

A Pastoral Romance, From the Ancient British: Godwin's Rewriting of Comus

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Godwin is steadily rising in reputation, both as philosopher and as novelist. Over the last few years several biographies have appeared; his ideas have been analysed; and his best-known works, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and *Caleb Williams* (1794), have received considerable scholarly attention.¹ Now his post-revolutionary novels are being recognized as the fictions of an intellectual who was impressive in his own right, not merely because of his association with Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Yet William Godwin's early novels are still almost completely neglected. In this context *Imogen* (1784) is of special interest as the first of Godwin's mature novels, and as a significant addition to the intellectual fiction of the Romantic period.

Imogen: A Pastoral Romance, From the Ancient British was the last of three novels produced by Godwin in the winter of 1783 and 1784 and the one over which he took the most trouble.² The title alone signals

1 Major recent biographies are Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Peter Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984); William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989). Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986), studies Godwin's thought up to 1800. Intelligent appreciations of *Caleb Williams* include Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 179-208; Marilyn Butler, "Godwin, Burke, and *Caleb Williams*," *Essays in Criticism* 32 (1982) 237-57; Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 230-39.

2 Godwin, autobiographical note for 1783, Abinger Manuscripts Dep. b. 226/2. I am grateful to

Godwin's dissatisfaction with the eighteenth-century prose conventions exploited in the earlier *Damon and Delia* and *Italian Letters*, modelled respectively on Smollett and Richardson. Those critics who have recognized *Imogen* as more than hack work have discussed Godwin's interest in eighteenth-century primitivism as reflected in the Preface, but the novel's most remarkable feature, its construction out of poetic models, has gone practically unnoticed. In particular, Godwin's intriguing use of Milton's "Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle" [*Comus*] has not been explored.³

Godwin's conjunction of pastoral romance, political idealism, and topical comment makes *Imogen* the first expression of that "new and startling" blend of philosophy and fiction to be developed in *Caleb Williams*.⁴ Though allusion to Milton is in itself commonplace in radical fiction and polemical treatises of the period, Godwin's interest in *Comus* as a model for the renovation of genre is unique. Godwin's early experiment with allegorical modes offers a displaced enactment of theoretical issues which sheds light on a relatively obscure period of his development. In particular, the technical inventiveness of *Imogen* suggests his independence of the polemical method of other Jacobin novelists, in which ideas are largely superimposed on conventional plots. Instead, he sought to remould literary conventions in order to dramatize his philosophical interests. Godwin's indirect manner of presenting ideas in fiction establishes *Imogen* as a forerunner of the non-naturalistic, mythopoeic type of intellectual fiction, which he developed in *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon* (1799), and *Fleetwood* (1805), and which was taken up in the next generation by Mary Shelley and Thomas Love Peacock.

The full intellectual resonance of *Imogen* is apparent only in the context of Godwin's early thought. After leaving Hoxton Dissenting Academy

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3 For discussions of eighteenth-century primitivism, see Jack W. Marken, introduction to William Godwin, *Imogen, A Pastoral Romance from the Ancient British* (New York: New York Public Library, 1963), and appended critical discussion, esp. Burton R. Pollin, "Primitivism in *Imogen*," pp. 113-17. References to *Imogen* are to this edition. See also Locke, p. 26. Critics who mention Godwin's use of *Comus* include Marken, introduction, p. 12; I. Primer, "Some Implications of Irony," *Imogen*, pp. 118-21; B.J. Tysdahl, *William Godwin as Novelist* (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 25; Marshall, p. 64. Ingrid Kuczynski, "Pastoral Romance and Political Justice," in *Essays in Honour of William Gallacher: Life and Literature of the Working Class*, ed. Anselm Schlösser et al. (Berlin: Humboldt University, 1966), pp. 101-10, offers a more politicized reading of *Imogen*.

4 Hazlitt, "Mr. Godwin" [1830], *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-34), XVI, 394.

in August 1778, he spent several periods in London before settling there in May 1782 to earn his living as a writer. During these years the demand for parliamentary reform among the politically articulate classes excluded from power, which has been identified as the last phase of activity of the eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen,⁵ reached its height. But more important to Godwin's early development is the intellectual influence of the Commonwealth tradition, which maintained the study of government in the spirit of seventeenth-century writers such as Milton, Harrington, Sidney, and Locke. In keeping with his interest in speculative politics, Godwin's political imagination was first exercised by the intellectual debate on the American Revolution. "It was auspicious for me," he later recalled, "not that a question of finances & taxes, of customs & excises, of commercial monopolies & preferences, engaged the attention at that period, but a question involving eternal principles, a question of liberty & subjugation, & a question that seemed to embrace one half of the world."⁶ For Godwin as for other radicals who achieved greater prominence in the debate on the French Revolution, the question of the rights of the American colonists provided a catalyst for theoretical discussion of English liberty. Though the full implications of Thomas Paine's attack on the British constitution were brought home only with the publication of the *Rights of Man* (1791-92), written in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Paine's principles had already been set out in *Common Sense* (1776), where he argued for the founding of a republican government in America, independent of British rule. Second only to *Common Sense* in forming radical opinion was Richard Price's *Observations on ... Civil Liberty* (1776), a pamphlet offering a philosophical defence of the colonists' right to political self-determination. In his later *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (1785), Price celebrated this "revolution in favour of universal liberty" as "a revolution by which Britons themselves will be the greatest gainers, if wise enough to ... catch the flame of virtuous liberty which has saved their American brethren."⁷

5 Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 320-77.

6 Ab. MSS b. 226/2. My account is indebted to Robbins, pp. 3-21; Marshall, pp. 46-61; and Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), pp. 32-64.

7 A.H. Lincoln, *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 133; Richard Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution, and the Means of Making it a Benefit to the World* (1785), pp. 1-2.

