



PROJECT MUSE®

Godwin's Caleb Williams: "A Half-Told and Mangled Tale"

John Rodden

College Literature, 36.4, Fall 2009, pp. 119-146 (Article)

Published by West Chester University

DOI: 10.1353/lit.0.0082



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/lit/summary/v036/36.4.rodnen.html>

Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: "A Half-Told and Mangled Tale"

John Rodden

If man were an omnipotent being, and at the same time retained all his present infirmities, it would be difficult to say of what extravagances he would be guilty. It is proverbially affirmed that power has a tendency to corrupt the best dispositions. Then what would not omnipotence effect? (Godwin 1831, 98)

In *Things As They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, written thirty-seven years before the *Thoughts on Man*, Godwin himself presents the fictional answer to his own question. The novel is a terrifying portrayal of omnipotent persecution, corrupted nobility, and deep-ridden guilt. Unfortunately, because of both Godwin's explicit statement of purpose in the Preface and *Caleb Williams*'s publication just one year after Godwin's landmark philosophical treatise *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice*, critics have traditionally tended to approach the novel's theme of power and powerlessness almost exclusively in sociopolitical terms.¹

*John Rodden has taught at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Virginia. His latest book is **Dialectics, Dogmas, and Dissent; Stories of East German Victims of Human Rights Abuse** (2009).*

According to George Woodcock, the “principal theme” is “the crushing of the individual by the forces of civilized society . . .” (120). D.H. Munro sees the novel as a study in “the insufficiency of honor” (86–108). And Godwin himself called *Caleb* a “vehicle” for presenting “the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man” (1960, xxiii).²

However much these perspectives illuminate certain aspects of the novel and Godwin’s philosophical anarchism and utilitarianism, they do not finally account for what readers have invariably testified to as their feverishly intense reading experience of *Caleb*. Godwin himself insists that it was written in “a high state of excitement” and with an eye toward maintaining “interest and passion” in order to create “an epoch in the mind of the reader” (1960, xxvii). Moreover, the focus upon *Caleb* as a gloss on *Political Justice* or as a chronicle of institutional decay has led some critics to castigate Godwin’s narrative as “improbable” and “clumsy” even while expressing admiration for his skill in dramatizing political ideas (Woodcock 119, 122).

It is undeniable that *Caleb Williams* is, as Caleb himself laments in the novel’s final line, “a half-told and mangled tale” (Godwin 1960, 378). My contention, however, is that an explanation of *Caleb*’s series of fantastic accidents, abrupt plot turns, and horrifyingly obsessive mood is not traceable to Godwin’s oft-bemoaned stylistic faults or to his political philosophy. Rather, this is a story of omnipotence and impotence in the language of psychoanalytic theory. Within the framework of libidinal development described by Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein, Caleb’s narration of causally disconnected events and his deep-seated ambivalence toward his master-surrogate father Lord Falkland become understandable when viewed as a fundamentally narcissistic personality unconsciously engaged in a homosexual struggle with his omnipotent father. The world of *Caleb Williams* represents the narrator’s search for the ideal family of romance, a projection of Caleb’s self, with the various characters serving as different aspects of Caleb’s fragmented ego. Caleb’s immediate reflection on the novel’s central incident, “the crisis of my fate” (154)—his breaking into Falkland’s trunk—is therefore unwittingly accurate: “It now appeared to me like a dream” (153). In presenting what Caleb himself fears is “an imperfect and mutilated story” (355), Godwin ironically and metaphorically has written the very “mangled tale” that he vowed to avoid when he rested for three months during the third volume’s composition: “I endeavored to repose myself in security, and not to inflict a set of crude and incoherent dreams upon my readers” (xxx).

Godwin has indeed created a narcissistic dream world, operating according to the dream mechanisms of secondary revision, disguise, distortion, displacement, and condensation. It is, of course, extremely doubtful that

Godwin consciously crafted the novel as dream (though his essay on “Self Love and Benevolence” in *Thoughts on Man* shows he grappled with related issues), and Caleb himself is certainly unaware of his position.³ P.N. Furbank has approached the novel in autobiographical terms as a “highly dramatized symbolical picture of Godwin himself in the act of writing *Political Justice*” (1955, 215). Thus, for both strictly textual and autobiographical reasons, a psychoanalytic treatment of the novel as the enclosed world of a narcissist is warranted,⁴ for such an approach can effectively address Caleb’s “passion”⁵ and lend coherence to its seemingly inexplicable narrative “leaps.”

The sociopolitical implications of the theme of power in *Caleb* also need not be limited to that explicit context; the homosexual father-son, master-servant, feudal lord-peasant struggle may also be viewed in the psychosocial, phylogenetic terms of “repressive civilization” as discussed by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Moses and Monotheism*, and his other cultural studies. The price of civilization is the renunciation of our instincts; this is, said Freud fatalistically, “Things As They Are”—alternately the novel’s title and subtitle in various editions. Once started, Captain Raymond, Laura, Collins, and Falkland tell Caleb separately that a course of action or belief cannot be altered. “Am I not compelled to go on in Folly, once begun?” grieves Raymond (Godwin 1960, 265).

One might also redirect Raymond’s question to the history of scholarship on *Caleb*: we critics are not “compelled to go on” generating readings of the novel in overtly political terms, let alone casting it as a “highly dramatized” expression of “political justice.” If we move beyond sociopolitical commentary, we can appreciate how the disordered narrative structure and flow of this “mangled tale” invite a psychoanalytic approach to its “improbable” and “clumsy” plot, dreamlike setting, dynamics of characterization, and central themes of omnipotence and paternal domination. Such an argument would reconceptualize the terms in which we approach *Caleb Williams*, with keen attention redirected to its problematic literary issues and oddities—including the roles of dreams, the motif of writing and composition, themes of omniscience, narcissism, and father-son conflict—as constituents within a patterned narrative best understood via the psychodynamics of Freudian theory.

Accordingly, this essay reframes the narrative approach to the novel as it reintegrates the aforementioned topics in the terms of Freudian psychopathology. The argument contends that *Caleb Williams* is a stark exposition of the irreconcilable conflict between the free gratification of man’s instinctual needs and the development of civilization, a warring dialectic between the pleasure and reality principles. Caleb and Falkland are shackled and exhausted by their battles and mutual guilt, just as the perpetual inhibi-

tions upon Eros ultimately weaken the life instincts and strengthen and release the very destructive forces against which they struggle. Although Godwin asserted in *Political Justice* both that a theory of the instincts was “absurd” and that “hereditary effects nothing” (Brown 1926, 47) and environment everything, the novel does seem driven toward death: Falkland’s physical and Caleb’s psychological demise, resulting in a void or Nirvana-like severance with a defamed Falkland dead and a legally absolved Caleb with “no character . . . to vindicate.”

|

“Primary narcissism” in Freud’s libidinal theory consists of the integration of narcissistic ego with the external world, in which the infant is unable to distinguish self from others and from the world. The ego holds the idea of “limitless extension and oneness with the universe,” so that other people and the world itself are felt to be an extension of the self. The “need for the father’s protection” and the urge “to reinstate limitless narcissism” form the two chief infantile drives (1961, 10.72). This state of infantile narcissism is also posited in Melanie Klein’s theory of the paranoid-schizoid condition, which constitutes the earliest “position” of infantile development. The infant constructs a complex “inner world” of split objects inside himself, which he feels concretely. These objects are felt to be loved and hated, and are interrelated to the self and to one another. The infant’s obsessional fear is that he will lose the good objects (and thereby part of himself) or that the persecutory objects will overwhelm and annihilate the idealized objects (and the self). Thus the leading anxiety of psychic disintegration (death) is paranoid, and the state of the ego and its objects is characterized by splitting, which is schizoid. Klein describes the projective identification of the self onto the external world as narcissistic:

When the ego-ideal is projected into another person, this person becomes predominantly loved and admired because he contains the good parts of the self. Similarly, the relation to another person on the basis of projecting bad parts of the self into him is of a narcissistic nature, because in this case as well the object strongly represents one part of the self. Both these types of narcissistic relation often show strong obsessional features. The impulse to control people is . . . an essential element in neurosis. The need to control others can . . . be explained by a deflected drive to control parts of the self. When these parts have been projected excessively into another person, they can be controlled only by controlling the other person. (Klein 1946, 13)

The person’s obsessiveness leads him to formulate a conception of “extremely bad and extremely perfect objects” and to “look at people mainly from the point of view of whether they are persecutors or not.”

