

Godwin's Fleetwood: *Shame and the Sexuality of Feeling*

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"Shame is Prides cloak." – Blake (36)

My epigraph comes from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, published in 1793, by the English Romantic poet William Blake. Included among the poem's *Proverbs of Hell* section, this forceful little aphorism contains multitudes. It not only insists on the inseparability of shame and pride, but on a dyadic, even dialectical, relationship between two definitionally opposed emotions. According to Blake, shame contains pride or, at the very least, the potentiality of a pride's unveiling. Blake's imagery is biblical – shame enters the Garden of Eden in the form of loincloths that cover, or cloak, Adam and Eve's newly naked bodies – while his personification of pride looks forward to a liberating modality of the future rather than backward to scriptural symbols. In accordance with Blake's revolutionary politics, and those mind-forg'd manacles that are made only to be broken, the cloak of shame exists only to be cast aside, to be dropped so that pride can come out naked and unashamed. In just four words, Blake imagines a state of proud shamelessness.

Another radical English writer and member of the Joseph Johnson circle recognized shame as a particular kind of blockage that negatively impacts the affective lives of men by impeding their access to pride and joy. In fictional works such as *Things as They Are or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1799), Jacobin novelist and philosophical anarchist William Godwin dramatizes

the isolating effects of shame, particularly the gendered aspects of this feeling. But it is Godwin's later novel, *Fleetwood: or, the New Man of Feeling*, that best manifests another marriage, every bit as hellish as Blake's, in which shame plays a crucial and corrosive role. What's most striking about Godwinian shame is its paradoxical structure since it operates both as a blockage, in the psychological sense, *and* as a self-enclosed cycle from which Casimir Fleetwood cannot free himself.¹ On hearing his wife Mary Macneil's voice in the novel's last scene, Casimir exclaims: "Oh, that voice! Contending emotions, hope, fear, transport, and shame, held me motionless" (422). That feeling of inertia, of going nowhere, is integral to Fleetwood's shameful sensibility but also significant on a metatemporal level as well. Feeling ashamed is a repetitive act constituted through time, through what Judith Butler calls the "reiterative and citational practice" by which gender and sexuality materialize in a "performative fashion" (2). To the extent that a faulty sensibility precludes conjugal felicity, *Fleetwood* fails to live up to the teleologies of the traditional marriage plot. In terms of character development, which always unfolds over time, Godwin's man of feeling exists at a permanent standstill. When Bakhtin describes the spatial and temporal features of what he terms a novel's "chronotope," he argues that the "adventure-time" of the romance always involves a "boy and girl of marriageable age" who are separated, confronted with obstacles, reunited and ultimately wed along a lineage-driven timeline (87). The major obstacle that confronts Casimir Fleetwood and Mary Macneil, meanwhile, is not some threat external to the couple like an abduction or warfare. Rather the impediment that forces *Fleetwood*, the man *and* the narrative, to go in circles is the feeling of shame, the last but certainly not least of those four "contending emotions" that drives a wedge between Casimir and the young wife he believes is cuckolding him. Fleetwood's manhood, and indeed his identity, are based on feelings of shame, and through his cohabitation with Mary, he uses marriage as an outlet for his fetishistic tendencies.

The principal point of this argument is that Godwin's *Fleetwood* should be read as a queer novel not simply because it chronicles a bad marriage and the failure of heterosexual love to fully flourish and

solidify normative bonds, but because the three-volume structure of *Fleetwood, or the New Man of Feeling* circles back on itself, ouroboros-like, in keeping with the cyclicity of male shame. And just as gender is the result of certain mannerisms and acts of cloaking, shame is another performative forged, as it were, by and through a continuous process of accepting and resisting the social roles assigned to us. An ancillary aim is to trace Godwin's depiction of male shame in *Fleetwood* to the literature of sensibility in eighteenth-century Britain, particularly the Man of Feeling at his most ashamed state, which this writer exploited for his own literary and cultural objectives. His depiction of shame intersects in remarkable ways with later attempts to assimilate the history of shame into the history of homosexuality. In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century in England, the word "shame" would be used by Wilde and his circle to cryptically denote sexual, specifically homosexual, Eros.² This means that tracing shame, as I do here, is another way in which queer subjects and queer feelings can be located in an era, such as Godwin's, when sexualities and sexual feelings were not openly discussed and "shame" stood in for a whole range of desires outside of the hetero-norm.

To begin, the destructive role that shame plays in *Fleetwood* cannot be comprehended apart from those key terms – sentiment, sympathy, sensibility – so central to sentimental fiction, which reigned supreme as the master-genre from the 1770s onward. Carla Mulford comments that the multiplicity of meanings associated with the word "feeling" became "crucial in the newer phrasing of sentimentalism or sensibility (as this psychoperceptual theory came to be called)" (23). Even by 1818, the rhetoric of romantic feeling was as palpable as ever. Consider Robert Walton's demand, at the opening of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for sympathy, or fellow-feeling (a demand that the Creature will make later on as a testament to his own humanity): "I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me, whose eyes would reply to mine" (10). If the parental influence over Walton's outpouring was, appropriately, William Godwin, Godwin was also responding to an even longer tradition that enshrined virtuous men of Britain who could feel

correspondingly, or alongside, one another. The obvious referent in his alternate title (*or, the New Man of Feeling*) is Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), which holds up a sensitive businessman named Harley as the paragon of masculine virtue. (A bestseller, *The Man* was reprinted nine times by 1800.) Visiting Harley's grave, Mackenzie's narrator sits in the hollow of a tree and gushes that "every nobler feeling rises within me! every beat of my heart awakens a virtue!" (98).