For Godwin too there was more at stake than the question of American liberties. By 1779 his political views had shifted from Toryism to the Whig Opposition, and he embraced republican principles a year later. Though he remained detached from practical movements for reform, his writings in this period show a growing preoccupation with theoretical questions involving constitutional liberties. In his first publication, the *Life of Chatham* (1783), he contented himself with moderate criticism of his subject's "misguided flame of patriotism" in seeking to subdue the American colonists.⁸ But two early pamphlets, which appeared anonymously, show more direct commentary on political issues: in *A Defence of the Rockingham Party* (1783) Godwin wrote in support of Fox's tactical coalition with his former antagonist Lord North, and in *Instructions to a Statesman* (1784), written after the defeat of the Rockingham Whigs, he made a satirical attack on unprincipled statecraft. It is Godwin's less overtly political writings, however, that are more relevant to his indirect treatment of topical concerns in *Imogen*. In *The Herald of Literature* (1784) he wrote a series of literary parodies in the guise of forthcoming works of well-established writers; then proceeded to review them as if they were genuine. Even here, he is preoccupied with the American debate, for he included skilful imitations of William Robertson's *History of America*, Burke's speeches on commercial links with the colonies, and Paine's *Common Sense*. In his editorial remarks he took the opportunity to praise Paine's style ("exactly that of popular oratory") while distancing himself from his polemical arguments: "They may be the sentiments of a patriot, they are not certainly those of a philosopher."⁹

For a more accurate guide to Godwin's theoretical stance we must turn to *An Account of the Seminary* (1783), the prospectus for his planned school at Epsom, which shows the impact of the French *philosophes* on his thought. By the end of 1782 Godwin's reading of d'Holbach, Helvétius, and Rousseau led him to reject the notion of original sin in favour of the belief "that human depravity originates in the vices of political constitution." In *An Account of the Seminary*, drawing selectively on Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men* and

8 *The History of the Life of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (London: G. Kearsley, 1783), p. 284, published anonymously.

9 [Godwin], *The Herald of Literature: or A Review of the Most Considerable Publications that will be made in the Course of the Ensuing Winter* (1784), reprinted in *Four Early Pamphlets (1783-4)*, ed. Burton R. Pollin (Gainesville, FL: Scholar Press, 1966), articles II, IX, X, p. 106.

on *Emile*, he sought to present a mode of education that would liberate the mind from institutional pressures:

The state of society is incontestably artificial; the power of one man over another must be always derived from convention, or from conquest; by nature we are equal. The necessary consequence is, that government must always depend upon the opinion of the governed. Let the most oppressed people under heaven once change their mode of thinking, and they are free.¹⁰

It is in the context of this belief in internal renovation, as opposed to practical reform, that Godwin's turn to novel-writing at the end of 1783 should be viewed. From his earliest writings, Godwin had aimed to renovate "the opinion of the governed" through imaginative fable rather than doctrinal statement. As he wrote in the first edition of *Political Justice*, he regarded works of imagination as uniquely capable of furnishing "the enquiring and philosophical reader ... with the materials and rude sketches of intellectual improvement." He further quoted with approval Turgot's account of "romances as holding a place among treatises of morality, and even as the only books in which he [Turgot] was aware of having seen moral principles treated in an impartial manner."¹¹ This insight into the special strengths of romance is crucial to *Imogen*, where he is particularly concerned with remoulding the perceptions of "the young reader." In keeping with the Commonwealthmen's concern for the training of good citizens newly voiced by Paine—"Youth is the seed time of good habits, as well in nations as in individuals"—Godwin remodels the exemplary action of eighteenth-century conduct books to create a proto-revolutionary narrative.¹²

Even a brief outline of the plot shows Godwin's integration of imaginative and philosophical concerns. Two major points may be immediately noted; first, the novel's symbolic setting in primitive Wales—as signalled by the subtitle, *From the Ancient British*, Godwin's narrative should be

10 Godwin, undated note, Ab. MSS b. 229/9; see also Godwin's account of his loss of faith, Ab. MSS c. 604/1; *An Account of the Seminary ... at Epsom in Surrey, for the Instruction of Twelve Pupils ...*, reprinted in *Four Early Pamphlets*, p. 2.

11 Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, photographic facsimile of third edition (1798), corrected and edited with variant readings of the first (1793) and second (1796) editions by F.E.L. Priestley, 3 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), III, 270 and n. References by volume and page number are to this edition.

12 [Review of *Imogen*], *English Review* 4 (August 1784), 142; Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 107.

read in the context of the influential radical argument that English democratic government originated before the Norman conquest¹³—and second, the novel's allegorical structure of quest, trial, and rescue. With its multiple associations with romance and spiritual quests, this economical plot brings the simplicity and suggestiveness of myth to bear on contemporary issues. More precisely, Godwin evokes Spenser's "Legend of Britomartis, or of Chastitie," in the third book of *The Faerie Queene*. But it is *Comus* that provides a language for this secular enterprise. It is central to the instructive purpose of *Imogen* that Milton's phrasing, resonant with moral authority, is pervasive, but at the same time this moral authority is undercut by significant shifts of emphasis as Godwin rejects the underlying sense of humanity's imperfections which is crucial to *Comus*. Godwin rewrites Milton's exemplary theme of virtue in distress as a paradigm of revolutionary experience, highlighting the power of private judgment to dethrone hereditary vice.

The story is set in the Welsh valley of Clwyd, a native mountain republic where the undeclared lovers, Edwin and Imogen, live in perfect equality, in conformity with the precepts of the Druids. On their journey home from a bardic festival the lovers are besieged by threatening forces: a goblin of darkness, a supernatural storm, and a ferocious wolf. In a scene reminiscent of Proteus's rescue of Florimell, Roderic appears and carries Imogen off to his palace in a golden chariot.¹⁴ When the tempest subsides, Edwin vows to rescue Imogen and defeat the false enchanter. He seeks the advice of the hermit Madoc, whose instructive role resembles that of Milton's Attendant Spirit.

Madoc's function is to educate Edwin into an awareness of his historical situation: "this is your hour of trial" (p. 45). Godwin evokes a range of allegorical precedents to sketch the rise of government as a perversion of pastoral values. Madoc traces the origins of Roderic's tyrannical power to his mother's abuse of great talents: like *Comus*'s mother and Spenser's Radigund, Rodogune sought to enslave all men, building a stately mansion to house "crouds of degenerate shepherds ... in every brutal form" (p. 46). On the principle of hereditary succession, her property passes to her only son, Roderic, who claims further affinity with *Comus* and the Spenserian deceivers Proteus and Cupid by virtue of his

13 Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958), pp. 99–109; Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (1968; revised edition, London: Libris, 1989), pp. 11–15.

