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Article abstract

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Abstract
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Biographical Note
Peter Melville is Associate Professor at the University of Winnipeg where he specializes in Romanticism, Critical and Cultural Theory, and Fantasy Fiction. He is author of *Romantic Hospitality and the Resistance to Accommodation* (2007) and various articles published in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Studies in the Fantastic*, *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, *European Romantic Review*, *SEL: Studies in English Literature*, *Mosiac*, and *The Dalhousie Review*.

1. In his first two major novels, *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1799), William Godwin emphasizes the sense of alienation and the desire to seek refuge that attend what I have elsewhere called his protagonists' experiences of being "made strange" in the eyes of the state (336). The omission of Godwin's original Preface from the first edition of *Caleb Williams* reveals his publisher's real fear of such experiences. A note added to the novel's second edition (1795) explains, "[t]error was the order of the day; and it was feared that even the humble novelist might be shown to be constructively a traitor" (280n). Specifically, Godwin's publisher worried that *Caleb Williams*' twofold purpose, outlined in the original Preface, might be deemed too radical by English authorities: first, to communicate to the general public the extent to which "the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society;" and second, "to comprehend . . . a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man" (*Caleb* 279). According to Nicolle Jordan, *Caleb Williams* accomplishes these aims by illustrating how public opinion is manufactured and how it "stymies individual integrity and leads to the gross miscarriage of justice" (244). In both *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* these related processes also compel the would-be transgressor to identify with and seek refuge in the strange and the abject; whereas Caleb mingles with thieves disguised as an abject social outcast, Reginald de St Leon's alchemical secret estranges him from his wife and from his children. Neither Caleb nor Reginald initially welcomes estrangement, yet it productively enables each of them to confront his own internal strangeness and produces a moment of "profound self-consciousness" (Melville 336).

2. As Gary Kelly points out, *Fleetwood; or the New Man of Feeling* (1805) differs from *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon* inasmuch as it adopts new narrative interests and marks "the metamorphosis of English Jacobin fiction into English Romantic fiction" (238). In terms of generic dissimilarity, Gary Handwerk notes that *Fleetwood* contains nothing like "the suspense-driven plot" or "Gothic machinery" of Godwin's first two novels, but is instead "presented to the reading public as straightforward realistic fiction" (376). The story, writes Godwin in the Preface of the novel's first edition, "consists of such adventures, as 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" (13). Given these shifts in focus and narrative discourse, it is not surprising that *Fleetwood*'s figures of refuge work quite differently than those in *St. Leon* or *Caleb Williams*. Rather than seeking

refuge from persecution in the strange and the abject like Reginald and Caleb, Casimir Fleetwood retains an abiding desire for refuge from himself, from the abject core of his own misanthropy. His is likewise a narrative of emerging self-consciousness, but self-awareness is not gained through mimicry or through identification with the other. Rather, it comes on the heels of a long and tragic history of turning *from* the other in whose face Fleetwood persistently witnesses the distorted reflections of his own depravity and self-disgust. It is not until a "favourable crisis" occurs in the novel's much discussed wax-figure scene (*Fleetwood* 265), in which Fleetwood constructs and then savagely destroys life-size models of his wife, her supposed lover Kenrick, and his own son, that Fleetwood experiences a profoundly debilitating, albeit transformative, moment of abjection from which he purportedly emerges a different man of feeling altogether.

3. What remains unclear by the end of the novel is whether newfound awareness or acceptance of self leads to a reformed relation with the other, or whether it merely enables Fleetwood to tell his story in an openly confessional mode. For as Tilottama Rajan and others have observed, Fleetwood's narrative ultimately fails to register any emotional life or change in his wife Mary beyond her final offer of forgiveness (Rajan 122), from which Fleetwood promptly turns in order to acknowledge, and prove to the reader, the extraordinary depths of his own "remorse" (*Fleetwood* 290). This final turn from other to self—or from other to reader, as the case may be—calls to mind Mona Scheuermann's suspicion that Fleetwood "never learns to go beyond his egotism, to adjust himself to another human being" (19). Does Fleetwood's retreat into writing and self-reflection, in other words, facilitate or foreclose a reciprocal engagement with the other? I contend that his failure to envision and represent such a relation with his wife betrays his final inability to rise above the misogyny he unflinchingly recounts and condemns throughout his retrospective tale. In this respect, Fleetwood's narcissism anticipates the kind of dangerous male egotism that Mary Shelley, Godwin's daughter, thoroughly critiques in *Frankenstein*, a novel whose structural and thematic resemblances to *Fleetwood*, I suggest, have gone largely unappreciated in Romantic criticism.

