

The Prefaces of William Godwin and the Literary Public Sphere

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*T*he anonymous author of the “it-narrative”/novel *The Adventures of a Corkscrew* (1775) compares the reception of a novel by the public with the reception of a stranger in a public ordinary or coffee house:

When a stranger is introduced into company, a gentle whisper may be heard to circulate around the room, which is occasioned by the natural curiosity so prevalent over every other in the human breast, and involuntarily compels the inquisitive mind to demand, “*Who is he? Where does he come from?*” and a multitude of other no less curious questions. It is a similar circumstance when an author issues his performance into the world; every one is desirous to know his name, his character, and the motives which urges him to trouble the world with such a quantity of paper, that may share the like fate with the works of many of his contemporary brethren, and be of infinite use in a cheesemonger’s, or chandler’s shop. (1)

The description elicits an image of a common or public place complete with the hint of established cliques wary of a new entry. The “gentle whisper” of exclusiveness evident here gives way to an accepting curiosity that is both “natural” and “involuntary.” The public curiosity elicited by the introduction of a new literary production, likewise, while at first negative can quickly turn positive. The questions of identity and motive, common to both environments, answered in the analogous public space by the stranger himself, can only be answered in the preface with biographical details and

narratives of composition. Like the stranger, the preface becomes a participant in an established community. The fate of some books (to be used as wrapping in a chandler's or cheesemonger's shop) strikes a division between the "practical" uses of writing/paper and a literary use that is a recurrent trope in the prefaces of this period. The "infinite use" of paper in these contexts contrasts with the negative connotation often associated with novel reading and writing.

Clifford Siskin, for one, has examined William Godwin and especially his novel *Caleb Williams* as a key element in the rise of what he describes as a new field, Literature. Siskin notes that, despite the traditional shift of critical attention to the beginnings of Romanticism following the "rise of the novel" with Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson, the 1780s and 1790s are "precisely the decades when the novel took off" (*Work* 155). During this period, according to James Raven's statistical studies, the number of new novels published reached "unprecedented levels" (qtd. in Siskin 155). Siskin argues that the periodical and new forms of authorship "fostered new kinds of audiences – desiring readers who proved crucial to the quantitative rise of prose fiction" (158). This essay elaborates on the new authorial figure as exemplified by Godwin, specifically in his prefaces. Godwin's prefaces, while conventional in many respects – including self-deprecating humility and narratives of discovery and composition – represent a significant move toward a critical standpoint. Like Fielding in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, Godwin uses the preface as a venue to make his critical arguments. But Godwin, writing in a changing literary sphere and as a new conception of the author, expresses his ideas from an authoritative position rather than a covert or humble one. In this crucial period of novel development, Godwin offers a significant portrait of the novelist as author, both resisting and embracing the literary public sphere.

Toward a Critical Preface

While many prefaces addressed a "gentle" or "observant" reader – indicative of a private reader, one who reads variously for education or entertainment – the anonymous author of *The Birmingham Counterfeit*

(1772), like the author of *Adventures of a Corkscrew*, writes of being "arraigned at the awful Tribunal of Critical Reviewers" (i). He takes the opportunity to suggest that the "learned Gentlemen" should see by the title ("a sentimental romance") that "this is a most contemptible performance and BENEATH the Censure of Critical Reviewers" (i). The critic as a type of reader differs from the private reader in that the critic's role is a public one and involves judgment and possible censure. A critic's reading, therefore, is not for entertainment or education. The addition of the critic creates a third part in an author-reader relation, the critic standing as an intermediary between author and reader. Increasingly, authors submitted their works for the approval of the critics, and readers looked toward the critic for judgment. With ever-expanding book production, such intermediaries became necessary.

The critic and the critical industry were effectively housed in the new periodical type, the review. Considered little more than "thinly disguised publisher's catalogues" (Gross 1) before the 1790s, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the reviews became an "institution" and "social force" (1). The purpose of these journals was to keep "serious readers informed about the progress of knowledge in all fields" (Roper 19). The practice of including (at times lengthy) extracts from books under consideration, often abused and criticized during the time, was obviously a time-saving technique valued by readers of the reviews, and continued even when literary works were the subject (Roper 42-43). The *Monthly Review*, founded in 1749, first incorporated a critical component, and was joined later by the *Critical Review* in 1756.