Caleb's consuming drive is to create what Freud called "the neurotic's family romance" (1961, 2.238). Of course, Caleb remains unaware of this drive, but as narrator in control of his own story he is led to control the plot and others (into whom he has projected parts of himself) as a way to gain control of himself. According to Freud, the small child's "peculiarly marked imaginative activity" focuses upon his "most intense and most momentous wish": "to be like his parents (that is, the parent of his own sex) . . ." (2.237). In later childhood, he recognizes his parents' (particularly his father's) fallibility and his imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others who, as a rule, are of a higher social standing (2.238-39). Freud's succeeding observations about the "young phantasy-builder" sound as if they were written to annotate *Caleb Williams*:

He will make use...of any opportune coincidences from his actual experiences, such as his becoming acquainted with the Lord of the Manor or some landed proprietor if he lives in the country. . . . (Freud 1961, 2.239)

In the replacement of both parents or of the father alone by by grander people, we find that these new and aristocratic parents are equipped with attributes that are derived entirely from real recollections of the actual and humble ones; so that in fact the child is not getting rid of his father but exalting him. Indeed the whole effort at replacing the real father by a superior one is only an expression of the child's longing for the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women. He turns to the father in whom he believed in the earliest years of his childhood. (Freud 1961, 2.240-41)

Caleb relates that he is born of "humble" peasant parents who could leave him little inheritance except for "an honest fame" and an education "free from depravity" (Godwin 1960, 3). Although he makes no mention of his father or his own childhood experiences after the first three pages, his "invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance" suggests his intense longing for the "happy, vanished days" of his real parents' apparent grandeur. Yet, filled with romantic visions, his imaginative childhood mind is seemingly absorbed precisely in "getting free" from his humble parents and yearns to undertake an adventurous aristocratic future: "I panted for the unraveling of an adventure with an anxiety perhaps almost equal to that of the man whose future happiness or misery depended on its issue" (4).

The adventure begins when, during the very moments Caleb's father is lying on his deathbed, Lord Falkland returns to the county from a lengthy trip abroad and "surprisingly" summons Caleb to him immediately after Farmer Williams's funeral. Mrs. Williams had died some years earlier, so that

eighteen-year-old Caleb “had not now a relation in the world. . . .” Falkland benevolently agrees to “take [Caleb] into his family,” and the boy forms “golden visions of the state I was about to occupy” (Godwin 1960, 5–6).

Nevertheless, narrator Caleb, from a perspective many years after their initial meeting, immediately reflects that this first encounter with Falkland marked the end of his “gaiety and lightness of heart” and the start of days “devoted to misery and alarm.” Thus, just as the growing child’s awareness of his real father’s human weakness incites him to look to a socially superior surrogate, Caleb’s heightened understanding of Society and Falkland’s vinctibility reawakens in him a narcissistic longing for his original godlike parents. His attempt to create a family romance in Falkland’s home fails, and his life after his father’s death proves unremittingly miserable, with the exception of his brief success in finding a new mother and family, Laura and the Denisons. Caleb “honoured and esteemed the respectable Laura like a mother,” judges her children admirable and her husband “shrewd, sensible and rational” (Godwin 1960, 338, 336). Farmer Denison’s “obscure retreat” or “remote retirement” in Wales strongly resembles Caleb’s father’s “remote” cottage. Caleb regresses to childhood, only to be thrust abruptly out of his new family when Falkland once again intrudes—at the very moment Caleb is about to explain his past with his master to Laura, she informs him disgustedly that she has just learned it all “by a mere accident” (348).

The novel therefore becomes orphan Caleb’s romantic quest, as character and narrator, to recover the “good father” and (secondarily) “good mother” whom he lost in childhood. Falkland is the mighty father figure who replaces Caleb’s dead father and for whom Caleb feels both reverence and contempt. His master is in a sense the demiurge whom narrator Caleb reacts to ambivalently in place of his good, though infinitely distanced parents. So all-encompassing is Falkland as a paternal figure that, except for a passing remark of Falkland’s footman Thomas about “honest Farmer Williams” (Godwin 1960, 203), neither of Caleb’s parents is mentioned beyond the opening paragraphs.

Yet Caleb’s narcissism and quest for the good parents extend beyond his unconscious strivings to forge a family romance through Falkland and Laura. In terms of Freud’s concept of narcissistic libido, not just Falkland and Laura but *all* the major characters Caleb encounters are extensions of the self, grafted libidinally onto “the ego itself and finding satisfaction [and distress] in the ego just as satisfaction is usually found only in objects.” Caleb indeed also views Forrester, Spurrel and Raymond in a parental light, and he even calls Collins “father.” In Kleinian terms, all these characters are split-objects projected out from Caleb’s inner world and from whom he feels he cannot be separated without incurring injury or disintegration.

Caleb meets either trusted friends or villainous betrayers. As we shall see, because Caleb's dominant relationship with Falkland is one of ambivalence, several other characters also change from allies to victimizers just as Falkland does. Each of them is an idealized object representing good and/or bad aspects of Caleb, a projection of a good or bad feature or side of him. Just as Caleb as a character struggles with Falkland for control of this "half-told tale," with Falkland circulating the scurrilous *Wonderful and Surprising History of Caleb Williams* and with Caleb thereupon writing his rejoinder in the form of the novel itself, narrator Caleb often suggests that even his mind did not seem his own but rather a battle for control between the omnipotent Falkland and himself: "I knew his misery so well, I was so fully acquainted with its cause, and so strongly impressed with the idea of its being unmerited, that, while I suffered deeply, I continued to pity rather than hate my persecutor" (Godwin 1960, 262). Or as Rudolf Storch expressed it in a landmark essay:

[The characters] are not so much separate persons with their own motivations (or characters in an observed society) as elements within the mind of one person who projects them warring one against the other onto the figures moving. . . . (Storch 1967, 194)

If each character is a projected aspect of Caleb, Falkland must be viewed as alternately an "extremely perfect" and "extremely bad" part-object of the idealized noble and cruel aspects of Caleb's self. Caleb "devours" romances; Falkland lives them. The squire's favorite authors in youth are the Italian heroic poets and his conduct "assiduously conformed to the model of heroism that his fancy suggested; as Collins explains, "no Englishman was ever in an equal degree idolised by the inhabitants of Italy" (Godwin 1960, 11). Caleb is also an entertaining conversationalist and "a good and zealous hearer" for Forrester; Falkland was the "perpetual delight of the diversified circles" he frequented in his youth and "imparted an inconceivable brilliancy to his company and conversation" (9). The mind of Lord Falkland was "fraught with all the rhapsodies of visionary honor," and Caleb too exhibits a "love of praise" (4).

Falkland does therefore appear as Caleb's projected ego-ideal, the perfect paternal object "almost too sublime for human nature" (Godwin 1960, 124). Even after his unspeakable sufferings, Caleb in the closing trail scene affirms Falkland's majesty: "From the first moment I saw him, I conceived that most ardent admiration. He condescended to encourage me; *I attached myself to him with the fullness of my affection*" (372; my emphasis).

Caleb also "attaches" himself to Falkland with the fullness of his antipathy, however, and Falkland stands as the "extremely bad" object whose "insurmountable power" sadistically inflicts infinite torment upon Caleb. Honor becomes Falkland's consuming obsession, and he laughs at Caleb's

impotent arguments: "Do you not know, miserable wretch! . . . I have sworn to preserve my reputation whatever be the cost, that I love it more than the whole world and its inhabitants taken together" (Godwin 1960, 177). Yet Falkland's persecution and omnivorous appetite for honor are actually the idealized aspects of Caleb's sadistic, equally obsessive curiosity disguised and displaced onto Falkland. Caleb knows he is torturing Falkland by recalling his master's painful past, but he also views it as an explorer's game in which he means no real harm and cannot be judged guilty. "To be a spy upon Mr. Falkland!" he muses (124).

With each conversation in which Caleb slanders Falkland's heroic Alexander and Clitus as murderers, he drives his master into "convulsive shuddering" and "supernatural barbarity" that "seemed to shake the house" (Godwin 1960, 131). Collins describes Falkland as "a fool of honour and fame" who "in the pursuit of reputation nothing could divert" (116); Caleb's curiosity is an "insatiable desire" stimulated further whenever it is indulged and which "carries its pleasures, as well as its pains, along with it" (141). Thus, "to [Falkland's] story the whole fortune of [Caleb's] life is linked." "My heart," Caleb cries, "bleeds at the recollection of his misfortunes, as if they were my own!" (10).