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4. By his own account, Fleetwood comes by his vexed history with others naturally, as it were. Although "[m]y father loved me extremely," he writes in the opening moments of the novel, "he

was also enamoured of solitude" (17). Left alone to roam the "mountains and precipices," "roaring" oceans and "dashing" waterfalls of North Wales, the young Fleetwood gains what he calls a "full enjoyment of the beauties of nature" (17), but it comes at the cost of an extensive and varied experience with social intercourse. It is, in the words of David O'Shaughnessy, an upbringing that utterly fails to "prepare him for interaction with others" (143). O'Shaughnessy is by no means alone in assessing this failure. It has become a commonplace in the novel's critical legacy, due in large part to the work of Kelly and Handwerk, to frame Fleetwood's upbringing in terms of Godwin's ambivalent embrace of Rousseau and romantic thought. In a remarkably Wordsworthian passage, for instance, Fleetwood draws the pastoralizing aesthetic of romantic subjectivity to its objectifying, egotistical conclusion: "I gazed upon the populous haunts of men as objects that pleasingly diversified my landscape; but without the desire to behold them in nearer view" (18). Maintaining this kind of sterilized distance from the "jarring passions" of other men, the young, reclusive Fleetwood resembles the older Rousseau who, like Fleetwood, found his truest friendship in his dog Turc (the young Fleetwood's "only companion" was his dog Chilo [18]) and who likewise preferred good books to good company.[1]

5. The isolation that Fleetwood fondly recalls from childhood forms a kind of mythic place of refuge to which he intermittently attempts to return throughout his recounted life. This place of refuge is mythic in the sense that it is a figure of discourse "artificially reconstruct[ed]" in hindsight (van Leeuwan). Even Fleetwood has trouble perceiving his years spent in Merionethshire as anything more than the "illusions of a magic lanthorn" or a "delightful dream" (*Fleetwood* 47). At once the projected origin and destination of his desire, Fleetwood's solitary existence as an adolescent consistently circumscribes and gives shape to his expressions of misanthropy. When he leaves his father's estate in Merionethshire to attend university at Oxford (his most heartfelt adieu being reserved not for his father or childhood tutor but for Chilo the dog), he quickly falls in with a mischievous group of fellow students whose behavior, though abhorrent to him, he begins to emulate. "It is surprising," he admits, "how soon I became like to the persons I had so lately wondered at and despised" (31). "Though I had assumed an impudent and licentious character," he says again if only for emphasis, "I despised it" (33). What he calls "the Fleetwood of Merionethshire" and "the Fleetwood of the university" (31) form a demoralizing internal contrast that finds external expression in a fear of similitude: he hates himself for resembling the other and the other for reflecting his transformation. Misanthropy and self-loathing converge as images

of Wales and Merionethshire return to reproach Fleetwood like the conscience of a sinner: "Oh, Cader Idris!" he exclaims, "oh, genius of the mountains! oh, divinity, that president over the constellations, the meteors, and the ocean! how was your pupil fallen! how the awestruck and ardent worshipper of God, who shrouds himself in darkness, changed into the drinker and debauchee" (32).

6. One particular episode from his Oxford days is worth noting, for it not only illustrates the cruel sort of pranks in which Fleetwood participated, but it also anticipates (in the form of parody) Fleetwood's most devastating flaw—namely, his inability to cope with the uncertainty of knowing another person's consciousness. When an unsuspecting classmate by the name of Withers is manipulated into showing one of Fleetwood's colleagues a full-length tragedy he has written based on the Fifth Labor of Hercules (i.e., the cleaning of Augeas' hopelessly dung-ridden stables), the poem quickly becomes "a source of inexhaustible amusement" to what Fleetwood calls "the wits and satirists of our college" (34). Rather than openly ridicule Withers for incongruously combining "solemn phrases" and "lofty ornaments" to express "the filth and slime which constituted the foundation of the piece," his disingenuous colleagues entice the poet to recite the poem to them in person so they might take "more exquisite gratification" in Withers' humiliation (35). Showering Withers with false praise, the gullible boy's audience struggles to suppress their derisive enjoyment of the poem's ludicrous language and design. Withers' reading concludes in a riotous manner as his tormentors coax their inebriated victim to "mount upon a table, that he might recite some of the most brilliant passages with great effect," while they crown him with "wreaths of parsley" and anoint him with "libations of wine" (41). Godwin, it turns out, adds to the boy's embarrassment, as A. A. Markley observes, in providing a lengthy passage from the ridiculous poem so that his "classically informed readers" might also "join in the laughter at the pathetic Withers' expense" (par. 22).

7. Recalling the wretched affair, Fleetwood laments that his remorseless classmates come to the conclusion that they had "not yet extracted amusement enough from so rich a subject as the unhappy Withers" (41). Accordingly, Morrison, the ringleader of the group, convinces the boy that the headmaster of the college has somehow "got hold of the name Withers" in relation to the previous evening's hijinks and has summoned him for chastisement (42). Withers is escorted later that day to a room in which Morrison and his "fellow-collegians" have constructed an elaborate

puppet "dressed up in a gown and wig similar to those of the master" (42). The puppet is "so contrived as to have its hands and head capable of being moved by one of the confederates, who unseen held the springs for that purpose" (42). Known throughout the school for his uncanny skills at ventriloquism and mimicry, Morrison provides the headmaster puppet with a voice and mercilessly berates Withers before commanding him to disclose the names of his coconspirators. Utterly fooled by the mechanical simulation of embodied authority before him, Withers refuses to inform on his classmates; but instead of being humbled by his loyalty to them, Morrison and his followers persist in their cruelty and even contrive to have the puppet raise its hand "as if in the intention of striking him" (43). The gesture fills Withers with indignation and in a "moment of insanity" he attacks the puppet—or "machine," as Godwin calls it—reducing it to pieces on the floor (43). The plot thus uncovered, the scene ends as a "long, boisterous, and deafening peal of laughter burst[s] out from every person in the assembly" (43). Intensely mortified and ashamed, Withers is soon after found drowned in the Isis.

