

"The Romance of Real Life": Autobiography in Rousseau and William Godwin

Gary Kelly

Volume 1, 1982

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1011794ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1011794ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / Société canadienne d'étude du dix-huitième siècle

ISSN

0824-3298 (imprimé)

1927-8810 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Kelly, G. (1982). "The Romance of Real Life": Autobiography in Rousseau and William Godwin. *Man and Nature / L'homme et la nature*, 1, 93–101.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1011794ar>

9. “*The Romance of Real Life*”: *Autobiography in Rousseau and William Godwin*

To readers in late eighteenth-century England there were two Rousseaus, Rousseau the political and moral philosopher, author of the *Discourses*, the *Social Contract*, and *Emile*, and Rousseau the man and legend, author of *Julie*, the *Rêveries*, the *Dialogues*, and the *Confessions*.¹ Those who were seeking rational solutions to the problems of human nature and society found in the “political” Rousseau new but often “paradoxical” insights into man’s individual and social existence; while those in increasing numbers who believed that reason could be at best but a feeble and unreliable guide found in the “autobiographical” Rousseau new and exciting prospects for the sympathetic reconciliation of individual man with nature, his fellow men, and himself. There were few in England after Rousseau’s death who were better prepared to recognize the achievement of his political thought than the English Dissenters and their allies, the “eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen.”² They shared with Rousseau a common inheritance of ideas from English political theorists of the seventeenth century and British epistemologists and moral philosophers of the eighteenth;³ moreover, they were prepared by a century and a half of evolving political experience and religious thought to welcome the religion of the Savoyard Vicar, the political and moral philosophy of the citizen of Geneva, and the bourgeois utilitarianism of this son of a Swiss artisan.

They were also beginning to appreciate the confessional and autobiographical writings of the “Solitary Walker,” for although they too had shared in the century’s disposition to observe and analyze, to institutionalize the Spectator, and to provide rational or empirical proofs for everything, they were also coming increasingly to believe that merely intellectual knowledge was sterile and nihilistic without the support of religion and human feeling. English Dissenters and “Commonwealthmen” could easily share Rousseau’s view of man as naturally good but socially depraved, and they could share his philanthropic passion to replace this fallen and divided world with a new Eden in which man would be once more in harmony with himself and with the physical and social world around him. Therefore it was appropriate for them in 1789 to celebrate the Revolution which Rousseau had anticipated in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, and which invoked

Rousseau as one of its tutelary spirits.⁴ But if the Revolution seemed at first to confirm the ideas and the predictions of the “political” Rousseau, it soon seemed to take a different course, away from a paradise of social justice and harmony towards the unrestrained passions of the Terror and all the horrors and injustice of war. Events now seemed to vindicate the other Rousseau, the persecuted “Solitary Walker,” and those who turned to his autobiographical writings found consolation in the possibility that Eden might still exist, not in the external world of society, politics, and power, but within.⁵ When the Revolution destroyed its first, more moderate leaders, and therefore betrayed its English sympathizers, Rousseau, a different Rousseau, was still there to offer solace, and to speak to those who would carry the spiritual and intellectual impetus of English Dissent into a new movement, English Romanticism.

