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ILDIKO CSENGEI

Godwin's Case: Melancholy Mourning in the "Empire of Feeling"

"THERE ARE MOMENTS, WHEN ANY CREATURE THAT LIVES, HAS POWER to drive one into madness. I seemed to know the absurdity of this reply; but that was of no consequence. It added to the measure of my distraction." In his *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), this is William Godwin's description of his feelings shortly after questioning the nurse just coming out of the room where his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, lay dying. To Godwin's question, what she thought of the state of her mistress, the nurse responded that "in her judgment, she was going as fast as possible."¹ Godwin's distracted condition during Wollstonecraft's fatal illness continued well beyond her death. It is from the state that verges on the borderline of madness that he started to mourn her. After Wollstonecraft's death from septicemia following the birth of the future Mary Godwin Shelley, Godwin, symbolically taking his dead wife's place, moved into her room at the Polygon, where she used to live and work separately from Godwin during the day. Here he immediately immersed himself in work, rereading all her books and letters. As a reaction to his pain at her loss he started writing the *Memoirs*, and also began to edit and then publish her posthumous works in 1798, among them her last, unfinished novel, *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman*, and her letters to Gilbert Imlay.

Much scholarly attention has been paid to the unfortunate consequences of the publication of Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Despite Godwin's respect for Wollstonecraft and his good intentions, the book—with an honest account of his wife's sexual affairs, suicide attempts and unorthodox religious ideas—scandalized contemporaries, and was an inevitable blow to the feminist views associated with

1. *Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin: A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and Memoirs of the Author of The Rights of Woman*, ed. Richard Holmes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 268–69. Subsequent references are cited in the text as *Memoirs* and *Short Residence*, respectively.

Wollstonecraft's life and work. After the publication of the *Memoirs*, Wollstonecraft's work was largely ignored and her name only invoked as a warning until the end of the following century.² Her reputation suffered intensely from what the public saw as tasteless exposure. Even friends like Southey were disappointed and accused Godwin of a "want of feeling in stripping his dead wife naked." Roscoe condemned him for mourning her "with a heart of stone."³ Cruel jokes written by Tory journalists proliferated, while the Reverend Richard Polwhele saw the hand of Providence operating in Wollstonecraft's life, death and the *Memoirs*: "she died a death that strongly marked the distinction of the sexes." The *Anti-Jacobin*, in one of its volumes anonymously edited by Polwhele, cross-referenced "Wollstonecraft" and "Prostitution" in its index.⁴

While in our time successful critical attempts have greatly restored Wollstonecraft's reputation and significance, and incorporated her works into the study of literary and cultural history, Godwin's mourning has not yet been fully understood. There seems to be some resistance on the part of scholarship equally to do justice to both sides—perhaps shying away from a critical position that risks not being feminist enough when recovering a

2. For the publication and reception of the *Memoirs*, see Ford K. Brown, *The Life of William Godwin* (London and Toronto: Dent, 1926) 133–34; Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1974; London: Penguin, 1992) 289 ff.; R. M. Janes, "On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (1978): 293–302; Mitzi Myers, "Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft: The Shaping of Self and Subject," *SiR* 20.3 (1981): 299–316; William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber, 1989) 184–86; Amy Rambow, "'Come Kick Me': Godwin's *Memoirs* and the Posthumous Infamy of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Keats-Shelley Review* 13 (1999): 24–30; Tilottama Rajan, "Framing the Corpus: Godwin's 'Editing' of Wollstonecraft in 1798," *SiR* 39.4 (2000): 511; Mary Jacobus, "Intimate Connections: Scandalous *Memoirs* and Epistolary Indiscretion," in *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere: 1700–1830*, eds. Elizabeth Eger and Charlotte Grant (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 274–75.

3. Robert Southey to William Taylor, 1 July 1804, in *A Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late William Taylor of Norwich*, ed. J. W. Robberds, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1843) 1: 507; Roscoe's lines on Godwin's mourning of Wollstonecraft were "written from memory" on a copy of the *Memoirs* by Dr. William Shepherd:

"Hard was thy fate in all the scenes of life,
As daughter, sister, mother, friend, and wife;
But harder still thy fate in death we own,
Thus mourn'd by Godwin with a heart of stone."

See *Notes and Queries* III, 8 (1865): 66, qtd. in Ralph M. Wardle, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography* (London: Richards; Lawrence: U of Kansas P, 1951) 357, n. 17. See also Tomalin 337, n. 9.

4. Richard Polwhele, "The Unsex'd Females. A Poem," ed. Gina Luria (New York and London: Garland, 1974) 29–30.

feminist icon. What does it mean to mourn “with a heart of stone” a person one deeply loved—a mourning that, besides “stripping his dead wife naked,” threatened to damage Godwin’s own reputation in the eyes of his—and even our—contemporaries?⁵ How is it possible to demonstrate a paradoxical “want of feeling” under the influence of the most powerful emotions? This essay reads Godwin’s writings produced at the time of Mary Wollstonecraft’s death (his *Memoirs*, letters, notes and diary) as they were created in the vortex of overwhelming emotions induced by loss. As I will argue, the growth of affectivity and sensibility that has often been observed in Godwin’s writing during this period is the result of a complex and emotionally ambivalent psychological process: melancholy mourning. Godwin’s case reaches beyond the boundaries of the eighteenth-century understanding of melancholia, raising questions that point towards the ideas of Freud and his successors. Also, as this essay will hope to show, Godwin’s mourning—as registered in his writings—offers an alternative case study, which in many respects differs from, and poses new questions to, existing psychoanalytic views.

Freud discusses the two processes in his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” and later in *The Ego and the Id* (1923). In his terminology, the work of mourning implies a gradual withdrawal of the libido from the lost loved object during a long and painful process. The attachment is given up bit by bit, through the testing of external reality, until the ego becomes free and uninhibited again. For Freud, the key to understanding melancholia lies in identification. Melancholia develops when the free libido is not placed onto another object after the loss, but is withdrawn into the ego. The ego identifies with the abandoned object and draws it into itself, thus the object loss is transformed into an ego loss, splitting the ego. Melancholia has certain unique symptoms, such as a strong diminution of self-esteem, harsh self-reproaches, as well as ambivalent feelings toward the object. According to Freud, the self-reproaches are in reality accusations against the internalized object, which is also the real target of the ego’s simultaneous feelings of love and hatred.⁶

As Freud emphasizes in his earlier essay, mourning and melancholia share similar structures. Both are reactions to a loss and imply a painful mood, in-

5. Myers notes that attitudes towards Godwin’s *Memoirs* have been contradictory. While some praise the work as honest and sympathetic, other commentators “find Godwin’s vision of Wollstonecraft chauvinist and retrograde, a mere sexist stereotype of woman as all sentiment and no ideas” (Myers 303).

6. Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, et al., vol. 14 (London: Vintage, 2001), esp. 243–49. Subsequent references to the *Standard Edition* are cited as *SE*. See also Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” in *SE*, vol. 19: 12–66.

hibition or loss of interest in pleasurable activities. Both aim to prolong the existence of the object, and involve the long and gradual withdrawal of libido—even though in the state of melancholia this withdrawal is unconscious. As many readers of Freud, including Judith Butler, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, point out, the two are bound together more closely in Freud's later work. In *The Ego and the Id*, melancholic identification is a prerequisite for letting the object go, as well as for the constitution of the ego. As parting with the object is never entirely possible, the ego contains a history of its lost objects.⁷

Godwin's case probes the meeting points of mourning and melancholia as they take place in writing and find expression in language. His literary activity sets in motion the processes that define the interface of mourning and melancholia: the taking in and simultaneous giving up of the lost loved object; in other words, the process of losing as it creates the object as internal, while allowing one to part with it at the same time. First I will discuss Godwin's letters written to his friends and relations after Wollstonecraft's death, together with Wollstonecraft's tormenting, suicidal letters to Gilbert Imlay, and point to processes of identification between Godwin and his melancholy love object. I shall trace how the internalized other transforms the self from within and argue that the growth of affectivity in Godwin's writing is the result of such intersubjective transformation. Then I will read Godwin's hurtful letters and ostensibly emotionless diary entries as the language of melancholia fuelled by the conflicting emotions of love, hate, triumph and aggression. My contention is that Godwin's *Memoirs*, as well as the image of Wollstonecraft they present, are a further product of this ambivalent language. As a case of melancholy mourning, Godwin's case instantiates how sensibility, together with a controversial image of Wollstonecraft, is produced through an inherently ambivalent process: the vicissitudes of identification burdened with the simultaneous love and hatred of the survivor.

