with children, in a system of public education. Godwin echoes this point in the *Enquirer*:

> Private education is almost necessarily deficient in excitements. Society is the true awakener of man; and there be little true society, where the disparity is so great as between a boy and his preceptor. A kind of lethargy and languor creeps upon this species of studies.[138]

The fault in private education, in Godwin's perception, is that it creates little space for "true society" or sociability. According to Godwin, this is difficult in private education, given the vertically hierarchical social relationship of the "boy and his preceptor" or the child and the adult teacher. Without the egalitarian sociability expressed in horizontal social networks between children themselves, Godwin considers that the purpose of education is defeated, because the isolated student is afflicted by "lethargy and languor," while solitary boredom saps his or her very urge to learn anything new.

In *The Enquirer*, Godwin further undercuts the teacher's authority, by pointing out that adult authority is often unstable. He castigates "foolish parents," for example, who "tenaciously adhere to every" rule or pronouncement they have "once laid down." Godwin offers a salutary rebuke:

> We should acknowledge ourselves fallible; we should admit no quackery and false airs of dignity and wisdom into our system of proceeding; we should retract unaffectedly and with grace whenever we find that we have fallen into mistake."[139]

The adult teacher is asked to admit his or her occasional vulnerability to the child. Thus, through his educational ideas, Godwin further lessens the adult-child divide.

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[138] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 106-7.
[139] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 123.

The Child's Freedom

Godwin attempts to limit the adult teacher's authority in the child's education, and to break down the adult-child hierarchy. He aims to grant the child a degree of autonomy, and advises a number of practical methods to achieve this. Thus, he boldly announces that his "plan is calculated entirely to change the face of education." The radical act of evening out power between the teacher and the student means that "no such characters are left upon the scene as either preceptor or pupil." The child, like the intellectually aspiring adult, becomes a student out of his or her own urge to learn, rather than through the influence of externally imposed authority:

> The boy, like the man, studies because he desires it. He proceeds upon a plan of his own invention, or which, by adopting, he has made his own. Every thing bespeaks independence and equality. The man, as well as the boy, would be glad in cases of difficulty to consult a person more informed than himself. That the boy is accustomed almost always to consult the man, and not the man the boy, is to be regarded rather as an accident, than any thing essential.[140]

The autonomy that Godwin posits as a basic right for the adult is enjoyed by the child in the form of "independence and equality." In this ideal system of education, the adult and the child are artificially, chancily placed in different positions: theirs is not a natural difference of essence or being.[141]

Accordingly, Godwin repeats the tenets of the tradition of "enquiry" that he enumerates up till *Political Justice*: Godwin extends the ideal of enquiry, previously applied to the adult reader, to children. "An awakened mind" is stated to be "one of the most important purposes of education." Godwin's implication of vital energy, in the word "awakened," is key to what he calls the objective of education.

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[140] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 115-16.

[141] It is perhaps telling that for all his liberal views, Godwin thinks of the young student as the "boy" or the generic male child: the word indicates a male-centred discourse, but in this context, could almost be interchangeable with the gender-neutral word "child." The shift in Godwin's views regarding the child's gender will be discussed in the next chapter.

> It is of less importance, generally speaking, that a child should acquire this or that species of knowledge, than that, through the medium of instruction, he should acquire habits of intellectual activity.[142]

The passage shows Godwin's own growing trust in the child, his willingness to give up control as an adult educator, and his confidence that the child will not subvert what the adult decrees to be truth. Godwin's phrase "habits of intellectual activity" signals that the child can perform enquiry, when the adult lets the child adopt an exploratory approach:

> Let him explore the path for himself. Without increasing his difficulties, you may venture to leave him for a moment, and suffer him to ask himself the question he asks you, or, in other words, to ask the question before he receives the information.[143]

Godwin encourages the child to go into a wilderness, as the unpredictable direction of the child's mental development becomes appealing to the adult teacher or parent. Here, Godwin evinces a reduced faith in predetermined truths, indicating, through his ideas on the child's education, a jettisoning of absolute rational truths for a new discourse of openness and exploration.

This theoretical doctrine finds practical expression in Godwin's advocacy of the child's free reading, in his essay "Of Choice In Reading":

> As the true object of education is not to render the pupil the mere copy of his preceptor, it is rather to be rejoiced in, than lamented, that various reading should lead him into new trains of thinking [.][144]

The child is not to become a "copy" passively reproducing the ideology imprinted by the adult educator, but through a variety of reading, should rather build on the possibilities offered, and explore "new trains of thinking" in spaces unregulated by adults.

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[142] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 84-85.
[143] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 116.
[144] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 143.

Godwin's advocacy of free reading for the child can also be seen in the perspective of the essay "Of Learning," where he asserts that reading in "a just spirit" means that "we mix our own reflections with what we read." Although Godwin's vocabulary hinges on rationalist values of being "just" and measured, his conception of ideal reading favours open-endedness:

> A judicious reader will have a greater number of ideas that are passing through his mind, than of ideas presented to him by his author.[145]

In a near-anticipation of reader-response theory, Godwin claims that the meaning of a text depends less on the authoritative "ideas presented" by the author, than the spontaneous responses triggered by the text in the reader. Godwin's coda thus encourages the independent reception of texts, since the validity of an interpretation is not to be defined by the author. Thus Godwin's idea of reading turns out to be the same for the child and the adult reader.[146]

As Godwin challenges the culturally created adult-child separation through methods of reading, his advocacy of free reading for the child protests against the sentimentalised innocence of the child in his contemporary aesthetic culture, gesturing at the common perception of the child in Romanticism as a pure, natural being.[147] "It is not good," he says, that the child

> should be wholly ignorant of the perverseness of the human heart, and the springs that regulate the conduct of mankind. Trust him in a certain degree with himself. Suffer him in some instances to select his own course of reading. There is danger that there should be something too studied and monotonous in the selection we should make for him. Suffer him to wander in the wilds of literature."[148]

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[145] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 237.

[146] Cf. O'Shaughnessy 9-10, 20. In O'Shaughnessy's analysis, texts in Godwin's early career contain "an authorial truth to be uncovered by the perspicacious reader." Godwin jettisons these "immanent truths" in his later texts, where the "relationship between author and reader" exists in the "form of an equitable, conversational exchange, encouraging "the reader to construct his own truths," thus "giving the reader greater authority."

[147] See above, pp. 2-4.

[148] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 142.

Godwin advises that the child ought not to be reared as an ethereal being, "wholly ignorant" or protected from the "perverseness" or evil that exists in the adult world, or the passions that dictate the activity of adult humanity. Instead of patronising the child, Godwin asks the adult to "trust" the child's wisdom, although (probably as a practising parent) he qualifies this with the phrase "a certain degree." Pointing his finger to adult fallibility, he marks the possible narrowness of the adult's "studied and monotonous" selection. The adult should let the child "wander in the wilds," that is, explore by himself or herself the many-faceted medium that is "literature," a creative medium that open-endedly bears complex, oppositional meanings in the same text and resists final meanings.

As Godwin expresses his willingness as an adult educator to let go of the child, the latter represents his political urge to let disempowered adults explore paths for themselves too. This is evident in his democratic endeavour to make cultural capital accessible to everyone, by widening educational opportunities to the socio-economically deprived: [149]

> It has often been said that classical learning is an excellent accomplishment in men devoted to letters, but that it is ridiculous, in parents whose children are destined to more ordinary occupations to desire to give them a superficial acquaintance with Latin, which in the sequel will infallibly fall into neglect.[150]

Instead Godwin posits that "We can never certainly foresee the future destination and propensities of our children." Here, Godwin emphatically includes lower-class children in the discourse of common humanity in the pronoun "our," even as he speaks from his own middle-class perspective, and insists that "Some refinement of

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[149] See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1977) 71-106 for discussion of cultural capital.
[150] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 105.

mind and some clearness of thinking will almost infallibly result" from a classical education that is open to everybody. With the word "almost," Godwin stops short of claiming that classical studies will "infallibly" make a philosopher of the peasant:

> Though our children should be destined to the humblest occupation, that does not seem to be a sufficient reason for our denying them the acquisition of some of the most fundamental documents of human understanding.[151]

In short, through the extension of a classical education to the lower-class child, Godwin attempts to give up the patronising upper or middle class attitude that wants to lock the lower-class child into pre-determined social inferiority.

In *The Enquirer* Godwin continues to invoke his early belief in the Lockean concept of *tabula rasa*, stating that children's "minds are like a sheet of white paper."[152] In *The Enquirer*, to prove that the lower-class child ought to freely get a good education, Godwin develops his argument for the equality of all human beings in *Political Justice*. Asking his reader to "Examine the children of peasants" Godwin observes that

> Nothing is more common than to find in them a promise of understanding, a quickness of observation, an ingenuousness of character, and a delicacy of tact, at the age of seven years, the very traces of which are obliterated at the age of fourteen. The cares of the world fall upon them. They are enlisted at the crimping-house of oppression. They are brutified by immoderate and unintermitted labour. Their hearts are hardened, and their spirits broken, by all that they see, all that they feel, and all that they look forward to. [153]

Here, Godwin's rational argument for human equality is the same as in *Political* Justice, based on a constructivist view of the human subject, but the argument is rhetorically expressed through more vivid, organic images. Instead of focusing on the passive facial features of the peasant children, he represents them as real people with the active qualities of "a promise of understanding, a quickness of observation, an

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 111.
[153] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 89.

ingenuousness of character, and a delicacy of tact." The image of the "crimping-house," stresses society's betrayal of their initial promise. The animal imagery in the word "brutified" emphasises society's cruelty in divesting the children of their potential for intellectual refinement in their adolescent years. With their "spirits broken," the peasant children are culturally separated from the discourse of humanity.

In the *Enquirer* then, Godwin uses the concept of the *tabula rasa* only as far it serves his egalitarian agenda. Generally, he tones down the air of complete adult control over the child's mind in *Political Justice*. An element of uncertainty about the child's future creeps into the text as he discusses, for instance, the late-eighteenth century idea of "genius" as talent, positing an equality of intellectual capacity between human beings at birth:

> Genius, it seems to appear from preceding speculations, is not born with us, but generated subsequent to birth. It by no means follows from hence, that it is the produce of education, or ever was the work of the preceptor. Thousands of impressions are made upon us, for one that is designedly produced. The child receives twenty ideas *per diem* perhaps from the preceptor; it is not impossible that he may have a million of perceptions in that period, with which the preceptor has no concern. We learn, it may be, a routine of barren lessons from our masters; a circumstance occurs perhaps, in the intercourse of our companions, or in our commerce with nature, that makes its way directly to the heart, and becomes the fruitful parent of a thousand projects and contemplations."[154]

With the qualifiers "perhaps," "not impossible" and "may be," Godwin is hesitant about the kind of complete, rationalist, positivistic control over the environment that shapes a child's development, which reflects his general shift from his early certainties to a dawning discourse of exploration, a conception echoed in Godwin's rhetoric of eternal becoming: "This change however takes place by degrees, and probably is never complete."[155] In fact, Godwin's hesitant attitude echoes

[154] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 88-89.
[155] Ibid.

Wordsworth's rejection of the rational "meddling intellect" that destroys "beauteous forms," in the latter's "The Tables Turned" (even though the later text of Wordsworth's *Prelude* gives modern readers the impression that Godwin's rationalism was anathema to Wordsworth from the late 1790s onwards).[156]

Thus in the late 1790s, Godwin switched to the view that humans are equal in terms of their political rights but not biologically identical at their birth. It is possible that this revision of his early abstract rationalist ideas owes something to his observation of his own children and their distinctive character traits. In the public text of *Enquirer*, Godwin admits that children are not identical at birth: "That some differences are born with children cannot reasonably be denied." However, he jettisons the significance of their degree, to stress the importance of education in shaping the child's development: "But to what do these differences amount?"[157] Godwin expresses this sense of innate differences amongst children far more boldly in *St Leon,* written over roughly the same period as *The Enquirer*. In the fictional narrative of *St. Leon*, Godwin is far less accountable for his political beliefs than in a discursive work like *The Enquirer*: thus in *St. Leon,* Godwin expresses a strong sense of the uniqueness of each child. Leon, as a father, says:

> One exquisite source of gratification, when it is not a source of uneasiness, to speak from my own experience, which a parent finds in the society of his children, is their individuality. They are not puppets, moved with wires, and to be played on at will[.][158]

The negative analogy with puppets echoes Godwin's growing sense of the child as an autonomous agent, not completely amenable to adult will. The child's unpredictable "individuality" becomes exciting to the adult parent, who glories in giving up control.

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[156] Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth* 130-31; see Wordsworth, *Thirteen-Book Prelude* 232-43 (Book XII).
[157] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 87.
[158] Godwin, "Leon," *CWG* 4 114-15.

The Child's Human Identity

The trouble with overtly authoritarian relationships between the adult and child, according to Godwin, is that they create an artificial cultural divide, whereby the child is hardly recognised by the adult as sharing a common human nature. Thus in the late 1790s, Godwin represents the disempowered child as a social other, who must be integrated into the discourse of common humanity, if political emancipation is to take place. Yet Godwin's collapsing of adult-child boundaries is often accompanied by an implicit devaluing of the child, as he remains implicated in his own adult perspective and continues to reproduce subtly the adult-child divide.

In *The Enquirer*, as Godwin observes how the adult dominates the child, he notes that "a wall of separation" is artificially "erected between children and adults." In a vivid metaphor of surveillance in prisons, Godwin states that children

> are made prisoners, and subjected to certain arbitrary regulations; and we are constituted their jailors. All generous reciprocity is destroyed between the two parties.[159]

By the strategic use of the pronoun "we," Godwin draws his adult reader into a community of guilt regarding the treatment of the child. This rhetorical move of identification between Godwin the adult writer and the adult reader enforces, by contrast, the absence of "generous reciprocity" or spontaneous trust between the separated "parties" of adults and children. Godwin's indication of this absence plays upon the emotions of the reader, pointing out the absurdity of the artificial separation between regulating adults and regulated children. He hammers in the absurdity of this separation further:

> The line which is ordinarily drawn between men and children is so forcible, that they seem to themselves more like birds kept in a cage, or sheep in a pen, than like beings of the same nature.[160]

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[159] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 136.
[160] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 126.

In order to jolt the adult reader, who unwittingly treats the child as a being "not of the same nature," Godwin rhetorically assumes the perspective of the child. To the victimised child, there is no self-evident difference in the superior adult's treatment of inferiors, be they human children or imprisoned animals. By deliberately representing the child in animal similes, Godwin implies that the child ought to be integrated into the discourse of humanity that is restricted to adults.

In turn, Godwin preaches that the child should be educated into egalitarian values by the adult. He attacks his contemporary upper and middle-class ethic of keeping a social divide against lower-class domestic servants because it is contrary to liberal discourses of humanism. Upper and middle-class adults show their children

> other human creatures, upon whose forehead the system of the universe has written the appellation of man, whose limbs outwardly seem to have been formed in the same mold, but upon whom we think proper to fix a brand and attach a label with this inscription, Come not near me![161]

The child is asked to admit social others into the discourse of humanity. A commonality of human forms, Godwin implies, calls for an equality of human treatment as well. Here, Godwin finds fault in attitudes that involve condescension from a social superior to an inferior:

> We may shake our heads in arrogant compassion of their lot; but we must think of them as the puppy-dog in the hall, who is not to be touched, because he has got the mange.[162]

This "lesson of separation" would be imbibed by the middle-class child, and "will almost necessarily produce the most injurious effects."[163] Through his animal imagery of the "puppy-dog" with sores, Godwin stresses that domestic servants possess human forms but not human identities: their politically inferior position

[161] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 168.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

makes them non-human, like the disempowered child.

Insisting that the adult and the child share a common human identity, Godwin advises against sentimentalising children and placing them on a pedestal of innocence, since children inevitably grow into adulthood. Thus, he expounds his philosophy on the child's free reading in more general, abstract terms: "A child is not to be reared as that precious thing, that no wind may blow, and no sun may scorch."[164] Here, in his natural images, Godwin insists that a child is not to be treated by the adult like a delicate, greenhouse plant, safe from the blowing wind and scorching sun, that is, the vicissitudes of adult life that he or she will inevitably come to face in future, adult life. According to Godwin, the child is not to be culturally sequestered in artificial innocence a position that conflicts with the common critical perception of the sentimentalised Romantic child.[165]

As Godwin claims that the child shares a common human nature with the adult, he also points out that the child shares political rights with the adult. The child is recognised as an autonomous being, "an individual being, with powers of reasoning, with sensations of pleasure and pain, and with principles of morality," and therefore "he has a claim upon his little sphere of empire and discretion; and he is entitled to his appropriate portion of independence."[166] Godwin's diminishing and limiting adjectives "little" and "appropriate," while slightly patronising, nevertheless claim for the child a space that need not be regulated by adults. Indeed, Godwin's insistence on the child's "independence" claims for the child a representative human status. In the essay "Of Riches and Poverty," he states:

> The greatest of all human benefits, that at least without which no other benefit can be truly enjoyed, is independence.[167]

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[164] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 130.
[165] See above, pp. 2-4.
[166] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 119.
[167] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 183.

The idea is echoed elsewhere in *The Enquirer*, where Godwin recognises and respects the child's construction of his or her private universe, claiming this universe to be the force that nourishes the well-being of the child, rather than the external forces of formal education:

> The thoughts which a young person specially regards as his personal property, are commonly the very thoughts that he cherishes with the greatest affection. The formal lessons of education pass over without ruffling a fibre of his heart; but his private contemplations cause his heart to leap, and his blood to boil. When he returns to them, he becomes a new creature. He casts the slough of sedentary confinement; he resumes that elasticity of limb which his fetters had suspended. His eye sparkles; he bounds over the sod, as the young roe upon the mountains. His moments of restraint being gone, the boy becomes himself again.[168]

However, it is important to note that in this eulogy to the neo-Wordsworthian vibrancy of the child, Godwin stops short of actually claiming the stature of a creative genius for the child: "The thoughts of childhood indeed, though to childhood they are interesting, are in themselves idle and of small account."[169] Within Godwin's plea for the freedom of the child, therefore, from his own adult perspective there is an implicit contradiction as he dismisses the child's "thoughts" as "idle," since they cannot be validated by the adult's value-judgements.

This contradiction colours Godwin's educational ideas, even as he asks the adult to treat the child, with the respect due to another human being. According to Godwin, children are not to be infantilised and patronisingly spoken to by adults in a baby-language: "In our own conduct towards them, it is perhaps desirable that we should always talk to them the language of good sense, and never the jargon of the nursery." Thus,

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[168] Cf. Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," *Lyrical Ballads* 118. Wordsworth remembers his childhood as a time "when like a roe/I bounded o'er the mountains" (68-69).
[169] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 132.

> We may be gay; we may be affectionate; our countenance may be dressed in smiles; we may stoop to their capacities; we may adapt ourselves to the quickness and mutability of their tempers. We may do all this, we may win the kindness of their hearts; at the same time that we are lifting them to our level, not sinking ourselves to theirs."[170]

Here, Godwin attempts to lessen the social distance between the adult and the child: the adult is asked to make an effort and "adapt" to the elastic moods of the child. Yet, Godwin's air of adult condescension is unmistakable, especially in the use of his verbs: the serious adult is asked to "stoop" to the child's thoughtless, light-hearted gaiety, but Godwin rejects the "sinking" that the adult might perform in such an act. The implicit assumption is that the child is an inferior being, whom the superior adult raises to his or her own "level." In such devaluations of the child Godwin continues to reproduce the adult-child cultural divide, as he remains imprisoned in his own superior adult perspective.

The Child and Language

In the discussion of *Political Justice* above, it emerges that in Godwin's early career, due to his intellectual background in Rational Dissent, he believes that the "Truth," if communicated properly in the public sphere, can bring about political improvement. But simultaneously, through the metaphor of the child, Godwin is also aware that many disempowered adults do not have access to this self-validating "Truth."[171] Towards the middle of his career, this awareness is refined: his attitudes become more liberal and humane, as he recognises that when people are disempowered, they cannot afford to tell the truth straightforwardly.

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[170] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 130.
[171] See above, pp. 172-73.

In *The Enquirer*, given the evidently unequal power relationship between the adult and the child, Godwin states how this relationship is manifested in verbal exchange. Here, Godwin expresses distrust with the adult's powers of rational persuasion:

> The child may be unprejudiced and open to conviction. But it is little probable that the parent does not bring a judgment already formed to the discussion, so as to leave a small chance that the arguments of the child will be able to change it.

Seeing the child as the socially disempowered party, Godwin states that the parent's pretence of rational conversation is a sham: "If you do not convince me, you must act as if I had convinced you."[172] The child may instinctively feel unconvinced by the adult parent's rational "judgment," but because of his or her disempowered position, may not be able to counter the adult parent through counter-rational "arguments." Godwin's reflections here develop his incipient awareness, in *Political Justice*, that the language of rational persuasion can be used to intimidate a socially disempowered party like the child. Thus, through his representation of the child, he admits more explicitly, that the socially disempowered have less access to discourse and that every individual is not equally articulate in the public sphere.

In his educational principles for the child, through the later 1790s, Godwin continues to preach the straightforward communication of truth, in terms of rationalist principles. He conceives of "Frankness" as "perhaps the first of virtues" in *The Enquirer*.[173] Advocating against the adult's harsh exercise of authority on the child, through frequent punishment, Godwin states that such children would not become "frank and sincere in their behaviour." "The child, whose education has been thus mistaken" by the harsh exercise of adult authority "will become indifferent to the

[172] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 122.
[173] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 145.

question of truth and falsehood, and will exhibit the arts of a practised sophister."[174] Such a helpless child, at the mercy of the powerful adult, would become a "sophister" or manipulator of words. Such a child resorts to untruth to defend himself or herself against injustice, and Godwin recognises that he or she cannot be blamed for this.

Godwin is speaking here from the frame of Dissenting values, where the straightforward communication of truth implies that words ought to mean precisely the things they signify, in a transparent language. In *The Enquirer*, echoing Locke, Godwin insists that "One of the greatest misfortunes incident to morality, as well as to a majority of sciences, flows from the ambiguity of words."[175] However, through the child's education, Godwin recognises that the disempowered party cannot use such a transparent language in practice. The child becomes Godwin's representation of the linguistic subversion that the disempowered must adopt to survive in an unjust system.

Godwin's reluctant recognition in *The Enquirer* is developed more openly in *Caleb Williams*, where the persecuted Caleb is only too aware that words must be used by the oppressed to obfuscate and mislead those in power, if the oppressed are to survive at all. Caleb himself is the son of a peasant and discovers that the gentleman Falkland has murdered his evil neighbour Tyrrel: for this discovery Falkland and his agents continually hound Caleb, and Falkland, being a gentleman, possesses more socio-economic power than Caleb. At one point in the narrative the persecuted Caleb finds himself in prison: hemmed in by power structures, he resorts to several tricks to escape, and defends his actions: "In these proceedings it is easy to trace the vice and

[174] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 123
[175] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 221.

duplicity that must be expected to grow out of injustice."[176] Caleb's "vice and duplicity" is expressed in his hoodwinking of the jail keeper: as he explains

> I was not prepared to maintain the unvaried sincerity of my manners, at the expence of a speedy close to be put upon my existence.[177]

Through Caleb's departure from "sincerity," Godwin questions the doctrine of straightforward truth that he preaches in *The Enquirer*.

It is probably no coincidence that Caleb expresses his state of oppression in the simile of the child: "Young, ambitious, fond of life, innocent as the child unborn, I looked forward to the gallows!"[178] However, lest the reader should trust to Caleb's protestation of his legal innocence in his sentimentalised terms of the child yet to emerge from the womb, who is a blank in terms of lived experience, Godwin also indicates in his text that Caleb uses the rhetoric of the innocent child to defend himself in terms of a sentimental Romantic-era representation. Although Caleb is certainly wronged, Godwin also presents him as an unreliable narrator whose unnecessary prying of Falkland's secrets led to his downfall.[179] In fact, Caleb's persecutor Falkland is also discussed as "innocent as the child unborn" in a public house.[180] Through the public perception of Falkland as the child-like wronged party, Godwin shows the power of words to obfuscate reality, showing that the child's innocence itself is a kind of rhetoric conveniently used by adults as they please.

Ironically, although Falkland's words are believed by the public just because he carries socio-economic authority, he is not the villain that Caleb makes him out to be through most of the narrative. The law can never grasp the complexities of Falkland's murder of the evil Tyrrel. Hence, the phrase "innocent as the child unborn"

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[176] Godwin, "Caleb Williams," *CWG* 3 173.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Godwin, "Caleb," *CWG* 3 273.
[179] Godwin, "Caleb," *CWG* 3 102-6.
[180] Godwin, "Caleb," *CWG* 3 210.

is both true and false for both Caleb and Falkland, even as Godwin shows that words do not straightforwardly reflect the truth (indeed, if there is a single truth), and signals this to the reader through linguistic play in the representation of the unborn child. In 1794, Godwin's metaphor of the child signals that his former belief in the power of straightforward rational communication has broken down.

Godwin's awareness, and use, of the double-sidedness of words, in this period, can be understood in terms of his own disempowered position, as an intellectual battling the State's backlash against radicals in late 1790s Britain. From the later 1790s onwards, conservatives gathered momentum in Britain, and the radical communities were eroded by conservative government propaganda.[181] In this hostile environment, Godwin fought a losing battle, trying to sustain himself through politically non-conformist publications that never proved as successful as *Political Justice*. As Mark Philp has observed, the social networks, such as that of the Rational Dissenters, that had previously read and sustained Godwin, had much less political power to express themselves straightforwardly from the mid-1790s onwards.[182] At the time, the State became increasingly repressive towards the radicals' freedom of speech, and Godwin was intimately involved in the radicals' struggle to express themselves publicly. At the infamous Treason Trials of 1794, when Godwin's friends, Horne Tooke, Thomas Holcroft and a number of other radicals were arrested, Godwin courageously defended them.[183] In 1795, he published *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills, concerning treasonable and seditious practices and unlawful assemblies, by a lover of order* (1795). Here, he attacked the State law "subjecting a man, for all manner of speaking, to imprisonment and transportation."[184]

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[181] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 192.
[182] Philp 223-24.
[183] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 124-35.
[184] Godwin, "Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills," *PPWG* 2 144.