Messrs. Forester and Spurrel also are both projections of aspects of Caleb's self and father surrogates toward whom he feels ambivalence. Forester is Falkland's elder half-brother and "in many respects the reverse of Falkland": "a violence of manner" and a lack of concern with honor. Just as Falkland suddenly returned when Caleb's father was dying, Forester appears on the scene after "a residence of several years upon the continent" and immediately after Caleb's fatal pact with Falkland. "I shall always hate you," Falkland had said, and it is as if Caleb introduces Forester as a superior and rival father figure with whom he has at least a chance for love and affection. The "novelty" of Falkland may be wearing off, as Caleb suggests when he first holds his private discussions with his master, and his second squire may serve as another paternal replacement. Significantly, Caleb draws the comparison and admires Forester with the same filial devotion: "Mr. Forester was the second man I had been uncommonly worthy of my analysis, and who seemed . . . almost as much deserving to be studied as Mr. Falkland himself" (Godwin 1960, 164). Like Caleb, he is a "man of penetration" (127) and possesses a "severity" similar to Falkland's criticism of Caleb's "harsh" judgments upon Alexander and Clitus. Caleb's "firmness and consistency astonish me," says Forester, "and add something to what I had conceived of human powers" (200). But Forester's relentless pursuit of Caleb through Gines and other instruments across the British Isles is no less superhuman. Caleb prizes above all "the independence of my own mind" (200), and there seems no one in

the kingdom more self-confident and of stricter integrity than Forester. As he tells Caleb during the interrogation over Caleb's alleged jewel theft: "I am indifferent myself about the good opinions of others. It is what the world bestows and retracts with so little thought, that I can make no account of its decision" (187).

On the other hand, Spurrel is, like Falkland, a victim of the world's values: a fool of mammon. He harbors a consuming "love of money" (Godwin 1960, 311) and, in contrast to Falkland's magnanimous spirit and Forester's principled integrity, "a charitable officiousness of demeanour" (311). Yet Caleb identifies strongly with Spurrel, for he "appeared to love me with a parental affection" and insists that Caleb's ugly visage is the "very picture" of his dead son. Spurrel asks Caleb to be his new son and promises to treat him "with the same attention and kindness" as he did his own dead son (310). But as with Falkland and Forester, love turns to betrayal. Spurrel turns Caleb over to Gines for money, just as his previous protectors made him the victim of obsessive honor and pitiless integrity. Yet Caleb discusses Spurrel's weakness for mammon in similar terms to Caleb's own irresistible passion for knowledge: he surmises Spurrel was "driven by a sort of implicit impulse" (317). Spurrel's mournful cries when Caleb is captured echo Williams's own complaints following the trunk opening and during the final trial: "I could not help it: I would have helped it if I could!" (316).

Caleb also views Captain Raymond and Mrs. Marney with unreserved filial affection. Both of them affirm what matters more to Caleb than anything else: belief in his innocence. Raymond declares Caleb "guiltless of what they lay at his charge as that I am so myself," and Mrs. Marney assumes his innocence and "had no desire for any further information than I found expedient to give" (Godwin 1960, 299). He calls Raymond "my protector" and notes that Mrs. Marney "interested herself so unreservedly" in his literary dispatches to the local printer that "she felt either [my] miscarriage or good fortune much more exquisitely than I did" (300). Like Caleb, Raymond possesses a "fervent benevolence," a "candour seldom equaled," and "penetration." He seems to Caleb "eminently superior" to his criminal partners and "out of place" (267), just as Caleb feels himself extraordinary yet painfully cut off from intercourse with mankind. Mrs. Marney too is a "benevolent soul" and "humble," as Caleb's parents were. And like young Caleb who "knew not the world" before he met Falkland, Mrs. Marney is unacquainted with the "cares of wealth and the pressures of misfortune." Most strikingly, she has a "noble" heart and is "sincere," just as Caleb astounds all who hear him speak with the force of his honest spontaneity and heartfelt conviction.

Caleb refers to Laura and Collins as "mother" and "father," yet they repudiate him most severely—as a "monster" and a "machine" (Godwin 1960,

348, 360). They are the final characters whom he meets before his trial and the only two people with whom he had ever “experienced the purest refinements of friendship” (351). Laura’s connections with Caleb as a maternal figure have already been suggested. Like Caleb, she is altogether “extraordinary” (as Collins says of Caleb).

Moreover, Laura’s background reaffirms her apparent fitness with Falkland as a choice for Caleb’s projected “family romance,” for her past and nature are notably similar to Falkland’s. Orphan Laura is a highly refined Neapolitan nobleman’s daughter who grew continually in “the fund of her accomplishments.” Whereas Falkland spends much of his young manhood “idolized” in Italy (and even has a Romance name, “Ferdinando”), Laura grows up in his native England. Both now live in remote English counties because of personal or family scandals. Falkland has withdrawn from society ever since the Tyrrel and Hawkins murders; Laura’s father was banished upon suspicion of political and religious heresy and took her to Wales. According to Caleb, Laura regards “every little relic of her father’s with a sort of religious veneration” and reveres Falkland’s name because he is discussed “in terms of panegyric” in some of her father’s correspondence. So even though Laura “treated me as if I had been one of the family,” says Caleb, “and I sometimes flattered myself that I might one day become such in reality” (Godwin 1960, 339), he is doubly thwarted: both by a paternal figure from whom he thought himself free and also by one from the distant past whom he never even met. Both Falkland’s fabricated *History* and Laura’s father’s distorted letters dash Caleb’s final hope for a family and wage war against his own “imperfect and mutilated tale.”

Caleb’s chance encounter with Collins in the final pages constitutes his concluding attempt to escape his haunting bad fathers and find the good father. Collins is the executor of his father’s farm and Caleb’s “earliest and best beloved friend” who, like Caleb’s father, was suddenly “lost” at a critical moment. Just weeks before Caleb’s “fatal reverse of fortune” with the trunk, Collins was sent by Falkland to manage his West Indian plantation and remained there ten years. “I always believed that if he had been present [at Forester’s interrogation], he would have felt me innocent,” bemoans Caleb (Godwin 1960, 356). “Felt,” rather than “believed,” is the crucial word here, for the narcissist feels the outer world an extension of his self and Freud maintained compassion has a “narcissistic origin.” Caleb yearns to have “amiable, incomparable” Collins support him, but his final consideration seems a selfless one: “Might not Mr. Falkland reduce him to a condition as wretched and low as mine? After all, was it not vice in me to desire to involve another man in my sufferings?” (360). Caleb’s wild ravings directed to Collins

show his willingness to abase himself before his “father” and his obsessive need to displace his guilt and have others believe his innocence:

Collins! I now address myself to you. I have consented that you should yield me no assistance in my present terrible situation. I am content to die rather than do anything injurious to your Tranquility.—But remember,—you are my father still! I conjure you, by all the love you ever bore me, by the benefits you have conferred upon me, by the forbearance and kindness towards you that now penetrates my soul, by my innocence—for, if these be the last words I shall ever write, I die protesting my innocence! (Godwin 1960, 365)

To injure Collins would be to injure a part of himself; to control him is to begin to gain control of himself. In fact, so strongly does Caleb identify with Collins that the novel’s first volume is actually Collins’s story filtered through Caleb (with the Tyrrel trial scene presented in Collins’s own words).⁶

Repeatedly Caleb as narrator attributes or surmises thoughts and behavior which he could not have learned even at a narrative distance of several years. This too suggests that the novel’s “accidents” may not be merely unexpected events which narrator Caleb later reports but are instead part of his unconscious manipulation of his world. The next two sections will illuminate how, if *Caleb Williams* is examined in light of the dream mechanisms at work in the novel, both Caleb’s repressed homosexuality and the psychic reasons for Collins as narrator in Volume One and Caleb as narrator thereafter become clear.

||

Caleb Williams’s texture is that of the superficial rationality of dreams, in which threatening unconscious thoughts undergo preconscious censorship to make them less ominous to the ego. Extremely sensitive material is subjected to a “far-reaching,” “tendentious” second censorship, which Freud calls “secondary revision.” This second process “fills up the gaps in the dream structure with shreds and patches,” so that the dream “approximates to the world of intelligible experience” (Godwin 1960, 490). Fully successful secondary revisions result in dreams that seem “logical and reasonable,” arrive at conclusions “caus[ing] no surprise,” and possess an “appearance of rationality” that betrays a meaning “as far removed as possible from their true significance.” The dream-work produces “absurd dreams and dreams containing absurd elements if it is faced with representing any criticism” in the dream thoughts (490).

