

# Narrative and Ideology in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*

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Seventeen ninety-three and 1794 were years of growing nervousness for British radicals. After 1792—the “*annus mirabilis*”<sup>1</sup> that saw the founding of the London Corresponding Society and the rapid growth in membership of societies for political reform—the responses of the government and other supporters of the social order constituted a disturbing backlash. When Godwin completed his final corrections of the first edition of *Political Justice* in January 1793, John Reeves had founded the anti-reform Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers and the gentry had begun to organize their tenants into a yeomanry for purposes of drill and propaganda. Pitt’s Attorney-General, Sir Archibald Macdonald, had just achieved a conviction of Thomas Paine *in absentia* for seditious libel over *The Rights of Man*, Part II, and had prepared two hundred indictments, for the most part against publishers of radical opinions.<sup>2</sup> Government, gentry, and or-

1 Marilyn Butler, “Introductory Essay,” *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 7–8.

2 The *Morning Chronicle* of 14 January 1793 reminded its readers: “There are no fewer than two hundred indictments prepared by the Crown Officers, to be presented to the Grand Juries throughout the kingdom for libels and seditious words. They are of all kinds, some against newspapers, some against pamphlets, hand-bills, &c. and of the seditious words some were uttered from the pulpit, and some in the ale-houses, in moments of jollity and inebriation. On the slightest computation, the trial of these indictments in law costs, and the value of the time of the imprisonments that may follow conviction, cannot be less [for the inditees] than 50,000 [pounds] to say nothing of the utter extinction of free opinion.” See Lucyle Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England, 1792–1793* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 199.

dinary citizens alike were becoming increasingly intolerant of reformist ideas: as support grew for Reeves's Association, it diminished for the London Corresponding Society. Godwin's preface to *Political Justice* shows his awareness of the change in atmosphere: "it is the fortune of the present work to appear before a public that is panic struck, and impressed with the most dreadful apprehensions respecting such doctrines as are here delivered. All the prejudices of the human mind are in arms against it."<sup>3</sup> When Godwin started to write *Caleb Williams*, six weeks after completing *Political Justice*, relations with France had made the atmosphere more threatening. Godwin's journal records that during those weeks Louis XVI had been tried, sentenced to death, and executed. The very day that Godwin presented a copy of *Political Justice* to Chauvelin, the French ambassador was directed to leave the country. Soon Britain and France were at war. When Godwin finished *Caleb Williams* in late April 1794, the government were about to arrest the officers of the London Corresponding Society, some of whom were Godwin's friends and all of whom were acquaintances. About this time, Godwin rewrote the ending of his novel. The texts of both endings exist and a comparison of them raises the question: Did Godwin tone down the radicalism of his novel with an ending palatable to political authorities? If not, what motivated the revision?

The two endings contrast strikingly. The original ending seems unflinchingly reformist. Caleb testifies to Falkland's murders before an unsympathetic magistrate and Falkland convincingly debunks the testimony as the clever fabrication of a thief, prison-breaker, and master of disguise. This final trial is a victory for Falkland, who resumes control over Caleb. Caleb, imprisoned and harassed, declines into madness, debility, and death, leaving behind only his manuscript to proclaim a final condemnation of "Things as They Are." The ending that Godwin published is much less reformist. It features a trial also, but during the hearing Falkland acknowledges Caleb's innocence and confesses to his crimes. Much weakened by age and struggles with his conscience, Falkland dies three days later. The establishment of Caleb's innocence seems to undermine the novel's extended demonstration of inequities and abuses in the administration and execution of justice. The original ending, in the

3 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, ed. F.E.L. Priestley, 3 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), I, xii. References are to this edition. Volumes I and II of the Priestley edition comprise a photographic facsimile of Godwin's third edition of 1798. Volume III contains variant readings from the first and second editions of 1793 and 1796.

manuscript, is the climax of the steadily developing recognition by Caleb that he cannot obtain justice in a prejudiced society. Godwin substituted an ending more complex and surprising. Caleb and Falkland experience individual recognitions that reverse the trend of the novel and result in a measure of justice. Yet that reversal is followed by a second one in which Caleb repudiates his own quest for justice, regards himself as a murderer, and turns away from a self-vindicating narrative to embrace a guilty silence.