14 Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London and New York: Longman, 1977), III, viii, 35. References are to this edition.

magical ability to assume different shapes.¹⁵ Crucially, though, Roderic's power is limited by a curse, pronounced at his birth by a disaffected goblin, which prophesies the exact circumstances of his destruction:

WHEN RODERIC SHALL BE OVERREACHED IN ALL HIS SPELLS BY A SIMPLE SWAIN ... WHEN RODERIC SHALL SUE TO A SIMPLE MAID, WHO BY HIS CHARMS SHALL BE MADE TO HATE THE SWAIN THAT ONCE SHE LOVED, AND WHO YET SHALL RESIST ALL HIS PERSONAL ATTRACTIONS AND ALL HIS POWER; THEN SHALL HIS POWER BE AT AN END. HIS PALACES SHALL BE DISSOLVED, HIS RICHES SCATTERED, AND HE HIMSELF SHALL BECOME AN UNPITIED, NECESSITOUS, MISERABLE VAGABOND. (p. 47)

As in Horace Walpole's Gothic romance, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the plot turns on the fulfilment of prophecy. Walpole's aristocratic fable depicts the overthrow of a property owner and the restoration of the rightful heir. By contrast, Godwin predicts the dissolution of property values through the action of humble figures, a simple maid and her swain. At intervals the goblin reappears to remind Roderic of his inescapable destiny, inviting comparison with another influential representation of the supernatural Gothic, Henry Fuseli's recently exhibited picture, *Nightmare* (1782).¹⁶ The goblin, who articulates Roderic's deepest thoughts and fears, suggests an unacknowledged aspect of the self, and travesties the heavenly wisdom offered by the supernatural Spirit in *Comus*.

To foil Roderic's hereditary power of enchantment, Madoc equips Edwin with a "small and sordid root" (p. 48) which resembles the Attendant Spirit's treasured haemony.¹⁷ But the plant's powers are superfluous to a plot which emphasizes secular moral choice, and gives the initiative to a traditional representative of the oppressed classes, a woman of the common people. When Imogen wakes up in Roderic's palace, she is subjected to a series of temptations which reflect all the specious contrivances of advanced political society. Drawing on Spenser's elaborate settings, Godwin recasts the exemplary moral action of *Comus* as a

15 Milton, "A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634" or *Comus* (1637), ll. 50-77, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London and New York: Longman, 1971); all references are to this edition. *Faerie Queene* V, iv, 29-33. Cf. Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791-92), ed. Henry Collins (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 104: "Aristocracy has never more than *one* child." *Imogen*, p. 47; cf. *Faerie Queene* III, viii, 40-41, xi, 306-39.

16 See Nicholas Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p. 98.

17 *Comus*, ll. 628-40.

symbolic confrontation of old and new orders. He sets the vices of a decaying constitution in opposition to pastoral values and the precepts of the Druids.

The "grand, and simple, and commanding" architecture of Roderic's mansion, supported by "pillars of the Ionic order" (p. 97), signals his role as an exemplar of aristocratic decadence, for it immediately brings to mind the classical elegance of the eighteenth-century country house. More revealing of Godwin's philosophical point of reference is the management of Roderic's vast estate. It is no accident that Roderic's land is an enormous "inclosure" which prospers through "that wondrous art, as yet unknown in the plains of Albion, of turning up the soil with a share of iron" (p. 61), for Rousseau had isolated ploughing as the source of the inequalities of civil society: "for the philosopher it is iron and wheat which first civilised men and ruined the human race."¹⁸ Roderic's admission that he is suffocated by a life of ease and envious of pastoral simplicity further supports Rousseau's account of social progress: "behold man, who was formerly free and independent, diminished as a consequence of a multitude of new wants into subjection." What appals Imogen most is the "unresisting passivity" of Roderic's household; like Rousseau's primitive man, she cannot understand the terms "master" and "servant" by which he maintains his authority:¹⁹

The Gods have made all their rational creatures equal. If they have made one strong and another weak, it is for the purpose of mutual benevolence and assistance, and not for that of despotism and oppression. Of all the shepherds of the valley, there is not one that claims dominion and command over another. (p. 59)

In offering Imogen a share in his prosperous estate, Roderic holds out the promise of a revolutionary transformation in her fortunes: "From this moment let a new aera and better prospects commence" (p. 64). However, brought up in the Druids' belief that "the mind is the nobler part," Imogen rejects this offer in favour of rational "freedom and independence" (pp. 65, 64).

Imogen is then conducted into a room hung with an arras depicting heroic women of antiquity, where Roderic attempts to win her through

18 Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (1755), trans. and ed. Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 116.

19 Rousseau, p. 119; cf. Rousseau, p. 106: "savage men ... could hardly even be brought to understand what servitude and domination are"; cf. Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 113: "Submission is wholly a vassalage term ... and an echo of the language used at the Conquest."

a song in praise of the civilizing power of feminine charms. Again, Godwin invokes a Spenserian frame of reference to make a contemporary point. In the mouth of the deceiver Roderic, Spenser's eulogy of female virtue is redeployed to highlight the eighteenth-century use of an idealized concept of womanhood to shore up patriarchal values.²⁰ In opposition to his "mummery, dissimulation, and hypocrisy" (p. 73), Imogen struggles to maintain a sense of personal rectitude. The next challenge takes place in Rodogune's enchanted garden, where Roderic exploits his Protean gift by appearing disguised as Edwin. He counsels a surrender of her will to oppressive circumstances: "it is in vain that we resolve, and in vain that we struggle" (p. 86). But, unlike the passive women of *Otranto* ("It is not ours to make election for ourselves; heaven, our fathers, and our husbands, must decide for us"),²¹ Imogen resists being cast as a figure in someone else's plot. Instead she adopts the posture of a defiantly independent heroine: "If the courage of Edwin fail, I will show him what he ought to be. ... You shall see what an injured and oppressed woman can do" (p. 85). Armed with this enhanced rational self-reliance, she resists the final temptation of a feast of excess, which is heralded by close verbal echoes of *Comus*: "Let the board of luxury be spread. ... Night is the season of dissipation and luxury" (p. 92).²²

At this point Edwin enters Roderic's grounds in the manner of a knightly challenger. Dazzled by the ornate splendours of the palace, Edwin is brought before Roderic, who invites him to a banquet of sensual extravagance. Roderic's seductive argument for drinking deep of the "cup of pleasure" (p. 102) brings to mind all the implications of *Comus*'s philosophy of self-indulgence, against which the Lady's explicitly egalitarian sentiments are counterpoised:

If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeching share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,

20 *Faerie Queene* III, iv, 1-3; Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 15-17; cf. Mary Wollstonecraft's attack on "mistaken notions of female excellence" in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. Miriam Brody Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 81-83.

