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Romantic Anarche: The Philosophical and Literary Anarchism of William Godwin

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Theory and Criticism

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ROMANTIC ANARCHE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY ANARCHISM OF
WILLIAM GODWIN

(ROMANTIC ANARCHE: WILLIAM GODWIN)

Monograph

by

Jared McGeough

Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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**Romantic Anarche: The Philosophical and Literary Anarchism of
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requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This study examines the philosophical and literary anarchism of William Godwin. Through an analysis of several of Godwin's major works, including *Political Justice* (1793, 1796, 1798), "Of History and Romance" (1798), and his novels *Caleb Williams* (1794), *St. Leon* (1799) and *Mandeville* (1817), I argue that Godwin's relationship both to the intellectual history of anarchism and its literary expression in the form of the historical romance is more complex than has been recognized. In order to tease out this complexity, I approach Godwin from the perspective of recent critics who reread the ideals of classical anarchism through post-structuralist theory. Rather than reduce Godwin to contemporary approaches to anarchism, however, this study demonstrates that Godwin's texts anticipate and participate in a continuing dialogue with, and deconstruction of, the Enlightenment suppositions of his own anarchism.

This questioning leads to a conception of anarchy in Godwin that comes to mean something quite different from "anarchism." Anarchy, rather, designates something closer to its root sense in the term *anarchē*, an existence without *archē*: principle or origin. *Anarchē* less names a political ideology so much as a "negativity" in the heart of *archē* that refuses any sanctioning of things as they are, embracing an idea of history and subjectivity predicated on contingency. The *anarchē* evidenced within Godwin's corpus unworks the possibility of any rational politics from within, showing rationality itself to be interminably afflicted by its own "groundlessness." In this respect, Godwin can be read alongside a broader shift in the history of ideas, beginning in romanticism, which traces a growing skepticism towards the emancipatory projects of Enlightenment. One of the tributary aims of this study is therefore to make a case for Godwin as a *romantic* writer, if by "romantic" we refer to a "literature involved in the restless process of self-examination" (Rajan, *Dark Interpreter* 25). By examining this "restless process" in several of Godwin's works, this study contributes both to the fields of contemporary anarchist theory as well as romantic studies by extending a conceptual bridge between the political and literary histories of ideas in which Godwin himself participates, but is often marginalized.

Keywords

Godwin, William; Anarchism; Romanticism; Deconstruction; Enlightenment; Post-Structuralism; Post-Anarchism; Hume, David; Deleuze, Gilles; Derrida, Jacques

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List of Abbreviations

Works by William Godwin

CW – *Things as they Are, or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*. Ed. Gary Handwerk and A.A. Markley. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000.

“HR” – “Of History and Romance” in *Caleb Williams, or Things as They Are*. Ed. Gary Handwerk and A.A. Markley. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000. 453-67.

Mand. – *Mandeville, a tale of the seventeenth century in England*. Ed. Pamela Clemit. *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*. Vol. 6. Ed. Mark Philp. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992. Print. 8 vols.

PJ – *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*. All citations refer to the three-volume facsimile edition of 1798, edited by F.E.L. Priestley (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1946). References are indicated by volume, followed by page number.

St.L – *St. Leon, a tale of the sixteenth century*. Ed. William D. Brewer. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2006.

Chapter 1

1 From Anarchism to *Anarchē*: Reconsidering William Godwin's Anarchism

Humanity has no foundation and no ends, it is the definition of groundlessness.

- Costas Douzinas, "The End(s) of Human Rights"

Anarchy is, and always has been, a romance.

- Alan Moore, Interview

"The meaning ordinarily attached to the term anarchy," according to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, "is absence of principle, absence of rule, consequently it has been regarded as synonymous with disorder." Yet "anarchy – the absence of a master, of a sovereign," Proudhon continues, "is the form of government to which we are every day approximating. . . . Just as the right of force and the right of artifice retreat before the steady advance of justice, and must finally be extinguished in equality, so the sovereignty of the will yields to the sovereignty of reason. . . . As man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy" (277, 277 n1). Proudhon's definition points to how the ideals associated with the anarchist movement are closely interwoven with a post-Enlightenment belief in history as the progressive unfolding of the "sovereignty of reason" as the means to the dissolution of all forms of instituted power. As the absence of a master, anarchy becomes the sociopolitical paradigm connected with a belief in humanity's inherent capacity to overcome the arbitrariness of power and to remake society according to axiomatic principles of "justice" and "equality." As George Woodcock comments, such a paradigm "springs from the belief that anarchism is a manifestation of natural human urges, and that it is the tendency to create authoritarian institutions which is the transient aberration" (*Anarchism* 35).

Implicit in this classical representation of anarchism, however, is a paradox that goes deeper than Proudhon's half-ironic remark that "society seeks order in anarchy." Anarchism reverses the normative binary of order and disorder to reveal that anarchy is in fact the "true" order of society obscured by the artificiality of institutions. Yet, this reversal also leaves the hierarchical structure of the binary intact by reasserting a

foundation or essence to the social. If, as nineteenth century American anarchist Benjamin Tucker points out, anarchy “does not mean simply opposed to the *archos*, or political leader” but “opposed to *archē*, . . . beginning, origin” or first principle, then the very definition of anarchy must immanently resist its own claim to represent a foundational, “natural” or “sovereign” rationality that would constitute the true essence of the social (qtd. in Weir 11). Indeed, the very definition of *archē* is always already riven by contradiction. As Paul de Man remarks in his discussion of the related German term *entstehen* – to “originate” or to “spring forth” – “we can understand origin only in terms of difference: the source springs up because of the need to be somewhere or something else than what is now here. The word ‘entstehen,’ with its distancing prefix, equates origin with negation and difference” (*Rhetoric* 4). The *archē* or origin is never properly original, but *is* only in relation to what it is not: that is to say, *archē* is always already in some way *an-archic*, the privative *an-* becoming the “distancing prefix” that makes visible the aporetic, self-dividing structure at the heart of the supposed simplicity and purity of origins. In this sense, there can be no anarchism “as such,” since this would be to attribute an essence to that which is, by definition, the displacement of all essences.

With such paradoxes in mind, this study explores the role of “anarchy” in several philosophical and literary works by its historical progenitor, William Godwin. Beginning with Peter Kropotkin’s landmark entry for the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1910), historical and critical consensus¹ suggests that the modern sociopolitical theory of anarchism finds its first systematic expression in Godwin’s Enlightenment philosophy. Yet, according to Woodcock, Godwin’s place in anarchism’s historical development has always been tinged with uncertainty: like “Tolstoy or [existential anarchist Max] Stirner,” Godwin stands somewhat “outside the historical anarchist movement of the nineteenth century.” But Woodcock immediately closes off the radical potential in associating Godwin’s rationalism with Stirner’s existentialism, pointing out instead that Godwin’s politics displays such affinities with nineteenth-

¹ See Rucker (1938); Woodcock (1962); Marshall (1984) and (1992); Crowder (1991); Clark (1977); and most recently, Goodway (2006).

century anarchism that it is ultimately legitimate to acknowledge his place “at the head” of anarchism’s “family tree” (*Anarchism* 54-5).

Although Woodcock argues that Godwin’s ambiguous status vis-à-vis classical theories of anarchism has more to do with a lack of acknowledged influence than with conceptual differences, his suggestion invites further reflection on the manner that Godwin relates to this tradition. The main argument in what follows is that a closer analysis of both Godwin’s philosophy and his literary texts reveals a “margin” more substantive than simple neglect; rather, this study argues that in Godwin one can already perceive a revision and questioning of the major assumptions of an anarchism that is still in the process of being invented. In methodological terms, this questioning can be called deconstructive, insofar as Godwin’s oeuvre consists of an ongoing dialogue between philosophy and literature that combines the political with an epistemology that ungrounds any rational politics, disclosing the *anarchē* within his more overt claims for an anarchism grounded in an autonomous, rational, or natural *archē*.

In this respect, this study proceeds from the argument that both Godwin’s philosophy and his fiction anticipate recent theorists of anarchism such as Reiner Schürmann, Todd May, Saul Newman, and Lewis Call.² Despite their differing approaches and conclusions, each of these theorists aims to incorporate “the moral principles of anarchism with the poststructuralist critique of essentialism” and thus theorize “the possibility of political resistance without essentialist guarantees” (Newman 158-9). Such developments in contemporary theory open hitherto unexplored possibilities for rereading Godwin’s anarchism. Nonetheless, and I will return to this point, post-structuralist approaches to anarchism also miss a certain potential in reading Godwin otherwise by failing to reread these more deconstructive³ possibilities back into the

² Schürmann (1990); May (1994); Newman (2001); Call (2002).