On close reading, *Caleb Williams* proceeds like a dream, full of “irresistible forces” and “mysterious impulses” causing sudden shifts in action and setting. The dreamlike irrationality of *Caleb* is manifested by narrator Caleb’s mysterious descriptions of time and place, by the extraordinary number of unex-

plained “miraculous accidents,” and by narrator Caleb’s seeming omniscience about others’ behavior when he could have no knowledge of their thoughts and actions.

First, although Caleb prays fervently to an absent Collins to preserve his record of events, Caleb is inexplicably ambiguous as to the details of the novel’s settings. Why should he be so secretive if he wants his record preserved? Caleb refuses to tell us what year his contact with Falkland began (Godwin 1960, 4) or how much time elapses between his father’s death and his meeting Laura. He vaguely calls it an “intervening period” and says his Welsh respite was followed by “several years” of “dreadful vicissitude and pain” (354). Only his memoir-writing served as a “source of avocation” for “some years” (352). He quotes Collins as reporting only that “some years” passed between the time of Falkland’s murders and Collins’ storytelling. Furthermore, while Caleb does mention his stays in London and Wales, he absurdly conceals the location of the prison, where he and the Hawkinses were kept (253).

The wildly improbable plot leaps and sudden character appearances, most of them connected with Falkland’s seeming “omnipresence,” reinforce a sense of *Caleb*’s dreamlike quality. Caleb often uses the words “miraculous accident” in relating plot shifts; the number of coincidences is legion: Falkland appears when Caleb’s father is on his deathbed (Godwin 1960, 4); he arrives suddenly to save Emily Melville from the burning house (48); his accidental presence in the forest preserves Emily from Grimes’s clutches (74); “mere accident had enabled him to return home earlier than expected” “at a critical moment” to humiliate Tyrell at the county assembly (108); two rustics “accidentally on the spot” identify the Hawkinses as near the murder scene (19); Caleb finds “by some accident” Hawkins’s letter to Falkland behind a drawer (131); Falkland enters the blazing manor house room at the moment Caleb pries open the trunk (152); Caleb loses his way to an errand and “by accident” arrives at Forester’s (170); “as if he had dropped from the clouds,” Falkland materializes at Forester’s (172); Caleb wakes at the instant the thieves’ old woman is about to knife him (268); she makes an “extraordinary” “disappearance” (270); by a “miraculous accident” Mrs. Marney observes Gines following her and warns Caleb (307); Laura’s father writes glowingly about Falkland and Laura prizes the letters (341); as Caleb is about to explain his past to her, Laura repudiates him because she was “informed of it by a mere accident” (348); Collins appears on the road after Caleb as spent several paragraphs musing about him (358).

Caleb describes Falkland as “the eye of omniscience” (Godwin 1960, 354), but narrator Caleb makes many observations that even from a perspective of “some years” later could only be inferred or reconstructed. Gines is

the instrument of Falkland's "omniscience," but Caleb seems to know every piece of minutiae about Gines' whereabouts and even thoughts:

Upon my arrival in town he for a moment lost all trace of me. . . . He went from inn to inn (reasonably supposing that there was no private house to which I could immediately repair) till he found, by a description he gave and the recollections he excited, that I had slept for one night in the borough of Southwark. But he could get no further information. . . .

Having traced me to my second inn, he was here furnished with more copious information. . . . An old woman, of most curious and loquacious disposition . . . who rose early . . . espied me. . . . She thought there was something Jewish about my appearance. . . .

The information thus afforded to Gines appeared exceedingly material. But . . . he could not encounter every private house into which lodgers were ever admitted. . . . He walked the streets, and examined with a curious eye the countenance of every Jew about my stature; but in vain. . . . He was more than once upon the point of giving up pursuit. . . . (Godwin 1960, 304-05)

If Caleb's life, as he muses in Wales, has indeed been a "distempered and tormenting dream" (Godwin 1960, 342), these ambiguities in setting, extraordinary twists of fate and fantastic coincidences, and peculiar narrative omissions and suppositions become understandable as unconscious materials arising from the id and forcing their way into the ego. In the id there are no conflicts; contradictions and antitheses exist side by side. The id has no conception of time and knows no values. As a result of the ego's resistance to the id, dreams become distorted, with persons or entities condensed or displaced unrecognizably. Thus Caleb meets characters whom he does not recognize as aspects of himself. In Kleinian terms, the narrative gains coherence when viewed as the processes of a mind in the paranoid-schizoid position, at which point the infant has not yet developed the capacity for "linking and abstraction" and can only engage in "disjointed and concrete thinking" (Segal 1964, 70).⁷ Falkland's providential or calamitous materializations in Caleb's narrative are the shifts of an unconscious mind that recognizes no orderly or sensible progression of events, of a paranoid personality that can engage only in "disjointed" thinking.

Narrator Caleb's oddly eclectic omniscience is a desperate preconscious (or ego) attempt to impose narrative order, which the id overpowers by puncturing the patchwork with manifest improbabilities. Klein explains in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* that one mode of the ego's attempt to master anxiety is to "get the better of the unconscious" by "overemphasizing all that is tangible, visible, and perceptible to consciousness" (1946, 260). Caleb's

occasional “omniscience” (as in the Gines passages), therefore, may be the ego’s frenzied overcompensation for narrative gaps.

Klein identifies this anxiety defense as the “homosexual” mode; narrator Caleb’s repressed homosexual guilt is evidenced by his displacement of criticisms about his veracity. His characters insistently voice criticisms that he unconsciously knows are true. Forester admires his verbal “dexterity” but ridicules his guarded request for asylum as “a disjointed story with no common sense”; Falkland is stunned by Caleb’s speechmaking but declares he will be an “imposer” in the world’s eyes no matter how “plausible” his tale; Laura admires his “abilities” but cannot “tolerate” his “character” and condemns him though he pleads she has “heard only one side of the story” (Godwin 1960, 347).⁸ For although he claims at the trial and elsewhere that he has merely “told a plain and unadulterated tale” (375), Caleb knows unconsciously that he has manipulated content if not form. He must have Collins report and accept full responsibility for Volume One because it contains his most deeply repressed homosexual guilt feelings. But it indeed is the volume most disguised and distorted by secondary revision. Caleb takes Collins’s telling of events and in his composition constructs a series of remarkable unconscious identifications which confirm his latent homosexuality and link Volume One with Volumes Two and Three.

At least four individual instances of character identifications between Collins’ and Caleb’s volumes are notable: (1) Emily-Caleb; (2) Hawkins-Caleb; (3) Grimes-Gines; and (4) Tyrrel-Spurrel.⁹

The most significant and revealing link as to Caleb’s feelings toward Falkland is Williams’s tie to Emily. Both Caleb and Emily are teenage orphans when Falkland enters their lives. Like Caleb, Emily experiences her most intense encounter with Falkland in a fire, in which he saves her from death. While Emily lay in Falkland’s arms, Caleb writes, “she lived an age in love” (50). On the other hand, after the Caleb-Falkland trunk confrontation, Falkland rages that he will “always hate” Caleb. Moreover, several of Emily’s phrases re-echo from Caleb’s lips. “You may imprison my body, but you cannot conquer my mind!” Emily announces to Tyrrel (Godwin 1960, 65). Caleb later rails against Falkland: “I say, he may cut off my existence, but he cannot disturb my serenity” (216). Even Emily’s final hallucinations are not of the Falkland she has ever seen, but of the “haggard, ghost-like” Falkland whom Caleb sees at the trial: Emily sees a “mangled corpse” whom she longs to embrace; Caleb beholds “the appearance of a corpse” who “to my infinite astonishment, threw himself into my arms!” (376).

Caleb’s identification with the Hawkinses springs from his fascination with their innocence. “Never was a story more affecting!” than the fall of Hawkins and his son, thinks Caleb (Godwin 1960, 124). Just as the

Hawkinses have been victimized by Tyrrel and Falkland, Caleb believes he has been wronged by Falkland: "I consulted my own heart, that had nothing to whisper but innocence" (210). At the close of the previous chapter, he had made his emotional link to the Hawkinses explicit: "I was conducted to the same prison which had so lately enclosed the wretched and innocent Hawkinses. They too had been the victims of Mr. Falkland" (204).