Discussions of the revised ending engage one or more of three approaches. The historical approach explains the revision by the political situation in 1794. Thus, Gary Kelly ties Godwin's revision to the needs of English Jacobins for an optimistic ending that asserts the power of truth at a time of increasing repression.<sup>4</sup> A second approach, usually involving a specific comparison of the two endings, accounts for the resolution of the story according to the requirements of the fictional narrative. Marilyn Butler, for instance, prefers the second ending because the dénouement arises not from external actions but from internal conflict.<sup>5</sup> A third approach links Godwin's revision to the philosophical arguments of *Political Justice*. D. Gilbert Dumas, Robert Kiely, and Gary Kelly, with differing emphases, regard the revised ending as a departure from the principles of *Political Justice*. In accounting for Godwin's revision, this paper will examine each of these approaches and will raise reservations about arguments that detach aesthetic from philosophical explanations.

There is no evidence to connect the rewritten ending directly to governmental persecutions. D. Gilbert Dumas was the first to call attention to the original ending that he found in the manuscript copy of *Caleb Williams* in the library of the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>6</sup> Cross-referencing the manuscript with a microfilm of Godwin's working diary, he dated the revision of the ending to between 4 and 8 May 1794. He would have found independent confirmation of his finding with access to the Abinger Collection, now in the Bodleian Library. A folio in Godwin's hand entitles these pages the "new catastrophe."<sup>7</sup> Dumas sought evidence to connect the rewritten ending with the political arrests of the officers of the London Corresponding Society that began on 12 May, but could find none.

4 Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 185–86.

5 Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 68.

6 D. Gilbert Dumas, "Things as They Were: The Original Ending of *Caleb Williams*," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 6 (1966), 575–97.

7 Abinger Papers, Shelf mark Dep. f. 66.

Since Godwin rewrote the ending before the arrests and consistently demonstrated courage and defiance in the face of government threats, it is unlikely that his changes were motivated by external events. When the treason trials began the following October, Godwin attended as a friend of the accused and would surely have shared their fate if they had been found guilty.<sup>8</sup> That the motivation for the revision was political timidity is thus highly unlikely; we must find other reasons for the revised trial scene.

Direct evidence connecting Godwin's revisions to the political situation would neatly solve a perplexing problem. Dumas is not alone when he expresses dissatisfaction with the way the revised ending undercuts "the severity of Godwin's view of 'Things as They Are.'"<sup>9</sup> Gary Kelly agrees that "this conclusion is clearly contrary to the principles of the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*."<sup>10</sup> Although he does not disapprove of the revised ending, Robert Kiely acknowledges "Godwin's failure to sustain the theoretical framework of *Political Justice* in *Caleb Williams*." He is quick to quote David McCracken's argument that it is false to say Godwin the novelist "betrayed or simply ignored" Godwin the philosopher. He maintains the opinion without reservation, however, that "the artist prevails over the philosopher."<sup>11</sup>

The view that the revised ending is more artistic and the original more philosophical is likely to distort an assessment of the two conclusions. It rests on an assumption that may well be ideological,<sup>12</sup> namely, the assumption that Godwin the artist can be separated from Godwin the philosopher and that, therefore, the two may be in conflict. Godwin's philosophy may be embarrassing in some political and intellectual climates. An unconscious ideological bias may incline a reader, unsympathetic to the philosophy, to discover a tension between the demands of philosophy and the demands of narrative. Walter Allen, for example, observes

8 Kegan Paul quotes Mary Shelley's certainty of that result. See *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols (New York: AMS Press, 1970), I, 129.

9 Dumas, 584.

10 Kelly, p. 185.

11 Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 94.