Godwin and Wollstonecraft: Destructive Correspondences

In September 1797, in a strange boost of creativity at a moment of debilitating grief, Godwin sat down with Wollstonecraft's papers to prepare them for publication and to salvage and preserve as much as he could of the literary remains of his beloved wife. He devotedly undertook to pay her a literary tribute, as "the world is entitled to some information respecting

7. *SE*, vol. 14: 244–45, 256; *SE*, vol. 19: 29; David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, Introduction, in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2003) 1–25; Judith Butler, "Moral Sadism and Doubting One's Own Love: Kleinian Reflections on Melancholia," in *Reading Melanie Klein*, ed. Lindsey Stonebridge and John Phillips (London and New York: Routledge, 1998): 179–89.

persons that have enlightened and improved it.”⁸ Simultaneously, he kept up his correspondences with his friends and relations, informing them of the sad news and receiving their condolences. Written by a man overwhelmed with feeling, some of these letters end up discussing the difficulty or impossibility of their own production. In the end, Godwin often confers the task of writing on his friends. The letters that he did write convey inordinate passions polarized between intense anger and overflowing gratitude, targeted at a world split into “good” and “bad” objects. On the day of his wife’s death, he wrote to his friend, William Nicholson, that “expressions of attachment and kindness from a man I have known so long, and value so highly, are consolatory and soothing beyond imagination.”⁹ The letters he sent to Elizabeth Inchbald, however, are full of accusations written in a particularly aggressive tone, and, as Inchbald puts it, more resemble “distracted lines than anything rational” (qtd. in Brown 131). Even the letter in which he informs Inchbald of the death of his wife is loaded with reproaches: “My wife died at eight this morning. I always thought you used her ill, but I forgive you. You told me you did not know her. You have a thousand good and great qualities. She had a very deep-rooted admiration for you.”¹⁰

Godwin’s angry letters to Inchbald refer back to an incident that happened shortly after his marriage to Wollstonecraft had been made public. The marriage meant an open confession that Wollstonecraft had not been married to Gilbert Imlay previously. Inchbald—like Amelia Anderson and Sarah Siddons—was one of those friends who did not react to the marriage favourably and who turned away from Wollstonecraft out of social prejudice or possibly even jealousy. When she found out about the marriage, Inchbald withdrew her invitation to a theater party that she had previously

8. Godwin to Hugh Skeys, 4 October 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Dep.b. 227/8 (a), new folio 55–57. I am grateful to the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, for permission to publish materials from the Abinger papers. I would like to thank Bruce Barker-Benfield, Senior Assistant Librarian, for his help with the collection. Letters from the former Dep. b. 227/8(a) (the folder of Godwin’s letter-press copies of his outgoing correspondence) have recently been reordered and foliated into a new box, provisionally called “Bodleian Abinger, Godwin Letter-Press Copies.” This box is still awaiting allocation of its final shelf-mark. Here I cite the old Dep. numbers and the new, already finalized internal folio numbers as given by Pamela Clemit in “William Godwin and James Watt’s Copying Machine: Wet-Transfer Copies in the Abinger Papers,” *The Bodleian Library Record* 18.5 (2005): 532–60. I rely on Clemit’s new identification of some of Godwin’s correspondents in the cited letters.

9. Sunday, 10 Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep.b. 227/8 (a), new folio 42.

10. Godwin to Inchbald, 10 Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a), new folio 40; qtd. in Charles Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (London: Henry S. King, 1876) 1: 276.

made to Godwin. We do not know exactly what happened at the theater, but when the couple turned up for the play, Inchbald made a comment that both Wollstonecraft and Godwin found insulting.¹¹ The friendship between Godwin and Inchbald started in the early 1790s and continued after the incident; after Wollstonecraft's death, however, Godwin's resentment escalated into aggression and eventually destroyed their friendship.

Even the short report of death quoted above is used as a declaration of war. Inchbald tries to pacify and console Godwin, takes an understanding attitude and urges him to express his emotions: "Write to me again. Say what you please at such a time as this; I will excuse and pity you."¹² Each new letter Godwin writes, however, carries a new and harsher attack, until the theater incident returns with its full force. In Godwin's rereading of the past event, it grows into an unpardonable offense against an idealized and revered object, who can only be recovered in writing:

I must endeavour to be understood as to the unworthy behaviour with which I charge you towards my wife. I think your shuffling behaviour about the taking places to the comedy of the *Will* dishonourable to you. I think your conversation to her that night at the play base, cruel and insulting. There were persons in the box who heard it, and they thought as I do. I think you know more of my wife than you are willing to acknowledge to yourself, and that you have an understanding capable of doing some small degree of justice to her merits. I think you should have had magnanimity and self-respect enough to have shewed this. I think that while the Twisses and others were sacrificing to what they were silly enough to think a proper etiquette, a person so out of all comparison their superior, as you are, should have placed her pride in acting upon better principles, and in courting and distinguishing insulted greatness and worth; I think that you chose a mean and pitiful conduct, when you might have chosen a conduct that would have done you immortal honour.¹³

Inchbald, in her repeated attempts at consolation, attributes Godwin's accusations to his feelings and sees in his letters the language of a man under the influence of strong, uncontrollable emotions. As she writes in one of her replies: "I could refute every charge you allege against me in your let-

11. Roger Manvell, *Elizabeth Inchbald, England's Principal Woman Dramatist and Independent Woman of Letters in Eighteenth Century London: A Biographical Study* (New York; London: Lanham, 1987) 99–101; St. Clair 171–72. See also Rambow 40.

12. Inchbald to Godwin, 10 Sep. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. c. 509; qtd. in Kegan Paul, *Godwin* 1: 277.

13. Godwin to Inchbald, 13 Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a), new folio 44–45; qtd. in Brown 131 and Kegan Paul, *Godwin* 1: 278.

ter; but I revere a man, either in deep love or in deep grief: and as it is impossible to convince, I would at least say nothing to irritate him."¹⁴ However, Godwin does not stop the flood of insult and Inchbald finally ends their friendship.

Inchbald's attribution of Godwin's attacks to his grief invites the critical reader of their correspondence to see his writings produced during that period as expressions of mourning and melancholia. The stake of these writings—the outcome of which is the publication of the *Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* in 1798—is that they had a critical role in the formation of the image and reputation of Wollstonecraft in Godwin's time, and even in subsequent centuries. The *Memoirs* and Wollstonecraft's letters, as presented by Godwin, have functioned as targets of critique as well as crucial sources of available information about her life and relationships.¹⁵ Godwin composed and compiled these writings from details that he asked for in letters to friends and relations shortly after Wollstonecraft's death. There is, however, something peculiar in the tone of his letters, which strikes us when we read them together with Mary Wollstonecraft's letters to Gilbert Imlay—letters of a deserted love that Godwin read and edited after her death. These are letters written in a passionate tone during her previous, stormy relationship with the American Imlay, a relationship which began in Revolutionary France and culminated in disappointment. After the birth of their illegitimate child, Fanny, Imlay's commitment to the affair evidently started to wither. His neglect and betrayal of Wollstonecraft, who was striving to maintain the relationship at all costs, contributed to her two consecutive suicide attempts in 1795, both unsuccessful. The relationship ended, and Wollstonecraft had to come to terms with the reality of her loss.¹⁶

14. Inchbald to Godwin, 14 Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. c. 509; qtd. in Kegan Paul, *Godwin* 1: 279.

15. Godwin did not have access to various sources and letters which could have shown perspectives other than Wollstonecraft's. Letters were withheld from Godwin by friends, family and relations: Everina Wollstonecraft and Henry Fuseli, for instance, refused to share the letters in their possession. Imlay's letters do not survive either. See Tomalin 288. Wollstonecraft's letters to Fuseli were destroyed, probably to conceal the scandal, soon after Wollstonecraft's grandson, Sir Percy Florence Shelley, had bought them from John Knowles. See Wardle, *Mary Wollstonecraft* 350, n. 8. See also Janet Todd, ed. *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Penguin-Allen Lane, 2003) 204–5 for an attempted reconstruction of the fragments. For Godwin's shaping of the image of Wollstonecraft, see also Holmes, Introduction 53–54, as well as Rajan 511–31 and Myers 299–316.

16. For the details of the Wollstonecraft-Imlay relationship see Tomalin 210–44; Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2000) 231–87; Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 123–24; Charles Kegan Paul, "Prefatory Memoir," in *Letters to Imlay*, by Mary Wollstonecraft (London: Kegan Paul, 1879) xxxviii–xlvi.

After Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin, dearly loving his wife, was left behind, just as Wollstonecraft had been abandoned earlier by the unfaithful Imlay. In his yearning for a lost love object, Godwin steps into a role similar to Mary Wollstonecraft yearning for her always absent lover, Gilbert Imlay—a yearning that, as Claire Tomalin observes of Wollstonecraft, transformed a clever and strong-willed person into “a creature eager, dependent and trembling” (Tomalin 190). Wollstonecraft's letters to Imlay around the time of her two suicide attempts in 1795 are full of reproaches for his absence and neglect, and they speak of extreme depression and despair. These letters, like Godwin's letters to Inchbald, are composed from within a similarly distracted mental state. Due to Imlay's absences, and in the midst of weaning her child, Wollstonecraft's thoughts are constantly preoccupied with ideas of death, destruction and suicide. Waiting for Imlay's answers, which rarely arrive, she complains that her life is “a living death” tormented by uncertainty.¹⁷

While many of Wollstonecraft's suicide threats and farewell letters promise to be the final one, there are always new ones to follow. Even after her second suicide attempt at Putney Bridge in November 1795, her revived voice cannot stop attacking the unfaithful, insensible lover. This voice of aggression and despair, twice recovered from the brink of the grave, unceasingly and repetitively tortures Imlay with reproaches for treating her badly, neglecting her and not responding to her letters. Her inability to remain silent only aggravates the vicious cycle of neglect, aggressive response, and the further alienation such a response entails. She tortures him precisely by promising not to torture, and by the very act of narrating how she tries to hide her sorrows in order not to trouble him with them. In one letter she writes: “You tell me that my letters torture you; I will not describe the effect yours have on me. . . . I meant not to give vent to the emotions they produced.” However, the rest of the letter is nothing more than an elaboration of these emotions. “Forget that I exist: I will never remind you,” “Be free—I will not torment, when I cannot please.” The letter itself is a means of reminder and torment. Far from sparing him the troubling circumstances, in the very same letter she cannot help giving a detailed, physiological description of the bodily condition induced by her suffering: “I am agitated, my whole frame is convulsed, my lips tremble, as if shook by cold, though fire seems to be circulating in my veins.”¹⁸ After Wollstonecraft's unsuccessful attempt at drowning, her accusing voice cries out in the very act of promising silence: “If I have any criterion to judge of right and wrong, I have been most ungenerously treated: but, wishing now

17. London, Nov. 1795, *Letters to Imlay*, Letter 70 (187); hereafter cited as *LI* in the text.

18. Gothenburg, 26 Aug. 1795, *LI*, letter 64 (171–72).

only to hide myself, I shall be *silent as the grave* in which I long to forget myself."¹⁹ The grave from where she speaks, however, never proves to be silent. The next letter speaks out again with the desire to torment Imlay with her pain and to see him suffer. The voice is that of the accusing and revengeful ghost, someone defying death only for the sake of taking pleasure in punishment. She complains that "my heart thirsts for justice from you," and, as she adds, "Even at Paris, my image will haunt you. You will see my pale face, and sometimes the tears of anguish will drop on your heart, which you have forced from mine."²⁰

In these letters a peculiar, ghostly narrative voice is created, which speaks from the position of someone surviving and desiring death at the same time—swaying between extremes in the borderline territory of life and death, sorrow and distraction. Often the discourse is not very different from Godwin's own description of his mental state bordering on distraction after the death of his wife. Wollstonecraft's letters repeatedly act out and literalize the trope of the oxymoron, producing a voice of silence and a discourse of "living death." Embarking on her trip to Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft writes to Imlay from Hull "in a sort of a tomb-like house."²¹ In one of her last letters written to Imlay, dated November 1795, after her second suicide attempt, she writes: "In fact, 'the decided conduct which appeared to me so unfeeling,' has almost overturned my reason; my mind is injured, I scarcely know where I am or what I do. . . . My life therefore is but an exercise of fortitude, continually on the stretch, and hope never gleams in this tomb, where I am buried alive."²² The voice of the *almost* dead calls out from beyond the tomb—a tomb that is life itself, burying reason that is *almost* overturned. Here Wollstonecraft the survivor cries out from the realm of the 'almost,' where sadness slides into insanity and the life that entombs her is already beyond death. Her head is "*disturbed*,"²³ and in her letters "the agonies of a *distracted* mind were but too faithfully portrayed."²⁴ The anger and impatience felt at Imlay's persistent, cruel silence finally chokes one of her letters: "What have I to do here? I have repeatedly written to you fully. Do you do the same, and quickly. Do not leave me in suspense. I have not deserved this of you. *I cannot write*, my

19. London, November 1795, *LI*, letter 73 (193); my emphasis.

20. London, 27 Nov. 1795, *LI*, letter 74 (198, 197). For the destructive, sado-masochistic dynamic of the Wollstonecraft-Imlay correspondence see Mary Jacobus, "Intimate Connections" 281–86. Jacobus shows how the "love letter metamorphoses into a scene of mutual torture." Here love letters turn into "hate letters," becoming the instruments of "epistolary self-destruction" and of "mingled self-torture and revenge" (285).

21. Hull, 27 May 1795, *LI*, letter 42 (116).

22. London, 27 Nov. 1795, *LI*, letter 74 (195–96).

23. Copenhagen, 6 Sept. 1795, *LI*, letter 65 (175).

24. Hamburg, 27 Sept. 1795, *LI*, letter 67 (177).

mind is so distressed. Adieu!"²⁵ The expression accelerates through a short, passionate question, a request, an order and a reproach, until suddenly the writing is cancelled out by the intensity of emotion, as if repeating the author's act of self-destruction. If not overtly threatening suicide, Wollstonecraft's letter acts it out in its rhetorical construction. Even when the author is not decidedly suicidal, her letter is.

The bodily symptoms of shaking and trembling often surface in Wollstonecraft's letters in relation to her uncertainties and the emotional ambivalence of the Imlay relationship. These concerns get closely tied into Wollstonecraft's attempt to formulate an attitude to sensibility. The oscillating dynamic of shaking and trembling implies uncertainty and signifies swings of mood between hope and despair. "Trembling" is a metaphor Wollstonecraft uses in a letter to Imlay, subsequently published in her *Letters from Scandinavia* (1796), which aptly expresses her ambivalent feelings towards sensibility as a component of female education. She spends much time "musing almost to madness," and philosophizing over sensibility from the state of melancholy induced by parting from her daughter for the first time. In "Letter Six," she feels "affected" by the sympathy the Norwegians express towards her, a woman traveling alone. Responding sympathetically to their sympathy and hospitality, she comments that the kindness of the simple people "increased my sensibility to a painful degree" (*Short Residence* 97). It is from this state of increased sensibility and suffering in the absence of her lover and her child that she expresses anxiety about the future of her daughter:

I dread lest she should be forced to sacrifice her heart to her principles, or principles to her heart. *With trembling hand I shall cultivate sensibility,* and cherish delicacy of sentiment, lest, whilst I lend fresh blushes to the rose, I sharpen the thorns that will wound the breast I would fain guard—I dread to unfold her mind, lest it should render her unfit for the world she is to inhabit—Hapless woman! what a fate is thine! (*Short Residence* 97; my emphasis)

Again, these reflections and ambiguities are spelled out from within melancholy that is *almost* madness. This melancholy is caused by a loss within the loss, occasioned by Wollstonecraft's temporary parting with her daughter in a state of absence and foreignness.²⁶

Writing in a fragile state of sensibility, this Wollstonecraft is different

25. Hamburg, 25 Sept. 1795, *LI*, letter 66 (170); my emphasis.

26. For an interpretation of Wollstonecraft's melancholia see Mary Jacobus, "In Love With a Cold Climate: Travelling With Mary Wollstonecraft," in *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art and Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995) 63–82.

from, if not too distant from, the harsh critic of sensibility in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Sensibility in the *Rights of Woman* contributes to the emergence of female softness. Far from being constitutional, this softness is argued by Wollstonecraft to be a social product. By being educated in sensibility, she claims, women are made slaves to their senses, neglecting the development of skills that could be more empowering for their social existence. In the *Rights of Woman* sensibility is criticized as an institutionalized culture of weakness, made fashionable in order to appeal to women, but the cultivation of which brings about their own social enslavement. Wollstonecraft directly links sensibility with materiality. She describes it as a realm that women are encouraged to inhabit, having been denied access to the culture of rationality:

And what is sensibility? 'Quickness of sensation, quickness of perception, delicacy.' Thus is it defined by Dr Johnson; and the definition gives me no other idea than of the *most exquisitely polished instinct*. I discern not a trace of the image of God in either sensation or matter. Refined seventy times seven they are still *material*; intellect dwells not there; nor will fire ever make lead gold!²⁷

Sensibility is instinct, even though—paradoxically—"exquisitely polished." Being related to materiality, it is directly opposed to the faculties of the intellect and the needs of an immortal soul. This binary fades away by the time of the *Letters from Scandinavia*. Here the state of sensibility—as a materially determined condition—can fuel philosophical reflection and even bring about a critique of sensibility itself.

