1968

William Godwin's novels: a study of the interrelationship between Godwin's novels and political justice

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WILLIAM GODWIN'S NOVELS: A STUDY OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GODWIN'S NOVELS AND POLITICAL JUSTICE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville
June, 1968

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INTRODUCTION

William Godwin (1756-1836) is remembered primarily as the radical English philosopher of the revolutionary era, the author of the Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness (1793). This work produced a revolutionary effect upon Godwin's contemporaries, and its impact was recorded by William Hazlitt:

> No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. Tom Paine was considered for the time as a Tom Fool to him, Paley an old woman, Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode; and these were the oracles of thought.[1]

Though Godwin's philosophical reputation suffered as a result of the reaction against the excesses of the French Revolution, his influence upon the literary and philosophical minds of the time is significant.

Godwin was the center of a literary group which included Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Parsons, Mrs. Opie, and Dr. Moore, each of whom achieved a considerable contemporary reputation as a novelist. This group produced novels which have been variously designated revolutionary, doctrinaire, and didactic:

> They took the novel as it came to them--the sentimental romance, the story of adventure, the Gothic romance--and incorporated into it the social trea-

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[1]William Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age (London: The World's Classics, 1904), p. 18.

> tise. When they had done this in fictions that were for a period readable, they had created the didactic novel.[2]

The titles of works by two of the disciples of William Godwin indicate the general tenor of the fictional output of the group: Man as he Is (1792) and Hermsprong, or Man as he is Not (1793) by Robert Bage, and Woman as She Should Be (1793) and Women as They Are (1796) by Mrs. Parsons.[3] These titles also relate their authors to William Godwin.

The original title of Godwin's first major novel, Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams (1794), gives evidence of the didactic purpose of the novel. In addition, the author's Preface connects the novel with philosophy by way of contrast: the novel is "no refined and abstract speculation," but a study of "things passing in the moral world."[4] It is evident that Godwin hoped with the novel to reach those people who would not encounter his philosophical treatise. Furthermore, the highly speculative Political Justice provides an ideal view of "things as they should be" and indicates the methods by which this millenium could be attained. Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams demonstrates the abyss which separates the ideal from the real.

Caleb Williams and the five novels which succeeded

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[2]Wilbur L. Cross, The Development of the English Novel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 93.

[3]S. Diana Neill, A Short History of the English Novel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 107.

[4]See below, p. 15.

it--St. Leon (1799), Fleetwood (1805), Mandeville (1817), Cloudesley (1830), and Deloraine (1833)--even though they contain a variety of character types, settings, and plots are very closely related thematically. The encompassing and pervasive theme which dominates the novels is human misery, the cause of which is two-fold: the institutions which dominate human life are a corrupting and limiting influence on human behavior, and individuals pervert human nature by actions which are contrary to reason and benevolence.

Each novel involves a variation on this theme. The institution which is responsible for evil may be government, the law, aristocracy, or religion. The suffering protagonist may violate his conscience through passion, predisposition, or premeditation. The result is always the same--tragedy. It is significant that all six novels deal almost exclusively with disaster: "Tragedy is an unusual bias to be kept through six novels written over a period of forty years."[5]

The "bias" seems to be not only unusual, but deliberate. Caleb Williams demonstrates the iniquity which results from the perversion or denial of truth, and each succeeding novel continues the demonstration. Godwin used the novels to illustrate the validity of the basic conclusions of Political Justice: political institutions coerce man, enforce prejudice, prevent enlightenment, subvert morality, and

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[5]George Sherburn, "Godwin's Later Novels," Studies in Romanticism, I (Winter, 1962), 82.

therefore produce unhappiness. "Truth is omnipotent"; if man is free to seek the truth, it will prevail and, in turn, promote rational progress and universal benevolence. To deny truth and submit to political coercion is to live in the misery that is depicted in Godwin's novels.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between Political Justice and the six major novels in the light of Godwin's didactic purpose. It is evident that Godwin used the novels both as a proving ground for his philosophical conclusions and as a vehicle for disseminating his ideas. Because the novels were published during a forty-year period after the appearance of Political Justice, they also provided Godwin with the means of promulgating the emendation of his original thought.

The fundamental conclusions of Political Justice are never denied in the fiction, but the study of each novel individually reveals a gradual modification of certain ideas. Each novel is related to Political Justice as the demonstration of the validity of its philosophical conclusions, as the modification or rejection of certain ideas, or both. A chronological investigation of the novels provides a unique view of Godwin's continuous testing of his philosophy. Those conclusions which do not stand the test of "reality" in the fiction are discarded gradually, while those which are reaffirmed in each succeeding novel produce a cumulative effect of incontrovertible truth.

CHAPTER I

POLITICAL JUSTICE

The Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness was first published in 1793 and was revised by the author for subsequent editions in 1796 and 1798. The 1798 edition is considered to be the valid culmination of Godwin's thoughts on political justice and has been reproduced in a modern edition.[1] The title of the work indicates that William Godwin believed that the importance of politics lies in its relation to virtue and happiness. Godwin's political philosophy is at the same time a moral philosophy, and the metaphysics and epistemology which form the basis for his thought are important to the understanding of his philosophical thought.

Though Godwin accepted the Newtonian belief that the universe was a vast system of interrelated events, antecedents and consequents, he went back to the Greeks for the basis of his metaphysics. Godwin adopted the Platonic doctrine of eternal and unchanging, universal truths existing *per se* and serving as formal causes of reality. The importance of this doctrine to Godwin's philosophy cannot be

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[1]William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, ed. by F. E. L. Priestley (3 vols.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946); hereinafter referred to as *Political Justice* in the text and *PJ* in parenthetical citations to specific passages of the work.

overestimated. His doctrine of human perfectibility and rational progress depends fundamentally upon the existence of absolute truth which becomes the standard by means of which progress may be measured. It follows that man must be capable of knowing these truths which are the measure of his progress.

Godwin's psychology and epistemology take man's rational process into account, although he takes a skeptical position on the manner of knowing matter and substance. For Godwin, the one certainty of knowledge is the "existence of our own thoughts, ideas, perceptions or sensations (by whatever term we may choose to express them), and that they are ordinarily linked together, so as to produce the complex notion of unity or personal identity" (I, 26, note). This series of thoughts encompasses the term "mind" for Godwin. Man's intuitive knowledge of his own thoughts, or consciousness, makes reason omnipotent in man. Reason, according to Godwin, "is nothing more than a collation and comparison of various emotions and feelings" (II, 341). Critical to Godwin's philosophy is the position of reason as capable of "collating" emotions and feelings, as well as ideas and apprehensions, and judging rightly the truth of a situation in relation to eternal truth.

Since man is capable of right judgment, lack of it indicates the subversion of human nature by false opinion inflicted on man by outside force. Godwin emphasizes the importance of this conclusion in stating the corollaries of

his fundamental position in regard to the power of truth:

> Sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error: Sound reasoning and truth are capable of being so communicated: Truth is omnipotent: The vices and moral weakness of man are not invincible: Man is perfectible, or in other words susceptible of perpetual improvement. (I, 86)

Godwin's subjugation of immediate, individual pleasure to the universal good signifies a break with the French utilitarians. Godwin often uses the language of the utilitarians, however, and he is capable of judging the goodness of an action on the basis of utility, but his notion of pleasure is not the immediate pleasure of the senses but the pursuit of virtue. This pursuit of virtue requires that the individual good be subjected to the common good, that is, the general utility.

Since truth is omnipotent, according to Godwin, he who knows the truth must act in accordance with it. There is no separation of reason and will in Godwin's philosophy, and thus man acts from necessity. Though this "necessity" allies Godwin with the determinist school of philosophy, his doctrine is in fact very similar to belief in freedom of the will. According to Godwin, man can act only in accordance with what he knows to be true or good. It follows that evil is only the absence of good or lack of knowledge.

For Godwin, a virtuous action must have both good consequences and a benevolent intention. Godwin judges an intention benevolent insofar as it comes into conformity with objective and universal good rather than a narrow, individ-

ual good. Again, it is knowledge that provides the opportunity for virtuous action. Vice will disappear when man gains enough knowledge, and this is the foundation for Godwin's belief in the process of rational progress. F. E. L. Priestley sums up Godwin's conception of human nature:

> Godwin sees man as part of an ordered moral universe, desiring the good of the whole system, ready to subordinate his own immediate pleasure to that good, motivated by a rational benevolence whose mode of operation his reason dictates, seeking for guidance through the exercise of reason the immutable truths which are part of the system, and finding his chief joy in the exercise of the reason and in the performance of the benevolent acts which it dictates.[2]

Since this is not the observable condition of mankind, some explanation of the present state of human nature must be postulated. Godwin asserts emphatically that the cause of man's misery is government. David H. Monro sums up Godwin's attribution of the blame for man's unnatural state:

> First, vice is only error translated into action; secondly, mind is of itself adapted to the quick detection of error; but thirdly, government impedes the activity of mind--it bars the way to the discovery of truth and consequently to the practice of virtue.[3]

Godwin disagrees with the French philosophes on the nature of government in general. While Helvétius and d'Holbach, along with Rousseau, believe that government can be a positive force for good with proper administrators, Godwin

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[2]Critical Introduction to Political Justice, III, 27.

[3]David H. Monro, Godwin's Moral Philosophy (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 187.

looks upon government as inherently evil. Godwin sees government as a "necessary evil" which is forced upon man by "The errors and perverseness of the few" (I, 124). Government is evil, according to Godwin, because it depends for its existence on the restraint of man's capacity for perfectibility. Godwin believes that since man is capable of pursuing values, he has the corresponding right to be free to pursue and realize those values.

The evil inherent in both monarchy and aristocracy, according to Godwin, is dependence for existence upon the inequality of human beings. He believes that these forms of government can remain in existence only by maintaining the status quo, with lack of human progress necessarily resulting. Democracy is seen by Godwin as the least of the "necessary evils," but he has serious objections to the underlying basis for democracy as well. Because he believes in the primacy of man's ability to think for himself, Godwin feels that no man can delegate his judgment to another. In addition, democracy presupposes compromise, and Godwin feels that truth cannot be compromised. The opinion of the majority is no guarantee of the truth of the majority opinion, and in any case no majority has the moral right to coerce the minority.

Godwin's theories concerning the immorality of coercion and contracts are central to his philosophy of government, education, and society. He objects wholeheartedly to any form of coercion--governments should not coerce the in-

dividual and the individual may not overthrow the government; a child must not be forced to learn; nor a man and woman coerced into lifelong unhappiness by an unfortunate marriage. Godwin would do away with all contracts, civil and religious, on the basis that future enlightenment may make a present contract untenable.

Punishment is equally unacceptable to Godwin. If vice and crime are only a lack of knowledge, then punishment has no power to reform man. What the criminal requires is knowledge, not punishment. While capital and corporal punishment are never justifiable, Godwin does allow the restraint necessary to protect society. For Godwin, punishment may be applied to an offender only on the basis of his intention and the probability of future injury to society. Laws and punishment may not <u>avenge</u> anything and, therefore, Godwin is opposed to any rigid classification of crimes according to severity.