Roper estimates the circulation of the reviews by 1797 reached over thirteen thousand, one-sixth of the reading population, but notes that many copies reached multiple readers, greatly increasing that percentage (214). This reading public was characterized by Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, in almost contradictory terms. In one description, he notes a civil relation: "every man who appears before the public appears before a company to whom he owes respect and on whose sympathies he ought not to reckon too securely," but in a second description, the

relationship is more harsh: “the public was a stony-faced tribunal and the author who presumed too far was asking for a merciless rebuke” (qtd. in Gross 4). The judiciary metaphor in the description was not far from the reality of certain reader-author relations, as sedition trials were common during the period. Frank Donoghue describes how the “near uniform hostility” (55) between readers, authors, and critics practically disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century. From a time, near mid-century, when critics were seen as “encroaching upon a conceptual space big enough for authors and readers alone” (55), critics were later seen as “legitimate intermediaries between author and reader” (55). Donoghue’s use of the spatial metaphor indicates the aptness of seeing the literary field as a public sphere, one that has specific limits and territory.

Donoghue details the distinctive and distinguishing fundamental natures of the *Monthly* and *Critical Review* as offering alternative visions of a public sphere. For the dissenting and populist *Monthly Review*, reading was “a politically neutral means of acquiring information” (59), while, for the conservative *Critical Review*, on the other hand, reading was a means “of consolidating and strengthening discriminations of social class” and was an “exclusively civilizing process” (59-60). The reviews were not only at odds within the philosophical basis of the public sphere, but were at the mercy of the consumerist basis of the literary marketplace. Just as I will describe Godwin’s position within these contradictory impulses, Donoghue relates how the reviews “had to present issues as commodities – as salable entities, but at the same time, the reviewers had to present themselves above the literary marketplace – offering the disinterested perspective [...] to police the reading public” (67). Novels, particularly, contributed to this peculiar attitude toward the literary marketplace and literary public sphere, which I will argue, is usually at odds.

Rejected mostly on moral grounds, the novel suffers as both morally dangerous and as a symptom of the increasingly consumer-based market as echoed in the reviewers’ attitudes toward their readers. They saw themselves as having a protective relation to the reading public. As part of his seminal study of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas argues that

"wherever the public established itself institutionally as a stable group of discussants, it did not equate itself with *the* public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece in its name, perhaps even as its educator" (37). *The Quarterly Review*, for example, reveals a relation of approbation and judgment as it addresses "our readers" and notes how the reviewers will not "trespass on their patience" (i). At other times, the audience is referred to as "the public," "novel-readers," "the romance reader," "the critical reader," "respectable readers," as well as the "public mind." Absent are the negative appellations seen in some prefaces of this and earlier periods. What this creates is an ideal, if not perfect, literary public sphere composed of constituents identified by their role: author, reader, and critic. The presence of the booksellers and the rest of the apparatus of the marketplace impinge on the ideality of the public sphere, incorporating financial and commodity pressures. The conflict between these two systems becomes a source of concern for critics, authors, and readers.

Godwin and the Public

Godwin's publishing career, which included histories, biographies, sermons, and dramas as well as political treatises and novels, spanned from 1783 to 1834, a period that witnessed the establishment and entrenchment of the novel as a genre and the appearance of the critic along with the critical journal. The period was the high point of what Habermas locates as the ideal liberal public sphere of the coffeehouse and salon tradition, and Godwin took full part in the debate, becoming with *Political Justice* a focal point within the discourse. Godwin's attitudes make him a prime example of a participant in the liberal public sphere of political debate. According to biographer Peter H. Marshall, Godwin preferred "at all times a revolution in opinion rather than on the barricades" (402). Private judgment and public discussion earmarked Godwin's political philosophy, which rejected rule-governed practices including law, private property, and marriage. The inculcation and spread of knowledge was his ultimate goal, which he envisioned as ultimately having a physical manifestation.

Despite the variety of Godwin's styles, he returned to fiction throughout his career, with novels punctuating his publishing career at a regular rate. Godwin wrote a total of ten novels, from the juvenile *Damon and Delia* and *Italian Letters* (1783) to the gothic *St. Leon* (1799) and the sentimental *Fleetwood* (1805), writing his last novel *Deloraine* in 1833. Financial reasons, for one, forced Godwin to return again and again to fiction. Throughout his adult life, Godwin faced economic troubles and was never able to support himself and his family through these efforts. In essence, he swung between his fictional sales in order to survive. Godwin's first major writing project was an anonymous biography of William Pitt, published in 1783, for which he received little if any money. In that same year, however, his first novels, *Damon and Delia* and the epistolary *Italian Letters* were critically well-received and garnered Godwin five guineas for the former and twenty guineas, two times the normal sum, for the latter. The following years, his second novel, *Imogen* sold for ten pounds and was also favorably received. The next seven years Godwin spent writing for the *English Review* and *New Annual Register* without much monetary reward: the *English Review* netted Godwin two guineas a sheet with the possibility of twenty-four guineas per year, but the *Herald of Literature* and *Sketches of History in Six Sermons* garnered him nothing financially. Godwin then began writing *Political Justice*, and upon its publication in 1793, Godwin became a literary celebrity.