One of the most powerful early influences on the English Romantic poets, essayists, novelists, and historians was William Godwin.⁶ Godwin had inherited the intellectual and cultural tradition of English Dissent when it was at its height, and he adapted it completely to the needs of the Revolutionary decade in England. The son of an East Anglian Calvinist minister, he had received a thorough training in eighteenth-century philosophy, science, and rational religion at Hoxton Dissenting Academy,⁷ and although he had lost his clerical vocation by the late 1770s and his religious faith by the late 1780s, he retained into the 1790s all the essentials of the Dissenting experience, philosophy, and mythology. Like other Dissenters and “Commonwealthmen” he could appreciate Rousseau’s radical analysis of society, government, and civilization because the Dissenting tradition had in a sense prepared him for it;⁸ and when, in September 1791, he began to write his own reply to Burke’s attack on the French Revolution and its English Dissenting sympathizers, he prepared himself by reading through the most important of Rousseau’s political works.⁹ Like the Dissenting thinkers of the previous generation, Godwin tried in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) to provide a rational demonstration of virtue and philanthropy, to deduce liberty, equality, and fraternity from essential human nature. Both his contemporaries and posterity judged Godwin to be the most thoroughgoing rationalist of his time, and it was a judgment he accepted willingly at first; but once he had completed *Political Justice* he began, like many of the young men he influenced in the middle years of the decade, to see how much his rational philosophy was a creature of his heart’s desire, a rationalization of his own emotional and intellectual experience. Over the next three years he wrote a novel which demonstrated the emotional springs of social oppression and rebellion (*Things As They Are*, better known as *Caleb Williams*, 1794), published a condemnation of overly-zealous pursuit of rational reform (*Considerations*, 1795), and tried to revise *Political Justice* itself to give greater place to feeling in his philosophy of man and society (second edition 1796, third 1798). As he began to understand the sociology of his own knowledge and of the “English Jacobin” philosophy, Godwin began to believe that he had seen only the truth he wished to see, and that if he were to see the truth whole, he must know himself as a whole man. By 1796 he was beginning to appreciate and to explore the “sentimental” side of his nature, and soon

after he fell in love with Mary Wollstonecraft, herself a student of the autobiographical Rousseau, he began to re-read *La Nouvelle Héloïse*.¹⁰ Wollstonecraft's death in September 1797 left him alone, with an enhanced appreciation for the "Solitary Walker," and soon he was beginning to compose his own autobiographical reflections. By the end of the decade, when the Revolution had failed, when the Dissenting drive for reform had been stifled, when his wife was dead and he was once again alone, Godwin, like the young Romantics, had come to believe it was a terrible error to deny the "domestic affections" and to try to separate individual feeling from general considerations of "political justice". Many forces had helped to shape Godwin's new and Romantic sensibility, but he had discovered, like Rousseau from whom he drew, that "a vision of regenerated humanity could be presented only by a man who had just discovered it in his own heart."¹¹

It is, then, highly appropriate that from 1789 to 1804 Godwin should have worked intermittently on a translation of Rousseau's *Confessions*.¹² He had always valued Rousseau's autobiographical writings as documents in the "science of mind," as evidence for the empirical epistemology and necessitarian metaphysics of his English Jacobin philosophy. Rousseau himself had intended that his *Confessions* be "une pièce de comparaison"¹³ for future students of human nature. But it was during the period of self-examination and self-discovery which followed Godwin's revision of his philosophy in 1795-96, and which co-incided with his marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft and the aftermath of her death in 1797, that he came to concentrate fully on the autobiographical writings of Rousseau. It was during the same period that he composed the first and most important of his own autobiographical reflections. Only then, it seems, could he fully appreciate this aspect of Rousseau's achievement. However, once experience and the evolution of his "English Jacobin" philosophy had taught Godwin to value the sensibility of Rousseau, once he had made sense of his own sensibility, he turned again to his favourite task of using every form of moral and philosophical writing for the enlightenment of his fellow-man.

Godwin's interest in the "autobiographical" Rousseau falls into three main periods, then: up to 1795, 1795-1802, and after 1802. In the first of these periods, he used Rousseau's autobiographical works as material to substantiate his own philosophy; in the second he used them as a guide in his own struggle for self-awareness; and in the third he used them again, in conjunction with an enhanced sense of his own sensibility, to substantiate the revised version of his philosophy. Clearly, it is the second and central period which is of greatest interest and complexity.¹⁴ Godwin was not just interested in coincidental factual parallels between his life and Rousseau's. Rather, it was the way in which Rousseau regarded his life, explored it, and described his feelings about it, which interested him as he searched for the roots of his own sensibility. For although Godwin's autobiographical MSS vary from mere outlines of dates and events to lyrical effusions in the manner of the *Rêveries*, all are concerned with tracing the origins of their author's mind and personality, and all illustrate the same pattern of experience: a childhood dominated by fancy and feeling, a youth consequently passed in solitude, and a resulting tendency in maturity towards a radical view of society and its