Still, State repression went on unabated: in 1796 the State put into practice Gagging Acts, curbing the freedom of the press.[185]

Much of the Government's repression of the radicals was mounted through attacks on their public expression, and use of language. The radicals hit back by insisting that language was not a straightforward medium of expression, and that the same words could be interpreted in different ways. As Jon Mee has observed, the radicals achieved this through subversive, metaphorical writing where the precise referents were kept unclear. For instance, if the State accused the radicals of writing a fable which could be read as sympathetic to regicide, the radicals argued that a fable about talking animals could be interpreted in many ways, and did not necessarily indicate regicide. Unless the jury could prove that the fable referred precisely to the phenomenon of regicide, the accused could go scot-free.[186] As Mee has persuasively argued, in practice, the disempowered 1790s British radicals were by no means linguistically naïve, and in fact habitually played with words and their frames of signification: very often, a fable that indicated regicide did refer to the subversion of State authority.[187] Fictional forms like fables were thus politically deployed by the radicals, as they capitalised upon the ambiguities of language not only to tell the truth, but also to tell it indirectly to the public. Godwin's use of fictional forms to convey his politically radical messages to the public can be understood in the light of the late-1790s socio-political climate. His repetitive simile of the child in *Caleb Williams* represents the unstable quality of language.[188]

It is not surprising then that in his anti-authoritarian political writing of the same period, Godwin represents the child as an emblematic figure of political

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[185] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 138; Braithwaite 151-52.
[186] See Annabel Patterson, *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 1-5. Patterson discusses the literary tradition of political messages in fables.
[187] Mee, "Examples of Safe Printing," 81-95; see Braithwaite 129.
[188] See above, pp. 199-200.

subversion. Animadverting against the stultifying, repressive "machine of human society" in *Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills* Godwin states

> The fabric that we contemplate is a sort of fairy edifice, and, though, it consist of innumerable parts, and hide its head among the clouds, the hand of a child almost, if suffered with neglect, may shake it into ruins [.][189]

Here, Godwin assures his adult readers that repressive systems and dominant ideologies are so superficial, and fragile, that even the hand of an unruly, playful child can easily tear them apart. Godwin represents the child here as a mere being: the child's hand "almost" succeeds simply because it is "suffered with neglect," that is, careful adults are not looking. Yet, the child is unaware of his or her own powers: Godwin reassures his adult readers, through the metaphor of the playful child, that they can politically "shake" repressive systems into "ruins." Through these contradictory valuations of the child, Godwin represents the child as a force that cannot be defined and limited. Instead, the child represents the destabilisation of existing categories of meaning, in linguistic play.

At the end of the 1790s, Godwin perceives several problems with the adult-child hierarchy and social divide in his contemporary culture. To undo this hierarchy, he attempts to empower the child in his representations. Ironically, over this period of Godwin's writing-career, his empowering representations of the child are addressed to the adult reader, not to the child reader: his liberal agenda for the child thus exist in theory, not practice. The next chapter explores how Godwin expresses his radical discourses practically by directly addressing the child reader.

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[189] Godwin, "Considerations," *PPWG* 2 126.

Chapter 4. In Honour of "Lynx-eyed sagacity": Godwin's Radical Books for Children

Chapter 3 shows how Godwin represents the child to adult readers as a many-faceted metaphor as he develops his political radicalism towards the end of the eighteenth century. Through Godwin's writing career over the early 1800s, his unconventional representations of the child to adult readers culminate in direct addresses to child readers, privileging their specific needs. In this phase, through his pseudonymous books for children published through the "Juvenile Library" (1805-1825), Godwin extends his radical literary and political agenda from the adult to the child reader. Unlike mainstream didactic early-nineteenth century children's literature, Godwin shows that children need not be constantly controlled by powerful adults.[1] He puts his theoretically liberal agenda for the child in the 1790s into practice through his direct addresses to the child reader in the early 1800s.

The majority of the works Godwin wrote over the early 1800s were fictional rather than discursive in nature. This confirms a general shift in his writings from his early discourse of rational argument to relatively imaginative forms in his later career. In Godwin's children's literature, his adoption of indeterminacy and open-endedness infuse his addresses to children with political and literary experimentation. Unlike most early-nineteenth century authors of children's literature, he does not tell children what is best for them.

The Story Behind Godwin's "Juvenile Library"

In 1801 Godwin married his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont, who already had two children, Charles and Claire (originally called "Jane"). Between them, the couple had to bring up five children in the next two decades--Fanny, Mary, Charles,

[1] See above, pp. 26-27.

Claire and William (born in 1803 after their marriage).[2] Godwin had to find a means of supporting this growing family.

In Godwin's time, the growing market for children's literature offered its authors and publishers a fairly regular source of income. From the early 1800s, Godwin had been involved in writing for children. He read and revised *Robin Hood*, *The Little Woman and Her Dog*, and *The Pedlar* for Benjamin Tabart, a well-established publisher and seller of children's books.[3] He wrote a children's *Bible Stories*, published by Richard Phillips in 1803. On the other hand, his wife Mary Jane Godwin had supported herself as a hack-writer of children's books for Benjamin Tabart, before she married Godwin.[4]

Given their mutual experience in writing for children, it was a logical choice for the Godwins to set up a children's bookshop in 1805. The name "Juvenile Library" was common for children's bookshops at the time, and the Godwins sold not only books, but games, toys, paints and stationery to appeal to children in all kinds of ways other than reading.[5] Below is a picture that that they adopted as a sort of "trademark": this engraving was printed on the flyleaves of the Juvenile Library books.[6] This picture was based upon a sculpture over the door of the Godwin residence at 41 Skinner Street, which housed the shop as well.[7] The picture shows the frontispiece of one of the Juvenile Library productions, Godwin's rewriting of Aesop's *Fables* (1805); indeed, the picture features Aesop telling stories to children with the animals in the background.[8]

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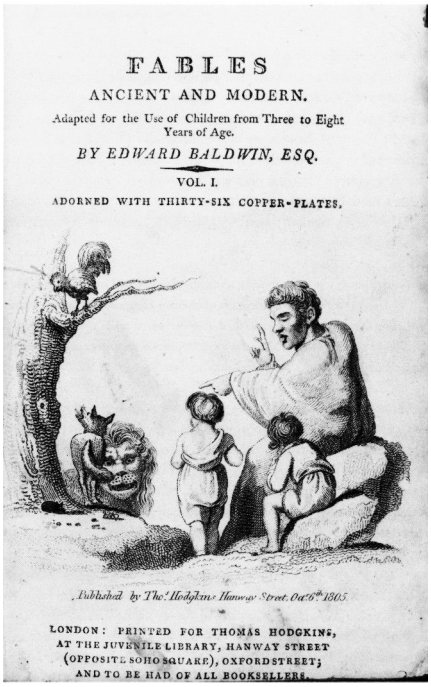
[2] See Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 249-50.
[3] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 282-83.
[4] Alderson 163.
[5] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 284-85.
[6] St. Clair, "William Godwin," *Children and their Books* 174.
[7] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 289.
[8] Edward Baldwin [William Godwin], *Fables, Ancient and Modern, Adapted for the Use of Children*, 1805, ed. David L. Greene (New York: Garland, 1976). The picture is reproduced from Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 56.


FABLES
ANCIENT AND MODERN.
Adapted for the Use of Children from Three to Eight Years of Age.
BY EDWARD BALDWIN, ESQ.
VOL. I.
ADORNED WITH THIRTY-SIX COPPER-PLATES.
Published by Tho.s Hodgkins Hanway Street Oct.r 6.th 1805
LONDON: PRINTED FOR THOMAS HODGKINS,
AT THE JUVENILE LIBRARY, HANWAY STREET
(OPPOSITE SOHO SQUARE), OXFORD STREET;
AND TO BE HAD OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

The shop ran with moderate success until 1825, when a slump in the book market forced many booksellers like the Godwins into bankruptcy.[9]

Writing for the Child Reader

At the outset of this discussion about Godwin's children's books, I would like to point out that I am using the term as a convenient label to denote the books that we know Godwin certainly authored, from archival and historical evidence. Current critical discourse has greatly questioned the Romantic legacy of the original, individual genius by shifting focus to histories of collaborative creation, and in the case of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle, as Julie Carlson has shown, individual authorship is a particularly doubtful point. Godwin's wife Mary Jane Godwin may have had a significant role in shaping the texts that are attributed to him, through verbal conversation or other exchanges that may never be recoverable to us through written documents. This is especially likely considering that Mrs. Godwin had experience in writing for children before Godwin himself did. Similarly, Godwin may have borrowed ideas from other family members or friends, but tracing this

[9] Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 261.

whole web of connections would be beyond the scope of the present thesis, and would obscure the line of continuity about the represented child that I am establishing from Wollstonecraft onwards, a discourse further developed by Godwin and the Shelleys.

Godwin's children's books have not been very widely investigated, very possibly because children's literature has still to gain respectability in many academic departments of literature worldwide. Considered from traditional academic perspectives, Godwin, the father of grand political theories of philosophical anarchism, appears to have retreated into a genre of lesser canonical, literary significance, when he took to writing mere children's books.

Critics who have resisted this traditional academic bias and pioneered significant treatments of Godwin's children's books include William St. Clair, Pamela Clemit and Brian Alderson. Through their differing perspectives, they have interpreted these children's books as texts that constitute a continuation of Godwin's political and educational interests, from the 1790s.[10] Thus, William St. Clair observes that Godwin, as a sidelined intellectual in the conservative anti-Jacobin atmosphere of the 1800s, reacted by steering away from addresses to adult readers, and worked "quietly away at influencing the next generation"—child readers who would eventually grow into adults.[11] Pamela Clemit, who shows the political force of Godwin's children's books, locates these texts in the context of his pedagogic interests, given his belief in "education as the means by which social change was to be achieved."[12] In her textual analyses, Clemit shows that Godwin's subversiveness often lies in the "formal strategies" used within the texts of his children's books, designed to foster the moral autonomy of the child reader," who is not dictated an interpretation

[10] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 279-87; St. Clair, "William Godwin as Children's Bookseller," Children and their Books 165-81.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 44-70.

of the text by the author, but given freedom to choose.[13] Brian Alderson shows that Godwin and his wife brought many creative elements into their illustrated children's texts, even as they worked within the constraints of commercial publishing in the book market.[14] These critical approaches have successfully shown the importance that Godwin gives to the child reader. By investing his profound intellectual energies in writing for children, Godwin directly challenges the adult-child social divide in early nineteenth-century culture.

Writing for child readers can be understood as Godwin's practical method of changing society, through forms of direct address to young readers. In fact, these childrens books continue, and supplement, Godwin's addresses to adult readers. Clemit's archival research on Godwin's letters reveals projects left unfinished for adult readers, which he successfully produced for child readers. In a letter written in 1793, for instance, Godwin mentions "a Roman History from the building of the city by Romulus to the battle of Actium."[15] He did not produce this work for adults, but his children's books do include a *History of Rome*.[16] Moreover, as this chapter shows, Godwin's children's books often feature the same political and literary themes as Godwin's writings for adults from the 1790s to the early 1800s, although his treatment of these themes often differs significantly depending on the age of his audience.

In practical terms, the importance that the Godwins gave to the child reader is shown by their recognition of the distinct needs of child readers. The

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[13] See Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 48. Clemit observes that Godwin's children's books attested to the Rational Dissenters' faith in the print medium as an agent of social reform and empowerment for the readers.

[14] Alderson 159-89.

[15] Clemit "Holding Proteus," *Repossessing the Romantic Past* 108.

[16] Edward Baldwin [William Godwin], *History Of Rome: From the Building of the City to the Ruin of the Republic. Illustrated with Maps and Other Plates. For the Use of Schools and Young Persons,* 1809, 2nd ed. (London, 1811).

Juvenile Library books, in the tradition of late eighteenth century children's books, were written in large print and suitably sized to fit a child reader's hands.[17] The Juvenile Library texts were written for children of school-going age, which meant that they were able to read these books by themselves, without adult assistance. In the Preface to *History of England* Godwin advertises a layout that is child-friendly, which is not unique to the Juvenile Library books, but a key element of much of the children's literature of his era:[18]

> My pages are not crowded with a variety of articles: they are so printed as to be agreeable and refreshing to the eye of a child [.][19]

Through the Juvenile Library books, the Godwins put in much talent and creativity into the publishing of children's books, some of which have become classics of children's literature. Some of Godwin's own books were reprinted until the later nineteenth century, with revisions by Victorian editors. The Godwins published the English translation of the German *Der Schwerische Robinson*, a family version of Robinson Crusoe, as *The Family Robinson Crusoe* (1814). They slightly altered the title of this text, which has since become the children's classic *The Swiss Family Robinson.*[20]

The Godwins' publications engaged a network of talented authors and illustrators outside their immediate family circle. Artists like William Mulready and George Cruikshank illustrated the books through wood-cuts. The author Eliza Fenwick worked for sometime on the shop's publications in 1807.[21] William Hazlitt published *A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue: For*

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[17] See Clemit, "Holding Proteus," *Repossessing the Romantic Past* 63.
[18] See above, pp. 11-12.
[19] Edward Baldwin [William Godwin], *The History of England, for the Use of Schools and Young Persons*, 1806; repr. 1812, rev. ed (London,1854) iv.
[20] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 294.
[21] George Cruikshank (1792-1878); Eliza Fenwick (1766-1840).

the Use of Schools (1810), with an introduction by Godwin's alter ego Edward Baldwin. Lady Mountcashell's two volumes of *Stories of Old Daniel* (1807, 1820) proved popular enough to be reprinted until Victorian times. Under Godwin's aegis, Mary Lamb published *Mrs Leicester's School* (1809) and *Poetry for Children* (1809). Together with her brother Charles Lamb, she brought out the still reprinted *Tales from Shakespear* (1807), a text that still serves as many children's (perhaps adults'?) introduction to the Shakespearean canon, allowing even modern lay readers to bypass the hurdle of early modern English. Charles Lamb's own *Adventures of Ulysses* (1808) gave children access to Fénelon's work for adults, *Adventures of Telemachus* (1699).[22]

Through such books Godwin benefited many people, by democratising knowledge to those who did not have access to highbrow culture through their schooling or family background. *The Pantheon* (1806) gave lower middle-class readers like John Keats the access to Classical culture that was not available to them otherwise.[23] Indeed, the trump-card of Godwin's *Pantheon*, as he advertises it, is to help "young readers to admire and to enjoy the immortal productions of Homer, Horace and Virgil." Thus, "young persons" could acquire cultural capital, "to improve their taste," since Classical works could be "regarded as perpetual models in the art of fine writing," for those trying to empower themselves socially by the formal study of rhetoric. The Godwins' books were priced within easy reach of a lower middle-class juvenile audience, from a few shillings to a few pence each. Through this democratisation of knowledge, practically Godwin achieved the political ideal he had preached in *Political Justice*. This was duly observed by a government spy, whose

[22] See St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 290-97.
[23] See Clemit "Philosophical Anarchism" 54. See Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 66-67.

report on the Godwins' Juvenile Library books noted that they were written "to allure schools of a moderate and lower class."[24]

That Godwin's children's books were subversive enough to attract a government spy's attention shows the many odds he had to battle, in order to democratise knowledge. Godwin was writing his children's books under duress, under the shadow of government repression. The bookstore was formally owned by Mrs. Mary Jane Godwin, and the books were trademarked as "M.J. Godwin and Co." This was probably a deliberate strategy to deflect the state authorities' attention from Godwin himself, who was publicly known as the political theorist who had attempted to subvert the State in the 1790s. [25]

Yet, apart from Godwin's idealistic agenda, there is a practical dimension to these children's books. These texts were produced essentially to supplement Godwin's slender and erratic means of livelihood, strained by a growing family. In addressing a mass-market of child readers through commodity culture, Godwin, as a publisher, was intimately involved with all aspects of book production, from commissioning authors and illustrators to advertising his wares. The strong commercial impetus of these books is confirmed by the Godwins' aggressive marketing tactics as booksellers. For instance, the jacket covers of their books advertised the eclectic range of books offered by the Juvenile Library. Although the Godwins started their business at their home in Somers Town in 1805, in 1807 they moved to 41 Skinner Street to make use of a better business location.

Moreover, Godwin was not unfailingly subversive in his texts. To help the cause of his enterprise he pretended to toe the establishment line, given that the

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[24] Quoted in Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 45-46. This was a report submitted to the Home Office, entitled "A few particulars concerning Godwin's Juvenile Library which ought to be made generally known."

[25] See Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 44. The shop was registered at first in the name of Thomas Hodgkins, who was later dismissed for mismanagement.

prospective buyers of his books would be adult parents and teachers (often conservative in their thinking) and not children themselves. Besides, Godwin was exploiting a market for child readers at large in order to support his own children: his politically idealistic urge to liberate the child had to be weighed against his practical, disciplinary role as a performing parent.

Yet, Godwin's children's books cannot be simply dismissed as play-it-safe, commercially acceptable literature for children. Such a dismissal does serious injustice to these texts, as well as to Godwin as a writer who anticipated, by at least half a century, the tradition of children's literature that developed from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards. Writers working in this tradition, including relatively recent experimental writers like Maurice Sendak or Diana Wynne-Jones, write in a culture where children's books are an important enough discourse for authors to consistently express their artistic selves through this medium. But, as I hope to show through this discussion, compared to other children's books widely read in Godwin's own time, his texts achieve levels of aesthetic and moral complexity that ought to earn them not just an honoured place in the history of education, but also in the literary history of children's books as an art form.

Neither can Godwin's children's books be claimed as straightforward expressions of Godwin's idealistic political agenda (as St. Clair and Clemit's approaches especially seem to imply). By making reading material available to more people through commercial means, Godwin was performing an important social service in the economy of the State, in the terms of Adam Smith whose writings had shaped Godwin's political philosophy.[26] These texts are often affected by commercial pressures and by the practical need to please the adult parent or teacher. And yet the

[26] See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 213-15; see above, pp. 145-46.

much-maligned commodity culture actually enables Godwin to convey his radical messages to his child readers: as mentioned in the introductory chapter, the ambivalence of Godwin's position as an eighteenth-century children's bookseller is comparable to Walter Benjamin's radio programmes for children in the early twentieth century.[27] As the discussion in this chapter shows, the contradictions in the conditions in which Godwin's texts were produced are reflected in the ideological contradictions within the texts. Godwin is often culturally subversive and conformist within the same text. The relationship between Godwin as an adult author, and the child reader as addressee, is further complicated by the fact that he could not address his young readers straightforwardly as he could adults. Very often children did not buy books: adult parents or teachers did. In the existing criticism on Godwin's children's books, this difference of the disempowered position of the child reader relative to the adult reader has not been significantly observed.

In order to reach out to the child reader, Godwin had to negotiate many structures of adult authority, including his own disciplinary role as a parent. Chapter 3 discussed how Godwin represents the child as a metaphor of linguistic subversion and play for adult readers, as he aims to unsettle repressive authority structures. The present chapter shows how Godwin negotiates adult authority as he addresses child readers, through the rhetoric of linguistic play. He tells the truth but slants it to the child reader. Indeed, this playful, slanted element in Godwin's children's books can be confirmed in his own words: recalling his dabblings in "commerce" in "Of the Length of the Life of Man: A Confession" (1822), Godwin wrote that his children's books were produced when he "panted for some interval of repose."[28] The word "repose" suggests that these texts involved an element of unregulated play, where

[27] See above, pp. 37-38.
[28] Godwin, "Of the Length of the Life of Man:," *CWG* 1 64-65.

Godwin did not feel the need to hammer in straightforward political messages to his child readers, but was, to some degree, willing to let these texts stand as literary texts in their own right, full of ambiguities, resisting closure and final meanings.

The present discussion therefore works on an approach that is alive to these nuances of Godwin's children's books, locating them within early 1800s cultural contexts. Through analyses of Godwin's playful prose and linguistic subversion, the discussion establishes that his children's books are not simply watered-down versions of serious issues that he addresses (or proposed to address) to adult readers, although his children's books feature many of the same themes as the adult books. Instead, through the irony and understatement, Godwin's rhetoric addresses radical literary and political discourses to the child reader, which is formally innovative in the context of didactic mainstream early-nineteenth-century children's literature. Through linguistic play, Godwin's adult voice achieves a richness in his addresses to the child reader that far surpasses his relatively straightforward addresses to adult readers in his discursive tracts or in his novels.

The following discussion focuses upon a number of Godwin's children's books, which are representative of his Juvenile Library corpus. *The Life of Lady Jane Grey* (1806), *History of England* (1806) and *History of Rome* (1809) are representative of Godwin's short histories for children. *The Pantheon* is Godwin's introduction to Classical mythology. In *Fables* (1805), Godwin rewrites the Aesop fables. *The Looking-Glass* (1805) is the biography of a child-artist. These works are typical of Godwin's Juvenile Library publications, offering straightforwardly educational, as well as open-ended imaginative reading to the child reader.

These texts are compared, where relevant, to Godwin's novel for adults, *Fleetwood* (1805), a novel that features representations of childhood in significant

detail and serves as a representative example of Godwin's adult fiction, written at the same time as his children's books. The themes are fairly straightforwardly presented to the reader in Godwin's adult fiction, but expressed much more subtly, through linguistic play and imaginative rhetoric, in the children's books.

Truth and Lies

Through the 1790s, Godwin, theoretically at least, preached the ideal of a rational straightforward language in the service of truth, in line with Dissenting values of "frankness." But in practice, in the later 1790s, he turned towards a language of subversion and play, as he gradually realises that the disempowered cannot speak the truth straightforwardly. This section shows how Godwin's adult fiction and children's books exemplify these different models of language.

For adult readers in *Fleetwood*, the child represents, in contrast to the adult, true knowledge that issues in truthful language. The adult world is portrayed as flawed, and childhood is invested with an instinctual apprehension of the truth. Remembering his schoolboy years, Fleetwood remarks that when

> boys grow up to be men, the dullard will frequently play his part to the great satisfaction of the spectators; and not only outstrip his more ingenious competitor in the road of fortune, but even be more highly esteemed, and more respectfully spoken of, by the majority of those who know him. [29]

The deluded adult world of the "dullard" and his rapt spectators "are respectfully spoken of" by false, flattering adults. Fleetwood elaborates that this does not exist in childhood, where pretence is invariably dismantled, which the "lynx-eyed sagacity and frolic malice of schoolboy against schoolboy are sure to discover and expose."[30] The child possesses the virtue of calling a spade a spade, maliciously or otherwise.

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[29] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 49.
[30] Ibid.

Godwin's representation of the truthful child is linked to political subversion in *Fleetwood.* In the sub-plot, there is a classic fairytale predicament: the child Ruffigny, orphaned by the early death of his parents, is victimised by an evil uncle, who deprives Ruffigny of property and a home, sending him into a life of drudgery in the silk-mills of Lyons. This uncle backs up all these actions through the rhetoric of adult domination over the child. Addressing Ruffigny as "a very perverse and wicked boy," without any justification whatsoever, the uncle works from a political discourse where the child functions as a silent Other to the adult and is patronised accordingly: "you do not know what is good for you, and must trust to the better discernment of your elders." [31] This "trust" is an abuse of the child's trust by the adult. As Godwin shows, this rhetoric has the effect of cowing down the child, even though the latter has an instinctive sense that his uncle is hardly being as altruistic as he pretends to be:

> The phrases my uncle had employed, of the superior judgment of our elders, the incapacity and blindness of children, and every thing that older people do being calculated for our good, was the cant I had incessantly heard during the last year; and, though these phrases certainly were never employed upon a more unworthy occasion, they excited in me a mysterious sensation of reverence and awe, which I felt incapable to shake off [.][32]

Instinctively, the child Ruffigny is suspicious of this "cant," recalling Godwin's political position in the 1790s, as he drew upon his Rational Dissenting heritage, for a transparent language, where words would not be used to obfuscate meaning for the vested purposes of the socially powerful.

Even in the early 1800s, Godwin continued to espouse the straightforward, rational communication of truth through transparent language, for instance, in his essay on the liberal politician Charles James Fox, "Character of Mr Fox," published in the *London Chronicle* (1806). Here, Godwin states: "Truth gave a forcible impulse to

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[31] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 82.
[32] Ibid.

his sensorium, and he felt excited to communicate it in all its nakedness." Godwin's creed of frankness infuses his praise: "He hated disguise, and could not demean himself to practise it."[33] Godwin compares Fox's frankness to that of the spontaneous, ingenuous child: "His feelings in themselves, and in the expression of them, were, in the most honourable sense of the word, childlike."[34] Here, the word "childlike" represents a political corrective to the adult's debased behaviour and language.

In the passage from *Fleetwood* analysed above, despite the smokescreen of words misused by the adult, the child Ruffigny recognises the political relation in which he stands with respect to adult hegemony. When Vaublanc, his uncle's agent, makes a show of asking the boy for his consent to be sent to the silk-mills, the child cannot influence the decision, but through his recognition of adult hypocrisy, at least puts up resistance by asking for linguistic transparency: "pray, pray, M. Vaublanc, do not ask me another time, whether I am willing?"[35] The weak child's plea for transparent language negates the powerful adult's mere show of the child's consent to his enslavement.

Following his employment in the silk-mills, the child Ruffigny relates the horror of his experiences there, in the right rhetoric of straightforward yet impassioned language.[36] Through the fictional child's voice, Godwin makes his adult readers aware of the real evils of industrialised child labour in the early nineteenth century. Ruffigny speaks as one child among many at the silk-mill, making his experiences not individual and accidental, but representative of the general victimisation of children by cruel, misguided, powerful adults. The child-labourers' experiences stand at complete odds with the evil Vaublanc's rhetorical claim that his

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[33] Godwin, "Introduction to a History of the Administration of 1806," *PPWG* 2 222-23.
[34] Godwin, "History of the Administration," *PPWG* 2 231.
[35] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 87.
[36] See above, pp. 149-50.

"town is a perfect paradise." This "paradise," as Vaublanc elaborates, is divested of "poverty. We have no such thing as idleness, or lewdness, or riot, or drunkenness, or debauchery of any sort."[37] It soon becomes evident, however, that this apparent utopia is in reality a dystopia of futuristic science fiction: Vaublanc explains that the child-labourers are "four years of age" or younger, and compose a lobotomised world of soulless, efficient human beings browbeaten into utter submission: the children "learn no bad habits; but are quiet, and orderly, and attentive, and industrious." In contrast to Vaublanc's optimism, Ruffigny draws the adult reader into commiseration with the children's deformed bodies and the "stupid and hopeless vacancy in every face."[38]

This rhetorical move lets Godwin bring his angry message visually home. Supervised within an atmosphere of "intermitted vigilance" of adult factory personnel, the children are disciplined and mechanised by the "dead life, this inactive and torpid industry."[39] Here, the children are disciplined through the ethic of surveillance that Godwin had railed against in his 1790s political writings against policies of state repression. Such surveillance is shown to dehumanise the physical child, as well as the child who metaphorically represents the woes of the early-1800s, incipient, working classes. Ruffigny voices Godwin's political objection to the exploitation of the lower-class adult or child, in a language that potentially provokes the adult reader's outrage at socio-economic injustice within industrial capitalism.

In his address to adult readers, Godwin shows the victimisation of the weak child by the powerful adult through the straightforward communication of the truth of social injustice. In his address to child readers, however, Godwin often performs this through a highly allusive language where he shows, and does not simply tell, the child reader about the victimisation of children by unenlightened adults.

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Godwin, "Fleetwood" *CWG* 5 89.
[39] Ibid.

In *Life of Lady Jane Grey*, the noble protagonist Jane is mistreated by her despotic parents when young, and shown to be politically victimised by her parents' misguided notions even when she reaches her late teens. Although Jane is not quite a child at this age, she is still young and vulnerable. The cunning Duke of Northumberland plots to make her queen for his own political interests in collusion with her parents, and Godwin draws a parallel between her parents' methods of child-rearing with their disloyal attitude towards the State:

> The same folly which had made these good people taunt and tyrannise over their lovely daughter, because they thought that was the way to make her accomplished, made them now scruple no crime against their country.[40]

Godwin directs an ironic barb at the "good people," that is, Jane's over-ambitious parents, signalling to the child reader that his words are not to be invariably taken at face-value. His ironic register is continued, as he contrasts the young Jane's wish for "tranquil usefulness and honour" with the political ambition of her mother, the marchioness of Dorset. Godwin represents the parent's grasping ambition in the conventional rhetoric of motherly love:

> So entirely did the marchioness of Dorset love her daughter, that, though her own claim in the order of nature came first, she willingly resigned all pretensions for herself, that she might see her pious and lovely Jane on the throne of England. [41]

Here, Godwin attacks the rhetoric of maternal love, which victimises the child in this case. The ironic archness of Godwin's "entirely" and "willingly resigned" hints to the child reader that the reality of the situation is in fact just the opposite: Jane's mother loves her ambition more than her daughter.