On the heels of *Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams* was sold in 1794 for 840 pounds. In 1799, *St. Leon* sold for 400 guineas and the first edition sold out – reviews were mixed but mostly positive. Between 1800 and 1805, Godwin turned to drama, but both of his plays, *Antonia* and *Faulkener* failed. In 1803, his *Life of Chaucer* sold for 600 pounds but was published to negative reviews. Godwin then wrote the sentimental *Fleetwood*, which was generally well-received, but by no means solved his financial problems. Between *Fleetwood* and *Mandeville*, Godwin attempted two major projects, a *History of England*, for which he received a two-thousand-pound contract, and the *Juvenile Library*. The *History* was never completed and the *Juvenile Library* had difficulty making much profit. In

1817, then, Godwin "turned to the well-tried remedy of fiction" with *Mandeville*. *Mandeville* met with harsh criticism from the literary journals, yet it sold well, riding on Godwin's previous reputation. Less than a decade later in 1825, Godwin was forced to declare bankruptcy, prompting another recourse to fiction. The publication of *Cloudesley* in 1828 immediately sold out the first edition to positive reviews. In 1833 his last novel, *Deloraine*, was written when Godwin was seventy-seven years old. Godwin died three years later, after finally receiving a sinecure and pension in 1833. A comment by Godwin himself summarizes his writing career succinctly. At the age of seventy-six, he complained that he still found it necessary to write "not for the marble to be placed over my remains, but for the bread to be put into my mouth" (qtd. in Marshall 373).

Examining Godwin's prefaces suggests an additional answer to the question of why he always returns to the novel that involves his conception of history, fiction, and his view of himself as an author. Godwin never wrote an "art of fiction," but did, as David McCracken concisely states, "consider the relation between reason and imagination, the status of the novel as a genre, its potential effects on the novel-reading public, its elements and construction, and the hazards of combining political philosophy and fiction" (114). His prefaces were the platform for these considerations; there, Godwin posits a literary public sphere in which his novels can function as political documents. First drawing on the conventional rhetoric of the preface, he aligns his work with the mechanics of the marketplace, but read in concert with the reviews, it is clear that he has in mind the more idealized nature of the literary public sphere. The case of Godwin illustrates both the apex of the literary public sphere as well as the beginning of its fragmentation. Godwin himself is caught between these two movements, and thus his prefaces are complicated and not always what they seem. It is difficult to discern when Godwin is speaking in his "authentic voice" and when he is more rhetorically subversive. Such texts are always rhetorical, of course, but in relation to the preface, the expectation of disingenuousness raises the stakes of the rhetoric.

Of the traditional motifs of the preface, Godwin uses both self-deprecation and identification of sources to defend the genre against its critics. Godwin characterizes *Caleb Williams* as a “mighty trifle,” “nothing,” and “a book to amuse boys and girls in their vacant hours, a story to be hastily gobbled up by them, swallowed in a pusillanimous and unanimated mood, without chewing and digestion” (341) and describes *St. Leon* in diminutive terms: “this little work” and “little volumes” contrasted with “graver productions” (i) such as *Political Justice*. McCracken argues that the statement about *Caleb Williams* is a subterfuge: “But the very wording suggests that Godwin thinks *Caleb Williams*, at least, *should* be chewed and digested; it is a trifle only to those who misjudge it, who lack courage and animation” (121). For Godwin, the power of the novel lay in its ability to disseminate to almost every level of society its tenets because it appealed to those many levels.

Godwin himself grew up on the novel. Despite his Calvinist upbringing, Godwin had read by his mid-teens *Robinson Crusoe*, *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones*, and *Roderick Random*. Godwin even read *Clarissa* to his seminary students (Marshall 75). He believed that facts alone were not enough, preferring “inaccurate history with great moral truth to a dry factual chronicle” (38). In fact, Godwin considered romance as surpassing history. In his essay, “On History and Romance,” Godwin argued:

The historian is confined to individual incident and individual man, and must hang upon that his invention or conjecture as he can. The writer of romance collects his materials from all sources, experience, report, and the records of human affairs; then generalizes them; and finally selects, from the various elements and various combinations they afford, those incidents he is best able to portray, and which he judges most calculated to impress the heart and improve the faculties of his readers. (345)

Jon Klancher notes that the essay, intended for a second volume of the *Enquirer* but unpublished until 1988, was perhaps “the first of those romantic critical programs that promoted literary genre-reform as the means

to induce greater social and ideological reform in history" (146). In this passage, Godwin delineates the two primary concerns that will repeatedly appear in reviews and other discussions of the novel: interest and improvement, otherwise known as entertainment and education. But questions of infelicity and immorality regarding the novel abounded, and Godwin uses the preface instead of the essay as a site from which he can enter the debate about the novel.