21 Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. W.S. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 88.

22 *Comus*, ll. 122-24.

Nature's full blessings would be well-dispensed
 In unsuperfluous even proportion.²³

But, "by an irresistible impulse of goodness" (p. 103), Edwin actively resists Roderic's plea and succeeds where the Lady's Brothers "mistook": he snatches the enchanter's wand and breaks it in pieces. Like earlier architectural symbols of a corrupt ruling order (but unlike Comus's palace), Roderic's mansion collapses in ruins, and he and his train vanish "like shadows at the rising of the sun" (p. 104).²⁴ Pastoral harmony is speedily restored: the lovers are reunited and return to their haven of equality in the vale of Clwyd, where virtue is rewarded by the sense of having passed through the "ordeal of temptation" with "an approved fortitude" (p. 106).

Even in this brief account, the extent to which Godwin transforms Spenserian and Miltonic themes to reflect his own philosophical interests should be apparent. The technical sophistication of his enterprise, however, can be fully appreciated only by contrast with more polemical treatments of the *Comus* theme in the novels of Robert Bage, Thomas Holcroft, and Elizabeth Inchbald.

On one level, Godwin's use of the theme of virtue in distress reflects a commonplace of eighteenth-century fiction. According to E.A. Baker, popular romantic fiction found its mainstay in "the theory that fiction should portray virtue attractively, and show it always triumphing over vice." This concept derived moral authority from Milton's precedent, where the trial of virtue depends on the Puritan definition of virtue as integrity of mind. As St Augustine comments, chastity "is not a treasure that can be stolen without the mind's consent"; although the Lady is physically at risk when she is imprisoned, Comus remains helpless in the face of her intellectual defiance. In novels which sought to propagate a Puritan morality in opposition to the degenerate habits of the ruling class, attempted rape provided a stock situation in which that "strong siding champion Conscience" had to prove its worth.²⁵ Desiring to emulate "the glorious Milton," Richardson pushed this emphasis on internal resources

23 *Comus*, ll. 767-72; cf. *Political Justice* I, 15.

24 *Comus*, ll. 813-15: "What, have you let the false enchanter scape? / O ye mistook, ye should have snatched his wand / And bound him fast." Cf. the fall of Busirane's mansion (*Faerie Queene*, III, xii, 37, 42-43), and the collapse of Otranto (*Otranto*, p. 108).

25 E.A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, V (1929, London: Witherby, 1957), pp. 22-23; cf. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson, ed. David Knowles (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 40; *Comus*, l. 211.

to its limit. Allowing the rape of Clarissa to take place in a minutely documented social setting, he exposed the clash between the Puritan ideal of virtuous conduct and the ethic of self-interest prevalent in eighteenth-century society.²⁶

More directly relevant to Godwin's purpose is Richardson's first novel, *Pamela* (1740), which united profoundly appealing romance themes with naturalistic social detail. Richardson's choice of a servant as heroine, persecuted by a landed proprietor who eventually marries her, established the proto-revolutionary plot stripped to its essentials in *Imogen*, and taken up again in the radical novels of the 1790s. In exchanges between a recognizably eighteenth-century servant and master, the egalitarian sentiments of *Comus* take on a new directness: "my *soul* is of equal importance with the soul of a princess," declares Pamela, "though in quality I am but upon a foot with the meanest slave." Like *Imogen*, Pamela is clothed in pastoral garb for her period of temptation, and her resistance to material wealth is couched in terms of pastoral values.²⁷ *Imogen's* "ardent desire to set out for the cottage of her father" (p. 59) is surely indebted to Pamela's very similar intention. Pamela also wants to return to her father's cottage, and believes that her parents pray "with hearts more pure, than are to be met with in palaces!" Finally, though, Richardson's transformation of his heroine into the "happy condition" of a gentlewoman forms no part of Godwin's scheme.²⁸

A more overtly radical use of *Comus*, which may have stimulated Godwin's interest, was provided by Bage in his first novel, *Mount Henneth* (1782). This witty epistolary narrative recounts the story of James Foston's education in benevolence through a series of adventures in primitive settings. In an Indian episode, suitably remote from the constraints of advanced society, Bage takes issue with Richardson's treatment of female dishonour in *Clarissa* (1747-48). Foston arrives at the house of a Persian merchant just in time to rescue his daughter Caralia from being butchered by marauding soldiers, but too late to prevent her rape. Unlike Clarissa, however, Caralia does not die: instead Foston marries her and brings her to England. Caralia's fears for her good name offer a direct critique of "the reigning manners and opinions" in English society as

26 For Richardson's admiration of Milton, see *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John I. Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 176, 98; Christopher Hill, "Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times," *Essays in Criticism* 5 (1955), 315-40.

27 Richardson, *Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Peter Sabor with an introduction by Margaret Anne Doody (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), pp. 197, 87, 112.