12 Godwin predates the word "ideology" but his *Political Justice* is fully conversant with the concept, particularly of the Marxian versions isolated by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). In choosing the Marxian notion of ideology, rather than the use de Tracy made originally of the word, I cannot but agree with H.M. Drucker that the two usages are fundamentally opposed: "de Tracy's 'ideology' is the Enlightened replacement for the idols of the market-place; Marx's 'ideology' is the idol of the market-place" (H.M. Drucker, *The Political Uses of Ideology* [London: Macmillan, 1974], p. 14).

that Godwin wrote *Caleb Williams* "from profounder impulses than the purely political." At one level the novel portrays the relationship between the government and its enemies, but, as Allen points out, *Caleb Williams* transcends narrow interpretations. He notes that the Falkland-Caleb relationship, in which enmity turns into love, might also be "a profound symbolic rendering of the relation between God and man."<sup>13</sup> Such an interpretation of the reconciliation of Caleb and Falkland might well have startled Godwin had he read it.

Everyone who reads *Caleb Williams* is struck by its intellectual energy—not just the passion of Caleb's political rhetoric, but a deeper energy revealed in a fundamental shaping of narrative. The effect of that creative energy needs to be explored. It seems reasonable to approach the enigma of the revised ending in terms of the dynamics that Godwin set up in his fiction, and to see if the logic of the fiction is inconsistent with the logic of the philosophy. Our experience of the novel's power suggests that imagination and philosophy are in harmony, not in conflict. Perhaps a preference for seeing Godwin's conservative creative imagination triumphing over a radical philosophy leads to Allen's vision of an ultimate reconciliation between God and man. But while Godwin offers rich ambiguities throughout his novel, his grasp of his subject is too firm for the fundamental ambiguity that Allen suggests. Caleb may embrace his tyrant at the end, but the novel never reconciles itself to tyranny.

It is worth remembering the wise reminder of Michael Henry Scrivener that "Godwin changed the ending, just as he revised *Political Justice*, as a result of his inquiry and concern for unity."<sup>14</sup> While the manuscript ending brings the victimization of Caleb to a logical conclusion, the published ending satisfies more complex expectations by taking into account Caleb's two roles as protagonist and narrator, and by completing narrative patterns and fulfilling literary meaning. *Caleb Williams* is a fictionalizing of *Political Justice* in both obvious and subtle ways. Godwin hoped to extend the influence of his philosophy by presenting it in a form accessible to the far greater numbers who read novels rather than philosophy. The two works are stages in an audacious programme of reform, a programme that begins by undermining dominant ideologies and opening minds to change. The published ending fulfils narrative patterns based on the tribunal and on the contract, paradigms for the route

13 Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (New York: Dutton, 1954), p. 105.

14 Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 14.

and the obstacles to reform. And it is true to Godwin's vision of political and personal realities, in which a radical principle of change and a reactionary commitment to stasis form complex interactions, and in which inner belief may conflict destructively with outer truth. The rewritten ending satisfies the demands of art and philosophy coherently and without simplifications. The manuscript ending is the act of a competent novelist; the published ending represents a quantum leap forward in the creative synthesis of narrative and philosophy.

One narrative pattern centres on the sequence of tribunals. In *Caleb Williams*, as in many of Godwin's writings of this period, the tribunal seems to have become an emblem of the open society he advocated, an environment where truth may emerge despite confusion and prejudice. The third letter of Mucius of 30 March 1793, protesting the trial of Daniel Crichton, deplores the government's action, warns of the dangers to freedom of speech and the press, and enjoins each jurymen to take the opportunity of the trial to convince his fellows to proceed leniently against the victims of malicious spies and prosecutions. "One upright and intelligent jurymen might put a close to that scene of persecution which is the disgrace of Britain."<sup>15</sup> His "Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices and Unlawful Assemblies" of 1795 presents the hypothetical instance of his own prosecution by a malevolent minister of the crown over one of his publications. His hope rests on a legal tribunal. "The only security I have against the infliction of these penalties, the moment a prosecution is commenced against me, consists in the hope, that the judge may be unbiassed and impartial; that the arguments of my counsel may be found in the experiment to be irresistible; or that my jury in whole or in part may be persons of a firm, independent, and intrepid temper."<sup>16</sup> It is a hope which recurs in his writings. In *Political Justice*, while attacking the uncertainty of the law and the subtlety of lawyers, he places some confidence in "the plain unperverted sense of a jury of my neighbours, founded in the ideas they [entertain] of general justice" (II, 401). Godwin's mind returns repeatedly to the idea of a tribunal, not out of a naïve confidence but a desperate acknowledgment: in an atmosphere of repression, a legal hearing was the one forum where opposing positions could be heard. In a chapter of the 1793 version of *Political Justice* he wrote, "The only substantial method for the

15 *Uncollected Writings* (1785-1822), ed. Jack W. Marken and Burton R. Pollin (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), p. 124.