In regard to education of the young, Godwin again rejects all use of coercion and punishment. He objects also to rewards as a means of motivating the child to learn. Knowledge is its own reward, according to Godwin, and to coerce a child to learn or to punish him for lack of learning is to enforce opinion rather than to advance true knowledge. When government intrudes into education, enforcement of opinion results. The same result follows religious intervention into education. Religious institutions, as well as political institutions, superintend opinion and, therefore,

> The men therefore whom we are supposing to exist, when the earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population, will probably cease to propagate. The whole will be a people of men, and not children. Generation will not succeed generation, nor truth have, in a certain degree, to recommence her career every thirty years. Other improvements may be expected to keep pace with those of health and longevity. There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice, as it is called, and no government. Beside this, there will be neither disease, anguish, melancholy, nor resentment. Every man will seek, with ineffable ardour, the good of all. Mind will be active and eager, yet never disappointed. Men will see the progressive advancement of virtue and good, and feel that, if things occasionally happen contrary to their hopes, the miscarriage itself was a necessary part of that progress. (II, 528)

Though Godwin himself states that the truth of his speculations about the prolongation of life is independent of the veracity of his whole theory (II, 529), readers have seized upon his more sensational theories on marriage and population as representative of his philosophy. Other critics have read Godwin as the advocate of immediate revolution. Sir Leslie Stephen was deluded into writing:

> The Utopia in which his imagination delights is laid out with geometrical symmetry and simplicity. Godwin believes as firmly as any early Christian in the speedy revelation of a new Jerusalem, four-square and perfect in its plan.[4]

Nothing could be further from the truth. Godwin emphasizes again and again his belief that rational progress may be accomplished only by gradual change. His denial of the right of force or coercion on anyone's part precludes the sudden establishment of a new order of society.

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[4]Sir Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (2 vols.; 3d ed.; London: John Murray, 1902), II, 264.

the problem of evil is, to a great extent, a valid criticism of Political Justice. A complete understanding of Godwin's thought requires an investigation of the novels which succeeded Political Justice, complemented it, and sometimes contradicted it. The problem of evil is fully investigated in the novels:

> There is a frightening chasm, a nightmare dissociation between the gloomy tortured lives of Godwin's heroes and the sweet reasonableness, the universal good sense of Political Justice, though the horror of the novels gives full answer to the facile criticism of Godwin's anarchism on the grounds of psychological naïveté and failure to consider the problem of evil.[5]

Evil, as depicted in the novels, is a direct result of malevolence and error. The "gloomy tortured lives of Godwin's heroes" demonstrate the evil which prevails when men refuse to submit to truth or institutions enforce error. In Godwin's philosophy, pain and evil are synonymous and the aura of misery which pervades his novels gives evidence of his concern over the problem of evil.

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[5]Angus Wilson, "The Novels of William Godwin," World Review (June, 1951), p. 40.

CHAPTER II

CALEB WILLIAMS

William Godwin's first major novel is best known as Caleb Williams, but the title page of the first edition (1794) calls the work: Things as They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams.[1] Also included on the title page of this edition are these lines:

> Amidst the woods the leopard knows his kind;
> The tyger preys not on the tyger brood:
> Man only is the common foe of man.

Godwin calls attention to the fact that the novel was intended as contemporary social criticism and also points out the theme: man's inhumanity to man. The Preface originally intended for the first edition was withdrawn at the instigation of the booksellers because it also called attention to the purpose of the novel:

> What is now presented to the public, is no refined and abstract speculation; it is a study and delineation of things passing in the moral world. . . . It is now known to philosophers, that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society. But this is a truth, highly worthy to be communicated, to persons, whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach. Accordingly it was proposed, in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a

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[1]This title page is reproduced in The Adventures of Caleb Williams: or Things as They Are by William Godwin, with an Introduction by George Sherburn (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), p. 21; hereinafter referred to as Caleb Williams and cited parenthetically in the text.

> general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man. (p. xxiii)

It is evident that Godwin intended to diffuse his philosophical theory to include those people who would not otherwise be affected by Political Justice. In addition, Caleb Williams allowed Godwin to demonstrate the truth of his speculative conclusions with the "proof" of existing conditions. Godwin's own account of the spirit which helped to produce Caleb Williams gives additional evidence of the intended connection between it and Political Justice: "It was the offspring of that temper of mind in which the composition of my 'Political Justice' left me."[2]

The major emphasis in Caleb Williams is on law and the corruption which results from the imposition of it. Law represents institutional society in Caleb Williams as government represents all institutions in Political Justice: "Law is merely relative to the exercise of political force, and must perish when the necessity for that force ceases" (PJ, II, 413). It is the force of law which permits pervasive injustice in Caleb Williams: wealth and position secure the cooperation of the law; law is concerned with punishment, not truth or reform; an innocent man dies in jail for lack of money; the administration of law is both degenerate and corrupt; and finally, "the law . . . turns into marble the hearts of all those that are nursed in its prin-

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[2]C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (2 vols.; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876), I, 78.

ciples" (p. 322).

Falkland and Tyrell represent the decadent aristocracy which government and law encourage and sustain. Falkland, apparently a refined, sensitive, and benevolent man, is reduced by a momentary submission to passion to a life of suffering; Tyrell, who is totally degenerate, ruins not only himself, but everything and everyone he touches. Falkland, a victim of Tyrell's injustice, is in turn moved to inflict injustice on Caleb Williams, and it is the law which permits the machinations of the privileged to oppress and corrupt the rest of society.

The pernicious nature of the system which permits an aristocracy to control it is explored in depth in Political Justice:

> The mischief of aristocracy is that it inexpressibly aggravates and embitters an evil, which, in its mildest form, is deeply to be deplored. The first sentiment of an uncorrupted mind, when it enters upon the theatre of human life, is, Remove from me and my fellows all arbitrary hindrances; let us start fair; render all the advantages and honours of social institution accessible to every man in proportion to his talents and exertions. (II, 93-94)

Godwin, in addition, accuses the system of social privilege of killing "all liberal ambition in the rest of mankind," of putting into the hands of a few "the means of oppression against the rest of their species," and of filling the favored few with vain-glory and affording them "every incitement to insolence and a lofty disregard to the feelings and interests of others" (PJ, II, 94-95).

Falkland's mistake is precisely his sacrifice of truth

and justice to the reputation his position requires: "My life has been spent in the keenest and most unintermitted sensibility to reputation" (p. 116). Falkland describes the circumstances which led to his ruin as "links in a chain," which began with an insult to his reputation and endures in the depraved means with which he attempts to maintain it:

> This it is to be a gentleman! a man of honour! I was the fool of fame. My virtue, my honesty, my everlasting peace of mind, were cheap sacrifices to be made at the shrine of this divinity. . . . I am as much the fool of fame as ever. I cling to it to my last breath. Though I be the blackest of villains, I will leave behind me a spotless and illustrious name. (p. 157)

Falkland's compulsive dedication to his reputation results in the deaths of three men, the destruction of Caleb Williams, and the loss of his own physical and mental health. He is the first of Godwin's guilty, suffering, fictional characters who demonstrate the misery which results when human beings deny the omnipotence of truth and justice. In Political Justice, Godwin describes the suffering of the man who is at war with the principles of morality:

> He will become melancholy, dissatisfied and anxious. His firmness will degenerate into obstinacy, and his justice into inexorable severity. The further he pursues his system, the more erroneous will he become. . . . As truth is an endless source of tranquillity and delight, error will be a prolific fountain of new mistakes and discontent. (I, 314)

Falkland's unjust and inhuman persecution of Caleb Williams, through manipulation of the law, allows Godwin to demonstrate the dehumanizing effects of following such a course on both guilty and innocent, as well as the absurdity

and evil of legal justice. The young Caleb's only fault is curiosity. Though Godwin recognizes curiosity as necessary to progress (PJ, II, 231), this curiosity is for the benefit of mankind. In Caleb, curiosity becomes a "ruling passion" seeking only to ferret out one man's secret. Since Caleb's curiosity is neither constructive nor benevolent, it leads to disaster. Since Caleb speaks of the "fascinating power" which his "error" exercises over him, it is unlikely that Godwin approves of this kind of curiosity. It seems also unlikely that Caleb symbolically represents Godwin in the act of writing Political Justice.[3]

Caleb is hurried along by an "uncontrollable destiny," "mysterious fatality," and "instantaneous impulse" until he forces Falkland to reveal his secret. Caleb admits his fault as a "mistaken thirst of knowledge" (p. 154) and has no desire to use the information against Falkland:

> I conceived it to be in the highest degree absurd and iniquitous, to cut off a man qualified for the most essential and extensive utility, merely out of retrospect to an act which . . . could not now be retrieved. (p. 150)

It is his ultimate repudiation of this reasonable conclusion which leads to Caleb's mental suffering.

In Political Justice Godwin denies the efficacy of punishment, which may reasonably be inflicted only when it will produce an "overbalance of good." To punish a miscreant "for what is past and irrecoverable, and for the consid-

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[3]P. N. Furbank, "Godwin's Novels," Essays in Criticism, V (July, 1955), 215.

eration of that only, must be ranked among the most pernicious exhibitions of an untutored barbarism" (II, 327). Punishment requires the use of force and "coercion first annihilates the understanding of the subject upon whom it is exercised, and then of him who employs it" (II, 334).

Falkland coerces Caleb Williams and destroys himself. Caleb's long flight from his oppressor takes him to prison, to the hideout of a band of robbers, to the London slums, and to a remote corner of Wales. The inhumanity of man is demonstrated in each of these places. During his first attempt at escape from the power of Falkland, Caleb marvels at the state of mankind:

> I thought with unspeakable loathing of those errors, in consequence of which every man is fated to be, more or less, the tyrant or the slave. I was astonished at the folly of my species, that they did not rise up as one man, and shake off chains so ignominious, and misery so insupportable. (p. 180)

Godwin, the revolutionary, speaks through Caleb Williams to demonstrate the depth of the ignominy and misery to which man may sink.

Falkland is said to exhibit, on a contracted scale, "a copy of what monarchs are, who reckon among the instruments of their power prisons of state" (p. 204). Prison is depicted by Caleb as a "scene of misery." The loneliness which afflicts the prisoner seems to Caleb the worst of tortures:

> We talk of instruments of torture. . . . Alas, he that has observed the secrets of prison, well knows that there is more torture in the lingering existence of a criminal, in the silent, intolerable min-

> utes that he spends, than in the tangible misery of whips and racks! (p. 208)

Caleb also meditates on the human condition:

> 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. How great must be his depravity or heedlessness, who vindicates this scheme for changing health and gaity and serenity, into the wanness of a dungeon, and the deep furrows of agony and despair! (p. 209)

Prison represents to Godwin not only the depravity of law and government, but also every contemporary social institution which inhibits man's free pursuit of truth and justice. Man's mind appears, to Caleb, "never intended by nature to be the slave of force" (p. 217).

