

# **"The Subject of Detection": Legal Rhetoric and Subjectivity in *Caleb Williams***

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**I**n a letter dated 23 January 1794 and addressed to Joseph Gerrald, then in prison awaiting trial on a charge of sedition, William Godwin suggests that the best path to acquittal lies in a strict attention to the rhetorical situation of the courtroom:

Never forget that juries are men, and that men are made of penetrable stuff: probe all the recesses of their souls. Do not spend your strength in vain defiance and empty vaunting. Let every syllable you utter be fraught with persuasion. What an event would it be for England and mankind if you could gain an acquittal! Is not such an event worth striving for? It is in man, I am sure it is, to effect that event. Gerrald, you are that man. Fertile in genius, strong in moral feeling, prepared with every accomplishment that literature and reflection can give. Stand up to the situation—be wholly yourself. "I know," I would say to this jury, "that you are packed, you are picked and culled from all the land by the persons who have at present the direction of public affairs, as men upon whom they can depend; but I do not fear the event; I do not believe you will be slaves. I do not believe that you will be inaccessible to considerations irresistible in argument, and which speak to all the genuine feelings of the human heart. I have been told that there are men upon whom truth, truth fully and adequately stated, will make no impression. It is a vile and groundless calumny upon the character of the human mind. This is my theory, and I now come before *you* for the practice."<sup>1</sup>

1 Godwin's letter to Gerrald appears as an appendix (pp. 355–58) to Maurice Hindle's edition of

The composition of this letter, coming, as it does, shortly before Godwin's completion of *Caleb Williams* (30 April) and his subsequent revision of the "Postscript" (finished 8 May), has itself been entered as an evidentiary exhibit in the various cases made by modern critics. It has, in particular, been used to assess the two versions—one published, one left in manuscript—of the climactic trial scene at the end of the novel, their status as either the confirmation or the betrayal of Godwin's radical political beliefs. Gary Kelly, for instance, cites the letter as evidence of Godwin's growing political sophistication, his refusal to indulge in the rhetorical excesses of the Jacobin radicals, their (in the terms of the letter) "vain defiance and empty vaunting." It is along these lines that Kelly can go on to defend the revised ending of the novel, which features a chastened, contained rhetoric, against the discarded manuscript ending, which features an unrepentant, vitriolic Caleb accusing his aristocratic oppressor, Mr Falkland, in open court.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, other advocates read the evidence differently: Maurice Hindle, for example, condemns the published ending, with its tearful reconciliation of Caleb and Falkland, as Godwin's cowardly flight from historical reality, a reality represented for Hindle by Gerrald's eventual conviction and deportation for his "crime."<sup>3</sup>

There are many reasons, however, to call this evidence into question, not the least of which, in Kelly's case, is the fact that Godwin's letter

*Caleb Williams* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988). References are to this edition. The original manuscript of the letter is in the Abinger collection of Shelley-Godwin materials at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. In *The English Jacobin Novel 1780–1805* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), Gary Kelly suggests that Godwin might have intended the letter for publication as part of his "Letters of Mucius" series in the *Morning Chronicle*, but the audience for Godwin's rhetoric, whether limited to Gerrald himself or inclusive of a broader reading public, is impossible to ascertain.

2 Kelly, pp. 184–90, 196–98.

3 Introduction to *Caleb Williams*, pp. xxxvii–xxxix. Other readings of the two endings of the novel generally divide into those which prefer the published ending and those which prefer the original ending. Among the former are Mitzi Myers, "Godwin's Changing Conception of *Caleb Williams*," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 12 (1972), 591–628; Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986), pp. 103–19; Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 35–69; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 68; and Kenneth Graham, *The Politics of Narrative: Ideology and Social Change in William Godwin's "Caleb Williams"* (New York: AMS Press, 1990), pp. 36–42. Those who prefer the manuscript ending include D. Gilbert Dumas, who claims it better represents Godwin's philosophical doctrine, "Things As They Were: The Original Ending of *Caleb Williams*" in *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 6 (1966), 575–97; and Raymond Williams, who finds Godwin's first attempt more genuinely radical than the published version, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 142–49. Tillottama Rajan moves beyond this facile dichotomy in her fine consideration of the various hermeneutics implied by the two endings in *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 188–90.

to Gerrald precedes in composition both the inflammatory rhetoric of the original ending and the subdued rhetoric of the revision, and thus cannot represent any definitive crisis of political maturity in Godwin's career. But the most substantial criticism of the various interpretive uses of the Gerrald letter, and, in consequence, of the various readings of the two endings, will come only from a reconsideration of the details of that letter and of exactly what Godwin's courtroom rhetoric entails for Caleb's numerous trials and for the novel as a whole. Initially, it might seem that what Godwin recommends to Gerrald is what could be called a "rhetoric of sincerity." Sincerity, indeed, is one of the threads that connects the Gerrald letter and *Caleb Williams* to Godwin's monumental work of the previous year, the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Recommending sincerity as the cornerstone of all social virtues, Godwin there imagines a manner of self-presentation which could not fail of convincing its audience:

the face, the voice, the gesture are so many indexes to the mind. It is scarcely possible therefore that the person with whom I am conversing should not perceive, that I am influenced by no malignity, acrimony and envy. In proportion as my motive is pure, at least after a few experiments, my manner will become unembarrassed. ... There is an energy in the sincerity of a virtuous mind that nothing human can resist.<sup>4</sup>