Nowhere is the line between desire and identification finer than in those heart-to-heart profusions that transpire between men of deep pathos. For example, Fleetwood's close friendship with Mr. Macneil precedes his marriage to Macneil's youngest daughter and before he figuratively fills Macneil's shoes by assuming the role of paterfamilias and moving Mary to what he calls "my paternal mansion," he listens carefully to Macneil's story about two sailors shipwrecked together (291). One is a misanthrope like Fleetwood and the other the "most gross, perverse, and stupid of the crew," but marooned on a desert island together, the two men come to sympathize with each other, so much so that they remain inseparable upon returning to their native England. "How these two companions would love another!" Macneil exclaims. "How they would study each other's virtues and attainments – even each other's foibles! With what eager anxiety, when any necessary occasion separated them, would they look for each other's return!" (250). The scenario is hypothetical, but the sentiment belongs to a queer, Greco-Roman counter-discourse in which same-sex Eros was celebrated as virtuous, romantic, and noble. The downside of this platonic tradition was an ideology of male supremacy, and in terms of vocalizing this particular prejudice, Fleetwood is a broken record chauvinistically stuck on repeat. He is incapable of taking Macneil's vignette to heart because, as he openly admits, he has no interest in women his own age (due to the "small chance of offspring") (252). Furthermore, he affirms his bachelorhood with all the pride of Shakespeare's Bernardo and the shaming misogyny of Hamlet: "I am impressed with no favourable prepossessions toward the female sex [...] Till the softer sex has

produced a Bacon, a Newton, a Homer, or a Shakspeare, I will never believe in [any parity between the sexes]" (252).³

Shame, in Godwin, is what separates the sexes and, in Fleetwood's case, makes his identity. Reginald de St. Leon, stripped of his wife and children and wandering Hungary, confesses to feeling the "sentiment of shame," which he locates in his "overwhelmed heart" (367), and, earlier, "kindled in my bosom" (158). No less a loner than St. Leon, Fleetwood is also in lifelong need of a friend, or "another self, who joys in all my joys, and grieves in all my sorrows...not with a sympathy that changes into smiles when I am no longer present" (230). What Fleetwood desires in a close friend – in the longed-for "brother of my heart" – is not simply a man who feels *for* him but a man who feels *with* him and whose eyes would respond to his (230). But sensibility is not enough to satisfy Fleetwood's emotional needs; he needs another man's (or woman's) sympathy as well. As Juliet Shields notes, one limitation of sensibility is its unidirectionality whereas "sympathy is a moral neutral mechanism that enables the transmission of any sentiment, from outrage to joy, among two or more people" (9). Another limitation, too seldom noted by scholars of sentimental literature, is that such transmissions among people of the same sex were always relegated to the shadows, which shrouded desires like Fleetwood's in shame and opprobrium.

Shields is by no means the only scholar of British Romanticism to stress the limitations of sensibility. Commenting on *Fleetwood* specifically, Julie A. Carlson contends that "*Fleetwood* uses Fleetwood's paranoid suspicions regarding Mary's infidelity to suggest that sensibility itself is what undermines marriage. Or at least sensibility as it plays out in men" (48). The excessive sentiment underlying Fleetwood's sensibility is shame and it separates this man of (too much) feeling from his wife and family. Wollstonecraft's well-known critique of Rousseau's character in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is also applicable in Casimir's case, for he too is a man overtaken by sentiment rather than by rationality. "When he should have reasoned, he became impassioned,"

Wollstonecraft writes of Rousseau, “and reflection inflamed his imagination instead of enlightening his understanding” (88). This surplus of sentiment is what renders male sensibility in *Fleetwood* a kind of sickness. “I laid before him the secret grief that preyed upon my heart,” he confesses to Mary’s father, which is surely an odd way to represent one’s self to a potential father-in-law, “I described the sickly sensibility of my temper” (247). The sagacious Macneil listens to Fleetwood’s myriad objections to marrying (i.e. his years of bachelorhood, his sexism, his defective sensibility) before uttering perhaps the most prophetic statement in all the novel: “Fleetwood, I confess, that the woman who marries you will engage in a considerable risk” (258). To her detriment, Mary Macneil takes that risk and by the time her jealous husband has dispatched his nephew Gifford to spy upon her and Kenrick (the young soldier whom Fleetwood suspects is Mary’s secret lover), his condition has worsened. Gifford’s report “contained,” says Fleetwood, “most of those particulars which my diseased imagination had before presented to my thoughts” (351).

For Godwin, shame is a socially transmittable sentiment; thus it is a relational and sexualized feeling. This is made abundantly clear not only in his fiction but in his love letters to Mary Wollstonecraft. During their courtship, in the summer of 1796, he admits: “I had rather at this moment talk to you on paper than in any other mode. I should feel ashamed in seeing you” (173). Here Godwin prizes the disembodied nature of their epistolarity over seeing the object of his desire face-to-face. A whole bevy of scholarship has attended to the bodily, even sexualized, dimensions of eighteenth-century sensibility.⁴ Tracing, as I will do here, the embodiment of male shame in Godwin’s fiction will only help to further close the gap between sexuality and sensibility. The reason why shame is particularly effective at bridging these two fields of feeling is twofold: first, in terms of *Fleetwood*, shame blocks impassioned men from uniting whole-heartedly with the opposite sex. Second, shame is a negative affect causally related to certain societal prohibitions placed on gender/sexuality norms and therefore marks the limits of normative

identity. Only recently have contemporary queer theorists turned to shame to counterbalance the traditionally more positive lines of inquiry in queer historiography, which has tended to privilege the politics of legitimacy and liberation (or "gay pride") over the harsher realities of queer selfhood ("things as they are"). Heather Love, amongst others, has claimed that "backward feelings" such as "shame, depression, and regret" have, up until now, not been very appealing to scholars sensitive to GLBT issues precisely because such negative emotions have been hard to "integrate into a queer literary genealogy" (8).⁵ To this day, that genealogy is perhaps still over-invested in a feel-good ideology, which is an understandable but ultimately reactionary position created by a culture that has historically shamed its gay and lesbian members. A more balanced perspective needs to take into account the fact that gay people also, at times, feel bad about themselves.

Shame transcends sexual identity. In fact, what gays and straights have in common, at the very least, is shame since shame makes both categories. Though countless self-help books have promised their gay readers a way out of shame, there is nothing intrinsically queer about this emotion as it forcefully levels all sensibilities *and* sexualities.⁶ Jacques Derrida, for example, does not see shame as gender- or sexuality-specific when he admits to feeling the emotion while standing, stark naked, in front of his housecat. Instead the markers of identity are dissolved as if appearing naked in front of another mammal reduces the human to his or her most basic, libidinal self. "It is as if I were ashamed, therefore, naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed," Derrida writes, with the circularity of this emotion in mind. "A reflected shame, the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself, a shame that is at the same time specular, unjustifiable, and unable to be admitted to" (372-373). The "ashamed for being ashamed" builds upon the experience of seeing one's self through the eyes of an animal, an animal which is always naked and therefore never ashamed. Apart from stressing the highly specular, mimetic dimensions of shame, Derrida reminds us of a certain unwillingness to admit to, much less analyze, this uncomfortable state of feeling simultaneously exposed *and* cloaked by shame.