³ The subtle shift in terminology between post-structuralism and deconstruction is deliberate and will be taken up in more detail further on in the chapter. At this point, it suffices to say that critics such as Tilottama Rajan have made convincing cases that the two terms are not exactly synonymous. Deconstruction has its roots not only in structural linguistics but also in the philosophical tradition of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, whereas what is termed post-structuralism often defines itself as an “emancipatory overturning of structuralism” largely “unconcerned with phenomenological issues” (Rajan, *Deconstruction* 35-6). That contemporary re-appraisals of anarchism have defined

history of classical anarchism itself, thus betraying a certain presentism in post-anarchism's claims to represent a more sophisticated, self-aware version of anarchist politics.

An attempt to trace this figure of *anarchē* within Godwin's philosophical and literary works will be elaborated in the chapters that follow. At this juncture, it is first necessary to outline several crucial ideas from which this study proceeds. In particular, I want to distinguish between three positions: classical anarchism, post-structuralist anarchism or "post-anarchism," and the more skeptical, deconstructive approach that I see as closer to the central insights of Godwin's corpus. Such insights, I argue, anticipate certain aspects of post-anarchism insofar as Godwin's work remains skeptical towards the residual essentialism that persists within classical versions of anarchism. What my own approach seeks to avoid, however, is post-anarchism's tendency to simplify prior "anarchisms" by seeing them as incapable of responding to the problems created or intimated by their own discourse. To the contrary, certain works by Godwin show him already engaged in a process of self-questioning irreducible to the essentialist view of classical anarchism, a self-awareness thus far neglected by post-anarchist theoreticians.

At stake in this reconsideration of Godwin's anarchism is a rethinking of the (inter-)disciplinary relations between Godwin and the history of classical anarchism, as well as the literary and political aspects within his own oeuvre. My argument is not simply that Godwin ought to be reincorporated as a central, rather than marginal, figure in the history of classical anarchism, but that certain works in Godwin's corpus anticipate and contribute to the ongoing process of *rethinking* anarchism taken up by post-anarchist theorists. Developments in post-structural theory and its critique of classical versions of political anarchism allow us to (re)read the process by which, at certain points in his career, Godwin can be shown to be actively revising the very aims and limits of anarchist

themselves as "post-anarchist" implies an identification with post-structuralism rather than deconstruction, though deconstruction is often deployed by post-anarchist theorists as though it were identical with post-structuralism.

politics. In this sense, it is an oversimplification to hypostasize Godwin's role as a foundational thinker for the anarchists of the nineteenth century who are, in turn, succeeded by contemporary post-anarchism.

Secondly, reevaluating Godwin's relation to the history of anarchism entails an analogous reevaluation of the connection between the political and literary aspects of his corpus. Critics often interpret this relationship in one of two ways. On one hand, earlier critics often understood the literature as a relatively straightforward translation of Godwin's political theory, or a mild qualification of that theory, that keeps its central assumptions intact. On the other hand, more recent critics – Rudolf Storch, Jerrold E. Hogle, David Collings, and John Bender, to name but a few – argue that Godwin's literary texts radically undermine his political ideals by exposing the often pathological subtext of his commitment to pure reason. Both of these approaches, however, appear to close off the possibility for a productive tension in which the literary complicates the political by rendering the latter something that remains to be worked-through, rather than mimetically re-presented or hysterically dismantled. Undoubtedly, Godwin understands the role of the novel as offering a position from which he can articulate political ideas otherwise precluded by institutional authority. At the same time, passing from the political/philosophical to the fictional also forces Godwin to reconsider his philosophy within a literary framework that implicitly raises the question of the very connection between politics and literature. As Jacques Derrida avers, the "possibility of literature" is a distinctively *an-archic* possibility: "the possibility of literature, the legitimation that a society gives it, the allaying of suspicion or terror with regard to it, all that goes together – politically – with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition," even those that it would offer as "true" alternatives (*On the Name* 28).

This more "textual," deconstructive anarchism at once provides a literary framework for Godwin's more explicitly stated desires for an unlimited questioning of all forms of institution. Yet, because this questioning is unlimited, it is also necessarily a self-questioning that generates a reflexivity within Godwin's corpus that traces a path between Enlightenment and its deconstruction. Godwin's novels can be read as

potentiating complexities that already begin to surface, if only tentatively, in the more affirmative or utopian claims of his political philosophy. In this respect, I read Godwin, to borrow Thomas Pfau's terms, as "*skeptical* in an essential, rather than merely occasional or topical, sense" ("Beyond Liberal Utopia" 84). One must account for the persistence of a utopian impulse within an anarchism that simultaneously moves towards skepticism and, as such, can no longer confirm utopia as the *telos* of a rational politics. Instead, certain works within Godwin's oeuvre demonstrate a persistent dialectic in which the utopianism of his political commitments prevents his emerging skepticism from completely taking over, while the novels themselves skeptically expose this utopianism to its own *an-archic* groundlessness.

With such issues in mind, the rest of this introduction is dedicated to sketching the assumptions within classical discourses of anarchism that count Godwin as their canonical forefather, the post-structuralist response to and critique of these assumptions, and the lineaments associated with the notion of *anarchē* that will provide the theoretical underpinnings of my own approach to Godwin. With these theoretical issues in place, I then unfold the narrative logic of the chapters that make up the analysis of Godwin that follows.

1.1 Classical Anarchism and/as Pragmatic Anthropology

Godwin's philosophy has been long understood as providing the roots of modern anarchism. In his entry for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Kropotkin writes that although Godwin did not give the name "anarchism" to the "ideas developed in his remarkable work," he was the first to formulate what would become anarchism's fundamental "political and economical conceptions," conceptions that would be more fully elaborated in the nineteenth century by anarchist thinkers such as Mikhail Bakunin, Proudhon, and Kropotkin himself. The "remarkable work" to which Kropotkin refers is Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, first published in 1793 and revised in two expanded editions of 1796 and 1798. Although Godwin is often relegated to minor status within the history of political thought, William Hazlitt observed in the *Spirit of the Age* that "no work in our time gave such a blow to the

philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*" (20).

The object of *Political Justice* is a systematic critique of any and every possible form of coercion by "positive institutions" that would interfere with "the peculiar and independent operation of [an] individual"'s rational judgment and its use for the "general benefit" to society as a whole (*PJ* 1:1). In this respect, Godwin exemplifies the optimism of an "enlightened" humanism which posits that "reason is the only legislator, and her decrees are irrevocable and uniform." Any such institution that would mediate between the good of society and the authority of one's own "immutable reason" is a form of coercion only masquerading as justice (1:156). As Collings remarks, Godwin's philosophy seeks not only to challenge "the rule of law or of government," but also to effectively repudiate "rhetorical power, prejudice, custom, contracts, promises, cooperative action, gratitude, codes of manners, marriage, the subordination of child to parent, employment of one person by another, and internalized forms of external constraint, as well as the coercion involved in any revolutionary or collective attempt to overturn institutions" ("The Romance of the Impossible" 848).

Godwin's attempt at a total critique of institutions is supplemented by a quasi-millenarian belief that man and society are naturally progressive and rationally "perfectible." Although couched in the language of Enlightenment, perfectibility exercises considerable influence on early romantic writers such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, as well as Godwin's son-in-law Percy Shelley.⁴ This influence aligns with an emerging romanticism that sees the discourse of perfectibility shift from rationality to the aesthetic, which, in more conventional interpretations of romanticism offered by critics such as M.H. Abrams, becomes the medium through which a natural innocence overcomes the corruptions of experience and procures the coincidence of mind and nature.⁵ Residues of this shift are evident in Kropotkin's definition of anarchism in the *Encyclopedia*, which synthesizes Godwin's

⁴ For a discussion of Coleridge and Southey's failed attempt at creating a utopian community based on Godwinian principles see Fulford (2006), 120-40.

⁵ See especially, Abrams (1971).

Enlightenment optimism with a post-romantic organicism: “anarchism is a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government. . . . Such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary – as is seen in organic life at large – harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces.”⁶ Similarly, Bakunin defines anarchism as “a natural, organic, popular force” that diagrammatically opposes the externalized “artificial authority” of “pneumatic machines called governments” (*Political Philosophy* 212). The organicist metaphors permeating the classical anarchist vision of society aligns with a post-romantic idealism that aims to restore the existence of a natural and harmonious *Gemeinschaft* over an artificial, alienated *Gesellschaft*.