As this passage indicates, however, Godwin's recommendation of sincerity seems to point beyond the realm of rhetoric and language altogether. Godwin's notion of the body as an "index" to the mind represents an attempt to evade the mediation of language and its persuasive functions, proposing a "natural sign" which requires no interpretation and no rhetorical force. Similarly, Godwin's advice that his troubled friend "be wholly [him]self," that he open himself to the jury with no reservation, seems to imply that vindication will depend not upon the cleverness of his arguments, but upon the mere bodily presence of Gerrald as the just man. Rejecting rhetoric, Godwin can confidently assert that it is "in man," rather than in words, that the hope of acquittal lies.

But the rhetoric of the courtroom cannot be so easily dismissed. Traditional rhetoric, as Godwin well knew, made a place for matters of self-presentation, under the rubric, for instance, of an Aristotelian *ethos* which focuses less on the arrangement of the argument than on the manner of the speaker and his or her "development of a certain character."<sup>5</sup>

4 William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), p. 137. All further references are to the revised 1798 version, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

5 *Rhetoric*, book 2, section i.

For Aristotle, the *ethos* of the speaker is not a natural sign, an "index of the mind," nor are its motivations any more "pure" than those of argumentative speech: the "sincere" self-presentation of the speaker is just one of the arrows in the rhetorical quiver, all of which are aimed at persuasion. By the same token, Godwin cannot disguise all of the rhetorical elements of sincerity, that unencumbered opening of the mind which must, nevertheless, stand the practice of "a few experiments" before it is perfected. Similarly, one need only recall the rhetorical situation of the Gerrald letter—Godwin recommending one course of action over another—to become newly aware of the rhetorical dimensions of the advice. The rhetorical nature of Godwin's epistolary appeal and of the course of action he recommends is most powerfully indicated by his use of the imperative voice ("be wholly yourself") for his central recommendation. There is some danger, it seems, that Gerrald will not be himself, will be other than himself: the purpose of the letter is to bridge the gap between Gerrald as non-self and as self, to provide the motive force which can lift him into selfhood. Similarly, selfhood as a legal rhetorical stance ("*Stand up* to the situation—be wholly yourself") has the effect not merely of static present truth, but also of motion, the rhetorical power to move his audience and to "probe all the recesses of their souls." Finally, Godwin reveals the rhetorical nature of his advice, its difference from a merely static self-evidence of the self, in the ease with which he ventriloquizes the voice of the self he is conjuring, impersonating the voice of sincerity he is recommending: "'I know,' I would say to the jury, 'that you are packed.'" One must conclude, as a prelude to assessing this letter's importance for *Caleb Williams*, that what Godwin is recommending is not a non-rhetorical "sincerity," but instead a rhetoric which grounds itself in the strong appeal of the self, what I will call for the purposes of this paper a "rhetoric of subjectivity."<sup>6</sup>

The status of subjectivity, as either the ground of a "pure" sincerity or the *ethos* of a rhetorical strategy, is equally crucial to any assessment of the two endings of *Caleb Williams*. Convincing cases have been made for the revised ending as a turning point in Godwin's depiction of the requirements for lasting political change: "In the final meeting of Caleb

6 For another rhetorical analysis of *Caleb Williams* which comes to conclusions quite different from mine, see Jacqueline T. Miller's "The Imperfect Tale: Articulation, Rhetoric, and Self in *Caleb Williams*" in *Criticism* 20 (1975), 366–82. More direct evidence of Godwin's use of rhetoric in actual forensic contexts can be found in his *Cursory Strictures on the Charge Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the Grand Jury*, published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1794. This brilliant piece of rhetoric challenged Eyre's broad definition of constructive treason and, in Hazlitt's later opinion, "possibly saved the lives of twelve innocent individuals." *The Spirit of the Age*, ed. E.D. Mackerness (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1969), p. 50.