8. As Richard Gough Thomas notes, in the brief interval between his encounter with the master-puppet and his suicide, Withers becomes a recluse. "[He] lifted his head no more," recalls Fleetwood; "[h]e could not bear to face any of his fellow-students; those who had not been actors in the plot against him were, he nothing doubted, well acquainted with all that had passed; he shut himself up, as much as possible, in his own apartment" (44). In this respect, Withers' life and experiences prefigure Fleetwood's own narrative trajectory. Like Fleetwood, Withers is "brought up in solitude under the sole direction of his father" (33); he enters the university as an impressionable young man unskilled in the manners of social intercourse; he becomes the target of another's vindictive machinations, and turns to misanthropy and despair as a result. Gough Thomas suggests that Morrison (Withers' principal tormentor) is Godwin's prototype for Gifford, who in the novel's third volume manipulates Fleetwood into believing fabricated stories of his wife's infidelity. Like Withers, Fleetwood responds to such humiliation by secluding himself in a locked apartment where, in a similar moment of insanity, he has his own disorienting and explosively violent encounter with a puppet that seems to come to life before his very eyes. I will return to consider this later scene in greater detail. Suffice it to say for now that if these narrative similarities between Withers and Fleetwood reveal the latter's failure to learn "the lesson of [Withers'] extreme case" (Markley par. 22), then the repetition of the novel's animated puppet scenes also yields a model of subjectivity so radically narcissistic that it is unable to distinguish

meaningfully between another human being and an inanimate object that merely mimics the outward appearance of the human—that is, between the signified and the signifier of human consciousness. For Fleetwood, the distance that such narcissism imposes between self and other precipitates a series of tragic social interactions that are riddled and ruined by persistent suspicion and mistrust.

9. Upon his departure from Oxford, Fleetwood does not return to the restorative embrace of his paternal estate in Wales, but is instead ordered by his father to "make a tour of other countries for [his] improvement" (*Fleetwood* 46). Representing Godwin's take on "the dangers and possible benefits of the Grand Tour" (Tysdhal 111), Fleetwood's tour of France and Switzerland results in a series of failed attempts to find refuge in personal relationships that bolster his misanthropic disposition and trigger incipient feelings of misogyny. The first of these attempts involves the Marchioness, a "finished coquette" of the French court to whom Fleetwood, inexperienced in the ways of Parisian courtiers, forms an exceedingly strong emotional attachment (53). His time at Oxford having "killed the purity and delicacy of [his] moral discrimination," Fleetwood is hopelessly drawn to the Marchioness's "inexpressible" charm, while also "tormented" by "her flights and uncertainty" (52, 54). Her mind, he complains, "resembled in its constitution the sleek and slippery form of the eel; it was never at rest, and, when I thought I possessed it most securely, it escaped me with the rapidgity of lightning" (54). When he discovers, through the intelligence of his friend Sir Charles Gleed, that the manipulative Marchioness is no more partial to him than she is to other men of "*bonnes fortunes*," the devastated Fleetwood does what he claims the "people of fashion in Paris were accustomed to do": "I consoled myself for the infidelities of one mistress by devoting my attentions to another" (52, 60). Though "exceedingly unlike" the Marchioness, his new paramour, the Countess de B——, leaves him feeling similarly betrayed: "I trusted; I was deceived; my eyes were opened; I suffered all the torments of disappointment and despair" (60, 62). For a man whose "muscles were not formed to a smile" (31), these failed attempts to find meaning and comfort in female companionship further fuel his hatred of men in general and his prejudice toward women in particular. "The distress I suffered from the inconstancy of the Countess de B——," he says, "taught me to abhor and revile her sex" (63). And yet, his "initiation" into "the polluted tracts of adulterous commerce" leads him not only to despise and vilify the other along such indefensibly sexist lines (65); it also compels him, once again, to conflate misanthropy (or in this case misogyny) with feelings of self-disgust. "My soul

was in tumults," he laments; "I loathed existence and the sight of day; and my self-love was inexpressibly shocked to think that I could have suffered so gross a delusion" (64). Witnessing his own abject debasement in the face of the other, Fleetwood turns from society to seek recompense in a return to nature, wherein he discovers another, more self-serving and indulgent set of egotistical projections: "I fled from Paris," he writes, "and sought the craggy and inhospitable Alps; the most frightful scenes alone had power to please, and produced in me a kind of malicious and desperate sentiment of satisfaction" (64).