Godwin consistently acknowledges sources and several times provides a limited narrative of composition in order to defend his novel. According to the prefaces, *Caleb Williams* is a paraphrase of Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard*, *St. Leon* was inspired by John Campbell's *Hermippus Redivivus*, his play *Faulkener* on Defoe's *Roxana*, *Mandeville* on Charles Brockden's Brown's *Wieland* and Joanna Baillie's tragedy *De Montfort*, and *Cloudesley* is a "paraphrase of the old ballad of the Children of the Wood" (i). Godwin is careful, however, to separate himself from his sources. His knowledge of *Wieland* extends only so far that it was "written by a person, certainly of distinguished genius, who I believe was born and died in the province of Pennsylvania in the United States of America, and who calls himself C. B. Brown" (iii). In the preface to *Faulkener*, he states that although the germ of the story came from Defoe, in adapting the subject to the stage, Godwin "felt incumbent ... to diminish the faults of the mother, to make the child whose pursuit she fears a son instead of a daughter, to elevate the rank of the personages, and otherwise so disguise the story, that few persons would have been able to trace me to my source, had not my habits prompted me to this frank avowal" (vi). In other words, there is not much of *Roxana* left, but Godwin's divulgence indicates that a segment of his readers would be interested in locating his source. The "frank avowal" and delineation of "habits" presents Godwin as honest and trustworthy, borrowing from the ethos of the historian.

Godwin forestalls the critics in *St. Leon*. By referring to Campbell's *Hermippus Redivivus* as a source for *St. Leon*, he relates how he himself attempted to locate its source:

To this story, in the book from which I have quoted it, is subjoined the following reference: – “*Memoires Historiques*, 1687, tom. i. p. 365.” Being desirous of giving my extract from the oldest authority, I caused the British Museum, and the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, to be searched for this publication, but in vain. The story and the reference are, not improbably, both of them fictions of the English writer. (viii)

Lending an air of authenticity to his own narrative by displacing the fiction back one remove, Godwin escapes the accusation of fiction. Godwin’s insistence on divulging his sources, although typical of the period, suggests that it is important that his readers understand that he is not responsible for the original conception of these fictional creations, as if the rational Godwin cannot also be the imaginative Godwin. Godwin even absolves himself in the preface after making his full disclosure: “Having signed these bills against me, I hold myself for the present occasion discharged from all claims of my literary creditors, except such as are purely transient and incidental” (x).

In the case of *Mandeville*, B.J. Tysdahl suggests that this acknowledgement of sources is a red herring since a more likely source left unstated is Sir Walter Scott. According to Tysdahl, Godwin had visited Scott and read both *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary* immediately prior to writing *Mandeville* (129). In fact, Tysdahl remarks that *Wieland* and *Mandeville* are not as closely related as Godwin would suggest them to be: “Brown’s horror is not of Godwin’s kind. [...] *Wieland* does not observe madness from the inside as Godwin’s novel does, and the account it gives of its development is sketchy” (134).

Godwin recounts several times in his prefaces how he composed his novels. Rather than fictional narratives, Godwin presents a personal, psychological account of the composing process. Godwin relates in the preface to *St. Leon* how he started to write a novel eight years prior and describes a dual source of the hero falling asleep and waking in the future, one religious, one secular, as being either the “story of the Seven Sleepers