Ego resistance can distort not only persons but also words, and given the other identifications within the dream structure, and their roles in volume one, "Grimes" and "Tyrrel" appear to resonate as "Gines" and "Spurrel." Just as Grimes serves as Tyrrel's loathsome tool to oppress Emily, Gines is Falkland's unyielding instrument for Caleb's persecution. Tyrrel betrays Emily though she regards him as a father; Spurrel hands over Caleb to Gines after asking Caleb to serve as a substitute for his dead son.

Because Collins's raw reportage (with the exception of the Tyrrel trial) is reconstructed through Caleb's mind in the act of writing his mangled tale, these character links may be viewed as unconscious identifications which reveal Caleb's psychic propensity toward homosexuality. He views himself as a victim like Emily and the Hawkinses, and as betrayed by Falkland and Spurrel. Caleb unconsciously represses his violent hatred of Falkland, metamorphosing it into Falkland's omnipotence, much as Freud described five-year-old Little Hans as doing because of castration anxiety:

the instinctual impulse . . . was a hostile one against the father. One might say that impulse had been repressed by the process of being transformed into its opposite. Instead of aggressiveness on the part of the subject towards the father, there appeared aggressiveness (in the shape of revenge) on the part of the father towards the subject. (Freud 1961, 6.106)

Caleb's constant fear of being "crushed" or annihilated by Falkland corresponds to Little Hans's fear of being "devoured" by his father, which "gives expression, in a form that has undergone regressive degradation, to a passive, tender impulse to be loved by him in a genital-erotic sense" (Freud 1961, 6.105). Falkland's sentence of everlasting hatred upon Caleb merely gives rise to more loving feelings by Caleb and his fantasizing of an even more invincible Falkland. Caleb identifies with Emily because, despite Collins's avowals that Falkland acted from chivalry rather than passion in saving her, Caleb knows she loved him and can rationalize from events that he loved her. As Alex Gold puts it simply, "Caleb wants to be loved the way Emily is loved"—the way that he can romanticize she was loved (1977, 144).¹⁰

Caleb's alternate "hostile aggressiveness" and "passive tenderness" toward Falkland and his other father figures constitute the emotional "ambivalence" that Freud considered a defining characteristic of latent homosexuality, in which "in the course of their development from auto-erotism to object

choice” persons remain “at a point of fixation between the two” (1961, 6.85). It is therefore inaccurate to consider *Caleb Williams* a laboratory model world of primary narcissism. More precisely, Caleb displays narcissistic object-choice, in which the subject’s own ego “is replaced by another one that is as similar as possible” (10.426). Because this “narcissistic type” prefers homosexual object-choice, it is very close developmentally to primary narcissism:

Homosexual object-choice originally lies closer to narcissism than does the heterosexual kind. When it is a question, therefore, of repelling an undesirably strong homosexual impulse, the path back to narcissism is made particularly easy. (Freud 1961, 10.426)

Thus, Caleb’s introjection of part-objects remarkably similar to his own ego marks him as narcissistic, while his homosexuality indicates that he is tending toward object-choice. Caleb is indeed at a “point of fixation between the two.” Even the conception of an omniscient Falkland and a relentless Gines corresponds to Freud’s observations in “Libido Theory and Narcissism” (1917) that the narcissist’s suspicions of constant surveillance are an effort to reinstate primary narcissism:

The patient is betraying a truth to us which is not yet sufficiently appreciated when he complains that he is spied upon and observed at every step he takes and that every one of his thoughts is reported and criticized. His only mistake is in regarding this uncomfortable power as something alien to him and placing it outside himself. He senses an agency holding sway in his ego which measures his actual ego and each of its activities by an ideal ego that he has created . . . with the intention of re-establishing . . . primary infantile narcissism. . . . (Freud 1961, 10.429)

As if he were an anguished Narcissus staring into the stream, a dejected Caleb cries out at the novel’s close, “Why must my reflections perpetually center upon myself?” (Godwin 1960, 377). The answer is that Caleb is trapped in a narcissistic world that is without security, wanting to hate and to love his fathers—and wanting to be a father. In “Dostoevsky and Parricide,” Freud expresses the consequences of repressed hatred toward the father characteristic of the Oedipal complex in the formulation: “‘You wanted to kill your father in order to be your father yourself. Now you *are* your father, but a dead father’”—and further . . . ‘Now your father is killing *you*’” (1961, 3.185). Caleb’s attempt to create a family romance has turned into almost a classic case of *paranoia persecutoria* which redoubles upon him with Falkland’s death:

The person of the same sex whom the patient loved most had . . . been turned into his persecutor. This made a further development possible: namely the replacement of the beloved person, along the line of familiar resemblances, by someone else—for instance, a father by a schoolmaster or by some superior. Experiences of this kind lead us to conclude that para-

noia persecutoria is that in which a person is defending himself against a homosexual impulse which has become too powerful. (Freud 1961, 10.424)

By the novel's final lines, Caleb is the father, though he is only physically alive. As narrator and character, he has triumphed in his Oedipal struggle with Falkland by reducing him to a mere corpse and letting his own shame extinguish the remaining flicker of life. Although he has lost his "mother" Laura to the Falkland she adored, Caleb with his mighty phallic pen finally "stabs Falkland in the very point he was most solicitous to defend!" Caleb "wins" the trial. It is, of course, a Pyrrhic victory.

III

"This is the empire that man exercises over man! Thus is a being, formed to expatiate [to roam freely], to act, to smile, to enjoy, restricted and benumbed. How great must be his depravity or heedlessness who vindicates this scheme for changing gaiety . . . into the deep furrows of agony and despair!" (Godwin 1960, 209)

Domination. Renunciation. Suffering. Caleb's outcries in jail echo the Enlightenment conviction that civilization corrupts pristine human nature. But his anguished protest inevitably raises questions that extend beyond political systems into the realm of psychology and man's instinctual nature. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud argues that history demonstrates that mankind's struggles center upon "the single task of finding some expedient (i.e., satisfying) solution between individual claims and those of the civilized community" (1961, 12.61). Because community life necessitates the partial renunciation of instinctual gratification, and therefore incites rebellion, "every individual is virtually the enemy of society" (1.72)—and vice versa. Born to roam freely, to smile, to enjoy, to seek pleasure, we are fettered by the realities of institution and law.

Thus, a psychoanalytic approach to the themes of omnipotence and impotence in *Caleb Williams* is not limited to the conflict of father versus son but also includes the social struggle of master versus servant, squire versus peasant, and society versus individual. For Caleb must contend not only with Lord Falkland but also a social system of privilege and an unjust Law. The underlying thrust of all Freud's social studies was the "similarity between the process of cultural development and that of the libidinal development in an individual" (1961, 12.620). Like narrator/dreamer Caleb's internal psychic battle of id against ego, *Caleb Williams* is a bitter war of pleasure principle against reality principle, in which Caleb's only moments of contentment occur in Laura's family, his brief source of narcissistic satisfaction.

At first glance *Caleb* seems not only a political allegory of *ancien regime* versus new order but also a theological parable. Caleb's thirst for knowledge,

the forbidden trunk, Caleb's "soul-ravishing" epiphany in a garden, and Falkland's open claim to possess more might than the "omnipresent God" all fit a transparent archetypal mythopoeia of concupiscence, Garden, apple, Original Sin, Fall and punishment. Yet this overworked religious symbolism also furnishes the clear basis for a psychosocial treatment of *Caleb* beginning with Freud's phylogenetic explanation of "repressive civilization."