10. Fleetwood's flight to the Alps calls to mind the Alpine retreat taken by his literary descendant Victor Frankenstein, who similarly seeks solace from grief and self-loathing in the "sublime and magnificent" environs of the Arve and the valley of Chamounix (Shelley 122). However, not unlike Victor, who almost immediately encounters the creature (his monstrous other) during a solitary sojourn to the glacier summit of Montanvert, Fleetwood is also unable to escape the troubling face of the other while passing through the Alps:

> [T]he instant I plunged into solitude and the retreats of uncultivated nature, my reveries became endless and inexhaustible. When I turned round a point of the rock, when I gazed intently, yet with an absent mind, upon the deep shadows of the mountains, visto beyond visto, enveloped in clouds, and where no human form was to be discerned, there the figure of the Countess de B—— flitted before me. (66)

Tormented by uncertainty over his affair with the Countess ("Why had I left her?—Had I left her?—Why had she proved herself dishonorable and unworthy?" [66]), Fleetwood comes to the realization that his affections for the Countess were essentially narcissistic, that he loved not her but an idealized mental projection of his own invention that continues to pursue him through the Alps as an other-to-himself. "There was no such woman," he complains, "It was all a delusion!" (66). Critics of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* insist that Victor and the creature he creates play dopplegänger to the other, that together they represent an instance of "psychological mirroring" that Shelley "borrowed from her father's doubles, Caleb Williams and Falkland" (Mellor 136). Fleetwood's unsettling encounter with the apparition of his *ex-petite amie* in the mountains between France and Switzerland arguably qualifies as another instance of Godwinian doubling that may well have been an inspiration to Shelley's much more famous novel. It suggestively sets the stage, that is, for one of the most dramatic and fantastical moments in *Frankenstein* when the

creature accosts his maker between the "icy and glittering peeks" of Europe and implores Victor to listen to his tale (Shelley 124).

11. What is more, if Fleetwood resembles Victor in this instance, inasmuch as he encounters his othered self in the "inhospitable" Alps, then he also resembles Victor's double—the creature, who returns to Switzerland late in *Frankenstein* to murder Victor's wife Elizabeth and once again take "refuge in the Alps" (Shelley 222). When Victor discovers his wife's lifeless body and espies the creature's "hideous" figure outside the windows of his rented mountain house, his eyes are drawn to the creature's "grin" which jeers at him in the moonlight (218). This is a grin to which Shelley draws the reader's attention at two earlier distinctive moments in *Frankenstein*. Victor first encounters it when startled from the dream he has in which Elizabeth dies in his embrace and is transformed into "the corpse of [his] dead mother" (86). He awakens to find the creature staring at him through the curtain of his bed and "mutter[ing] some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks" (86). Victor notices the grin a second time while assembling the body of the monster's female companion: "I saw by the light of the moon the daemon at the casement. A ghastly grin wrinkled his lips as he gazed on me" (190-1). The grin is ghastly enough that it inspires Victor to destroy the unfinished female body in a fit of madness. The point to be made about the creature's grin is that it consistently "wrinkles" the features of his reconstructed face. It places a "ghastly" strain on his skin, which, as Victor elsewhere points out, "scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath" (85). There is, in other words, something incongruous or unnatural about the creature's grin, as though like Fleetwood the creature's "muscles were [also] not formed to a smile" (*Fleetwood* 31). This similarity between Fleetwood and Shelley's creature suggests that their faces are somehow not built for human sociability. While the "horrid contrast" of the creature's "lustrous" black hair, "pearly" white teeth, "watery" eyes, and "shrivelled" complexion inspires abject terror in the people he meets (Shelley 85); Fleetwood's physical (or physiognomic) inability to form a smile in "convivial joviality" (*Fleetwood* 31)—presumably conditioned by years spent in youthful solitude—predisposes him toward failed attempts at social interaction and feelings of misanthropy. It is hardly surprising, for instance, that a man without a natural inclination to express non-verbal signs of friendliness and good cheer would find little satisfaction in the homosocial and heterosexual commerce of Oxford and Paris.[2]