Before proceeding to a sustained reading of *Fleetwood*, however, and the complex ways in which the husband of that novel projects the sentiment of shame onto his spouse, I wish to turn preliminarily to *Caleb Williams* since it condenses many of the conundrums of shame (i.e. dignity versus disgrace, shameful- versus shamelessness) that play an even stronger role in that later novel. Another flawed character of Godwin's, afflicted with what he again calls a "diseased imagination," is Barnabas Tyrrel, the (first) villain of *Caleb Williams*, an unfeeling bully and philistine whose cruelty and lack of sensibility sets the novel's cycle of shame in motion (27). When Tyrrel suspects his niece Emily Melville of putting on airs by preferring a wealthy gentleman like Squire Ferdinando Falkland over a simple yeoman, Tyrrel upbraids her thusly: "Pride always wants a little smarting. If you should be brought to shame, it is I that shall bear the blame of it" (51). True to his name, Tyrrel takes great pride in tyrannizing others until he meets his match in Falkland, a neighbor who implores him to open his heart and give up his war against the impoverished Mr. Hawkins. Falkland, by contrast, is a man of "acute sensibility," writes Godwin, and the mere sight of Emily on her deathbed only intensifies his hatred for Tyrrel (90). During one of their early confrontations, Falkland tells him, "I am ashamed of you! Almighty God!", which is revealing because the honor-obsessed Falkland is not speaking for himself alone but for the entire British aristocracy. According to him, he has a public duty to uphold a certain ethos, namely the *noblesse oblige*. "Ashamed of himself for wearing the same form," Falkland proceeds to blame the "system of nature" for producing such a monster (93). Systems of nature and socio-economic class construct the feeling of shame, which tortures Falkland until such a sentiment finds an outlet in the murder of Tyrrel. On the concept of cause, Godwin posits that social class and identity can make a man feel ashamed; shame arises through the so-called "circumstances and events" that shape a man's sensibility, according to his *Political Justice* (155). In the parlance of that work, men are circumstanced into negative emotional states because of external, class-based factors. This is Rousseau's point,

in his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), when he speculates that pre-social man was, in his original innocence, a shameless man and that only with the advent of social hierarchies did man begin to feel ashamed.⁷

Beyond that initial movement of male shame, the remainder of *Caleb Williams* centers around Falkland's relentless pursuit of the man he believes will expose his secret, and in persecuting Williams, he becomes a tyrant in his own right. His desire to disgrace an innocent man is really the unconscious displacement of his own remorse for the murder of Tyrrel, which he attempts to hide from society and from himself. He finds a second symmetrical relationship in which he can ward off his feeling of remorse through the objectification of another. But Caleb lacks the aggression of a Tyrrel and rather than putting up a fight, he continues to sympathize with Falkland, the novel's second villain. Clifford Siskin describes *Caleb Williams* as a "nightmare of sympathy gone awry" (51). Williams, who confesses to having once loved his employer, never stops feeling for the man responsible for his felony convictions and imprisonments.⁸ With a sense of character bordering on bulletproof, Williams refuses to adopt his master's shame: "I will never from fear, or any other mistaken motive, do any thing of which I ought to be ashamed" (293). In the idiom of Blake, Caleb refuses to be cloaked by Falkland. Max Fincher, in *Queering Gothic in the Romantic Age*, sees the love-hate relationship between the novel's hero and villain in more historical terms, or in terms of things as they were in Georgian England. For him, Caleb's desperate efforts to counteract "rumour, secrecy and gossip" are based in the fear of being accused of sodomy, which, in eighteenth-century England, had the power to destroy not only a man's marriage but his reputation (130).⁹

Godwin, as is well known, was so determined to craft the perfectly cathartic conclusion to his adventure-tale that he wrote not one but two endings to *Caleb Williams*. Part of what makes the original, unpublished version of the conclusion so compelling is its explicit reference to shame, which helps to break the chain effect and foreground Williams' counter-shaming defense before a magistrate. There, too, he pleads that his

motivation was never to seek revenge because Squire Falkland “brought me to shame” but to keep his head held high (as opposed to lowering one’s head, a gestural sign of shame (342). In the published version, Williams stands before the magistrate and delivers a panegyric on Falkland’s virtues so moving that his listeners “melted into tears” (335). That moment derives its dramatic intensity from its courtroom setting, the audience overtaken by sentiment, but also from the performative nature of shamefulness. Nathaniel Leach has called the social practice of shaming a “performative and inter-subjective process in which its own performance is necessarily implicated” (156). This means that shame is not so much enacted as it is accomplished in theatrical settings, which are, in Falkland’s opinion, the only place where shame can be felt . Falkland tells Tyrrel, earlier in the novel, that “this public scene is the only place where I can have any thing to say to you,” and goes on to denounce him, shouting “Shame upon you, inhuman, unrelenting tyrant!” (98). That earlier effort on Falkland’s part to shame his enemy is mirrored by the final courtroom encounter, the last act in what Williams describes after all as a “theatre of calamity” (5). In the end, Bakhtin’s theory of “adventure-time,” both progressive and linear, aptly describes the timeline narrativized by Williams who overcomes the ordeal and ends his tale through a reunion with his idol, Falkland. “I have revered him,” Williams declares, “I have loved him” (331). Only by sympathizing with his oppressor does Williams break the shame-chain and triumph as another exemplar of manly virtue.

For Gary Kelly, the popularity of the first-personal confessional narrative style among English Jacobin novelists is attributable to their belief that only “self-reflection and its resultant political consciousness can break the cycle of institutional reproduction of evil or error” (204). Godwin adopts the style that Kelly is describing, but rather than breaking the ideological cycle, *Fleetwood* ends not with maturation or personal transformation but with the continuation of shame’s transfer. The seeds of Fleetwood’s anti-sociality are sown in the childhood he spent without friends or siblings in North Wales. He grows up with no memory of his

dead mother, but finds an alternative source of strength and inspiration in the natural world around him, in the clouds, winds, and streams, and in what he calls, memorably, the "mysterious power of vegetation" (54). Like his father, he eschews the "jarring passions of men, their loud contentions, their gross pursuits" for the countryside around their estate home in Merionethshire where he connects with the "sublime and romantic features of nature" (53-54). His youth is positively Wordsworthian: the landscape at the foot of Cader Idris is like the sylvan Wye of "Tintern Abbey" and similarly teaches Casimir the values of mutability and solitude.