institutions; the anti-social outlook enhances the imagined isolation, and the only compensations are a sense of conscious virtue, the pleasures of nature, the influence of women (society's underdogs), and a sublime and transcending idealism. Reading Rousseau helped Godwin to perceive this pattern in his own life.

Firstly, then, helped by Rousseau, Godwin began (in middle-age) to see that his mind too had always been dominated by imagination. This may have been because the early years of both were passed in a Calvinist cultural milieu, and perhaps that dark religious doctrine, against which both later rebelled,¹⁵ fostered in both a counter-veiling vigour of fancy. Godwin was obviously writing of himself and very much under the influence of Rousseau, for example, when he had the hero of his novel *Fleetwood* (1805) describe how the solitude of his childhood led to a tendency to mental abstraction or "reverie" (Vol. I, p. 9). This same withdrawal from reality to an imagined world also led to a passionate interest in history, to a zealous identification with the republican heroes of classical antiquity. Rousseau found his heroes in Plutarch, Godwin his in Rollin, but for both the identification was an impassioned one; as Jean Starobinski puts it, "la distance historique n'est plus que distance intérieure . . ."¹⁶ Hence reverie joins history just as history joins fiction, in the form of romance; and although Rousseau and Godwin differed somewhat in their favourite youthful fictions (*Confessions*, O.C., I, 171), in both the appeal was from the form of romance, a form that influenced their conception of the pattern of their own lives. Godwin was probably still guided by Rousseau, for example, when he described reading Rollin at the age of twelve: "No book ever occasioned me such sublime and transporting emotions. I now for the first time [a phrase that recurs again and again in the *Confessions*] perceived the glorious energies of which the species is capable among whom I was an individual."¹⁷ The same emotions were experienced when Godwin read *Tom Jones* at sixteen,¹⁸ and he concluded that "it was an essential part of my early character, that I read for feeling, and not for criticism. . . ."¹⁹ Books, whether history or fiction, contained a world created by and for the imagination,²⁰ and kept the physical eye away from the imperfect world of everyday reality.

Secondly, Godwin, like Rousseau, saw the connection between imagination and solitude. Perhaps Rousseau, like Godwin, would have traced part of his tendency to mental abstraction and indulgence in imagination to the simple fact that he too had poor eye-sight;²¹ but certainly both linked the tendency and the indulgence to a preference for solitude in later life.²² The solitude of youth, however, is not that of embittered maturity; it is mingled with the pleasure born of fantasy, a fairy-tale element described by Ruffigny in Godwin's Romantic novel, *Fleetwood* (II, 43); and so the imagination creates a sense of the self's uniqueness, and this special sense persists into maturity. Only when there is a realization that one's self-consciousness is not understood by others does the sense of uniqueness become disturbing and dangerous. The punishment of Rousseau for supposedly breaking Gabrielle Lamercier's comb comes as a complete revelation to him, for it reveals that others cannot see him as he sees himself, and therefore creates the possibility of injustice (I, 20). Godwin came to a similar rude awakening when he received his first