Caleb escapes from prison at last, but not before he has suffered humiliation at the hands of his jailors and witnessed the death of an innocent and virtuous man who had no money to pay for his defense. Caleb finds benevolence at last in the person of an outlaw. The romantically conceived band of thieves is characterized by their leader:

> Our profession is the profession of justice. . . . We who are thieves without a licence, are at open war with another set of men, who are thieves according to law. (p. 251)

Caleb's attempt to dissuade the outlaws from their occupation is rebuffed, and law is again blamed. Law precludes the return of the outlaws to society because it leaves "no room for amendment." Though God judges men "by what they are at the period of arraignment," the "institutions of countries that profess to worship this God" admit no distinction between what a man did once and what he has become

(pp. 264-65). Law and punishment, according to Godwin, not only coerce man and degrade him, but actually impede and negate any possible improvement. Like all other political institutions, law enforces the status quo and prohibits rational progress. Reason and truth alone have the power to improve the human condition (PJ, II, 341).

Forced by the malevolence of one of the band to flee the outlaw sanctuary, Caleb encounters iniquity wherever he goes. The lowest level of society is infected with greed for reward as the upper level is hungry for power. Ironically, Caleb's chief pursuer becomes a man who is a converted outlaw, whose "initiation in the mysteries of thieving" qualified him to become a retainer of the law. Disguise is attempted by Caleb, though it made his life a "lie," but this too fails. Hunted to exhaustion, Caleb is finally overcome by the power of Falkland's position and reputation.

Only then does Caleb determine to expose Falkland as a murderer. Thwarted again by Falkland and the law, Caleb confronts his persecutor, only to find that Falkland's suffering has nearly equalled his own. Falkland has been destroyed by guilt and vengeance:

> He appeared like nothing that had ever been visible in human shape. His visage was haggard, emaciated, and fleshless. . . . His eyes were red, quick, wandering, full of suspicion and rage. (p. 325)

The misery of Falkland awes Caleb: "How weak in comparison of it is the imaginary hell, which the great enemy of man-

kind is represented as carrying everywhere about with him!" (p. 330).

Though Caleb Williams has seen the misery produced by vengeance and coercion, he succumbs to the same error. The victim not only gets his day in court, but succeeds also in convincing the law of his innocence. Caleb's long, impassioned plea before the court softens even the heart of Falkland: "As I went on, he could no longer resist. He saw my sincerity; he was penetrated with my grief and compunction" (p. 376). Falkland's surrender to truth precedes his death by only three days, and Caleb assumes the guilt of the murderer: "It would have been more merciful in comparison if I had planted a dagger in his heart" (p. 377).

Caleb Williams is so thoroughly corrupted by the institutions of society that he believes that he can use them to overcome his suffering. Too late he realizes fully that no prison, torture, or hell can approximate the suffering of a guilty conscience: "Hitherto I have only been miserable; henceforth I shall account myself base!" (p. 371).

Caleb Williams demonstrates the corruption of mankind as a result of the political institutions which inhibit the progress of truth. If the novel does not offer a solution to the misery of society, it offers an emphatic denunciation of "things as they are." The alternative may be found in Political Justice.

CHAPTER III

ST. LEON

The Preface to the first edition of St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century (1799) offers further evidence that Godwin himself connected the opinions expressed in Political Justice with those of the novels. He realizes that the conclusions about marriage in this novel are a topic "of the warmest eulogium, while in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice they seemed to be treated with no great degree of indulgence and favour."[1] Godwin admits that his opinions about "private life" have changed, but he sees no cause "to make any change respecting the principle of justice, or any thing else fundamental to the system" which was delivered in Political Justice (p. x).

St. Leon begins Godwin's long investigation of the institution of marriage which culminates in the ideal marriage depicted in Deloraine. It has been suggested that St. Leon's wife, Marguerite, is the image of Godwin's first wife, Mary Wollstonecraft. Though it is possible that Godwin's relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft helped to change his views on marriage, it seems unlikely that Marguerite and

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[1]William Godwin, St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century, Standard Novels, No. V (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), p. ix; hereinafter referred to as St. Leon and cited parenthetically in the text.

St. Leon represent Mary and William Godwin or that the marital problems depicted in Fleetwood represent Godwin's second marriage to Mrs. Clairmont.[2]

If St. Leon is a criticism of man "as he is," it is evident in neither the representation of Godwin's personal life nor the setting of the novel. Though the events take place in the sixteenth century, the problems which assault the characters are timeless. St. Leon's gift of immortal life and the problems this gift entails represent man's search for power and immortality at the sacrifice of justice and benevolence in this life. St. Leon sacrifices both general and private benevolence to self-interest and, in the process, loses happiness for himself, his family, and everyone he encounters.

St. Leon's obsession with gambling leads to loss of his fortune, Marguerite's inheritance, and the family's means of subsistence. The gambler is the "most despicable creature that exists," according to St. Leon, and suffers torments which surpass those of hell:

> Hell is but the chimera of priests, to bubble idiots and cowards. What have they invented, to come into competition with what I felt! Their alternate interchange of flames and ice is but a feeble image of the eternal varieties of hope and fear. All bodily racks and torments are nothing compared with certain states of the human mind. (p. 56)

Thus Godwin states in St. Leon the basic attitude to-

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[2]George Sherburn offers the opinion that such speculation is "doubtless malicious" in "Godwin's Later Novels," Studies in Romanticism, I (Winter, 1962), 69.

ward human suffering which appears in each of the novels: the mental agony which results from the denial of truth and benevolence exceeds any torture which may be imposed or threatened by political, religious, or social institutions.[3] The man who chooses self-interest rather than benevolent utility is doomed to unhappiness. Godwin has prescribed the means of attaining happiness and utility in his definition of virtue:

> Any action or actions of an intelligent being, proceeding from kind and benevolent intention, and having a tendency to contribute to general happiness. (PJ, I, 149)

Godwin's notion of virtue, duty, and benevolence always includes an intention which is in conformance with truth and an end which conduces to the general good or utility.

St. Leon's wife is equal to the demands of her husband's mental derangement, which results from his gambling losses. Marguerite reclaims him temporarily from malevolence:

> She was my steward. . . . She was my physician. . . . She was the instructor of my children. . . . The love of order, the activity, the industry, the cheerfulness of . . . this illustrious matron, became contagious to all the inhabitants of my roof. (p. 84)

The idyllic life of the family, amid the beauties of nature and without "artificial" refinements of society, almost converts St. Leon, but his education and position have left him still hungering obstinately for "admiration and homage" (p. 87). The extreme poverty to which the family is reduced

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[3]See above, p. 22, and Caleb Williams, p. 330.

is relieved by the appearance of a mysterious stranger, whose gift to St. Leon is the philosopher's stone and immortality.

St. Leon's acceptance of the conditions of the gift initiates the disruption of his happy family life. He may reveal the secret to no one, he cannot explain the stranger, nor can he give a reasonable explanation of his sudden wealth. He rationalizes his entry into the world of deceit: "Other men have their secrets: nor do they find their domestic tranquillity broken by that circumstance" (p. 137)--and appeals to his need of independence:

> A man can never be respectable in the eyes of the world or in his own, except so far as he stands by himself and is truly independent. He may have friends; he may have domestic connections; but he must not in these connections lose his individuality. Nothing truly great was ever achieved, that was not executed or planned in solitary seclusion. (p. 138)

It is this self-interest and desire for reputation which eventually leads to his isolation from the rest of humanity.

St. Leon learns that deceit is destructive of love and friendship: "Friendship is an object of a peculiar sort; the smallest reserve is deadly to it" (p. 153) and, at the same time, "the human mind insatiably thirsts for a confidant and friend" (pp. 161-62). Marguerite does not long survive the lack of truth and candor in her marriage, and St. Leon's equivocal position brings disaster to his children. Before her death, Marguerite speaks for Godwin and society:

> A generous spirit . . . delights to live upon equal terms with his associates and fellows. He would disdain, when offered to him, excessive and clandestine advantages. Equality is the soul of real and cordial society. (pp. 210-11)

Godwin is dedicated to equality in Political Justice:

> Equality of conditions, or in other words, an equal admission to the means of improvement and pleasure, is a law rigorously enjoined upon mankind by the voice of justice. All other changes in society are good, only as they are fragments of this, or steps to its attainment. (PJ, II, 469)

But the views on independence, friendship, and marriage expressed in St. Leon constitute a more radical departure from those expressed in Political Justice than Godwin apparently cares to admit. St. Leon's misery is a result of his independence, loss of friendship, and the failure of his marriage. In Political Justice, "individuality is of the very essence of intellectual excellence. . . . The truly venerable, and the truly happy, must have the fortitude to maintain his individuality" (II, 500). Godwin insists that every man must think for himself and flatly asserts "that every thing that is usually understood by the term cooperation, is, in some degree, an evil" (II, 501). Godwin believes that "we ought to be able to do without one another. He is the most perfect man, to whom society is not a necessary of life" (II, 505). The subject of cooperation includes Godwin's opinion of cohabitation:

> The evils attendant on this practice, are obvious. . . . Cohabitation is . . . hostile to that fortitude, which should accustom a man, in his actions, as well as in his opinions, to judge for himself, and feel competent to the discharge of his own duties. Add to this, that it is absurd to expect the inclina-

> tions and wishes of two human beings to coincide, through any long period of time. To oblige them to act and to live together, is to subject them to some inevitable portion of thwarting, bickering and unhappiness. (II, 506)

Though Godwin asserted early in Political Justice that "society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness" (I, 124), the suffering attendant on exclusion from society which is evident in Caleb Williams and continues through the other novels denies the validity of the above assertions on cooperation. The change in Godwin's belief is evident in the agonized cry of St. Leon:

> Man was not born to live alone. He is linked to his brethren by a thousand ties; and, when those ties are broken, he ceases from all genuine existence. Their complacence is a food more invigorating than ambrosia; their aversion is a torment worse than that of the damned. (p. 282)

St. Leon's long flight from the persecution of society takes him to many countries and allows Godwin to comment on the corruption in government which is evident in each. The City of Constance imprisons St. Leon without evidence or an accuser because "the government assumes to act the part of a parent to its subjects," as "censor morum" (p. 220).

In Spain St. Leon falls into the hands of the Inquisition. Not only is he subjected to misery and horror, but he is also forced to submit "to that most profligate of all impositions, an oath of secrecy as to what I had seen, and what I had suffered" (p. 311). In a rather long passage which is devoted to the denunciation of the church in general and the inquisition in particular, Godwin depicts the

church as interested only in power, robbery, and the enforcement of error. When St. Leon does not succumb to their importunities, the "holy father" of the inquisition consigns him to solitary confinement, "the bitterest torment that human ingenuity can inflict" (PJ, II, 387). Godwin ultimately dismisses the inquisition with irony: the chief inquisitor sanctimoniously informs his prisoner, who will live forever, that "the fundamental principle of their proceedings was borrowed from that humane and compassionate maxim of the old Roman law: De vita hominis nulla cunctatio est longa" (p. 322).