16 *Uncollected Writings* (1785-1822), p. 220.

propagation of truth is discussion, so that the errors of one man may be detected by the acuteness and severe disquisition of his neighbours" (III, 276).

There are at least ten tribunals in *Caleb Williams*, varying in importance, formality, and corruption. Such repetition gives to the idea of the forum an emblematic significance that grows as the novel proceeds. It would be appropriate for Godwin to end his novel on a forum of culminating importance. Three possibilities for closure were open to him—two apparent but the other less so. The apparent alternatives are signalled in the double title of the novel. *Things as They Are* points to the doctrinaire closure of Godwin's first version in the failure of the forum as tyranny triumphs over innocence. *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, the second title, suggests a rejection of doctrine in favour of adventure, with a victorious conclusion to Caleb's adventures. At first glance, this appears to be the rewritten ending when the forum leads to Falkland's confession. But Caleb's attitude as he finishes his narrative is closer to defeat than triumph. Godwin's chosen closure replaces both doctrine and adventure with an intertwining of psychology and aesthetics that is unusually complex, assuringly realistic, as well as subtly true to the philosophy of *Political Justice*.

Caleb's psychological need for a forum impels his narrative. He longs to be vindicated, "to redeem my future life from endless woe."<sup>17</sup> In that final hearing, the ideal forum for truth is almost realized. Earnestly Caleb confesses his respect for Falkland, his impudent and imprudent curiosity, the harmlessness of his intentions, the undeserved calamities he has endured. Falkland replies with a generous acknowledgment of Caleb's sincerity and innocence, and an admission of guilt. The needs of Caleb, the novel's narrator, should be satisfied in that final forum. It is a medium for the communication he has wished for: "a frank and fervent expostulation ... in which the whole soul was poured out" (p. 323). The forum seems to answer Caleb's double need, for justice and for therapy.

Godwin refused to oversimplify the interaction of private and public worlds: the resolution of the novel brings the satisfaction neither of justice nor of therapy. The novel cannot respond both to Caleb's needs and to the logic of the narrative, at least not at the same time or in the same way. Indeed, the novel recognizes a fundamental difference between the demands of justice and the demands of therapy and indicates different means for the determination of each.

17 William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. David McCracken (London: Oxford University Press, 1970; reprinted 1977), p. 319. References are to this edition.

As a demonstration of British justice, the last hearing does not arouse any more confidence than the previous ones: the law continues to be an instrument of the gentry and their interests. The magistrate is reluctant to entertain Caleb's accusation and accedes only when Caleb's clear knowledge of the law offers a threat of liability. Even then the magistrate, in deference to Falkland's rank, takes liberties in procedure. The hearing is ambiguous in the way it is constituted and might easily be repudiated on appeal. It is neither formal nor informal, public nor private. It takes place in the magistrate's residence before a small invited audience. Falkland is not arrested but sent a notice of the charge and asked to appear. He is not treated as an accused felon: this final tribunal does not demonstrate equality before the English law. The administration of law continues to be irregular and inequitable. While Marilyn Butler asserts that Caleb "succeeds in making others believe him,"<sup>18</sup> the text is more equivocal. Caleb records that his hearers experienced a mixture of sympathy for "the great qualities of Falkland" and for "the tokens of my penitence" (p. 324). Fortunately for the cause of justice, the tribunal does not have to decide between Falkland's "great qualities" and Caleb's "penitence." Only one member of his audience is convinced unreservedly by Caleb's honest eloquence, and that person is Falkland, who knows the truth already. The final forum permits us to draw no comfort from British justice; the only change is in Falkland. His resolve to protect his reputation has weakened with the decline of his health and the approach of his death. Falkland's guilt is established not in Caleb's eloquent testimony but in Falkland's confession. Thus, institutionally, things remain as they are. The courts are uniformly biased by social division.