While the *Rights of Woman* considers miserable those "whose cultivation of mind has only tended to inflame its passions" (153–54), her *Letters from Scandinavia* assume a position in the midst of inflamed passions—heightened almost to madness—to express concern about such an overwhelming sensibility, yet simultaneously to testify to the legacy of feeling. The letters are the product of a hopeless pining and a desire to attract the attention of an indifferent lover. As Godwin puts it in his *Memoirs*, it is a book that was "calculated to make a man in love with its author," producing a language of feeling that is at the same time a discourse of creative ideas. While the philosophical and critical language of sensibility did not manage to revive Imlay's love, Godwin, the philosopher, proved to be its ideal reader. He fell in love with an author who shed the "occasional harshness and ruggedness of character" that characterized the *Rights of Woman*, and who was

27. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin, 1992) 156; my emphasis.

softened by the suffering of unrequited love, thus falling victim to “the romance of unbounded attachment” (*Memoirs* 249).

As Daniel O’Quinn observes in the context of Wollstonecraft’s second novel, *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), trembling occurs when a woman’s idealizing fantasy projected on a man is successfully fitted to that man’s seduction strategy. The protagonist, Maria, trembles with emotion when George Venables, her future husband, gives away a guinea in a false act of charity, calculated to make Maria—a woman of fortune and sensibility—fall in love with him. Maria’s miserable fate is thus, to a great extent, due to her falling for her mental projections. She falsely identifies Venables as a man of feeling, and her future lover, Darnford, as the Saint Preux of fantasies induced by novel-reading.²⁸ In the *Letters to Imlay*, I would argue, moments of trembling come about when the narrator, in love with her fantasy projection, is held in suspense as to the man’s willingness to step into the image of such a projection. Trembling signifies anxious moments of expectation and uncertainty. It occurs in moments of hope, and is caused by a woman’s refusal to come to terms with the reality of loss and rejection. As Wollstonecraft writes to Imlay from Le Havre, full of expectation, “Still I cannot indulge the very affectionate tenderness which glows in my bosom, without trembling, till I see, by your eyes, that it is mutual.”²⁹ Like those women—educated in feeling—whom she attacks in the *Rights of Woman*, or like the sentimental heroine whose unhappy fate was brought about by her emotional fragility, Wollstonecraft is at the mercy of tormenting and destructive feelings. In her letters to Imlay, her sensibility is presented as a deep-rooted propensity that she has no power to master, and which threatens her independent subjecthood.

Thus conceived, trembling inevitably has a dark side. With the potential to escalate into the more forceful movement of shaking, it becomes symbolic of death and destruction in Wollstonecraft’s letters, as when Wollstonecraft writes: “I have been treated ungenerously—if I understand what is generosity. You seem to me only to have been anxious to shake me off—regardless whether you dashed me to atoms by the fall. In truth, I have been rudely handled.”³⁰ “Shaking off” is the metaphor Wollstonecraft uses to figure Imlay’s indifference to the clinging affections by which she tries to remain attached to him despite his cruelty. To be shaken off and dashed to atoms by the other is a mortal threat to her subjectivity. After finding out about Imlay’s infidelity for the first time, she feels that her “soul has been

28. Daniel O’Quinn, “Trembling: Wollstonecraft, Godwin and the Resistance to Literature,” *ELH* 64 (1997): 771–72.

29. Havre, 7 Apr. 1795, *LI*, letter 38 (108).

30. London, 27 Nov. 1795, *LI*, letter 74 (198).

shook," and a suicide attempt follows.³¹ Trembling and shivering reappear as signals of death in Godwin's description of Wollstonecraft's last days of septicemia. A few days after Wollstonecraft's delivery, Godwin sent for a male practitioner, Dr. Poignard, who immediately resorted to surgery to extract the unejected placenta. The operation was not only painful, but also fatal; Wollstonecraft lost a lot of blood, and on 3 September 1797 the onset of the infection was marked by uncontrollable fits of shivering. As Godwin describes it: "Every muscle of the body *trembled*, the teeth *chattered*, and the bed *shook* under her. . . . She told me, after it was over, that it had been a struggle between life and death, and that she had been more than once, in the course of it, at the point of expiring" (*Memoirs* 267; my emphases).³²

In Godwin's account in the *Memoirs* of his wife's last days, Wollstonecraft's condition oscillated between distressful fits and promising improvement, making it difficult for Godwin and his friends to give up hope until the last minute. While Wollstonecraft—in the manner of Rousseau's Julie—kept her patience and affectionateness, it is now Godwin who "dwelt with *trembling* fondness on every favourable circumstance" (*Memoirs* 268; my emphasis).³³ During the last two days, the shivering fits ceased entirely, on which Carlisle observed that her continuance struck him as miraculous, encouraging him to look out for favorable appearances. These, however, never arrived. By the morning of 10 September, Wollstonecraft was dead, just like Julie at the end of Rousseau's novel.

In many respects, Godwin's mourning repeats the behavior of the melancholy and suicidal Wollstonecraft of her letters to Imlay. In Godwin's letters to Inchbald, Godwin acts as if he is trying to do justice to Wollstonecraft, and seems to identify with the role of the revengeful tormentor. It is the same voice Wollstonecraft assumed in her despairing letters to Imlay. It almost seems as if Godwin is internalizing the Wollstonecraft driven by a desire for vengeance and stepping into the character of a haunting ghost-Mary who posthumously punishes her offenders. He adopts the impossible subject position assumed by the writer of the suicide note, a dead subjectivity imagined to be still alive and capable of serving justice. Thus, Godwin's case displays the process of mourning *in statu nascendi*, in

31. London, 22 May 1795, *LI*, letter 40 (113).

32. For the circumstances of Wollstonecraft's death, see Vivien Jones, "The Death of Mary Wollstonecraft," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 20 (1997): 187–205.

33. Godwin was reading Rousseau's *Julie*—among other works, such as *Confessions*, *Émile* and Goethe's *Werther*—at the time of writing the *Memoirs* and around the time of Wollstonecraft's illness and death. See Godwin's diary, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. e. 202 (No. 8). The punctuality of the diary is striking: even half-pages of what he reads or writes are indicated.

the process of its being structured like melancholia. It shows that the role of the mourner and the deserted lover are similarly constructed through processes of identification which, in turn, are burdened with ambivalent feeling.³⁴

In "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein mentions the case of Mrs A—a "normal," non-pathological mourner—who, a few days after the death of her young son, started sorting out letters in the house, keeping her son's letters and throwing others away. In Klein's interpretation, this was an attempt to restore and keep the dead person safely inside, while separating the "good" objects that belong to him from the indifferent or harmful "bad" objects. Such obsessive behavior patterns, claims Klein, often accompany normal mourning.³⁵ As in Godwin's case, they are the mourner's way of reconstructing from the mingled fragments of good and bad the lost other as a good object, inside oneself. Godwin's polarization of voice between extreme kindness and hostility, and his sharp distinction between good and helpful friends and bad and harmful ones could be signs of a similar shattering and subsequent rearrangement of the inner object-world. However, Godwin's writing and editing takes place at the early stages of loss, when mourning is still an illness, when the other is being taken into the self and separation has not yet fully begun. His mourning is burdened with ambivalence—something that, for Freud, is a distinctive characteristic of melancholia. Moreover, Godwin internalizes a melancholy object, a Wollstonecraft who is full of her own losses. The love object she is constantly in the process of losing in her letters to Imlay is only a replica of earlier lost objects. By the time of the Imlay relationship, Wollstonecraft had struggled through the end of an unrequited love-affair with the painter Fuseli, as well as the deaths of her mother and her close friend, Fanny Blood. For Godwin, it is this object—containing multiple, never-healing wounds—that starts living its own life when taken inside, transforming both self and writing. Moving into his wife's study, surrounding himself with her objects, undertaking the care of her children, and immersing himself in her writings, Godwin internalizes the melancholy object he has lost, partly turning into and acting like—identifying with—Wollstonecraft. In his creative mourning, the object is

34. Imlay returned Wollstonecraft's letters after their final separation. Godwin could have seen these letters even before Wollstonecraft's death, and definitely had immediate access to them after her death and during the time of his own correspondence with Inchbald. He also knew about the details of the Wollstonecraft-Imlay relationship from private conversations with Wollstonecraft. See Kegan Paul, "Prefatory Memoir" xli. See also Holmes 53.

35. Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940), in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works by Melanie Klein* (London: Karnac and The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1992) 355–56.

never entirely lost, but, together with the subject, gets caught up in the process of losing and taking in. What emerges is a cluster of subjectivity-fragments, a subject-in-process between a dead and a living self, a Godwin turning into Mary—but a somewhat softened and emotional Mary of sensibility, more like the Mary of the *Letters to Imlay* than the radical and feminist Mary of the *Rights of Woman*.³⁶

“Genuine sentiments” and Godwin’s Diary

In 1796, in the first surviving letter of their correspondence, Wollstonecraft writes of sending Godwin “the last volume of *Heloise*.” She encourages Godwin, the well-known philosopher of reason, to express more of his feelings, and warns him not to make her into an object of his writing: “I want besides to remind you, when you write to me in *verse*, not to choose the easiest task, my perfections, but to dwell on your own feelings—that is to say, give me a bird’s-eye view of your heart. Do not make me a desk ‘to write upon,’ I humbly pray.”³⁷ The period between 1796 and 1798 was a time when the question of feeling forced itself to the forefront of Godwin’s philosophy. As Gary Kelly points out, after Wollstonecraft’s death, Godwin, giving himself completely to the memory and works of his wife, re-educated himself in sensibility.³⁸ Could this new, emerging sensibility have, at least to some extent, been the product of his melancholy mourning?

In his miscellaneous notes of 1798, Godwin drew up a project of the literary works he intended to complete. Dissatisfied with his *Political Justice* for its “not yielding a proper attention to the empire of feeling,” he planned the correction of “certain errors” in this work. In his notes he emphasized the power that feeling, as opposed to reason, possesses over the course of human action: “The voluntary actions of men are under the direction of their feelings: nothing can have a tendency to produce this species of action, except so far as it is connected with ideas of future pleasure or pain to ourselves or others. Reason, accurately speaking, has not the smallest degree of power to put any one limb or articulation of our bodies into motion.”³⁹ In the preface of his 1799 novel, *St. Leon*, he mentions his eagerness to see affections and judgment as reconcilable faculties, and to revise

36. As Tilottama Rajan argues, Wollstonecraft, as presented in the *Memoirs*, is also a “subject-in-process”—in that her life and ideas are seen by Godwin as unfinished (513–14).

37. 1 July 1796, qtd. in Ralph M. Wardle, ed. *Godwin and Mary: Letters of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft* (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1966) 4–5. Subsequent references are cited as *Godwin and Mary*.

38. Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780–1805* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 225–26.

39. William Godwin, a schedule of literary projects, Sept. 1798, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 228/9. Qtd. in Kegan Paul, *Godwin* 1: 294.

Political Justice according to this view. Here he refers to his *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft* as a work in which he has already stated a similar opinion about the value of feelings.⁴⁰

In his ruthless self-analysis of 1798, Godwin was far from considering himself as the cold, unimpassioned philosopher of reason he had often been held to be. While he saw himself as "too sceptical, too rational," he attributed his coldness to social anxiety and a fear of others' opinions. He pointed out that the "two leading features of my character are sensibility and insensibility." His mind, "though fraught with sensibility, and occasionally ardent and enthusiastic, is perhaps in its genuine habits too languid and unimpassioned for successful composition, and stands greatly in need of stimulus and excitement." He represented himself as a "nervous" character, who loses self-possession in scenes that require action, and is overwhelmed with a debilitating frightfulness or strong passions: "my heart palpitates, and my fibres tremble; the spring of mental action is suspended."⁴¹ His increasing preoccupation with the "empire of feeling" is expressed in the following letter written after Wollstonecraft's death, where he harshly and indignantly responds to a friend who doubts the sincerity of a compliment Godwin had paid him earlier:

I am sure that I wrote nothing more in my last letter to you than my genuine sentiments, and I gave you credit for the discernment to distinguish between real feeling and unmeaning panegyric. It is, I believe, a part of the English character, to feel that sort of *mauvaise honte*, which prevents men from giving utterance to their sentiments of each other; and two friends \here/ will sometimes hold commerce for years, always talking upon general subjects, and neither assured of the rank he holds with the other. I conceive this to be very vicious. I regard it to be my duty, and I find it fraught with secret pleasure, to tell every man what I think of him, more especially when I find cause for approbation. We all of us, I believe, stand in need of this encouragement. I love these overflowings of the heart, and cannot endure to be always heating, and being heated by my friends, as if they were so many books.⁴²

Here Godwin treats genuine emotional expression as something inevitable and habitual in his behavior—an assumption that obviously surprised his correspondent.

While the appreciation of genuine feeling becomes more and more inte-

40. William Godwin, *St. Leon* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1799) viii–ix.

41. William Godwin, analysis of his own character, miscellaneous notes, 1798, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 228/9.

42. Godwin to ?Anthony Carlisle, 19 Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a), new folio 50–52.

gral to his personality, many of Godwin's letters echo the struggles in Wollstonecraft's writing between affectivity and expression. Yet, as I hope to show by the analysis of these letters, a language of sensibility grows out of the conflict Godwin experiences between writing and blocked expression. Apart from his correspondence with Inchbald, written in the aggressive, distracted language of loss, he repeatedly has to confess—in writing—his inability to write. He asks his friends to send the sad news to other friends and relatives, being unable to do it himself. In one of his letters he complains about the dangers of writing his emotions, which, though tempting, can lead to a frightening mental state:

I wrote several letters on the day succeeding this dreadful, incurable calamity, till I felt myself called upon by every principle of justice and reason to lay down my pen and write no more. The effects that employment produced in me alarmed me. Since that time I have carefully abstained from writing on the subject. I could not however refrain from putting down these few lines to you: but I dare not trust myself to express or dwell upon my feelings.⁴³

Another letter to Mrs. Cotton, a friend of Wollstonecraft's, begins as follows: "Dear Madam,—I cannot write. I have half destroyed myself by writing. It does more mischief than anything else. I must preserve myself, if for no other reason, for the two children."⁴⁴

While writing is destructive, dangerous or even impossible, Godwin mentions a more soothing, even healing form of literary activity: reading, compiling and editing the papers Wollstonecraft left behind. Her papers, personal objects, their common friends, and the children all function as traces of Wollstonecraft, and arouse pleasurable feelings of melancholy:

I have a melancholy pleasure in living in the midst of objects, which have been rendered interesting to me by her presence. I choose to indulge this melancholy. I think I understand something as to the management of my own mind, and know how to cultivate a virtuous melancholy, without indulging it to a dangerous extreme. I am at present employed with the papers she left behind, and compiling some materials for an account of her life. This employment soothes without agitating me.⁴⁵

43. Unaddressed letter, ? Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a).

44. 14 Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a), new folio 48–9; qtd. in Kegan Paul, *Godwin* 1: 280.

45. Godwin to Hugh Skeys, 4 Oct. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a), new folio 55–57.

For Godwin, everything related to his lover leads to the cultivation of the language of loss and melancholy in which he takes pleasure. Feeling inconsolable, and finding his loss “irreparable,”⁴⁶ preserving the other in himself and writing as if he were the other—these are the only activities that alleviate the pain. Perhaps this is the point where Godwin experiences and understands the pleasure that comes from the emotionally charged perception and recollection of objects that Wollstonecraft talks about in her *Letters from Scandinavia*. The act of reading and compiling her papers is a melancholy occupation, yet it is a way of preserving the lost object and not letting it go. The pleasure of melancholy comes from defying the call of reality and counteracting the work of mourning.