In Hungary, St. Leon's attempt at philanthropy is repulsed by starving men, and the Turkish ruler castigates him as a "busy-body" who assumes the competence to superintend the "public welfare" which belongs only to "those whom Mahomet has raised to the situation of statesmen" (p. 388). Bribery solves St. Leon's difficulty with this government-religion, but does not preserve him from the Hungarian nobility. A savage misanthrope as a result of the murder of his wife and children, Bethlem Gabor imprisons St. Leon because he has tried to benefit mankind instead of "seeking occasions of glorious mischief and vengeance" (p. 416). Bethlem Gabor's persecution of St. Leon aptly demonstrates man's inhumanity to man and the chain of circumstances which produces it. War, cruelty, and murder have turned Gabor into a savage, and he, in turn, will continue the savagery. Ultimately, it is political institutions which condemn man

to this perversion of his nature.

The effect of this perversion is recounted by St. Leon:

> It is one of the most striking characteristics of the nature of man, that we are eternally apt to grow dead and insensible to the thing we have not. Half our faculties become palsied, before we are in the slightest degree aware that we are not what we were, and what we might be. There are philosophers who regard this as the peculiar privilege of man, a wise provision of Providence to render us contented and easy with our lot in existence. For my part, I do not envy, and I have never aspired to, the happiness of ignorance and stupidity. (p. 447)

Godwin's philosophical credo is expressed in this passage. Appalled at the state of the human condition, he denounces the philosophy of optimism and urges man to revolt against the political institutions which prevent him from becoming what he might be.

Godwin's basic position, which asserts that political and religious institutions enforce the error and injustice which preclude the existence of "the best possible world," has not changed. But his assessment of the relative importance of human relations has undergone a significant revision. It is evident in St. Leon and the succeeding novels that man needs sympathy and understanding, and the private affections of a wife, family, and friends in addition to his rational benevolence toward mankind in general.

CHAPTER IV

FLEETWOOD

Godwin's third major novel, Fleetwood: or the New Man of Feeling (1805), is set in contemporary society and records incidents that "multitudes of readers have themselves passed through." The author forestalls criticism from those "certain persons who condescend to make my supposed inconsistencies the favourite object of their research," by asserting that Political Justice recommends not "a pitiful attempt by scattered examples to rennovate the face of society," but "a grand and comprehensive improvement of its members."[1] Godwin has already admitted in St. Leon that he now approves of "private affections."

In contrast to the idyllic married life pictured at least temporarily in St. Leon, Fleetwood deals with the problems encountered in that institution. The problems are encountered, however, by a very special kind of man. Fleetwood is "the natural history of, and also a satire on, a Man of Feeling."[2] At first glance, Fleetwood seems to represent the ideal man, but it soon becomes evident that this sensi-

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[1]William Godwin, Fleetwood: or the New Man of Feeling (3 vols.; London: Richard Phillips, 1805), Preface, pp. ix-xii; hereinafter referred to as Fleetwood and cited parenthetically in the text.

[2]P. N. Furbank, "Godwin's Novels," Essays in Criticism V (July, 1955), 220.

tive man has one major flaw--he is isolated by his pride and lack of benevolence. Although he meets the perfect man of benevolence in M. Ruffigny, Fleetwood's isolating egocentricity negates even the effect of this sage who communes with nature in the Alps.

Fleetwood's early life was spent admiring the glories of nature: "My earliest years were spent among mountains and precipices, amidst the roaring of the ocean and the dashing of the waterfalls" (I, 3). Fleetwood recalls that he was a spoiled child--"I had been little used to contradiction"--and that he had been preserved from "the jarring passions of men" (II, 4). The young Fleetwood developed an attitude of condescension toward everyone he encountered, including his tutor: "My temper . . . was somewhat unsocial" (I, 31). To this young man of consummate delicacy Oxford came as something of a shock.

The account of Fleetwood's university experience is of two-fold interest: it refutes permanently the charge that Godwin altogether lacked a sense of humor,[3] and it demonstrates most vividly Godwin's aversion to universities. In the one truly comic episode to be discovered in Godwin's fiction, an original play based on the Fifth Labour of Hercules is read by a country bumpkin to an audience of college rakes. Fleetwood, of course, is not amused by this ludi-

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[3]Critics of Godwin's literary and personal life uniformly charge this lack, though Fleetwood and certain letters written by Godwin to Mary Wollstonecraft (Kegan Paul, Vol. I) seem to refute the charge.

crous and cruel situation, but unmistakably Godwin laughs sotto voce at Fleetwood the prig, university scholars, and the idea of a university in general. In all seriousness, Fleetwood recalls that "Withers (this was the name of the poet) might be said, like Virgil, to 'fling about his dung with an air of majesty'" (I, 59-60).

Though none of Godwin's heroes gain anything of value from their university experiences, it is Fleetwood who undergoes the most critical reversal:

> My understanding was brutified; I no longer gave free scope to the workings of my own mind, but became an artificial personage, formed after a wretched and contemptible model. (I, 55)

In Political Justice, Godwin reserves his most scathing denunciation of institutional education for the universities:

> But to describe them as useless, is a very feeble expression of their demerits. They actively restrain the flights of the mind, and fix it in the belief of exploded errors. It has frequently been observed of universities, and extensive establishments for the purpose of education, that the knowledge taught there, is a century behind the knowledge, which exists among the unshackled and unprejudiced members of the same political community. (II, 298)

Fleetwood loses more than his intellectual freedom at Oxford: "My experience at the university had killed the purity and delicacy of my moral discrimination" (I, 119).

Fleetwood plunges into the social life of Paris and believes himself totally debauched. Unfortunate experiences with women complete his conversion to misanthropy. Fleetwood searches in vain for a friend: "It is inconceivable in how deep and insurmountable a solitude that creature is in-

volved, who looks every where around for sympathy, but looks in vain" (II, 149). Fleetwood looks for sympathy, but gives none. This "man of feeling" is not Godwin's "man of benevolence," but a caricature of selfishness.

Fleetwood encounters benevolence in the person of M. Ruffigny. It has been suggested that Godwin offers this episode as an answer to man's solitude, fear, and pride:

> We are offered the ennobling answer of man communing with nature in the person of the sage--almost Chinese in type--M. Ruffigny, who from the majestic heights of the Alps--the El Dorado of so much eighteenth century aspiration--gives counsels of order, decency, the nobility of man and the sublimity of the rivers and hills.[4]

Fleetwood accepts Ruffigny's generous offer to accompany him to England after the death of his father.

This journey allows Ruffigny to unfold the story of his life and allows Godwin to interject an important bit of social commentary. M. Ruffigny's deprived childhood had included a sojourn in a silk mill in Lyons. In an ironic passage which echoes Swift's "A Modest Proposal," the owner of the silk mill explains its value:

> You cannot think . . . what an advantage these mills are to the city of Lyons. In other places children are a burthen to their poor parents; they have to support them, till they are twelve or fourteen years of age, before they can do the least thing for their own maintenance: here the case is entirely otherwise. In other places they run ragged and wild about the streets: no such thing is to be seen at Lyons. In short, our town is a perfect paradise. We are able to take them at four years of age, and in some cases sooner. Their little fingers, as soon

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[4]Angus Wilson, "The Novels of William Godwin, World Review (June, 1951), p. 40.

> as they have well learned the use of them, are employed for the relief of their parents, who have brought them up from the breast. They learn no bad habits: but are quiet, and orderly, and attentive, and industrious. What a prospect for their future lives! (I, 239-40)

M. Ruffigny's account of the methods used to train the children, their appearance of "stupid and hopeless vacancy," and the monotony of work in the mills is a savage indictment of the abuse of children and the dangers of a manufacturing society:

> A mechanic becomes a sort of machine; his limbs and articulations are converted, as it were, into wood and wires. Tamed, lowered, torpified into this character, he may be said perhaps to be content. (I, 277)

Though it is not specifically in reference to manufacturing, Godwin's statement in Political Justice may be applied to this and to all superintendence: "Beware of reducing men to the state of machines. Govern them through no medium but that of inclination and conviction" (II, 497).

When young Ruffigny escapes from the slavery of the mill, he falls into the hands of the law. His comment on entering jail for the first time may be said to sum up Godwin's hatred of prisons:

> At entering, it struck me, that the scene was not new to me, but that it was very like a silk mill; the same meanness in the building, the same squalidness in the inhabitants, the same dejection in every countenance. (I, 287-88)

Ruffigny's adult benevolence resulted from the goodness of Fleetwood's grandfather and he attempts to repay the debt to Fleetwood, but the young man reverts to debauchery,

this time in London. Fleetwood is recalled from vice, not by force, but by persuasion. Ruffigny uses reason in a last effort to save him. He entreats Fleetwood to remember that he (Fleetwood) once looked upon such a life with horror, he accuses him of sophistry, warns that he sacrifices "the serenity of an honourable mind to the tumult of the lowest passions in man" (II, 94), and reminds him that "goodness is the cornerstone of all excellence" (II, 95). Ruffigny's virtue and benevolence conquer Fleetwood and demonstrate the efficacy of reason, as stated in Political Justice:

> Reason is omnipotent: if my conduct be wrong, a very simple statement, flowing from a clear and comprehensive view, will make it appear to be such; nor is it probable that there is any perverseness that would persist in vice, in the face of all the recommendations with which virtue might be invested, and all the beauty in which it might be displayed. (II, 341)

Though Fleetwood is rescued from the life of a libertine, he is not redeemed from his brand of misanthropy: "Perhaps that is the most incorrigible species of misanthropy, which, as Swift expresses it, loves John and Matthew and Alexander, but hates mankind" (II, 107). Fleetwood tries politics, but is disappointed:

> Modern governments always must, or at least always do, have recourse to various modes of proceeding, not exactly in accord with pure notions of integrity; a statesman in place cannot, but in a very limited sense of the word, be an honest man. (II, 130-31)

Godwin's views on government are well known. He says of those who run the governments:

> Falsehood must be their discipline and incessant

> study. We will suppose that they adopt this system of imposture, in the first instance, from the most benevolent motives. But will the continual practice of concealment, hypocrisy and artifice, make no breaches in their character? (PJ, II, 138)

Fleetwood encounters another virtuous man, Mr. Macneil, a man who has known and admired Rousseau. The discourse between Macneil and Fleetwood reveals the extreme positions of the philanthropist and the misanthropist. Fleetwood thought "too highly of the human mind in the abstract, to be able to consider with patience man as he is" (II, 190). Macneil's view of man is just the opposite:

> For my part, instead of joining in the prevailing cry of selfishness, the wickedness, the original sin, or the subsequent depravity, of mankind, I feel my heart swell within me, when I recollect that I belong to a species, almost every individual of which is endowed with angelic virtues. (II, 193)

Godwin's position lies between the extremities. Although he concentrates on the "ideal standard" of Fleetwood, he patiently prescribes the method of approaching it. Though he believes in the innate goodness of man, like Macneil and Rousseau, Godwin cries out at the prevailing wickedness which suppresses it. Godwin's ideal is not the philanthropist or the misanthropist, but the "man of benevolence," he who recognizes the existence of evil and sets out to correct it.[5]

Macneil advises marriage as an antidote to misanthropy, and Fleetwood eventually marries Macneil's daughter, but not until her family and fortune have been lost and she

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[5]See below, p. 57.

is sunk into misery. At first Fleetwood regards his wife as the "friend" for whom he has been searching: "I had not been aware that nature has provided a substitute in the marriage-tie, for this romantic, if not impossible friendship" (II, 289). But Fleetwood's hypersensitivity and egoism cause him to find fault where there is none.