While continuing the exposure of the justice system that has been an organizing principle of the novel, the rewritten ending brings to an uneasy resolution the dynamics of the relationship between Caleb and Falkland. The dénouement fulfils an aesthetic principle by fashioning a climax in which recognition and reversal coincide.<sup>19</sup> There is in fact a series of recognitions and reversals in the final confrontation of Caleb and Falkland. In the debilitated Falkland, Caleb recognizes frail humanity where before he had seen a monster and tyrant. In the patient and compassionate Caleb, Falkland discovers a magnanimity that contrasts with the baseness of his own passion for reputation. The final tribunal provides

18 *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p. 68.

19 It is a principle praised by Aristotle in ancient times and demonstrated by Fielding in modern ones.



an opportunity for a meeting that overcomes jealous self-absorption and enacts change. Before the hearing, Falkland is firm in his resolve to protect his reputation, indignant at Caleb's defiance, and full of hatred. With the trial, he confesses his guilt, acknowledges the truth, and throws his arms around Caleb. Before the hearing, Caleb, assured of his own innocence and convinced his accusation is justified, is determined to expose Falkland. At the trial he realizes he has made a dreadful mistake and concludes that he is Falkland's murderer. Nothing happens as expected and Caleb, freed from Falkland's persecutions, becomes the prisoner of his own remorse. The reversals are dependent on recognitions that could not have taken place without the hearing. Thus the revised ending, with its recognitions and reversals, its energy and surprises, is aesthetically more satisfying than the original one.

The final forum, corrupt in its constitution yet surprising in its results, enacts ideas consistent with Godwinian philosophy. While the tribunal of truth remains only an ideal, and while the novel shows how even this ideal may be distorted, the novel also suggests how the ideal, if unattainable, may at least be approached. Corruption in the judicial process does not result only from prejudice and class difference. It enters the process whenever reason is tainted by passion, objectivity by subjectivity. Initially Caleb thinks his action in bringing Falkland to justice is dictated by cool reason.

But he comes to recognize the passionate nature of his motives. Yet the final trial points the way towards the ideal. What changes the attitude of both Falkland and Caleb towards each other is openness and sincerity. For a brief moment at a real trial, truth emerges because a tribunal at least provides a forum that may permit truth to be spoken. The enemies of change are mysteries, secrets, and concealments, while a forum, however corrupt, provides an occasion where concealment is resisted, speaking may be frank, and truth may emerge. *Political Justice* demonstrates the possibility that the individual may effect small changes, and so too does *Caleb Williams*. "Things" remain "as they are," yet Falkland and Caleb are changed. Except infinitesimally, the world has not improved, but the reader is left with a sense of the direction that improvement will take; that is, in a spirit of open and rational inquiry that can transform both individuals and institutions into instruments for the discovery and communication of truth.

If the reader can derive some satisfaction from that forum, Caleb cannot. The effect of the hearing on the private world of Caleb's consciousness is far from therapeutic. He is crushed by the results of the

forum he so long desired. A revolution seems to separate the narrator of the postscript from the rash and angry man who brought Falkland to trial. The last paragraph is full of a peculiarly selfless yearning for penitence and expiation:

I began these memoirs with the idea of vindicating my character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate: but I will finish them that thy [Falkland's] story may be fully understood; and that, if those errors of thy life be known which thou so ardently desiredst to conceal, the world may at least not hear and repeat a half-told and mangled tale. (p. 326)

The postscript is startlingly revisionist, transforming, in Northrop Frye's terms, a mythos of summer, in which the perilous journey leads to social recognition and exaltation of the hero, into a mythos of winter, in which the journey ends in the hero's alienation and society remains unchanged.<sup>20</sup> Caleb seems permanently alienated from the world and his attitude colours his sense of narrative purpose. His experience has taught him a kind of nihilism: there is no innocence, no escape from the contaminating effects of human society, no future in a reconciliation with the social world or with himself, and no peace. The world is blighted; there is no hope to look forward to, no future projected. His vision is a vision of limitation; his narrative a confession of guilt and an admission of defeat.