and Falkland, Godwin offers a counter-proposition to [the] cycle of revolution and tyranny, replacing Caleb's rebellious zeal with a no less revolutionary change of heart."<sup>7</sup> But such readings depend upon seeing Caleb's final courtroom contrition as a natural sign, his tears and exclamations as an "index" to his mind or, as here, to his heart. Another way to understand the final scene might begin, not with a sincere reading of the endings, but with the suggestion that they themselves are readings of sincerity. Indeed, if one turns to the chapter on Sincerity in the revised edition of *Political Justice* (1798), *Caleb Williams* comes to seem the turning point in Godwin's thought on the nature of subjectivity, rather than in his ideas on the question of revolutionary retribution. In these revisions, mainly undertaken to remove "many things that now appear to the author upon a review not to have been meditated with a sufficiently profound reflection" (p. 71), sincerity is still recommended, as a "perfect frankness [which] discards every species of concealment or reserve" (p. 319). But Godwin seems no longer to believe that the body is the unfailing index of the mind, imagining instead that it might be possible to become an "expert" at disguising the betrayals of blush and nervous stutter, "cut[ting] off all commerce between the heart and the tongue" (pp. 317-18). More telling still is Godwin's re-evaluation of the possibility of sincerity itself. Abandoning his earlier notions of a possibly "pure" correspondence between motive and utterance, Godwin now claims that "There is no instance in which truth can be communicated absolutely pure. We can only make approximations to such a proceeding, without ever being able fully to arrive at it" (p. 327). Far removed from the supra-linguistic recommendation to Gerrald to "be himself," Godwin now realizes that the taint of language always modifies and colours the truth it seeks to tell.<sup>8</sup> The final step in this process of revision, and the one which might have made the greatest change in Godwin's advice to Gerrald, comes with Godwin's proposing the rule that, "wherever a great and manifest evil arises from disclosing the truth, and that evil appears to be greater than the evil to arise from violating, in this instance, the general barrier of human confidence and virtue, there the obligation of sincerity is suspended" (p. 331). No longer the irresistible resource of a virtuous mind, sincerity now stands convicted of sometimes being the source of "great and manifest evil," an evil best avoided

7 Clemit, p. 64.

8 For a fine assessment of issues of truth in the novel, see Kelvin Everest and Gavin Edwards, "William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: Truth and 'Things As They Are,'" in 1789, *Reading Writing Revolution: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, July 1981, ed. Francis Barker (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1982), pp. 129-46.

by recourse to other means. In the light cast backwards from this radical revision of a central tenet of the *Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams* can be seen as the testing ground of Godwin's earlier notion of sincerity, as the tribunal in which the notion of a pure subjectivity is called out of court in favour of a carefully situated rhetoric of subjectivity able to evade the dangers of simple self-revelation.

Although *Caleb Williams* abounds in scenes which involve some sort of adjudication, whether formal or informal, the scene I wish to focus on, before proceeding to a fuller consideration of the two versions of Caleb's final trial, depicts the semi-formal hearing held by Mr Forester, Falkland's brother, to decide whether to hold Caleb over for trial on the charge of theft. By its proliferation of forensic settings, the novel offers what could be taken as a typology of courtroom rhetoric, but it is in this scene that the questions of subjectivity, its strengths and weaknesses as a rhetorical stance, are first powerfully raised. The hearing itself arises as a challenge to Caleb's subjectivity at a time when he had decided to quit Falkland's service, assuming that Falkland would take him at his word when he promised not to reveal the secret which haunts his master's life. Already on the road away from Falkland's estate, Caleb is stopped by a messenger with a letter from Forester, a seeming friend of Caleb, who tells him that a charge has been raised against him, and that he is asked to return. As Forester poses the situation, Caleb's return is a matter of crucial self-vindication—"It is of the utmost consequence to your future honour and character" (p. 166)—and Caleb responds by affirming his belief in the power of the self to stand as its own evidence:

Innocence and guilt were, in my apprehension, the things in the whole world the most opposite to each other. I would not suffer myself to believe, that the former could be confounded with the latter, unless the innocent man first allowed himself to be subdued in mind. ... I determined never to prove an instrument of destruction to Mr. Falkland; but I was not less resolute to obtain justice to myself. (p. 167)

Resolved on this legal theory which bases innocence on self-presentation, Caleb is unprepared for the false charges and the inventive malevolence raised against him by Falkland.

Falkland's central ploy to ensure Caleb's condemnation and imprisonment, although never fully explained in the plot, serves as an apt metaphor for Caleb's erroneous reliance on subjectivity. Wrongly accused of having stolen some valuables from Falkland prior to his retreat, Caleb is anxious to reveal the place in the house where his possessions are hidden, as if by so doing he would be turning out his inmost mind for inspection by Forester and those attending his trial. But after his boxes

are retrieved from the "small apartment" behind "a concealed door" (p. 161) where Caleb had hidden them—itself a metaphor for his inmost interiority—the participants in the trial are shocked (Falkland at least appears so) to discover some of the property in question contained within. Faced with Forester's angry questioning, which raises against the rhetoric of subjectivity a contesting rhetoric of facts—"to what purpose appeal to probabilities and conjectures, in the face of incontestable facts?" (p. 175)—Caleb's dumb astonishment registers the initial defeat for his reliance on the truth of subjectivity. His later reconstruction of his thoughts at the time reveals even more:

To the rest of the persons present I seemed to be merely the subject of detection; but in reality I was, of all the spectators, that individual who was most at a loss to conceive, through every stage of the scene, what would come next, and who listened to every word that was uttered with the most uncontrollable amazement. (p. 175)

Caleb's use of the word "subject" here implies much of the critique of subjectivity which I suggest the novel supports, replicating, as it does, Louis Althusser's perceptive unravelling of the word's multiple and contradictory strands:

In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e., in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection "all by himself."* *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.* That is why they "work all by themselves."<sup>9</sup>

As the "subject of detection," Caleb is subjected by the "higher authority" of Forester's court and Falkland's powerful duplicity. He is detection's subject, possessed by the power of detection (indeed, how would the meaning of the passage be altered by calling him "the object of detection"?), while, at the same time, seemingly shining forth in his full subjectivity: the "detection" which occurs before an audience of witnesses and observers is supposedly the detection of Caleb's true self, his desire to defame and steal from his master. The "subject of detection" is thus, to all appearances, the "detection of the subject." But as Caleb's

<sup>9</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 182.

confession reveals, what looks like a discovery of a "free subjectivity," "author of and responsible for his actions," is (subjectively) experienced as "uncontrollable amazement." As if to confirm Althusser's claustrophobic argument, Caleb is forced to the realization that *any* response, if spoken (or even not spoken) from the position of the subject, will destroy him: admission of guilt, the path closest to "submit[ing] freely to the commandments of the Subject," will bring no remission of punishment; expostulation, the path Caleb eventually chooses, will fall on deaf ears; and silence will be taken as evidence of guilt. We might partially revise Althusser's analysis, while not disconfirming it, by noting that not only the active, freely submitting subject "works" for the Subject; even the silent subject works "all by himself" for his own subjection.<sup>10</sup>

But if this initial experience would seem to disabuse Caleb of his naïve faith in the power of subjectivity's witness, part of the strength of Godwin's novel is its ability to show the persistence of ideological beliefs, even in the face of their continual inefficacy. After repeating his declaration of innocence, and even attempting to impute guilt to Falkland (for his plot to frame Caleb, if not for the crime of murder which lies at the heart of the novel), Caleb makes a plea which might remind us of Godwin's affirmation to Gerrald that it is "in man" to effect his own acquittal:

Mr Forester, you are a lover of justice; I conjure you not to violate it in my person. You are a man of penetration; look at me! do you see any of the marks of guilt? Recollect all that has ever passed under your observation; is it compatible with a mind capable of what is now alleged against me? Could a real criminal have shown himself so unabashed, composed and firm as I have now done? (p. 178)

Like Godwin's suggestions to Gerrald, Caleb's appeal to Forester seems to go beyond language while itself occupying the medium of language. Injustice in this case will be a crime against Caleb's "person"; justice, on the other hand, can be read from Caleb's mere bodily presence, an "index" of his innocence. But the decision to acquit, if Forester takes it, will indeed be an act of reading, reading the "marks of guilt" which appear or do not appear in Caleb's physical presence. Even as a blank text,

10 These reflections on subjectivity can be extended to a consideration of the novel as a genre by comparing them with Georg Lukács's analysis of the form in *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1971), later taken up by Lucien Goldmann in *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1975), to the effect that the novel is the form which, more than any other, reflects the paradox of the capitalist subject who simultaneously feels himself in control of his own destiny and subjected to the whims of a system beyond his control.



a text on which no "marks" appear, Caleb is a linguistic entity, and his appeal to Forester is a rhetorical one, even if based in a rhetoric of subjectivity. At the close of this hearing, before he is to be transported to prison, Caleb, in a last statement to the court, reaffirms his faith in the power of subjectivity: "I must ... be reduced to derive my satisfaction from myself. Depend upon it, I will not begin that career by dishonourable concessions. If I am to despair of the good-will of other men, I will at least maintain the independence of my own mind" (p. 180). Conceding the failure of his rhetorical efforts, Caleb still clings to subjectivity as its own reward.

The aftermath of Caleb's first hearing, his incarceration in a squalid prison, serves as an apt testing ground for the dynamics and the resilience of subjectivity as an ideological stance, representing as it does the most extreme interiority imaginable, the interiority of confinement. As Victor Brombert has convincingly shown, the prison is frequently the site of romanticism's most moving experiments in subjective transcendence, combining the subject's alienation from society at large with an intensity of self-reflection.<sup>11</sup> As both metaphorical and actual architecture, the prison also, of course, illustrates the duplicity of subjectivity, its status as both autonomy (the isolated prisoner) and as coercion (the prisoner "subjected" by the walls which enclose him). Our most powerful theorist of the prison, Michel Foucault, describes this duplicity under the heading of "discipline," a penological innovation of Godwin's time best illustrated by the architectural layout of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon:

We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheral building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.<sup>12</sup>

11 Victor Brombert, *The Romantic Prison: The French Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). See especially chap. 1, "The Prison Dream," and chap. 4, on the Gothic tradition. Brombert, of course, treats French texts exclusively, but his analysis can easily and usefully be extended to the prior English romantic texts which treat confinement and imprisonment, particularly the Gothic novels.