The account of Fleetwood's marriage (Vol. III) has been called "Godwin's finest achievement outside Caleb Williams."[6] As an account of a tortured mind, the episode succeeds brilliantly. Fleetwood is too "sensitive" to be frank with his wife, and a succession of innocent affronts leads to petty frustration, inward rage, and, finally, jealousy and madness. Fleetwood considers himself a slave to love:

> Love, is a passion in which soul and body hold divided empire. The meaner half of our nature is essential to its support. It is sex, it is "a set of features and complexion, the tincture of a skin," that constitutes its origin and principle. Considered in this light, it is, all through, a selfish sentiment, the pampering of a weakness, a delicious scheme for beguiling the hours and weeks of our existence. Certainly man, particularly the man whom heaven has endowed with inventive faculties and a comprehensive intellect, was made for something better than this. (III, 94)

This passage, which represents Godwin's only overt allusion in the novels to the physical side of marriage, is very like his description of the attitude of the "ideal" man of the future, when the marriage contract has been abolished:

> The same sentiments of justice and happiness, which, in a state of equality, would destroy our relish for expensive gratifications, might be expected to de-

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[6]Furbank, p. 220.

> crease our inordinate appetites of every kind, and to lead us universally to prefer the pleasures of intellect to the pleasures of sense. (PJ, II, 508)

It seems improbable, however, that Godwin would put a positive assertion of belief into the mouth of a mad misanthropist. It is equally unlikely that Fleetwood represents Godwin's second marriage, as St. Leon does his first. It is more likely that Fleetwood reinforces the idea, which was introduced in St. Leon and reaches its zenith in Deloraine, that happiness in marriage is possible when both partners pursue truth and benevolence.

Unable to perceive the innocence and goodness of his wife, Fleetwood is doomed forever by his inability to recognize the falsity of the Iago-like villain who urges him on to destruction. Maddened by jealousy, Fleetwood drives his wife out of his house, ruins her through the corrupt practices of law, and finally celebrates his wedding anniversary with a macabre party for himself and two wax figures.

Fleetwood is eventually converted to the truth by a man who is himself a repentant sinner. Mr. Scarborough found virtue impossible to resist: "There is a contagion in virtue and ingenuousness, that not the hardest heart in nature, not even my heart, can resist" (III, 312). When he has realized in full the depth of the injustice which he has perpetrated, Fleetwood is overcome with remorse. His wife's benevolence only increases his suffering:

> It is from the hour in which we are forgiven, that the true remorse commences. That I could ever have acted thus toward the angelic creature who condes-

> cends to pardon me for what I acted, this is the sensation that is sharper than all the pains of hell! (III, 340-41)

Like Godwin's other protagonists, Fleetwood is doomed to a life of expiatory suffering as the novel closes. The self-centered "man of feeling" has ignored his duty to general utility and benevolence: "By his novel Godwin endeavored to turn the balance in favor of action and against the cult of the ego."[7]

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[7] James R. Foster, History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1949), p. 273.

CHAPTER V

MANDEVILLE

Mandeville: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England (1817) assumes essentially the form of the memoirs of a madman. Though this novel and its predecessor, *Fleetwood*, may be called "psychological studies, two case-histories of obsession,"[1] it is an oversimplification to dwell on Mandeville's obsessive hatred of Clifford, the rival who eclipses him at every turn, to the exclusion of the causes behind his psychotic obsession. Mandeville is a madman ultimately because he cannot perceive truth, goodness, and virtue; that is, he is out of contact with reality. Mandeville's mature madness is a direct result of his abnormal childhood, and Godwin presents in this novel a case-study of the effects upon the human mind of bigotry and prejudice, horror and cruelty.

One of Godwin's fundamental theories in *Political Justice* is the primacy of environment over heredity in its influence on human lives:

> The actions and dispositions of men are not the offspring of an original bias that they bring into the world in favor of one sentiment or character rather than another, but flow entirely from the operation of circumstances and events acting upon a faculty of receiving sensible impressions. (I, 26-27)

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[1] P. N. Furbank, "Godwin's Novels," *Essays in Criticism*, V (July, 1955), 220.

Godwin rejects innate principles, instincts, and prenatal influences as critically important in directing the actions of human beings and concentrates on the effects of education:

> It has appeared that the characters of men are determined in all their most essential circumstances by education. By education in this place I would be understood to convey the most comprehensive sense that can possibly be annexed to that word, including every incident that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections. (PJ, I, 45)

The education of the infant Mandeville plausibly produced a madman. At the age of three he witnessed the murder of his mother and father, and every other English Protestant in the company, during the religious wars in Ireland. The uncle who became his guardian was a neurotic recluse who had not put on his shoes to leave his room for twenty years and who could tolerate his nephew only once a month for two minutes. Mandeville's early impression of the isolated estate of his uncle, Audley Mandeville, remained with him:

> I remembered only the silence, the monotony, and the gloom that pervaded it. . . . My education was grave and sad; but if the restlessness of boyish years chanced at any time to awake me to a gayer tone, the sight of my uncle checked my buoyant spirits at once, my countenance fell, and my thoughts became solemn.[2]

The third and perhaps most critical influence on the boy's life was his tutor, Mr. Bradford:

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[2]William Godwin, Mandeville: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England (2 vols.; New York: W. B. Gilley, 1818), I, 53; hereinafter referred to as Mandeville and cited parenthetically in the text.

> His figure was tall and emaciated; his complexion was a yellowish brown without the least tincture of vermillion, and was furrowed with the cares of study, and the still more earnest cares of devotion. . . . He conformed himself not at all to the celebrated maxim of Plato, of "sacrificing to the Graces." (I, 56)

Mr. Bradford was a Protestant divine who saw in his young pupil's premature gravity "a vocation to the crown of martyrdom" (I, 58). Bradford's overruling passion was hatred of the Roman church, and he callously played upon the youngster's memory of the death of his parents to reinforce his teaching.

The detailed exposition of Bradford's opposition to the Catholic church permits Godwin to demonstrate his objection to the superintendence of opinion and the enforcement of prejudice which are a necessary complement to institutional religion. Though Bradford objected to the Roman church on many grounds, his primary opposition was directed toward its magisterial authority. The "sanguinary character of the Church of Rome" dismayed Mr. Bradford, and he used examples of the suppression of heresies, the inquisition, and even the Gunpowder Plot to illustrate his thesis (I,60). The idea of punishing a man for his opinions was odious to Bradford:

> No bigotry perhaps could persuade its adherent, that a man attached even to death to the religious opinions he had formed was a criminal, in the same sense as a murderer, or a robber, a man who broke through all restraints or morality, or violated all the securities of society, that he might indulge in depravity and excesses. The unfortunate victim of the law against heretics, was usually a man of exemplary moral habits, and who sacrificed every baser and

> sensual enticement to the dictates of his conscience. He was therefore, if erroneous, rather an object of pity, than of ferocious vengeance. . . .
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> He considered the craft of Popery as calculated with infernal subtlety, to enslave the minds, and subjugate the understandings of all its lay adherents. . . . Rome undertook to control the civilized world. By means of her dignitaries, she did not fail to superintend the education of all persons of royal or elevated birth, and to have some of her clergy admitted to political offices, and possessing the secrets of all cabinets. Auricular confession, and the sacrament of absolution, was a stupendous device for subjecting the consciences of all, men, women, and children, to her despotic authority. (I, 61)

Having disposed of Catholicism, Godwin wryly dispatches so-called liberal Protestants:

> Mr. Bradford usually wound up his argument . . . with the favourite maxim of the most liberal at the time of which I am speaking--that all sects and every denomination of creed were entitled to toleration, except the Papist. (I, 61)

In Political Justice, Godwin considers religious establishments under the section which deals with the political superintendence of opinion (II, VI, ii). Speaking of religious institutions, Godwin states: "The system of religious conformity, is a system of blind submission" (II,234); "the tendency of a code of religious conformity, is to make men hypocrites" (II, 235); and, the clergy "are fettered in the outset, by having a code of propositions put into their hands, in a conformity to which all their inquiries must terminate" (II, 234). The primary objection of Godwin to institutional religion is that it impedes the progress of truth:

> The direct tendency of science, is to increase from age to age, and to proceed, from the slenderest be-

> ginnings, to the most admirable conclusions. But care is taken, in the present case [religion], to anticipate these conclusions, and to bind men, by promises and penalties, not to improve upon the science of their ancestors. (II, 234-35)

Rational progress depends upon the assumption that "it is the characteristic of mind to be capable of improvement" (II, 299). To believe that the ultimate truth has been discovered is to become static rather than progressive. According to Godwin, religious institutions, like other social and political institutions, advocate permanence and stagnation and then, worst of all, use force to achieve these ends.

The description of the barbarity which was a natural result of the religious war in Ireland illustrates in Mandeville the absurdity of an attempt to impose religious alliance by force. Force breeds barbarity: "Hatred and contempt are powerful inciters to cruelty" (I, 19), and a human being who uses force becomes a savage: "In every thing that is most horrible and revolting to an ingenuous mind, such is the constitution of human nature, it is often the first step only that is difficult" (I, 19-20).

Godwin's objection to institutional or national education is based fundamentally upon the same principle with which he decries religion:

> How great would be the progress of intellectual improvement, if men were unfettered by the prejudices of education, unseduced by the influence of a corrupt state of society, and accustomed to yield without fear, to the guidance of truth, however unexplored might be the regions, and unexpected the conclusions, to which she conducted us? (PJ, II, 202)

Educational institutions also deal in superintendence of opinion:

> Public education has always expended its energies in the support of prejudice; it teaches its pupils, not the fortitude that shall bring every proposition to the test of examination, but the art of vindicating such tenets as may chance to be established. (II, 299)

It needed only successive stays at Winchester, an English public school, and Oxford to complete the education of young Mandeville in misanthropy. The headmaster of Winchester had been a friend of Mandeville's tutor and it was here also that Mandeville first met his hated rival, Lionel Clifford. As a result of his tortured childhood, Mandeville could communicate with neither teachers nor students and his hatred of Clifford developed from jealousy of that boy's ascendancy. Thwarted at every step, sometimes by himself, sometimes by circumstances--but always blaming Clifford for his problems--Mandeville at last succumbs to madness.