The significances that Caleb perceives at the end of his narrating process are not the only ones that Godwin's text encourages his readers to see. Caleb's self-assessment, for example, is not shared by the reader. He may annoy us with priggishness; he may disturb us with his self-centredness.<sup>21</sup> But we recognize that any evil he has done is small in comparison with the evil done to him. Since we do not share Caleb's opinion of himself, we are particularly uneasy about the effects of that opinion on him. His judgment that he has "no character" seems to be a self-fulfilling description. We note a lassitude in the last paragraph. The narrative ends because of a disinclination to act on the part of the narrator; it ends because of a failure of character. If "character" is a moral disposition to behave in a certain way, then Caleb at the end indeed has "no character."

20 *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957; reprinted 1960), pp. 131-239.

21 His distaste for the robbers who have behaved generously to him seems based on a priggish sense of superiority. His indifference to the fate of Mrs Marney, sent to Newgate for helping him preserve his concealment in London, exemplifies an intense self-centredness hardly justified by the harassment he was experiencing.

Caleb's state of mind in the rewritten ending reflects Godwin's recognition of the power of ideology. Commentators may be misled into perceiving a division between novelist and philosopher by a failure to make a distinction that is inherent in the narrative structure of *Caleb Williams*, a distinction between argument and ideology, between the explicit rhetoric of a Caleb or a Raymond declaiming against British bastilles and legal and economic inequalities, and an implicit ideology in the Marxian sense of the term, defined by Raymond Williams as follows:<sup>22</sup>

(i) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; ii) a system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge

*Political Justice* concerns itself with false consciousness, particularly when illusory beliefs support and are encouraged by the governing classes. The thrust of Godwin's inquiry carries the reader from a false to a true consciousness, to a true and complete understanding of the system of power and imposture that, for Godwin, is government.

The two fundamental, empirical premises of *Political Justice* assert that character originates in external circumstances and that action originates in opinion. Godwin's study shows that human beings are born into a world of false opinions; that they assimilate false opinions as customs and prejudices; and that it is next to impossible for anyone to eradicate all of them through rational processes. The difficulty of the task, however, is not an excuse for not undertaking it. *Political Justice*, which particularly concerns itself with forms of imposture in governmental institutions that seek to terrify or seduce people into obedience and acceptance, demonstrates Godwin's awareness of the function of ideology:

Our prejudices, our undue reverence, and imaginary fears, flow out of some views the mind has been induced to entertain; they are founded in the belief of some propositions. But every one of these propositions is capable of being refuted. (I, 88)

Every man has a confused sense of the real state of the question; but he has been taught to believe that men would tear each other to pieces, if they had not priests to direct their consciences, lords to consult for their tranquillity, and kings to pilot them in safety through the dangers of the political ocean. (I, 97)

22 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 55.

The real enemies of liberty in any country are not the people, but those higher orders who find their imaginary profit in a contrary system. (I, 104)

The chapter he devotes to the political control of opinion warns of the power of government to prolong habits and propensities, indeed, to support the ideologies from which its power springs. And he warns of the danger of error allied with power (II, 225). Godwin may not have used the word, but he was fully conversant with the concept of ideology. Indeed, he must be one of the first European philosophers to recognize and respond to ideology as a collective false consciousness that tends to mask the realities of material interest and political power.

In the rewritten ending of *Caleb Williams* the tribunal brings about a conclusion that satisfies Godwin's philosophy but not his narrator. The thrust of Caleb's narrative is towards a double goal, therapy as well as justice. The tribunal pattern points in the direction of justice. The satisfaction of therapy would require attention to a second narrative pattern, a pattern that the original ending does not acknowledge. We perceive a narrative sophistication equal to Sterne's when we realize that, in the complex rewritten ending, Godwin is demonstrating conclusions that Caleb, as the narrator of his *Bildungsroman*, cannot draw. *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* demonstrate an understanding of ideology and its power that Caleb does not and cannot share. Godwin makes Caleb a case study of the influence of ideology, particularly the ideology arising from the story of Eden and the fall of man. Himself sceptical of contracts, Godwin makes contracts the second organizing principle of his plot, quietly underlining parallels with the original contract in the Garden of Eden. Caleb's state of mind at the end can be accounted for by his subjection to that original contract and his participation in two paradigmatic contracts, one implicit and the second explicit.