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[40] Theophilus Marcliffe [William Godwin], *Life of Lady Jane Grey, and of Lord Guildford Dudley, Her Husband* (London, 1806) 35-36.
[41] Ibid.

Through the young Jane, Godwin communicates to the child-reader a sense of the child's truth versus adult falsehood, but he performs this through an allusive, playful language that is significantly different from Ruffigny's serious, direct indictment of false adult language in *Fleetwood.* In the political landscape there is a period of confusion, as Jane ascends the throne, and is then replaced by Mary I. Consequently, Jane is accused of treason.[42] Godwin describes the scene of Jane's accusation in court in terms which make it clear that an innocent defendant is being silenced by an unfair bombardment of impressive words:

> When she was brought into court, there were lawyers there, instructed to describe what she had committed as the most hardened of crimes, and to urge the excellence of her understanding, the greatness of her attainments, and the piety of her heart, as the most horrible aggravations of her guilt. They asked her, how she, so young, and who had been thought to be so good, could have worked herself up, thus to set her hand to war and battle, to the murder of her lawful sovereign, and the destruction and misery of her country? The proofs of the facts alleged against her were unquestionable, and she made no defence.[43]

In this instance the child reader is shown, rather than told, the disjunction between truth and falsehood. Godwin does not say that Jane is innocent: instead, he represents her through a tissue of perception where her being "so young" and "thought to be so good" are used as counters by the lawyers "instructed" by higher authorities, to emphasise her downfall. Godwin's description of this trial scene possibly draws on his earlier, personal experience of the Treason Trials of 1794, as well as his descriptions of the hounding of Caleb Williams by the socio-economically privileged Falkland: apparently neutral legal "facts" belie the truth of Jane's moral innocence.[44] Godwin describes Jane's trial, in the context of what he has described before in the narrative, that is, Jane's persecution by her ambitious parents and the duke of

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[42] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 49-51.
[43] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 68-71.
[44] See above, pp. 199-201.

Northumberland. This context conveys to the child reader that he or she is not to believe the lawyers who only see the apparent "facts," and are blind to the history of Jane's situation at the trial.

Moreover, Godwin shows the child reader that Jane's silent refusal to acquit herself is a resistance to her powerful prosecutors' misuse of language. In a throwback to his political ideal of straightforward, transparent language in the early 1790s, Godwin shows that Jane's accusers do not use rhetoric in the service of truth. When the staunchly Catholic Queen Mary I sends Friar Feckenham to convert Jane to Catholicism before her execution, Jane refuses to listen to him, and the priest cannot understand her obstinacy:

> He thought it was pity (sic) the admirable discourse he had meditated for her edification, should be lost. He had always found, in the schools of Oxford and Cambridge, that three days was sufficient for a proposition to be debated in all its forms between the most learned disputants.[45]

Here, Godwin (from the perspective of his own non-religious position) directs his animus at the collusion of Church and State interests, as they deny Jane's intellectual autonomy: the attempted religious conversion serves Queen Mary's political interests. The Friar presumptuously assumes that he can cow Jane by a string of impressive words. Here Godwin, coming as he did originally from professional middle-class Dissenting circles, has his little dig at the upper-class set-up of Oxbridge, as he shows Jane's immunity to the whorls of sophistry. The Friar uses the medieval model of scholastic rhetoric, still in use at Tudor Oxbridge, with a pre-formed "proposition" and "forms," as he concentrates on the forms rather than the spirit of persuasive language. The Friar's language was one of the kinds of outdated rhetoric criticised by the progressive practitioners of eighteenth-century right rhetoric, which was less rule-

[45] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 91-92.

bound and valorised the language of plain speaking.[46] Jane's silent resistance here to retrograde practices of language conveys her alignment with politically progressive forces to the child reader.

Furthermore, Godwin gives physical shape to the political persecution of the innocent Jane in his narrative, as he relates the physical circumstances of her imprisonment. He paints graphic images of the surveillance practised by authorities over political prisoners, representing the phenomenon as a fundamental violation of human dignity. The conditions of a prison, he begins "are what no one," generally, and "not a prisoner" specifically "would desire." "Persons committed to a fortress for imputed crimes against the state" have at least three watch guards in close proximity, besides, "A guard sleeps in their chamber." Moreover, if the prisoners are let into the open air for short walks, "a gentleman-jailor (as he is called) walks close behind them, to observe their motions, and overhear their words": this figure sounds much like a government informer or spy. Further on, Godwin continues:

> A prison is a dreary abode, and, if the prisoners desire any amusement, they must apply for leave to have a book, a pen, or paper, which is sometimes granted, and oftener refused. Every thing depends upon the caprice of their superintendents, who are seldom indisposed to make those who are under government feel their power. The prisoner is rarely permitted to see his friends, rarely even (perhaps once a week, if he is particularly favoured) his nearest relations. The husband is not left alone with his wife, nor the father with his child.[47]

Surveyed at all hours, the prisoner remains subject to "caprice" or arbitrary sallies of authority practised by the prison officials. Godwin's indictment here, of the state of political prisoners reflects his experience of State repression of free speech in the 1790s, when he had seen his radical friends being arrested for seditious libel. In the passage from *Jane Grey*, with its "gentleman-jailor," Godwin shows the child reader

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[46] See above, pp. 149-50.
[47] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 71-74.

the inhumanity of Jane's persecution by the State in starkly visual images. He shows that freedom of speech should not be restricted by the State, instead of telling the reader, as he had in the 1790s through discursive works like *Political Justice*. The political need for frankness and open discussion is thus conveyed more subtly to the child reader than a straightforward argument.

In these texts, Godwin associates the adult world with falsehood of language and the child's with truth. This black-and-white moral division, however, does not reflect the reality of the conditions in which Godwin produced his texts for child readers through the Juvenile Library. In Chapter 3 I have discussed that although Godwin theoretically professes a straightforward, truthful language towards the end of the 1790s, in practice he realises that the disempowered cannot often afford to speak their truths straightforwardly. In his own disempowered position as a politically subversive writer of children's books, Godwin had to resort to several underhand practices to undermine State authority and social conservatism. These practices are briefly sketched below, as they are crucial to a fuller understanding of how Godwin presents his radical political ideals in fiction for child readers. The literary form of these texts allows sufficient ambiguity of interpretation, masking their politically subversive messages. The relative success of Godwin's bookselling business shows that many adult parents and teachers who probably adhered to mainstream conservative thought in the early 1800s were not bothered enough by Godwin's radical encoded messages (even if they detected any) to baulk at buying these books to entertain and educate their children.

For parents used to the mainstream didactic children's literature of the early 1800s, Godwin offered texts that could be seemingly assimilated into this tradition. To please the moralistic monitors of the children's publishing industry, the

advertisements of the Juvenile Library books (in individual texts) presented the books as didactic models for children. In the List of "New Books for Children" of *Life of Lady Jane Grey*, "The Looking-Glass" is subtitled as "a Mirror in which every Good Boy and Girl may see what He or She is; and those who are not yet Quite Good, may find what they ought to be."[48] To forestall criticism from State and religious quarters, Godwin's children's books were often strategically embellished with review comments, especially from the rival establishment, conservative camps. In the list of "New Books for Children" in the *Life of Jane Grey*, for instance, there are pages advertising *Fables, Ancient and Modern* by Godwin's alter ego Edward Baldwin. The *British Critic* for November, claims that these "fables are better calculated to excite the attention of Children, to amuse and instruct them, than any we have ever perused." The explicitly politically conservative periodical, *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* echoes the *British Critic*'s terms of praise, stressing the pedagogic import of the fables: "They are unquestionably written" for "making an impression on, and conveying instruction to, those for whose use they are designed."[49] As discussed earlier, late-eighteenth century mainstream children's authors, following Locke, primarily wrote to educate the child and not to simply entertain. Many pedagogues in the early 1800s continued to honour this tradition.[50]

Financially, the Godwin couple had not been very well off when they set up the shop: consequently, the shop was beset by frequent money crises. In 1806 and 1808, Godwin got the better of these crises by appealing to rich, well-established admirers of his previous work in the 1790s, such as Lord Lauderdale and Lord Holland.[51] On these occasions, Godwin collected subscriptions for his bookshop. To

[48] See flyleaf of Jane Grey.
[49] Ibid.
[50] See above, pp. 25-26, 54-57.
[51] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 291.

potential subscribers who might not sympathise with his radical politics, he described himself as operating

> under the feigned name of Edward Baldwin, an expedient to which he felt himself obliged to have recourse in consequence of the prejudices which have been industriously circulated against him. These books are so written as to be incapable of occasioning offence to any; as indeed, Mr. Godwin would have held it an ungenerous and dishonourable proceeding to have insinuated obnoxious principles into the minds of young persons under colour of contributing to their general instruction [.][52]

In the conservative milieu of his times, being under perpetual public attack made Godwin resort to dissimulation. As he ingratiates himself with his rich and famous admirers, Godwin promises not to discomfort the latter. Still, the self-defensive, pompous tone of his language protests too much: his protestations of innocence are nearly overturned by the sprinkle of negatives: "are so written as to be *in*capable of occasioning offence," "*un*generous and *dis*honourable" (my emphases).

The "feigned name" of Edward Baldwin was only one of the pseudonyms adopted by Godwin as the author of his children's books: other pseudonyms (convincingly identified by William St. Clair in particular) were Theophilus Marcliffe and William Scolfield.[53] In the passage quoted above, Godwin explicitly dismisses "obnoxious principles." But in a covert autobiographical note about his bookshop, probably written in 1805, he shows that he was fully aware of the delicate ground he trod amidst government regulation, as well as the conservative politics of evangelical philanthropists like Sarah Trimmer, who herself wrote religious texts to inculcate habits of social conformism in lower-class children:[54]

> Among many difficulties which were to be conquered in this enterprise, one arose from the absolute necessity there was that the

[52] Godwin, *William Godwin* I 160.
[53] St. Clair, Godwins and Shelleys 279.
[54] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 283.

> public should entertain no suspicion that I was connected with the concern.

As he adopted pseudonyms for his children's books to deflect attention from his position as a subversive public intellectual and sold the books with his wife's trademark, Godwin was sensible of brushing against mainstream culture: "The popular cry for some years past on the topics of government and religion, " he claimed, had been "opposite to the principles I am known to entertain."[55]

Godwin's radical "principles" thus exist in perpetual tension with his apparently conformist addresses to child readers. In the 1790s, he had preached that honesty was always the best policy in the use of language: language ought to be unfailingly straightforward and truthful. But as the following section shows, in his 1800s practice he could not always communicate straightforward truth to the child reader.

The Trickster

Chapter 3 shows how Godwin represents, in his novels for adults, the survival of the disempowered by dissimulation and the use of equivocal language: Caleb Williams survives Falkland's persecution through "vice and duplicity."[56] Caleb is a character who can be read as a trickster. The trickster recurs in several cross-cultural myths as an ambivalent figure, an underdog who subverts unjust authority through a cleverness that is often contrary to conventional morality and ethics (examples would include Hermes, the god of thieves in Greek myth, Anansi the spider in West African and Caribbean folklore, and the naughty hare Bugs Bunny in twentieth-century consumer culture).[57] In Godwin's recurring underhand, trickster-like practices in his addresses to child readers, he tries to convey his radical messages

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[55] Godwin, *William Godwin* II 129-31.
[56] Godwin, "Caleb," *CWG* 3 173; see above, pp. 199-200.
[57] See Carl Kerenyi, "The Trickster in Relation to Greek Mythology," trans. R. F. C. Hull, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, by Paul Radin (New York: Schocken, 1956) 171-91.

through allusive, playful language. So it is hardly surprising that his texts constantly feature the subversive trickster in a positive light.

In *History of England*, Godwin chiefly presents chronicles of the rulers of England, including kings and queens and republican politicians like Oliver Cromwell. Amongst these histories of the rulers, however, he expresses sympathies with people at the lower end of the socio-economic power equation. Thus he includes tidbits of subversive folklore within this history of authoritative figures, for instance, a digression about Robin Hood, the mythic English noble outlaw:

> In the time of Richard lived the famous Robin Hood, who retired with a hundred followers into Sherwood Forest, where he subsisted upon the king's deer, and the booty he took from travellers. Him and his followers men never dared to attack, though ever so strong: he pillaged the rich to give to the poor; so that, of all thieves, he is the prince and the most gentle: volumes of old English songs have been made of his exploits.[58]

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England, as Stephen Knight has documented, a cultural vogue arose for Robin Hood as a subversive figure or a classical trickster hero.[59] Godwin's representation can be easily understood in this light, as he knew Joseph Ritson, the antiquarian whose landmark text entrenched Robin Hood firmly in English culture.[60]

As Knight observes, although Ritson's own political leanings were radical and influenced by the French Revolution, he conceived of Robin Hood as dispossessed gentry rather than as a yeoman. This contradiction is echoed in Godwin's characterisation of Robin: "of all thieves, he is the *prince* and the most *gentle*" (my emphases). However, positioned after the obviously outlaw term

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[58] Godwin, *History of England* 42-43.
[59] Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003) 94-98.
[60] Joseph Ritson (1752-1803); Joseph Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs and Ballads Now Extant Relative to the Celebrated English Outlaw, To Which are Prefixed Historical Anecdotes of His Life* (London, 1820).

"thieves," Godwin's terms "prince" and "gentle" are also suitably vague, not necessarily literal references to Robin's birth, and dignify Robin's status as an underdog who gets the better of the establishment.

In Godwin's *Fables*, a text written in a genre that straightforwardly appears to drum morals into the (ideally) obedient child reader, subversive trickery becomes a necessary political tool for the socio-economically underprivileged. In "The Poor Farmer and the Justice" Godwin begins his narrative with vivid graphic caricatures of the "rich justice of the peace" and a "poor farmer," who has come to the justice to redress a grievance. The justice is afflicted with material excess. He boasts "five or six footmen," "several parlours," lives "every day upon turbot and venison," and in consequence, lies "very ill of the gout, reclining in his elbow chair, and with his foot supported upon a velvet cushion in great pain." The hard-working farmer, on the other hand, boasts "no superfluity of provisions," and "had not a pain or an ache about him." Thus Godwin directs the sympathy of his (probably not very privileged) child readers towards the farmer.

The justice's attitude towards the farmer's grievance is dismissive at first. Standing above and beyond the latter's universe, he negates the validity of its conflicts and concerns: "You little farmers are for ever falling out among yourselves, and then you come and plague me with your quarrels." It turns out that the justice possesses an unruly bullock that constantly breaks into the farmer's fields and destroys his crops. But, in a tactical move, the farmer asks the justice how he would deal with the bullock if it hypothetically belonged to the farmer. The justice falls for the underdog farmer's defence strategy, and with cruel complacency, rules that the farmer "shalt kill him immediately." At this, the farmer immediately clarifies that the bullock actually belongs to the justice, not the farmer, and the justice has humanity

enough to see the farmer's side of the question. On this episode, the seemingly naïve narrator comments:

> The justice was terribly ashamed of himself. If the farmer had said at first that it was the justice's bull that had done all the mischief, I am afraid he would have set a very different face on it. But he thought he could not sit there as a justice, and say that there was one rule for a rich man, and another for a poor one. So he sent his bailiff, and paid the waste, and the poor man was contented with this, and excused his worship from killing the bull.

However, the narrative is hardly resolved with this peaceful conflict resolution. The farmer goes home with a lingering sense of guilt, and confesses to his wife "I have told a sort of a lie, and this money will never prosper with us." He swears henceforth that he would "rather stand by the loss of half a field of corn, than not tell the honest truth at once."[61] But from the plot, and asides delivered in this story, it is evident that had the farmer told the "honest truth" at once, he would never have received justice. Through the farmer's linguistically subversive trick, Godwin shows the child reader that truth and falsehood are not morally simple, and the disempowered must occasionally resort to technical falsehood, in order to survive oppressive authority.

In his collection of classical myth in *The Pantheon*, Godwin glorifies the trickster on a grander scale in his anecdote about Bacchus as a child-god. While living in the island of Naxos, the sleeping child Bacchus is captured by a band of Tyrrhenian pirates, who intend to sell him off as a slave. However, "Bacchus, a blooming and lovely boy, was conscious, it seems, of his divine origin and power, and resolved to make himself sport of these audacious robbers." He pretends to be frightened of the pirates, and asks them to convey him home. The pirates, in turn, pretend to obey his

[61] Godwin, *Fables* 66-68.

wishes as they, in reality, row in the opposite direction. In response, Bacchus acts as though he were really in distress, and to teach the pirates a lesson, makes their ship immoveable, and subjects them to the power of his divine retribution:

> They plied their oars incessantly: suddenly vines which seemed to spring out of the sides of the ship, twined their branches round the oars, and they became immoveable too: the vines climbed the masts, and hung their luxuriant clusters over the sails: Bacchus waved a spear he held in his hand, and tigers, lynxes and panthers appeared to swim round the ship, and play with the waves: the pirates, seized with astonishment and frenzy at what they beheld, leaped overboard into the sea, and by the power of the God were changed into dolphins: this done, Bacchus caused the vessel once more to float upon the water, and presently arrived, accompanied with his train of tigers panthers and dolphins, at the place of his residence.[62]

Here, Bacchus acts the trickster, using deception to his advantage to get the better of the adult pirates who attempt to victimise him. To bring his message of subversion home to the child reader, Godwin also takes particular pains to make the figure of Bacchus come alive. He adopts a vivid storytelling style, injecting energy into his narrative: "vines" emerge "suddenly," and they hold the ship in a deadlock. Bacchus's companion animals magically appear out of nowhere and the ferocity of these wild jungle cats complements the playfulness of the dolphins into which the pirates are transformed. Bacchus's entourage of animals, as he goes home, makes the child-god, in this context, a larger-than-life figure, emphasising his extraordinary, developing powers.

The subversive intent of Godwin's trickster child-god Bacchus is especially clear when contrasted against his source text, Francis Pomey's collection of Classical myth, *The Pantheon Representing the Fabulous Histories of the Heathen Gods And Most Illustrious Heroes in a Short, Plain and Familiar Method, by Way of Dialogue*

[62] Edward Baldwin [William Godwin], *The Pantheon: or Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome For the Use of Schools, and Young Persons of Both Sexes* (London, 1806) 176-77.

(1713). Pomey's text was adapted and revised by Andrew Tooke "For the Use of Schools," and indeed, Andrew Tooke's was the standard textbook on Greek mythology in English schools when Godwin wrote his book.[63] Andrew Tooke's preface to this text advertises its "easie Method" and "agreeable Plainness," advertising its rationalist vocabulary.[64] Godwin instead, as seen above, presents the story of Bacchus as a sly child-god in full imaginative, narrative flair. Whereas Godwin develops Bacchus's story in vivid images, in his source-text the episode (from the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) is finished off by Pomey in a single dry paragraph.

> When he was yet a Child, some Tyrrhenian Mariners found him asleep, and carry'd him into a Ship: wherefore he first stupify'd them, stopping the Ship in such a manner, that it was unmoveable; afterwards he caused Vines to spring up in the Ship on a sudden, and Ivy twining about the Oars; and when the Seamen were almost dead with the Fright, he threw them headlong into the Sea, and changed them into dolphins [.][65]

The difference between Godwin and Pomey's treatments is obvious: Godwin's vivid visual description makes Bacchus an arresting, intriguing figure to the child reader's consciousness, enhancing his status as a trickster hero who gets the better of the unjust adult authority of the pirates.

Godwin's Bacchus gets the better of pirates, that is, adults who have already gone beyond the pale of conventional society's authority. But the episode, represented in Godwin's heightened language, illustrates complacent adults' under-estimation of the usually disempowered child. Bacchus is only a weak human child in appearance: through his godly identity Godwin shows the child reader that the seemingly weak can be very powerful in reality. His trickster's mode of behaviour shows the actually

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[63] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 173.
[64] Francois Pomey (1618-83); Francois Pomey, *The Pantheon, Representing the Fabulous Histories of the Heathen Gods,* 1659, rev. Andrew Tooke, 6th ed (London, 1713) 2.
[65] Pomey 76.

disempowered child a potentially powerful figure who gets the better of unjust authority.

Autonomy

Godwin conveys his radical message about empowering the child to his readers by representing the child frequently as a lone figure, often as an autodidact who must resist conventional adult codes of authority and systems of knowledge, and chalk out his or her own individual path.

To the adult readers of *Fleetwood*, Godwin represents the child's need for social empowerment directly, through the pronouncements of the child Ruffigny who stands out from the characters as an independent voice. Speaking of the victimised conditions of child-labourers at the silk-mills of Lyons, Ruffigny says that in such conditions of socio-economic entrapment, these children do not possess that autonomy that Godwin had posited as a basic human right in his political and educational writings of the 1790s. As Ruffigny asserts:

> The mind of a child is essentially independent; he does not, till he has been formed to it by hard experience, frame to himself the ideas of authority and subjection [.][66]

Here, Godwin recapitulates his Lockean inheritance of natural rights discourse to insist that the child has no innate notion of being subject to adult dominance—with the addition that the child, like the adult, is represented as an "essentially independent" or naturally autonomous being. This autonomy cannot find expression if the body of the child is mechanised into submission, and to prove this point, Godwin draws upon his Rousseauian heritage, where the freedom of the body is a correlate of the freedom of the mind. As Ruffigny states:

> Liberty is the parent of strength. Nature teaches the child, by the play of the muscles, and pushing out his limbs in every direction, to give

[66] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 89-90.

> them scope to develope themselves. Hence it is that he is so fond of sports and tricks in the open air, and that these sports and tricks are so beneficial to him[.][67]

Accordingly, the liberated, autonomous mind of the child deserves freedom, equally from constraining adult ideology and physical restraint.

> The mind of a child is no less vagrant than his steps; it pursues the gossamer, and flies from object to object, lawless and unconfined: and it is equally necessary to the development of his frame, that his thoughts and his body should be free from fetters[.][68]

This "Liberty," is "lawless and unconfined" beyond the pale of adult authority. Ruffigny concludes that this "Liberty," necessary to the growth of the child into a human adult, is not available to child-labourers "in manufacturing towns." Validating his statements by drawing upon the Rousseauvian discourse of the noble savage, Ruffigny observes that

> The children of gipsies and savages have ruddy cheeks and a sturdy form, can run like lapwings, and climb trees with the squirrel[.][69]

Hence, Ruffigny finds his liberation in physical movement: fed up with the drudgery of the silk mills, he runs away from the town. Escape from slavery makes the child glory in his "conviction" of autonomy: "I belonged to no one."[70]

Alongside Godwin's journalistic detailing of the child as victim, the adult reader is offered an alternative model of the powerful orphan child, who faces various adventures on his travels (he even gets robbed once). Godwin represents the child Ruffigny in the literary tradition of the lone runaway picaresque hero, who was usually an adult. The child Ruffigny becomes an emblem of the social outsider, "a friendless outcast and an exile," something of a Romantic wanderer, freed from the

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 107.

constraints of mainstream culture.[71] Thus, Godwin's representation of the physically liberated child becomes a metaphor of autonomy for both the child and the adult.

Godwin celebrates the child as an autonomous figure in his adult fiction, free from the adult dispensation. However, these representations of the autonomous child differ from his addresses to child readers. In the latter, Godwin writes as a parent himself, and, besides addressing his child readers directly, also indirectly addresses parents who actually bought his children's books. Thus, his radical desire to release the child is mediated by his realistic, adult, parental imperative to socialise, and therefore to some extent, contain the child within structures of adult authority.

In *Jane Grey*, the theme of the autonomous child's resistance to excess adult power is treated differently. Godwin states that Jane was not "fortunate in her parents."[72] She is kept under draconian discipline in her childhood: as she tells the Elizabethan scholar Roger Ascham, whenever she is "in presence either of father or mother," every action of hers must be performed "perfectly," or "else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yea presently sometimes with pinches, nips, and bobs."[73] Added to their acts of physical coercion, Jane's parents put pressure on her to excel in everything. They "were desirous she should be accomplished, but they did not know the best way of going about it." Unlike Godwin himself who invested time and effort in educating his own children, Jane's parents can only "procure" her a set of "instructors and masters."[74] Godwin is careful to emphasise, however, that although Jane's parents engage tutors to educate her, Jane acquires learning of her own volition. Thanks to her studies, books let Jane escape into an alternative utopia

[71] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 93.
[72] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 3.
[73] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 12-16.
[74] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 3.

where she counters the world of adults who exercise abusive authority. As she confesses to Ascham,

> whatsoever I do but learning, is full of grief, trouble, fear, and wholly misliking unto me. And thus my book hath been so much my pleasure, and bringeth daily to me more pleasure and more. [75]

Godwin represents the studious Jane as a role model to the child reader, where education is presented as a force of liberation. This representation serves a didactic function that is ultimately very Lockean, that is, to "trick" children into learning, and this message is conveyed in an indirect aside to adult parents or teachers, the prospective buyers of the Juvenile Library books:

> This little story, thus simply told by this admirable child, affords a striking example, how wrong that system of education is, which treats a free and apt disposition with severity, and, as it were, applies the whip and spur to that horse which, from the prompting of his own nature, would go as fast as any master ought to desire him.[76]

There is something disturbing about the scenario of the child retreating into the world of books in order to escape the cruel adult world. Books dignify Jane's rebellion: her rebellion does not make her a problem child and take a shape that would seriously displease her fictional adult parents, or indeed put off Godwin's prospective customers, that is, actual adult parents, from buying his book. Tellingly, even as Jane escapes sordid reality through her books, she reads in the library owned by her parents, and acquires knowledge from tutors hired by her parents, empowering herself by acquiring cultural capital. Her rebellion is therefore complicit with her fictional parents' aims: the child is controlled by reading, and likely to make actual adult parents buy Godwin's book.

Still, Jane is a child who survives adult neglect and abuse, becoming the self-fashioned individual, the autodidact. Godwin develops the representation of the child

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 15-16.

as an autodidact extensively in *The Looking-Glass,* his biography of his friend William Mulready as a child-artist.[77] Here the autodidactic child is represented, in very positive terms, as he gradually develops into an artist, and here Godwin expresses even more clearly than in the 1790s, his switch from his early abstract theory to a growing stress upon the role of affections. In July 1801, he observed that his "writings hitherto" had

> exhibited a view of half only of the human mind, there remain the feelings, & the imagination considered as the instrument of feeling[.][78]

Godwin expresses his new adherence to emotive values through his protagonist's growth in *The Looking-Glass*.