in the records of the first centuries of Christianity, or rather from the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood in Perrault's Tales of *Ma Mere L'Oie*" (ii). However, this task would have been too difficult, since he would "have had at least a dozen times to set myself to the task of invention, as it were, *de novo*." So instead he writes *Mandeville*. Not only does he relate two sources for the abandoned story, but when discussing the present novel, continues on at length about inspiration rather than invention: "Every author, at least for the last two thousand years, takes his hint from some suggestion afforded by an author that has gone before him, as Sterne has very humorously observed; and I do not pretend to be an exception to this rule" (ix-x). Godwin's final novel, *Deloraine*, includes a brief preface in which Godwin again confronts the issue that he had started the novel earlier, but had laid it aside. In this instance, however, he does not describe the reason why, stating that "the circumstances that compelled me to lay aside the undertaking for a time, are such as it would be impertinent in me to intrude upon my readers" (vi). He continues to say that "Suffice it to say that, after an interval of many months, I was induced, with no mixture of irresoluteness, and, as I would hope, with no flagging wing, to resume my task" (vi). Godwin mentions "The Great Unknown," recently deceased, who "had sufficiently shewn that it was not absolutely necessary for the mind of an author to lie fallow for years, between the conclusion of one work of fiction and the commencement of another" (v). Godwin's refusal to mention Sir Walter Scott by name hearkens back his overlooking of Scott as a source of *Mandeville*. One reviewer notes that this refusal is welcome and encourages other authors to do likewise: "This edition is rendered very interesting. [...] The whole is lesson to genius and the world has much to learn from it" (Graham 269; all references to reviews are from Graham). Bemoaning that we do not have the same divulgence from Fielding, this reviewer remarks that "the idea of making the author himself let us into the secrets of his great work was very ingenuous" (269).

As McCracken points out, Godwin thought a great deal about the nature of the novel, and the expression of these ideas appears in his prefaces. If his periodical writings are primarily political in nature, his

prefaces can be seen as a proto-poetics of the novel, concerned not only with the ontological nature of the genre but with pragmatic concerns as well. One of his more important distinctions is between the novel as a new genre and the more established genre of history. In contrast to earlier writers who capitalized on the generic similarities, Godwin concentrates on the unique abilities of the novel. In the preface to *Cloudesley*, Godwin clearly makes his distinction between history and fiction, and offers a reason for his continual return to the novel, despite its ambiguous reputation.

History, according to Godwin's preface, can be viewed from two points of view: the larger view encompassing "the vicissitudes of nations, their rise and fall, their progress in refinement and corruption, their literature, their habits and customs, their philosophy and their religion" (v-vi). From this, Godwin says, we gain a picture of "men in the aggregate" but nothing of the individual. For Godwin, "fictitious history is more true and to be depended upon, when it has the fortune to be executed by a masterly hand, than that which is to be drawn from state-papers, documents, and letters written by those who were actually engaged in the scene" (vi). Biography is not unimportant, but is "merely guesses in the dark" (vii), for it is impossible to "penetrate into the inmost thoughts of Cromwel [sic] and Hampden, of Burleigh and Elizabeth, of Cicero and Caesar" (vii). The writer of several traditional biographies, Godwin admits that "no man thoroughly understands himself: how then is it to be expected, that the historian who looks at him through a narrow aperture, and sees but a small part of his thoughts, his words and his actions, should arrive at a sounder result?" (viii-ix). Fiction, on the other hand, if competently done, provides the writer with two advantages:

his express office is to draw just conclusions from assigned premises [... and], while he endeavours to aid those conclusions by consulting the oracle in his bosom, the suggestions of his own heart, instructed as he is besides by converse with the world, and a careful survey of the encounters that present themselves to his observation, he is

much less liable to be cribbed and cabined in by those unlooked-for phenomena, which, in the history of an individual, seem to have a malicious pleasure in thrusting themselves forward to subvert our best digested theories.

(x-xi)

Although Godwin considered himself an "ardent lover of truth" (*The Enquirer* ix) and writes in *Political Justice* that "the duty he conceives himself most bound to discharge is the assisting the progress of truth" (70), the complexities of the truth appear to get in the way of his message. The fiction writer's "peculiar and enviable prerogative" is to "accompany the language made use of by them [the characters] with his comments, and explain the inmost thoughts that pass in the bosom of the upright man and the perverse" (xii). While it is difficult to attribute motive to a real person, the imaginative creation of motive and thought is appropriate and even commendable. At the same time, imaginative creation in the form of the novel is a questionable endeavor.

Godwin spends a significant portion of the *Cloudesley* preface criticizing drama, the one genre he abandoned early, having written *Antonio* the year after *St. Leon* was published and *Faulkenner* in 1807. Whereas in fiction the author can describe the inner thoughts of the characters, the dramatist is limited to the "words that his characters shall utter" (xii). The dramatist is also limited by the nature of the performative genre: "Whatever is offered there [in the drama], must be expected to be sketches scarcely half made up, and human passions and characters distorted, to fit a plot, and chime in with an abrupt and violent catastrophe" (xi-xii). Shakespeare, however, is the exception. Godwin lyrically lauds the playwright whose

conceptions are drawn from the profoundest abysses of thought; they seem to be supplied to him by the plastic principle to which the universe is indebted for its harmonies; and he had therefore comparatively little need, like inferior artists, to proceed step by step in unfolding the seeds of character, and to watch with timid and cautious observation the modes in which they

expand themselves, and the peculiarities by which they are divided. (xii-xiii)