Implicit is the contract of loyalty owed by Caleb, the servant, to Falkland, his master, his social and economic superior and his superior in intellectual accomplishment and moral sensitivity. In seeking evidence that his master is a murderer, Caleb plays contradictory roles: he is detective and he is spy, an agent of justice and an intruder into his master's privacy despite an obligation of loyalty. The explicit contract, the result of successful detective work, is made when Falkland swears Caleb to secrecy. This contract brings harassment and persecution since from the outset Falkland expects Caleb to violate it, as indeed he does on two occasions. Caleb's role in the implicit contract is also open to conflicting interpretations. He is a victim of persecution, but also a rogue, a prison-breaker, and a glib confidence trickster.

The dualities attest to the force of ideology. In terms of the ideology of the fundamental contract, Caleb is sinful man, driven to transgress a simple prohibition by intellectual arrogance. But in revolutionary terms he is Promethean man defying tyranny and injustice. Other characters accept or doubt Caleb's testimony to the extent that they reject or assume a conservative ideology. In the latter part of the narrative Caleb encounters only those who see him as the rebellious servant. His self-conception is influenced by their opinions of him and he is torn between his desire for justice and the influence of ideology. The assurance of innocence, sustained through most of the narrative, wavers and collapses at the end.

Just as his rewritten conclusion avoids the conventional closure of a *Tendenzroman* or of a novel of adventure, so the collapse of Caleb's narrative assurance keeps alive conflicting ideological interpretations. Godwin's novel is structured on a system of belief and not on simple notions of reality. Through the ambiguities of plot and character, Godwin is quietly suggesting that belief, however deeply and intensely held, may be false. He never quite fully develops the conventional plots suggested by the two titles, perhaps perceiving that literary conventions themselves are ideological and encourage assumptions about the nature of reality. Not challenged, assumptions harden into convictions. In *Political Justice*, more publicly than Blake and a generation before Shelley, Godwin had argued that Milton's God is a tyrant (I, 323-24), and his repetition of the myth of the Fall in *Caleb Williams* permits a similar interpretation of the godlike Falkland. Throughout the novel only Caleb knows of Falkland's evil and he must contend with the convictions of others that Falkland, like God, is good, and that he, as Falkland's antagonist, must be evil. It is natural and fitting that Caleb's belief is shaken by the force of these convictions around him.

Caleb's nihilism at the end reflects Godwin's insight into the fundamental contradiction of Caleb's desire for justice and therapy in a world distorted by ideology. Caleb experiences not triumph at the vindication of justice, but guilt at the violation of a dark and primeval contract. The thrust of tribunals, however distorted an individual tribunal may be, is towards openness, inquiry, and change. The thrust of contracts is towards the suspension of thought and the restriction of action. The tribunal looks to the future; the contract seeks to maintain the past. The tribunal engages the rational consciousness; the contract impedes the growth of knowledge and the development of understanding (*Political Justice*, I, 194-214). Caleb's actions lead to truth but not to therapy, to vindication but not to redemption. The ending recognizes not only the path to

truth and change, but also the obstacles, apparent and hidden, on that path. It confirms the philosophical insight that affirms the power of reason, while acknowledging the strength of the collective illusions fostered by authority that reason cannot easily overcome.

In *Caleb Williams* Godwin did not write a simple fable for his time; but it is difficult not to see in Caleb the plight of a progressive in a world hedged round by reactionary ideologies. The marketplace for opinions grew increasingly restricted as Britain entered the middle years of the eighteenth century's last decade. New ideas had to contend with convictions and prejudices defended by all the political and religious authority the British establishment could muster. Few in power were inclined to reassess their opinions, since upon them was founded the whole social and political fabric of the nation. Like Caleb's curiosity, the radical ideas were fundamentally threatening to authority. Just as Falkland uses spies and the law to harry and persecute Caleb, so Pitt used similar means against Godwin's radical acquaintances and their publishers. But in *Caleb Williams* Godwin's focus is not on the clash of radicalism and reaction but rather on the effect on the radical of his confrontation with conviction. Caleb's fate foreshadows the fates of many a radical facing an English reaction which developed as the threat of French military power grew: a diminishing assurance, a modification of ideas, and even the repudiation of one's radical past.