In his lucid moments, Mandeville seems to realize that Clifford is the epitome of the virtuous man who means no one harm, but his irrational hatred of the man allows only momentary and ineffective lucidity. Mandeville can repel even the inducements of an almost irresistible virtue in the person of his sister, Henrietta.

The continuing comparison of the kinds of "education" received by the brother and sister, who were separated in age by only one year, heightens the case-study effect of the novel. Henrietta's childhood was spent in a totally differ-

ent environment from that of Mandeville:

> Everything . . . was frank, easy, and communicative, and sensitive, and sympathetic. It was like the society of "just men made perfect," where all sought the good of all, and no one lived for himself, or studied for himself. (I, 96)

Mandeville himself realizes early that environment is the controlling force in the development of character:

> Had I lived with my Henrietta . . . I also should have been a human creature, I should have been the member of a community, I should have been as frank, as I now was invincibly reserved, suspicious, and forever disposed to regard my neighbor with thoughts of hostility! I should then have been amiable; and I should have been happy! But my fate was determined, and my character was fixed. The effects of living under such a master of a household as my uncle, with such a preceptor as Mr. Bradford, and in the midst of such an establishment as that of Mandeville House, will never be obliterated as long as one thought exists within this brain, and one pulse beats within my frame of man. (I, 96)

Henrietta and Clifford use every appeal of virtue, benevolence, and truth in an effort to return Mandeville to sanity. Percy B. Shelley, Godwin's son-in-law, financial patron, and occasional critic, likens Clifford's moral discourse to the speech of Agathon in the Symposium of Plato, and calls it "characteristic of all that is admirable and lovely in human nature,"[3] but it is Henrietta's speech to Mandeville, as he is recovering from his first bout with madness, which more likely contains Godwin's statement:

> Consider, that man is but a machine! He is just what his nature and circumstances have made him: he obeys the necessities which he cannot resist. If he

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[3] The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. by Frederick L. Jones (2 vols.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 574.

> is corrupt, it is because he has been corrupted. If he is unamiable, it is because he has been "mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit upon." Give him a different education, place him under other circumstances, treat him with as much gentleness and generosity, as he has experienced of harshness, and he would be altogether a different creature. He is to be pitied therefore, not regarded with hatred; to be considered with indulgence, not made an object of revenge; to be reclaimed with mildness, to be gradually inspired with confidence, to be enlightened and better informed as to the mistakes into which he has fallen, not made the butt and object of our ferocity. (I, 192)

It is worth noting here that "necessity" for Godwin is not the absence of the power to make one's own decisions absolutely, but rather the chain of events which is set into motion by a given set of circumstances. Basic to Godwin's philosophy is the belief in the power of human beings to change those circumstances. Mandeville, along with Caleb Williams, St. Leon, and Fleetwood, may be regarded as the illustration of Godwin's assertion that "man is of all other beings the most formidable enemy to man" (PJ, I, 7).

Mandeville is unique among the Godwinian protagonists in his ultimate refusal to "see" truth. Each of the others submits at last to the irresistible power of reason. Circumstances have destroyed Mandeville's ability to perceive the truth--he is mad. Godwin's long investigation into the causes, manifestations, and effects of paranoia merits more than dismissal as "rather absurd psychology."[4] Modern psy-

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[4]George Sherburn considers Mandeville "in its gloomy hateful tone and rather absurd psychology . . . perhaps the least pleasing of the novels," though it is "well constructed," in "Godwin's Later Novels," Studies in Romanticism, I (Winter, 1962), 82.

chological theory tends to support the conclusion that abnormal childhood conditions may provoke the onset of psychotic obsession in the adult. More than a century after the publication of Mandeville, modern psychologists would write:

> We have tried to stress the ways in which the child's early social learning affects his ultimate psychological adjustment. . . . Much of the personal misery, and thus part of the social unrest in the world today, is not inevitable. For since maladjusted or neurotic behavior . . . is learned, it is at least potentially avoidable or modifiable.[5]

Though Godwin's pre-scientific psychology differs somewhat from modern post-Freudian theory, the ultimate conclusions are basically the same: human misery is learned and therefore is not inevitable. Godwin's case-study of the effect of two distinct kinds of "education" upon a brother and sister demonstrates his belief in the possibility of human progress. Mandeville's psychological maladjustment is a result of his early learning. In the words of Mandeville: "It is the express purpose of the narrative in which I am engaged, to show how the concurrence of a variety of causes, operate to form a character" (I, 100). Reasonable causes, on the other hand, work to produce a well-adjusted and happy man.

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[5]Paul Henry Mussen, John Janeway Conger, and Jerome Kagan, Child Development and Personality (2d ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 607.

CHAPTER VI

CLOUDESLEY

Cloudesley: A Tale (1830),[1] which was not published until thirteen years after its predecessor, bears certain resemblances to both Mandeville and Caleb Williams and adumbrates Deloraine. Earl Danvers, who is the real protagonist of the novel since Cloudesley plays only a minor role, is like Mandeville eclipsed by a rival and like Falkland and Deloraine is made to suffer terribly from remorse and guilt. Danvers' rival is his elder brother, who receives preferential treatment, but Danvers is saved from obsessive hatred by the benevolence of the elder brother himself. One mistake, the concealing of the true heir after his brother's death, leads to a lifetime of mental suffering and demonstrates the futility of sacrificing truth to material power. Danvers' life touches many people in many countries and allows Godwin to illustrate the difference between natural good and ambition, to investigate further the problems of education, and to remind his readers once more of the power of truth.

Danvers' misanthropy, like Mandeville's, began in

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[1]William Godwin, Cloudesley: A Tale (3 vols.; London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830); hereinafter referred to as Cloudesley and cited parenthetically in the text.

childhood:

> My father and mother directed all their attention to the welfare and advantage of their eldest son. I was seldom judged worthy to be made the subject of a smile, a caress, the smallest encouragement. I seemed only to stand in the way, to be a being that had intruded himself into a world where he was not wanted. (I, 118)

Though the younger brother bitterly resented the partiality shown the elder, he had never been mistreated by the heir. Arthur, the elder, was moulded by nature "of the kindliest elements" and, when the boys had grown into men, the younger brother followed him contentedly, though occasionally he "bitterly repined at the partiality of fortune" (I, 125).

His bitterness leads him to his crime. Unjustly treated himself, he cannot resist the temptation to inflict injustice on his nephew, Julian, when the opportunity is presented. In Political Justice Godwin defines justice:

> By justice I understand that impartial treatment of every man in matters that relate to his happiness, which is measured solely by a consideration of the properties of the receiver, and the capacity of him that bestows. Its principle therefore is, according to a well known phrase, to be "no respecter of persons." (I, 126)

Danvers succeeds to the title which belongs to his nephew and, though he maintains possession for many years, suffers remorse over his guilty usurpation. Danvers sees divine retribution in the deaths of his children from mysterious disease:

> I saw in it the hand of God. It was justice, that he who had robbed and maltreated his brother's orphan, should himself be made childless, that he who had stolen the inheritance of his brother, should be denied the fruit of his loins to inherit after him.

> I saw the hand of the governor of the universe in all. He was my enemy! Where would he stop in the just retribution inflicted for my crime? What sort of monument of divine vengeance was I to become? (III, 20-21)

Though Danvers sees the "hand of God" in his misery, it is obvious that his predisposition to guilt and remorse is the primary cause of his mental anguish. Godwin has described the melancholy, dissatisfaction, and severity which assault the guilty.[2] It should be noted that Godwin asserts the existence of a creator in Political Justice, though he avoids any implication of interest or interference in creation on the part of the Supreme Being.

Very near the end of his life, Danvers makes restitution, but he is unable to enjoy his deliverance and can only remember the never-ending pain:

> If it had not been so, think you that the never-dying worm would so fearfully have gnawed at my heart, blanched my cheeks, and reduced this human figure of mine to an assemblage of skin only and bones? . . . Crime is of an insinuating nature; it steals upon us unperceived; the steps of its march are as the breadth of a hair. (III, 330)

Cloudesley, Danvers' partner in crime, offers an interesting contrast to the Earl's suffering. Cloudesley is a simple man who is turned into a misanthrope by injustice and then reconverted by benevolence. When first encountered by young Danvers, Cloudesley "had great frankness of disposition, and was exceedingly remarked for his good-nature, and invariable kindness and tenderness of heart" (I, 206).

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[2] Political Justice, I, 314. See above, p. 18.

Cloudesley becomes a misanthrope after a stay in prison:

> In proportion to the original integrity of his nature, was the bitterness of his soul, when he became so flagrantly the victim of unmerited calamity. As, before, he had loved all men, so it seemed now that it was sufficient to present any thing in human shape, to excite his antipathy. Before, the whole world was illuminated to him with sunshine, and decorated with the most brilliant colours of the rainbow; now all was dinginess, darkness and eclipse. (I, 209-10)

Godwin's distaste for punishment and imprisonment, which was demonstrated in Caleb Williams and St. Leon, is here reaffirmed.

Cloudesley is rescued from prison by the benevolent Arthur, but Arthur's goodness cannot redeem him from misanthropy. This attitude presumably allows Cloudesley to conspire with the younger Danvers to deprive Arthur's son, Julian, of his patrimony. Cloudesley regains his original benevolence as a result of the love he develops toward his foster son. Though the boy is unaware of his true identity, Cloudesley sees Arthur in Julian and loves him originally for his father's sake, later for his own nobility of nature.

The education which Cloudesley provides for Julian seems to be Godwin's prescription for education of all young men. Cloudesley devotes all of his efforts toward Julian's physical and mental health:

> Cloudesley was anxious in the first place for the robustness and sound health of the corporal frame of his pupil. He knew, that without health the enjoyments of a human being must be greatly curtailed, and that moral courage, that first of intellectual qualities, is intimately connected with animal strength and dexterity. (II, 158-59)

Cloudesley encourages Julian to associate with boys of all classes and hires a young university student to be his tutor:

> The studies of Julian could scarcely be said to cost the child labor or pains; at the same time that the preceptor endeavored in every practicable case to make him feel the cui bono, the satisfaction and advantages he would reap from his acquisitions. The instructor and the pupil played the game into each other's hands: they were both enthusiastic, both earnest; and therefore what they did had seldom the formality of a lesson. (II, 165)

Like Fleetwood, Julian finds only kindness and enjoyment in his early education. He is preserved from institutionalized education of any sort and, therefore, grows into an accomplished man:

> In a word, Julian won the favor of his elders by the clearness of his apprehension, and his progress in everything that was taught him, and of his equals by his excellence in all kinds of sport and feats of dexterity, which could be equalled only by the modesty, the good humor, and accommodating spirit with which he bore his honours, rendering others almost as well satisfied with his superiority, as if the triumph had been their own. (II, 187-88)

In Political Justice Godwin envisions a change in educational theory in the perfect society:

> It will then scarcely be thought more necessary to make boys slaves, than to make men so. The business will not then be, to bring forward so many adepts in the egg-shell, that the vanity of parents may be flattered by hearing their praises. No man will think of vexing with premature learning the feeble and inexperienced, lest, when they came to years of discretion, they should refuse to be learned. The mind will be suffered to expand itself, in proportion as occasion and impression shall excite it, and not tortured and enervated by being cast in a particular mould. (II, 512)

Julian's superiority and his foster father's guilty

secret lead to a chain of events which results in Julian's disappearance, Cloudesley's death at the hands of banditti, and Danvers' ultimate surrender to truth. Julian has never been exposed to harshness and flees it when he encounters it in the person of Borromeo. Ultimately, Borromeo is touched by benevolence, but not until Cloudesley has given his life in the performance of his duty. Cloudesley demonstrates Godwin's maxim that a man "has no right to his life, when his duty calls him to resign it" (PJ, I, 167). Cloudesley's death in pursuit of justice also illustrates the power of right thinking and benevolence once a man has seen the truth.