However, recent theorists of anarchism such as Schürmann, Newman, May, and Call have argued that classical anarchism’s vision of the social as an organic harmony constitutes its most conservative rather than radical dimension, even as a political philosophy that emerges at the threshold of modernism’s more unsettling vision of anarchy as radical historical discontinuity.⁷ As Schürmann argues, what the classical anarchists “sought was . . . to substitute the ‘rational’ power, *principium*, for the power of authority, *princeps* - as metaphysical an operation has ever been. They replace one focus with another” (*Heidegger* 6). Classical anarchism, according to these critics, does not effectively break from the metaphysical presuppositions that legitimized past authoritarian conceptions of power; rather, classical anarchism restates this authority by substituting it with a “rational power” that extends from the optimistic humanism of Enlightenment to the aesthetic idealism of organicist rhetoric. It is this inherent “metaphysical operation” that Newman characterizes as classical anarchism’s insistence on an “uncontaminated point of departure,” a certain notion of human essence derived

⁶ Proudhon emphasizes a similar notion in his utopian conception of anarchist society as “mutualism.” Mutualism is predicated on the ostensible existence of “natural groups” in which people “create among themselves neighbourly feelings and relations. . . . This group then takes on the form of a community . . . affirming in its unity its independence” (qtd. in Weir 24).

⁷ In his 1923 essay on Joyce’s *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot defines the task of modernist literature in finding ways of “giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (*Selected Prose* 177).

from an Enlightenment-humanist framework first articulated in the 1793 version of Godwin's *Political Justice*, a framework that asserts an "innate morality and rationality of man" against the "inherently irrational and immoral" power of institutions (Newman 39). Classical theories of anarchism from Godwin to Kropotkin make extensive use of a simplified binary logic that opposes the innately "good" human subject as an uncontaminated point of departure against the "irrational" and artificial authority of the state. As Paul Feyerabend argues, such binaries remain tethered to a naïve post-Enlightenment belief that "the established order must be destroyed so that human spontaneity may come to the fore and exercise its right of freely initiating action," exemplifying an "almost childlike trust" in the "'natural reason' of the human race" ("On Epistemological Anarchism").

Classical anarchism sees power as an external, irrational contaminant that inhibits or perverts the realization of a natural society fused into a common, organic substance. Consequently, while anarchism in general emphatically rejects republican and liberal political philosophies that focus on the self-interested individual, property rights, and representative democracy,⁸ it nonetheless remains within the horizon of what Immanuel Kant had earlier defined as "anthropology from a pragmatic point of view," which focuses on what man "as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself" and takes the "human being" as "his own final end" (*Anthropology* 3-4).⁹ Thus, in his seminal anarchist text *God and the State* (1871, published posthumously in 1882), Bakunin invokes the discoveries of "modern science" to reproduce a modified, anthropologically-oriented, and obliquely Hegelian conception of evolution as the index of "progressive action in history":

The social world, properly speaking, the human world – in short, humanity – is nothing other than the last and supreme development – at least on our planet and

⁸ Proudhon states that anarchists cannot be called Republicans, since *res publica* merely refers to an interest in public affairs. In this sense, "even kings are republicans" (qtd. in Woodcock, *Anarchism* 13).

⁹ Pragmatic anthropology, Kant argues, is distinguished from what he calls "physiological" anthropology. Where pragmatic anthropology is concerned with what "man" as a freely acting being makes of himself, physiological anthropology deals only with what "nature makes of man" (3). To put it simply, the distinction corresponds to the cognitive distinction between transcendental and empirical knowledge and, in the practical realm, the distinction between freedom and necessity.

as far as we know – the highest manifestation of animality. But as every development necessarily implies a negation, that of its base or point of departure, humanity is at the same time and essentially the deliberate and gradual negation of the animal element in man; and it is precisely this negation, as rational as it is natural, and rational only because natural – at once historical and logical, as inevitable as the development and realization of all the natural laws in the world. (8-9)

Despite persistent references to Darwin, Bakunin's conflation of nature, history, reason, and logic is less materialistic than demonstrative of what Slavoj Žižek calls a thoroughly ideological "evolutionary idealism": "the ideology of evolutionism always implies a belief in a Supreme Good, in a final Goal of evolution which guides its course from the very beginning. In other words, it always implies a hidden, disavowed teleology" (*Sublime Object* 161). Extending Godwin's idea of human perfectibility, Bakunin sees this historical evolution towards anarchism's "grand truth" as fallow but assured, a realization of nature's own laws in the form of the *anthropos* that belatedly renders history transparent to itself. Despite sympathy for the Miltonic Satan as read by William Blake, "the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and the emancipator of worlds," Bakunin capitulates to a Feuerbachian anthropology that finally seeks "God in man, in human freedom" (*God and the State* 22).¹⁰ Anarchism thus bases its revolutionary identity on high claims for anthropology as the evolutionary guarantor of a natural, moral, social foundation of human rationality against its corruption by institutions and state power, simultaneously protecting itself from charges of promoting "anarchy" in the sense of social disorder.¹¹ In this respect, Newman remarks that the theory of classical anarchism remains "the story of man: his evolution from an animal-like state to a state of freedom and enlightenment, of a rational and ethical existence" (37-8).

¹⁰ The latter is quoted in Pyziur (1968). The quotation in full reads, "You are mistaken if you think that I do not believe in God . . . I seek God in man, in human freedom, and now I seek God in revolution" (50-1).

¹¹ Kropotkin, for example, argues that such benevolent natural laws "are not extrinsic in relation to us, they are inherent in us, they constitute our nature, our whole being physically, intellectually, and morally," while Bakunin avers that "the idea of justice and good, like all other human things, must have their root in man's very animality" (Kropotkin, *The State* 12; Bakunin, *Political Philosophy* 84).

Godwin's canonical place at the head of this anarchist tradition ostensibly situates him at the origin of a strain of pragmatic anthropology that, while opposed to dominative authority (*princeps*), nonetheless seeks to reconstitute this power through an unscrutinized principle of rationality (*principium*) as human essence, and a vision of history predicated on a "disavowed teleology." One of the most extreme examples of this rational teleology can be found in Godwin's penultimate chapter, later Appendix, to *Political Justice* titled "On Health and the Prolongation of Human Life." Obliquely echoing the speculative fantasy of Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1623), Godwin extends his overall sense that "the intellectual state of man, [sic] may be presumed to be in a course of progressive improvement" to the evolutionary possibility that human rationality might eventually transcend the finite world altogether and enter into a disembodied Platonic heaven:

let us then, in this place, return to the sublime conjecture of [Benjamin] Franklin . . . that 'mind will one day become omnipotent over matter.' The sense which he annexed to this expression, seems to have related to the improvements of human invention, in relation to machines and the compendium of labour. But, if the power of intellect can be established over all other matter, are we not inevitably led to ask, why not over the matter of our own bodies? (2:520, 525)

Deploying the romanticized language of sublimity as coextensive with the *telos* of Enlightenment reason – namely, the complete abjection of material content for ideational form that, as Hazlitt remarks of Godwinian reason, "gives no quarter to the amiable weaknesses of our nature" (34) – Godwin reenacts a secular version of the metaphysical polarity that devalues the empirical, the contingent, and the historical in favour of the evolution of the rational soul: "we ought to be upon all occasions prepared to render a reason for our actions. We should remove ourselves to the farthest distance from the state of mere inanimate machines, acted upon by causes of which they have no understanding" (*PJ* 1:68).

In attempting to extrapolate beings from their finitude, Hazlitt notes that Godwin "raised the standard of morality above the reach of humanity, and by directing virtue to

the most airy and romantic heights, made her path dangerous, solitary, and impracticable. The author of *Political Justice* took abstract reason for the rule of conduct, and abstract good for its end,” a point earlier echoed by Wordsworth’s comment in the 1805 *Prelude* that Godwinian philosophy would “abstract the hopes of man / Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth / For ever in a purer element” (Hazlitt 22; Wordsworth, *Prelude* X. 807-9).¹² Through this idea of a “purer element,” Godwin safeguards the teleological efficacy of moral progress against the existential world that incessantly exposes the self to its finitude. Following Hazlitt’s appraisal of Godwinian virtue as “romantic,” early critics thus perceived Godwin’s appeal to pure reason as analogous to the aesthetic idealism of the romantic “imagination” (Pollin, *Education* 11).