12 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New

In this formation, the prison emerges as the very model of subjectivity, in its creation of autonomous subjects, each separated from the other in individuated cells, and in its subjection of these subjects to the centralized authority (Althusser's "Subject") of the observant supervisor. As it turns out, however, the Panopticon does not even require an actual full-time supervisor to discipline its inhabitants: Bentham's prisoners—madmen, patients, schoolboys—like the subjects Althusser describes, "work all by themselves."<sup>13</sup> For Caleb, it is the seemingly omnipresent gaze of Falkland ("Did his power reach through all space, and his eye penetrate every concealment?," p. 249) which constitutes both his unending subjection and also, paradoxically, his creation as a subject, as a spy, a refugee, the wrongly accused man, the subject of detection.

What interests the reader of *Caleb Williams*, however, is the novel's ability to make this subjectivity/subjection a question, rather than merely an assumption of the narrative. In his tracing of the dynamic process by which the subjected prisoner becomes the autonomous subject, Godwin holds up for analysis the entire mechanism of subjectivity, if not, at this point, explicitly rejecting it. Caleb, of course, is not incarcerated in a Panopticon, but in one of the dingy, unsanitary country prisons, combining both communal space and isolation cells, which much more nearly represent the norm for late-eighteenth-century systems of social control. Caleb's cell, to which he is confined at night, is thus not penetrated by light, as are the cells of the Panopticon, but is, as Caleb describes it, "damp, without window, light, or air, except from a few holes worked for that purpose in the door" (p. 187). Indeed, one might see a connection between the dark airlessness of Caleb's cell and his willingness to characterize his imprisonment as subjection, as tyranny, with no compensatory enhancement of subjectivity:

Among my melancholy reflections I tasked my memory, and counted over the doors, the locks, the bolts, the chains, the massy walls and grated windows that were between me and liberty. "These," said I, "are the engines that tyranny sits down in cold and serious meditation to invent. This is the empire that man exercises over man. Thus is a being, formed to expatiate, to act, to smile, and enjoy, restricted and benumbed." (p. 188)

York: Vintage, 1979), p. 200. Foucault's idea of discipline and his discussion of the Panopticon have, of course, been used in a wide variety of literary critical applications, but his analysis is particularly appropriate to Godwin. More than just contemporaries, Godwin and Bentham may almost be said to represent the opposing poles of thought in their age, one a libertarian anarchist, the other a utilitarian social scientist. For another consideration of this crucial relationship, see James Thompson, "Surveillance in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*," *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 173–98.

13 Foucault, p. 201.

Caleb's attention is, as it were, directed outward to the various mechanisms which confine him and to the powerful forces whose interests these mechanisms serve, rather than inward to his own subjectivity. Both Godwin's contemporary and his modern readers, his advocates and his detractors, find this section describing Caleb's confinement the most socially critical part of the novel, attacking, as it does, a specific and identifiable societal problem and laying blame where Godwin thought it belonged. By focusing on the privation of the prison experience—lack of community, lack of comfort, lack of light, lack of fresh air—Godwin is denying the subjective richness often depicted in other romantic texts; he is depicting, in contrast, an institution which destroys even the basic requirement of subjectivity in its methodical destruction of the human body.

But if Caleb's first days in prison are characterized by a critique of his own subjection, he quickly seeks solace in subjectivity. Lamenting the "perpetual anguish" caused by his obsession with his imprisonment, Caleb welcomes a new stream of thoughts: "after a time nature, wearied with distress, would no longer stoop to the burthen; thought, which is incessantly varying, introduced a series of reflections totally different" (p. 192). His critical consciousness replaced with romantic self-reflection, Caleb exchanges the material analysis which had helped him trace his predicament to the concrete social agency of a tyrannical monied class for an abstract causality in which "nature" and "thought" are the primary actors. The essential circularity of Caleb's explanation of his new mood, an explanation which makes "thought" responsible for creating new "reflections," reveals that we are now in the entirely mental terrain of romantic hyper-subjectivity. Caleb's new thoughts, however, have the power not only to change his mind, but to change his cell also:

No sooner did my contemplations take this turn, than I saw the reasonableness and possibility of tranquillity and peace; and my mind whispered to me the propriety of showing, in this forlorn condition, that I was superior to all my persecutors. Blessed state of innocence and self-approbation! The sunshine of conscious integrity pierced through all the barriers of my cell, and spoke ten thousand times more joy to my heart, than the accumulated splendours of nature and art can communicate to the slaves of vice. (p. 192)