12. Shortly after fleeing French society for the Alps, Fleetwood descends into Switzerland to seek out his father's childhood companion M. Ruffigny, "whose protection and counsels [his] father had so emphatically recommended" (66). "After having for some time pursued a serpentine path," Fleetwood hopes that with Ruffigny's guidance he can correct his course and return to a life of honest virtue (67). Even as Ruffigny welcomes him with enthusiasm ("[t]he very image of Ambrose Fleetwood, his grandfather!"), Fleetwood is made to feel "embarrassed with the recollection of affairs and transactions in Paris" (67, 68). Over the course of his stay, he draws much comfort from the attentions of his venerable host and from the surrounding beauties of the Ursesen valley. Fleetwood's recollection of his time spent with Ruffigny nevertheless reveals an underlying irritability with the paternalistic devotions of his Swiss mentor. Handwerk goes so far as to argue that Ruffigny's calculated efforts to improve Fleetwood's moral development reflects Godwin's misgivings over the dishonesty employed by a Rousseauvian system of education that is reducible to what Godwin in *The Enquirer* calls "a series of tricks, a puppet-show exhibition, of which the master holds the wires, and the scholar is never to suspect in what manner they are moved" (quoted in Handwerk 388). Fleetwood senses Ruffigny's emotional manipulation, for instance, in the "beautifully orchestrated" Lake Uri scene (Handwerk 392), where his mentor informs him of his father's death amidst scenery textured by the history of William Tell's great heroism. He is likewise unsettled by Ruffigny's equally manipulative chastisement of his licentious exploits upon their return to London. In light of such feelings, Fleetwood begins to suspect that Ruffigny has neither "treated [him] as an equal nor respected [him] as an adult" (Handwerk 393).

13. Whereas Handwerk insists that Fleetwood's "latent mistrust of Ruffigny gets projected, all the more powerfully for its indistinct nature, onto women" (393); Julie Carlson argues, in a more general way, that Ruffigny's covert exploitation of Fleetwood's sensibility heightens Fleetwood's intolerance toward what she characterizes as the "insurmountable alterity of an other, [albeit] not an other who confronts him with radical difference but who is at once most *like* him yet still separate from him" (49, original emphasis). Fleetwood claims his greatest desire is "to have a friend . . . who is to me as another self" (*Fleetwood* 148), but the "sheer separateness" of such an other's "mind and being," says Carlson (49), fundamentally disturbs Fleetwood and impels him anxiously toward paranoid fantasy. This is especially the case when he believes to have found

what he calls a "substitute" for this otherwise "impossible" form of friendship in his wife Mary (*Fleetwood* 191).

14. In his courtship with Mary, Fleetwood frequently describes their relationship as a form of refuge. When Mary's family perishes at sea, she turns to Fleetwood, who had lately become her father's close friend, and "pour[s] her sorrows" into his "bosom": "in my eye alone," writes Fleetwood, "did she meet the expression of humanity" (176). Left a "helpless beggar in the world," Mary finds in Fleetwood "a refuge from calamity, and a compensation for her sufferings" (181, 213). Fleetwood similarly admits to "hasten[ing] to her retreats" in order to "escape from the multitudes" (186). More than a refuge, he discovers in her a "countenance that gladdens at [his] approach" and that "constitutes the unspeakable charm of home" (191). Newfound refuge in his wife, however, robs Fleetwood of older, more private sites of refuge when the couple returns to Merionethshire on the very first day of their marriage. When shown Fleetwood's "favourite retreat" just off the principal drawing room and close to his bed-chamber—a "sequestered" closet that he prefers "to all the rest of the mansion taken together" (194)—Mary impulsively blurts out: "Do you know, Fleetwood, I shall take this closet for mine? I will have all my drawings brought here, and arrange my favourite flowers in the window. Will you give it me?" (194). Exhibiting more than the stereotypical bachelor's horror at the thought of post-matrimonial redecoration, Fleetwood is set with "sensations . . . of a singular and complicated nature": "my animal sprits were suddenly driven back upon my heart" (194). After "employing all my eloquence to describe to Mary how I loved this closet" (194), he is appalled by her snatching it from him, dumbfounded by her thoughtlessness.

15. Unable to fathom her motive in the affair—or to bear, as Carlson says, the "insurmountable alterity of an other"—Fleetwood projects onto his wife numerous conflicting intentions of his own design, while fantasizing scenes of moral outrage and rebuke: "Mary, Mary," he mumbles to himself at one point, "I am afraid you are selfish! and what character can be less promising in social life, than hers who thinks of no one's gratification but her own?" (196). Similar internal outbursts recur throughout their first week of marriage: he labels Mary an "[a]rtful hussy" when he thinks she has manipulated him into entertaining other families in the neighborhood; he attacks her capacity for sensibility when she interrupts their mutual reading of John Fletcher's *A Wife for a Month* to receive a houseguest; and he likens her dancing with the "young and handsome" Mr.

Matthews to "petty prostitution" (197, 205). Indulging in "perpetual relapses" of his "favourite theory about the female sex" (212), Fleetwood grows to despise his wife's impenetrable subjectivity as much as his own paranoid projections of intentionality and desire. Mary's countenance, which previously bore the "charm of home," increasingly returns to him the abject impressions of his own "sick imagination," which "is forever busy, shaping the attitudes and gestures" of what he cannot ascertain or witness for himself (235). Unable to withstand the "embers of jealousy" stoked by his cousin Gifford's scheme to ruin his marriage, Fleetwood turns from his wife in disgust—proclaiming in a fit of rage that "[s]he shall not sleep another night under my roof"—and briefly contemplates shooting himself with a pistol before "dashing it upon the ground" (242, 247). "Let my fellow-beings look upon me in this abject condition," he wails, "and despise me!" (249).