As such, Godwin becomes vulnerable to the criticism that his anarchism provides yet another example of romanticism’s tendency towards “aesthetic ideology.”¹³ Although the materialist orientation often found in later anarchists might suggest that the latter would reject Godwin’s insistence on the need to transcend the material altogether,¹⁴ classical anarchism’s vision of the social as a self-regulating, evolutionary, organic whole is an extension of, rather than a challenge to, the idealism that passes from Godwinian rationality to the romantic imagination. In any case, Godwin appears to lay the groundwork for a later anarchism that remains within the horizon of a totalizing metaphysics that, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have argued, develops a teleology of progress and a notion of the omnipotence of mind over matter that reinscribes the very “mythological” structures it sought to dissolve.¹⁵ Ironically, the discourse of classical anarchism does not appear properly *an-archic*, insofar as it remains indebted to a conceptual framework determined by *archē*, a natural foundation or origin

¹² In his short-lived periodical *The Watchman* (1796), Coleridge expresses similar concerns with Godwin’s austere rationalism. Replying to an earlier critic for his dismissal of *Political Justice*, Coleridge writes that “[I] am not quite convinced with yourself and Mr. Godwin that mind will be omnipotent over matter, that a plough will go into the field and perform its labour without the presence of the agriculturist, that may be immortal in this life” (*Collected Works* 2:197).

¹³ I use this term in de Man’s sense of aesthetic objects that posit themselves as ideologically innocent through a “confusion of linguistic with natural reality, or reference with phenomenism [the objects themselves]” (*Resistance to Theory* 11).

¹⁴ See especially Bakunin’s rejection of idealism for materialism in *God and the State*, 24-8.

¹⁵ See “The Concept of Enlightenment” in Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), 1-34.

entirely present to itself and somehow untouched by power and the contingencies of material existence.

1.2 From Post-Anarchism to *Anarchē*

Thinkers such as May, Newman, and Call therefore seek to disengage anarchism from its earlier essentialism by re-conceptualizing anarchistic practices along the lines of post-structuralist theory. Post-structural anarchism does not name a systematically coherent set of doctrines, but rather calls upon a diverse set of interrelated concepts from thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze (and Deleuze with Félix Guattari), Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan. If, as Lyotard famously suggested, postmodernity is defined by “incredulity towards metanarratives,” then post-anarchism bears a similar incredulity towards the Enlightenment metanarrative that legitimizes classical anarchism as a variant of pragmatic anthropology (*Postmodern Condition* xxiv). Call thus locates the overall aim of post-anarchism as an attempt at recreating the central principles of classical anarchism in the image of an “antianthropology” that launches a “full-fledged attack on the semiotics of political economy and all disciplinary institutions which grow out of” humanistic optimism, foreclosing any “comfortable return to the simpler days of the Enlightenment, despite the most strenuous liberal arguments to the contrary” (35).

However edifying in its recovery of classical anarchism for contemporary theory, much post-anarchist theory nonetheless remains limited by its tendency to privilege an affirmative, rather than self-critical, politics of liberation. In this respect, post-anarchism falls under the rubric of what Tilottama Rajan calls “affirmative post-structuralism.” As Rajan observes, affirmative post-structuralism employs a “loose use of *poststructuralism* to signify any kind of oppositional criticism,” in which anarchism would be transformed into “the unscrutinized foundation of ‘oppositional practices.’” Such practices make use of “the techniques of deconstruction . . . against systems and structures, but not against [themselves],” allowing certain theorizations of post-anarchism to uncritically recuperate an “affirmative” discourse of “vicarious revolutionism.” Consequently, post-anarchism often endangers the potential of its own insights on the limitations of classical anarchism

by capitulating to a “postmodern pragmatic anthropology” that allows anarchism to be safely “reconfigured as practice or as agency.” In this respect, much of post-anarchism remains deeply invested in a transference of “philosophy (or literature) into practice” that covertly maintains the “presentist” orientation of pragmatic anthropology (Rajan, *Deconstruction* 36-8).

The collapsed distance between theory and practice emphasized by many post-anarchists reinstalls the eminence of practice so as to instrumentalize theory, rather than expand the possible ways of thinking about how theory’s *resistances* to the pragmatic can also be considered anarchic, or the ways in which such a reconsideration of theory changes our understanding of practice. The pragmatics of post-anarchism has led certain post-anarchist theoreticians to simply dismiss classical anarchism as “irrelevant to today’s struggles,” displaying a presentism with respect to classical anarchist theory that, as Marjorie Levinson points out in a different context, establishes the contemporary critic as a “privileged, essential subject” who can “*cure* the past of its objectivity” (Newman 159; Levinson 29-30). Although providing valuable insights into the limitations of nineteenth-century anarchism, certain post-anarchists invoke the unwarranted privilege of a post-1968 theoretical orientation that sees itself as immune to the erroneous presuppositions of a prior anarchism, whose essentialism forestalls its emancipatory potential.¹⁶

At the same time, a post-anarchist theorist such as Newman appears more cautious than the more affirmative rhetoric found in May and Call. In particular, Newman focuses on a more deconstructive approach that does not immediately dismiss the “emancipative possibilities” within classical anarchism, provided that these possibilities make us aware of the “humanist foundations which limit it to certain forms of subjectivity” (129). Newman approvingly cites Derrida’s comment in “Force of Law”

¹⁶ In this respect, post-anarchism attempts something of a repetition of the revolutionary praxis of “propaganda by the deed” popularized by late nineteenth- early twentieth-century anarchists, albeit without the latter’s terrorism. Call christens May ‘68 the “birth of a Postmodern Anarchist Praxis” (99). Similarly, in “Postanarchism in a Nutshell” (2003) Jason Adams cites Douglas Kellner in Andrew Feenberg (2001) to argue that the contemporary revision of anarchism “ultimately began with the Events of May 1968” and “thus, whether it is fully self-conscious of this fact or not, it is ultimately against this background that ‘postanarchism’ has recently emerged.”

that “nothing seems to me less outdated than the classical emancipatory ideal, we cannot attempt to disqualify it today. . . . But beyond these identified territories . . . other areas must constantly open up that at first seem like secondary or marginal areas” (Derrida 28). In light of the limitations of certain aspects of post-anarchist theory, Jesse S. Cohn similarly argues that the question becomes “whether the anarchist tradition [itself] is liable to the anti-essentialist critique leveled at it by its would-be post-structuralist rescuers” (56). Cohn’s own approach sets out to argue for revisiting several major figures within the anarchist tradition as complex thinkers in their own right, while simultaneously arguing that “anarchist interpretive practices can and should appropriate the techniques and insights of other schools, from psychoanalysis and semiotics to dialogism and deconstruction. . . . It ought to do so without also borrowing their restrictions, their constraints, their limitations. This means that we should appropriate technique in a critical manner, avoiding a careless eclecticism” (97).

Curiously, throughout these various revisions and reinterpretations of anarchism, Godwin himself still occupies the outlying margins that Woodcock had already perceived with respect to classical anarchism’s family resemblances. With the exception of a brief mention by Newman,¹⁷ none of the post-anarchist studies cited above substantially revisit Godwin’s anarchism, which is to say that post-anarchist discourse has not yet encountered Godwin beyond what Derrida might call the “identified territories” of his thinking. What is offered in this study is, in part, a further extension of post-anarchism’s deconstruction of the official discourse of classical anarchism. More specifically, my argument proceeds from a sense that the post-anarchist deconstruction of classical anarchism can already be found in Godwin himself. Moreover, it is Godwin’s distinctive use of literature that opens a space that allows him to revise and question his own utopian rhetoric. Anarchism did not have to wait for post-anarchism to become aware of the limitations within its own discourse; rather, it is already in Godwin that anarchism is shown to be a deeply unsettled project that places its own logocentric and anthropological

¹⁷ Newman mentions Godwin’s emphasis on “universal benevolence” as a precursor to Kropotkin’s idea of a society based on “mutual aid” (41-2). “Mutual aid” refers to a society based on the cultivation of a natural “social instinct” towards cooperation and mutual assistance. See Kropotkin (1972).

assumptions in doubt. In what follows then, I admit the *critical* value of the post-anarchist resistance to classical anarchism, without subscribing to the affirmative celebration of revolutionary *jouissance* that such views recommend. Godwin's anarchism, to the contrary, remains skeptical rather than affirmative, and therefore cannot simply be described as either Enlightenment *or* post-anarchist anthropology.