In this *künstlerroman*, Godwin shows that the young Mulready's first attempts at drawing are remedial: before three years of age, with a piece of chalk, he sits and corrects the hares and dogs casually sketched by his father on the floor. Unfortunately most adults do not notice the child's talent.[79] Godwin's description of the individuality of the child-artist is shadowed by a sense of his isolation, as a nascent artist, from the general mass of humanity. The child's earliest attempts at drawing, on the floor of his house, demonstrate the resistance of the Romantic neglected artist, the *poete maudit*, to the plebeian world which does not appreciate his activities. His drawings are

> liable to accidents; the brush of the housewife might invade it; a careless visitor might sweep his coat against it; and thus part of the design unhappily become obscured or obliterated.[80]

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[77] Theophilus Marcliffe [William Godwin]*, The Looking-Glass. A True History of the Early Years of an Artist; Calculated to awaken the Emulation of Young Persons of both Sexes, in the Pursuit of every laudable Attainment: particularly in the Cultivation of the Fine Arts,* 1805, rev. ed. (London, 1885).
[78] Clemit, "Holding Proteus," *Repossessing the Romantic Past* 106.
[79] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 4-5.
[80] Ibid.

The father, however, does notice his son's visual sensitivity after a point, and consequently exposes the boy to interesting sights in town. The boy then begins to design flowers and fruit on the floor, proceeding from corrective to creative drawing.

Here, Godwin hints that the child's creations emerge from a mental space that is at least partly self-generating: "It is difficult to distinguish at this age, how much of what was done was spontaneous, and how much encouragement." With the polite disclaimer "difficult to distinguish," Godwin avoids a straightforward opposition to his own belief in the early 1790s (commonly held by many other late eighteenth-century educators) that the child's mind is a passive Lockean *tabula rasa*, and owes its growth to nurture rather than nature. But his use of the word "spontaneous" suggests that the child-artist's imagination is partly, at least, an innate attribute, in the sense of the active Romantic lamp with auto-generated light, that M. H. Abrams's scholarly study identified as a key image of the Romantic aesthetic.[81]

The boy's early drawings comprise basic sketches of human beings, birds and "a sort of figure he was taught to call a grampus, but I think was something more like a mermaid."[82] Here, Godwin indicates that it is adults who confer definitive names upon the imaginative creations of the child, and that while adults think in terms of single categories, like the "grampus" or dolphin, the child's consciousness easily combines a human and a sea-animal into a mermaid. Further on, he relates:

> With the incoherence of fancy incident to his age, the birds and grampuses were represented as growing upon trees, and sometimes there was water below, into which the grampuses appeared to be falling.[83]

Godwin appears to be using the term "fancy" in a rather indiscriminate sense here, without the finer shades of derogatory meaning that Wordsworth and Coleridge were

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[81] M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford UP, 1953) 52, 54, 58-60, 67.
[82] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 6-7.
[83] Ibid.

to confer upon the word in their aesthetic theories of the imagination, in the "Preface of 1815" and *Biographia Literaria*, respectively.[84]

In Godwin's tale, the child-artist's fluid imagination creates artefacts beyond adult apprehensions of reality, representing different species, birds and "grampuses" or dolphins "growing upon trees." However, the dolphins retain some semblance of reality in nature when they smoothly move themselves into the separate medium of water. Godwin's slightly incredulous and patronising tone, as he portrays the child-artist's consciousness, about "the incoherence of fancy incident to his age" reveals that to the child, the epistemology of rationalist categories is not self-evident: the child's synthetic imagination willingly integrates birds, dolphins, trees and water.[85]

Moreover, lest the child reader take Godwin's apparent, patronising, adult, dismissal of the boy's undifferentiated birds and dolphins as his final verdict, Godwin goes on to stress that as this child-artist grows older, it is actually his representations of the world that create reality in his consciousness. During his very early childhood in Ireland, he copies a view of St. Paul's cathedral which was hanging on the wall of his father's room. When he moves to England at the age of five, he recognises St. Paul's straightaway "from the copy he had made."[86] The child thus has a strong grasp of reality when he creates abstract representations in his copies: thus Godwin forestalls potential criticism from his prospective adult customers, that is parents and teachers, who might sceptically dismiss the boy's creations as wild and useless doodles.

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[84] Wordsworth, "Preface of 1815," *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism* 175-91; Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria," *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 304-5. See Coleridge's definition of the secondary imagination which willingly "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate."

[85] Ibid.

[86] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 9-10.

Throughout the narrative Godwin keeps privileging the child-artist, in contrast to the adults who surround him. He describes his protagonist, from his very early age, in terms that indicate a sharp sense of his individuality:

> The floor was an unfaithful depository; and each morning probably destroyed the labours of the day before. But the child did not mind; he worked for amusement, not for duration.[87]

In these early years of his artistic "apprenticeship," the child draws for "amusement," and not to serve personal pride. This early vogue for playful experimentation becomes the genesis of his aesthetic maturation. When one of his mentors, John Corbet, advises him to learn to draw anatomical features precisely from a textbook, the protagonist finds that "A new world was opened upon him."[88] Observing how much is left for him to learn, he feels a sensation of "joy," since, as Godwin glosses, "The ambitious mind is struck with a sort of despair, when it seems to itself to have done almost all that it is possible for him to do." The boy's sensation is couched by Godwin in terms recalling the Romantic artist's aspirational search for the sublime:

> When on the contrary he saw visto behind visto of improvement still opening upon him, and Alps upon Alps of difficulty offering themselves to his wondering sight, his very soul was roused.[89]

Fired by ardour, the artist-in-making discovers that "The season of boy's play was past, and he felt that here was business for a man."[90] Godwin specifies that the child-artist follows his autonomous desire: addressing the child reader directly, Godwin states that in "every stage of our narrative," "you discern the self-taught artist, prompted by an impulse he felt within, and scarcely ever receiving any external advantage or encouragement." [91] The boy's father is a lower-class leather breeches

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[87] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 7-8.
[88] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 87-89.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 74-75.

maker, and their home lacks the environment of cultured leisure where the boy might develop his artistic talent easily.

As he grows up, the young artist serves as a model for an established painter. The painter's occasional conversation with the boy reveals his subject's "love for the arts of design." Stirred by curiosity, the painter asks about the boy's formal training in the visual arts, and according to custom, if "he was in the habit of copying?" To this, "The poor boy answered, with an air of self-complacence, Oh, sir, I have left off copying!"[92] The characterisation "self-complacence" marks the boy's autodidactic audacity, his ignorant self-confidence at having left the mechanical task of "copying" for the higher flights of inspired work. Yet, Godwin's use of the adjective "poor" for the boy indicates his sympathetic, if slightly patronising, understanding of the boy-artist's resistance to conventional, adult codes of knowledge.

In fact, the boy's confidence, which verges on an ignorant arrogance, recapitulates Godwin's pronouncements about the character of the "self-educated," that is, the autodidact in his essay "Of Learning" in *The Enquirer* (1797):

> There is a striking independence of mind about them. There is a sort of audaciousness of thinking, that has a most happy tendency to counteract that stationariness and sacredness of opinion which is too apt to insinuate itself among mankind. New thoughts, daring opinions, intrepid enquiries, are thus set afloat, upon which more disciplined minds would perhaps scarcely have ventured.[93]

Godwin's sympathy for the child-artist's audacity can be understood in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of the cultural character of the autodidact: as Bourdieu puts it, "The absences, lacunae and arbitrary classifications of the autodidact's culture only exist in relation to a scholastic culture which has the power to induce

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[92] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 42.
[93] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 232.

misrecognition of its arbitrariness."[94] That the boy ought to start his artistic training by "copying" is to some degree an arbitrarily set coda of the establishment, probably true of the progress of some artists and the fact that the boy does not subscribe to this seemingly self-evident rule says more about the fossilisation of the adult system than the child-artist's lack of "correct" method. Earlier in the narrative, through the example of the boy's realistic copy of St. Paul's Cathedral described above, Godwin has already indicated that the boy's self-confidence about his artistic maturity is justified to a degree at least, and is not simply blissfully ignorant conceit.

At any rate, the boy receives artistic training, and at the age of seven, the boy progresses to drawing anatomical features, but they do remain imperfect facsimiles of reality. Consequently, he finds himself to be the butt of ignorant adults who can only mock his painstaking efforts:

> though his critics ridiculed his performance, they never told him where the fault lay, and it may be, had no clear idea of it themselves.[95]

To convince his child reader that the boy's efforts are really worth it, Godwin adds:

> Gentle reader, do not think these particulars trifling; for it was such beginnings, joined with persevering application, that this boy became, notwithstanding all external disadvantages, *an Artist.* [96]

The italicisation in the text stresses the sense of the child-artist's high calling: at the end of this *künstlerroman*, as the boy grows up through social anonymity and gets admitted to the Royal Academy, Godwin enacts the artist's fantasy of recognition by the cultural intelligentsia.

> The assiduity he had long exercised in solitude and obscurity, was rewarded with the spontaneous instruction and countenance of one of the artists of most acknowledged character in England.[97]

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[94] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 328.
[95] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 19.
[96] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 10-11.
[97] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 105.

Godwin's conclusion keeps the artist's status in an uneasy balance. On one hand the community of artists appears to remain separate from that of lay people, as Godwin states that the boy was happily rewarded by the generous, "spontaneous instruction and countenance " of one of the most well-established artists in England, and this artists' community appears not to follow the lay community's economic motives for labour. Interpreted in Bourdieu's terms, this is the counter economy of the artist's field which reverses the values of "all ordinary economies" followed by lay people. In such a counter economy, if the general public appreciates any cultural artefact, this has little or no value in the counter economy, and conversely, the truly gifted artist is neglected by the general public.[98]

Such, however, is not the case with Godwin's young artist: he rises from "solitude and obscurity," and is accepted by the cultural authority of the Royal Academy: his social rise satisfies the middle-class ethic of hard work and consequent reward, that was a standard feature of contemporary children's literature.[99] In Godwin's fairytale denouement in *Looking-Glass*, art is not at odds with middle-class socio-economic aspiration. This balance of artistic and socio-economic ambition lets Godwin reconcile his radical support of the Romantic writers (who were little read in their own time) and his own non-conformist politics with the conformist adult expectations of contemporary mainstream children's literature.

By glorifying the child-artist's "imagination," as seen in the passages discussed above, Godwin risked angering contemporaries involved in producing mainstream children's literature. Godwin's own Preface to *Bible Stories* (1802), under the pseudonym William Scholfield, had lionised the "imagination" as the "ground-

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[98] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. and introd. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity, 1993) 39.
[99] See above, pp. 61-63.

plot" of a "sound morality."[100] The contention earned him the critical ire of the conservative journal *Guardian of Education* edited by Sarah Trimmer, who saw the "imagination" as an "engine of mischief."[101] In contrast, Godwin's friends like Charles Lamb supported the exercise of the "imagination" in children's literature. Lamb's famed dismissal of "Mrs. Barbauld's and Mrs. Trimmer's nonsense," in a letter to Coleridge, has been often marked in critical discussions of early children's literature.[102] Lamb's dismissal is representative of adult readers who could not bear (what they perceived as) the boring loftiness of Anna Barbauld and Sarah Trimmer's improving, didactic literature for children. Speaking from his own perspective as a male writer (of children's books occasionally), Lamb lambasted these female writers as a furious, homogeneous, insect-like swarm of "the cursed Barbauld Crew": they were "Blights and Blasts of all that is Human in man and child" attacking the fertile field of elevated "Human" aspiration common to adults and children. [103] Hypothetically, Lamb asked Coleridge to imagine himself as the child reader at whom didactic literature could have been directed:

> Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives' fables in childhood, you had been crammed with geography and natural history? [104]

Here, Lamb claims that, in contrast to "Tales and old wives' fables," that is, wild, imaginative fairy tales, books of "geography and natural history," that is, instructive, education-oriented books make children "crammed." Lamb's verb, indicating the child reader's constriction, is echoed by Godwin in his correspondence, although he takes a more nuanced view of popular female writers of children's literature than Lamb. Writing to William Cole about his ideas on elementary education, Godwin

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[100] Godwin, "Preface to *Bible Stories*," *PPWG* 5 313-14.
[101] Quoted in St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 284.
[102] Avery, *Childhood's Pattern* 13-14; see above, pp. 26-27.
[103] Lamb, *Letters* 81-82.
[104] Ibid.

enthusiastically recommended his contemporary Anna Barbauld's books as "admirably adapted" to "the capacity and amusement of young children."[105] However, Godwin segregates himself from the "ruling passion" of his "contemporaries" in the "faculty" he aims to cultivate, as he rejects writing for children with overt informational content that does not aim to cultivate the imagination. He hits out, therefore, at mainstream children's books' obsession with "minutenesses," since "they freeze up the soul, and give a premature taste for clearness and exactness, which is of the most pernicious consequence."[106] Godwin's rejection of books that "freeze" the child reader's mind in "clearness and exactness" shows how far he has departed from his early views on simple and clear reading for children. Similar to Lamb, Godwin recommends books to Cole that encourage creative, imaginative thinking, especially fairy tales like *Beauty and the Beast* which were published by the Juvenile Library, as well as collections of poetry by the Lambs.[107]

Although Godwin covertly admits his ideological alignment with imaginative writings for children in his private correspondence, in the public text of *The Looking-Glass* he plays safe, limiting his glorification of the imagination to the glorification of the child-artist who moves beyond the epistemology of adult regulation. Godwin does insert several comments on books and reading for children in the text of *The Looking-Glass*, but they are placed so as to encourage the actual middle-class adult parent to buy the text for his or her children. As the protagonist of *The Looking-Glass* grows older, the boy's reading consists of well-known eighteenth-century novels largely selected by his father, consisting of *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Roderick Random* (1748), and the *Adventures of Captain Robert Boyle*

[105] Godwin, *William Godwin* II 118-20.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Godwin, *History of Rome*. See advertisements on final 6 pages, including Charles Lamb's *Adventures of Ulysses* and with his sister Mary, *Poetry for Children, Entirely Original*; St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 294.

(1726).[108] The initiating spark of the father's interest leads the boy to read for himself. From the money painstakingly earned through the sales of his drawings to his schoolmates, he procures a collection of Shakespeare, and Pope's translation of Homer from a bookstore in Covent Garden. [109] His regular attendance at the bookshop earns him the goodwill of the owner, who begins to let the boy borrow books for free. From books of poetry and plays, and "Having been treated once or twice to the play-house by his father," the boy learns the art of elocution.[110] As he moves from his father's petit-bourgeois selection to highbrow culture, he acquires cultural capital for himself, to invoke Pierre Bourdieu's terms once again of the cultural aspirations of the autodidact.[111] The bookseller allows the boy freedom of choice in reading his books, and the boy is not bound to read school textbooks alone. His real education is random, and acquired of his own volition. Here, reading is a liberating act for the child reader: unlike Jane Grey, the boy-artist is only initiated into reading by his father, and afterwards reads for his own pleasure and social empowerment by acquiring cultural capital. These are educational ideals that Godwin had advised in *Enquirer* to adult readers in bringing up their children: but only in such addresses to child readers does Godwin practise his own theory.

Moreover, the bookseller is middle-class himself and acts as an agent of social progress by helping socio-economically underprivileged empower themselves by the acquisition of cultural capital. Indeed, this can be read as Godwin's self-promotion, as a seller of books. This middle-class ethic infuses the text of *Looking-Glass*, as Godwin appeals to middle-class parents, in his preface, by presenting his text as a typical bourgeois *bildungsroman*, paying a panegyric to the virtues of hard work,

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[108] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 48-50.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Bourdieu, *Distinction* 327.

followed by consequent reward. In the pious preface addressed to his "Young reader" in *Looking-Glass*, Godwin stresses the status of his protagonist as autodidact, labouring, "for a long time under every disadvantage of a humble situation, and a total absence of instruction and assistance." To his child readers, Godwin democratises this status : "Perhaps you did not begin to draw so early; you may yet overtake our artist in his course." Moreover, the protagonist is no exemplary "bombastic and impossible character; he was a child like others," but he was a "child of merit. Merit, my young friend, is within your reach too. The artist related to me his history; and, when he had done, I said, "I will be at the pains to write it down and to publish it, for the advantage of those who may come after you." Addressing himself directly to the child reader, Godwin advertises the exemplary value of his protagonist: "Look at the steps of his progress; they were all gentle and easy; and see where he got at last, because he went on continually, and never allowed himself to flag."[112]

It would be unfair to dismiss Godwin's tone as a sop to keep parents happy. Godwin's valorisation of the autodidact, through the diligent child, owes much to his personal experiences of empowering himself through cultural capital as he grew up. William Godwin was an anomaly in his own, fairly impoverished family. Due to his diligence and merit as a student, he was admitted to the Dissenting Academy of Hoxton and lived on a scholarship bursary, where he benefited from a good education from his teenage years until he was twenty-two. [113] In adulthood he came to possess a vast range of general erudition and knowledge of polite literature that was largely self-taught and can hardly be explained by his family background or even Dissenting education.[114] His siblings went into blue-collar professions, according to family expectations: his brothers went into manual varieties of farming and sailing, while a

[112] Godwin, *Looking Glass* viii-x.
[113] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 8-10.
[114] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 53.

sister became a dressmaker.[115] In *The Looking-Glass* therefore, the lower-class child who breaks into the cultural intelligentsia represents something of Godwin's own empowerment through the acquisition of cultural capital.

In the texts for child readers discussed above, including *Jane Grey and Looking-Glass*, unlike Godwin's straightforward representation of the free orphan child in his adult novel *Fleetwood*, Godwin shows child-protagonists who are autonomous, whose parents, however, play key roles in their development, intentionally or unintentionally. The following section examines how Godwin's agenda of individuality and autonomy for the child are mediated through his longstanding political commitment to sociability, expressed in domestic circles through the presence of parents.

Sociability

Godwin upholds his political ideal of sociability through fairly transparent representations of childhood in his adult fiction, and in contrast, sociability is upheld, but qualified in his addresses to child readers. The discourse of sociability has special relevance in the context of the Juvenile Library books, since Godwin was producing them for his own children.

In *Fleetwood,* Godwin describes his protagonist's childhood extensively as he grows up on his father's rural estate: he bounds amongst hills and rivers, & these details carry distinct echoes of Wordsworth's youthful exuberance in "Tintern Abbey."[116] As a child Fleetwood is characteristically immersed in spells of creative, artistic "reverie" as he remains "engaged in imaginary scenes," and "constructed visionary plans."[117] Godwin however stops short of eulogising Fleetwood as a Rousseauian child of nature, or glorifying him as an autonomous child-artist unlike

[115] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 36-37.
[116] See above, pp. 195-96.
[117] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 19.

The Looking-Glass. He qualifies his description with the matured Fleetwood's observation that the "tendency" of

> this species of dreaming, when frequently indulged, is to inspire a certain propensity to despotism, and to render him who admits it impatient of opposition.[118]

The I-narrative of *Fleetwood* is related by a protagonist who has matured through (largely self-inflicted) suffering, and speaks from the perspective of having recognised the error of his former ways. His voice may therefore be trusted as expressive of Godwin's own ideological support of egalitarian sociability, where an individual can brook "opposition" from peers without reading every difference of opinion as a personal affront.

Gary Handwerk has rightly argued that Fleetwood's unquestioned dominance over his childhood dreams and his lack of sociability create the dictatorial thinking and paternalism of his adult life.[119] Used to the exercise of charity upon the tenants of his father's estate and the consequent monopoly of power, Fleetwood expects a pattern of abject gratitude from his beneficiaries in adult life, including his wife Mary, whom he marries after the loss of her entire family. In these fictional instances Godwin represents his rejection of the ethics of condescending charity that he had discussed in *Political Justice*.[120] The condescending Fleetwood expects total submission from his wife and is hypersensitive towards suspected slights: this triggers his Othello-like persecution of Mary as he baselessly suspects her of marital infidelity with his nephew Kenrick. It is telling that the alternative title of *Fleetwood*, *The New Man of Feeling* echoes Henry MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), a key text for the late-eighteenth century discourse of sensibility, which involved the ostentatious

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[118] Ibid.
[119] See Handwerk 389.
[120] See above, pp. 165-66.

cultivation and display of feeling.[121] Godwin shows how this discourse is degraded into Fleetwood's perpetual self-obsession in his adult life, owing to the habits of his unsociable childhood. Except for a tutor's company, Fleetwood is generally brought up in isolation.[122] Godwin's representation of the solipsistic child shows, as Gary Handwerk observes, "the potential terror of the system that follows from *Émile's* premises."[123]

However, Fleetwood's childhood is not entirely unsociable and a possible positive counterpoint to his solipsism is presented in the form of his father. Godwin's ideal of domestic sociability, from the later 1790s, continues to be valorised in the person of Fleetwood's father, a caring and benevolent parent. Fleetwood relates:

> The little implements and mechanical contrivances upon which my boyish thoughts were employed, and which my desires panted to realise, he would often lend me his hand to assist me to form. His lessons were so paternal, so indulgent, so considerate, so well adapted to my opening powers![124]

The child's "opening powers" bloom with parental support; the childhood creativity of "little implements and mechanical contrivances" depend on parental sympathy for expression. Through the caring parent Godwin shows an alternative route that the child Fleetwood could have taken, but did not.

The child Fleetwood's unfulfilled artistic promise, despite his exposure to nature and parental support, make for an interesting comparison with *Looking-Glass,* where the child actually develops into an artist despite the lack of an outdoors childhood and a home environment lacking in cultured leisure. Here, instead of Fleetwood's straightforward dismissals of unsociable despotism, Godwin communicates the message of sociability subtly. At every stage of the narrative,

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[121] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 273; see above, pp. 147-48.
[122] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 20-21.
[123] Handwerk 378.
[124] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 74.

Godwin emphasises that the young Mulready's artistic development owes as much to the support of his parents and grown-up artist mentors as to his individual genius. The frontispiece of the book is a drawing by the child-artist, carefully preserved by his mother.[125]



The initial impetus for the expression of the boy's artistic talents is given by his father, who sketches scenes of hare-hunting on the wainscot "for the diversion of his little boy" as he sits on his father's knee. "This sort of pictorial composition," Godwin says, "forcibly seized upon the boy's attention." Whenever the sketch gets erased by house-cleaning, the boy, still seated on his father's lap, refills the scenes with a piece of chalk: the parent-child bond becomes a strong, nurturing base for the child-artist's creativity.[126] The father helps his son acquire cultural capital by selecting books for him to read, in contrast to Jane Grey's wealthy, but uninterested parents.[127]

[125] Reproduced from Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 50.
[126] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 4.
[127] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 48-49.

Thus the parents' emotional support contributes substantially to the child-artist's development; as Godwin puts it, "His uninformed, but well-meaning parents, were willing to encourage and assist him." But Godwin significantly qualifies the nature of their "uninformed" support: "their choice was undecided, and they felt exactly as forward to encourage him in one thing as another."[128] Theirs is a well-meant affective support, not intellectually appreciative of their son's talents. Instead of the direct sympathy between father and son in *Fleetwood*, where the father's "lessons" are exactly "adapted to" the child Fleetwood's "opening powers," in *Looking-Glass*, sociability helps the child-artist, but he must still move beyond its magic circle to discover his own autonomy.[129]

The discourse of sociability has special relevance to the conditions in which Godwin produced the Juvenile Library texts, where the books worked as pedagogic tools within his own household as he used the books to educate his five children. Sociability was practised daily in the rather unusual constitution of the family: as William St. Clair has observed, through the analysis of archival evidence, with a mêlée of stepfathers and stepmothers, no two children in the Godwin family shared the same set of parents.[130] This meant that within the domestic family circle, Godwin practised the kind of sociability he had advocated in *Political Justice*, where biological ties had no importance.[131] He also practised the domestic sociability he had preached in the later 1790s with his biological daughter Mary, where biological ties could be integrated into the creed of sociability towards all humanity.

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[128] Godwin, *Looking-Glass* 74-75.
[129] See above, pp. 247-48.
[130] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 249-54; Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 57-58; Marshall 249-50.
[131] See above, pp. 160-61.

When Godwin remarried in 1801, Fanny was seven, Charles was five, and Mary and Claire were three years old respectively.[132] Godwin's youngest child William was born in1803.[133] In 1805, therefore, when the Godwins started the bookshop, the older children were of an age to read by themselves. From the existing records, Godwin appears to have been respected by his children as a father and an educator. Neither of Wollstonecraft's daughters, Fanny or Mary, was particularly fond of their stepmother, but the recorded voices of nearly all the children of the family affirm Godwin as a good father. The general tone of Charles Clairmont's letters to his stepfather Godwin, for instance, is affectionate.[134] In a letter written to Godwin while the latter was out of town in 1808, for instance, his regard for his stepfather is evident in the gentle gibe at Godwin's expense, demanding particular, individual affection on behalf of all the children: "as we cannot all of us expect a whole letter apiece from you, you will be so good as to send a line or two to each of us in your next letter to mamma."[135] Decades later, Claire Clairmont would recount Skinner Street as a space of emotional and a loftily intellectual nurture for the children: "All the family worked hard, learning and studying: we all took the liveliest interest in the great questions of the day." Together with the political awareness of "the great questions of the day," the children "had been brought up by Mr. Godwin to think that it was the greatest misfortune to be fond of the world, or worldly pleasures or of luxury or money; and that there was no greater happiness than to think well of those around us, to love them, and to delight in being useful or pleasing to them."[136] Thus the children were actively integrated into the adult world and its concerns, instead of being artificially

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[132] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 238.
[133] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 242.
[134] St. Clair, *Godwins and Shelleys* 295.
[135] Charles Clairmont, *The Clairmont Correspondence: Letters of Claire Clairmont, Charles Clairmont, and Fanny Imlay Godwin*, ed. Marion King Stocking, Vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) 2 vols. 3.
[136] Claire Clairmont, *Clairmont Correspondence* 2 625-26.

segregated like most middle-class children of their times in a world of leisured consumption. Meanwhile, Claire's portrait of domestic harmony confirms the sociability that underwrites Godwin's education for his children.

The Godwin children appear to have appreciated the innovative and emotionally nurturing pedagogic atmosphere in the household even as children, as the parents were intimately involved with their children's education. In Charles Clairmont's letter to his stepfather Godwin, quoted above, Charles chides Godwin for his absence from the household: "We were very much baulked at finding we did not say either our history or lecture, as we had learned it so very perfect."[137] Although Charles's tone is rather circumspect, his respect for Godwin in the role of benevolent instructor sounds genuine.

In fact, the Godwin children regularly acted as sounding boards for Godwin's productions. In the preface to his *History of England*, Godwin wrote of his double role as a father and educator to his own children:

> I am accustomed to consult my children, in this humble species of writing in which I have engaged: I placed the two or three first sections of this work in their hands, as a specimen; their remark was, *How easy this is! Why! we learn it by heart, almost as fast as we read it!*[138]

Here, Godwin's adult stance of teaching the child what to "*learn*" harks at his parental imperative to regulate and socialise the child, conceived within the adult-child hierarchy. However, the power equation is palliated, as Godwin acknowledges that he is "accustomed to consult" his children in the process of producing his children's texts. The children within Godwin's own family circle become active collaborators in the creation of their own textbooks. Reading becomes a creative act, as Godwin puts

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[137] Charles Clairmont, *Clairmont Correspondence* 1 2.
[138] Godwin, *History of England* v-vi.

into practice the ideal of free reading for the child that he had advised in *The Enquirer*.[139]

Through the act of collaborative, creative reading in his own family circle, therefore, Godwin challenges the implicit hierarchy between the adult educator and the educated child. The address to the child reader, even as Godwin writes in the voice of the adult author, helps him practice his political ideal of sociability, in potential settings of equality between the adult and the child. The following section explores how Godwin represents a social order based less on hierarchy and more on equality through the child.