16. Fleetwood's characterization of Mary as an imperfect "substitute" for the friend for whom his "soul panted" (that is, a friend "who should be to me as another self" [148]) appears consistent with what Jacques Derrida calls the "canonical" and "androcentric" understanding of friendship that restrains ideal companionship within the "proximity of the congeneric [male] double" (13, viii). Initially, Fleetwood seeks not a gendered female other to himself, but a fraternal other who is "the brother of [his] heart," who "joys in all [his] joys, and grieves in all [his] sorrows" (148-9). He believes himself to have found such friendship in Mary's father, Mr. Macneil, who is reputed to have "possessed the confidence of the celebrated Jean Jacques Rousseau" (152). Despite such auspicious credentials, however, Macneil is too much the philanthropist to play the role of Fleetwood's congeneric double. "I remained unaltered by his discourses," Fleetwood admits, "and, though I wished to be a philanthropist, was a misanthrope still" (164). If he fails to find the "brother of [his] heart" in Macneil, then his attempt to seek a "substitute" in his friend's daughter implodes, as we have seen, as his fear of the female other increasingly leads him to view the substitute not as a friend at all, but as a malicious and deceitful inferior copy. Godwin's own daughter (also named Mary) may well have been inspired to caricaturize Fleetwood's contempt for female alterity in portraying Victor Frankenstein's spontaneous and profoundly misogynistic "train of reflection" on completing his creation of a second, female monster: "I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness" (Shelley 190). Whereas Victor envisions unbridled female alterity resulting in the destruction of

"the existence of the whole human race" (190), Fleetwood similarly views what he imagines to be his wife Mary's own unfathomable dispositions as precipitating the end of *his* world, or at least a world in which he might finally find happiness or a friend.

17. According to William Brewer, it is precisely Fleetwood's "inability to communicate sincerely with his spouse [that] makes him vulnerable to Gifford's misrepresentations" (49). Stubbornly preferential to male companionship, Fleetwood turns to his cousin for comfort and is unable to refrain "from sometimes opening my soul to him on the most sacred of all subjects, – my sentiments respecting my wife" (*Fleetwood* 231). The irony of this confidence is not at all subtle, for Gifford is the furthest thing from a friend. In his attempt to secure his place as heir to Fleetwood's estate, Gifford fabricates evidence of Mary's infidelity and encourages Fleetwood to seek divorce and legally declare the illegitimacy of his newborn son. Impatient to obtain his cousin's fortune, Gifford even conspires to have Fleetwood murdered in a forest outside Paris. While he fails in this last attempt (Fleetwood is rescued from his attackers by none other than his wife's alleged paramour), Gifford is devastatingly successful in turning Fleetwood against Mary, the world, and ultimately himself. "I have, before this, called myself a misanthrope," Fleetwood admits in the wake of his cousin's malicious machinations; "but I never felt the bitterness of misanthropy invade, and lord it triumphant over my breast, till now" (248).

18. Fleetwood's hatred of self and other reaches its pinnacle in the novel's wax-figure scene, which van Leeuwan has called (for good reason) "one of the most disturbing scenes in Romantic-era fiction" (36). "[J]aundiced" of "body and soul," Fleetwood finds refuge from marital troubles in a hotel apartment in Florence where, on the anniversary of his marriage, he arranges "with so much care and expense" a gruesome tableau of life-size models of his wife and her putative lover Kenrick, along with a cradle and child-bed linen representing his infant son (*Fleetwood* 263, 264). On a barrel-organ, he plays "tunes" that Mary and Kenrick "had sung together when at Bath," while "in all the luxury of despair" he observes their repast at a table spread with a supper of cold meats (264). "Never had madness, in any age or country, so voluptuous a banquet," he remarks (264). The scene represents the fantastical consummation of Fleetwood's egotistical engagement with the other. His mind undergoes a "strange revolution"; fiction and reality overlap and merge as the other's placeholder is transformed as an object of consciousness: "I gazed at the figure of Mary," he says; "I thought it was, and it was not, Mary" (264). Reproaching her "with inward

and convulsive accents" for "her abandoned and infernal deceit," Fleetwood testifies to the literal incarnation of his wife: "I saw her move—if I live, I saw it. She turned her eyes this way and that; she grinned and chattered with me too" (264). Aside from resonating with Withers' confused encounter with the headmaster puppet in the novel's Oxford episodes, this peculiar animation scene, as it were, again calls to mind aspects of Shelley's *Frankenstein* monster, whose eye movements similarly mark the sign of his own startling animation, and whose grin, as I have suggested, is one of his more unsettling features. Just as the animation of Shelley's monster inspires unendurable feelings of "horror and disgust" that impel Victor to flee his laboratory (Shelley 85), the increasing tangibility of Fleetwood's paranoid encounter with his wife's chattering wax double is likewise too much to bear and forces him to confront the depth of his own madness. In a fog of inarticulate "murmurs, and hissings, and lowings, and howls," he lashes out and destroys the two wax figures, the barrel-organ, and the contents of the cradle, reducing them to broken pieces on the floor of his locked apartment (*Fleetwood* 264). He sinks into "immediate insensibility" and is confined to his bed for fifteen days, during which he confesses to being "really insane, but . . . too weak to break into the paroxysms of insanity" (265).