Having seemingly found that Archimedean point which so often moves the world in the romantic text, the point of self-consciousness, Caleb sees the very fabric of his physical surroundings transformed. Through an ecstatic enlightenment, the darkness and privation of his cell are dispelled and replaced with the rich "splendours" of subjectivity. But the directionality of this new light which floods Caleb's cell might raise questions

about its cause, and might also lead us to believe that Caleb now inhabits a metaphorical Panopticon. If the source of his new joy is "conscious integrity," then the fact that this sunshine must come from without, must "pierce" the barriers of his cell, initially seems odd. For Caleb's new subjective strength, like the light which individuates each prisoner in the Panopticon, is as much a creation of the institution in which he finds himself and of its centralized authority as is his more obvious subjection: indeed, subject and subjection are here one and the same. The true claustrophobia of Caleb's confinement is represented in the fact that the very subjectivity he holds to as evidence of his superiority to his persecutors is itself the mark of the institution's hold upon him, its power to subject him; his enlightenment is his benightedness.

One might expect that the coda to this scene of extreme subjectivity would be silence, the cessation of all discourse, given that Caleb's "self-approbation" removes him from any need for persuasive rhetoric. Silence is the index of subjectivity in both its senses: as the triumphant transcendence of all occasion for speech and as the effective silencing of the subjected prisoner. The very fact that the rest, so to speak, is not silence, that Caleb and his reader will go on to further trials and their accompanying discourses, indicates much about the deployment of subjectivity in the final courtroom scene and its importance for adjudicating the claim of the two endings. Caleb identifies his cell, not as a space for silence, but as a school for rhetoric, shortly after the apotheosis of subjectivity quoted above: "I cultivated the powers of oratory ... and improved more in eloquence in the solitude of my dungeon, than perhaps I should have done in the busiest and most crowded scenes" (p. 193). Just as Godwin's advice to Gerrald must be seen in its rhetorical context and not simply as a recognition of the self-presentation of the truth, so must Godwin's depiction of Caleb's "self-approbation" be seen not merely as the (ideological) triumph of romantic subjectivity but more properly as the creation of a *rhetoric* of subjectivity. It is Godwin's emphasis on rhetoric, his canny ability to distinguish between the self-presence of subjectivity and the representation of subjectivity in rhetoric, that provides the ending with its intellectual and literary vigour. And it is also this emphasis on rhetoric which supplies a crucial means for assessing the various effects of the two endings, for it is my contention that what we see at work in Godwin's abandonment of the manuscript ending for the published ending is a move from subjectivity or sincerity simply considered to a fully complex notion of the rhetoric of subjectivity.

The rejected manuscript ending might indeed be seen as a literary restaging of the Gerrald trial and as a meditation on the tragic hero-

ism of subjectivity. Just as Godwin recommends to Gerrald that he "be wholly [him]self," so does Caleb, during the climactic trial scene, ground his claims to vindication in self-presentation: "I ... found myself perfectly self-possessed. My mind reviewed with ease the successive parts of the transaction I had to explain. I was varied, perspicuous and forcible. My confidence every instant increased, till I felt all the satisfaction of undoubting certainty" (p. 340). Self-possession, in its close ties to "varied, perspicuous and forcible" testimony, seems allied with persuasive rhetoric. But if the Gerrald trial and Godwin's imaginative recreation of it in the manuscript ending make claims for a rhetoric naturally issuing from subjectivity, then in both cases we must judge this rhetoric to be largely ineffective.<sup>14</sup> The historical trial ended in Gerrald's conviction, transportation, and eventual death in Australia (in November 1795), and the literary trial ends similarly with conviction and Caleb's descent into madness. Caleb comments more directly on his rhetorical failure when assessing his chances, after the conviction, for a more favourable judgment from history: "Perhaps I am beguiling myself ... merely for want of strength to put myself in the place of an unprepossessed auditor, and to conceive how the story will impress every one that hears it. My innocence will then die with me!" (p. 345). Contrary to Godwin's earlier advice to Gerrald that it is "in man" to effect his own acquittal, Caleb here realizes that the only thing which inheres in his own body is his innocence and that, indeed, it will be buried with his body when he dies. The final pages of the manuscript ending, with their record of a gradually disintegrating personality, trace the ultimate defeat of a simply conceived notion of subjectivity, in that they pursue the depiction of imprisonment beyond the romantic celebration of the self to the point where the human becomes the inhuman: "True happiness lies in being like a stone—Nobody can complain of me—all day long I do nothing—am a stone—a GRAVE-STONE!—an obelisk to tell you, HERE LIES WHAT WAS ONCE A MAN!" (p. 346). This initial attempt at a rhetoric of subjectivity ends with a rhetoric of subjection, in which the only voice is that of an inscription on a stone, whose only message, it turns out, concerns the absence