beating from his tutor at Norwich, and although he drew somewhat different conclusions, the point of departure for his recollection of the incident could easily have come from the *Confessions*: "It had never occurred to me as possible," Godwin writes, "that my person, which hitherto had been treated by most of my acquaintances . . . as something extraordinary and sacred, could suffer such ignominious violation. The idea had something in it as abrupt as a fall from heaven to earth" (Kegan Paul, I, 11; probably written February, 1800). Thenceforth all relations with others were shadowed by insecurity, for the immediate understanding of others could no longer be taken for granted, and had instead to be constantly striven for and frequently missed. Desiring to return to that blissful state of innocence in which one's sense of oneself was instantly communicated to others, both Godwin and Rousseau desperately worked to please, and consequently failed to do so. "Past doubt," Godwin writes, "if I were less solicitous for the kindness of others, I should have oftener obtained it." And later in the same passage of self-analysis he remarks, "Perhaps one of the sources of my love of admiration and fame has been my timidity and embarrassment. I am unfit to be alone in a crowd, in a circle of strangers, in an inn, almost in a shop" (Kegan Paul, I, 359; dated Sept. 1798). Once again Godwin's reflection seems to have been stimulated by a passage from the *Confessions*, although Rousseau was characteristically more explicit about making a virtue out of necessity: "Je me fis cynique et caustique par honte; j'affectai de mépriser la politesse que je ne savais pas pratiquer" (*Confessions*, O.C., I, 368).

Thirdly, then, the sense of not belonging in polite society easily developed into a sense of not belonging to society in general, indeed, developed into a sense of persecution. And yet it was this otherness which created the basis for their critical view of social conventions and institutions. The feeling of isolation which stemmed from their early self-consciousness thus contributed greatly to the passion with which they conceived their philosophical work,²³ for these philosophies would demonstrate the benevolence and humanity of their authors to all the world. But once again, the fantasy foundered on experience. As a young man Godwin had already been marked out for the singularity of his religious views (Kegan Paul, I, 14, 16, 18-19), although not with the violence which Rousseau experienced at Môtiers; and as with Rousseau, each book he published for the service of truth and his fellow-man only seemed to raise the chorus of abuse and vilification against him. In fact, at the very time when, after the death of Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin was becoming deeply interested in the "autobiographical" Rousseau, he was also becoming the *bête noire* of the Anti-Jacobin press. And what stung Godwin and Rousseau most was that they were most abused by erst-while friends. In Godwin's eyes it would be an irony only more likely to incline him to sympathy for Rousseau that his one published attempt to explain the conduct of himself and Mary Wollstonecraft (his *Memoir* of her, 1798) should have contributed most to wrecking his reputation. He learned the lesson that Rousseau did not learn, and therefore transformed his confessions into fictions.

Fourthly, then, Rousseau published his autobiography as such, whereas Godwin did not. Indeed, Godwin did little more in his autobiographical MSS than to sketch out the form Rousseau had helped him to perceive in his own

life, and, influenced by Rousseau, to trace the main aspects of his personality to their origins in his early experience. Perhaps Godwin left his autobiography in fragments and in manuscript because when he wrote these fragments he was still in the midst of re-forming his philosophy, his sensibility, and his sense of himself. Once this reformation was complete, he was more interested in applying his new knowledge to his old vocation of serving truth and his fellow man through philosophy, history, and fiction, through, that is, conventional, even if seriously renovated, forms of public discourse, rather than through personal discourse immediately made public. Godwin's major autobiographical MSS were written during the period of his crisis of sensibility, from 1797 to 1801. After that his intellectual and emotional energies were poured into new work (*The Life of Chaucer*, 1803, and the novel *Fleetwood*, 1805) and a new family (he had married Mrs. Clairmont in December 1801 and she bore him a son in 1803). On one MS, begun apparently in February 1800, Godwin added in 1805: "I shall probably never complete it. My feelings on the subject are not what they were. I sat down with the intention of being nearly as explicit as Rousseau in the composition of his Confessions" (Kegan Paul, I, 13). But although he almost ceased to write autobiography,²⁴ Godwin's autobiographical impulse did not slacken, and both *The Life of Chaucer* and *Fleetwood* contain passages from his own life, subjected to a variety of transformations. The autobiographer became absorbed in the philosopher-as-artist. Godwin did complete his exploration of the meaning of his existence, and he did so according to the pattern revealed in Rousseau's autobiographical writings; but he preferred to assimilate his own confessions to a variety of "conventional" literary forms in history and fiction.