Equality

In this section I discuss how Godwin represents his political ideal of egalitarianism to the adult reader straightforwardly through representations of the child in his adult fiction. In his children's books, however, he does not tell, but shows the child reader that equality is desirable for the welfare of society.

Through the radical culture of egalitarian sociability in his early career, Godwin had criticised political conservatives like Burke, who upheld aristocratic values and the ties of the blood. Adherents of sociability saw the family as a locus of affective bonds, rather than as the foundation of property relations like Burke. While Fleetwood's childhood makes him adopt patriarchal codes of behaviour, the outsider child Ruffigny helps Godwin voice, in fictional form, his ideological distaste for the patriarchal constitution of the family that he had expressed discursively in *Political Justice*.[140]

The child Ruffigny is adopted by the protagonist Fleetwood's grandfather, and his ties with his adoptive family become stronger than those of consanguinity: as

[139] See above, pp. 186-87.
[140] See above, pp. 159-62.

Ruffigny recalls, "Mr Fleetwood, almost from the first, conceived for me the affection of a father."[141] This affective relationship is not built on an ethics of condescension from the socio-economically privileged gentleman to the impoverished orphan: as Ruffigny clarifies, "He did not treat me as a vagabond whom he had taken up out of charity, and kept at a distance from him."[142] This politics of egalitarian sociability is reinscribed on the protagonist Fleetwood's father as he grows up with Ruffigny in harmony, sharing property without being troubled by questions "of blood or alliance":

> he saw me brought up with himself, and enjoying the same advantages, yet he never repined at the favour in which I was held [.][143]

This instinctive childhood generosity helps Godwin prove, imaginatively, his rational thesis in *Political Justice* that there is nothing innate in the values propagated by patriarchal distributions of property, ideas represented through the two children in the Fleetwood household.

In stark contrast to Ruffigny and Fleetwood's father's childhood, unmarred by considerations of property, stands that of the novel's villain Gifford. Born illegitimate into his mother's lawful wedlock, the genesis of his villainy sharply echoes the position of Edmund in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Adult distinctions of legitimacy or illegitimacy imprint his identity from his earliest childhood: his mother

> had never loved her son; for she beheld him as the innocent instrument of her disgrace. He harboured in his childish bosom a secret abhorrence of his mother.[144]

Born and bred into jealousy of his legitimately born half-brother Kenrick, Gifford finds himself in a strange relationship of comparison and analogy with Fleetwood's child to be born; Fleetwood relates:

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[141] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 118-20.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 223.

> He felt, I believe, an unreal and anticipated resemblance between the circumstances of this creature beginning to exist, and those under which he himself had been born[.][145]

The child-to-be becomes the silent sign of patriarchal property disputes as Gifford wheedles Fleetwood into believing that the child is a product of his wife's infidelity. The *Othello* jealousy triangle plot is enacted over this incipient being, who becomes a stamp of Fleetwood's patriarchal possession: Fleetwood dreads the prospect of having to "strain to one's bosom"

> the thing that we hold as our own flesh and blood, while that thing is, in reality, the impure blood of unhallowed lust [.][146]

Fleetwood's excessive use of negative adjectives bespeaks a hysterical fear of being superseded by another person in an affair of what he considers as his "own": the vocabulary of possession underwrites his ideological immersion in the values of patriarchy.

The counterpoint to the class-hierarchised values of patriarchy in *Fleetwood* is provided once again by the child Ruffigny. As he runs away from the silk-mills, the juvenile Ruffigny decides to "go to Versailles, and throw myself at the feet of the King of France."[147] This feels like a perfectly logical plan to the child uninitiated into the adult ideology of social classes and power structures:

> I know not whether it will appear incredible that a child as I was should have been capable of this daring. It was in reality, perhaps, because I was a child, that I was capable of it. I understood very imperfectly the distinctions of rank in artificial society. I was wholly ignorant of the forms and fences which are set up to separate one man from the rest of his brethren. A king, to the imagination of a child, is but a man[.][148]

To the child's consciousness, the "distinctions of rank" do not exist naturally: upon this lack of self-evident difference between humans Godwin builds his egalitarianism.

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[145] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 228.
[146] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 253.
[147] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 97.
[148] Godwin, "Fleetwood," *CWG* 5 114.

His argument recalls that of *Political Justice*, where he uses the concept of the child's mind as a *tabula rasa* to posit the similarity between peasant and king, in an essentialist discourse of common humanity. It is important, however to note the difference of Godwin's approach in *Fleetwood* from that of *Political Justice*, or even *The Enquirer*, where the child is educated by the adult to adopt egalitarian attitudes.[149] In *Fleetwood*, the child's active mind perceives the common humanity of peasant and king, without adult guidance.

In his addresses to child readers, Godwin illustrates his political commitment to equality through inset stories. In these texts, characters do not straightforwardly say that all humans are equal, but Godwin leaves it to the child reader to infer this from the story. In *History of England*, Godwin gives the child reader historical evidence to prove that aristocratic lineage is a mere ideological construct. In his account of William the Conqueror's formulation of the "*feudal system,*" Godwin says that he divided the land into "knights' fees, baronies, and earldoms." [150] A "knight, a baron, and an earl, meant then the lord or proprietor of a certain province or portion of land." As Godwin elaborates,

> A feudal lordship was at first a very humble and dependent station: the person who held it was bound to perform certain menial offices for his superior, such as taking care of his dogs, superintending his wardrobe, or airing his shirt (hence come our master of the horse, groom of the stole, and lord of the bedchamber); he swore obedience, on his bended knees, and with his joined hands put between the hands of his lord paramount; when he died, his successor paid a fine to be permitted to have the land, and if he were under age, was placed at the direction of his superior; but the feudal lords grew more and more powerful, till they became little less than kings, each over his inheritance, and seldom paid much attention to those above them.[151]

In Godwin's narration of the origin of feudal lordships, the post begins with a willing, disgraceful, surrender of one's autonomy in "menial offices" and "obedience." Thus,

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[149] See above, pp. 192-93.
[150] Godwin, *History of England* 23-25.
[151] Ibid.

through the strategic use of historical data, Godwin dismantles the aura surrounding an aristocratic title, exposing it as an unnatural, cultural construct and of no real significance.

Similarly, in *Jane Grey*, Godwin expresses his anti-monarchic argument to the child reader in an imaginative biography of the queen who ruled England for a mere nine days. Even though Jane possesses royal blood from birth, Godwin makes this a characteristic of least importance as he strategically quotes that part of Roger Ascham's letter to a friend that superlatively describes Godwin's protagonist as a "divine virgin diligently studying the divine Phædon of the divine Plato in the original Greek." Ascham concludes: "More happy certainly in this than in deriving your origin, both by the father's and mother's side, from kings and queens!"[152] For Godwin then, Jane is more important for what she becomes through her studies than on account of her parentage.

In his *Fables*, Godwin indicts the nature of socio-economic power structures in the fable of the wolf and the mastiff where, in the well-established tradition of the beast fable, he comments on human behaviour through fictional animals.[153] Here, a wild, unkempt wolf and a well-fed, tamed mastiff have a conversation on their respective situations. The allegorical force of the wolf's identity is brought forth in Godwin's adjectival description of the animal as "a free and high-spirited creature." [154] By contrast, the non-autonomous dog stakes the apparent superiority of his position in his submission to his master:

> Yes, he generally chains me up in the day time, that I may be more fierce of nights. Sometimes I am so foolish as to be tired of my chain; and then I struggle to get loose, and howl most dismally: and then my master comes with a great stick, and gives me a sound beating to make

[152] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 18-19.
[153] Patterson 2-5. See the political use of the beast fable.
[154] Godwin, *Fables* 80.

> me quiet. But he gives me excellent meat every day, and as much as I can eat.[155]

The dog stands in for the slave, goaded into shows of resistance against the "chain," his occasional agitations for freedom petering out through the master's bribes of "excellent meat."

Discussing human behaviour more directly in *Fables*, Godwin makes rather obvious digs at aristocratic pride, from his own middle-class perspective. As the narrator speaking in an avuncular tone to the child reader, he comments on a "nobleman," who, "because he was very rich, thought himself very great. He believed that his country must go to ruin, if the race of so illustrious a family as his was should perish."[156] The rather crude irony exercised here at the expense of the nobleman's unwonted family pride is given more subtle shape in *History of England*, where Godwin relates the monolithic power relations between King Henry and his minister Thomas à Becket. To point out the ethics of condescension involved even in good monarchy, Godwin relates an anecdote about Henry and Becket, portraying the "familiar terms this able king and his clever minister lived" in.

> One day, as they were riding on horseback through the streets of London, they observed a beggar shivering with the cold: "Would it not be a good action," said the king, "to give that poor fellow a warm coat, in this hard season?" "That it would," said Becket; "and your majesty does well to think of such charitable actions." "Then he shall have one presently," replied Henry, and with that gave a smart pluck to Becket's cloak: the minister pulled it close about him, and defended himself as well as he could, till both king and minister had like to have been down in the dirt: at length Becket, like a good courtier, let go his hold, and the king give the cloak to the beggar; it was made of scarlet, lined with ermine: the beggar knew nothing of the quality of the persons he saw, and was not a little surprised at the nature of the present.[157]

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Godwin, *Fables* 193-94.
[157] Godwin, *History of England* 34-35.

The "familiar terms" turns out to be a superficial camaraderie: it keeps the hierarchical power relations between the king and his minister intact. The king's charity is exerted at the cost of the minister. To dismantle the child reader's conditioning about the inherent superiority of the king further, Godwin strategically adds the uncomprehending gaze of the beggar (whose presence appears to be a random coincidence) to whom, visually, the difference between the king and the minister is not self-evident. Unlike the child Ruffigny in the adult novel *Fleetwood*, Godwin leaves it to the child reader here to infer the ideology of human equality.

In *History of Rome*, Godwin's egalitarian arguments are exercised through an imaginatively written anecdote, where he recalls his arguments in *Political Justice* to prove the glaring inequality of property is an inherently objectionable social set-up. Referring to Spurius Cassius Viscellinus's views on an equitable redistribution of landed property, Godwin comments on the patrician's address to the people to "*resume for their own benefit the lands which had thus fraudulently come into the possession of the great.*" Spurius refers to the original set-up of Rome as authoritative: *"Rome, at the beginning,* he said, *had been peopled by citizens, who had none of them any advantage of wealth one over another: he did not insist upon restoring them to their original state of equality; he would allow to industry the superiority it naturally acquires over prodigality; but it was but just that property acquired by notorious fraud and deception, should be refunded."* Godwin here invokes the middle-class ethic of property justly earned through an individual's hard work, but in practice he pins down almost every instance of excess property ownership to the illegitimate basis of "*notorious fraud and deception."*

> The rich are scarcely ever willing to give up their possessions and become poor: a good rich man is desirous of doing good with what he has, but he does not love to have it taken from him: the rich men of

> Rome at this time, would not have been thought rich in times of greater luxury; but the advantage they had in point of property was as dear to them as a prince's revenue: nine tenths of the respect that is paid to men in almost every country of the world, is on account of their wealth, and the human heart is fond of respect: the rich men of Rome therefore combined in hostility to the proposition of Cassius: it was an alarming thing, for every man to have the title by which himself, or his father, or his grandfather, came into possession of his estate, enquired into and criticised.[158]

Godwin shows here that the ethics of condescension practised by the "rich," where their own interests remain paramount, obstructs any possibility of constructive political dialogue.

In *Jane Grey*, Jane's resistance to the status of monarchy which is offered to her is enacted through her inverse valuation of its symbols, as she announces:

> My liberty is more to be desired than the chain you proffer me, with what precious stones soever it be adorned, or of what gold soever framed. I will not exchange my peace for honourable and precious jealousies, or magnificent and glorious fetters.[159]

This method of rejecting social hierarchy through the rejection of its signs is also invoked in *Fables*, in a story where a mischievous dog gets punished with an attached bar and clog. On this event, the narrator comments: "Well, this naughty silly dog had reason enough, you will think, to be ashamed of his clog; it told everybody he came near, the paltry tricks he had done." Instead, the dog

> thought he had got a fine ornament. The bar he looked upon no less than a collar of knighthood, and the clog as equal to a king's train. So, instead of hanging down his head, he strutted, and pranced, and insisted upon all the other dogs making way for him. My dear friend, said a sly old codger, it is bad enough to be obliged to carry about every where the marks of disgrace; but the dog who mistakes them for emblems of honour, is the most incorrigible puppy I ever heard of.[160]

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[158] Godwin, *History of Rome* 37-39.
[159] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 45.
[160] Godwin, *Fables* 210-11.

Here, Godwin compares the dog's binding devices with the paraphernalia of knighthood and kingship. The imaginative narrative bears out what Godwin says in *The Enquirer* about the reader's potential for multiple interpretations as he discusses Aesop's morals: "Examine the fable impartially, and you will find that the lesson set down at foot of it, is one of the last inferences that would have occurred to you."[161] Essentially, Godwin dislodges and plays around with the received meanings of these fables from the moral: his political rhetoric works through allusion; he never actually *tells* the child reader that a "collar of knighthood" might be no better than a "bar" in reality, or a "king's train" a mere "clog."

In such instances, the texts of Godwin's children's books contain passages that flatly contradict the premises professed in his pro-establishment prefaces. He extends to child readers the strategies of linguistic and semantic play that the British Jacobin radicals had practised through their texts in the later 1790s for adult readers.[162] Thus in *Fables,* Godwin insists in the Preface that he had tried to make his "narratives end in a happy and forgiving tone" that would not discomfort child readers or make them interrogate received "truths." Yet, the fable with which he concludes this collection stands in complete opposition to the ideology professed in the Preface. This fable is about a lower-class cobbler, who is swindled into selling a stall to a contractor, and is then helped back to his shop by the goodwill of some upper-class "gentlemen." The story ends with a description that leaves the reader with the sense of a scar unhealed: "he could never after see a guinea, without stopping in his song, and feeling a twinge in his heart."[163] Through the rhetorical devices of irony and understatement, Godwin opens up a space for the thinking child reader to question the consent that the elite and powerful buy over from the disempowered masses. Infused with the political ideal of

[161] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 137.
[162] See above, pp. 199-200.
[163] Godwin, *Fables* 238.

enquiry that Godwin had discussed in *Political Justice* and *Enquirer*, the child reader is encouraged to subvert what the text explicitly says, and through a deliberately misreading, infer that the grievances of the socio-economically underprivileged cannot be waived away by a random act of charity from the upper classes.[164]

Through the act of enquiry in reading literary texts, Godwin encourages the child reader to infer his radical political ideals of sociability, equality and so forth. These ideals specifically influence Godwin's books of history for child readers, where his innovative methods of history-writing anticipate many modern conceptions of historiography.[165]

Rewriting History

Godwin's writing strategies in his children's books are key to the histories he writes under the pseudonym of Edward Baldwin. His histories for child readers in the early 1800s were practical expressions of his theoretical tenets addressed to adult readers in the late 1790s. By relevant comparisons of Godwin's children's histories to standard textbooks of the time, I show how he unsettles earlier conventions of writing history in seemingly neutral modes, where the historian speaks as a transcendent authority standing outside his text. Godwin replaces this magisterial voice by one where he steps down from a position of ultimate authority, leaving loose ends in the text which would potentially encourage readers to engage in further debate and discussion.

In the later 1790s, in the essay "Of History and Romance" for adult readers, Godwin shows that no history can pretend to absolute, straightforward truth, as different historians may interpret the same evidence in different ways: "Nothing is

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[164] See above, pp. 165-66.

[165] I am referring to the theoretical tenets of twentieth-century classic works, such as E.H. Carr., *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964); Hayden White, *Metahistory : the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973).

more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfying, than the evidence of facts." Facts turn out to be relative and not definite repositories of information, "the broken fragments, and the scattered ruins of evidence," that is, texts that can be interpreted in many ways. Accepting that historical evidence is subject to multiple interpretations, Godwin rejects a model of history that "is the mere chronicle of facts, places and dates." He introduces a historiography that veers away from a bald narrative of data:

> He that knows only on what day the Bastille was taken, and on what spot Louis XVI perished, knows nothing. He possesses the mere skeleton of history. The muscles, the articulations, every thing in which the life emphatically resides, is absent.[166]

Writing history, therefore, according to Godwin, presupposes the historian's act of concentrating and distilling facts.

This fleshing out of historical fact is what Godwin practises in his children's histories, as he writes in the Preface to his *History of Rome*. Here, Godwin upholds the legendary nature of his narrative by insisting that he had "been anxious" "not to load the memories of youth with insignificant and trivial particulars" and had written his history "by paring away dry and repulsive details." By rejecting the transmission of knowledge through boring, "ponderous quartos," he had "found room to tell some of those stories which best unfold and most strongly interest the human heart."[167] Godwin places direct emphasis on feeling and imagination, in his writing of history, in keeping with his general switch from discursive to imaginative forms of expression. Thus, in the preface to his *History of England*, Godwin advertises the narrative appeal of his text. He does not give the reader "a catalogue of five thousand remarkable events": instead, he intends "a bird's eye view of the History of England, not to exhibit it by the aid of a microscope." Claiming a macro-perspective in the

[166] Godwin, "Essay of History and Romance," *PPWG* 5 297. According to the editors' "Introductory Note" on p. 290, the date of composition is unavailable, but Godwin apparently wrote the piece when *The Enquirer* was going through the press.
[167] Godwin, *History of Rome* v-vi.

writing of his history, Godwin states that he focuses on "the great landmarks of history," that is "eras, revolutions, public men, and works of literature in England." He stresses that his writing of history was a spontaneous, imaginative act: "I seldom, if ever, found it necessary to take down a book from my shelf, as I wrote." [168]

Even as Godwin implies the active role of the historian in writing narratives of history, he forestalls potential criticism from adult teachers and parents, who might think that the truth-value of Godwin's history is getting lost in narrative appeal.[169] Thus he claims that though his narration might appear to "skim over the surface of events," his imaginative narratives are moored in scholarly fact:

> lightly as I may appear, in my narrative, to skim over the surface of events, the reader will be surprised, when he comes to look at the Tables at the end of the volume, to see how great a mass of information this book contains.[170]

Godwin's advertisement for his own production also emphasises that his writing strategies are significantly different from those of previous historians. He expresses his "hope" that

> the young scholar will learn more from my pages, than from some productions on the same subject in two or three crowded volumes[.][171]

Godwin's indictment of "crowded volumes" refers probably to the massive works of eighteenth-century historians, like the six volumes of *The History of England* (1778) by David Hume, whom Godwin invokes as an authority in the Preface, or Oliver Goldsmith's four volumes of *History of England* (1771).[172]

As seen in the previous sections, in this later phase of his career, Godwin is less faithful to his earlier mode of straightforward, reasonable transmission of truth

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[168] Godwin, *History of England* iv-viii.
[169] Cf. the early Wollstonecraft's views, pp. 55-56.
[170] Godwin, *History of England* v.
[171] Ibid.
[172] See St. Clair, *Reading Nation* 568.

through a transparent language. Thus in the essay "Of Posthumous Fame" in *Enquirer*, Godwin stresses the active role of the historian, in constructing histories through language. As he observes, history is as history is written, especially by the powerful and victorious:

> History is in reality a tissue of fables. There is no reason to believe that any one page in any one history extant, exhibits the unmixed truth. The story is disfigured by the vanity of the actors, the interested misrepresentations of spectators, and the fictions, probable or improbable, with which every historian is instigated to piece out his imperfect tale. Human affairs are so entangled, motives are so subtle and variously compounded, that the truth cannot be told.[173]

Here, history becomes a representation rather than unmediated reality, or the illusion of an oracle. Godwin waives aside the very validity of a straightforward, rationalist language in writing history: since "the truth cannot be told," history often lies more in its silences than what is actually told to the reader. No wonder then, that in his children's histories, Godwin draws the child reader's attention to the conscious act of telling history, drawing him or her into a conversation with the written text, asking the child reader to understand and dismantle the given constructs of history.

Godwin's *History of England* does not profess to be a definite or authoritative history. Promising to "touch the very principles and foundation of history and political society," Godwin purports "to awaken curiosity for the further investigation of these matters hereafter, as they are treated of in Hume and the principal historians of our country."[174] As he proposes to ready the child reader for adult encounters with David Hume and other historians, Godwin invokes the term "curiosity." The word harks at his longstanding political ideal of "enquiry," the educational method that

[173] Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 204-5.
[174] Godwin, *History of England* vii.

encourages the child to seek the voluminous knowledge of "principal historians" of his or her own volition, and not by the adult educator's command.

By encouraging the child reader to perform enquiry in the reception of *History of England*, Godwin makes the child reader aware of different truths of history. Relating the history of the Wars of the Roses, Godwin cites Warbeck's claim to be the duke of York, and holds up this claim to scrutiny rather than dismissing it straightforwardly: "Was he the duke of York, or was he an impostor?" This, Godwin rhetorically pretends to answer, "is one of the most difficult questions in history."[175] Through his rhetorical questions, Godwin adopts an overtly narrative style for his history, indicating that there are several stories that can be told about this single incident.

Similarly, asking the child reader to be wary of the received truths of history, at the end of his chapter on Richard III, Godwin showers Shakespeare with criticism for his "historical play," where the latter, "to please the Tudors, and fall in with prevailing prejudices, has represented Richard more like a monster than a man."[176] Thus Godwin lets the child reader know that just because the hallowed pen of Shakespeare has demonised Richard III, his cultural authority is not to be accepted as gospel truth. As Godwin writes his history so as open up a conversation with (and between) child readers, his iconoclastic rejection of cultural authority puts into practice his long-cherished political ideal of every citizen's right to free speech, elucidated discursively in *Political Justice*.[177]

At least one child reader awoke to Godwin's challenging of generally accepted historical narratives: as Pamela Clemit notes, Mary Shelley, one of the "proofreaders" of Godwin's *History of England*, built upon her father's questioning of the principles

[175] Godwin, *History of England* 85.
[176] Godwin, *History of England* 83.
[177] See above, pp. 170-71.

of monarchy to present Henry VII as a power-hungry interloper and Richard, Duke of York, or the pretender Perkin Warbeck, as the "legitimate heir to the English throne."[178]

Through non-linear writings of history, Godwin disrupts his earlier teleological beliefs in the perfectibility of human civilisation. In *History of Rome*, Godwin's eulogy of Roman civilisation does not blot out its darker shades, or the unresolved tragedies of history. He relates in detail the resistance of Syracuse to the Romans, especially through the larger-than-life figure of Archimedes. Describing the scientist as "the greatest geometrician of antiquity," Godwin vividly describes, with imaginative gusto, the military "machines he contrived for the annoyance of the Romans." The vignettes about these devices are "as wonderful as the incidents of an Eastern tale" and "infinitely more terrible than the giants fabled of old with a hundred hands," and these ingenuous devices consist of "machines" that "threw immense stones, crushing whole companies of men, and beating their ships in pieces," as well as "burning-glasses of so great a power, as to set fire to the ships, and consign them to devouring flames." [179] The killing of Archimedes by the Romans, as described by Godwin through the rhetorical persuasion of vivid images, is felt to be a foolish and irreparable loss. Archimedes stands as an intellectual against the course of history: his story cannot be integrated into a teleological history of Roman progress.

Here, Godwin represents Archimedes as an intellectual oppressed by political tyranny: very possibly, Archimedes's story parallels Godwin's own situation of personal disillusionment, as he lived in the culture of contemporary State repression of his radical political beliefs. Through the story of Archimedes, Godwin shows the child reader the uselessness and costs of the early 1800s wars against Napoleonic

[178] Clemit, "Philosophical Anarchism" 67.
[179] Godwin, *History of Rome* 112-13.

France. As Simon Bainbridge observes, Godwin belonged to the circle of intellectuals who were consistently opposed to the rhetorical glorification of war to the public by the British government in its alliance against France.[180] Godwin's anti-war rhetoric surfaces a number of times in *Political Justice*: in *History of Rome*, through the story of Archimedes, Godwin communicates to the child reader that war can be very far from a glorious activity, retarding human progress rather than augmenting it.

In the same text, Godwin revises history as he avoids taking sides in the British government's anti-war propaganda. He enacts this in his illustration of the long tussle between the empires of Rome and Carthage led under Hannibal. Here, Godwin moves away from Eurocentrism and avoids villainising the African conqueror. Hannibal begins as "a child of the greatest promise," joining his father Hamilcar on a military expedition on his own volition.[181] Godwin makes it clear that Hannibal's battles were against Rome, and not waged for the sake of sheer conquest or vindictiveness. On his "third victory," Godwin says, Hannibal treated his Roman prisoners of war differently from their allies: "the former he threw into chains; the latter he liberated without ransom, telling them that he *was come among them, not as an enemy, but a deliverer*."[182] Moreover, Godwin regularly qualifies Hannibal's military strategies with laudatory adjectives like "sagacity." Even past his prime, the war-hardened Hannibal, meeting the Roman Scipio "in the plains of Zama," cuts an impressive figure "worn with a thousand hardships and toils, his complexion darkened with many a rough campaign, and having lost the sight of one of his eyes."[183]

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[180] Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 16,19, 84; see also Kathryn Moore Heleniak, "Old Kaspar: Pictorial Pacifism in the Napoleonic Period," *Art Bulletin* 72 (1990): 106-17.
[181] Godwin, *History of Rome* 97.
[182] Godwin, *History of Rome* 104.
[183] Godwin, *History of Rome* 127-28.

Although Godwin makes no explicit reference, his Hannibal may be a covert reference to Napoleon, the military star of European politics in the early 1800s.[184]

In keeping with his pacifist political stance, in the political tussle between European Rome and African Carthage, Godwin sides with Carthage's non-military stance: the latter, having devoted itself "to the pursuits of commerce," "scrupulously avoided infringing in the smallest degree the treaty concluded" with the Roman Scipio Africanus. The Roman Cato's dispute with Carthage arises out of sheer malice: "Cato was shocked to see their territory fertile, and their city abounding with inhabitants and wealth: from this time." He makes it the one governing motto of his life, therefore that "*Before all things Carthage is to be destroyed,*" and keeps drumming this into the general Roman populace through his "public harangues." The "dastardly device of the Cato," and "the growing degeneracy of the Romans" led to an unprovoked attack by Rome upon Carthage. In response, the latter sent "ambassadors" for a peace treaty, in the process surrendering her arms, but this would not satisfy the Romans' perverse desire "*to demolish and rase out for ever the city of Carthage.*" On this behaviour of the Romans Godwin comments: "The method of this proceeding was as fraudulent and disgraceful, as its purpose was barbarous." The people of Carthage put up a brave fight against this command:

> this unfortunate people resolved not to quit their city, the dwellings of their ancestors, their household Gods, and their name: they barred their gates: they worked day and night: they made every day one hundred and forty shields, three hundred swords, five hundred spears and javelins, one thousand arrows, and a certain number of catapultæ: they wanted materials for the construction of ropes, and the women understanding this, cut off their hair, and applied it to that purpose[.]

Lauding the Carthaginians's political resistance as that of "a great and industrious people," Godwin dismisses the Roman administration:

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[184] See above, pp. 267-68.

> they had taken it for granted, that a people so far humbled and disarmed as the Carthaginians, were incapable of resistance: for two years the Africans were incessant in their sallies and offensive attacks, and the Roman army was reduced to the extremest peril.

The Roman offence is won at last by the grandson of Scipio Africanus: the tussle is vividly described by Godwin in terms where the Carthaginians become the losing heroes of history, and the Romans the lucky and remorseless winners.