It is also significant that such an immersion in melancholy should be intertwined with a painful, yet pleasurable, sensibility. Nine days after Wollstonecraft's death Godwin admits again that there is a pleasurable aspect to his suffering and grief: “I find a pleasure, difficult to be described, in the cultivation of melancholy. It weakens indeed the stoicism in the ordinary awareness of life, but it refines and raises my sensibility” (qtd. in St. Clair 180). Even on the day of Wollstonecraft's death he writes to his friend Holcroft that he does not want to be consoled. And a month later, in October 1797, he writes:

I am still here, in the same situation in which you saw me, surrounded by the children, and all the well-known objects, which, though they talk to me of melancholy, are still dear to me. I love to cherish melancholy. I love to tread *the edge of intellectual danger, and just to keep within the line which every moral and intellectual consideration forbids me to overstep*, and in this indulgence and this vigilance place my present luxury.⁴⁷

This is the language of the borderline condition of melancholy in mourning, which for Godwin results in an increase of sensibility. He produces the impossible, yet possible, language of the inability to mourn: the language of intense grief sliding into extreme pleasure. Everything that the loved one left behind gains new significance relevant to the mourner's loss; they all point to a lack—in the survivor.

There is one document, however, that does not seem to fit within the painful, passionate discourse of his writings from this period. Godwin's diary, a rigorous written testimony of its time, systematically records all the events surrounding Wollstonecraft's childbearing, illness and death. The di-

46. Letter to Thomas Holcroft, 10 Sept. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a), new folio 39; Godwin to Hugh Skeys, 4 Oct. 1797.

47. Godwin to ?Charlotte Smith, 24 Oct. 1797, Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. b. 227/8 (a), new folio 71–73; my emphasis. Qtd. in Kegan Paul, *Godwin* 1: 280–81. Kegan Paul wrongly identifies this correspondent as Mrs Cotton. See Clemit 341.

ary consists of a series of small booklets, in which each page is divided by horizontal red lines into seven narrow parts to be filled in with the events of the day. The historical events of his time are also noted in red ink. All the entries are written in a characteristic business-like, note-taking style, full of abbreviations in order to fit everything into the small space he provided for each entry. Quoted in full, the following diary entries cover the period from three days before the birth of Mary Godwin Shelley to the burial of Mary Wollstonecraft on 15 September 1797:

- Aug. 27. Su. Gould calls: call on Ritson: Mart. [?] dines; adv.
M Hays & Stoddart.
- 28. M. Call on Fuseli & Inchbald; adv. Tattersal: theatre,
Merchant of Venice; –.
- 29. Tu. Barnes calls: walk to Booth's, w. Wt: read, en famille,
Werter, p.127.
- 30. W. Mary, p. 116, R. Fell & Dyson call: dine at Reveley's:
Fenwicks & M. sup: Blenkinsop.
Birth of Mary, 20 minutes after 11 at night.
From 7 to 10 Evesham Buildings.
- 31. Th. Fetch Dr. Poignard: Fordyce calls: in the evening,
Miss G, EJ, M Reveley & Tuthill: JG calls
- Sept. 1. F. Call on Robinson, Nicholson, Carlisle & M Hays:
Johnson calls.
Favourable appearances.
- 2 Sa. Carlisle, Montagu, Tuthill, Dyson & M Reveley call:
worse in the evening. Nurse
- 3. Su. Montagu breakfasts: call with him on Wolcot n, Opie
n, Lawrence n & Dr Thompson n. Shivering fits: Fordyce
twice. Poignard, Blenkinsop & nurse.⁴⁸
- 4. M. Blenkinsop: puppies. Johnson & Nicholsons call: Mas-
ters calls. E Fenwick & M sleep. M Hays calls.
Pichegru arrested
- 5. Tu. Fordyce twice: Clarke in the afternoon. M Hays calls.

48. The small "n" after names appears in the manuscript but I have not seen it transcribed in scholarship before. It probably means "not at home" (confirmed by William St. Clair, oral communication, January 2007).

6. W. Carlisle calls: wine diet: Carlisle from Brixton: Miss Jones sleeps.
7. Th. Barry, Reveley & Lowry call: dying in the evening.
8. F. Opie & Tuthill call. Idea of Death: solemn communication. Barry: Miss G sleeps.
9. Sa. Talk to her of Fanny & Mary: Barry.
10. Su. 20 minutes before 8.

Montagu, M, Miss G and Fanny dine.
11. M. Carlisle calls: Montagu at tea.
12. Tu. Johnson and Ht n call: Montagu and Miss G at tea.
13. W. Ht n, Opie n & Dyson n call: Miss G removes: Fenwicks sup from Fordyce: write to Inchbald, Tuthill & Parr.
14. Th. Write to Mrs Cotton. Barbauld on Devotion, p. 22. Fenwicks and PV sup.
15. F. Funeral: M's lodgings. Write to Carlisle. Purley, p. 50. Fawcet dines; adv. Fenwicks.⁴⁹

These entries were written at the time of emotional intensity and personal tragedy, and yet, the language can hardly be called a language of feeling. The entries record the steps through which a scene of childbirth gradually turns into a scene of illness, dying and death.

When discussing Godwin's diary and Wollstonecraft's death, scholars tend to point out the curious three lines indicating Wollstonecraft's death on 10 September. This diary entry, however, is often misquoted, and is never followed beyond the telling horizontal lines. Charles Kegan Paul, for instance, fully cites the diary entry from the childbirth on 30 August up to the three lines. As he observes, "the hand-writing never falters, the same precise abbreviations and stops are used, till the last, when occur the only lines and dashes which break the exceeding neatness of the book" (*Godwin* 1: 274). Importantly, however, in the original manuscript the entry for 10 September does not stop at the three lines, but is followed after Wollstonecraft's death in the morning by the mention of a dinner with

49. Abinger Collection, Bodleian Library, Dep. e. 202 (No. 8). I noticed several errors in Kegan Paul's transcription of the diary (*Godwin* 1: 274–75). Here I cite the entries as I believe they appear in the original manuscript. Kegan Paul's citation is from 30 August to 10 September, but his last entry is incomplete.

Montagu, M, Miss G and little Fanny in the evening. The entries related to his wife, except for the one death entry, are not in any way different from other entries on sundry subjects, such as visits, meetings or dinners, which continue after her death like before. The diary does not seem to suggest that Wollstonecraft's childbirth, illness and dying would have been Godwin's sole preoccupation. It is only her death, blanked out of verbal representation, that can momentarily disrupt the almost compulsively strict pattern. The diary-machine—as a techné—soon recovers its usual mode of recording Godwin's daily regime. On the night of her death, a dinner entry is already squeezed into the same rubric, and the following day, on the other side of the red dividing line, visits of friends are recorded. Although they are visits of condolence, their representation is not any different from that of social events and friendly outings.

Despite the fact that most of these entries do not differ from those written at other times of his life, the slip into the non-verbal makes us read them as a representation of what Godwin calls in the *Memoirs* a state of anxiety and grief, verging on madness. The entries themselves do not contain any verbal expression of emotion. "Favourable appearances," Wollstonecraft's getting worse, and the phases of her dying are conveyed in a detached language, which, written while the events and feelings were taking place, is still the immediate verbalization of feeling. Only the quick phrases and abbreviated words stand there as the channel for happiness, hope, fear, love, anxiety and grief. At the change from uncertainty to certainty, from hope to grief, from parental happiness to Wollstonecraft's illness and death, Godwin's writing does not undergo any transformation but, on the day of her death, it simply slips from the verbal into the non-verbal. Like Wollstonecraft in her *Letters to Imlay*—so overwhelmed with strong feeling at her lover's absences that she cannot write—Godwin's words are silenced too. A reader well-versed in sentimental writing will know instantly what this could mean. As words fail to convey uncontrollable feelings, they need to be channeled into graphic expression. Intense feeling is marked only by the graphic slip into aposiopesis, a favorite trope of the novel of sensibility. Thus, with the appearance of Godwin's three lines, the meaning of the seemingly affectless presentation becomes entirely dependent on the act of reading; only knowledge of the context and of Godwin's account in the *Memoirs* allows us to interpret it as the language of powerful emotion. It is the act of reading that turns this form of writing—unstoppable and insensible—into a writing of sensibility. This act of reading—dependent on context, intentions, and in any case on the reader's projections—considers it as the production of a "heart of stone" or a heart of feeling.