<sup>14</sup> Kelly suggests that the very fact that Gerrald's testimony is reported to have moved several of his auditors is evidence of its rhetorical success and therefore provides a parallel to Caleb's success in the published ending (*English Jacobin Novel*, p. 197). But Godwin is quite clear in his letter to Gerrald that what he looks for is acquittal, not any abstractly conceived "moral victory." Judging Gerrald's speech and Caleb's testimony in the manuscript ending on purely rhetorical grounds—in terms of their capacity to achieve desired ends—one must conclude that they are examples of failed rhetoric. The published ending of *Caleb Williams*, on the contrary, presents a successful rhetoric.

of the subject, "what was once a man." If the trial in the manuscript begins with Caleb's confident self-possession, it thus ends with his being possessed by the institutions who use subjectivity as one of their tools of social control.

It could indeed be said that subjectivity triumphs in the manuscript version of Caleb's trial, but that it triumphs only in the service of Falkland and his claims for the superiority of his "character":

To my [Caleb's] allegations he would offer under the present circumstances only one short answer. The character of neither of the parties, the accuser or the accused, was wholly unknown. He had lived in the face of his country and in the face of Europe. His life had been irreproachable; it had been more than this; he must say it, it had been uniformly benevolent and honourable. I also was known, notwithstanding the meanness of my origin, as extensively as he was. My history was notorious; first a thief; then a breaker of prisons; and last a consummate adept in every species of disguise. (p. 341)

Caleb's lesson (learned too late) is that the representation of subjectivity takes place only within the constraints of socially determined forums, which allow some evidences of the self to be heard but not others: subjectivity is, as it were, subject to supra-subjective limits. Given this materialist unravelling of the doctrine of subjectivity, it is surprising to see the defenders of this original ending attack Godwin in inherently subjectivist terms for rewriting it. D. Gilbert Dumas, the "discoverer" of the manuscript ending, criticizes the published ending for its inconsistency both with the novel up to that point and with the philosophical principles of the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*: "If I have stressed doctrine, I have done so because of the startling divergence of the alternate endings and because the new ending appears to me to betray Godwin's proclaimed purpose."<sup>15</sup> Raymond Williams, with specific reference to the new ending's relation to Joseph Gerrald's conviction, claims that it is "understandable to feel angry at what would be a contrived fictional ending" and calls Godwin's subsequent communications with the imprisoned Gerrald "incredibly insensitive and offensive."<sup>16</sup> All of this talk amounts to, it would seem, a conviction of Godwin himself, but, with its references to betrayal and insensitivity, the sentencing fails to go beyond a simply conceived notion of subjectivity, negatively figured here, in terms the feudal Falkland would welcome, as fidelity and sensitivity. In turning to the published ending, I would suggest that rather than reading Godwin's revision in terms of betrayal—either of his political principles or of the consistency of his narrative—we do well to

<sup>15</sup> Dumas, p. 594.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, p. 148.

acknowledge its cunning repositioning of subjectivity, not simply as the unquestioned foundation of a (failed) rhetoric, but as a rhetorical counter itself, part of a system of representation attuned to the demands of the courtroom as an institutional setting.

One place to begin is with a theme that conceives the consistency of Godwin's published narrative along lines quite different from those of subjective truth: the theme of disguise. Falkland's condemnation of Caleb's character in the first ending, quoted above, ends with his identification of his one-time servant as "a consummate adept in every species of disguise." Falkland here refers to the series of disguises—a beggar, a farmer's son, a Jew, a cripple—to which Caleb resorts in his attempts to free himself from persecution. We might see these disguises as Caleb's gradual abandonment of subjectivity as the best hope for deliverance, in favour of a willingness to assume alternate selves. Caleb originally laments the necessity of these disguises as a loss of self: "My life was all a lie. I had a counterfeit character to support. I had counterfeit manners to assume. My gait, my gestures, my accents, were all of them to be studied. I was not free to indulge, no not one, honest sally of the soul" (p. 265). He indeed feels himself "subjected" (p. 264) under disguise more than he did when imprisoned in his own person. But the most extreme expression of this perceived alienation from one's own body and even from one's self occurs when Caleb overhears a street vendor announcing the sale of a new halfpenny paper, "the MOST WONDERFUL AND SURPRISING HISTORY AND MIRACULOUS ADVENTURES OF CALEB WILLIAMS" (p. 278). His general unhappiness when in disguise, combined with the fact that this paper faithfully records all of the disguises he has thus far assumed, leads Caleb to abandon this particular avenue of escape: "Disguise was no longer of use" (p. 279). The circulated paper, distressingly accurate in most of its details, stands as the most powerful example of subjectivity's repressive force: Caleb is not allowed to escape from his subjectivity by disguise, continually brought back to a (now repressive) identification as "Caleb Williams." Mirroring Godwin's own composition of Caleb's life, the paper reveals its subjection of its literary subject in the way that it "authors" Caleb for the purposes of discipline. Subjectivity shines through disguise only when the light is provided by the Panopticon; otherwise it is buried in darkness.