> never was a struggle more fiercely and terribly pursued; the young Scipio fighting with all the resoluteness of the ancestors of Rome, and the Carthaginians with an energy that drew courage from despair: the Africans were conquered in the fourth year of the war; the city was set on fire, most of the inhabitants massacred, and fifty thousand persons who surrendered on condition that their lives should be spared, were immediately sold for slaves.[185]

All of Godwin's strategies of rewriting history, discussed above, can be observed in his *Life of Lady Jane Grey*, his biography of the woman who ruled England for nine days, and became one of the great losers of history. As indicated above, Godwin's revisionism in his writing of history is enacted through the rhetorical strategy of linguistic play, as he encourages the child reader to subvert the apparent meaning of the historical text. In *Jane Grey*, Godwin describes the childhood of Edward VI, Elizabeth and Jane Grey, all three future monarchs growing up in close proximity. Explaining the social dynamics between the children, Godwin characterises Elizabeth as possessing qualities that anticipate her future monarchical brilliance: she "was distinguished for her talents and literary turn," and everybody "admired her." However, "Edward VI," Godwin continues,

> gave her the good-humoured nick-name of his *Lady Temper*. It is a little difficult to know what Edward VI. meant by this name. Was it given in allusion to the sagacity she possessed beyond her years, and the prudence and propriety which, as they marked all her actions in the sad period of her adversity, may be supposed to have discovered themselves even now? Or, is it possible, as Elizabeth when queen of

[185] Godwin, *History of Rome* 138-43.

> England, though she was the most extraordinary and deep-judging of her sex, showed herself occasionally a woman of very violent passions, that she teased her poor brother thus early with the quickness of her resentments, and the tartness of her replies? Lady Jane Grey made a third in this agreeable society.[186]

Clearly, a label of volatility like "*Lady Temper*" can hardly refer to qualities like "sagacity" or "prudence and propriety," which signify maturity and self-control respectively. With his sly insinuation, "little difficult to know," rhetorical questions beginning "Was it given" and "is it possible," Godwin himself rips apart the air of apparent naivety with which he relates the monarchs' common childhood. The ironic adjective "agreeable" for this competitive society disrupts the straightforward historical narration for the child reader, in a transparent language.

Jane makes merely a "third" in this exalted society. In terms of the disempowered position for Jane that this implies, it is enlightening to compare Godwin's history of Jane Grey with one of his possible source texts, the well-known eighteenth century work by Oliver Goldsmith, *The History of England, From The Earliest Times to the Death of George II* (1771), which was still reprinted often at the time that Godwin wrote his book.[187] Goldsmith's focus is on Mary Tudor and the story of Jane Grey forms only a small interlude in Mary's rise to the throne, although Goldsmith does speak of Jane Grey and her erudition in glowing terms: "though yet but sixteen, her judgment had attained to such a degree of maturity, as few have been found to possess. [188] Godwin, however, elevates the underdog to protagonist: Jane had only a slender claim to the English throne, but Godwin chooses to centre his narrative on her.

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[186] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 6-8.
[187] St. Clair, *Reading Nation* 568.
[188] Oliver Goldsmith, *The History of England, From The Earliest Times to the Death of George II*, 4th ed, Vol. 2 (Dublin, 1789) 4 vols 27-36.

The difference in Goldsmith and Godwin's treatments of the story of Jane Grey is especially evident in the final episodes of her execution for treason by Queen Mary Tudor. In Godwin's account, Jane makes a farewell address on the scaffold, which bespeaks her continuing resistance to the external images imposed upon her by those in authority. She professes to

> deliver to my God a soul as pure from such trespass, as innocence from injustice; but only for that I consented to the thing I was inforced unto, constraint making the law believe I did that, which I never purposed.[189]

Here, Jane's undiluted truthfulness is evident in her "pure" use of language and her transparent "innocence." Godwin conveys, through the right rhetoric valorised in rationalist epistemology, to the child reader the dangerous political consequences of consenting to the "inforcing" or abuse of authority. Through her impassioned, direct speech Godwin represents Jane in an extremely dramatic situation, as an articulate person speaking with conviction of her moral innocence. Her speech addresses the child reader directly, positively submerging him or her in an excess of emotion. Through Jane's voice, Godwin keeps alive in the child reader a perpetual, indeterminate state of questioning about the irreparable losses of history, encouraging him or her to ask whether what happened on the political scene was really for the best.

Whereas Godwin conspicuously fleshes out his narrative in the above instance, Goldsmith presents Jane Grey in a defence of her innocence in indirect speech, preserving a calm distance from his subject. Goldsmith's Jane, in the last moments of her life, gives John Gage, the constable of the Tower of London, a "memorial" of herself. Silently, she also gives him three tablets "where she had just written three sentences on seeing her husband's dead body, one in Greek, one in

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[189] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 103-4.

Latin, and one in English, importing, that she hoped God and posterity would do him and their cause justice." Goldsmith also describes Jane's speech on the scaffold at some length. In this speech

> she alleged that her offence was not the having had her hand upon the crown, but the not rejecting it with sufficient constancy; that she had less erred through ambition than filial obedience; that she willingly accepted death as the only atonement she could make to the injured state; and was ready by her punishment to shew, that innocence is no plea in excuse for deeds that tend to injure the community.[190]

Goldsmith's portrayal of Jane is appealing to the reader in a different way from Godwin's. In Goldsmith's history, Jane speaks to John Gage only through silence and signs. In Goldsmith's narration in indirect speech, Jane comes across as a majestic and dignified figure, with the moral surety that "innocence is no plea in excuse for deeds that tend to injure the community."

Indeed, Goldsmith's rationalist credentials are confirmed in his preface, where he portrays himself as an impartial historian. As he advertises his own history book, he distinguishes himself from other histories. According to Goldsmith, quite a few of these other histories are written "to answer the purposes of a party," and are full of "misrepresentations."[191] Unlike these other historians, Goldsmith professes to deliver the truth in his measured, rational style observed above.

Unlike Goldsmith, Godwin does not pretend to be an impartial teller of history and implicitly claim that his is the true version, giving definite answers. He leaves it to the child reader to read his historical texts and interpret his radical messages as they desire.

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[190] Goldsmith 36.
[191] Goldsmith iv.

History and the Rise of Women

An important aspect of Godwin's radical methods of history-writing is the way he conveys messages of gender equality to the child reader. This probably owes to his personal brush with Wollstonecraft's feminist thought, and his production of texts with an implicit awareness of educating three girls in his household—Fanny, Mary and Claire. In his earlier works on education, such as *The Enquirer,* Godwin often represents the juvenile student as the "boy," with frequent use of the pronoun "he." [192] Godwin's male-centred language, even in gender-neutral contexts, owes to the cultural representation of the male child as normative, particularly in Locke's and Rousseau's educational ideas.[193] However, with his changed domestic circumstances in the early 1800s Godwin probably became aware of the totalising implications of a male-centred perspective for the child.

Godwin's feminist views are expressed in his presentation of strong female protagonists in his histories, as in his *Life of Lady Jane Grey*. Godwin begins his panegyric to Jane Grey by emphasising her femaleness, and pointing to her as a role model for girls: she "is the most perfect model of a meritorious young creature of the female sex, to be found in history: her example therefore is the fittest possible to be held up to the fairest half of the rising generation." Having established her exemplary status, Godwin posits this upon her association with the generally masculine discourse of the Renaissance: "The life of lady Jane Grey is connected with those great objects, the *Reformation*, and the *Revival of Learning.*"[194] Godwin's recognition of the female intellectual probably owes to the fact that he personally knew a number of female

[192] See Godwin, "Enquirer," *PPWG* 5 110-12, 115-16, 128-30.
[193] See above, pp. 17-18.
[194] Godwin, *Jane Grey* v-vi.

intellectuals apart from Wollstonecraft, like Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Hays, Mary Perdita Robinson and Maria Reveley (later Gisborne).[195]

In *Jane Grey*, having glorified his protagonist's intellectual stature, Godwin takes care to tone down her possible association with the stereotype of the bluestocking, to keep his prospective customers, that is, adult teachers or parents, happy. Unlike "some learned ladies," Jane did not "fall into any neglect of those more useful and ornamental arts, which are peculiarly to be desired in the female sex."[196] Godwin follows up this declaration with a recital of Jane's "accomplishments" in the standard eighteenth and nineteenth-century ladylike oeuvre of needlework, handwriting, instrument-playing and singing. Nevertheless, Godwin does not focus upon the latter set of accomplishments in the rest of his narrative: consequently Jane's status as a female intellectual is not cancelled out.

In his histories, Godwin also points out the victimisation of women, by bringing in stories of the deliberate downsizing of women through history and culture. This is illustrated in the *Pantheon* through Godwin's presentation of the myth of Pandora's box. Speaking about the allegorical connotations of the story, Godwin states this to be a Greek myth of origin that explains the presence of "evils," "years of misery," "vices" and "a thousand additional evils, perfidy, tyranny, cruel tortures, murder and war" in the world. This myth Godwin glosses as the excuse of the early ancients "to speak evil of the female sex," and strategically enough, he adds:

> it is impossible not to remark a considerable resemblance between the story of Pandora's box, and that of the apple with which Eve in the Bible *tempted* her husband, *and he did eat*.[197]

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[195] Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821); Mary Hays (1760-1843); Mary Perdita Robinson (1757-1800); Maria Gisborne (1770-1836).
[196] Godwin, *Jane Grey* 8-9.
[197] Godwin, *Pantheon* 77-78.

Through the analogous cases of Pandora and Eve, Godwin draws the child reader's attention to the fact that stories of evil or deluded women are written by men in a male-dominated society. Godwin does not give the child reader a lecture on how women have been downsized by male writers: he simply points out artificial sexist constructs, asking the child reader to "remark a considerable resemblance," implying that this resemblance is not a random coincidence, but reflective of deeper social injustices, in terms of gender. Godwin lets the child reader see that representation in texts lies in the hands of the socially powerful, in this case powerful male writers with access to education. With this recognition Godwin encourages the child reader to dismantle artificially imposed ideological constructs—including, by implication, those imposed by powerful adults upon children. In doing so Godwin challenges the cultural authority of Greek myth, and the religious authority of the Bible, treading a fine line against contemporary socio-religious conservatism.

In *History of England,* Godwin shows up the disempowering of women further by relating a particular instance of the swindling of a woman by the questionable ethics of a man. Godwin gives us a chapter heading in bold letters in 1135: "STEPHEN OF BLOIS OBTAINED THE CROWN BY A TRICK." Due to Stephen's fraud, the rightful heir Maud puts up resistance by resorting to the stratagems of a classic trickster figure. She escapes being captured by him at Oxford "by dressing herself in white, and walking at night over the snow," and "the second time out of Wallingford in a coffin." Finally, Stephen keeps his crown, but Godwin undercuts his victory by pointing out that his reign was thoroughly marred by struggles between the "fierce and haughty barons": "they took all power into their own hands, and reduced the prerogative of the king to almost nothing: besides this, they were continually quarrelling and fighting with each other, so that poor England

fared like a barbarous nation."[198] One private, random act of the unfair exercise of power, in terms of gender, wreaks ruin on the public history of the country.

In all of the above instances, Godwin leaves the child reader to infer his feminist messages from his historical narratives, instead of addressing long tracts on the subject. In doing so he builds on Wollstonecraft's legacy, from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* onwards, communicating his and her radical political messages in radical literary forms to child readers. Indeed, striking similarities can be discerned in Wollstonecraft and Godwin's representations of the child. For although both begin their writing-careers with fairly restrictive, mainstream representations of the child, they increasingly address radical messages to the child reader in texts with more scope for multiple interpretation--Wollstonecraft in "Lessons for Children" and Godwin in his Juvenile Library books.[199] Their romantic partnership was strengthened by a fruitful intellectual collaboration, expressed in their mutual correspondence, and their writings over the period. Although they did not write for children at the same time, Wollstonecraft's writings continued to shape those of Godwin. This space of collaborative creation helps to explain why the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations of the child delight in dialogue and resist monolithic meaning.

[198] Godwin, *History of England* 30-31.
[199] See above, pp. 132-37.

Conclusion. "As a child I scribbled": the Legacy Inherited by Mary Shelley

In Chapters 1-4, I have shown how the child is represented in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin. The concluding chapter and the epilogue explore how the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations influence the next generation of important authors in their family circle, namely Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (later Shelley) and Percy Bysshe Shelley respectively. These explorations show how the Shelleys appropriate and transform their predecessors' representations of the child, reflecting the altered cultural contexts during their writing careers in the nineteenth century.

Mary Shelley was a primary receptor of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations of childhood, as both a literal and intellectual child of the older couple. Her textual engagement with her parents' works, throughout her life, is evident in her diligent reading of their works. She never actually knew with her mother, due to Wollstonecraft's death soon after her own birth. Yet all her life, Mary Shelley was preoccupied by a sense of being an illustrious mother's child.[1] The lack of personal interaction probably made Mary Shelley more intent, than she would have otherwise been, upon recovering her absent mother textually through the alternative avenue of Wollstonecraft's writings. [2] Mary Shelley also grew up reading her father Godwin's Juvenile Library books through her childhood. Her faithful reading of his political works and novels, in later years, was key to the decades of literary collaboration that ensued between Mary Shelley and her father until the 1830s.[3]

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[1] See Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, Vol. I (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 3 vols. 3-4.
[2] See Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 16-17.
[3] Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 260.

Mary Shelley's thematic transformations from her parents' works will be chronologically investigated section by section, from *Frankenstein* (1818) to *The Last Man* (1826). Her representations of the child in these texts are examined by dividing this part of her writing-career in two phases, discussed successively in chronological order. The first phase includes the children's story *Maurice* (1820), where Mary Shelley primarily negotiates her childhood reading of Godwin's Juvenile Library books, and also begins to engage with Wollstonecraft and Godwin's texts in fictional forms. The second phase focuses on Mary Shelley *The Last Man*, where she challenges her parents' politically utopian thinking severely through her representations of the child, finding her own literary voice in the process.

These texts have been selected for their significant representations of childhood in the novels for adult readers, or for addressing the child reader, as in *Maurice*. *Matilda* (1819) is excluded, because although it is centred on a parent-child relationship, the protagonist Matilda is fairly mature, physically and mentally, and thus not really a child at the time she narrates her incendiary relationship with her father. The chapter also excludes *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), because although Mary Shelley was acquainted with the historical figure through her father's Juvenile Library books, her novel does not significantly feature representations of the child. Mary Shelley's novels of the 1830s, *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837), are concerned with the education of the girl-child, but these post-*Last Man* representations depart too much from the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations to express a direct continuation of their legacy, and are therefore beyond the scope of this thesis.

Frankenstein and Maurice: Dialogues with Godwin's Juvenile Library

The education of the Godwin children, including Mary Shelley, is a direct link between the generations of the Godwins and the Shelleys. This section examines how Mary Shelley's childhood reading and writing, within the context of the Godwins' Juvenile Library books, influences her own representations of the child in *Frankenstein* and *Maurice*. When she wrote these texts, she had severed links with Godwin's household physically by having eloped with Shelley in 1814. As a budding author in her late teens, she was still immersed in the values that Godwin cultivated at his home, but in these texts she begins battling with her father, straining towards an independent literary voice. However I devote more attention to *Maurice*, a text which directly addresses a child reader and is therefore more relevant to the context of childhood representations. Moreover, *Maurice* features representations of the child that have not been extensively explored in criticism, in contrast to the vast body of scholarly studies on *Frankenstein*.

Since the focus is on Mary Shelley's negotiation of her Juvenile Library reading, my discussion explores how the young adult author represents her own recent childhood conflicts with her father's values, through the figure of Victor Frankenstein as the mad, unruly scientist. Mary Shelley devotes significant space to Victor's development through his childhood education. He has fond memories of the enlightened education he experienced in his family home: "Our studies were never forced."[4] Indeed, the Frankenstein household's children learn their lessons through the practices of philosophical enquiry, valorised by Wollstonecraft and Godwin from their Rational Dissenting heritage:

> so far from study being made odious to us through punishment, we loved application, and our amusements would have been the labours of

[4] Shelley, "Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus," *NSWMS* 1 170.

> other children. Perhaps we did not read so many books, or learn languages so quickly, as those who are disciplined according to the ordinary methods; but what we learned was impressed the more deeply on our memories [.][5]

Without the coercive pressure of "punishment" from adult educators, the children find their learning process to be a playful enterprise, full of "amusements." Without the imperative to impress others by a superficial breadth or skill, in their knowledge of "books" or "languages, the Frankenstein children develop into autonomous beings who retain in their adult "memories" what they have happily learned in childhood. In fact, Victor's slightly random, fortuitous education is very similar to Mary Shelley's own childhood education through the Juvenile Library books.

This Godwinian education leads the reader to expect beneficial results in Victor's adulthood, but Mary Shelley undercuts such optimism by showing that Victor's unregulated freedom allows him to create the monster that wreaks absolute havoc, as he remains trapped in the playful quality of his childhood education. Thus, *Frankenstein* has been read very frequently as a doctrinaire, punitive text where Mary Shelley criticises Victor's Faustian arrogance in his ambition to create new life. In feminist critical studies especially, the text has been viewed as a critique of male Romantic egocentrism.[6] Victor is the male, individualistic and Romantic artist-creator, whose bold thirst for random knowledge and disrespect of conventional codes of social behaviour makes him selfish and regardless of the needs of other people.

As much as Mary Shelley condemns Victor, however, much of his mindset during the creation of his monster coincides with her authorial self as she writes her text. Much of the monster's evil owes to his misery at not being accepted by human

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[5] Ibid.

[6] See Mellor, *Mary Shelley* 72-73. According to Mellor, Victor Frankenstein's education (or self-education) coincides with that of Percy Bysshe Shelley: "both were fascinated by alchemy and chemistry; both were excellent linguists, acquiring fluency in Latin, Greek, German, French, English, and Italian."

society (including his creator Victor) because of his extreme ugliness, that is, his unusual appearance. However, the moot, intriguing question here is, why does Victor knowingly give life to an ugly adult human that is doomed to be rejected by most humans? The text suggests that Victor does not do this deliberately: he means to create a handsome man, but ends up creating a ghastly creature by accident:

> His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set[.] [7]

Given Victor's description of his own creation as a patchwork of "muscles and arteries," and "eyes" of no recognisable colour," most humans who encounter the eight-feet-tall monster, with amorphous features, are too terrified to even identify him as human: he might as well be an alien from another planet. Indeed, Victor is not fully in control of the appearance of his creation: he meant to create a "beautiful" creature according to his society's norms, but instead ends up making a creature so amorphous that a live "mummy" "could not be so hideous as that wretch." [8]

The terms in which Victor describes his unintentionally ugly creation are echoed years afterwards by Mary Shelley in her Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*. Reflecting on her text of 1818, she points to its wildness and extravagancy.

> I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart.[9]

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[7] Shelley, "Frankenstein," *NSWMS* 1 40.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Shelley, "Introduction to the 1831 *Frankenstein*," *NSWMS* 1 180.

Knowing that the "hideous" quality of her text resembles Victor's "hideous wretch," Mary Shelley portrays the novel as the creation of her light-hearted younger years, sans "death and grief." Her vocabulary signals that she was implicated in her protagonist's perspectives. Through the word "progeny" she represents her text as a child, reworking the metaphor from Western literary convention that Godwin had revitalised in his political works.[10] Disguising her unruly writer's creativity in the madness of the male scientist, Mary Shelley elaborates on the history of the text's composition in her Introduction. As a budding writer, she situates herself within her parental heritage, as the daughter of two well-known authors:

> It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing. As a child I scribbled; and my favourite pastime, during the hours given me for recreation, was to "write stories."[11]

Here, even as Mary Shelley reveres her parental legacy, she portrays her childhood writing as an act of liberation from others' demands, an autonomous "recreation" for which she was accountable to no one. This "recreation" grew more important to her when she spent some time in Scotland over 1812-14.[12] Here, the picturesque landscape was "the eyry of freedom, and the pleasant region where unheeded" she "could commune with the creatures of" her fancy. She "wrote" in these times of liberation amongst the great outdoors.[13] Her appreciation of freedom in Nature, as a child, recalls a key element of Romantic poetic aesthetics.[14] She perceives her childhood writing as unregulated, dreamy creation: through her reverie, she creates a parallel universe of fictitious "creatures," much like Victor's wild creation of the monster.

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[10] See above, pp. 151-52.
[11] Shelley, "Introduction to the 1831 *Frankenstein*," *NSWMS* 1 175.
[12] Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 121-22.
[13] Shelley, "Frankenstein," *NSWMS* 1 176.
[14] See above, pp. 2-3.

Indeed, Victor is not only a scientist but, like Mary Shelley herself, an eloquent narrator. Through the power of his rhetoric, he inspires the desperate Walton's Arctic explorers, demoralised by their endless difficulties over the ocean. On the ship, as Walton relates,

> Even the sailors feel the power of his eloquence: when he speaks, they no longer despair; he rouses their energies, and, while they hear his voice, they believe these vast mountains of ice are mole-hills, which will vanish before the resolutions of man[.][15]

Victor's inspirational speeches to the sailors encourage them to plough through the seemingly insurmountable icebergs. These speeches are infused with the same overweening ambition, as the "resolutions" with which he created the monster. The monster is the result when Victor, as a creator, gets so carried away in his creation that he forgets everyone else around him.

Through the monster, then, Mary Shelley expresses her own anxieties about her writerly creativity that originated in her childhood, and delivers herself a cautionary tale. To stress that creativity is not wrong *per se*, she introduces the character of Victor's childhood friend Henry Clerval, to represent a positive counterpoint to Victor's selfish ambition. From his childhood Henry is something of an artist: he writes fairy tales, his favourite books are "of chivalry and romance," and he writes plays based on characters like Robin Hood and St. George, the kind of reading material that Godwin's Juvenile Library had offered to child readers.[16] Henry Clerval is imaginative like Victor, but also the icon of sociable friendship, in the spirit valorised by Wollstonecraft and Godwin. Henry nurses Victor back to health following his nervous breakdown after the creation of the monster. The wisened Victor acknowledges Henry's corrective moral perspective, which goes beyond the

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[15] Shelley, "Frankenstein," *NSWMS* 1 162.
[16] Shelley, "Frankenstein," *NSWMS* 1 24. See above, pp. 241-43.

principles of self-interest: "A selfish pursuit had cramped and narrowed me, until your gentleness and affection warmed and opened my senses."[17]

Through Henry, the text signals that Victor's imaginativeness is troubling because it is not regulated by the moral force of sociability. Victor neatly summarises this, in his saddened and wisened moments preceding his death. "In a fit of enthusiastic madness" he created his monster, forgetting that "My duties towards my fellow-creatures had greater claims to my attention." Indeed, this moral stamp of sociability upon the narrative can be identified with Mary Shelley's own reading of Godwin's Juvenile Library books. Although Godwin had theoretically preached autonomy and creativity for the child in his novels for adult readers, as a practising parent and author of the Juvenile Library books, he tried to discipline runaway individualism with the value of sociability.[18] In *Frankenstein* then, the insistence upon sociability probably reflects the regulatory moral voice of Godwin in disguise. Through Victor's endless remorse, Mary Shelley, as a developing author, keeps her own runaway creative impulses in check.

Yet the text of *Frankenstein* is hardly as seamless as its moral message of sociability suggests. There is more than a hint that Victor does not fully understand his own creation: he finally concludes that the monster "shewed unparalleled malignity and selfishness in evil" by gradually destroying everyone that he cares for.[19] On the other hand, the monster exonerates himself by claiming to Walton that his wholesale rejection by human society warranted his violent actions:

> I desired love and friendship, 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?[20]

[17] Shelley, "Frankenstein," *NSWMS* 1 49.
[18] See above, pp. 247-51.
[19] Shelley, "Frankenstein," *NSWMS* 1 165-66.
[20] Shelley, "Frankenstein," *NSWMS* 1 169-70.

The monster's rhetorical questions are unanswerable, as he condemns not only Victor but all of humanity, even implicating the potential reader who would probably be horrified by his very sight. This ambiguity is expressed further in the open-endedness of the novel, as the monster jumps onto his ice-raft, professedly to die alone. Walton narrates that "He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance."[21] The reader never knows whether the monster actually dies, just as one never knows if Mary Shelley's childhood sympathies with the dreamy creativity of Victor have been fully tamed by the punitive force of the monster.

The text thus leaves many unresolved, creative contradictions, as Mary Shelley turns abstract theories of individualistic creativity versus sociability into complex, living characters, and plays them off against each other. The complexity and elusiveness of the text is evident from the vast body of critical material available on *Frankenstein*, to the near-exclusion of Mary Shelley's other works. Through her saga of the mad scientist and the misunderstood monster, Mary Shelley disrupts all moral certainty as her language plays with Godwin's politically radical messages, leaving her text open to multiple interpretations by readers. In her allusive language and semantic play, Mary Shelley bears out the legacy of the Juvenile Library books, even as she strives to free herself of Godwin's fatherly influence.

Complexity and allusiveness are key features of Mary Shelley's children's story *Maurice, or The Fisher's Cot*. Mary Shelley's children's writing is a generally unmapped area, but *Maurice* deserves attention as a text that develops Godwin's radical methods of address to child readers in the Juvenile Library books. Mainstream children literature in the early nineteenth century continued to be didactic in tone, as

[21] Ibid.

Sarah Trimmer passed on her mantle to the evangelical Martha Sherwood.[22] Mary Shelley, however, despite writing as an adult author, does not patronise the child reader, and introduces themes that were usually discussed by her (roughly contemporary) Romantic-era authors in texts for adult readers. Mary Shelley converses with the child reader about potentially frightening issues such as death and loneliness, and resists giving final answers or explanations, despite her position of power as an adult author. Her iconoclastic blending of the subject-matter of children's literature, with literature for adult readers, is a hallmark of postmodern children's fiction.[23] As early as 1820, Mary Shelley explores territory that has excited children's authors until recent years: her text, therefore, deserves to be recognised as a pioneering text of children's literature.

In *Maurice*, Mary Shelley addresses herself to a particular child. The story was written for Laurette, the elder daughter of Lady Mountcashell, Wollstonecraft's much-loved ward when she had been a governess in Ireland, and later, Godwin's friend as well.[24] Mary Shelley's text thus emerges from a social space where Wollstonecraft and Godwin were very much present in spirit.[25] They also influence their daughter's choice of protagonist, a lone child named Maurice. Wollstonecraft and Godwin had persistently represented their own feelings of alienation or critiqued society at large through the autonomous child, such as the orphan figures Sagesta or Ruffigny.[26] Maurice, as a child wandering the countryside alone, is another Romantic outsider

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[22] Patricia Demers, "Mrs. Sherwood and Hesba Stretton: The Letter and Spirit of Evangelical Writing of and for Children," *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James McGavran, Jr. (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1991) 129-49.

[23] See Zipes, Paul, Vallone, Hunt, Avery, eds. "Preface," *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* xxxi-xxxii.

[24] Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 50-51; see above, pp. 115-16.

[25] See Claire Tomalin "Introduction," *Maurice, or The Fisher's Cot*, by Mary Shelley, introd. Claire Tomalin (London: Viking, 1998) 1-54. Mary's journal records a story written "for Laurette" in Aug 1820, and in Oct 1821 Godwin wrote to Mary that her story Maurice was too short to be published by Juvenile Library. The text was lost, and discovered by Claire Tomalin in 1997, through Laurette's family heirlooms.