28 Richardson, pp. 199, 337.

reflected in fictional treatments of the dishonoured woman: "Women who have suffered it, must die, or be immured for ever. Ever after they are totally useless to all the purposes of society. ... No author has yet been so bold as to permit a lady to live and marry, and be a woman after this stain."²⁹ But Foston's travels have so enlarged his outlook that he insists that Caralia's "mind is fit for heaven," and that a woman would be "more dishonoured by a wanton dream" in which she willingly participated. In this way the "test of reason" exposes the injustice of received social morality. Though Bage's ironical attitude to what he calls "the loss of—innocence, a bagatelle" tends to defuse his radicalism, his sentiments anticipate Wollstonecraft's more polemical attack on Richardson in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792): "When Richardson makes Clarissa tell Lovelace that he had robbed her of her honour, he must have had strange notions of honour and virtue. For, miserable beyond all names of misery is the condition of a being, who could be degraded without its own consent!"³⁰

Several overtly didactic novels of the revolutionary decade amplify Wollstonecraft's point. In Holcroft's *Anna St. Ives* (1792) the aristocrat Clifton threatens Anna with rape in order to break her will. But Anna does not believe in the notion of female dishonour, and her exemplary fortitude owes much to the eloquent defiance of the Lady in *Comus*: "Nay, think you that ... I would falsely take guilt to myself; or imagine I had received the smallest blemish, from impurity which never reached my mind? That I would lament, or shun the world, or walk in open day oppressed by shame I did not merit? No ... You cannot injure me—I am above you!"³¹ Here Holcroft exploits "the entire mythology of rape, the 'fate worse than death'" in the service of his larger political argument, which highlights the power of reason to transcend prejudice and prescription.³² As Frank Henley insists with disconcerting simplicity: "No man can be degraded by another; it must be his own act."³³ Yet despite this outspoken criticism of established morality, Holcroft's

29 Robert Bage, *Mount Henneth; a novel*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1782), I, 233, 230.

30 Bage, I, 147; Wollstonecraft, p. 166.

31 Thomas Holcroft, *Anna St. Ives*, ed. Peter Faulkner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 423–24.

32 Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 80.

33 Holcroft, p. 140.

radical tendency is limited by his final conformity to novel-reading expectations, which reaffirms the conventions he sets out to question. His independent-minded hero and heroine resolve their dissatisfaction with the existing order by becoming part of it: Anna and Frank Henley marry and take their places among the privileged classes, where they continue the task of reforming Clifton. Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796), an allegorical treatment of social oppression, is more consistent in its ethical design. In keeping with Godwin's symbolic version of political relations in *Imogen* and *Caleb Williams*, Inchbald blends issues of class and gender: the plight of Hannah Primrose, the servant who is sentenced to death by the aristocrat who seduced her, reflects the multiple levels at which social tyranny operates.

Though the *Comus* theme achieves its most concentrated expression in the novels of the revolutionary decade, it is by no means exclusive to that period. In *Melincourt* (1817), Peacock's most ambitious and densely textured political satire, abduction and threatened rape are the mainspring of the plot. Though Peacock draws on Holcroft's and Inchbald's themes, he surpasses them in his masterly use of allegory and allusion. In *Melincourt*, as in *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829), a politicized rendering of Celtic myth that invites direct comparison with *Imogen*, Peacock creates a unique fictional world of rich figurative possibilities.³⁴

If Godwin's use of allegory and fable—rather than of elaborately plotted, more naturalistic modes of representation—invites comparison with Peacock's highly cerebral art, it also establishes a special feature of the Godwinian intellectual novel. In *Italian Letters* Godwin had experimented with Richardson's epistolary style and seduction theme, the conventions used by Holcroft in *Anna St. Ives*, to present a straightforward opposition between rural innocence and aristocratic depravity: as in Holcroft's novel, social criticism is simply grafted on to a derivative plot. The more radically experimental character of *Imogen* is suggested by Godwin's early autobiographical fragment, in which he recalled his youthful reveries: "I made whole books as I walked, books of fictitious adventures in the mode of Richardson ... & books of imaginary institutions in education and government, where all was to be faultless."³⁵ The conspicuous artifice of *Imogen* is thus an aspect of its genre: Godwin's use of

34 Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 58–101, esp. p. 80, and pp. 155–82; "Druids, Bards and Twice-Born Bacchus: Peacock's Engagement with Primitive Mythology," *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 36 (1985), 57–76.

35 Godwin, autobiographical fragment [1756–69], Ab. MSS b. 228/1.

pastoral romance anticipates the aims, though not the method, of first-person narratives such as *Caleb Williams*. He seeks to disrupt rather than passively validate the reader's preconceptions, to persuade the reader to his own point of view rather than to consolidate things as they are.

In this respect he would have found Milton's use of the masque, the artistic form chosen by the early Stuarts to embody their absolutist claims, especially instructive. Though traditionally designed to affirm aristocratic power, the entire form of *Comus* scrutinizes the basis of its own rituals. Recent scholarly readings of *Comus* have shown how Milton's moral strenuousness undercuts conventional masque expectations. As "an emergent Puritan's recuperation ... of the masque," *Comus* argues for equality in the spiritual sphere independent of worldly rank.³⁶ What appealed to Godwin, though, was not Milton's piety but the political implications of his use of masque conventions. Most important, the Lady's enchantment is undone, not by the presence of nobility as the audience would have expected, but by the commoner Sabrina, the spirit of the place and the representative of true pastoral values. Towards the end of the masque Milton uses pastoral as a means of depicting an ideal order centred on an aristocracy of virtue rather than material wealth and power.

With this masterly precedent in the reformation of genre, Godwin's choice of native literary sources suggests his desire to return to the quality of pastoral isolated by George Puttenham, its ability "under the veile of homely persons ... to insinuate and glauce at greater matters."³⁷ In seeking to reinstate the original humble dimension of pastoral, he liberates the form from the aristocratic transformation which led William Hazlitt, for example, to describe Sidney's *Arcadia* as "a lasting monument of perverted power."³⁸ Godwin's revisionary attitude has a further topical resonance in the context of the debased pastoral rituals favoured by Marie Antoinette in the court of the *ancien régime*. Clifton's energetic satire of these "rustic" entertainments in *Anna St. Ives* provides an illuminating gloss on Godwin's juxtaposition of pastoral simplicity and courtly excess: "The simplicity of the shepherd life could not but

36 John Creaser, "'The present aid of this occasion': The Setting of *Comus*," in *The Court Masque*, ed. David Lindley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 111-34, esp. p. 134; cf. Cedric C. Brown, *John Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 78-103.