Caleb's dilemma prior to the published epilogue thus seems dismal: subjectivity and its rhetoric fail because they are constructed by institutional power; but disguise is quickly penetrated by that same power and subjected to subjectivity. Where to turn? The particular innovation of Godwin's published ending, the recognition of which radically changes

the way we read the novel, can most simply be stated as Caleb's decision to come to the trial *disguised as himself*. In condemning Caleb as "a consummate adept in every species of disguise," Falkland has paradoxically identified Caleb as a man with no identity; he has defined Caleb's character, for the purposes of indictment, as the adoption of multiple and contradictory characteristics. This conviction of Caleb, by which he is simultaneously hailed as a legal subject and judged guilty for his inability to maintain coherent subjectivity, provides the groundwork for his own defence theory in the published ending, which will embrace disguise as the projection of sincere subjectivity: "I ... believed that the conduct now most indispensably incumbent on me was to lay the emotions of my soul naked before my hearers" (p. 331). Like Gerrald, driven by extremity to "be himself" in a hostile courtroom, but with a new awareness of the complications of the situation and of the distance which separates him from himself, Caleb substitutes a rhetoric of self-reflection for his former accusations of Falkland: "I now see [my] mistake in all its enormity. I am sure that if I had opened my heart to Mr Falkland, if I had told to him privately the tale that I have now been telling, he could not have resisted my reasonable demand" (p. 334). Having cleverly constructed a self to throw upon the mercy of the court, Caleb adopts the rhetoric of fidelity (Dumas) and sensitivity (Williams) with which his author Godwin is condemned, but with the rhetorically limited goal of achieving his own acquittal. His invocation of the privacy in which Falkland might have accepted his tale seems to fly in the face of actual experience, since Falkland has once already "privately" rejected Caleb's pleadings (see pp. 292-94, where Falkland, in private conference with Caleb, rejects a compromise). But the tactic becomes clear, when one sees this rhetorical gesture as Caleb's *public* positioning of the private, his polemic use of a transcendent ideal of non-polemical consensus.<sup>17</sup> As in the earlier hearing, Caleb's private self is here turned out for public perusal, but where that first inspection discovered the property of another (Falkland's valuables in the hidden trunk), this last inspection reveals only a carefully constructed subjectivity. Where genuine privacy had met only with failure, this seemingly non-coercive "open[ing]" of his heart actually has the power to coerce an acquittal which Falkland publicly "could not have resisted."

17 It is tempting, but beyond the scope of this inquiry, to think about how the model of the rhetorical deployment of subjectivity which I am developing here relates to Jürgen Habermas's idea of the public sphere, which he characterizes as "the sphere of private people come together as a public." *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 27.



The cunning rereading which I am proposing for the published ending of the novel clearly has its designs upon the reader as well as upon Falkland, in its refusal to lift the disguise of subjectivity which Caleb has so cleverly assumed, but the text does leave us with a trace, in Falkland's response, of the process by which an audience is convinced by Caleb's plea:

His indignation against me was great for having retained all my resentment towards him, thus, as it might be, to the last hour of his existence. It was increased when he discovered me, as he supposed, using a pretence of liberality and sentiment to give new edge to my hostility. But as I went on he could no longer resist. He saw my sincerity; he was penetrated with my grief and compunction. (p. 335)

The possibility of "pretence," of disguise, on Caleb's part is raised, and not definitively dispelled by Falkland's submission. Falkland's "seeing" of Caleb's "sincerity" has usually been treated as the central conversion experience of the narrative, the resistless recognition of truth, but how would the story be changed if this seeing were staged as merely another spectacle in Caleb's "theatre of calamity" (p. 5)? Falkland does indeed "see" Caleb's sincerity, not as the index of his innermost subjectivity, but as a publicly acknowledged fact which "he could no longer resist." Sincerity, like the rhetoric which Godwin recommends to Gerrald, is not the mere static presentation of the self, but has the power to move and penetrate its auditors, who, as Godwin had told Gerrald, "are made of penetrable stuff." The published ending with its cunning deployment of subjectivity, rather than a betrayal of dearly held political beliefs, is Godwin's primer on effective courtroom rhetoric. It transforms, in this first English example of the detective novel,<sup>18</sup> a repressive apparatus which had positioned Caleb as "the subject of detection," turning it to the ends of acquittal, to the point where Falkland himself is brought to say, in his final speech to Caleb, "I stand now completely detected" (p. 335).

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18 Ian Ousby makes the claim for *Caleb Williams* as the "first work of English fiction to display a sustained interest in the theme of detection" in *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 22.