In *Moses and Monotheism* and *Future of an Illusion*, Freud argues that religion springs from "a longing for the father" and "a need for protection" and the beginnings of civilization spring from the murder of the "primal father." This parricide was provoked by the oppression of the father, who achieved total gratification by imposing his iron will on others. The murderers' conspiracy gives rise to a "primal horde," which negotiates a kind of "social contract" that inevitably necessitates instinctual renunciation and does not efface the murderers' guilt. The horde is civilization's first cell. It signals both the onset of an irreversible evolution toward increasing security from Nature's domination and the chaos of anarchy and lessening "happiness" from reduced gratification: "recognition of mutual obligations, institutions declared sacred, which could not be broken—in short, the beginnings of morality and law" (Freud 1961, 13.82). Religion in the form of monotheistic rituals of human sacrifice and eating of the fathers evolve out of the original parricide, with Christianity displacing the parricide by sacrificing the son instead.¹¹ In social terms, the ambivalence toward the father which fomented rebellion and subsequent guilt remains and swells. But whereas parricide was possible if a strong man were confronted by his superior, community life presupposes "a number of men united together in strength superior to any single individual and remain united against all single individuals" (12.59). The united body's strength is then proclaimed "Right" and any opposition is "brute force." Revolution therefore entails even greater guilt than for the first assassins because it includes both the overthrow of "right" and the "archaic heritage" of parricide, our species' "memory-traces" of repeatedly re-enacted rebellions and parricides. Mankind's "memory-traces" resemble the individual's repressed unconscious thoughts. The implications for evaluating civilization are momentous:

If we assume the survival of these memory-traces in the archaic heritage, we have bridged the gulf between individual and group psychology: we can deal with peoples as we do with an individual neurotic. . . . After this discussion I have no hesitation in declaring that men have always known (in this special way) that they once possessed a primal father and killed him. (Freud 1961, 13.100)

Thus, the sense of Kafkaesque guilt pervading *Caleb Williams*—a guilt for something one did not do, a guilt so severe that it devours even innocents

like Emily Melville and the Hawkinses—is deeper than the characters themselves, inherent in the fabric of their civilization. “Things As They Are” is not merely a system of judicial graft or aristocratic depravity; community life oppresses aristocrats like Falkland and Tyrrel just as surely as peasants like Emily, the Hawkinses, and Caleb. The overt difference is merely physical and ultimately a matter of degree rather than kind. Of course, the physical and mental torment for the peasants is most apparent and effected in the name of “Right” through a perverted legal system: Tyrrel ridicules Hawkins for “gentlemanly” pretensions and persecutes him for not wishing to raise his son as a servant; Falkland rages at his “insolent domestic” Caleb, who is jailed without due process; innocent Brightwel dies in prison without a trial; noble Raymond is compelled to turn to thievery; Caleb is indicted as an Irish robber even though he has no brogue; his efforts to bring Falkland’s crimes to light are dismissed contemptuously by magistrates. Yet Caleb’s almost saintly private pledge to preserve his integrity and not ruin his respected master by betraying his secret is wrapped in a crippling guilt. Godwin captures Caleb’s convulsive trauma in his essay “Of Self-Love and Benevolence”:

The disciple of the theory of self-love, if of a liberal disposition, will perpetually whip himself forward “with loose reins” upon a spiritless Pegasus, and say, “I will do generous things; I will not bring into contempt the master I serve—though I am conscious all the while that this is but a delusion, and that, however I brag of generosity I do not set a step forward, but singly for my own ends and my own gratification.” (Godwin 1831, 223)

Even before Falkland’s trial, Caleb “knows” too he has already murdered him, as in Freud’s formulation: “You wanted to kill your father in order to be your father yourself.”

Yet even Tyrrel and Falkland are victimized by Society. After Tyrrel’s cruel jailing of Emily results in her death, Society brands him “the most diabolical wretch that ever dishonoured human form” (Godwin 1960, 102). Falkland rails against a world that could vilify, as Caleb does, a heroic Alexander: “Detested be the universe, and the laws that govern it. . . . If it were in my power I would instantly crush the whole system into nothing!” (135).

Tyrrel’s and Falkland’s *angst* is not explainable simply by their murders; for there is an insidious fatalism in *Caleb Williams* which renders the crimes not only a cause for the aristocrats’ suffering but equally a manifestation of the neurotic civilization of “Things As They Are.” Over and over again, Falkland and Tyrrel express the thought: “Man’s nature is what it is—it cannot be changed.” Falkland warns Count Malvesi that had the Italian’s affront been public, “it would not have been in my power” to decline the challenge (Godwin 1960, 17); Tyrrel justifies his plan to marry Emily to Grimes with the words “what must be must be” (58); Falkland speaks with Calvinistic

omniscience to Caleb: "I know what I am, and what I can be. I know what you are, and what fate is reserved for you!" (330). And Tyrrel rebukes Falkland's effort at reconciliation with quintessential fatalism: "I am neither a philosopher nor poet, to set out on a wild goose chase of making myself a different man from what you find me. As for consequences, what must be must be" (330). Such fatalism directly evokes Freud's conclusion in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that the central problem of man's existence as a social being lies in the "claim to individual freedom against the will of the multitude" and "whether a solution can be arrive at in some particular form of culture or whether the conflict will prove irreconcilable" (1961, 12.61). This is the ultimate question in Freud's cultural works, a level to which Blake alone among Enlightenment thinkers penetrated; Voltaire, Rousseau and Godwin, with their focus upon institutional vice, never seriously asked whether guilt and evil might be rooted in man's own psyche. As in Blake, the implication in Freud's work is that human improvement is possible only by transforming human nature, not by a change in political form. Like Tyrrel, Freud was less than optimistic.

Although Godwin's moralism never enabled him to see enough deeply to raise Freud's questions, it is remarkable the extent to which *Caleb Williams* as an anarchist's and utilitarian's "vehicle" implicitly does address Freud's psychosocial preoccupations. Freud's fundamental individual and cultural conclusions sprang from his investigations into how "energy"—instinctual energy—was "applied": to bind into ever greater unities or to loosen and to destroy; Eros and the destructive instinct. Albeit in a sociopolitical context, Caleb too ponders energy "applied" and "misapplied." He reflects upon the vigor of Captain Raymond's thieves:

Uninvolved in the debilitating routine of human affairs, they frequently displayed an energy which, from every partial observer, would have extorted veneration. Energy is perhaps of all qualities the most valuable; and a just political system would possess the means of extracting from it . . . its beneficial qualities, instead of consigning it, as now, to indiscriminate destruction. . . . the energy of these men . . . was in the highest degree misapplied . . . [and] directed only to the most narrow and contemptible purposes. (Godwin 1960, 254)

Of course, the thieves are a small, self-contained community; they consider themselves in the "profession of justice" and expel him as a "disgrace to our society" (Godwin 1960, 251). Modern civilization cannot do this on a massive scale, and so, like individuals gripped by instinctual tension and deep guilt, civilization writhes amid the mounting struggle between Eros and Thanatos:

It is not really a decisive matter whether one has killed one's father or abstained from the deed; one must feel guilty in either case, for guilt is the

expression of the ambivalence, the eternal struggle between Eros and the . . . death instinct. This conflict is engendered as soon as man is confronted with the task of living with his fellows. . . . Since culture obeys an inner erotic impulse which bids it bind mankind in a closely knit mass, it can achieve this aim only by means of its vigilance in fomenting an ever-increasing sense of guilt. That which began in relation to the father ends in relation to the community. (Freud 1961, 12.121)

In *Caleb Williams* one may therefore witness a schematized (and admittedly reductive) psychic duel played out between the id's instinctual impulses and the ego's reality principle until the destructive end. The novel's mediating reality principle is the poet Clare. Once he dies, the onslaught between Eros and Thanatos rockets out of control. Volume One pits honor against pride. Whereas Falkland's obsessive honor (his "love of fame") is an "attraction" force that seeks to draw others to him, Tyrrel's manic pride is largely concerned with "unknotting" and destroying opposing wills: in these respects they broadly correlate to the pleasure principle and the death instinct of pre-Freudian faculty psychology. Volumes Two and Three pit curiosity against vengeance (the drama of Forester's pitiless justice and Falkland's offended honor turning vindictive). Inasmuch as Caleb's insatiable curiosity, his "thirst for knowledge," represents a pleasure-seeking principle, he is Eros; because Forester's iron impartiality and Falkland's vindictiveness seek to reduce Caleb (to "crush" him) and they gain no real pleasure from it, they are Thanatos.

Clare is described by Collins as "the great operative check" upon "the excesses of Mr. Tyrrel": "this rustic tyrant had been held in involuntary restraint by the intellectual ascendancy of his celebrated neighbor" (Godwin 1960, 41). Clare "dispose[s] [Tyrrell] to submission" and "the conduct of Mr. Tyrrel had even shown tokens of improvement since Mr. Clare's residence in his neighborhood" (42). The poet also warns Falkland about his "impetuosity" and "imagined dishonour," concluding, "I would have you governed by justice and reason." Falkland replies, "I will be better" (39).