No doubt Godwin's utilitarian "English Jacobin" philosophy encouraged him to break out of the confessional syndrome which Rousseau could not escape. Moreover, Rousseau himself had once turned to fiction, as he explained it in the *Confessions*, to embody both personal and universal truths which neither philosophy nor autobiography could compass (I, 427, 431). Philosophical writing could be seen as demonstrating truth without referring to the personal feelings which in reality gave it birth. Autobiography on the other hand could seem to dwell on mere facts or personal feelings and make truth almost an idiosyncratic by-product of individual experience. But in the novel, life and general truth could be reconciled under the public conventions of art. Fiction could also elicit from the imagination acts of compensation, confession of the recompense as well as the expense of living for passion and truth. As he read Rousseau's account in the *Confessions* of how he had felt while writing *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Godwin saw that he too had become a confessional novelist when he wrote *Caleb Williams* in 1793-4, that he too had turned from philosophy to fiction in order to purify his conscience, indulge un-lived passions, idealize personal and social realities, and balance the particularity of experience against what would seem to be the universal truth of an accepted form of public, yet artistic and therefore personal, discourse.

Finally, then, although he did not publish — or even complete — his autobiography as such, all of Godwin's novels do embody a pattern similar to that found in the autobiographical writings of Rousseau. The protagonist

struggles against a social and political world so corrupt that it construes benevolence as misanthropy and counts virtue a crime. At the same time that Godwin's heroes struggle, like Rousseau and his St. Preux, against "things as they are" (the original title of *Caleb Williams*), Godwin himself struggled to reconcile the pessimism born of experience with the optimism born of hope and demonstrated by reason. Godwin's philosophy, like Rousseau's, was born of his personal experience; and when the experience and the philosophy conflicted, when experience pointed to a despair that his philosophy could not recognize, Godwin, like Rousseau, was faced with a dilemma that was both personal and philosophical. Only in fiction constructed as romance could this dilemma be faced, for only there could the imagination reconcile philosophy and autobiography according to the demands of form. Godwin's personal problem, like Rousseau's, became an artistic one, that was resolved by recourse to "romantic" compensations — love, self-knowledge, conscious virtue, sympathetic nature, and an all-embracing idealism that transcends imperfect reality. Of course, in the autobiographical writings of Rousseau and in Godwin's novels despair is the only true evil, but like the enchantress it has its fascinations. Godwin's heroes and Rousseau's St. Preux become more or less anti-social and misanthropic because of their experience of society; Godwin's heroes and Rousseau himself come to see the social and political world as a prison, and the simile descends through Gothic fiction and the poetry of Byron, sanctioned by the last book of the *Confessions* in which Rousseau, ejected from his self-exile on the Ile de Saint-Pierre, pathetically requests the government of Berne to imprison him for life in order to free him from life (I, 647-8). But in both Rousseau and Godwin the triumph of hope is made more affecting by the passage through despair. The structure and furniture of romance, assimilated by Rousseau in his attempt to make sense of his own sensibility, and adapted by Godwin in his attempt to make art out of experience, were ready to be used by the Romantics themselves. The final optimism of Rousseau and Godwin is the optimism of Romantic sensibility rather than of Enlightenment or "English Jacobin" philosophy, because it is an optimism won through experience of feeling, of persistent self-reflection, and of self-awareness.