Because *Fleetwood* is a *bildungsroman*, a great deal of attention is paid to Casimir's education, first in the natural world, then with a private tutor. Oxford is the first of two cities, however, where Fleetwood experiences a precipitous fall from his insular paradise as he is soon confronted by "pert youngsters" all aggressively competing in intellectual, artistic and athletic ways (71). Peter Marshall observes that Godwin develops a "Rousseauist contrast between the scenes of nature which inspire virtue and the corrupting influences of city life" (261). At Oxford, where Casimir feels claustrophobic for the first time, he is shocked into the cruelties of an all male living environment. Oxford, he discovers, is a virtual bacchanal, a place of drunken "coxcombs" and "midnight orgies" (71-72). In keeping with Fleetwood's postlapsarian state, shame makes its first appearance in the novel.¹⁰ Casimir laments that he has lost the innocence of his youth because of this "populous place of education" where young men are freed from so-called "established restraints of decorum and shame" (92). Shame, then, works to counterbalance the excesses of the flesh (i.e. inebriation, *jouissance*, savagery).

The most shameless prank of all involves the mock-trial of a fellow collegiate named Withers, a clergyman's son with an inflated sense of his own talents as a tragedian. The homosocial humiliation of Withers is described in terms of seduction: his torturer Morrison is his "seducer" (80) and Withers his "prey" (83). After a classmate named Frewen

entreats Withers to recite his play about Hercules for his classmates, the boys gather for what Withers thinks is a serious recitation of his work amongst friends (78). Instead, the pranksters proceed to get Withers drunk, crown him with parsley wreaths, and carry him through the streets of Oxford. Again, the circumstances of Withers' public shaming are theatrical and ultimately tragic. Realizing later he has been the butt of ridicule, and questioned by the college principal for causing a riot, Withers drowns himself in the river Isis. Casimir's own complicity in Withers' humiliation and suicide, as Steven Bruhm notes, is an ambiguous matter. "Thus, as he puts on trial his own moral worth and the behavior of Withers," writes Bruhm, "[Fleetwood] righteously claims a sympathetic community with the victim while actually rationalizing himself into a position of guiltlessness" (109). Casimir maintains his innocence but, looking back, admits that he yielded to such sadistic amusements only "once or twice" (90). Such ambivalence lies at the heart of what Sianne Ngai calls the "deeply equivocal status" of all "ugly feelings" (3).

Now a graduate, Fleetwood makes a futile attempt to outrun such feelings by relocating to Paris, a second locus of shame and one wherein he finally socializes with the opposite sex. The debauchery of college life has set the stage for Fleetwood's entrance into the court of Louis XV, a hedonistic hotbed of "the most shameless adultery," Godwin writes (99).¹¹ Two brief affairs with fashionable women, the Marchioness and the Countess, convince him that all women must be untrustworthy sensualists. Whereas most men adore the Marchioness, Casimir dislikes her fancy, her egotism, her loudness in the theatre, and her distractability, which are many of the same character flaws he later finds in his wife Mary. He confesses that that he, by turns, "loved and hated" the Marchioness for appearing "too masculine" while the Countess's coquettish ways leave him with this impression: "It taught me to abhor and revile her sex" (114). Disgust is what drives Fleetwood out of Paris and into Switzerland where takes refuge in the fraternal connection he forms with his father's friend, M. Ruffigny. Casimir learns of his father's

death and listens as Ruffigny narrates a long account of his youth spent as a child laborer in the silk-mills of Lyon. He has the Fleetwood family to thank for rescuing him from poverty and when he extols the virtues of Casimir's grandfather Ambrose, he uses a cardiac discourse to purify his feelings for the noble men who came before him: "my beloved companion, the brother of my heart...Never, perhaps, did I love a human creature, as I loved that man." (195).¹² The strongest affective ties in *Fleetwood* are exclusively male.¹³

If the Fleetwood of Volume I experiences the dangers of living above the law and without shame, the Fleetwood of Volume II struggles to reestablish those so-called "restraints" imperiled in places like Oxford and Paris. He returns to England in the hopes of reforming his rakish ways and, in the following, likens shame to waste: "I, that had felt with such bitter remorse my debaucheries at Paris, and the shameful way in which I had wasted my time when my father lay on his death-bed...I had lost all the ingenuous and decent shame, which so often and so happily stops a young man on the brink of the precipice" (206). On a temporal level, Fleetwood's endorsement of shame is an effort to make up for lost time. The figure of Ruffigny plays a pivotal part in shame's reestablishment because he is a shaming agent and a relic from Fleetwood's family history. This is most salient in the opera house scene in which Fleetwood is made to feel as if he were a spectacle. At this point, he is hiding his latest liaison from the virtuous Ruffigny, the last living connection to the Fleetwood family line. "I looked in his face," he says of his friend, "and saw the features of the venerable Ambrose Fleetwood, and of my beloved father" (213). His affair with Mrs. Comorin, the ex-lover of Lord Mandeville, is based more on physical attraction than on mutual understanding, so Fleetwood keeps the relationship a secret for fear that Ruffigny will judge him as a backslider. Fleetwood is embarrassed to be seen with Comorin in public because she is an unfeeling woman – incapable of "sentiment and real attachment," he concedes – so when the face of Ruffigny suddenly appears in the orchestra pit below him, Fleetwood immediately reddens (205).