[26] See above, pp.104-6, pp. 232-33.

with simultaneous weakness and strength: he is socially alienated, generally deprived of adult nurture, but also an indomitable survivor who transforms the lives of people who surround him.

Mary Shelley's selection of a child-protagonist draws the child reader into sympathetic identification with Maurice, especially by showing his weak position as a lone child with respect to powerful adults. Maurice finds a temporary home with the kind fisherman Barnet, but after Barnet's death his adult brother takes over their cottage and delivers Maurice an ultimatum to leave immediately. Through the rhetoric of the adult's address, Mary Shelley stresses the absolute isolation of Maurice:

> You are honest and I need hardly tell you that nothing in the cottage belongs to you, except what you brought yourself, and that you will not be allowed to take anything away with you.[27]

Here, Mary Shelley shows Maurice's victimisation through the adult's language. Technically Barnet's brother says nothing directly accusatory to Maurice: in fact he even asserts that the boy is "honest." But the assertion turns out to be a rhetorical strategy of intimidation. Maurice possesses "nothing," and he "will not be allowed" to take anything from the cottage: through his barrage of negatives, the adult takes on a disciplinary role, implying that the boy may be inclined to steal. Mary Shelley's sympathy for Maurice is subtly expressed in Barnet's brother's cruelty as he harps on the lone child's lack of both family and property, which leaves him vulnerable and liable to exploitation by grasping adults. Barnet's brother's intimidatory tactics towards the child recall those of Ruffigny's evil uncle in Godwin's *Fleetwood*.[28]

However, Maurice is no passive victim to exploitation by adults, and

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[27] Shelley, *Maurice* 69.
[28] See above, pp. 214-15.

can protect himself, as he counters adult rhetoric by the force of his own language. Earlier in the narrative, Maurice requests the fisherman Barnet to let him work for him, in order to be self-sufficient. But Barnet's retort easily stereotypes his supplicant into a lazy boy:

> 'how is it that you have nothing to do? Good boys ought to work; you do not belong to these parts, and it is not well to see a boy of your age wandering about the country alone.' –'My parents are poor,' replied Maurice, 'and not being able to maintain me, I have tried to earn my own livelihood; I have been brought up to no trade, and have always been weakly and unable to work hard[.] [29]

The fisherman Barnet, with his sanctimonious statement "Good boys ought to work" sounds much like the preachy adult characters in didactic children's literature, in fact much like Wollstonecraft's early children's books in the late 1780s.[30] Maurice, however, is not cowed, and explains his unemployment in the language of truth and confidence. His riposte, stating his lack of vocational training and his ill-health, shows that he is not simply lazy. He is also considerate and understanding of his impoverished parents.

It is worth contrasting Barnet's easy stereotype of the wandering Maurice as a lazy boy to Mary Shelley's contemporary evangelical middle-class children's authors like Mrs. Sherwood. The latter, like her predecessors Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More, was keen to train "wandering" underprivileged children into the middle-class ethic of hard work. In *The History of the Fairchild Family, or, The Child's Manual* (1818), the iconic middle-class Fairchild couple run charitable schools for children of the poor, and diligently train their own home-schooled children to help with simple household tasks (although the actual domestic chores are performed by lower-class domestic servants).[31] In the evangelical tradition, authors represented homeless

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[29] Shelley, *Maurice* 64-65.
[30] See above, pp. 48-50.
[31] Mary Martha Sherwood, *The History of the Fairchild Family, or, The Child's Manual*, 1818, rev. ed.

children as individually lazy, rather than recognising that their wandering was related to the larger socio-economic problem of poverty. Maurice, however, has to wander the countryside precisely because he wants to find work: through him, Mary Shelley invokes the bourgeois rhetoric of hard work, and consequent reward, as a moral benchmark only to reject it. Her critique builds on that of Wollstonecraft's, for adult readers, in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, where the underprivileged child Jemima slaves away for various adults, but remains trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation.[32]

Maurice's straightforward truth is not, however, his only ally in his battle against the pious adult. He follows his explanation of his "wandering" with a litany of his various misfortunes with hard taskmasters in the past, and adds: "although I say it myself, I am honest and have always been considered handy and industrious." Here Maurice uses the word "considered" strategically, implying to the adult listener that the child's reputation as a good worker has been tested through the perception of powerful adults, and therefore is all the more convincing an argument to Barnet. Even as Mary Shelley exposes the orphan child's socio-economic weakness, he gets the better of his disempowered position through the intelligent use of language. Thus, Mary Shelley refines Godwin's strategy of telling the truth, but slanting it in his children's books.[33]

While the above instances show the child reader the coercive use of authority by adults, Mary Shelley also upholds an alternative model of social relations where friendship between adults and children is possible, on relatively equal terms. When the traveller in the story meets Maurice at Barnet's cottage, his adult tone is markedly uncondescending as he speaks to the boy as an equal:

(London, 1822) 1-3.
[32] See above, pp. 123-24.
[33] See above, pp. 225-28.

> I came to this cottage on purpose. I have particular reasons for wishing to see it, and would be much obliged to you if you could afford me a bed tonight.[34]

Here, the adult's sense of being "much obliged" to the child shows the traveller to be an enlightened adult, the kind valorised by both Wollstonecraft and Godwin especially in their educational texts.

As Mary Shelley levels the power equation between the adult and the child, she valorises her child-protagonist by representing him as a complex and interesting character. As he relates his troubles to the traveller, he asks his interlocutor to keep his story secret:

> Unfortunately I am a delicate boy and unable to work as he would have me and have often been confined to my bed with fevers. My father never would believe I was really ill and would beat me and send me to bed without my supper when I could hardly stand. I do not mean to complain of him, and though I have told all this to you who are so kind, pray do not mention it to anyone else.[35]

As Maurice refuses to publicise his father's cruelty, he comes across as a dignified child with a developed interior consciousness. Although his trust in the traveller makes him confide his sorrows to this sympathetic listener, he does not expose his vulnerability to all and sundry, and lives on as a multi-layered character.

Mary Shelley shows that Maurice's multidimensional nature is necessary for his survival. Godwin, in his children's books, had shown how the disempowered cannot afford to speak the straightforward truth: as a lone, vulnerable child Maurice must become something of a trickster in order to elide the unjust adult authority of his father.

> He said that he had called himself Maurice because he was afraid that the cruel man whom he thought his father might come to that part of the country and find him out and beat and ill-use him as he used to do at home.[36]

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[34] Shelley, *Maurice* 71.
[35] Shelley, *Maurice* 73.
[36] Shelley, *Maurice* 85-86.

Luckily, Maurice does not have to keep escaping his (seeming) father forever. The narrative of *Maurice* ends as a family romance as the boy discovers the traveller, the caring and well-off adult, to be his true father. However, this does not mean that Maurice retreats into the blissful innocence of his new-found parents' protection, even as he reverts to his birth-name, Henry. Instead, he continues to live by masks, as his altruistic nature prompts him to help the neighbouring poor amongst whom he had once lived. Maurice/Henry and his real father come to visit Barnet's cottage every year, but the boy can only aid the poor by putting on "a coarse country dress." Here, clothes make the child, as he switches back to his former identity:

> When they were at this cottage Henry always went by the name of Maurice, and he would go about among his friends whom he had known when he lived with old Barnet, helping and consoling them if they were sick or afflicted, and doing all the good a little boy could do, or by the help of his father making people happy when poverty or misfortune made them miserable.[37]

Donning his former name and his former clothes, Maurice adopts his former identity to be at one with the people he helps. Mary Shelley subtly signals to her child reader that to help his old friends, Maurice must become one of them, and not simply offer condescending charity from his newly-acquired upper or middle-class position. Like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, she challenges the bourgeois ethic of charity through the "little boy" Maurice, although unlike them, she does not leave an obvious radical message of the need for socio-economic reform and elimination of poverty.

This subtlety also characterises Mary Shelley's argument for gender quality in *Maurice*, which she addresses to the child reader (the girl, Laurette) in the indirect form of an inset story. The traveller, relating to Maurice the story of how he lost his baby, tells the story of the childless Dame Smithson. Her sailor husband is "a bad

[37] Ibid.

man, and would beat and reproach her for not having a child." Given the male-dominated nature of the household, the child desired is a "son." Tired of her husband's demands, Dame Smithson resorts to a fictitious child:

> At length once when her husband went on a long voyage, she wrote to him a month after his departure and told him that she was with child. He stayed away a long time, and she continued to write and to tell falsehoods, how the child was born and was thriving; and she did this foolishly without thinking of the consequences, or what her husband would say when he returned and found no child.[38]

Imprisoned in her morass of lies, Dame Smithson finally extricates herself by stealing the traveller's son, who ultimately turns out to be Maurice himself. Her own victimisation makes her perpetuate the vicious cycle of pain and exploitation on the hapless traveller and his wife. However, if the traveller's voice indicates Mary Shelley's own opinion (since there is no obvious irony directed at the traveller in the entire narrative of *Maurice*), Dame Smithson's action is not subjected to much judgement or condemnation, and indeed the narrative description of her ensuing remorse signals that she is more sinned against than sinning. She is forced into falsehood due to the prejudices of her chauvinistic husband, who believes that a woman's primary role is that of a child-bearer, according to social convention. Dame Smithson's lie arises from her disempowered social position, and is therefore condoned, if not portrayed as a positive act. Here, through an apparently random story of a woman's baby-stealing, Mary Shelley makes her child reader aware of gender discrimination: the example of the sailor's domestic tyranny over his wife shows political tyranny in practice. She is not a trickster in the same sense as Maurice: her effort to save herself involves unjustified violence on others. But her wrongdoing does not arise from a vicious nature, but social injustice. Thus, Mary Shelley conveys

[38] Shelley, *Maurice* 81.

her feminist, political argument through sophisticated narrative to the child reader, developing Wollstonecraft and Godwin's literary techniques in their later careers.

Mary Shelley's sophisticated use of language builds on Godwin's techniques in his children's books, where he becomes a trickster in his language and delivers apparently safe, conformist messages, veiling radical content. Thus, like most Romantic-era didactic children's literature, her text encourages the child to read educational books which offer rational answers and closure to the child's possible questions. When the traveller is hosted by Maurice, their pleasures include:

> in the evening to read entertaining books, telling them of how the earth is cultivated, and how various countries bring forth various fruits: of the sea, and how different voyages and discoveries have been made on it: of the sky, and how the beautiful stars which we see at night move, and the signs they make of winter and summer. The traveller told Maurice that there were books more delightful than these which told of what good and wise men had done a great many years ago; how some had died to serve their fellow-creatures, and how through the exertions of these men everyone had become better, wiser and happier.[39]

The passage begins by referring to the virtues of books with information about agriculture and astronomy. Like Godwin's sanctimonious prefaces in the Juvenile Library books, Mary Shelley valorises books with educational content.[40] However, in terms of form, these books are soon jettisoned for "more delightful" reading, that is, imaginative histories, where historical figures, their lived emotions, and their sacrifices transform their given conditions of existence to make everyone "better, wiser and happier." Rational, definite, "happier" destinies for humankind are paradoxically made by imaginative, unconventional people, who irrationally "died to serve their fellow-creatures," becoming makers of history. These vivid historical figures, with their transformative acts, sound like characters from fairy tale, a genre

[39] Shelley, *Maurice* 75.
[40] See above, pp. 226-27.

that the Juvenile Library books had eagerly offered to child readers.[41] Godwin wrote his Juvenile Library histories in an imaginative, storytelling style to make the past come alive to the child reader, even as he encouraged children to read literature with imaginative, and not just informational content. Correspondingly, Mary Shelley overtly endorses books for the child reader with rational explanations about the earth, the cosmos, and human history, but subtly encourages her child reader to question the rational and certain values of society, encouraging change and transformation.

This ambiguity of presentation characterises the apparently comforting end of Mary Shelley's story: the resolution of Maurice gives the narrative a tragicomic air. Maurice is reunited with his biological parents, the traveller and his parents, who are caring and well-off. He persuades his father to buy old Barnet's cottage, where he spent his earlier days. This decrepit cottage is however washed away by the sea, so Maurice builds "a house not far off where he placed to live a poor fisherman and his two children, who having lost his boat in a storm some months before and scarcely saved from drowning himself, was in great want and poverty." Often, Maurice comes back to "visit the cliff, and the trees, and the rock." In these picturesque surroundings

> he would sit and reflect on the life he had led while a little boy with old Barnet in the pretty, old, fisher's cot; and how his father came to visit and assist him when he was poor and helpless, not knowing him to be his son; and how on that very rock he had first discovered that he belonged to good, kind parents; with whom he now lived in content and happiness.[42]

Maurice's childhood appears to find its acme in "good, kind parents" who give him "content and happiness." The child reader is assured that she can trust her parents. After his early experiences of deprivation, Maurice is a wise child who fully appreciates the cathartic state of a peaceful life. Mary Shelley's last line markedly

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[41] See above, pp. 263-73.
[42] Shelley, *Maurice* 87-88.

echoes Wordsworth, whose poetry she had read and admired. Wordsworth's Pedlar, "from ruin and from change," sees "So still an image of tranquillity" in Margaret's cottage in "The Excursion," that he is liberated from the tragic past and says: "I turned away,/ And walked along my road in happiness."[43]

Mary Shelley's alignment with Wordsworth's aesthetic fulfilment seems a politically pacifist move, giving Maurice a fairytale ending that dupes the child reader into believing that this is the destiny of all underprivileged children. Yet, this resolution is undone by dissonant factors. Mary Shelley gently inserts the reminder of the fisherman's poverty, showing that the boy owes his present happiness to the lucky accident of meeting his well-off father amidst a scenario of socio-economic deprivation. Without this accident his own state would have been very similar to that of the fisherman and his family. In this subtle message of social reform, Mary Shelley's narrative resolution is similar to Godwin's last story in *Fables*, where the cobbler's collapsed business is resurrected by well-off gentlemen, but their chance generosity does not wipe away his memories of social injustice.[44] In *Maurice*, Mary Shelley's rich, ambiguous end balances out Wordsworthian cathartic release with Godwin's political activism.

The political import of the happy resolution is stressed as Maurice remains interested in the welfare of others, notwithstanding his own good fortune. As mentioned above, baby Maurice was abducted from his parents by Dame Smithson, a sailor's wife, and brought up as her own son. The narrative, being a family romance, restores Maurice to his birth-parents, but Mary Shelley lets affective bonds remain nearly as strong as biological ones. After Maurice and his father, the traveller, in the story, buy Barnet's cottage, they let Maurice's adoptive mother Dame Smithson live

[43] William Wordsworth, *The Ruined Cottage and The Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979) 71. See James Butler, "Introduction," *Ruined Cottage* 3-35.
[44] See above, pp. 261-62.

in for the part of the year that they do not visit there. In addition to Dame Smithson's remorse at having stolen Maurice/ Henry from his birth-parents, the narrator clarifies that she

> loved Henry very much; and Henry never forgot that he had loved her once as a dear, good mother.[45]

The child brings together the well-off traveller, his wife and the sailor's wife Dame Smithson, from different socio-economic strata, into common understanding, much as Maria's daughter brings together the middle-class Maria and the lower-class Jemima in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*.[46] Maurice's abiding love for his adoptive "dear, good mother" probably reflects Mary Shelley's own wishful thinking about such a mother, considering that Wollstonecraft had shortly died after her birth. Mary Shelley never found a second mother in her stepmother, Mary Jane Godwin: their relations were generally strained.[47] In *Maurice*, the non-biological, affective relationship between Maurice and Dame Smithson valorises sociability, as Mary Shelley interweaves this organically into the narrative, more subtly than in *Frankenstein*. In her support of the biological as well as non-biological affective bonds, she builds upon Godwin's gradual integration of the local space of the family circle within a more expansive sociability that encompasses the whole of the human race.

The complexity of *Maurice* is expressed especially in the way Mary Shelley ambivalently represents the Romantic "child of Nature." She draws upon both Wollstonecraft and Godwin's ideas on child rearing, which were profoundly influenced by the Back-to-Nature writings of Rousseau as well as the poetry of the Romantic generation of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Thus, after Maurice is re-united

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[45] Shelley, *Maurice* 87.
[46] See above, pp. 129-30.
[47] Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 65.

with his father, the traveller, the text contains a lyrical, poignant description of Maurice and his father's boat-trips, binding the child-protagonist and his parent in a common appreciation of twilit, seaside beauties.

> In the fine evenings they would sail out to sea in the old fishing boat; they did not fish, for they did not like to give pain to, and to destroy animals, but they would observe the dancing waves, and the rocky shores; and if they stayed out long after sunset they saw how the stars came out one by one till the whole sky was covered by them.[48]

In the text of *Maurice*, as Claire Tomalin has observed, Wordsworth appears to "preside over" the text.[49] Indeed, in the above passage Mary Shelley echoes Wordsworth very closely in her simple language to describe the beauties of the rocky seashore or the stars. The passage evokes Wordsworth's "The Idiot Boy," featuring an uncanny boy-protagonist, who is attuned to the crowing cocks, the sun, the stars and the woods, and deeply loved by his mother.[50] But Mary Shelley's lines also echo Coleridge, whom she had known as a frequent visitor at her father's house.[51] Her lines recall "Frost at Midnight," where the poet, as a father, hopes that his son will be a child of Nature, wandering in an imposing landscape "by lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags/Of ancient mountain."[52]

However, in Mary Shelley's passage quoted above, the actual landscape is not wholly benign, with its "fishing boat," "dancing waves," barren "rocky shores" and lonely "stars." Barely three paragraphs after these lines, Mary Shelley describes a fisherman's boat lost in the storm, highlighting the ominous aspects of the landscape. Here, the text echoes Wollstonecraft's loco-descriptive passages in *Letters Written*

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[48] Shelley, *Maurice* 86-87.
[49] Tomalin, "Introduction," *Maurice* 15.
[50] Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth* 67-80.
[51] Tomalin, "Introduction," *Maurice* 5.
[52] Samuel T. Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, Vol. 16 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton UP,1969-2002) 16 vols. 456.

During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark—a text that features, as one of its main themes, Wollstonecraft's melancholic separation, as a mother, from her child Fanny Godwin.[53] Wollstonecraft's Letter I describes the "picturesque beauty" of the landscape in Norway, setting the tone for the rest of the text:

> Rocks were piled on rocks, forming a suitable bulwark to the ocean. Come no further, they emphatically said, turning their dark sides to the waves to augment the idle roar.[54]

The general melancholy in Wollstonecraft's passage here appears to hover over Mary Shelley's lines in *Maurice*. Moreover, in her fragment "Letters on the Management of Infants," Wollstonecraft had expressed a practising mother's mediated understanding of Rousseau's child of nature, stressing the fragility of young children. Wollstonecraft's views were further developed by Lady Mountcashell, Laurette's mother, in her child care text of 1823, *Advice to Mothers*.[55] Given the family friendship, one can infer that Mary Shelley was familiar with Lady Mountcashell's views. From her own experiences too, Mary Shelley was poignantly aware of the child of nature as an ideological construct that could not always be enacted in reality. In the lines from *Maurice* quoted above, the ominous aspect of the landscape probably owes to the recent deaths of her young children Clara and William, through 1818-19. Mary Shelley attributed their deaths to illnesses bred in the warm Italian climate. In a letter to Leigh Hunt's wife Marianne, "the Climate," she claimed, "has destroyed my two children."[56] Indeed, baby Clara's illness had developed during long travels in the heat, and William possibly succumbed to malaria: either way, the medical care the Shelleys arranged could not counteract the illnesses bred in their surrounding environment. [57] It is not surprising if henceforth, Mary Shelley's

[53] See above, pp. 97-98.
[54] Wollstonecraft, *Short Residence* 14.
[55] See above, pp. 115-19.
[56] Shelley, *Letters* I 101.

perception of the local Italian climate expanded into a general perception of Nature as a malignant force, hostile to the child. Her endorsement of the child of nature undercuts the ideal at the same time, by gesturing at the potential malignancy of Nature.

In *Maurice*, therefore, Mary Shelley develops Wollstonecraft's ambivalence about the child of nature further than her mother by addressing this discourse directly to the child reader. The kinds of ambivalence and complexity detailed above in Mary Shelley's representations of the child deepen in the next text discussed here, *The Last Man*.

Coming-of-Age: The Last Man

In her early writings, Mary Shelley's representations of the child are immersed in her parents' values, but she begins to appropriate and develop these representations subtly. In *The Last Man*, her representations of the child mark a serious rupture with her parents' writings. This novel is an early work of science fiction, hypothetically looking into the future of the human race in the twenty-first century. Here, Mary Shelley's representations of the child seriously question, and radically depart from her parents' utopian, optimistic, political hope. Through her deeply ambivalent, complex, literary representations of the child, she vents the intense personal sorrow and disillusionment she experienced in this phase of her life, but paradoxically, also clings on desperately to irrational hope for the future.

The ambivalence of Mary Shelley's representations of the child in *The Last Man* can be understood in terms of the drastic changes in her life by the time she wrote the novel. In 1822, Percy Bysshe Shelley was drowned in a sailing accident. Percy Shelley's sudden death plunged the widowed Mary into a morass of emotional

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[57] Mary Shelley, *Letters* I 102; Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. F. L. Jones, Vol.II (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964) 2 vols. 41-42; Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 257.

trauma and continual financial struggle, as she was left to fend for herself and her son Percy Florence. She returned to England from Italy in 1823, reconnected with the Godwins in London, and gradually carved out a career for herself as a writer to support herself and her child.[58] Still, Mary Shelley remained haunted by a sense of isolation. Even in late 1824, she rhetorically asked in her journal: "Why is the companion of Shelley companionless—the centre of a loved circle deserted by all?"[59]

The Last Man, with its telling title, is a fictive expression of Mary Shelley's overwhelming aloneness. She described her novel's subject in 1824:

> The last man! Yes, I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me.[60]

In her complete isolation, the "beloved" old dispensation of her family and friend circle did not work any more. She poured out her feelings of estrangement in a poem called "The Choice," recorded in her journal in 1824. Significantly, she represents herself as a child here, acknowledging a deep parental debt as she traces the beginnings of her existence.

> And thou, strange Star! ascendant at my birth
> Which rained, they said, kind influence on the earth,
> So from great parents sprung I dared to boast
> Fortune my friend, till set, thy beams were lost![61]

Here, Mary Shelley accepts that her day in the sun is no more. As she looks back at the heritage of her "great parents," although she does not blame her parents directly for her ill "Fortune," the lines evince her sense of betrayed promise, as she finds herself in a no-man's land where the "kind influence" of her parents' existence fails to

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[58] See Jane Dunn, *Moon in Eclipse: A Life of Mary Shelley* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978) 238-77.
[59] Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman & Diana Scott-Kilvert, Vol. II (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 2 vols. 484.
[60] Shelley, *Letters* I 316.
[61] Shelley, *Journals* II 490-94.

provide any meaning to her current life. The outsider child that she had gladly echoed from her parents in *Maurice* no longer seems so attractive.

The Last Man is a text, therefore, where Mary Shelley strikes out her own way beyond her parents' influence. It is probably not sheer coincidence that she even begins her narrative by tracing the vivid portraits of two orphan children, the siblings Lionel and Perdita. In these two personalities, Mary Shelley appears at first to endorse the values of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. As the narrative develops however, she parts ways with the past.

The novel's protagonist, the I-narrator Lionel Verney, begins his story by describing his orphaned childhood "among the valleys and fells of Cumberland," where he lives as a shepherd boy. Here, Mary Shelley directly echoes Wordsworth, as he acknowledges the hardships of a shepherd's life, subverting the Arcadian, pleasant, associations of the image in conventional pastoral.[62] Mary Shelley, however, goes further than Wordsworth in subverting the pastoral connotations of the shepherd's life:

> I cannot say much in praise of such a life; and its pains far exceeded its pleasures. There was freedom in it, a companionship with nature, and a reckless loneliness; but these, romantic as they were, did not accord with the love of action and desire of human sympathy, characteristic of youth.[63]

Pointing towards the hardships of a rural lifestyle, Mary Shelley criticises the individualistic "reckless loneliness" of the glorified, orphaned, child of nature commonly represented in Romantic poetry, who lacks the sociability of "human sympathy."[64]

The child Lionel does have some human company: he associates "with others friendless like myself," but his relationship to them is defined as one of unchallenged

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[62] See Wordsworth, "Michael," *William Wordsworth* 224-36.
[63] Shelley, "The Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 14.
[64] See above, pp. 30-31.

power. Here, the portrait of the young Lionel echoes Godwin's critique of a Wordsworthian childhood in *Fleetwood*.[65] Lionel's unsocialised character, like that of the child Fleetwood amongst his rural environs, becomes despotic.

> I was rough as the elements, and unlearned as the animals I tended. I often compared myself to them, and finding that my chief superiority consisted in power, I soon persuaded myself that it was in power only that I was inferior to the chiefest potentates of the earth.

Like an "unlearned" herd of "animals," Lionel lives with the other "shepherd-boys" in a maelstrom of endless male competition. The voice recalling the shepherd-boy's life is that of the mature Lionel. Through his ironic, seemingly non-judgemental tone as he reflects on his childhood self, Mary Shelley criticises his excessive individualism and juvenile arrogance. He expresses this arrogance in a supreme disdain for anyone not aligned with power, in a cruel ethos of the survival of the mightiest: "I owned but one law, it was that of the strongest, and my greatest deed of virtue was never to submit."[66] Here, Mary Shelley echoes Godwin in *Fleetwood*, but her irony at the young Lionel's expense conveys her wariness about the child of nature more subtly than Godwin's sanctimonious, straightforward narration from the wisened, adult Fleetwood. Her deep scepticism about the child of nature in this text further develops the ambivalence that she had expressed in *Maurice*, as she breaks away from the childhood influence of the poetry of Coleridge, as well as Wollstonecraft and Godwin's reserved appreciation of Rousseau.[67]

Orphanhood makes a different impact on Lionel's sister Perdita, as a girl child. Mary Shelley represents her vulnerability in a name that echoes Shakespeare's

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[65] See above, pp. 246-47.
[66] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 14-15.
[67] See above, pp. 298-99.

foundling, alluding probably to its literal meaning "the lost one."[68] The reader is given an unsentimental view of this child as a social outsider:

> though lovely and full of noble feeling, my poor Perdita (for this was the fanciful name my sister had received from her dying parent), was not altogether saintly in her disposition. Her manners were cold and repulsive. If she had been nurtured by those who had regarded her with affection, she might have been different; but unloved and neglected, she repaid want of kindness with distrust and silence. She was submissive to those who held authority over her, but a perpetual cloud dwelt on her brow; she looked as she expected enmity from every one who approached her, and her actions were instigated by the same feeling.[69]

Perdita is a misunderstood, lonely child. Rankling in "distrust" towards everybody, she is seemingly "submissive" to those to whose power she is subjected to, but her perpetually resentful facial expression gives away her untameable, autonomous self. Unlike Wordsworth's sweet Lucy, she is no "flower" of "Nature," who is "sportive as the fawn" and lives "wild with glee."[70] Perdita's wildness holds no feminine charm.