Godwin kept Rousseau before him over the entire period of his philosophical and sentimental development, but through the last three years of the 1790s and the first few years of the nineteenth century it was the autobiographical writings on which he concentrated, so that Rousseau must have seemed an almost living presence and could almost be included among his "principal oral instructors." Always a man apart, one who kept his distance, Godwin proceeded very much by a kind of detached sympathy which enabled him to remain within himself at the same time that he "felt" with or for another. This was the sympathy which, according to Rousseau, joined men together at the same time that it made them independent of one another. It was also the feeling which became the grand theme of the English Jacobin novel after 1794, and one of the dominant themes of nascent English Romanticism. Within Godwin's breast of course, sympathy did not vibrate as extravagantly as it did in Rousseau's, but worked on a more mental, though not an abstract or purely intellectual plane. Godwin allowed the extravagance

to manifest itself in his confessional fiction, especially in *St. Leon* (1799), and this partly explains the novel's failure. In his own life sympathy worked in more covert ways. It could, for example, take the form of that excessive "ductility"²⁵ of which his friend Coleridge complained,²⁶ an androgynous willingness to receive the influence of others which was, again, a mark of Rousseau's character. Or it could take the more active if still largely covert form of open-mindedness. Godwin himself, in an autobiographical note, described his mind as "dependent on others for its determination to any particular point, working subtly and actively on the suggestions it receives or collects."²⁷ His mind was like the aeolian harp of the Romantic poets, it worked not by passive influence, but by active sympathy.

It was this sympathizing power which was always ready to respond to the spirit of Rousseau, a sympathy for the man as much as for his ideas. For at whatever point in his life Godwin picked up the autobiographical writings of Rousseau he, like his friend Thomas Holcroft, would have been struck by similarities between himself and the "Citizen of Geneva." But there was more than just a surface similarity between the two; there was in the last three years of the 1790s a profound and complex "confrontation" between Godwin's sense of himself and his sense of the man Rousseau. In the years immediately after the death of Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin, apparently for the first time, attempted to record both the origins and the essence of his own existence. It was a peculiarly Rousseauist endeavour, carried on no doubt with the necessitarian rigour of which Holcroft would have approved; but an examination of these scattered MSS shows that Rousseau had found, in the somewhat unlikely person of Charles Lamb's "Professor," the man who would vindicate in his reformed sense of himself the painful candour of Rousseau's own autobiographical method. More important, Rousseau helped Godwin to see life itself as a romance which contained a truth of form superior to the truths of both reason and historical and social reality. Always a philosopher of necessity, Godwin learned from Rousseau that only the imagination could perceive the romance of real life.

Gary Kelly
University of Alberta

Notes

- ¹ The influence of the two Rousseaus has been studied in detail by Henri Roddier, *J.-J. Rousseau en Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1950) and Jacques Voisine, *J.-J. Rousseau en Angleterre à l'époque romantique* (Paris, 1956).
- ² See Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (1959, rpt. New York, 1968), and Carl B. Cone, *The English Jacobins* (New York, 1968).
- ³ See Rousseau's *Confessions* in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, I, 237, 409 n.1. All further references are to this edition. Rousseau received the influence of the English political theorists through Locke and Montesquieu; see John C. Hall, *Rousseau, An Introduction to his Political Philosophy* (London, 1973), p. 149.
- ⁴ For an interesting account of the relationship between Rousseau and the Revolutionary sensibility, see Gita May, *De Jean-Jacques Rousseau à Madame Roland. Essai sur la sensibilité préromantique et révolutionnaire* (Geneva, 1964). Madame Roland had probably been known to Godwin's wife, Mary Wollstonecraft. See also Joan McDonald, *Rousseau and the French Revolution 1762-1791* (London, 1965), ch. xii, "The Revolutionary Cult of Rousseau."