One can already glimpse the ambivalences that Godwin will explore to more radical effect in his novels in his decision to move "On Health and the Prolongation of Human Life" to an Appendix for the 1798 edition of *Political Justice*. In deferring what would logically have been the final chapter of the 1793 edition, Godwin seems to acknowledge implicit doubts as to whether his hopeful image of a purely disembodied rational subject culminates in the myth of its own (im)possibility. The very form of an Appendix lends itself to such ambiguities, since the function of an Appendix is to envelop a content whose supplemental status makes it at once internal and external with respect to the text to which it is appended. By choosing to include his speculations in the form of a supplement to the text, Godwin tries to preserve the illusion of perfectibility's realization at the very moment that he skeptically concedes its insubstantiality as mere "speculation." As if trying to contain an implicit recognition that the goal of perfectibility is at best hopeful and, at worst, a mythology of progress that actually undermines the more concrete aims of *Political Justice*, Godwin assures his reader both at the beginning and the end of the Appendix that its content "must be considered, as eminently a deviation into the land of conjecture. If it be false, it leaves the system to which it is appended, in all sound reason, as impregnable as ever"; "before we dismiss this subject it is proper once again to remind the reader, that the substance of this Appendix is given only as a matter of probable conjecture, and that the leading argument of this division of the work is altogether independent of its truth or falsehood" (2:519, 529). Indefinitely postponed into the future and protected from critical scrutiny in the present, Godwin sustains his idealistic hope for a New Atlantis in seeing it as probable, if not guaranteed.

But in relegating the accomplishment of political justice to "mere" speculation, Godwin reveals a deeper awareness that his vision of a pure reason liberated from the material world may be nothing more than an invention of consciousness, rather than the

final end of an immanent law of human progress embedded in actual history. Both the form and the content of the Appendix gesture towards a tacit uncertainty as to the viability of an anarchism deduced from pure reason, whose speculative status opens a lacuna between its stated theoretical aims and the practical realization of these aims. At the same time, this lacuna suggests a potentiality for thinking that forbids closure, opening a future dimension that persists despite the fact that it can no longer be guaranteed. Speculation remains a supplement that is always in excess of what can be posited, suggesting an incompleteness and an anxiety that disturbs both rational and institutional forms of self-presence, what Godwin identifies in his late essay collection *Thoughts on Man* (1831) as a “rebelliousness” within human nature that compels us “to launch into the wide sea of possibilities, and to nourish [our] thoughts with observing a train of unforeseen consequences as they arise,” so as to challenge the “wearied . . . repetition of rotatory acts and every-day occurrences” (97).

What has been lost in contemporary post-anarchist criticism is recognition of the ways in which Godwin’s career already constitutes “an important transition away from the rational and systematic mode of his philosophical writing and its totalizing aspirations and toward a new, radical paradigm of literature.” This literary paradigm effectively signals “the collapse of self-consciousness and intentionality as the Archimedean point for a coherent and comprehensive social theory” (Pfau, *Romantic Moods* 115). The sense that literature becomes a site for the corrosion of the Enlightenment tropes of reason, progress, individual autonomy, and transparent selfhood often assumed to guide Godwin’s corpus is at odds with the approaches taken by earlier critics. The latter often situate Godwin’s fictions as extensions of, rather than challenges to, the overt assumptions of his political philosophy.¹⁸ Although some critics, like Angus Wilson and

¹⁸ Godwin himself provides some justification for these interpretations, suggesting in the preface to his first novel *Caleb Williams* (1794) that literature functions primarily as a “vehicle” for political ideas: “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 but of late that the inestimable importance of political principles has been adequately apprehended. . . . But it is a truth highly worth to be communicated to persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach” (CW 55). Following Godwin’s prompt, early interpreters H.N. Brailsford, D.H. Monro, Woodcock, and Mitzi Myers argue that Godwin’s fictions remain optimistic and politically progressive. For Brailsford, *Caleb Williams* “conveys in the form of an eventful personal history the essence of the criticism against society, which had inspired *Political Justice*,” while Woodcock locates the “principal theme” in Godwin’s fiction in his depictions of the unjust ways that political

B.J. Tysdahl, are willing to admit some form of “ambiguity” into their discussions of Godwin’s fiction, these ambiguities are often recuperated within an overall philosophical framework whose unity is enabled rather than threatened by the presence of contradiction.¹⁹ Consequently, earlier criticism does not see the ambiguities that surface within Godwin’s fiction as calling the principles of classical anarchism into question.

While it is undeniable that Godwin writes his fictions with an eye to expressing his political ideas, it is distinctive that his writings appear more thematically interested in unsettling such ideas, whether through pathological or untrustworthy narrators, or plot structures that foreground the contingency of events over rational progression. Thus, in a move similar to post-anarchism’s shift in perspective concerning classical anarchism, recent literary criticism has begun to acknowledge a breach between argument and narrative in Godwin’s oeuvre that challenges earlier interpretations and, by extension, the conventional presuppositions of his status as a classical anarchist. As Handwerk remarks, the thrust of Godwin’s novels is so often “fundamentally contrary to the explicit political assumptions and expectations” of his moral philosophy that they tend towards “reopening the gulf between politics and ethics, between power and justice, that [his] political

institutions “crush” the individual (Brailsford 143; Woodcock 120). Gary Kelly likewise suggests that *Caleb Williams* be understood as a “Jacobin” fiction whose aim is to promote resistance to “tyranny and oppression, be it domestic, national or international” and the “persecution of individuals” in order to reinforce the idea of history as an allegorical “account of the efforts of some men to establish the rule of reason against its enemies . . . error and prejudice” (7, 179). Writing of Godwin’s late decision to revise his conclusion to his first novel, Myers points out that the author’s “habits of composition and revision, and his changes from the original version [of the novel] suggest that his vision . . . evolved in the course of actual composition.” Such critics do not see Godwin’s revisionary approach to the novel as upsetting the trajectory of his classical anarchism. Rather, Myers suggests that Godwin’s revisions in fact “both complete the moral pattern developed in the book and underscores the principle of impartiality which is the root of the moral system elaborated in *Political Justice*” (591).

¹⁹ See Wilson (1951), 38. Adapting the New Critical terminology of William Empson (1930) and Wayne C. Booth (1974), Tysdahl anticipates a more deconstructive potential in *Caleb Williams* by classifying the novel as exemplifying a radical type of ambiguity in which “two entire *Weltanschauungen* vie in catching our attention,” creating an “Unstable Irony,” as opposed to [a] Stable Irony” that would enable “a reader to reconstruct one definite meaning” (32). However, the unstable irony admitted by critics such as Booth is harnessed within a typology of rhetorical species and subspecies that classifies it as a “deviation” from, and thereby governed by, a normative, mediating form of irony that deals with relatively stable, recuperative meanings. Conversely, deconstructive critics such as de Man argue that irony as such is “unstable,” insofar as it begins from the recognition that “the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous” (*Blindness and Insight* 209).

writings had sought to bridge” (“Of Caleb’s Guilt” 940). How one interprets this gap between political expectation and literary expression – as an irreducible breach or prelude to affirmation – is crucial in determining Godwin’s relationship to anarchism and to post-anarchism. The breach itself admits a skepticism that reflects a turn from the rationalism of Godwin’s early work towards a more skeptical perspective that doubts reason’s vaunted capacity to provide definite and self-validating knowledge of the external world. Indeed, by the third edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin no longer sees reason as an “independent principle.” More and more influenced by his readings of Hume, Godwin begins to suggest that reason “has no tendency to excite us to action; in a practical view, it is merely a comparison and balancing of different feelings” (*PJ* “Summary of Principles” VI).²⁰ The inversion by which consciousness becomes a “calm” passion cuts off the more formalist implications of a rationalism that would exclude the tangled domain of affect from its moral analyses. Instead, Godwin begins to acknowledge that reason is not “archaic,” but is rather driven by a complex web of obscure, non-conscious motivations that persistently threaten to destabilize the axiom of a sovereign, transparent, and self-possessed consciousness.