Within the theatre, the blush is an important prop in Casimir's enactment of shame and since it's one of the few physical details Godwin provides, the reader becomes another spectator to Fleetwood's affect, which is suddenly externalized as that which cloaks *and* denudes him.¹⁴ He wears his shame on his sleeve. Blushing, like crying, is a common enough response in the sentimental fiction that inspired him. In *Julia de Roubigné*, another of Mackenzie's novels, the eponymous wife of Montauban is questioned by her distrustful husband and her reaction is to turn red-faced: "He looked steadily and with a sort of question at me; or rather my own mind interpreted his look in that manner – I believe I blushed" (260). Julia's downturned eyes also expose her inner state: "My eyes now found something in Savillon's which they were ashamed to meet" (261). What makes shame and its performances a trickier matter in *Fleetwood* is that Godwin reverses the roles, putting Casimir in a vertically superior position inside the Baronet's box and Ruffigny, in the role of super-ego/watchtower, on the theatre floor but looking up.¹⁵ This is the precise moment at which shame comes to define Fleetwood as a man of (negative) feeling because, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out, shame has the power to produce identity. "Shame and identity remain in a very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational" she writes in *Touching Feeling*, "because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating" (36).¹⁶ *Fleetwood* confirms that if feelings are contagious – "there is a contagion in virtue and ingenuousness," Mr. Scarborough tells Casimir – shame, above all other bad feelings, has the power to make and unmake subjectivity (411).

A synecdoche for the law of the father, Ruffigny shames Casimir through jointly visual and verbal means. When Fleetwood locks eyes with Ruffigny, the sensation of shame is as instantaneous as it is self-dividing: "In one of my idlest and most forward sallies I caught the eye of Ruffigny; my face instantly became as red as scarlet" (207). Seeing himself from the outside, he feels ashamed as his feelings are involuntarily written on his face. This is the way in which shame unfolds

by simultaneously separating the subject from any rational control over his emotions while unifying affect and embodiment in potentially embarrassing ways. Later, in a letter written to Casimir, Ruffigny spells out his disappointment and cautionary advice further: "Shame, my dear Fleetwood, shame is ever the handmaid to vice" (211). Godwin's abrupt turn to epistolarity reemphasizes the relationality of shaming. Regardless of whether he is shamed by the gaze or by seeing his own name in print – it opens: "Casimir Fleetwood, you are called on to decide!" – the effect is the same: Fleetwood, unlike Caleb Williams, accepts the identity assigned to him. Even the verbal juxtaposition of "the eye of Ruffigny; my face" reinforces the peculiar legibility of this emotion, which bares itself on one of the few bare areas (aside from the hands) on the body. This is why Wollstonecraft, in her *Vindication*, frames the sentiment of shame in similarly facial terms: these "poor ignorant wretches," she laments, were once "only bashful, shamefaced innocents" (121). A desirable woman is one who has not lost her original state of shame, as in Macneil's assurance that inside every "wife at forty-five" resides the "blushing virgin" of her prime (254). Virginity can be lost, physically speaking, but not shame. Once he repents under the inquisitorial eye of Ruffigny, and vows to remain on a virtuous path, Fleetwood proceeds to a new friendship with Mr. Macneil, the last in a long line of alternative fathers.

In marriage, Fleetwood finds the perfect forum for his shame.¹⁷ Originally, it was Mary's emotional transparency that set her apart from her sisters Amelia and Barbara. Unlike them, Mary's "blood absolutely spoke in her cheeks," and her "whole physiognomy" struck Fleetwood as a text to be read: "It was scarcely possibly to believe that a thought could pass in her heart, which might not be read in her face" (246). Over time, however, Mary's face becomes increasingly difficult for Fleetwood to decode, and as a result, more negative feelings such as doubt and jealousy begin to surface. Underlying his uncertainty about Mary's fidelity is the frustrated wish to domesticate a young woman and, in accordance with the logic of sympathetic identification, appropriates the

other's difference.¹⁸ He makes no secret of the fact that what he first felt for Mary Macneil was *not* romantic love, but rather, pity after the Macneils drowned on their way to Italy, leaving her orphaned and penniless. In effect, Fleetwood reestablishes the benefactor-ward relation that Ambrose Fleetwood and the young Ruffigny shared decades before by becoming himself a figure of super-vision, a "watchman to [Mary's] heart" (to adopt Ophelia's description of her own loving captor Laertes) (I.iii.46). Mary's feelings for Fleetwood are no less fraught with oedipal baggage: "She saw in me her father's friend" (268), and later, "She felt toward me as toward father, mother, sisters, in one" (278). If marriage provides Fleetwood with a mirror in which he can transfer his shame from self to other, it also provides Mary with a composite character of Fleetwood-Mr.Macneil-Mrs.Macneil-Amelia-Barbara, or the living-dead she calls her husband.

The first sign of trouble in the Fleetwood marriage occurs only two days into their new life together. At the start of Volume III, Godwin's narrative rewinds itself as Casimir moves his bride back to Merionethshire. In terms of setting, the novel re-sets itself to Casimir's childhood home where he is soon incensed to find Mary occupying the private reading room he treasured as a boy. "In this closet I meditated, I composed, I wrote," Fleetwood recalls and though he sacrifices this space, he resents his new wife deeply for the intrusion (292). Rather than explaining the room's significance to her, Fleetwood represses his feelings when Mary, excited to move her flowers and drawings inside, exclaims: "It shall never be yours again!" (292).¹⁹ Retreating to the opposite wing of the house, he tries to read and reflect elsewhere, but he cannot concentrate outside his beloved closet (that "scene of a thousand remembered pleasures") (294). Clearly such architectural self-division materializes the deepening rift between the Fleetwoods. To say that Mary forces Casimir out of the closet is perhaps too pat of a reading though, given the closet's function as a room reserved for gentlemanly study and reflection, her intrusion disrupts the unseen, private space in which her husband indulges his solitary pleasures.²⁰ Chief among these solipsistic