Godwin concludes the preface by remarking that, in addition, the characters in drama are “abstractions, or rather diagrams, and not pictures; the finishing and reality are wanting. It is as if the shadows and first hints of men, drawn by a novice, walked out of their frames, before the substance and filling out of a man were added to give them reality” (xiii), concluding with the verses “They mock our eyes with air./ These are black vesper’s pageants. With a thought/ The rack dislimns them, makes them indistinct/ As water is in water” (xiv). While these lines from *Antony and Cleopatra* may be well known, it is somewhat surprising that Godwin does not cite them as he usually does. Instead he makes the note: “A few of our dramatists, contemporaries of Shakespear [sic], are in a considerable degree to be exempted from this censure” (xiv).

Godwin and the Reviewers

The critical reviews of Godwin’s novels suggest a distinctive feature of the literary public sphere in that there is a conversation occurring between critics and authors. Critics, for instance, commented on the generic instability of the novel. In a review of *Fleetwood*, the novel genre is disparaged: “we were sorry to find Mr. Godwin descending from the higher and more dignified walks of literature to engage in the manufacture of novels. This line of composition, is, at present, so degraded by the dulness or stupidity of the scribblers who deal in it, that men of talents and sense regard it as disreputable” (254). In a review of *Mandeville*, they note that “under the name of novel are included compositions rising to the highest, as well as sinking to the lowest class of literature” (360). The *Literary Journal* claims that “according to the ideas we usually annex to the term, this book can by no means be called a novel” (365). In the first reviews of *Italian Letters*, the *Critical Review* distinguishes between novels which are a “faithful and accurate description of the feelings of wounded mind” and those that interest by “incident, bustle or intrigue” (29). This distinction, which can be seen as the difference between the Richardsonian model on

the one hand and the Fieldingesque novel on the other, is evident throughout the reviews by the preference of the reviewers for a certain type of novel. What this also indicates is a strongly entrenched theoretical idea of the genre. According to these reviews, eighteenth-century readers looked primarily for interest and moral instruction. *Italian Letters*, for example, is considered by this same review as "pleasing, tender, and pathetic; at the same time strictly moral and cautiously delicate" (29).

A similar stance is forwarded by other reviews of Godwin's first novel: "In these volumes there are characters and incident. The morality is also to be commended" (30); "common incidents, love, perfidy and tragical catastrophe, related with no uncommon force or pathos" (30); "these Letters are written in a chaste, easy, and perspicuous style; and intermixed with reflection equally sensitive, benevolent, and moral. [...] The story's both pathetic and interesting" (30). Godwin's second novel, however, met with the opposing reaction from one critic: "His wit is too insipid to amuse, and his pathos too dull to affect" (31). Despite the pejorative stance, this claim shows that the genre was expected to amuse and affect. The other primary concern for the reviewers is that of probability. For the most part, Godwin fails the test of probability. "Improbable" is how his novels are described. According to the reviewers, "though Romance rises beyond the level of common life, yet it should not shock probability" (32). Godwin "often sacrifices probability to originality," which only secures attention but not interest (253). In addition, despite Godwin's prefatorial arguments, verisimilitude and historical accuracy mattered to most reviewers.

One of the common strains in the reviews, however, is how Godwin's novels are distinguished from his contemporaries. Even reviews of his anonymous juvenile novels remark how Godwin's novels rise above the common run. Of *Damon and Delia*: "This is an amusing little story, without any very considerable pretension to novelty or elegance. There is however some reason to think it is the production of no common author [...]. It is, on the whole, superior to those tales which commonly fall in our way" (30-31); and "This little volume we beg leave to recommend to our readers as indisputably superior to the common run

of novels” (31). With the success of *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, the name Godwin carried with it the sign of genius. *Caleb Williams* “ranks greatly above the whole mass of publications which bear the name of novels” (86). The exceptions are Fielding, Smollett, and Burney. The sense of a literary public sphere, in which ideas are debated and authors and novels become actual participants, is emphasized by the frequency at which other novelists are mentioned in the reviews. Fielding and Smollett are often in tandem, especially in the early reviews. Other authors mentioned include Burney, Edgeworth, Richardson, Radcliffe, the German and French school of novelists, and Milton, Johnson, Byron, Wordsworth, and Dante, and Scott. In an even later review, Godwin’s hero Falkland is linked directly to Richardson: “He may be allowed to be a sort of Sir Charles Grandison, taking himself for what he is not. He is Richardson’s hero in miniature, under the sad advantage of having committed a capital offence” (91).