Godwin’s recognition of a non-rational ground of consciousness suggests that affect cannot be contained within the rational forms that “regulate” it. In his revised versions of *Political Justice* and in his essays for the *Enquirer* (1797), Godwin argues that the illusion of a self-validating consciousness rests on a radically unstable ground: “ideas are to the mind nearly what atoms are to the body. The whole mass is in a perpetual flux; nothing is stable and permanent” and subsequently, “human affairs are so entangled, motives are so subtle and variously compounded, that the truth cannot be told” (*PJ* 1:35; *Enquirer* 261). “Truth” in this instance becomes the overdetermined effect of a tangle of motives whose causes remain obscure, a truth whose very appearance always bears the trace of its own groundlessness. Although Godwin maintains a certain efficacy

²⁰ In his facsimile edition of the 1798 edition of *Political Justice*, F.E.L. Priestley notes that Godwin begins to shift specific terms in his second edition to more adequately reflect a Humean position. Godwin rewrites all references to “cause” and “effect,” for instance, as “antecedent” and “consequent,” suggesting a movement away from the influence of the materialist determinism of French *philosophes* such as d’Holbach. See Godwin’s “Preface” to the first edition of *Political Justice*.

for reason in the form of a regulatory mechanism, his very definition gestures to the compensatory rather than foundational role of a rational consciousness guided by the strongest passion, exposing “the spectre of an Enlightenment subjectivity whose underlying emotive strata no longer bear any stable or discernible relation to reason” (Pfau, *Romantic Moods* 4). Acknowledging the ways in which Godwin eventually comes to see reason as the “mechanism” of the passions gestures towards an ambivalence that cannot be recuperated within an internally consistent sociopolitical program. Rather, as Pfau avers, Godwin’s fictions increasingly take the form of a “rigorous inquiry into the structure of consciousness and its elusive, indeed chaotic, a priori sources (impulses, emotions, anxieties, cryptic memories, etc.).” The consequence, Pfau continues, is that Godwin “renders anarchy less a political objective than the epistemological default” (20).

It is precisely this “default” – rather than the explicit “political objective(s)” of anarchism – that constitutes the major conceptual thread connecting the chapters that follow. My intention, then, is not to provide a means of bridging Godwin’s respective works of philosophy and literature on the basis of a sociopolitical conception of anarchism. Instead, I argue from the perspective that Godwin’s changing understanding of romance over the course of his career produces a dialogical relationship between philosophy and literature that acknowledges a more radical conception of anarchy as the *a priori* condition of the real, a condition that effectively deconstructs what May identifies as the *a priori* of classical anarchism: “humanist naturalism, the concept of a benign human essence” (75). My approach therefore necessitates a different conception of what is often understood by anarchy, the theorization of which is already partially signaled by the critical, rather than affirmative, aspects of post-anarchist theory.

Pfau’s sense that Godwin’s career gradually moves towards an *an-archic a priori* is already counter-intuitive, for it implies a revision of the normative relationship between anarchy and *archē* that, since Plato and Aristotle, has largely conceived the latter as the rational condition for the former.²¹ Standard definitions of *archē* reduce anarchy to

²¹ For a detailed discussion of the history of *archē* within the Western metaphysical tradition, from Plato and Aristotle through Duns Scotus, Leibniz, and finally to Heidegger, see Schürmann. For Schürmann, the

an adjectival derivative, the mere logical negation of a prior positivity, or the corruption of a pre-existing order or original plentitude upon which it parasitically depends. To conceive of anarchy as *a priori* would therefore be to deprive the original of its status as an uncontaminated point of departure. To understand the *a priori* as properly *an-archic*, *anarchē* cannot simply be reconstituted as a foundational principle. As Emmanuel Lévinas points out, to raise anarchy to the status of a principle is contradictory, and threatens to re-inscribe the very authority it sought to displace: “anarchy cannot be sovereign, like an *archē*. . . . [Anarchy] does not *reign*” (194 n3, 4). Nor can anarchy be understood simply as the (logical) negation of *archē*, a definition that remains conservative insofar as it ties anarchy’s existence to a principle already in place. Rather, to borrow Schürmann’s formulation, the *anarchē* at issue in this study names

a history in which the bedrock yields and where it becomes obvious that the principle of cohesion, be it authoritarian or “rational,” is no more than a blank space deprived of legislative, normative, power. Anarchy expresses a destiny of decline, the decay of the standards to which Westerners since Plato have related their acts and deeds in order to anchor them there and to withdraw them from change and doubt. (7)

Anarchy here refers to a hiatus in which the discursive principle(s) that hitherto organize a certain historical/social/political culture are no longer experienced as reliable. In this respect, anarchy well describes the turbulent historical situation in which Godwin’s writing career unfolds: first coming to prominence with *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* during the French Revolution, Godwin continues to publish throughout the revolutionary turbulence of the 1790’s, experiencing a twelve-year gap between his third and his fourth novels *Fleetwood* (1805) and *Mandeville* (1817), finally bringing out a history of Cromwell (*A History of the Commonwealth*, 1824-28), his last two novels (*Cloudesley*, 1830; *Deloraine*, 1833), a book of essays (*Thoughts on Man*, 1831), and a

definition of *archē* undergoes a metaphorical transference from Greek to Latin that sees it transformed first into the *princeps* of Scholasticism, which privileges a static hierarchical order of essences governed by Divine Prince, and finally reified into the “anthropologized origin” of a *principium* in the eighteenth century (116).

history of the occult (*Lives of the Necromancers*, 1834) all during the fractious period of the European Restoration.

Anarchy might also accurately describe the interregnum more broadly associated with the romantic period. Implicitly referring to Godwin's best-known work, Pfau comments that romanticism exhibits "a persistent dialectic between vaunted claims for spiritual renewal, political justice, and cultural innovation, on the one hand, and a continual sense of affective and epistemological bewilderment, on the other. . . . [R]omanticism's quest for solutions in the mediated, imaginary sphere of aesthetic productivity . . . reflects the period's conclusion that the languages by which the Augustans and Enlightenment had sought to make uneven sense of their experiential worlds were no longer reliable or even trustworthy" (*Romantic Moods* 1-2). The "blank" exposed by anarchy shows history to be governed less by an evolution that sublates error and discloses a foundational natural or rational law, than constantly interrupted by crises that dislocate the ideologically managed vision of history as linear and progressive. Anarchy, in this qualified sense, confronts the historical subject as implicated in necessities and antagonisms that can neither be predicted nor entirely overcome, while likewise disclosing a history that is, as Friedrich Schlegel argues of the romantic, "still becoming" (32). Anarchy is inextricable from the contingent, irruptive force of an *event* that retroactively shows the ostensible progress leading up to the present rife with antagonism, but also from a view of history as essentially incomplete and subject to contingency. As we shall see with Godwin's shifting views concerning his own doctrine of necessity, the latter loses its intentionality as a historically progressive movement and begins to signify a force of vicissitude closer to what Percy Shelley calls "Power" in "Mont Blanc," a force that leads Godwin, in his later revisions to *Political Justice*, to explicitly question whether "improvement has been the constant characteristic of the universe" (*PJ* 1:452-3).

Anarchy, in Schürmann's sense, can also be associated with a broader theoretical problematic as the erosion of "*the rational production of that anchorage*" that allows for a withdrawal from self-questioning (6). Anarchy discloses the contingency behind any metaphysic that claims a priority of essence or presence. The "blank space" behind

institutions is also a theme for Newman's post-anarchism, and goes some way to characterizing the nature and function of the *an-archic a priori*. For Newman, if anarchy is to avoid circumscribing itself as a moral or rational human essence, an irrational nihilism, or an overzealous model for revolutionary "practice," it can no longer appeal to "an actual place outside power and discourse from where domination . . . can be opposed" (141). Anarchism remains a form of bad faith insofar as it reveals the artificiality of institutions only to reassert a more "natural" ground for society in an unquestioned rational and moral essence. Insofar as anarchy is said to expose a blank behind institution, it can therefore no longer claim the privilege of a more primary, archaic, ground. In the same sense, this nothingness cannot simply be reaffirmed as the "essence" of society as in nihilistic versions of anarchy, which seek merely to abolish the social. Rather, anarchy names "that which denies society an essence," something that does not "seek the founding of a new order, but rather the displacement of all orders – including its own. . . . [Anarchy] does not reject essence, but rather constructs its essence as a non-essence" (Newman 149, 124). This essence, paradoxically (re)constructed as its own non-essence, points to the contingent rather than foundational basis of a political subjectivity or historical culture never completely able to grasp itself.