19. Steven Bruhm reads this episode as a torture scene designed to "extract a confession" of Mary's presumed guilt ("William" 35). Even as a simulation, the scene's "imaginative projection of what Fleetwood wants Mary to be" reproduces a common feature of the scene of torture: "the torturer *creates* the truth he wants to hear" (36, original emphasis). More to the point, the scene epitomizes for Bruhm the extent to which "Mary" has become "both a living, sentient being and an insentient figure, both animate subject and inanimate object. And the dividing line, that which separates the animate from the inanimate, is the sentient body that is incapable of remaining sentient" (36). Reduced to (and replaced by) an object within Fleetwood's egotistical relation to the other, Mary's lifeless double faces a fate similar to that of Withers' headmaster puppet or the body of Victor Frankenstein's female monster: she becomes the target of explosive violence, hatred, and shame.

20. From a more optimistic perspective, Handwerk argues that this waxen scene of abjection and Fleetwood's ensuing madness are "purgative" in a "nearly perfect psychoanalytic way"; "the acting out of a trauma . . . makes its terms available for conscious inspection and rational critique." Fleetwood's recovery marks the re-emergence of both Fleetwood's "sympathy" for Mary (the

other) and "the revival of romance" (397). And yet, as Rajan suggests, the novel's emphasis on the latter (romance) overwhelms the credibility of the former (sympathy) (142). Without the egotistical projections of Fleetwood's "sick imagination," the other effectively vanishes from the novel's conclusion. Mary's interiority, her development as a character since her banishment from Merionethshire, is concealed by her rather dubious (and brief) act of forgiveness: "Take my hand," she says; "Take my heart"; and finally, after falling into Fleetwood's arms, she jests: "You shall not make your next wedding supper like the last!" (*Fleetwood* 290). Openly trivializing the misogynistic violence unleashed in the destruction of her wax double, the unsettling humor of Mary's final words seems only to confirm Rajan's assessment of the novel's unsatisfactory ending: "*Fleetwood*," she says, "promises a reunion between Fleetwood and Mary only to withdraw this reparation as a worse wrong: the wrong that occurs when novels on the wrongs of woman end with marriage or the forgiveness of these wrongs" (142).

21. If the novel's happy ending is "unmotivated, even perverse" "given all that has happened" (Handwerk 397), then this narrative failure, I argue, is reducible to Fleetwood's final turn from female other to reader. When Mary returns in the novel's conclusion to forgive Fleetwood for his egregious mistreatment of her (having herself been absent from much of the previous seven chapters),[3] Fleetwood's narrative attention shifts immediately from his wife to the text's imagined addressee: "It is impossible for any one to imagine what I felt at that moment. Whenever I recollect it, I am astonished that I did not expire on the spot. . . . It is from the hour in which we are forgiven, that the true remorse commences" (290). Elided by this turn from dramatic instance of conjugal forgiveness to narrative aside is Fleetwood's reciprocal participation in the dialogue with his wife, as though the particulars of this momentous shared encounter were less important to him than how it makes him feel. Curiously, one of the feelings he associates with Mary's extraordinary act of compassion is loneliness, since he feels no one is capable of fully appreciating his emotional response to it, least of all his own wife.

22. And yet, if Fleetwood "still has no way to enter into and identify with someone else's subjectivity" (Bruhm, *Gothic* 117), then he nevertheless continues in his attempts to cultivate sympathy in those who might read his tale. After all, what does it really mean to declare the impossibility of others imagining one's feelings in a particular moment, if not precisely to enable and invite another person to appreciate the intensity and magnitude of those feelings through the

power of hyperbole? Were anyone capable of fulfilling this challenge and playing the role of a friend who is "as another self," then Fleetwood is convinced that person could not be Mary, before whom he can more easily imagine "expir[ing]," as he says, than actually responding to her act of forgiveness. He would rather project his desire for congeneric (again, presumably male) friendship onto an imaginary confidant whose presence remains permanently postponed at the novel's end. It is Fleetwood's hope that this figure of ideal readership will finally sympathize with the emotional contents of his confessional narrative. To that end, he uses the event of Mary's forgiveness not as a means to illustrate the exceptional strength of her character or the viability of their future together, but merely as a kind of talisman or symbol that foregrounds the quality and scope of his "true remorse." By the end of the novel, Fleetwood has returned to viewing people (particularly women) aesthetically and from a certain distance: "Mary," he says, "never looked half so beautiful, half so radiant, as now" (290). Looking to validate his feelings elsewhere by sharing them with a reader he will never know, Fleetwood effectively refuses to engage the female other who stands before him as little more than a "radiant" and "ravishing spectacle" and whose interior consciousness he ultimately fails to register either in his life or his writing (291). As a figure that embodies for Fleetwood a rare and dazzling mixture of innocence and "conscious honour" (291), Mary is simply too dissimilar, too foreign, to be the friend who is to him "as another self." She remains instead a fetishized object that Fleetwood holds in high esteem, but in which his patriarchal gaze finds little sympathy.[4]