joys is recollection, a backwards practice akin to feeling ashamed since it also returns Fleetwood to his adolescent years and to the homosocial confines of Oxford where he felt "cooped and cabined" for the first time (91). The fact that Fleetwood's impulse is to jealously guard a place of past pleasures and not to share it with a spouse with whom he would potentially "make memories" is a sign of a deeper, more destructive form of jealousy that has only begun to surface. But isn't Fleetwood's reticence to let go of this space reserved for recollection really just another repetition on his part? Kierkegaard sees repetition and recollection as two sides of the same coin, identical in terms of their movement but oppositional when it comes to their directions. "For what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards," he writes, "whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards" (33). Backwards or forwards, Fleetwood is still going nowhere as seemingly no amount of self-reflection can cure his shame. He prides himself on relinquishing the closet, but then blames Mary for thinking of no one's "gratification" but her own as if he is no less selfish (295). Essentially the same personality traits that Fleetwood found intolerable in his French mistresses reappear in Mary who is so capricious, so vain, and so intellectually inferior that there must be, he concludes, something "radically defective" about his wife's character (326). There is a similar repetitiousness in the way Fleetwood suspects his wife of being either unfaithful or secretive, but then castigates himself for doubting her in the first place.²¹ In one instance, he tells Mary that he wishes she would leave him for the handsome Mr. Matthews, a member of the neighboring gentry, but then pleads for her forgiveness, adding: "I beg your pardon. I am to blame" (305). In another, he mistakes his wife's grief over the loss of her entire family for an ill temper (a "diseased fancy") and again blames himself for not fully sympathizing with her emotional state (319). "I was of all men most inexcusable in having forgotten this" (322). The novel's conclusion, in which Mary's honor is once again reinstated, is a further continuation of this cycle.

Around and around the Fleetwoods go until they meet two brothers from Bath, the older of whom uses his wealthy Uncle

Casimir in a plot to disgrace his younger sibling and leave him penniless. Half-brothers, Gifford and Kenrick exist in perfect contrast to each other: Lieutenant Kenrick is a solider boy (“glowing with all the bloom of eighteen”) whereas Gifford, the son of a known coquette, is a “mulatto” whose penetrating eye subjugates Fleetwood on the spot (337). “There was a roving in his eye,” he observes of the twenty-eight-year-old, “which seemed to warn me to put myself upon my guard against him” (337). From the start, Casimir senses that this man “purposed...to possess me” though he fails to guard himself (and his pregnant wife) from Gifford’s Iago-like intentions (338). Perhaps he is looking for another eyewitness to Mary’s “crime.” Thus Gifford is granted special access to Fleetwood’s closet and once inside, he recounts what he saw in a social space in Bath known as the Upper Rooms. He learns that when Kenrick and his wife “caught his eye, and perceived for the first time that he was in the Rooms, he owned that their faces were immediately overspread with the deepest crimson” (351). We are once again in the paranoid world of *Caleb Williams*, a world of spying and entrapment, which makes Fleetwood something like the Falkland of married life. Shame is his weapon but also a vice that he indulges in private. Conversely, Mary is Caleb-like in her resistance – “she moved with all the pride of innocence” – but with her limited agency, she is ultimately unable to cure her spouse of his cuckold-complex. Mary’s anguished insistence that Fleetwood is indeed the father of their unborn child is met only by maniacal laughter (“– Ha, ha, ha!”) (381).

The repetitive nature of such mania reaches its apex in a mock wedding scene that few critics of Godwin’s novel have failed to comment upon because of its voodoo gothicism and utter weirdness.²² To mark the anniversary of his marriage, Fleetwood fashions a pair of wax effigies of Mary and Kenrick, dresses them in women’s linens and a lieutenant’s uniform, respectively, only to then lash out at the life-size replicas. Inside his Florence hotel room, he constructs a tiny theatre to essentially stage his shame and replay his part in the torture of Withers at

Oxford. The recreation of Mary and Kenrick in wax is even replete with a cradle and a barrel-organ made to play the songs Fleetwood believes his wife and nephew use to serenade each other. That the instrument is "formed," he tells us, "to repeat" those "tunes" is all part and parcel of the larger repetitions at work: Casimir demolishes a physical replica of a couple that exists only in his mind. He confesses to Gifford earlier in the narrative: "my sick imagination is for ever busy, shaping the attitudes and gestures which this monitor of mine saw, or pretends to have seen" (349). The scene, of course, prefigures the mutilation of the female monster in *Frankenstein* except that Casimir's dismemberment has an even more perverse, even onanistic, quality since it is carried out for his eyes only and not to settle some score ("I looked wildly, and with glassy eyes, all around the room; I gazed at the figure of Mary") (387). It is the clearest indication that Fleetwood is still busy making mirrors of those around him, or, in the words of Derrida, making "the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself" (372). With his fetish for feeling ashamed, Fleetwood hates what he sees, so he abruptly shatters the simulacra and sinks into what he calls "immediate insensibility," remaining there for fifteen days during which time he obtains a decree of divorce (388).

Yet an even more confounding, and irresolvable, scene than Fleetwood's puppet-show is the conclusion in which Mary's honor is finally restored and the Fleetwoods are reunited. Only another man, Mr. Scarborough (the father of Kenrick's actual lover, Louisa), had the ability to disavow Casimir of his doubts about Mary and drop the decree. Listening to Scarborough's narrative, which explains how the honorable Mrs. Fleetwood was only protecting the secrecy of the Kenrick-Louisa engagement, reminds Casimir that Mary's character is, as always, spotless. The realization that only he is to blame ushers in two strong and unsurprising emotions – "emotions of shame and horror against myself" (416). Directing his feelings outward, after all, is not Fleetwood's forte. Shame and self-hatred are so paralyzing, in fact, that a standstill occurs when Mary, veiled and dressed all in black, arrives at Fleetwood's hotel room. "Fleetwood!" she exclaims and falls into her husband's arms, held

“motionless” by a flood of contradictory feelings (“hope, fear, transport” and, last but by no means the least, “shame”) (423). Speechless as well, Casimir makes no reply and this silence, this failure to react to Mary either through speech or gesture, makes even the possibility of a “happy ending” questionable at best. Godwin’s novel is a protracted setup with no resolution.

In light of the alternate endings to *Caleb Williams* – good indications that Godwin often equivocated in the face of writing novelistic conclusions – *Fleetwood* is additional proof that a *bildungsroman* culminating in heterosexual matrimony proved just as challenging to tie up as the ending to an adventure tale. Whether Godwin’s ending really succeeds in allaying Fleetwood’s doubts and establishing trust once and for all has been a debate for some time. As early as April 1805, Sir Walter Scott, in the *Edinburgh Review*, commented that “we close the book with the painful reflection that Mary is once more subjected to his tyranny” and that characters such as Scarborough, who assists at the denouement,” seem undeveloped or “wooden” (522). Indeed the novel’s resolution, if it offers any resolution at all, is uncertain about things as they are and things as they may or may not be. One sign is that once Mary collapses into his arms, Casimir withholds any information about what he said or did in response to dwell, predictably, on his own feelings. “It is impossible for any one to imagine what I felt at the moment,” he says, foreclosing even the possibility of genuine sympathy, and then “Another feeling succeeded” (422). The feeling to succeed the last is Fleetwood’s reverence for Mary’s innocence and pride (“lifting up its head in conscious honour,” but it arrests rather than advances the action because the reader has seen it all before (422). The restraints of shame are reestablished once more as Casimir’s *mea culpa* necessitates an honorific over-estimation of Mary’s sacred status as the virgin mother. Fleetwood either venerates or vilifies his wife; there is no in-between.