To understand anarchy as *a priori* is to see this contingent "non-essence" as paradoxically constitutive rather than derivative. Anarchy might thus be considered "older" than *archē* in the same manner that Derrida suggests that writing is older than speech. "Older," in this instance, signifies a logical rather than chronological or essential priority, the priority of a differential "infrastructure" over the self-presence attributed to metaphysical ideas of *archē* as a first principle, the original, undivided, and uncontaminated essence underlying its contingent manifestations. Infrastructure, as Rodolphe Gasché argues, names a "preontological" figure that cannot be described in terms of the canonical oppositions (order-disorder, presence-absence, being-nothingness) that it engenders. As preontological, infrastructure indicates the non-logical *condition of possibility* for "every logical proposition": "infrastructure belongs to a space 'logically' anterior and alien to that of the regulated contradictions of metaphysics" (149).

The anteriority of the infrastructure signifies the “open matrix” of differences through which oppositions are engendered, an “irreducible complexity” for which the metaphysics of *archē* cannot account in a propositional language structured according to binary code. It is by “means of such infrastructures,” Gasché remarks, that one might account “for the differences that fissure the discourse of philosophy” (147). Rather than discover an uncontaminated human, natural, or social essence prior to institution, an anarchist hermeneutic must therefore account for this infrastructure, unmasking “rift behind closure, discord behind harmony . . . [,] the dark, turgid, struggle of silent forces . . . precariously held in check by notions such as human essence, morality, rationality, and natural law” (Newman 51). Unmasking *archē* requires a hermeneutic no longer aimed at the discovery of an ultimate ground, but rather the disarticulation of any metaphysic that seeks repose in the original, a hermeneutic not unlike what Foucault identifies with the Nietzschean concept of genealogy: “The [genealogical] search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 147).

Anarchy can be called *a priori* as the preontological infrastructure of complexities, differences, antagonisms, and disunities “before” to the emergence of a natural, monological, and uncontaminated point of departure. In its strictly regulated, Manichean, opposition between the organic life of society and the pneumatic artificiality of institutions, the sociopolitical discourse of classical anarchism situates itself according to a propositional-denotative language that claims to represent an essential core of reality that exists beneath the external, irrational, corruptions of power. To the contrary, Gerald L. Bruns suggests that a more accurate description of anarchy would name the “refractory region excluded by an integral rationality that disposes everything according to the rule of unity and identity” (6). On the hither side of what can be articulated in propositional language, anarchy reveals the “unity and identity” of *archē* as an ameliorative construction through which a historical culture or an individual subjectivity protects itself from the disclosure of its own groundlessness. According to Bruns, anarchy must therefore be understood “not as a position that might or might not be adopted but as a state of affairs, that is, a fact of the matter that cannot be done away with,” what Jean-Luc

Nancy analogously calls “the fact of existence as the essence of itself,” a fact that signals the incessant “putting into question of an affirmation” (Bruns 188; Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom* 11, 18).

In order to distinguish this more skeptical, (self-)questioning, conception of anarchy from both sociopolitical anarchism and blindly destructive nihilism, I follow Schürmann in using the Greek term *anarchē*. Terminologically, *anarchē* has the advantage of combining *archē* with the privative *an-* in such a way that it makes graphically visible an incompleteness within the structure of *archē* itself, rather than suggesting a specific sociopolitical ideology or one half of a simplified antithesis between order and disorder. At the same time, *anarchē* makes visible a conception of anarchy that cannot be reduced to a vicarious notion of freedom beyond all constraint. Soldered to *archē*, the privative *an-* gestures to strategic questioning of *archē* that more accurately reflects Godwin’s historical and ideological positioning as a writer who challenges Enlightenment rationality from within. Articulated from the point of view of an insistent questioning of an affirmation, *anarchē* is not a release from the strictures of tradition into a completely new, non-repressive, order of existence, but an internal provocation that exceeds *archē* by questioning the values that it represents. *Anarchē* in this sense is not the negation of *archē* so much as the interior disturbance, questioning, and illumination of the aporetic infrastructure proper to *archē* itself.

This conception of *anarchē* as the hither side of the propositional language is disclosed through literary language. Indeed, Godwin’s career could be said to articulate a persistent renegotiation of the discontinuous relationships between the genres of “literature,” “romance,” and “history.” Early on, Godwin follows an Enlightenment definition of literature as a vehicle for social change and thus antithetical to romance, which is reduced to a form of false consciousness. Near the end of the eighteenth century, however, Godwin shifts to a more complex understanding of romance and its relationship to theories of history that had become prominent during the Scottish Enlightenment. Romance becomes a way of resisting the positivism of the Scottish historiographers and the means through which Godwin reconnects to a history that is neither strictly factual nor actuarial but counter-factual, thereby opening a space for individual histories

otherwise foreclosed by the generalizing tendencies of historians such as Hume and William Robertson. But from his very first work of fiction, Godwin also appears to be aware of the duplicity of a pure reason that can only be articulated through the very literary language it would condemn as false.

In this respect, Godwin's career does not exactly follow a pattern that passes from a naïve belief in the omnipotence of reason to disillusionment so much as it perpetually re-stages a negative dialectic between his political/rational idealism and a skeptical awareness of this idealism as groundless. Such tensions cannot be entirely overcome through what Godwin calls the gradual "extirpation of errors." On the contrary, Godwin's emerging sense of the groundlessness of an anarchism predicated on reason is terminal and can only be reconstituted at the expense of forgetting that reason's self-mastery is illusory. Reason cannot fully recover from an exposure to its own *anarchē*, since the latter does not belong to the order of antitheses that reason needs in order to establish itself as a unity. Literary language, as another site of resistances to assimilation by propositional discourse, becomes the problematic site upon which Godwin confronts an *anarchē* that goes beyond classical political anarchism. As such, a tributary aim of the work that follows is to make a case for Godwin as a *romantic* writer, rather than an Enlightenment rationalist, or, to use Mark Philp's terms, a "sophisticated" utilitarian, who also wrote novels as a means of expressing his sociopolitical views (*Godwin's Political Justice* 159). Interpreted as a "romantic anarchist," Godwin can therefore be understood alongside Rajan's definition of romantic literature as "a literature involved in the restless process of self-examination, and in search of a model of discourse which accommodates rather than simplifies its ambivalence" (*Dark Interpreter* 25).

1.3 Chapter Outline

A study of the *anarchē* within Godwin's anarchism cannot properly begin without an examination of his seminal philosophical work, *Political Justice*. My second chapter thus engages with several of the major themes of *Political Justice*, including Godwin's definitions of perfectibility, institution, necessity, and subjectivity, emphasizing the conceptual and terminological shifts between Godwin's revisions of the text that Pfau

describes as eroding of the “totalizing aspirations” of his earlier rationalism. These transitions feature a revised approach to subjectivity that follows from the increased influence of Hume’s displacement of reason as *archē*. Godwin no longer conceives of reason as an “independent principle” but re-articulates the self as a groundless, protean figure in constant flux. To emphasize the radicality of this displacement, I read Godwin’s turn towards a more skeptical point of view through Deleuze’s anti-foundationalist, anti-positivist rereading of Humean empiricism. For Deleuze, the Humean breakthrough has less to do with the well-known empiricist ideas concerning the primacy of sense-data – the model through which skepticism is ultimately displaced by positivism – than a theory of subjectivity that foregrounds a radically contingent subjectivity that constitutes itself as a subject without a transcendental or pre-given orientation. In the absence of any clear link to a rational ground, I argue that Godwin’s definition of the “perfectibility” of the subject necessarily shifts towards a radically deconstructive conception of thought as the incessant revision and re-thinking of its own assumptions, the ungrounding of that which has been posited, including what the mind itself would hypostasize as “truth” or reason according to a history of rational or moral progress.

Chapter 3 extends the analysis of *Political Justice* into a reading of Godwin’s contemporaneous first novel, *Caleb Williams* (1794). *Caleb Williams* marks the first of Godwin’s texts to move beyond a straightforwardly utopian perspective on his anarchism. Situating the novel in relation to Godwin’s initial distinction between Enlightenment “literature” and the illusory “dreams of romance” in the first edition of *Political Justice*, a dichotomy that looks forward to classical anarchism’s assertion of “natural” over “artificial” authority, *Caleb Williams* shows these terms to be mutually contaminating rather than antithetical. Invoking Godwin’s later characterization of the novel as a psychological “dissection” of his characters’ motives, I suggest that *Caleb Williams* offers a nascent example of a genealogy of classical anarchism’s morals that exposes the groundlessness of Caleb’s search for a justice beyond the trappings of institutional power. Rather, Godwin shows this justice not only to be implicated in the false consciousness it seeks to deny, but also conditioned by a deeper, *an-archic* “curiosity,” a “restless propensity” and “fatal impulse” that dispossesses the subject as the transparent origin of a deliberative, rational truth. Focusing on the unpublished and published versions of

Godwin's conclusion to the novel, I then argue that the text moves from a sense of defeatism to an idea of "responsible anarchy" forced to account for this dispossession, and as such providing an opening for Godwin to re-think his anarchism as a task yet to be fully worked-through.