37 George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie* (1589), reprinted in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), II, 40.

38 Hazlitt, "Lectures on the English Poets" [1818], *Works*, V, 98.

be excellently represented, by ... the ragouts, fricassees, spices, sauces, wines, and *liqueurs*, with which we were regaled! Not to mention being served upon plate, by an army of footmen! But then, it was in the open air; and that was prodigiously pastoral!"³⁹ But it was Paine who had already redeployed pastoral imagery in support of arguments for a simplified constitution. In *Common Sense*, he depicted the rise of government in terms of debased pastoral values: "Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence: the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise." As an alternative to the decaying British system, he posited an image of rural seclusion: "a small number of persons settled in some sequestered part of the earth."⁴⁰

Mindful of the currency of pastoral ideals in radical thought, Godwin moves beyond Paine's transformation of imagery to renovate the entire system of expectations signalled by the pastoral form. Rejecting the mode of polemical commentary, he gives imaginative presence to his contemporary theme through an intriguing blend of popular eighteenth-century modes which evoke a simplified past. Godwin's use of Celtic mythology is especially significant. Recent historians have provided illuminating accounts of the growth of scholarly interest in the recovery of a mythical Welsh past in the second half of the eighteenth century. Prys Morgan has documented an explosion of nationalist activity in London-Welsh circles in the early 1790s, led by Edward Williams, also known by his Welsh name Iolo Morganwg, and William Owen Pughe, who sought to transform earlier notions of ancient Welsh culture into a secular ideology bodying forth the hopes of committed radicals.⁴¹ In this way, Welsh ideas of a pure society paralleled radical arguments that the rights of "free-born" Englishmen were lost under the yoke of Norman rule. Yet this imaginative defence of ancient liberties was already current among British writers in the period of the American War.⁴² In *Imogen* Godwin

39 Holcroft, p. 116; on the decadence of pastoral in the eighteenth-century French court, see Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 224-25, 256-66.

40 Paine, *Common Sense*, pp. 65, 66.

41 Prys Morgan, *A New History of Wales: The Eighteenth-Century Renaissance* (Llandybie: C. Davies, 1981), and "From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 43-100; see also Gwyn A. Williams, *Madoc: The Making of a Myth* (1979, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 89-117, esp. pp. 103-5, and p. 116.

42 See above, n. 13.

already recognizes the potential of Celtic myth as a form of displaced national commentary.

The Preface alone signals Godwin's interest in national myth, for he presents the revised *Comus* as a recently discovered translation of great linguistic purity, thus joining with those who were already claiming a native British mythology. At the same time he maintains the teasing editorial voice of his earlier accomplished exercise in literary parody, *The Herald of Literature*. Godwin complicates the issue of *Imogen's* authenticity by mentioning James Macpherson's Ossian poems, published between 1760 and 1763 with prefaces calling them "genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry." Though these poems were later discovered to be forgeries, Macpherson's imaginative evocation of Scottish history had a strong appeal for writers and intellectuals in the period. In his *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763) Hugh Blair defended the Ossianic enterprise in terms that would have appealed to Godwin: "it is the business of a poet not to be a mere annalist of Facts, but to embellish truth with beautiful, probable, and useful fictions." Thus Ossian, "building upon true history, has sufficiently adorned it with poetical fiction."⁴³ In the epic fragments *Fingal* (1762) and *Temora* (1763), cited by Godwin in his Preface, Macpherson offers not a factual account of historical events but an imaginative evocation of the fortunes of peoples, the decline and fall of Fingal's race. With this compelling precedent for the use of myth to recuperate the past, Godwin also mentions the works of the authentic Welsh bards Taliesin and Aneirin, brought to light by the painstaking scholarship of Welsh intellectuals such as Evan Evans, friend of the poet Thomas Gray. In *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards* (1764), Evans included extracts from Aneirin's *Y Gododdin*, a genuine sixth-century fragment recently discovered. He dissociated himself from Macpherson, and made a case for further research on ancient British manuscripts which would shed light on "a great many passages in history ... that are now dark and dubious."⁴⁴

43 [Hugh Blair], Preface to [James Macpherson], *Fragments of Ancient Poetry ... Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language* (Edinburgh, 1760), p. iii; on critical reaction to Macpherson, see Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), pp. 163-78; [Blair], *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763), p. 29.

44 Aneirin's *Y Gododdin* was a genuine find made by Evan Evans in August 1758 (Morgan, *A New History of Wales*, p. 80); a modern translation has recently been published (Aneirin, *Y Gododdin*, ed. and trans. A.O.H. Jarman [Llandysul: Gomer, 1989]); Evan Evans, *Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards, Translated into English* (1764), pp. iii, 155.

Yet the source of Godwin's hidden manuscript remains as elusive as that of *Otranto*. He makes a series of contradictory claims: it was written in Welsh and then translated; in the absence of a classical precedent for *Comus* it may have been Milton's source; its real author is a Welshman who lived later than Milton; and finally, the translator's own enthusiasm for *Comus* may account for "verbal coincidences" (p. 23). What is clear, however, is that Godwin insists on the non-classical origins of *Comus* in order to promote its current national resonance: "Its fame is continually increasing, and it will be admired wherever the name of Britain is repeated, and the language of Britain is understood" (p. 23).

The national dimension is developed through the novel's setting in Snowdonia at the time of the Druids. Godwin is not concerned with an idealized past but with a secular myth of a future state, for he exploits the prophetic dimension of the Welsh bardic tradition which gained immense popular currency after the publication of Gray's *The Bard* (1757). This poem tells of the slaughter of the last of the Welsh bards by Edward I on his invasion of Wales in 1282, and is dominated by the potent central image of the lone surviving bard calling down curses on Edward's troops:

"Ruin seize thee, ruthless king!
 Confusion on thy banners wait, ...
 Not even thy virtues, tyrant, shall avail
 To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,
 From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears!"