Clare's death unleashes an escalating cycle of vengeance that leads from Volume One to the novel's close. As Caleb mourns: ". . . and because they regarded each other with a deadly hatred, I have become an object of misery and abhorrence" (Godwin 1960, 21). Clare had been the one person "who could have most effectively moderated the animosities of the contending parties" (41). With the ego gone (and the novel is without a super-ego force), the id's demolition duel commences. Falkland's honor is a cancer that feeds on itself, and Tyrrel's pride is unconquerable. Falkland's years abroad bring regularly "some fresh accession to the estimation in which he was held, as well as his own impatience of stain or dishonour" (18). By the end of Volume One, he is the "fool of honor": "a man whom, in the pursuit

of reputation, nothing could divert; who would have purchased the character of a true, gallant, undaunted hero at the expense of worlds . . ." (117-18). Spoiled by his mother since infancy, Tyrrel believes "every thing must give way to his accommodation and advantage; every one must pay the most servile obedience to his commands" (19). He sets out to "destroy the prospects of a man . . . eminently qualified to enjoy and communicate happiness" (21). And from the "moment" that Hawkins tells his master that he would prefer his son not become a servant, "Mr. Tyrrel was bent upon Hawkins's destruction" (83).

The impulses in the succeeding volumes are equally unquenchable. Caleb notes that his curiosity is a "restless propensity," which "does but hurry [one] forward the more irresistibly the greater is the danger that attends its indulgence" (Godwin 1960, 130). By Volume Two, Falkland's obsession has turned psychotic: ". . . miserable wretch! . . . I love [my reputation] more than the whole world and its inhabitants taken together!" (178-79). And Forester in his severe justice "overlooks the sensibility of the sufferer and the pains he inflicts" (161).

In a deeper sense, of course, Falkland and Caleb are not destroyed by Tyrrel or Forester, or even by each other. Their false gods, knowledge and fame, contain the seeds of their own destruction. Freud in this respect reached a similar conclusion with the Nirvana principle in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which he considered Eros and Thanatos alike in their mutual tendency toward relaxation of tension:

The dominating tendency of mental life, and perhaps nervous life in general, is the effort to reduce, to keep constant, or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the "Nirvana Principle". . .)—a tendency which finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of that fact is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the existence of the death instincts. (Freud 1961, 10.54-5)

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud therefore postulates that the pleasure principle is actually serving the destructive instincts, with Eros and Thanatos both existing as forms of the more fundamental Nirvana principle. Freud here shifts his focus from "applied" versus "misapplied" energy, or binding versus loosening, and suggests one energy principle as basic to mental functioning in opposition to the reality principle. In that they are explicitly described as driven toward the elimination of excitation, Caleb's curiosity and Tyrrel's pride—identified with Eros and Thanatos respectively—may likewise be subsumed under the concept of the Nirvana principle. Caleb's description of the nature of curiosity and his passion for it are almost worded in Freudian language:

Curiosity is a principle that carries its pleasures, as well as its pains, along with it. The mind is urged by a perpetual stimulus; it seems as if it were continually approaching to the end of its race; and as the insatiable desire of satisfaction is its principle of conduct, so it promises itself in that satisfaction an unknown gratification, which seems as if it were capable of fully compensating any injuries that may be suffered in the career. (Freud 1961, 10.141–42)

I panted for the unraveling of an adventure, with an anxiety perhaps almost equal to that of the man whose future happiness or misery depended on the issue. I read, I devoured compositions of this sort . . . my imagination must be excited; and, when that was done, my curiosity was dormant. (Freud 1961, 10.142)

Similarly, Tyrrel has an almost sadistic “compulsion to repeat” persecution:

When he had once formed a determination, however slight, in favour of any measure, he was never afterwards known to give it up . . . the only effect of opposition was to make him eager and inflexible, in pursuit of that to which he had before been nearly indifferent. (Godwin 1960, 79)

“It has been my character, when I had once conceived a scheme of vengeance, never to forego it; and I will not change that character.” (Godwin 1960, 88)

In the final analysis, does a psychoanalytic approach to *Caleb Williams* mean that “what must be” must be, that things are as they are? Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization* argues that twentieth-century Western civilization has advanced to the stage to which technology can eliminate *Anake* (scarcity), which “provide[s] the rationale for the repressive reality principle” (1955, 137).¹² Technology has the potential to abolish the social demand for domination based on economic scarcity and therefore the need for repressive labor. Energy devoted to maintaining domination is then freed, permitting the development of non-repressive libido.

Of course, whether or not Marcuse’s vision is well-grounded theoretically, eighteenth-century England had not progressed industrially even to the point of satisfying its citizens’ minimal needs. The characters in *Caleb Williams* voice hope in three paths to ultimate human happiness. Clare and Brightwel present the first possibility. On his deathbed Clare speaks of the “prospect of human improvement” (Godwin 1960, 38); and Brightwel in jail delights in the thought that “the time would come when the possibility of such intolerable oppression would be extirpated” (221). Clare admits that the last half of his days have been lived in a “perfect” “serenity” (38); Brightwel believes he has “discharged his duty” and, although he dies with disappointments, “never was despair more calm, more full of resignation and serenity” (21). Clare and

Brightwel typify Freud's classic example of "aim-inhibited" love, Francis of Assisi, for they too "direct their love, not to single objects, but to all men alike":

These people make themselves independent of their object's acquiescence by displacing what they mainly value from being loved on to loving; they protect themselves against the loss of the object . . . and avoid the uncertainties and disappointments of genital love by turning away from its sexual aims and transforming the instinct into an impulse with an inhibited aim. What they bring about in themselves is a state of evenly suspended, steadfast, affectionate feeling. . . . (Freud 1961, 12.70-71)

A second solution in the novel, also a form of aim-inhibited love, is faith in the perfectibility of the next world. Raymond's words imply his trust in religious salvation and belief in heaven. After Caleb forcefully convinces him of the injustice of his thievery, Raymond laments:

Alas, Williams! . . . it would have been fortunate for me, if these views had been presented to me previously. . . . It is now too late. Those very laws which, by a perception of their iniquity, drove me to what I am, now preclude my return. God, we are told, judges all men by what they are at the period of arraignment, and whatever their crimes, if they have seen and abjured the folly of those crimes, receives them to favour. But the institutions of countries that profess to worship this God admit no such distinctions. They leave no room for amendment, and seem to have a brutal delight in confounding the merits of offenders. . . . How changed, how spotless, how useful avails him nothing. . . . Am I not compelled to go on in folly, having once begun? (Godwin 1960, 264-65)

Freud noted that religion was often used as a substitute fulfillment for the gratifications of the pleasure principle. But he opposed not only religion as an illusion but aim-inhibited love itself: "a love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value, by doing an injustice to its object" (1961, 12.70).

Caleb, if not Godwin, seems to reject both solutions as unworkable for him. He chooses instead upon Brightwel's death to pursue a life of "benevolence in a narrow circle" (Godwin 1960, 222): presumably the small community. Indeed his only period of brief happiness (in adulthood) is in the Denison family, where he was treated "as if I had been one of the family, and I sometimes flattered myself that I might one day become such in reality" (339). Caleb's unconsciously incestuous desires toward maternal Laura notwithstanding, he develops with the Denisons a deep intimacy, a "growing friendship" that is more than a "suspended, steadfast, affectionate feeling." Freud called family life "modified aim-inhibited affection" and thought it preserved (even without intercourse) a measure of sensual love (1961, 12.71). He also considered it possible that larger communities could live happily

together based on the concept of a “narcissism of minor differences.” People can “bind together” “in love” in fairly large numbers “so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness”: the differences can be national, ethnic, religious, gender, occupational or otherwise (12.90). National differences seem to mollify the peasantry in *Caleb’s* England, who think like Caleb that Britain has nothing resembling the Bastille (209), or imagine like servant Thomas that prisoners chained and without beds “never happen but in France, and other countries the like of that” (Godwin 1960, 233).

Sigmund Freud in his cultural treatises and William Godwin in *Caleb Williams* seem to hold faint hope that human civilization can exist on a worldwide scale without victims to oppress or that his neighbors can be both fully human and live peaceably together as social beings. Marcuse’s revisionist theoretical project of a non-repressive civilization may indeed lie within sight, but for Godwin and for us today the great challenge remains Freud’s in the final paragraph of *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self destruction. (Freud 1961 12.143-44)

And although Godwin never penetrated to the question’s core with Freud’s incisiveness and brilliance, it would be denying the philosopher his due to overlook that exactly a century earlier he directly addressed the subject’s moral correlative:

It is a thing deeply to be regretted that . . . man will frequently be compelled to devote himself to pursuits comparatively vulgar and inglorious because he must live. . . . The life of such a man is divided between the things which his internal monitor strongly prompts him to do, and those which external power of nature and circumstances compel him to submit to. (Godwin 1831, 125)

Notes

1. For instance, see Gross (1959, 401-11); also Barker (1974, 377-88) and Dumas (1960, 575-97). For recent scholarship that raises valuable questions in similar terms, see Garofalo (2006, 237-44), Radcliffe (2000, 528-53), and Smith (1989, 337-41).