Whether Fleetwood is even capable of lifting his head in honor and taking pride in his wife and family is also dubious at best. What is

certain, at least in the realm of the *bildungsroman*, is that a man's character should be the product of his education and circumstance, and in Casimir's case, the debaucheries of Oxford, Paris and London have made him incapable of heterosexual love and intimacy while, at the same time, dangerously prone to trusting men with secret ends. But it is shame that inflames his imagination, sickens his sensibility, and stymies the unfolding of Godwin's *Fleetwood* as a true *bildungsroman* in the generic sense of the term. As Marc Redfield writes, the "essence and itinerary of *Bildung*" is, in its "full anthropological determination as the aesthetic unveiling of 'man,' a pragmatic process of autoproduction-as-identification that is both predestined and a 'great task'" (46). Much of the autoproduction integral to the *bildungsroman* is enacted through the task of narration whereby the speaker rehearses what is past and in doing so reenters a chronological sequence that always puts him ahead of himself yet looking backward. In this way, *Fleetwood, or the New Man of Feeling* is a blocked novel of education with a speaker that repeats the same old mistakes and, when faced with the possibility of embracing the wife he has repeatedly wronged, remains "motionless." The reader is likely to feel as cold and unmoved as Fleetwood himself.

As I have amply shown, shame is the recurrent obstacle that impedes Casimir from embracing his wife and taking pride in married/family life. From the very start, he searches for a "brother of my heart" but settles on a so-called "substitute in the marriage-tie, for this romantic if not impossible friendship" (230). Is Godwin suggesting that a man who seeks emotional fulfillment in a same-sex romantic friendship is doomed to a life of unhappiness? Or does the real radicalism of Godwin's revision of the eighteenth-century man of feeling lie in his queering of a man's inner life, in his representation of male identity as the performative sum its parts? It should not be difficult by now to accept that shame, at least Fleetwood's shame, and queerness are linked. Shame is what sets Godwin's feeling man apart from others and renders him queer. Whatever he is – an onanist, a fetishist, an asexual bachelor, a closeted homosexual who resents being forced into the marriage-tie because same-sex love is socially prohibited,

or something altogether uncategorizable – Fleetwood is a self-defeating character whose shame is an obstruction to interpersonal connection on every level. Godwin's title is something of a misnomer insofar as Casimir Fleetwood never arrives at a heteronormative state of manly pride but, regressing into the shameful feelings that function as a substitute for connecting with others, faces impasse after impasse. Godwin's new man of feeling may not be an inspiring model for contemporary queer readers since he fails to transcend the restraints of shame, but the novel, read from a queer perspective, is no less instructive. This is a novel in which the conflict is completely internal to an over-sensitive man unwilling to leave his closet and his shame behind. Unable to form a romantic friendship with another man, he ab/uses women in a destructive cycle that makes *and* breaks his identity.

The temporal logic of the narrative is similarly loopy and goes nowhere, for it frustrates the conventions of the marriage plot and those dictates of chronotopic progression and (re)production, which, Bakhtin writes, determine “to a significant degree the image of man in literature” (85). Godwin's man appears to be going through the motions, perfunctorily and without feeling, while, beneath the illusory surface of his identity, a welter of contending emotions sicken his sensibility and preclude advancement. Godwin investigates, exhaustively so, the troubled mind of a man who is circumstanced into marriage and the paternal role, both of which are unfulfilling compared to that same-sex bond he searches for but never finds. Iconoclastic in this respect, Godwin recasts our normative view of man as destined for woman, children, family. The reader has his own expectations of Fleetwood at the novel's conclusion. We expect him to finally learn his lesson, but find that he shifts his attention from Mary and his newborn son to end on the manner of Gifford's death and Scarborough's status as a proud grandfather. We recognize these as additional sidetracks on his part. Fleetwood once again reenters the cycles of revenge and male rivalry and overlooks a more future-directed itinerary involving his wife, child, and his own emotional well-being. And we dread to think of what lies in store for the

Colin Carman, "Godwin's 'Fleetwood': Shame and the Sexuality of Feeling"

newest addition to the Fleetwood family who, coming under his father's eye, will have to decide whether he is a Caleb or a Casimir, whether he is "man enough" to resist or receive another man's shame.

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Notes

¹According to Freud, shame restricts the course, or flow, of the sexual instinct. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), he compares "disgust, feelings of shame and the claims of aesthetic and moral ideals" to "dams" that restrict the libido (43). For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts of the sublime in relation to psychoanalytic notions of blockage, see Hertz, 78-97.

² The word "shame" provided a way to locate queer feelings and identities in an era when there was no "homosexuality." Shame would come to signify something close to the love that dares not speak its name, and through a late Victorian discourse of unspeakability, the word "shame" is often a placeholder for same-sex desire. The affair between Lord Alfred Douglas and Oscar Wilde offers strong proof of this in the former's "In Praise of Shame," from 1894, in which shame is elevated as the "loveliest" of "all sweet passions" (56), as well as in the poem "Two Loves," which Wilde was forced to explain while under cross-examination. Love between men and shame are so indistinguishable in that poem that "shame" and "name," as in "his name is Shame" and "I am the Love that dare not speak its name," form a masculine rhyme (57). This mode of defense draws on a proto-homosexual tradition, as old as Shakespeare's sonnets, in which shame is associated with non-reproductive sexuality and wastefulness, as in Sonnet 129 ("Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame/Is lust in action") (141).

³ In his face-off with the Queen, Hamlet demands that his mother show her (ashamed) face even if she lacks the actual sentiment: "O shame! Where is thy blush?" (III.3.84).