- ⁵ See Northrop Frye, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism," in *Romanticism Reconsidered*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York and London, 1968). See also Marc Eigeltinger, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la réalité de l'imaginaire* (Neuchâtel, 1962).
- ⁶ For Godwin's influence on Wordsworth, see Leslie F. Chard, II, *Dissenting Republican: Wordsworth's Early Life and Thought in their Political Context* (The Hague and Paris, 1972), pp. 181-3; for Coleridge's attitude to "Godwinism" see Coleridge's *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (London and Princeton, 1971), introduction, pp. 1xvii-1xxx; and for Godwin's influence on Shelley see Kenneth N. Cameron, *The Young Shelley* (London, 1951), pp. 61-70. For Godwin and Southey, see Geoffrey Carnall, *Robert Southey and His Age* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 25-8.
- ⁷ Charles Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (London, 1876, rpt. New York, 1970), I, 14-16. Henceforth referred to as Kegan Paul.
- ⁸ On the relationship between the writings of the "Commonwealthmen" and the young Romantics, see Zera S. Fink, "Wordsworth and The English Republican Tradition," *JEGP*, 47 (1948), 107-26; Chard, pp. 83-91. On Godwin and the Dissenting tradition see F.E.L. Priestley's edition of *Political Justice* (Toronto, 1946), III, 78-81, and the dissertation being prepared by Peter Marshall of Sussex University.
- ⁹ Godwin's MS Journal, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I am grateful to Lord Abinger for permission to use this material.
- ¹⁰ MS Journal, 28, 29 October 1796.
- ¹¹ Ronald Grimsley, *Rousseau and the Religious Quest* (Oxford, 1968), p. x.
- ¹² According to the MS Journal he undertook the translation for Robinson, his publisher, on December 1789, and worked at it 24-28 August 1792, the first half of August 1797, July and August 1801, and February, March, and April 1804.
- ¹³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, I, p. 1149; see also the first pages of the *Confessions*.
- ¹⁴ According to the MS Journal Godwin composed the following autobiographical fragments between 1797 and 1802: (1) "Life," 19 pp. 1-5, 11 August 1797; (2) "My Own Life," approximately 20 pp., February-March 1800; (3) "Memoirs," 21 August 1800; (4) "Creed," 3 pp., 28 July 1801; (5) "Life," 5 pp., 29-30 July 1801; (6) "Life," 2 pp., 13 September 1802. These deal with Godwin's education and early sensibility, and all but (3) and (6) were preceded, accompanied, or followed by readings in either *Emile*, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, the *Confessions*, or the *Rêveries*.
- ¹⁵ Godwin's "Creed," written 28 July 1801. Printed in Kegan Paul, I, 27-8. The "creed" is very close to Rousseau's *Lettre à Voltaire*, which Godwin read 16 August 1798 and 5 March 1801.
- ¹⁶ *Jean-Jacques Rousseau. La Transparence et l'obstacle* (1957), rev. Paris, 1971), p. 31.
- ¹⁷ MS, autobiographical fragment, dated 29 July 1831. A similar passage occurs in a fragment probably written July 1801. I am grateful to Lord Abinger for permission to use this material.
- ¹⁸ MS autobiographical fragments, undated, but probably written July 1801.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ See Godwin's unpublished MS essay on "fictitious history," written in 1797, and discussed in my *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford, 1976), ch. v.
- ²¹ MS autobiographical fragment dated 29 July 1831. Cf. *Confessions*, O. C. I, 37.
- ²² *Confessions*, O. C., I, 41. Godwin would probably have translated this passage from Book II in 1797. The work went slowly and by 1801 he had only got to Book III.
- ²³ The Second of the *Lettres à Malesherbes*, O. C., I, 1135. MS autobiographical note, dated 10 October 1824.
- ²⁴ Several autobiographical fragments were written after 1804, and may be found in the Abinger collection, but most of them repeat the major points of the earlier MSS. Godwin did print some autobiographical reflections in the *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), and the *Thoughts on Man* (1831).
- ²⁵ "Ductility is a leading feature of my mind," he wrote, in an undated autobiographical note. Kegan Paul, I, 13. On Rousseau's ductility see Ronald Grimsley, *Rousseau*.
- ²⁶ Letter to Godwin, 23 June 1801, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, (Oxford, 1956), II, 736. Coleridge was complaining of Godwin's "retractions" in the second edition of *Political Justice* (1796) and his reply to Parr (1801).
- ²⁷ Undated. Abinger MSS.