Earl Danvers suffers mentally as a result of his refusal to rectify the injustice he inflicted. Other characters submit irresistibly to truth. The most impressive demonstration of the power of truth lies in the confrontation between Irene Colocotroni and Achmet, a Turkish commander. Irene (who was to become the wife of Arthur Danvers and the mother of Julian) pleads for the life of her father, who had been unjustly imprisoned. Though it has been noted that Achmet is ferocious, inhuman, unmerciful, and "indifferent to the allurements of the fair sex" (I, 170-71), Irene's request is granted:

> It was not pity that moved him; it was not the power of beauty. In these directions he was inaccessible. It was the voice of truth; it was the tone of deep-felt and entire conviction. It was impossible not to imagine, that the oracle of heaven expressed itself by her organs. (I, 177-78)

Implicit in this demonstration is Godwin's opinion that it is easier to impress a heathen Turk with truth than it is to affect an English nobleman.

Borromeo also succumbs at the end of the novel to virtue. His long discourse is displeasing aesthetically as a gratuitous moralistic appendage, but it graphically illustrates Godwin's use of his fiction to support and demonstrate his philosophy:

> The true system for governing the world, for fashioning the tender spirits of youth, for smoothing the pillow of age, is love. Nothing else could have made a Cloudesley; nothing else could have made a Julian. I and lord Danvers have been the delinquents; he for base and selfish ends; I from an erroneous judgment.
>
> The one thing that most exalts and illustrates man is disinterested affection. We are never so truly what we are capable of being, as when we are ready to sacrifice ourselves for others, and immolate our self-love on the altar of beneficence. There is no joy like the joy of a generous sentiment, to go about doing good, to make it our meat and our drink to produce the happiness of others, and diffuse confidence and love to every one within the reach of our influence. (III, 343-44)

The description of a "man of benevolence" in Political Justice is very similar to Borromeo's appraisal:

> The man who has once performed an act of exalted generosity, knows that there is no sensation of corporeal or intellectual taste to be compared with this. . . . He asks no gratitude. To see that they are benefitted, or to believe that they will be so, is its own reward. He ascends to the highest of human pleasures, the pleasure of disinterestedness. . . . No man reaps so copious a harvest of pleasure, as he who thinks only of the pleasures of other men. (I, 447-48)

Though the "voice of truth" is not featured so blatantly in the other novels, its presence in each is too ob-

vious to be denied. The disparity among the characters who are ultimately overcome by truth and reason in Cloudesley emphasizes Godwin's continuing belief in its power. In this novel, truth conquers an English nobleman and an English servant, an Italian nobleman, and a Turkish military leader. Godwin's attempt to demonstrate to man the need for truth and benevolence endures until the end of his career as a novelist. His failure to convince his readers of this necessity provokes the cry of Deloraine in the last novel.

CHAPTER VII

DELORAINE

Godwin's last novel, Deloraine (1833), which was published when the author was seventy-seven years of age, reiterates the conclusion of the first: human guilt and remorse exact a heavier penalty upon the individual than any social or political institution could possibly impose. Though the theme is stated more powerfully in Caleb Williams, Deloraine is certainly more than the indication of the "total collapse" of the novelist charged by Angus Wilson.[1] The debilitating effects of vengeance on both pursuer and pursued, the agony of guilt and remorse which follows crime and deception, and the inhumanity of political institutions are related again, with an important addition. In the person of Catherine Deloraine, Godwin concludes his career as a novelist with an eloquent and very moving demonstration of the power of truth. Deloraine himself gives voice to the agonized plea of the philosopher: "Oh, why have not human creatures a confidence in the force of truth and justice?"[2]

Deloraine is a typical Godwinian hero, "the most for-

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[1]Angus Wilson, "The Novels of William Godwin," World Review (June, 1951), p. 38.

[2]William Godwin, Deloraine (3 vols.; London: Richard Bentley, 1833), III, 303; hereinafter cited parenthetically in the text.

lorn and odious of men" (I, 3), recounting his fall from grace. An English gentleman, who had been "delicately reared" and educated by a tutor who made "learning interesting," Deloraine attains the perfection of happiness in his first marriage. Godwin's long investigation of the institution of marriage culminates with approval in Deloraine. The account of the marriage of Deloraine and Emilia Fitzcharles, however, is more than a final assertion that happiness in marriage is possible. It is the demonstration in miniature of the perfect society envisioned in Political Justice.

Emilia's charm lies in her simplicity, "her eyes fraught with intelligence, combined with a benignity that was more than human," and her "perfection" (I, 12). The courtship of this divine creature is described by Deloraine as the perfection which lies in imperfection:

> As virtue, so happiness, consists in action, in a perpetual progress towards that which we have not. . . .
>
> The imperfection of the state of courtship is its perfection. We have always something to look forward to. However extatic may be my present state of enjoyment, there is still better behind. The prospect, the comparison of the present and the future, "when we shall hunger and thirst no more," gives to the soul a peace that no words can describe. (I, 25)

Godwin's proposal of perpetual progress in the closing pages of Political Justice is similar:

> Whatever be the object towards which mind irresistibly advances, it is of no mean importance to us to have a distinct view of that object. Our advances will thus become accelerated. It is a well known principle of morality, "that he who proposes per-

> fection to himself, though he will inevitably fall short of what he pursues, will make a more rapid progress, than he who is contented to aim only at what is imperfect." (II, 553-54)

Godwin offers a glimpse of that perfect society toward which all should progress in the "mutual harmony" of Deloraine and Emilia, who "were wholly without reserve, and conversed with each other, even as a man might be supposed to commune with his own heart" (I, 30). The completely candid relationship between Deloraine and his wife with its lack of self-interest, reserve, forethought, and suspicion is contrasted with the usual mode of human intercourse with its choice of words to produce a premeditated effect, its suspicion of the motives of others, its fear of prejudice toward certain convictions, and its complexity. Deloraine attributes the difference to fear: "Social man is essentially a coward; we were fearless. Social man regards all those by whom he is surrounded as enemies, or beings who may become such" (I, 49-50). The frankness and simplicity of the Deloraines, their "truth," leads to perfect happiness; perhaps because it was perfect, it did not last.

Overcome with grief at the death of Emilia, Deloraine loses his health as well as his happiness. Comforted at last by his small daughter, Deloraine accepts the death of his wife: "The mind of man bends itself after a short struggle to the yoke of necessity" (I, 89).

The love affair of Margaret and William echoes the ingenuous relationship of Deloraine and Emilia, but it is so-

ciety, not necessity, which destroys it. The force exerted by parental authority precipitates a chain of events which destroys the lovers, the parents, and Deloraine. Central to Godwin's philosophical position, and misunderstood frequently by his interpreters, is the prohibition of force:

> It is right, that my actions should be governed by the dictates of my own judgment; and every man is an intruder, who endeavors to compel me to act by his judgment, instead of my own. (PJ, II, 161-62)

Though Margaret's father uses no physical force to persuade his daughter to marry his choice, not hers, his appeal to filial duty is precisely the "superintendence of opinion" which Godwin regards as the imposition of "slavery." Margaret's father fails to perceive the truth of her prophetic utterance:

> We [William and Margaret] shall be two withered plants, which while they were tended and fostered and nourished, grew up in strength and beauty, their foliage bright and healthful and vigorous, but which shall hereafter be rivelled, naked and unblest, left on the plain two monuments of wretchedness and blast. (I, 161-62)

When the mental tortures suffered by Margaret had destroyed her physical health, her father, at last struck by the truth, relents. But the inexorable chain of events which has been set into motion by his ambitious disregard of the reality of Margaret's prior engagement produces disaster for all concerned.

Deloraine marries Margaret when "grief had attenuated, and resignation had sublimed her. She was piety and filial virtue, and nothing else" (I, 267). Though Deloraine loves

Margaret totally and Margaret performs her duties to perfection, the marriage is doomed and Deloraine discontented because "Margaret was present with me in appearance, but absent in reality" (II, 16). In contrast to his life with Emilia, Deloraine finds that Margaret's secret thoughts are to be forever hidden from him. She belongs essentially to William, the man whom she had loved since childhood, whom she had promised to marry, and to whom she owed her life. The demonstration of the validity of this prior commitment needs only William's miraculous resurrection from the dead.

In an indictment of the evils of the social contract, Godwin presents here the distortion of immutable law by human institutions:

> Could I bear to live in the perpetual presence of a woman, who by the institutions of society was my own, but who, by a law prior and superior to these institutions, was dedicated to another? (II, 51)

Deloraine keeps the knowledge of William's return from Margaret for her sake. He believes that the conflicting claims of the "perfect union of souls" and the marriage of "convenience" will destroy her. In Political Justice Godwin calls the marriage contract the worst of monopolies:

> So long as two human beings are forbidden, by positive institution, to follow the dictates of their own mind, prejudice will be alive and vigorous. So long as I seek, by despotic and artificial means, to maintain my possession of a woman, I am guilty of the most odious selfishness. (II, 508)

Deloraine's frantic attempt, for whatever motives, to maintain his possession of Margaret leads to the murder of William, the death of Margaret from shock, and the condem-

nation of Deloraine himself to perpetual guilt and remorse. Deloraine appeals once more, however, to immutable law:

> I assumed in my own person the robe and function of public justice. I interposed not a moment for deliberation and the sifting of evidence. Bitterly, and impelled by a thousand reasons, have I since repented what I did. But at the time I had no doubts. The highest and purest of all laws, as I believed, was with me. I saw my wife and her paramour together. (II, 141)

Having violated every principle of the code of reason--he assumed that retributive justice was possible; he used force and punishment, not persuasion; he acted from passion, not reason; he acted in accordance with social law, not immutable law--Deloraine shoulders the burden of penitential suffering which had plagued Falkland in Caleb Williams.