2. On this theme, see also Ridley (1999, 69-88), Handwerk (1993, 939-60), and Thompson (1989, 173-98).

3. Nor, of course, did Godwin set out to portray his characters and their relationships in psychoanalytic terms, let alone to write a “Freudian” or “Kleinian” novel: such claims would obviously be anachronistic. Yet the degree to which Godwin’s literary imagination inspired a fictional world that anticipated certain Freudian themes and concepts is—to use a psychoanalytic term—“uncanny.”

4. Two recent psychological readings of the novel have been published. See, for instance, Faflak (2005, 99–121). Faflak concerns himself largely with the role of speech, the analyst–analysand dynamic, and the psychological climate of the Enlightenment as they relate to psychoanalysis, not to narrative issues of the reading experience of *Caleb Williams*, let alone to topics such as introjection either in Kleinian or object relations theory.

A second psychological treatment of *Caleb Williams* is Rzepka (2005). But Rzepka approaches the novel as detective story and confessional fiction, utilizing Freud to evaluate psychological evidence and to draw distinctions between psychological and legal truth.

For three insightful essays on Godwin's narrative technique as it relates to issues of power and resistance, see Daffron (1995, 213–32), Graham (1990), and Graham (1990, 215–28). For a study of the reading experience of the novel by readers during the Romantic era, see Leaver (1994, 589–610).

5. A standard approach to the theme of passion in *Caleb Williams* is to frame it in political and/or ideological terms. See, for instance, Gold Jr. (1977, 135–60), Hafizi (2003, 94–109), and Stauffer (2000, 579–97).

6. Has Caleb consciously or unconsciously adjusted Collins's reportage for his own uses? He insists that "scrupulous fidelity restrains me from altering the manner of Mr. Collins's narrative" but carefully notes that he "cannot warrant the authenticity" of Collins's words (Godwin 1960, 123). If he has not changed the "manner," has he changed the "content"? Despite Caleb's seeming familiarity with romance stories, "the case seemed entirely altered when the subject of those passions was continually before my eyes" (123). Caleb "brood[s]" over the story and it becomes "mysterious" as he "turn[s] it a thousand ways" (123).

7. Segal also notes that Klein chose the term "position" to "emphasize the fact that the phenomenon she was describing was not merely a passing "stage" or "phase," such as, for example, the oral stage; her term implies a specific configuration of object relations, anxieties, and defences which persist throughout life" (1964, xxxi).

8. If Laura or the reader could fully hear "both sides of the story," *Caleb Williams* would more properly be viewed not as a "half-told" tale but rather as a "twice-told" tale. But neither Falkland's *History* nor Caleb's novel can completely explain events or persuade the audience as to the tragedy's real victim or villain.

9. On these correspondences, see also Gold's analysis of the novel as dream (1977, 141–44). Also relevant is Uphaus (1977, 279–96).

10. Dean T. Hughes views the novel's interludes of romance as narrative defense mechanisms: "Each of Godwin's novels is an experiment in human psychology. A mind is studied during a time of crucial pressure or difficulty . . . each novel is interrupted by interludes of 'romance,' in Godwin's term, which avoids psychological probing." See Hughes (1980).

11. Even Godwin's choice of the name "Caleb" for the protagonist reinforces the religious resonance of the novel. Caleb literally means "dog" in Hebrew (i.e., "faithful"), and Caleb certainly considers himself faithful to Falkland and to his oath until the last pages. In the Old Testament, only Caleb and Joshua were to be permitted to see the Promised Land. Moses reports Yahweh's words: "Not one of these

men, this perverse generation, shall see the rich land that I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb. . . . He shall see it. "To him and to his sons, I will give the land he has set foot on, for he has followed Yahweh in all things" (Deuteronomy 1.30). Caleb is also known in Volumes Two and Three of the scurrilous Falkland *History* as "Kit," a diminutive for Christopher, which means "bearing Christ."

12. For an excellent critique of Marcuse and a fine summary and analysis of Freud's psychosocial thought, see also Bocock (1976).

Works Cited

- Barker, Gerald. 1974. "Justice to Caleb Williams." *Studies in the Novel* 6: 377-88.
- Bocock, Robert. 1976. *Freud and Modern Society*. Middlesex, Great Britain: Thomas Nelson & Sons.
- Brown, Ford K. 1926. *The Life of William Godwin*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Clemit, Pamela. 1993. *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Daffron, Eric. 1995. "'Magnetel Sympathy': Strategies of Power and Resistance in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 37.2 (Spring): 213-32.
- Dumas, D. Gilbert. 1960. "Things As They Were: The Original Ending of *Caleb Williams*." *Studies in English Literature* 6: 575-97.
- Faflak, Joel. 2005. "Speaking of Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: The Talking Cure and the Psychopathology of Enlightenment." *English Studies in Canada* 31.2-3 (June-September).
- Fodor, Nancy, ed. 1950. *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1961. *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. James Strachey. Vols. 1-13. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Furbank, P.N. 1955. "Godwin's Novels." *Essays in Criticism* 5: 215.
- Garofalo, Daniela. 2006. "'A Left-Handed Way': Modern Masters in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." *European Romantic Review* 1.2 (April): 237-44.
- Godwin, William 1831. "Of Human Innocence," "Of the Rebelliousness of Man," and "Of Self-Love and Benevolence." In: *Thoughts on Man*. London: Effingham Wilson.
- . 1946. *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*. Ed. F.E.L. Priestly. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . 1960. *Things As They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. New York: Rinehart Press.
- Gold, Alex. 1977. "It's Only Love: The Politics of Passion in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 19: 135-60.
- Graham, Kenneth W. 1990a. "Narrative and Ideology in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2.3 (April): 215-28.
- . 1990b. *The Politics of Narrative: Ideology and Social Change in William Godwin's Caleb Williams*. New York: AMS Press.
- Gross, Harvey. 1959. "The Pursuer and the Pursued: A Study of *Caleb Williams*." *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 1: 401-11.

- Hafizi, Afshin. 2003. "Ideology and Utopia in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory* 4.2 (Spring): 94–109.
- Handwerk, Gary. 1993. "Of Caleb's Guilt and Godwin's Truth: Ideology and Ethics in *Caleb Williams*." *ELH* 60.4 (Winter): 939–60.
- . ed. 2000. *Caleb Williams/William Godwin*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview.
- Hughes, Dean T. 1980. *Romance and Psychological Realism in Godwin's Novels*, *Dissertation Abstracts International* 33, 2330A.
- Klein, Melanie. 1946. "Notes on Some Schizoid Positions." *Developments in Psycho-Analysis* 27.
- . 1975. *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*. London: Delacorte Press.
- Leaver, Kristen. 1994. "Pursuing Conversations: *Caleb Williams* and the Romantic Construction of the Reader." *Studies in Romanticism* 33.4 (Winter): 589–610.
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1955. *Eros and Civilization*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Munro, D.H. 1953. *Godwin's Moral Philosophy*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Radcliffe, Evan. 2000. "Godwin from 'Metaphysician' to Novelist: Political Justice, *Caleb Williams*, and the Tension between Philosophical Argument and Narrative." *Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature* 97.4 (May): 528–53.
- Ridley, Glynis. 1999. "Injustice in the Works of Godwin and Wollstonecraft." In *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s*, ed. Linda Lang-Peralta. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Rzepka, Charles J. 2005. "Detection as Method: Reconstructing the Past in Godwin and Freud." *Literature Compass* 2.1 (January).
- Segal, Hanna. 1964. *An Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*. New York: Basic Books.
- Smith, Ken Edward. 1989. "William Godwin: Social Critique in *Caleb Williams*." *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 263: 337–41.
- Stauffer, Andrew M. 2000. "Godwin, Provocation, and the Plot of Anger." *Studies in Romanticism* 39.4 (Winter): 579–97.
- Storch, Rudolf. 1967. "Metaphors of Private Guilt and Social Rebellion in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." *English Literary History* 34.
- Thompson, James. 1989. "Surveillance in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." In *Gothic Fictions: Prohibitions/Transgressions*, ed. Kenneth Graham. New York: AMS Press.
- Uphaus, Robert. 1977. "*Caleb Williams*: Godwin's Epoch of Mind." *Studies in the Novel* 9: 279–96.
- Woodcock, George. 1946. *William Godwin*. London: Porcupine Press.