⁴ For the overlap between sensibility and sexuality, see Nagle's *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era* in which he claims that the literature of Sensibility was intended to "please, instruct, and come alive contagiously for its readers" (5). For sensibility

and autoeroticism, see Sedgwick's (in)famous "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," esp. 110-11; for sensibility and homosexuality, see "Sensibility and Its Symptoms" in Haggerty (1999), 81-110.

⁵ For more on the heuristic value of shame in queer criticism, see Halberstam (2011) and Munoz (1999), the latter of whom posits persuasively that by confronting shame head-on, critics do not have to "elide the 'harmful' or contradictory components of any identity" (12).

⁶ Shame and rage are intertwined according to Alan Downs whose *The Velvet Rage* offers its gay male readers a pathway to pride and joy. "So the little boy with the big secret becomes the man who is driven to avoid shame by hiding his dark truth" he writes (16), and later, "Having broken free from the stronghold of shame and the pain of trauma, the gay man begins to build his life – a life of meaning, purpose, and satisfaction" (155).

⁷ Rousseau classifies shame as an artificial sentiment that only arose in early civilizations as men began to seek the esteem of their peers. Rousseau's natural man, the so-called noble savage, was nomadic and therefore not acquainted with the social inequalities that come with group-formation. Only later, as man gathered into the first tribal communities and as each "began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself," did man begin to privilege some and discriminate against others (114). Hierarchies of strength, beauty and talent shattered man's original ignorance, creating in its place "on the one side, vanity and scorn, on the other, shame and envy," all "compounds fatal to happiness and innocence" (114).

⁸ For the homoerotics of the Falkland-Williams relationship, see Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985), 83-96.

⁹ For more on the history of homophobic rumor-campaigns in eighteenth-century London, see the consequences of Edmund Burke's defense of two men convicted of sodomy, Theodosius Read and William Smith, in Kramnick (1977), 83-87.

¹⁰ Godwin holds that innocence and shame are antithetical, which is a traditional line of thinking attributable to his background in provincial

religious Dissent and in what Rowland Weston has called Godwin's "religious sense" (407). William St. Clair notes that James Janeway's conduct book, *A Token for Children, being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of several young children* (first published in 1676), was a favorite in the Godwin household and one presented to "terrified" dissenting children in the event of illness (5). Within Janeway's conduct book, a pious little boy named John Harvey warns his siblings of the "danger of pride" and he understands pride as the polar opposite of shame (130). "How little reason they had to be proud of that which was their shame," says the god-fearing Harvey, who dies only pages later, for "if it had not been for sin, we should have no need of clothes" (95).

¹¹ Open expressions of sexuality result from a lack of shame. Walking along the Strand, Harley (Mackenzie's Man of Feeling) locks eyes with a drunken prostitute and finds her demeanor more endearing than is usual among "those whom the infamy of their profession has deprived of shame" (37).

¹² "Whether Harley or Julia, whether Man of Feeling or Woman of Feeling," writes Liljegren, "the heart is the only element in the novels which is indispensable" (17).

¹³ Percy Shelley recognized the richly romantic bond between Fleetwood and Ruffigny and casts Godwin and himself in those father-son roles in one of his early letters to his future father-in-law on 24 February 1812: "I had pictured to my fancy that I should first meet you in a spot like that in which Fleetwood met Ruffigny; that then every lesson of your wisdom might become associated in my mind with the form of nature" (264).

¹⁴ Hamlet to his mother: "O shame! Where is thy blush?" (III.3.84).

¹⁵ A scene such as this one expands upon David Hume's depiction of the theatre, in his *Enquiry* of 1751, as a virtual circuit-board in which every person within its walls transmits the emotions of the actors and spectators as if through magnetism. Any man of feeling who enters a theatre, Hume writes, gains that "superior sensibility or disposition of

being affected with very sentiment, which he shares with his fellow-creatures” (44). Even the dramatist is present so long as his listeners are moved to “weep, tremble, resent, rejoice” (44).

¹⁶ Sedgwick, here, is drawing upon the psychological model of Tomkins who theorized that shame originates in the rupture of the relationship between parent and child. This rupture occurs in infancy, when the mother averts her gaze from the baby’s, thereby breaking the mimetic symmetry between the two, but also in childhood when the parent loses his or her patience and scolds the child for misbehavior. The child, Tomkins observes, “therefore counteracts his shame by opposing his will against the will of his parent and he flaunts his shamelessness in exaggerated hilarity and playfulness” (176).

¹⁷ Tomkins comments that parent-child relationships are just as conducive to shaming as later conjugal ties: “A wife may shame her husband by continual display of shame and feelings of worthlessness with or without recrimination and the accusation that this is the fault of the spouse” while “the beaten, defeated posture of the mate is a prime source of shame in the spouse who is concerned for the welfare of the other” (159).

¹⁸ For the negative dimensions of sympathy whereby “the work of imagination appropriates the other to self and at the same time converts self to other,” see Duncan 268-305, 297.

¹⁹ In fact, the Fleetwood marriage is founded upon repression: As early as Mary’s closet invasion, Fleetwood feels as if “my animal spirits were suddenly driven back upon my heart” (292).

²⁰ On the closet scene, Tysdahl comments astutely: “[Fleetwood’s] tenderness and his egocentricity lead him up emotional blind alleys: he cannot tell his wife that he wants his room back (she would certainly have understood him, and given up the room with good grace), nor can he be happy in renunciation” (105).

²¹ At the time, anxieties concerning married women’s chastity were culturally ubiquitous. Hume, in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, argues that shame, in the form of disgrace (or “bad fame”), helps to impose limits on the otherwise uncontrollable nature of female sexuality (622).

Colin Carman, "Godwin's 'Fleetwood': Shame and the Sexuality of Feeling"

"We must attach a peculiar degree of shame to their infidelity," Hume writes, "and must bestow proportionable praises on their chastity" (622).

²² In his review, Scott calls Godwin's narrator a "frantic madman, who plays on a barrel-organ at a puppet-shew" (522). In the frontispiece to *Fleetwood* in the 1832 Standard Novels edition, a frenzied Casimir is shown with his right arm raised as he prepares to dismember the wax models. On the scene, Tysdahl comments that "there are echoes of the Last Supper here, and hints of cannibalism; and the language of the whole incident is that of fetishism" (124). Also see Bruhm 112-13.

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