At the meeting point of mourning and melancholia, it is surprising to have symbolization at all, especially the often detached, affect-denying,

documentary-like tone of the diary. Thus, Godwin's mode of writing calls attention to the conceptualization of mourning and melancholia in relation to language and signification. In *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva offers an interpretation of depression different from the explanations given by classic psychoanalytic theory (as represented by Freud, Abraham and Klein). Her re-interpretation starts out from the problematic explanation of the affect of sadness in psychoanalysis. Traditionally, she argues, psychoanalytic theory accounts for the ambivalence and heightened superego-functioning in melancholia by the operation of the mechanism of identification. Thus, in melancholia the reproaches against oneself are always implied attacks against the object turned back to the ego, and this is what sadness is an expression of in Freud.⁵⁰

However, as Kristeva points out, these theories do not always hold. In the case of narcissistically depressed individuals, sadness is not a disguised attack against the frustrating and absent other, and sorrow does not conceal the guilt of secretly plotting against the loved and hated object. These people do not consider themselves as wronged, but as afflicted with a fundamental deficiency. The mourning of such melancholic patients does not find a clearly identifiable referent; instead it fixes on an unsymbolizable "Thing"—a point that does not lend itself to signification. Their sadness, she writes, is "the most archaic expression of an unsymbolisable, unnameable narcissistic wound, so precocious that no outside agent (subject or agent) can be used as referent." The question arises for Kristeva: "Is mood a language?" Sadness becomes an expression of something impossible to put into a symbolic form. The mood itself stands for the representation, like a language. Sadness, and all affect, writes Kristeva, is "the psychic representation of energy displacements caused by external or internal traumas." It is pre-sign and pre-language, a form of representation preceding linguistic forms. Affects stand "on the frontier between animality and symbol formation." Grief becomes an early language-substitute, appearing exactly because representation is not possible, and thus acquiring the function of representation (12–13, 21–22).

In Kleinian psychoanalysis, melancholia is typically seen as a problem involving symbolization. The impossibility of symbolizing a loss causes illness by hindering the work of mourning. Adult mourning, argues Melanie Klein, repeats the processes that take place during the infantile "depressive position"—a crucial developmental stage in the baby's early life. During the time of weaning the infant goes through a state that is comparable to mourning, experiencing feelings such as pining for the mother, as well as

50. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 11. See also *SE*, vol. 14: 246–48.

hatred, triumph, idealization and a desire for reparation. According to Klein, these feelings are reactivated in every experience of mourning and depression in later life. Julia Kristeva writes that during early infantile development, affect arises because there are no available means for symbolic expression yet. Only by learning language, i.e., by creating a symbolic referent to what is lacking, is it possible to overcome the sadness of the depressive position. In cases of adult depression, symbolization (in the form of literary representation) can also function as a therapeutic device. Thus, both for the infant and the adult it is through symbols that the work of mourning and the separation from the lost object can successfully take place.⁵¹

Godwin's case, however, appears to stage a conflict between producing language and separating from the object in the process of mourning. For Godwin, it is exactly the act of writing that functions as the means by which the incorporation of melancholia is performed. The turning of the self into the object takes place through writing—a writing that insists on keeping the object alive and not letting it go. It is the act of writing that brings about the blockage to mourning and becomes the very medium of melancholia. The verbal products composed by Godwin under the immediate influence of grief (his letters, diary entries and the *Memoirs*) threaten their writer by their destructiveness, producing a vehicle for the ambivalence characteristic of melancholia and becoming a channel for feelings of love, hate, triumph and aggression. These writings turn the symbolic into the realm where the problem and the impossibility of symbolization are paradoxically expressed. Godwin's writing will thus be the very realization of the structures and affects of melancholia that simultaneously tie into and hinder the work of mourning.

Memoirs: the Crypt of Writing

Godwin's development of a language of affectivity and sensibility is the result of his attempt to come to terms with and define what he lost with the death of Wollstonecraft. Through his writings, Godwin aims to salvage and integrate into his work the affective and intellectual qualities he attributed to his wife. In the *Memoirs*, he claims that the loss is personal and private; it

51. Kristeva 24. For Klein's argument on mourning and depression see Melanie Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States" (1935), in *Love, Guilt and Reparation* 262–89 and "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" 344–69. For the role of symbol formation in Kleinian psychoanalysis, see Melanie Klein, "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego" (1930), in *Love, Guilt and Reparation* 219–32; Hanna Segal, "Notes on Symbol Formation" (1957), *The Work of Hanna Segal: A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice* (New York and London: Jason Aronson, 1981) 49–65; Juliet Mitchell, Introduction, in *The Selected Melanie Klein* (New York: Free P, 1986) 9–32.

is the loss of something related to him, within him. As he defines its most important aspect at the end of the *Memoirs*: it is “the improvement that I have for ever lost” (*Memoirs* 272). This is the influence of a certain intellectual-affective capacity Godwin himself did not have, and what was granted to him by her presence. As Godwin sees it, their creative minds were incomplete without each other, lacking qualities that were made available only by the other’s presence. While Godwin had powers to reflect on topics from all perspectives and a capacity for constant re-evaluation and re-examination, he did not have an “intuitive perception of intellectual beauty” (*Memoirs* 272). This is precisely where Godwin sees Wollstonecraft’s strength and importance. Godwin’s Wollstonecraft could form right judgments by speculation only, and she accepted and rejected opinions spontaneously, without much reasoning, yet with soundness. Her strong impulsiveness and intuitiveness were capable of influencing other minds by bringing about an unmediated communication between them. Her intellect differed from Godwin’s in that it perceived instantaneously by forming quick impressions, while the other learned by degree. As Godwin describes it:

In a robust and unwavering judgment of this sort, there is a kind of witchcraft; when it decides justly, it produces a responsive vibration in every ingenuous mind. In this sense, my oscillation and scepticism were fixed by her boldness. When a true opinion emanated in this way from another mind, the conviction produced in my own assumed a similar character, instantaneous and firm. . . . This light was lent to me for a very short period, and is now extinguished for ever! (*Memoirs* 273)

The powers of her intellect and her spontaneity of judgment, as well as her religion and philosophy, were “the pure result of feeling and taste” (*Memoirs* 272). What is lost with her is this “light” with its capacity to create a sympathetic contact between minds. It is an affective potential that also relates to the intellect—an affect with direct access to the mind and a power to exceed boundaries between subjectivities. This affect could function as a form of communication, replacing—and thus becoming—language.⁵²

One will find similar conceptualizations of feeling in Wollstonecraft’s writing. In her letters to Godwin she describes affection as a kind of feeling that reaches the intellect, lending it the capacity to function like language.

52. This instantaneous affective communication resurfaces in Godwin’s 1833 novel, *Deloraine*, between Deloraine and his much loved—and much idealized—first wife, Emilia. Emilia dies of a fever before the birth of her second child. Many aspects of this sentimental relationship appear to recall the Godwin-Wollstonecraft correspondence and Godwin’s *Memoirs*. See Godwin, *Deloraine*, 3 vols. (London, 1833), esp. vol. 1, chapter 2.

Emotion in her discourse often mingles intellectual appreciation with sexual desire: "I should have liked to have dined with you to day, after finishing your essays—that my eyes, and lips, I do not exactly mean my voice, might have told you that they had raised you in my esteem. What a cold word! I would say love, if you will promise not to dispute about its propriety, *when I want to express an increasing affection, founded on a more intimate acquaintance with your heart and understanding.*"⁵³ This affection is communicated by the sexual body, without words. Masked as esteem, it is love based on intellectual, as well as emotional, knowledge of the other. In another letter, sexual feeling is inseparable from the act of thinking, and is aroused by means of an internalized Godwin: "let me assure you that you are not only in my heart, but my veins, this morning. I turn from you half abashed—yet you haunt me, and some look, word or touch thrills through my whole frame—yes, at the very moment when I am labouring to think of something, if not somebody, else. Get ye gone Intruder!"⁵⁴ Here the image of the other connects thought and feeling, mind and body. This image haunts and inhabits the self almost parasitically, and, attached to its affects, behaves as its constitutive part.

Godwin may well have learnt from Wollstonecraft the importance of incorporating within one's self an emotionally invested object. In *Letters from Scandinavia* Wollstonecraft outlines the way in which memories are inscribed into the mind by way of emotionally charged sensations and impressions:

When a warm heart has received strong impressions, they are not to be effaced, Emotions become sentiments; and the imagination renders even transient sensations permanent, by fondly retracting them. I cannot, without a thrill of delight, recollect views I have seen, which are not to be forgotten,—nor looks I have felt in every nerve which I shall never more meet. The grave has closed over a dear friend, the friend of my youth; still she is present with me, and I hear her soft voice warbling as I stray over the heath. Fate has separated me from another, the fire of whose eyes, tempered by infantile tenderness, still warms my breast; even when gazing on these tremendous cliffs, sublime emotions absorb my soul. (*Short Residence* 99–100)

Sentiments are produced in a quick and sympathetic response to what is sublime and beautiful in nature. "Nature," writes Wollstonecraft, "is the nurse of sentiment," and "the harmonised soul sinks into melancholy, or rises to extasy, just as the chords are touched" . . . (*Short Residence* 99). Na-

53. 4 Oct. 1796, *Godwin and Mary*, letter 53 (41); my emphases.