Although Perdita and her brother Lionel are both independent by nature, Mary Shelley stresses that double standards operate for the sexes, in terms of people's reactions to the orphaned siblings. Lionel observes that

> If my courage and daring obtained for me a kind of respectful aversion, her youth and sex, since they did not excite tenderness, by proving her to be weak, were the cause of numberless mortifications to her.[71]

As a seemingly self-sufficient girl *and* child, Perdita is doubly disadvantaged by her inability to elicit charitable "tenderness," since her quietly resistant character unsettles conventional social expectations of female submissiveness. Through Perdita, Mary Shelley takes issue with the lone child of nature in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, showing that this is a male-centred ideal, as she develops Wollstonecraft's

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[68] See above, pp. 103-4. Cf. the figure of Sagesta.
[69] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 15-16.
[70] Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth* 154-55.
[71] Ibid.

arguments for female autonomy, as well as Godwin's critique of the power-hungry "courage and daring" of the autonomous child bred without peaceful sociability.

Perdita is isolated not only as an unfriendly female orphan, but also as a solipsistic visionary, a role usually more familiar from male Romantic poetry. This characteristic makes Perdita doubly subversive as a female child. As Lionel observes:

> My life was spent among tangible realities, hers was a dream. I might be said even to love my enemies, since by exciting me they in a sort bestowed happiness upon me; Perdita almost disliked her friends, for they interfered with her visionary moods[.][72]

The autonomous, subtly wild and dreamy Perdita looks down upon her plebeian "friends," much like the opium-addicted Coleridge did upon the enigmatic "person" from "Porlock" who interrupted his grand vision of Kubla Khan's fabled Xanadu.[73] More specifically, Perdita's roots can be traced back to Wollstonecraft's protagonist Mary in *Mary: a Fiction*, the unconventionally female child-visionary neglected by mean-minded adults.[74] Perdita is Mary Shelley's angry young girl-child who writes over the sweet, nearly ungendered Lucys of Wordsworth's poetry.

In critical studies, Perdita has been identified as a representation of Mary Shelley herself as a creative writer. Visually, she echoes Mary Shelley's features in a glorified form: "pale and fair," with "golden hair," and "impenetrably deep" eyes containing a "universe of thought."[75] With an unfriendly exterior, Perdita likes to "wrap herself in loneliness" and lose herself in imaginative "self-created wanderings."[76] Her visionary wildness echoes Mary Shelley's own confessions of the "eyry of freedom" she found in Scotland when she was growing up. Yet, viewed as

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[72] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 17.
[73] Samuel T. Coleridge, "Kubla Khan, or, A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment," *Coleridge: Select Poetry and Prose*, ed. Stephen Potter (London: Nonesuch, 1971) 93-95.
[74] See above, pp. 108-9.
[75] Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 123.
[76] See Mellor, *Mary Shelley* 153.

Mary Shelley's self-representation, Perdita's solipsism also makes her almost a caricature of the female visionary. The child Perdita's solipsism helps Mary Shelley inscribe an understated message supporting sociability, for Perdita's childhood reserve lets her nurture her excessive sensibility. As the narrative progresses, this sensibility makes her married life unhappy as she neurotically loses trust in her husband Raymond, and in turn abandons her own child Clara when she kills herself after Raymond's death. As Lionel puts it, Perdita, "in her pride of beauty and life, had thrown aside the pleasant perception of the apparent world for the unreality of the grave, and had left poor Clara quite an orphan. I concealed from this beloved child that her mother's death was voluntary."[77]

Lionel excuses his sister's act as her inability to move beyond the Platonic cave of beautiful shadows. This however does not exonerate the fact that Perdita's self-immolation leaves her child liable to exactly the same state of social estrangement that she herself was subjected to as an orphan child. Luckily, however, Perdita's brother Lionel and his wife are willing to undertake her child's nurture.

Perdita's choice to die very probably reflects upon Mary Shelley's knowledge of her family history. Through her reading of Godwin's *Memoirs* of his wife (amongst other possible sources of information), Mary Shelley would have known that in 1795 Wollstonecraft had been foiled in an attempt at death by drowning, a method disconcertingly reminiscent of Perdita's.[78] Wollstonecraft would have left the two-year old Fanny in a completely unprotected state, similar to Clara's. Perdita's act signifies a choice that Mary Shelley herself did not make, in the years following Percy Shelley's death. In her journals Mary recorded, several times, suicidal spells that she

[77] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 170-71.
[78] Godwin, "Memoirs," *CWG* 1 123-24. Perdita's death by drowning also perhaps reflects Mary Shelley's memories of Harriet Shelley's suicide (by a similar method), as well as Percy Bysshe Shelley's death in the sailing accident. See Todd, *Death and the Maidens* 244-49; see above, pp.

never actually surrendered to, for the sake of her young son Percy Florence: "my child," she claimed, "forces me to live."[79]

Thus, in the figure of Perdita, Mary Shelley rejects Wollstonecraft and own former self, showing what it is for the survivor to live on. In contrast to Perdita, the orphaned child Clara in *The Last Man* helps Mary Shelley subtly indict the adult Perdita's self-obsession. The growing Clara represents the positive force of sociability, as she integrates into Lionel's family. In sad times, she selflessly takes care of the sick and the dying. Significantly, Clara has the same name as Mary Shelley's dead daughter, and probably represents a projected, ideal self for Mary, a future unrealised.[80] Meanwhile the shepherd-boy Lionel, from his early hunger for power, grows beyond his circle of self-interest after interacting with Adrian. He becomes a caring husband, father and friend over the course of the narrative, as he immerses himself in the sociable activities of family life, and involves himself in the political life of the State.[81]

In political terms, the text of *The Last Man* enacts a process of comprehensive dialogue with Godwin. It takes *Political Justice* to its logical conclusion, envisioning a society in England where monarchy has been replaced by wholesale republicanism as Prince Adrian voluntarily gives up his throne.[82] Mary Shelley, however, departs from Godwin's (even the later Godwin's) fundamentally optimistic view of human nature, as she shows that his utopia turns into a dystopia through the series of disasters that wipes out all of humanity except the narrator, the last man Lionel. Nature is figured as a distinctively malevolent force, including relentless attacks of plague and

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[79] Shelley, *Journals* II 441.
[80] See Mellor, *Mary Shelley* 156.
[81] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 19-40.
[82] Ibid. See above, pp. 153-54.

natural disasters with floods that kill the last of the human race (apart from Lionel).[83] In critical studies, the series of disasters has been read as a reflection of not only Mary Shelley's personal losses, but also her sense of cultural loss, from her position as a remnant of the radical circles of Godwin and Shelley. In his outline of the cultural context of the novel, Lee Sterrenburg locates the novel amongst Romantic era writings from the mid-1790s onwards. According to Sterrenburg, in the "post-revolutionary despair" in these writings, "visions of utopian social reform simply gave way to premonitions of apocalyptic annihilation." Politically conservative camps, especially after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, gathered momentum in Britain, with the justification of having rooted out an international menace. Mary Shelley's *Last Man*, according to Sterrenburg, is part of this "apocalyptic milieu," where she "rejects the meliorative political views of her parents' generation." In her pessimism, she is "writing an obituary on the idea" that society "has a natural imperative toward survival and improvement." Sterrenburg infers that Mary Shelley's cynicism in *The Last Man* is captured in the representation of the malevolent Nature that is "conspiring to destroy all of civilization."[84]

Against this background of personal as well as cultural loss, Mary Shelley's representations of the child revise those of her parents. Chapters 1-4 show how Wollstonecraft and Godwin represent the child as a mythical figure of human promise, especially through processes of education and political emancipation. While Mary Shelley draws upon this paradigm, she qualifies it considerably; in her text the promise of cultural rejuvenation represented by the child floats into very airy possibility rather than a realistic end.

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[83] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 173-365.
[84] Lee Sterrenburg, "The Last Man: Anatomy of Failed Revolutions." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1978): 324-47.

Before the series of disasters strike the chief characters in the novel, Mary Shelley invokes her parents' representations of the child as the mythical future. In Lionel's delight in the growing powers of his nine-year old son Alfred, Wollstonecraft and Godwin's desire for the child's growth towards autonomy is clearly discernible:

> We no longer look on this dearest part of ourselves, as a tender plant which we must cherish, or a plaything for an idle hour. We build now on his intellectual faculties, we establish our hopes on his moral propensities. His weakness still imparts anxiety to this feeling, his ignorance prevents entire intimacy; but we begin to respect the future man, and to endeavour to secure his esteem, even as if he were our equal.[85]

Even as Lionel glories in the growing "intellectual faculties" or mental qualities of the child, he qualifies the child's autonomy with his own parental disciplinary role with the telling "even if." The child's biological weakness needs the adult's nurture and protection, but in the process Lionel, being an enlightened adult, pretends that the child is an "equal," and refrains from undue exercise of adult power.

Indeed, this image of the promised glory of the child as the future continues to be obstinately invoked till the end of the novel, when most of humanity has been wiped out by plague epidemics and natural disasters. Lionel's younger son Evelyn and his niece Clara play gleefully as children of nature although surrounded by an utter deathscape:

> By the margin of the stream, apart from all, in a tranquil nook, where the purling brook kissed the gentle sward gently, Clara and Evelyn were at play, sometimes beating the water with large boughs, sometimes watching the summer-flies that sported upon it. Evelyn now chased a butterfly—now gathered a flower for his cousin; and his laughing cherub-face and clear brow told of the light heart that beat in his bosom.[86]

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[85] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 179.
[86] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 323.

In such instances, Mary Shelley invokes the child as a metaphor of sociability and redemption, as the last members of the human race resist their inevitable eclipse. Evelyn and Clara drown (though accidentally, unlike Perdita) and their promise is ruthlessly cut short.

At the end of the novel, Lionel is left alone as the last surviving member of the human race, divested of all his social relationships. Desperate for human contact, he clings obstinately onto forlorn hope for the return of humanity, in an image that is infinitely sad:

> Yet, will not this world be re-peopled, and the children of a saved pair of lovers, in some to me unknown and unattainable seclusion, wandering to these prodigious relics of the anti-pestilential race, seek to learn how beings so wondrous in their achievements, with imagination infinite, and powers godlike, had departed from their home to an unknown country?[87]

Here, Lionel invokes "children" as a metaphor of hope without any reasonable grounds whatsoever. With the death of all political ideologies and rational optimism, Lionel hopes for the survival of the human race in a place "unknown and attainable," beyond the limit of his own vision. His memories of human civilisation are awestruck: "wondrous in their achievements, with imagination infinite, and powers godlike."

Significantly, in representing his hope through "children," Lionel uses the word "lovers," giving a strong emotional touch to the figures of the procreative, generic male and female. Lionel invokes the image in a very personal, self-defensive sense, holding on to the civilisation that he thinks is worth it, although the appearances of Nature belie his hope. Through his voice of absurd, imaginative hope in the metaphor of lovers' children, Mary Shelley appropriates her parents' radically political

[87] Shelley, "Last Man," *NSWMS* 4 362.

representations of the child for her personal, primal understanding of survival. Her metaphor of the redemptive child just stops short of nihilism, in an anticipation of existentialist vision: this is underlined by the novel's setting in the twenty-first century, a bold projection into the future.

In his survival, Lionel paradoxically returns to the isolation of his childhood. As a survivor figure, he becomes a writer himself, writing pages that have no visible reader. In Fiona Stafford's reading of the *The Last Man* as a fundamentally hopeful text, Lionel's story reflects Mary Shelley's personal experience of the writer as survivor: "Mary Shelley's powerful image of Lionel Verney sitting alone in the ruins of Rome, writing memoirs that no one would ever read, can be seen as a new affirmation of the essential importance of writing." Accordingly, "writing matters to the writer," if no one else.[88] Lionel's narrative is a powerful testament of survival, where Mary Shelley, through the voice of the I-narrator, affirms herself as a writer beyond the shadows of her past.

The Last Man turns out to be a text where Mary Shelley reassesses everything she has learnt before. But, as a child of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, she finally works through their influence, and finds an independent voice as a writer. Ultimately, she realises her parents' desires for the autonomy of the child: like the child in Wollstonecraft's *Lessons for Children*, she leaves her parents behind and skips outdoors alone to play.[89]

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[88] Fiona J. Stafford, *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994) 216-23.

[89] See above, pp. 135-36.

Epilogue. The "Wingèd Child" in Percy Bysshe Shelley

At the beginning of this thesis I observed that Percy Bysshe Shelley's representations of the child owe much to Wollstonecraft and Godwin.[1] In fact, Shelley offers a classic case study to gauge the textual impact of Wollstonecraft and Godwin's literary representations of the child, given that he did not encounter either of them in his childhood. Intellectually, however, he was greatly influenced by them: he was an admirer of Wollstonecraft's works, and Godwin's protégé at the beginning of his poetic career, sharing a close literary association with Mary Shelley afterwards.[2] When he and Mary Shelley eloped from the Godwin household in 1814 (with Mary's step-sister Claire), although they escaped Godwin's influence physically, they remained in touch with his values textually as they read Wollstonecraft's works together, particularly *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, and *Mary, a Fiction*. They also read Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft.[3]

Like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, Percy Bysshe Shelley's representations of the child are many-faceted. So on one hand, there is his self-representation as an eccentric, lonely boy seeking out the morbid, Gothic pleasures of "ghosts" in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (1817).[4] On the other hand, his work also represents the poignant, fantastically subtle memory of his beloved son William, buried in the Protestant Cemetery at Rome, defying death through the evocative power of the "light

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[1] See above, pp. 1-2.
[2] See U.C.Knoepflmacher, "On Exile and Fiction: The Leweses and the Shelleys," *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and their Silent Partners*, ed. Ruth Perry & Martine Watson Brownley (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984) 102-121.
[3] Clairmont, Claire. *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1968) 29,33,35,39.
[4] Shelley, *PS* I 530.

of laughing flowers along the grass" in "Adonais" (1821).[5] Yet, in this discussion I will show that Percy Bysshe Shelley's representations of the child are not simply an aesthetic category, but bear political continuity with those of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. In terms of literary history, Shelley's varied representations continue and develop the older couple's metaphors of the child as social victim, or imaginative freedom, or whatever other radical value the political context demands.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's protean representations are examined through the particular instance of the "wingèd child," a metaphor which appears as a leitmotif in his poetry. Classic examples of such aerial spirit-children include the Spirit of the Earth, in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and the child of Cythna, mysteriously lost through the narrative of "The Revolt of Islam" and resurrected in the last Canto as a "wingèd shape," a "child with silver-shining wings."[6]

A key feature of Shelley's wingèd children is their distinctly unearthly identities, contrasting with Wollstonecraft, Godwin and also Mary Shelley's recognisably human children. This begs the question, raised by Judith Plotz with regard to canonical male Romantic poets, as to whether his representations of the child are largely aesthetic evasions of the socio-political realities of contemporary children's lives.[7] To explore this question, I will examine whether or not Shelley's departure in his method of literary representation constitutes a "betrayal" of Wollstonecraft and Godwin's political radicalism.

The wingèd children, in Shelley's narrative poems, are imaginative projections and so the reader is never quite sure whether these wingèd children are meant to

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[5] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Selected Poetry, Prose and Letters*, ed. A.S.B. Glover (London: Nonesuch, 1951) 562.
[6] Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound," PS II 599; Shelley, "Laon and Cythna," PS II 252.
[7] Plotz xii-40.

represent objective realities or subjective beings in the minds of his protagonists. Laon and Cythna, in "Revolt of Islam" for instance, find the seraphic child in a different order of metaphysical reality only after they have been physically burnt at the stake by a despotic regime.[8] The Spirit of the Earth, in *Prometheus Unbound*, has a key role in the celebratory masque of the later Acts, representing the emancipation of the human race. A consistent feature of these wingèd children is that they invariably appear in contexts of cultural regeneration in Shelley's works, representing a post-revolutionary, emancipated world-order. These contexts suggest that the wingèd children serve a mythical purpose in Shelley's radicalism, embodying his utopian principles of "what ought to be, or may be," as he calls them in his dedication to Leigh Hunt in *The Cenci* (1819).[9]

A representative instance of the culturally rejuvenating wingèd child is the Spirit of the Earth in "Prometheus Unbound." Through this seraphic shape Shelley privileges the child's perspective over that of the usually authoritative adult. When Panthea relates the first meeting of the Spirit of the Earth with Asia, she claims that the Spirit spoke to Asia thus:

> with her
> It made its childish confidence, and told her
> All it had known and seen, for it saw much,
> Yet idly reasoned what it saw; and called her—
> For whence it sprang it knew not, nor do I—
> "Mother, dear Mother."[10]
>
> (19-24)

From the narrative context the reader can infer that the adult Panthea's words are not to be taken at face value: Shelley does not quite endorse her view of the Spirit and Asia's meeting. Panthea's voice of authority is unhinged in her confessed incomprehension of the Spirit's origins: "whence it sprang it knew not, nor do I." In

[8] Shelley, "Laon and Cythna," *PS* II 250-52.
[9] Shelley, "The Cenci,"*PS* II 725.
[10] Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound," *PS* II 599.

fact, Panthea's scepticism is balanced out by the juvenile Spirit's strange instinctive knowledge of its parentage as it addresses Asia as "Mother." Ultimately, the Spirit is proven right: at the meeting that is taking place during Panthea's description, Asia gladly reciprocates the spirit's address as "I love thee, gentlest being."[11] Moreover, Shelley does not present Panthea's voice as that of a reliable narrator: she judgementally observes that the Spirit "idly reasoned what it saw." Panthea's perspective is undercut in the forthcoming stanzas, as Shelley shows that the Spirit does not infer "idly" from its experience, but correctly gives good tidings of the peaceful revolution that has emancipated humanity, and made all creation beautiful: "All things had put their evil nature off."[12] The Spirit relates its own experience of how even low reptilian life, "toads and snakes and efts" had become uncannily "beautiful" in a reformed world-order, and exchanges this experience with its listeners. In doing so, it offers counsel about liberation to its direct listeners within the drama, and indirectly to readers of the text of "Prometheus Unbound." Here, the Spirit performs the role of a storyteller, in the elevated sense that Walter Benjamin, in his essay "The Storyteller," identifies as the wisdom of "teachers and sages."[13] Through the juvenile Spirit of the Earth Shelley, like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, invests cultural authority in the voice of the child and empowers the child in his empyrean representation, making the adult reader acknowledge the child's powerful presence.

One can safely generalise therefore that these wingèd children represent utopia within Shelley's radical discourses. However, does Shelley privilege the ethereal wingèd child at the cost of silencing the concerns of physical children, as alleged of

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound," *PS* II 601.
[13] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. and introd. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968) 83-109.

Romantic poets (particularly Wordsworth) by Plotz and other commentators?[14] A test case for this would be that of Cythna's child in "Revolt of Islam," who is a physical child when Cythna breastfeeds her and observes the child's expressive "looks," "touch" and "pulses."[15] But this child is displaced for the "wingèd shape," a "child with silver-shining wings" in the last Canto of the poem. Cythna, however, recognises this shape as "mine own child" from the real world. As Cythna relates to Laon, the child helped her recuperate from her miasma of sorrow after her separation from Laon and her rape:

> Lo, that is mine own child, who in the guise
> Of madness came, like day to one benighted
> In lonesome woods: my heart is now too well requited[.]
> (4645-7) [16]

Since this child came in the "guise of madness": Shelley stresses that it has a hallucinatory quality in its mortal existence itself. Given Cythna's overwhelming sense of loss, this child performs the narrative role of a recuperative agent or a healer in her life, and continues this role on a supernatural level in the last Canto of the poem after she has been burnt at the stake. However, Shelley does not elevate the wingèd child at the cost of corporeal human identity. As Laon narrates, Cythna "wept aloud" at the recovery of her child,

> and in her arms
> Clasped that bright Shape, less marvellously fair
> Than her own hues and living charms[.]
> (4648-50)[17]

The wingèd child's brightness does not equal the warmth of Cythna's "living charms." The statement is ironic, given the ontologically dead status of Laon and Cythna themselves in this strange poem with its multiple registers of reality. Cythna's

[14] See above, pp. 30-31.
[15] Shelley, "Laon and Cythna," *PS* II 187.
[16] Shelley, "Laon and Cythna," *PS* II 253.
[17] Ibid.

physical child slides into the state of the wingèd child, simply magnifying its erstwhile role as a healer, even as Shelley reverses the usual child-adult power equation in the utopian world of the last Canto: the wingèd child is strong enough to row both the adults Cythna and Laon in a boat.[18] Moreover, the wingèd child is not the only child in the narrative that Shelley describes as seraphic: earlier in the narrative, the child who accompanies the tyrant and pleads for Laon's life is a "Shape all light."[19] Distinctions between real and ideal become irrelevant for these represented children with their protean nature. Indeed, like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, Shelley represents the child in his texts according to the message he wishes to convey to his readers; thus, he represents the child in many forms. The wingèd child is simply one persistent representation of Shelley's child-metaphor: it signals regeneration, but is much more than a bright, flat being. The wingèd child in Shelley is not an evasion of flesh-and-blood human concerns, but a subtle representation of these concerns. A recognition of the wingèd child's protean nature helps analyse why the figure keeps making sporadic, yet repeated appearances within the narratives of Shelley's poetry.

This proteanness is evident in the strongly corporeal quality of Shelley's wingèd children. In "Prometheus Unbound," the moon is described in an extended metaphor, as Shelley compares it to a wingèd child. Within the chariot of the Mother of the Months

> sits a wingèd infant, white
> Its countenance, like the whiteness of bright snow,
> Its plumes are as feathers of bright frost,
> Its limbs gleam white, through the wind-flowing folds
> Of its white robe, woof of ethereal pearl.
> Its hair is white,--the brightness of white light
> Scattered in strings; yet its two eyes are heavens

[18] Ibid.
[19] Shelley, "Laon and Cythna," *PS* II 247.

Of liquid darkness[.]
(219-26)[20]

Shelley turns the metaphor of the wingèd child inside out, giving it a physicality so convincing that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the metaphor and the actual object described. The moon, as a "wingèd infant," is a strange combination of opposites: its moonbeams boast brightness and whiteness, and they co-exist with the darkness of its eye-like craters. The wingèd child's proteanness defies epistemological categories of real or ideal.

This protean quality explains why Shelley often represents the wingèd child as an element of subjective human perception, rather than as a transcendental, seemingly objective reality in his poetry. At one level, Shelley's wingèd children simply represent ineffable ideas: for instance, Cythna's wingèd child describes herself as a "wingèd Thought" in her speech to Cythna and Laon.[21] In Shelley's unfinished play about Tasso as well, the poet's eyes, in the madness of creative inspiration

seemed to track
Some half created image through the air,
Last of the wingèd children of his brain,
Ere yet the soft persuasion of his brain,
Ere yet the soft persuasion of his tongue
Had coloured it to intellectual sight[.]
(35-40) [22]

Here, the wingèd children in Tasso's brain exist before acquiring concrete shape as artistic artefacts. Here Shelley, like Godwin before him, reworks the standard metaphor of the text as child, derived from Plato's *Symposium* (a text he knew well

[20] Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound," *PS* II 625-26.
[21] Shelley, "Laon and Cythna," *PS* II 256.
[22] Shelley, "Scene for *Tasso*," *PS* II 368-69.

enough to translate personally).[23] In Shelley's homage to Tasso, the wingèd child becomes an extremely positive term, representing artistic adult creativity.

Thus, this protean quality of Percy Shelley's wingèd child effectively resists the cultural boundaries established elsewhere between the adult and the child. Worth observing here is the fact that Shelley never wrote children's literature directly to address the child reader, unlike Wollstonecraft, Godwin and Mary Shelley. But by representing the wingèd child as a protean metaphor, Shelley gestures at the child's specificity and yet invites the child (and, by implication, the disempowered adult) into the world of powerful adults. In his "Ode to the West Wind" (1820) Shelley, significantly, represents his radical messages as a "new birth," revitalising the image of the text of his poem as a child.[24] He attempts to speak to "unawaken'd earth," recalling the metaphor of the awakened child that Wollstonecraft and Godwin had previously invoked to represent their radical politics.[25] Ultimately then, like Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley too turns out to be an intellectual child of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and attains literary autonomy in his own politically radical representations of the child.

Moreover, both Mary and Percy Shelley, in their representations of the child, share a discursive relationship with the older couple. Their mutual relationships as a family are not constituted simply by genes or by marriage, but bear out the Wollstonecraft-Godwin political ideal of a sociability not limited by ties of blood: through their re-readings of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, the Shelleys remain the textual children of the former writers.

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[23] See above, pp. 152-53.
[24] Shelley, *Selected Poetry* 760.
[25] See above, pp. 128-29, 185-86.

The Wollstonecraft-Godwin Child: Modern Continuations

The Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations of the child have much to say to modern critical readers, especially in the fairly new and exciting academic field of childhood studies. Their representations also throw light upon cultural concerns that continue to be hotly debated in the public sphere, in modern lives scripted by the media. For instance, current wisdom about joint parenting and the active role of fathers in child care is anticipated by Godwin in his involvement with his children's education, through his publishing firm. The Wollstonecraft-Godwin dreams of gender equality remain to be achieved through the toy industry, even as Princess Barbie and GI Joe continue to enthral young girls and boys into stereotypical gender roles.

Studying the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations of the child throws light upon the ideological legacies of the Romantic child. Modern social policy-makers and the media continue to invoke children in the terms of Shelley's sweet and innocent Cythna, as they continue to plead for childhood as a special state of human life requiring nurture and protection from forces like child labour and child soldiering, especially in developing and under-developed economies. Violent video games and representations of paedophilia in films continue to provoke shock and outrage at the exploitation of helpless children.[26] The didacticism of Romantic-era mainstream children's literature resurfaces, in a modified form, in educational debates where adults try to protect children from losing their innocence. One only has to glance, for instance, at the American Library Association's list of recommended books for children, to see how censorship continues to be a real concern in children's books

[26] See Paula Fass, "Children and Globalization," *Journal of Social History* 36.4 (2003): 963-77, 3 Feb 2008 <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_social_history/v036/36.4fass.html>

today, as adults worry about how much explicit violence and sex children can "take" without permanent damage to their psychic well-being.[27]

Yet, as the Wollstonecraft-Godwin representations show, behind the sweet and innocent façade of the child lurks a potentially active agent for politically radical causes. This alternative child is visible in history in glimpses. Political awareness, for instance, is strongly visible in nineteenth-century English households, where girls like the young Lucy Aikin (Anna Barbauld's niece) used to furiously debate questions of women's rights against boys in their social circles.[28] Their contemporaries, that is, working-class children in Chartist Sunday Schools were active in their parents' radical urge to undo the inequalities of the class-system.[29] In more recent times, adults have recognised the need for international legislation, through the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to ensure that children are entitled to basic human rights all over the world. In the field of children's literature, current educators and artists alike are becoming more open to experiments with risque "adult" themes in children's books, which are enthusiastically read by children. In these alternative models of childhood, the cultural separation of the adult and the child is collapsed, even as the adult's quest for human commonality with the child recognises the child's difference and special needs.

Such modes of thinking recapitulate the Wollstonecraft-Godwin challenges to the cultural sidelining of the child in their representations. In terms of readership and literary respectability, the Wollstonecraft-Godwin family circle's representations of the child often remained marginal in its own times. But as this thesis shows, their

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[27] 18 July 2007<http://www.ala.org/>

[28] Kathryn Gleadle, comp. & ed., *Radical Writing on Women, 1800-1850: An Anthology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 7, 175.

[29] Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) 24.

Romantic-era avant-gardism has left rich treasures to modern readers, both to literary critics and the lay public.

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