Another comment from a review of *Fleetwood* places Godwin in the Richardsonian mold: “[he does not] make us acquainted with his hero by a minute relation of the incident of his life, as Fielding and others have done; but by favoring us with his soliloquies and reflections upon men and manners. His chief characters are all metaphysicians; who are reasoning when they should be acting; but who reason in so extraordinary a manner, that they rivet our attention” (257). William Hazlitt, in an 1818 review of *Caleb Williams* begins by noting that “it is pretty clear that the author of *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* is not the author of *Waverley*” (89). The review continues by reiterating the distinction already presented between novels – this time however it cites the Godwinian and Scott/*Waverley*-model, not that of Richardson and Fielding. The terms though are comparable: “one owes almost everything to external observation and traditional characters, the other owes everything to internal conception and contemplation of the possible workings of the human mind” (89).

In addition to the presence of a critical conversation, the literary public sphere as expressed by Godwin is characterized by the absence of one important element. Despite the necessity to make a profit from his novels,

this need is rarely, if ever, expressed in the prefaces. It is as if the subject is off limits to the preface as a contribution to the literary public sphere. In the preface to *Mandeville*, he comments on his motivation for writing:

Yet I have never truckled to the world. I have never published anything with the slightest purpose to take advantage of the caprice of the day, to approach the public on its weak side, or to pamper its frailties. What I have produced, was written merely in obedience to that spirit, unshackled and independent, whatever were its other qualities, that commanded me to take up my pen. (xi-xii)

The only suggestion to a financial concern in the prefaces is that in the second edition of *Caleb Williams*. When the novel was first published in 1794, the preface was suppressed by Godwin due to its incendiary political content. In a note appended in the second edition published a year later when the preface was restored, Godwin states that the preface was removed "in compliance with the alarms of booksellers" (*Caleb Williams* 1). The booksellers, fearing a loss of sales because of the content, advised Godwin to delete the discussion of politics. Jeff Miles argues that because of the delayed publication, its "power to rouse has been diminished" and is seen as a museum piece and a "harmless work of imaginative fiction" (81).

As in Godwin's prefaces, so in the reviews the issue of money rarely appears. The reviews produce a picture of a literary public sphere run by the journals, which are in the position of moral and stylistic judges. The reviews of Godwin's novels indicate a conception of the public and of the novel that is mostly in line with Godwin's conception found in his prefaces. In a 1794 review of *Caleb Williams*, the *Anthologica Hiberna* equates sales with taste: "we flatter ourselves that the quick sale of the novel will afford a proof of the literary taste of the inhabitants of this kingdom" (84). Even as early as this review, the only sure way the public can express its 'taste' is through purchasing. However, a criticism by the *Monthly Magazine* of *St. Leon* sounds the sour note of profit motive. The errors of the book are, according to the reviewers, "the consequence of too great hurry for publication" (163).

That is to say, Godwin, forced by matters of monetary exigencies, cannot attend to the details of novel conventions. The same review concludes that “an author of Mr. Godwin’s genius and talents ought to write more for posterity than for the existing generation” (163). This is exactly the dilemma Godwin felt himself faced with, and which he answers in an ironic way, with his statement about writing not for a marble headstone, but for bread to eat. Most obvious with respect to sounding the note of money, *Cloudesley* is recognized for what it is (as evident in Godwin’s biography) – a money-making venture. *The Athenaeum* remarked that although better than the common novel, it is not comparable to Godwin’s earlier works and “bears the unpleasing aspect of a production resulting not from the pleasures men of genius naturally feel at giving language to their thought, but from the pleasure all men feel at putting money into their pockets” (512).

While Godwin did not state concern for money in his prefaces, he does state concern for the welfare of the reader. The focus on the reader by both reviewers and by Godwin in his prefaces indicates that both took the idea of a literary public sphere seriously. Both Godwin and the reviewers address the reader in such a way as to intimate a strong relationship between the two. While the public sphere is theoretically composed of ‘status-free’ individuals, the realities of the reading public, especially that of the novel, make such a construct difficult to maintain. Both Godwin and the reviewers project an audience of readers at times in an equal position, at others at a subservient or a higher level. The 1817 preface to *Mandeville*, for example, presents Godwin at his most intimate. Supposing himself to be near death, Godwin appeals to the reader who reads the preface, “that small portion of the world whose eye is ever likely to light upon these prefatory pages,” describing the relationship as “the communicativeness of an intimate friend” (vii). Likewise, Godwin begins the preface to his next novel, *Fleetwood*, with more self-effaced sentiment: “Yet another novel from the same pen, which has twice before claimed the patience of the public in this form. The unequivocal indulgence which has been extended to my two former attempts, renders me doubly solicitous not to forfeit the kindness I