54. 13 Sept. 1796, *Godwin and Mary*, letter 36 (33).

ture inspires the process of recollection, and remembering a past experience, person or object will once again induce the emotion through which it was first inscribed into the imagination. Such sentiments and impressions are so strong that they can be perfectly reactivated through the work of memory, even after the death of those objects who left these impressions in the soul. Thus, by carefully retracting and internalizing every experience the soul can contain in the form of recoverable marks all its losses and their affective components. Feeling and sentiment are therefore important means of retaining and preserving in the self one's dead, lost and otherwise irrecoverable objects—a process one might want to resort to when trying to counteract the pain of loss.

The image of Wollstonecraft created in Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is indeed an image inscribed and produced through emotion. As I have been arguing in this paper, this image emerges from the salvaging of a loved object through the process of identification. During this process however, the object has gone through an interesting transformation. In the *Memoirs*, Wollstonecraft is presented as a self-sacrificing woman of feeling. As Godwin portrays her: "the sensibility of her heart would not suffer her to rest in solitary gratifications" (*Memoirs* 214). Here even Wollstonecraft's radical and feminist *Rights of Woman* is seen as integral to a special form of sensibility. While the book, according to Godwin, sometimes testifies to a "rigid, and somewhat amazonian temper," it also possesses a "trembling delicacy of sentiment, which would have done honour to a poet" (*Memoirs* 231–32). The sensibility Godwin attributes to her is the pathological and often dangerous excess of feeling that contributes to the misery and death of so many sentimental heroes, from Fielding's David Simple to Mackenzie's man of feeling and Goethe's Werther. In Godwin's melancholy salvaging, Wollstonecraft is seen as a "female Werther" whose mind seems "almost of too fine a texture to encounter the vicissitudes of human affairs, to whom pleasure is transport, and disappointment is agony indescribable" (*Memoirs* 242). In other words, her pleasure and pain are the products of her intense emotional susceptibility.

As we have seen earlier, the actual outcome of the publication of Godwin's *Memoirs* was very different from the intended preservation and affective inscription of a loved and valued person. Thus, while Godwin's writings were meant to function as a memorial, they contributed instead to Wollstonecraft's "burial" and erasure—acting more like a tomb. His portrayal of Wollstonecraft as a sentimental heroine who possessed an emotionality that Godwin claimed to lack thus fills for him a narcissistic gap, where the desired qualities lodged exclusively in the other are carefully distilled. Godwin's writings from this period do not dwell on his feelings, as

Wollstonecraft urged him to do, and they do not make her “a desk ‘to write upon,’” either. These are writings that stand for and behave as feelings, repeating the operation and production of feelings that are seen in Wollstonecraft’s writing as a form of re-inscription. Recovering her sensibility is also a process of losing—losing her as something else, while retaining what Godwin fell in love with. At the end of the *Memoirs*, even the inscription engraved on her tombstone is reproduced:

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin,
 Author of
 A Vindication
 Of the Rights of Woman:
 Born 27 April 1759:
 Died 10 September, 1797.

By repeating the engraving, the *Memoirs* function as an epitaph, memorializing Wollstonecraft as the dead author of the *Rights of Woman*. Therefore, the *Memoirs* themselves are a form of engraving, burying her in the tomb of sensibility, yet marking this with the inscription of feminist authorship. Her identity and her feminism are thus carved into the tombstone of Godwin’s affectivity, his written memorial.

In *The Shell and the Kernel*, the psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok present cases of pathological mourning, in which the work of mourning is blocked or otherwise made impossible. When an object loss cannot be acknowledged as such, an incorporation of the lost object takes place, forming what they call a “psychic crypt” or tomb inside the ego. The loss is “buried alive in the crypt as a full-fledged person,” creating a “whole world of unconscious fantasy . . . that leads to its own separate and concealed existence.” The “ghost of the crypt comes back to haunt the cemetery guard, giving him strange and incomprehensible signals, making him perform bizarre acts, or subjecting him to unexpected sensations.” Thus, such patients often act out the desires and motivations of the object they carry inside them, aiming to satisfy the unmourned objects with which they have identified. Abraham and Torok call this pathological form of mourning “melancholy mourning.” This involves a paradoxically reverse scenario, where it is the lost object who is grieving the loss of the mourner. It is this suffering, loving, dejected phantom object—which is “simply ‘crazy’ about the melancholic”—that the mourner identifies with.⁵⁵ In Godwin’s case, however, something different takes place. While

55. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed., trans., and intro., Nicholas T. Rand (1987; Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1994) 1: 130, 136–37, see also 125–38.

the loved object is over-invested at the time of its sudden and premature loss and the ego is dependent on it, the loss does get acknowledged and acted out—in writing, which writing is transformed by the presence of the object. Unlike the illness of mourning described by Abraham and Torok, Godwin's case is marked by the presence of symbolization, but only to act out the process of melancholic incorporation. Symbolization paradoxically becomes the medium for the inability to mourn. Thus, we might say, it is not the psyche, but the writing that becomes the crypt.

Mary Wollstonecraft's loss provided Godwin with an ever-recurring motif that would surface in his writing for the rest of his life. In his later fiction, however, the "crypt," so to say, is opened up, and Godwin becomes rather critical of his earlier sentimentalization of Wollstonecraft. *Fleetwood, or the New Man of Feeling* (1805) and *Mandeville: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century* (1817) are both stories about the psychology of misreading or misrepresenting woman. *Fleetwood* is a guilt-ridden exposure of the self-centeredness underlying the eponymous protagonist's jealousy, ambivalence, and cruelty toward his devoted but melancholy wife, Mary. *Mandeville* exposes a pathological mind trapped in its own self-enclosed world and tormented by bad feelings. Mandeville sentimentalizes his sister, Henrietta, into an epitome of sympathetic philanthropy, but his pathology is revealed in the huge discrepancy between his own interpretation of the events of his life and the perspective of other characters. The figure of the melancholy mourner surfaces in the character of Mandeville's uncle, Audley Mandeville, whose extreme sensibility is caused by the loss of his lover—a blow he never quite recovers from. Godwin's literary working-through continues even as late as *Deloraine* (1833)—a novel that reflects on the process of idealizing and burying woman.⁵⁶

On the basis of Godwin's case I have been arguing that symbolization, instead of bringing about the work of mourning can, in some cases, turn into its obstacle and become a means of maintaining the pathological state of melancholia. What is the importance of such a psychoanalytic argument for the study of literature—or any form of writing? What does it mean that a script can be a crypt: a form of melancholia that entombs another into the writer's self and text? As Godwin's example of 1797 shows, even in contexts as distant from psychoanalysis as the eighteenth century, emotions hide complex processes of identification, disturbing the boundaries of the self and restructuring, transforming, and dividing subjectivity. Such a crisis of subjectivity can have far-reaching consequences regarding the ethical

56. I am grateful to Tilottama Rajan for drawing my attention to Godwin's later novels in this context.

implications of reading and authorship. Who will claim responsibility and a right to authorship when a text, as Inchbald pointed out, uses the language of grief? If the troubling emotions of melancholy mourning transform subjectivity into a subject-in-process—into a self turning into the other—who is writing Godwin's angry and revengeful letters, his affectless, "stone-hearted" diary, or the *Memoirs* that ruined Wollstonecraft's reputation? Is there really an author, a responsible self behind the long period of resistance to Wollstonecraft's work and feminist ideas?

Even if one leaves these questions open, it is enough to say that a discourse of sensibility, emerging out of feelings that disrupt and divide the self, necessarily raises an ethical concern. The pleasurable pain of Godwin's cherished melancholia might have to do with unconsciously entering a problematic subjecthood in which the responsibilities and burdens of an authorial self are lifted. Out of the experience of strong emotions emerges a form of writing in which authorship is blurred and responsibility suspended. I believe that it is here, in the disrupting identificatory processes built into its discourse, that we can find the seductive—and for the period, dangerous—potential of reading the behavior, ideology and novels of sensibility. The "heart of stone" and the heart of feeling can speak the same language, after all.

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