So charged with significance was Gray's mythical subject, the overthrow of native Welsh by English oppressors, that it was regarded as historical truth by the Welsh themselves, and it contributed greatly to the late eighteenth-century vogue for the Welsh bard as a defender of ancient liberties.⁴⁵

Given this potent frame of reference, Godwin's Welsh mountain setting offers a return to pre-Conquest freedom and a liberation from institutional orthodoxies. Especially pertinent to his revision of *Comus* is the absence of "the slightest trace of Christianity" (p. 21), which is replaced by the secular precepts of the Druids. Prys Morgan has described the eighteenth-century shift in the status of the Druid "from the arcane obscurantist, who indulged in human sacrifice, to the sage or intellectual

45 Morgan, "From a Death to a View," pp. 82-83; Thomas Gray, *The Bard* [1757], ll. 1-8, *The Poems of Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London and New York: Longman, 1969), pp. 183-200; Evans cites Gray's poem as historical truth (p. 45n).

defending his people's faith and honour."⁴⁶ Godwin exploits this shift in significance to the full, for he presents the bards as exemplary poets, priests, and statesmen, but remains mindful of their barbaric past. The full implications of his use of bardic prophecy are seen in the festival at the start of the novel, which seems to celebrate the vigour of the Druids' faith in opposition to the "degeneracy of modern times" (p. 35). On closer inspection, though, Godwin criticizes the heroic past memorialized by the bards as equally degenerate.

Through the bardic competition which concludes the festival Godwin tells us how to read the rest of the novel. As in *Sketches of History* (1784), where he presents New Testament episodes as "philosophy teaching by example," Godwin offers a series of inset narratives to instruct the reader.⁴⁷ The first song establishes divine intervention, crucial to the failure of Comus's temptation of the lady, as legendary and archaic. Pursued by the rapacious Modred, the daughter of Cadwallo is saved not by the intervention of an Attendant Spirit with divine powers, but by the magical ability to assume the different shapes of hare, wolf, and hind. In this way she entices Modred, intent on rape and murder, to his death by drowning: "Let the fate of Modred be remembered for a caution to the precipitate. ... Heaven never deserts the cause of virtue" (p. 32). The song thus enacts in miniature the main plot of *Imogen*, which turns on the prophecy of Roderic's downfall at the hands of a shepherdess armed with the precepts of the Druids.

Godwin's use of Ossianic subject matter sheds further light on his instructive design, for he invokes Macpherson's stark rendering of history in terms of rape and military violence to highlight an alternative model for heroic action. Narrated in Macpherson's rhythmical prose manner, the inset tale of Cadwallo's daughter invites comparison with a specific fragment which tells of the persecution of the daughter of Cremor by "Ullin famous in war."⁴⁸ Similarly, the "action and enterprise" that Roderic contemplates, in true Ossianic fashion, is the brutal rape of Imogen: "There is something noble, royal, and independent, in the thought" (pp. 56, 55). This debased concept of heroism further brings to mind the tyranny, fraud, and usurpation introduced by the Norman conquest, memorably described by Paine: "A French bastard landing with an armed banditti,

46 Morgan, "From a Death to a View," p. 63.

47 Godwin, *Sketches of History in Six Sermons* (London: Cadell, 1784), p. 67.

48 [Macpherson], p. 27.

and establishing himself king of England against the consent of the natives, is in plain terms a very paltry rascally original."⁴⁹ By contrast, Godwin offers a redefinition of heroic virtue through the active mental resources of Edwin and Imogen.⁵⁰

Godwin pursues his redefinition of British heroism in his choice of characters' names, always significant in his novels and especially so in *Imogen* because they show a complete departure from pastoral precedents in favour of Welsh national heroes. Cadwallo, Llewelyn, and Roderic were native Welsh princes and kings, valiant defenders of Welsh independence against Saxon or Norman invaders, whose deeds were commemorated in ancient Welsh poetry. The name of Godwin's hero recalls Edwin, Prince of Northumberland and ally of the Welsh against the Saxons.⁵¹ That of the hermit Madoc is even more intriguing, for it alludes to the mythical twelfth-century Welsh prince who was said to have discovered America, the archetype of brave new non-hierarchical societies. However, it is hard to know whether Godwin was aware of the full topicality of the Madoc legend: Welsh interest in Madoc revived during the 1770s in the context of increased emigration from Wales to America, but it was not until the publication of a book on Madoc by Dr John Williams in 1791 that this transatlantic myth gained wider currency in London.⁵² Disseminated and developed by Iolo Morganwg, the Madoc legend became a potent source of imagery in William Blake's poems, and in 1794 Robert Southey started work on an epic poem called *Madoc* (1794–1805).

Godwin's contemporary theme gains further imaginative presence through a range of literary allusions which establish Imogen as a representative British heroine, oppressed by a decadent aristocrat. In keeping with the preference for native as opposed to classical models expressed

49 Paine, *Common Sense*, p. 78.

50 Godwin may be indebted to Chatterton's "Ossianics" [1769], short narratives presented as modern translations from ancient Saxon and Welsh, written in Macpherson's rhythmical prose but offering a critical commentary on Ossianic values; see, for example, *Ethelgar, A Saxon Poem*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton*, 2 vols, ed. Donald S. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I, 253–55.

51 See Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 77–82, for an account of common pastoral names, adopted by Godwin in his first novel, *Damon and Delia*; Morgan, "From a Death to a View," pp. 81–86; Evans, *passim*.

52 Morgan, p. 83; cf. Williams, *Madoc*, pp. 112, 117.

in much of the critical discourse of the period, Godwin draws on native sixteenth-century models, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. As early as 1756 Joseph Warton had voiced the need for a return to native historical subjects in poetry, citing the examples of Shakespeare's history plays and Milton's comment in *The Reason of Church Government*: "I am meditating what kind of knight BEFORE THE CONQUEST might be chosen, in whom to lay the pattern of a christian hero." In *Observations on The Faerie Queene* (1756, 1762), Joseph's brother and fellow-antiquarian Thomas adopted a similar view, placing Spenser at the high point of a native romance tradition. In *The History of English Poetry* (1774–81), Thomas represented "our national poetry" as arriving at its maturity in 1600, after which his narrative closes, thus avoiding the "French" influences of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵³