have experienced" (v). In describing the types of novels he has written, he notes that "fastidious readers – they may be classed among the best friends an author has" – may find that they can recognize themselves in either the recognizable or the miraculous type of novel: "that the story we cannot believe, we are by all the laws of criticism called upon to hate" (vi-vii). Godwin writes clearly in the vein of the author attempting to form a close bond with the reader. For instance, he describes *Caleb Williams* as "a story of very surprising and uncommon events, but which were supposed to be entirely within the laws and established course of nature, as she operates in the planet we inhabit" (v-vi). Similarly, *St. Leon* is "of the miraculous class" to "mix human feelings and passions with incredible situations, and thus render them impressive and interesting" (vi). *Fleetwood*, on the other hand, recounts adventures that "for the most part have occurred to at least one half of the Englishmen now existing, who are of the same rank of life as my hero" (vii). He goes on to recount the "ordinary incidents" the reader and the hero may have in common, including college and marriage. By incorporating these ordinary events into his novel, Godwin asserts he has performed the goal he also professed in *Caleb Williams*, "to form an idea of what is passing in the world" (x).

Godwin repeatedly expresses a concern for the reader in his prefaces: "The hearts and the curiosity of readers have been assailed in so many ways, that we, writers who bring up the rear of our illustrious predecessors, must be contented to arrive at novelty in whatever we are able" (ix). Godwin perceives his role as novelist to entertain, continuing "if I have mixed human feelings and passions with incredible situations, and thus rendered them impressive and interesting, I shall entertain some hope to be pardoned the boldness and irregularity of my design" (ix). The reviews also project a protective sense over the non-male readers, both women and youth. Godwin's *Damon and Delia*, for example, can be "safely perused by the most tender female in the most gloomy solitude" (31). Likewise, *The English Review* notes that in *Imogen* there is an "agreeable variety, romance, and morality, which cannot fail to recommend it to young readers" (32). Here the twin bands of amusement and instruction are struck.

The *Monthly Review*, on the other hand, is slightly harsher as it chides Godwin for writing a novel that “after having drawn a few tears from the eyes of a number of tender virgins, would have reposed in eternal peace on the loaded shelves of some circulating libraries” (86). Not only is the female reader clearly identified as a tender virgin, but the attitude toward the novel genre is evident as well. Far from being a social instrument, the common novel (“whining love tale”) quickly exits the public sphere to be added to the already full shelves of the circulating library. Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, however, is different. It is a social critique couched in the form of fiction, which is more able to gain a “ready reception” (86).

Despite Godwin’s rhetorical concern for his readers, an undercurrent of distrust and fear characterizes the prefaces. McCracken suggests that Godwin is aware of several types of readers, including a “mob-monster,” to whom McCracken suggests Godwin does not write (121). The reviewers also recognized this. For example, a review of *Cloudesley* begins by noting the change in reception of Godwin’s novels: “the announcement of a new novel by so distinguished a writer as Mr. Godwin, was received with more indifference than we looked for in the reading world” (512). This review, written in 1830, indicates a change in the reading public as observed by the literary journals: it was hoped that Godwin would be able to “reclaim the public taste from the foolish idolatries that now degrade it” (512). The reading public, now degraded, is described as a “mob” (512), and the typical novel (“fashionable and political novels”) is written by a “host of gentlemen with no material save effrontery and the court Guide” (516).

Godwin’s comment on the reader in his 1831 “Advertisement” to the Standard Edition of *St. Leon* indicates the shifting nature of the author-reader relationship during the period. Told by a trusted friend that “the public may sometimes be interested in the perusal of a book but that they never give themselves any trouble about the author,” Godwin is warned “on no occasion to say anything in print” about himself (vi). This friend’s image of the contemporary reader suggests the possibility of a literary public sphere unmarked by commercial and private demands. Godwin responds by noting that “the present race of readers” do not validate that opinion. The

impression evidenced in Godwin's earlier prefaces and by his differentiating the "present race of readers" indicates that this other type of reader existed but was being supplanted by one more concerned with material issues. Godwin describes them as "desirous to learn something of the peculiarities, the 'life, character, and behavior,' of an author, before they consign him to the gulph of oblivion, and are willing to learn from his own testimony what train of thoughts induced him to adopt the particular subject and plan of the work" (vi). This new reader dominates the nineteenth century and transforms the literary public sphere, with the preface, as transformed by Godwin, participating as a critical document.

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