It may not be possible to decide which of the two suffered more, but there are important differences between Falkland and Deloraine which should be considered.[3] Falkland was both the sufferer and the pursuer and his antagonist was much less powerful than he. Deloraine, on the other hand, is sufferer and fugitive, hunted by a worthy opponent who has not only right and "justice" but power on his side as well. In addition, Caleb Williams is only secondarily about Falkland, whose suffering is reported by the narrator. Deloraine is the history of the suffering mind of the protagonist and it records his progress from the righteous indignation with which he murders his wife's "para-

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[3]George Sherburn asserts that Deloraine "suffers far less than his predecessor Falkland, whom in his suffering he resembles" in "Godwin's Later Novels," Studies in Romanticism, I, (Winter, 1962), 73.

mour," through fear of capture, realization of guilt and the futility of flight, to his eventual acceptance of defeat.

Deloraine's cold-blooded and calculated flight from England is justified by the perception that his act which is vindicated in his own mind "would not be so received in an English court of justice as to obtain my acquittal of the crime of murder." He also believes that the death of Margaret would "exasperate a judge and jury against me" and that he would "certainly be regarded as a monster of iniquity, hardened in crime" (II, 154-55). Deloraine's long, impassioned discourse on English law gives evidence that Godwin's distaste for that institution had expanded and hardened:

> Nothing, I was well aware, was more precise than the expounding and application of the English law in the case of murder. It is like the application of a clothyard in a mercer's shop. In the matter of duelling only is it dispensed with. There the common sense of mankind rises against it; and the judge, however well disposed for the most part to be rigorous, finds himself obliged to relax. In all other instances the life of the individual arraigned, is disposed of in obedience to terms and definitions. The only question is, Does the deed under consideration come up to the rule? just as in the shop of the mercer we decide, Does the cloth measure three feet of twelve inches each? The investigation is of malice; in other words, Had the individual accused so much time given, between the sight of the offence that irritated him, and the infliction of the mortal wound, as may logically and metaphysically be interpreted to have afforded room for deliberation? Thus the judge rules it, and the jury obey, and the executive government rarely and with infinite hesitation supersedes the rule. No consideration is had of the character of the parties, or the nature of the provocation. The heart of the judge is dead within him, and so of the rest. The whole is determined, in a way that more resembles the turning of a machine, than the decision of

> that complicated being called man, endowed with eyes to see, and an understanding to discriminate, and a heart to feel, and a moral sense to judge according to the eternal law written in the skies.--It is further worthy to be considered, that circumstances tending to aggravate are sure to be taken into account; not so circumstances tending to extenuate. (II, 168-70)

Forty years before, Godwin had written:

> In defiance of the great principle of natural philosophy, that there are not so much as two atoms of matter of the same form, through the whole universe, it [law] endeavors to reduce the actions of men, which are composed of a thousand evanescent elements, to one standard. . . . There is more real justice in endeavoring to reduce the actions of men into classes, than there was in the scheme to which we have just alluded, of reducing all men to the same stature. . . .
>
> From all these considerations we can scarcely hesitate to conclude universally, that law is an institution of the most pernicious tendency. (PJ, II, 403-04)

Deloraine's long escape from the "myrmidons" of the law involves deception, evasion, disguise, and fear. All of these contribute to the mental suffering he undergoes: "The very idea that I was throughout a deceiver . . . poisoned all the pleasures I should otherwise have had . . . and rendered me perpetually uneasy, full of self-reproach and abasement" (III, 54). "No day could I call my own . . . the watches of the night have been full of terror to me. . . . My blood was fevered; my brain maddened" (III, 93-94). "To have a watch upon all our motions and upon every expression, and to conform to an artificial rule, is the worst of slaveries" (III, 268). But above all of the other tortures and encompassing them all is guilt:

> What a thing is guilt! How is it with the soul of man, when every trifle shakes it? (III, 63)

> I had done that, I had contracted such a guilt, as all the waters of the ocean could never wash away. (III, 307)

Exhausted by flight, deception, and disguise Deloraine at last gives up:

> I have gone through enough; I have tried experiments more than enough. I have fled from city to city, and from country to country. I have hid myself in places solitary, almost inaccessible. I have watched by day; sleep by night has fled from my eyes. I have seen in every bush an adversary; every sound has penetrated my soul, as if it were the harbinger of a final conflict. To all things there is a limit. What is the value of life on these conditions? At best existence is but a questionable gift. (III, 273)

Godwin had remarked casually in Political Justice: "Death is in itself among the slightest of human evils" (I, 271).

Freed from the threat of human or political persecution, Deloraine finds that he has been deceived. Pursuit was the unappreciated blessing which had given him something other than guilt to occupy his mind. His mental suffering, the result of a moment's passion, is worse than any physical punishment could be. Deloraine offers a moral to be collected from his history:

> My offence, though clothed with every possible aggravation, was but the offence of an instant. In all that went before, and all that followed, I was guiltless. What a momentous deposit therefore, and committed to how frail a custody, is human life! There is scarcely an instant that passes over our heads, that may not have its freight of infamy. How ought we to watch over our thoughts, that we may not so much as imagine any enormity! How exactly regulated and nicely balanced ought to be our meditations, that no provocation may take from us the mastery of ourselves, and hurry us headlong ten thousand fathoms beyond the level of a sound discretion! "Wherewith shall a man cleanse his way" in the complicated encounters of our mortal state? By binding

> constancy and truth "as a sign upon our hands," and wearing them "as frontlets between our eyes." (III, 315-16)

It is constancy and truth which have prompted Deloraine to tell his story. His daughter embodies constancy, truth, goodness, and virtue. In Catherine Deloraine, Godwin exhibits the perfection of human nature toward which all should aspire and progress. In Political Justice Godwin asserts that "the perfection of the human character consists in approaching as nearly as possible to the perfectly voluntary state" (I, 68). He defines virtue as "any action or actions of an intelligent being, proceeding from kind and benevolent intention, and having a tendency to contribute to general happiness" (I, 149). He has remarked also that "innocence is not virtue. Virtue demands the active employment of an ardent mind in the promotion of the general good" (I, 156). "Truth, immortal and ever present truth, is so powerful, that, in spite of all his prejudices, the upright man will suspect himself, when he resolves upon an action that is at war with the plainest principles of morality" (I, 313-14).

With reference to his daughter, Deloraine remarks: "Plato says, that, if we could see virtue in her proper form, all men would fall down and adore her" (III, 183). But Catherine is innocent, until her father reveals his crime to her. Though shocked and saddened at the revelation, Catherine's response is, "How can I make myself perfectly useful? How can I employ all my thoughts and ener-

gies in substantial good?" (II, 198). Catherine chooses to ally herself with the guilt of her father because he is her father: "Spotless herself, she voluntarily took up her abode under the tents of contamination" (II, 203). Catherine shares the fear and privation of her father's flight without murmuring, asking only to be useful, and it is she, of course, who finally confounds the persecutor with that most powerful weapon--Truth.

In an impassioned confrontation with the pursuer, Travers, Catherine appeals to his humanity, the "quick pulses beating in his heart, a 'soul made of fire, and offspring of the sun'" (III, 295). Catherine too excoriates the law which "comes with its scales, and weighs every thing to the partition of a hair" (III, 294). Her appeal for the relief of the living, her accusation of "the hunter of human blood," her appeal to the common bond of humanity, "What are we, that we should studiously engage ourselves in the infliction of misery, and derive a chosen delight from the perpetration of mortal agonies?" (III, 297), her reason for coming, to find "whether you are made of penetrable stuff, and whether the truth, poured from the soul of one who stands on the brink of perdition, will move you" (III, 298), had the desired effect: "Travers was melted with the fervent expostulation of Catherine." Then, in the reaffirmation of all he had written forty years before, Deloraine-Godwin concludes: "Could it be otherwise?" (III, 299).

Godwin concludes his long dedication to the cause of

truth with one last exposition of its power:

> Travers saw truth in her own "shape how lovely." He saw; and every avenue in his heart opened to receive it; and benevolence and philanthropy rushed in at once with a restless tide. (III, 299-300)

Though the revelation of truth came too late to offer comfort to Deloraine, the demonstration of its power to overcome evil makes more poignant his last cry: "Oh, why have not human creatures a confidence in the force of truth and justice?" (III, 303).

CONCLUSION

The theme of Godwin's last novel indicates that humanity had not yet adopted Godwin's philosophy. It also indicates, however, that Godwin's basic belief had not changed. Though human beings continued to live in "misery," Godwin, until the end of his life, continued his attempt to convince his contemporaries that the answer to the problems of human existence had been published in Political Justice.

The close comparison of similar passages from Political Justice and from each of the novels, which was the major emphasis of this study, reveals a relationship between Godwin's philosophy and fiction which could only have been intentional. The overall impression which results from this comparison is one of unswerving consistency. Even those conclusions which are modified through the novels are qualified with specific reservations.

Godwin's original proscription of binding social ties and private affections was a result of his belief that complete freedom of action was necessary to fully rational man. Theoretically Godwin believed that man is basically a rational being, but reality forced him to admit the dualism of reason and sense in man's nature. As the novels progressively indicate, Godwin modified his belief that an individual should be self-sufficient and acknowledged the social needs of man. Each of the private relationships which re-

ceive approbation in the novels, however, is based on a rational rather than a sensual foundation. Fully rational and benevolent man may find happiness in cooperation, friendship, and even marriage if the relationship is based on truth and is free from coercion. Godwin's early bias against marriage contracts resulted from his aversion to force. His prohibition of coercion never changes, but Godwin's appreciation of the possibilities of happiness in marriage grows and deepens until full approval is given in Deloraine. True happiness in marriage, however, is possible only between free and enlightened human beings.

Godwin is truly an apostle of freedom. His objection to political, religious, educational, and social institutions, which is demonstrated over and over again in the novels, is against the necessary tendency of these institutions to restrict man's freedom to attain truly human, or reasonable, stature. Though no attempt has been made in this study to validate or justify Godwin's philosophy, a perceptive appraisal of the reason behind the current revival of interest in his philosophy seems pertinent:

> So much has been seen and felt of the tyrannies which emphasis on man's guilt and corruption are made to justify, that an assertion of his innate goodness and powers of love, with the consequent demand for his full freedom to express them, rouses a responsive welcome in a bewildered generation, increasingly impatient of the claims of its rulers to restrain and control it for its own good.[1]

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[1]Angus Wilson, "The Novels of William Godwin," World Review (June, 1951), p. 37.

Godwin's lifelong dedication to the cause of truth, his belief in man's capacity to achieve happiness, and his battle against the forces which impede man's rational progress merit serious consideration. Political Justice and the novels, viewed together as the comprehensive exposition of Godwin's thought, reveal a sincere investigator into the human condition who deserves the epitaph which has been supplied by Kegan Paul:

> Write me, as one that loves his fellow-men.[2]

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[2]C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (2 vols.; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1876), II, 333.

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