In keeping with this polarization of literary values, Godwin enriches Imogen's representative role by invoking a range of native precedents. Allusions to Spenser's "Legend of Britomartis" introduce a powerful symbol of active femininity, for Spenser presents the Welsh-born Britomart as the source of rejuvenation of the British race.⁵⁴ Her conquests offer an exemplary blend of good deeds and chastity, the reverse of stereotypical female dependency in eighteenth-century fiction. For the name of his heroine Godwin turns to *Cymbeline*, where Imogen's honour is closely linked with the integrity of Britain as she suffers: "More goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults / As would take in some virtue."⁵⁵ The ultimate recognition of virtue for what it is ("not a thing for sale, and only the gift of the gods") leads to the regeneration of the kingdom, a conclusion hinted at towards the end of *Comus* when the ideal action of the masque is related to its Ludlow setting. Sabrina, the "goddess" of the Severn, rescues the Lady by offering the antithesis of Circe's magic, and her benign magic is in turn strongly identified with the rural life of the property administered by Bridgewater:

53 Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*, vol. I (1756), vol. II (1782), I, 280; Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry, From the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century* (4 vols, London, 1774–81 [final volumes never completed]), preface, I, v.

54 *Faerie Queene* III, iii, 23: "Renowned kings, and sacred Emperours, / Thy fruitfull Ofspring, shall from thee descend; ... / And their decayed kingdomes shall amend: / The feeble Britons ... / They shall upreare ..."

55 *Faerie Queene* III, iv, 3; *Cymbeline*, ed. J.M. Nosworthy (London: Methuen, 1955, 1966) III, ii, 8–9.

For which the shepherds at their festivals
 Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,
 And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream
 Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils.⁵⁶

By contrast, Roderic, despite his authentic Welsh name, has more in common with the "foreign manners, customs [and] images" introduced at the Conquest. He is presented through a range of exotic and conspicuously artificial devices drawn from Spenser and his eighteenth-century imitators. With its sumptuous interiors, wall-hangings depicting scenes from classical antiquity, banquet-halls, and seductive music, Roderic's mansion is especially reminiscent of Busirane's castle, the scene of Britomart's prolonged temptation at the end of book III.⁵⁷ As in James Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* (1748), a highly effective Spenserian burlesque which offers an allegory of contemporary values, the world to be rejected is symbolized by the pleasurable enchantments of a false magician in his richly furnished mansion. Godwin's contemporary point is especially evident in the ornate pageant illustrative of simplicity, which culminates in an attempt to crown Imogen with a jewel-laden coronet, an outright parody of monarchical ritual (p. 70). In this way Godwin gives a more precise topical resonance to a figure already linked in *Comus* with the forces of social and political conservatism. As an eighteenth-century voluptuary, Roderic's enthrallment to the values of his class anticipates the more psychologically complex but equally "foreign-made" Ferdinando Falkland: "Oh impotence of power! oh mockery of state! What end can ye now serve but to teach me to be miserable?" (p. 74).⁵⁸

Given this suggestive framework of literary reference, Godwin's exploration of a simplified past in *Imogen* cannot be construed as a retreat from political concerns, as several critics have argued. That the pastoral world remains unscathed at the end suggests rather that Godwin retains the high idealism of Milton's pastoral resolution, even if he does not subscribe to its piety. Even in Godwin's first published work, the *Life of Chatham*, the "restoration of paradise" forms a model for mental

56 *Cymbeline* I, v, 7-8; *Comus*, ll. 847-50; for an account of the national dimension of the pastoral resolution of *Comus*, see Brown, pp. 104-31.

57 J. Warton, *Essay on Pope*, II, 2-3; *Faerie Queene* III, xii.

58 Godwin, *Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), ed. David McCracken (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 20.

improvement rather than regression.⁵⁹ His pastoral ideal is thus most profitably viewed in terms of the mental attitude he seeks to inculcate in the interests of gradual but irresistible political progress: "Truth dwells with contemplation. We can seldom make much progress in the business of disentangling error and delusion, but in sequestered privacy, or in the tranquil interchange of sentiments that takes place between two persons."⁶⁰ It is the bard Llewelyn who highlights this theme when he rejects the impetuous pursuit of "a splendour that dazzles, rather than enlightens ... a heat that burns rather than fructifies," and advocates instead the gradual enlightening and fructifying power of "the shadowy and unnoticed vale of obscurity" (p. 39). The entire plot of *Imogen* enacts this purposeful renovation of inner resources as the crucial preliminary to wider social change. As Godwin later insisted, a state of equality need not be one of stoical simplicity; on the contrary, it offers a basis for a vision of perpetual improvements: "The most penetrating philosophy cannot prescribe limits to them, nor the most ardent imagination adequately fill up the prospect."⁶¹

Imogen: A Pastoral Romance plays a more significant role than has been allowed in Godwin's career as an intellectual novelist. As early as 1784 Godwin's innovative use of poetic sources demonstrates his separateness from the direct social commentary of much Jacobin fiction. Already he is experimenting with fiction to discuss theoretical issues in an artistically resourceful and satisfying way. In reworking the genre of pastoral romance, Godwin seeks to liberate the reader from a range of customary expectations, anticipating his bolder analysis of hierarchical structures in *Caleb Williams*. In his post-revolutionary novels, however, Godwin's central notion of the intrusion of government into private life requires a new form of characterization that negates the moral absolutes of pastoral romance. Nevertheless the imaginative method of *Imogen*—its enactment of contemporary concerns through allegory and myth—bears directly on later, more psychologically complex and mythologically capacious narratives in the Godwinian tradition. On a wider view, Godwin's initial perception of the figurative power of historical myth is abundantly confirmed by the large-scale poetic use of Celtic legend by Blake

59 Kuczynski, p. 108, criticizes Godwin's pastoral resolution, and Kelly, pp. 112–12, links Godwin's interest in pastoral with Pantisocracy as evidence of the defeat of English Jacobinism; [Godwin], *Life of Chatham*, introduction, p. xii.

60 *Political Justice* I, 190.

61 *Political Justice* I, 451.

and Southey in the 1790s. In the field of prose narrative Godwin's experiment with sixteenth-century models, unique among his novels, is developed by Peacock; while Peacock's lessons, like Godwin's, were never lost on Shelley.

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