23. If Fleetwood turns from Mary to reader for potential ideal friendship, then Godwin's readers might well question the underlying causes and motives behind this disappointing gesture of the novel's conclusion. Is Fleetwood's reluctance to entertain or envision a reciprocal engagement with his wife purely ideological, which is to say, strictly attributable to patriarchy? As a portrait of obsessive male jealousy and self-destructive behavior, Fleetwood consistently draws on discourses of misogyny throughout his tale. From the Marchioness to the Countess de B—— to his own beloved wife, the women in Fleetwood's life are all subject to his "favourite theory about the female sex" (212). That he gains self-critical awareness of his deplorable treatment of women, even as he concludes his narrative with an inscrutable yet "ravishing spectacle" of female alterity, suggests that he is, in the end, unable to relinquish the objectivizing perspective of patriarchal male subjectivity.

24. Alternatively, Pamela Clemit frames Fleetwood's failure to connect with others, including his wife, in terms of "historical pressures" that impel the individual toward disillusionment and introversion. Not unlike the eponymous hero of Godwin's *St. Leon*, Fleetwood's egotism is the "product of an aristocratic education," she argues; his "inbuilt sense of a heroic past breeds dissatisfaction with the present state of society" (Clemit 95). Disappointment drives him from social interaction to solitude, "from fashionable London and Paris to 'the craggy and inhospitable Alps.'" He never learns to break this pattern of egotism, even when confronted with his wife's improbable compassion. "[B]roken off from the richest possibilities of the past," Fleetwood suffers a "sense of radical displacement [that] is explicitly linked with recent political upheavals" (Clemit 95). In this respect, Clemit suggests he prefigures the "disenchanted heroes" of Byron's early poems, including Childe Harold whose wanderings are marked by weariness over post-Revolutionary Europe (95).

25. But Fleetwood is also, as we have seen, precursor to that other famous literary denizen of the inhospitable Alps, Victor Frankenstein. What is more, his resemblance to Victor (and his creature) throws into relief the combined influence of both patriarchal and historical pressures on Fleetwood's failure to find ideal friendship in his wife Mary. As much a product of post-Revolutionary disillusionment as Childe Harold, Victor Frankenstein is driven toward solitude in his pursuit to create new life—the results of which precipitate the demise of all those who might otherwise have shared with him intimate bonds of friendship and love. Most like Fleetwood, however, Victor ultimately seeks ideal friendship not in his wife but in male companionship. After all, it is not Elizabeth to whom Victor reveals his darkest secrets. It is, rather, the Arctic explorer Robert Walton, whom Victor meets in the opening pages of Shelley's novel, who is beneficiary to Victor's most private confidence. To borrow a phrase from Fleetwood, it is Walton and not Elizabeth who is the "brother of [Victor's] heart," the friend who is to him "as another self" (*Fleetwood* 148). In both novels, women suffer in their role as imperfect substitutes for the congeneric male double. *Fleetwood* may well anticipate the sense of radical displacement portrayed in early-nineteenth-century Romantic writing, as Clemit contends; but its under-acknowledged resemblances to *Frankenstein* indicate its specific influence on Godwin's daughter, who internalizes the lessons of Fleetwood and returns them to her father in the form of cautionary critique. Whereas Mary remains silent and distant at the end of *Fleetwood*,

Frankenstein envisions far more devastating consequences for Elizabeth, who suffers a brutal death quite literally at the hands of her husband's biggest secret.

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1. Maurice Cranston points out that Rousseau expressed more good will toward Turc than toward his friends and neighbors (336). For more on Rousseau's solitary eating habits, see Melville, *Romantic Hospitality and the Resistance to Accommodation* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 24.

2. I thank John Bugg for encouraging me to explore connections between *Fleetwood* and *Frankenstein*. Fleetwood's reflections on his changed personality at Oxford suggestively extend the comparison inasmuch as he likens himself to a monstrous brute recontructed in the image of his Oxonian classmates: "I no longer gave free scope to the workings of my own mind, but became an artificial personage, formed after a wretched and contemptible model" (*Fleetwood* 32).

3. Mary has not been present since Fleetwood calls her an "Impudent harlot" in Chapter XIII of Volume Three (*Fleetwood* 259).

4. In this respect, Fleetwood fails to gain the kind of insight into otherness that William Wordsworth gleans from his encounter with the blind beggar of Book 7 of *The Prelude*. Whereas Wordsworth feels "admonished" by the limits of what "we can know" of others, "of ourselves and of the universe" (649, 645, 646), Fleetwood evidently perceives such limits in terms of a gender difference. He may not find sympathy in the female other, but that does not stop him from seeking it elsewhere.