The following chapter engages in a close reading of Godwin's unpublished essay "Of History and Romance" (1797), which, alongside his revisions to *Political Justice*, marks a major revision of his earlier assumptions concerning fiction and its relationship to history. Where *Caleb Williams* sought to expose the false consciousness of romance through literary realism only to show this "realism" to be equally romanticized, "Of History and Romance" argues for the renewed importance of romance as a genre capable of re-articulating individuality as a form of radical historical contingency. Tracing the various ambiguities in Godwin's attempts to distinguish between the categories of general history, individual history, and romance, I argue that Godwin theorizes an individual that is no longer the self-possessed rational subject, but is rather a metaphor for an *anarchē* that resists assimilation into generalizing models of historical discourse emphasized by the historiographers of the Scottish Enlightenment. As such, Godwin cannot entirely constitute the romantic subject as something outside of history; rather, he re-articulates this subject according to a counter-factual theorization of "real history" as romance, which opens the potential to see history with an eye towards what could have been.

Chapter 5 reads the tangled relationship between history and romance with its literary counterpart, *St. Leon* (1799). The novel, which tells of an aristocrat whose gambling addiction causes him to waste his inheritance and who eventually discovers the philosopher's stone, inverts the approach of *Caleb Williams* by subjecting the romanticized/idealized figure of the alchemist to the vicissitudes of history. St. Leon's ambition, which leads him to ruin his family and sees him reviled by all those he tries to aid with his boundless wealth, has often been read in apologetic or reactionary terms as a literary representation of the failure of a politics founded on rational perfection. Such an interpretation, however, implicitly or explicitly valorizes the conservative ethos of domesticity represented by St. Leon's angelic wife Marguerite. To the contrary, I argue

that *St. Leon* can be also be read more *an-archically* in terms of an experiment with the counter-factual that re-articulates the individual's historical potential to unsettle institutions. While undesirable from a moral point of view, *St. Leon*'s respective proclivities towards gambling and alchemy are structurally connected through a shared unpredictability in which the relationship between cause and effect becomes unreliable. Such unreliability, I claim, opens the possibility of experimenting with ideas in history, so that *St. Leon* can claim that "the world is open" (147).

My final chapter analyzes Godwin's late novel *Mandeville* (1817), which, I suggest, constitutes his most radical literary expression of *anarchē*. Where *St. Leon* concludes with a more hopeful, if skeptical, indication of anarchism's historical (im)possibilities, *Mandeville* returns to the site of an individual history to expose the psychic and social traumas that unwork liberal models of history as progressive. By far Godwin's darkest fiction, *Mandeville* documents the torments of its eponymous protagonist, a Royalist during the Cromwellian period of British history. After witnessing his parents' slaughter in the Irish Revolt of 1641, the titular Charles Mandeville is raised in the ancestral home of his shut-in uncle and becomes the misanthropic rival of a popular and eloquent schoolmate, Clifford. The latter appears as a paragon of the upwardly mobile liberal progressive, a signifier for the emerging modernity whose affirmative discourse of inclusiveness, opportunism, optimism, and self-interest, is juxtaposed with Mandeville's "unusable" negativity.²² My argument, however, resists the tendency embraced by most critics to see Mandeville's tortured misanthropy as debilitating pathology and historical failure. To the contrary, Mandeville exemplifies the *anarchē* of a history that refuses to be posited in the public history of counterrevolution and Restoration, a radically nonproprietary existence that discloses the underside through which the *archē* of the "good" and the "normal" legitimize themselves. In doing so, Mandeville raises the spectre of another history, a history of the other – vividly

²² That is, a refusal to put "negativity" to work in the conventional Hegelian logic in which the negative is generative of the overall movement by which Spirit reproduces itself in and as history. Unusable negativity is theorized in particular by Bataille (1989) as the interminable excess of unproductive energies beyond the restricted use of this energy for utilitarian purposes by individual entities. See also Blanchot (1995), 300-66.

symbolized in the final pages of the novel in Mandeville's metaphoric identification with the slaves of the West Indies – that returns to haunt civilization with its discontents.

In many ways, the deterioration of the reified foundations of society can be understood as an explicit theme of Godwin's philosophical anarchism, insofar as it targets any discourse that has become hypostasized and any tradition that claims permanence. Initially, Godwin appears to oppose institution only to reassert the *archē* of an "uncontaminated" idea of reason and justice and a confidently teleological vision of history. Yet, key moments in Godwin's philosophy and his literary texts provide tools by which to disclose the gaps and antagonisms within classical anarchism's affirmative rhetoric. In turn, Godwin's career can be shown as a recursive movement in which his philosophical ideals are experimented upon in and as literature, which in turn provokes more sophisticated philosophical reflections and reformulations of the tangled relationships between the subject and its unconscious "ground," the subject and history, history and romance. As such, one can perceive in Godwin an implicit challenge to the pragmatic anthropology that post-anarchism will criticize in the classical anarchist movement to which Godwin himself gives birth. If Godwin has been canonically understood as the "origin" of anarchism, then the goal of this study is to argue, as Derrida likewise says of the *différance* at the heart of every origin that would claim absolute self-presence, that the complexities raised by Godwin's oeuvre demonstrate a "non-simple . . . differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name 'origin' no longer suits it" (*Margins of Philosophy* 11).

Chapter 2

2 “So Variable and Inconstant a System”: The *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*

“Such, I am afraid, is man. Mixed in all his qualities, and inconsistent in all his purposes. . . . [I]t is vain that the philosopher sits in his airy eminence, and seeks to reduce the shapeless mass into form, and endeavours to lay down rules for so variable and inconstant a system: Nature mocks his efforts, and the pertinacity of events belies his imaginary hypothesis.”

- Godwin, *Italian Letters* (1784)

Any reconsideration of Godwin’s anarchism necessarily begins with an examination of his philosophical masterwork, the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. *Political Justice* marks the most sustained expression of Godwin’s anarchism and, for a time, made its author a prominent voice amongst a circle of rational dissenters in Britain that included Richard Price, John Thelwall, Thomas Holcroft, and his first wife, Mary Wollstonecraft. As Hazlitt comments, the appearance of *Political Justice* in February of 1793 brought Godwin to “the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity; he blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after, and wherever liberty, truth, justice was the theme, his name was not far off” (179-80). The radicality of *Political Justice* comes in posing the question of whether there is some way of pursuing the ideal of a more just society at a moment in which this ideal is contested at all sides, not only by the repressive measures of the Pitt government and the increasing violence of the French Revolution, but by any internal or external forms of coercion that would impede the sovereign deployment of reason. At the heart of Godwin’s answer to such difficulties lies his dual conviction that “man is perfectible, or in other words susceptible of perpetual improvement” (*PJ* 1:86), and his belief in a universal principle of justice that supersedes “the shrine of positive law and political institution” (*PJ* 1:13). Where perfectibility names a principle of gradual, evolutionary progression through which an individual, and a society, outstrips the need for institutions,

what Godwin will call the “euthanasia” of government, justice constitutes the *archē* that grounds the gradual movement towards a society in which “immutable reason is the true legislator” (*PJ* 1:221). Anticipating Proudhon, Godwin explicitly rejects “the evils of anarchy” (*PJ* 2:367-9) and, in turn, argues that society seeks order in “anarchism.”

Very much a product of the Enlightenment, *Political Justice* demonstrates the attempt to substitute monarchical with rational authority that post-anarchist theory associates with the essentialism of classical anarchist theory. To a great extent Godwin encourages such views, making persistent reference throughout *Political Justice* to an “unalterable rule,” an “abstract and immutable” principle of justice obtained through the rigorous exercise of impartial judgment, and setting the stage for nineteenth-century anarchism’s orthodox metaphysical desire for a pure place of resistance beyond the artifices of power (*PJ* 1:145). As already suggested in the previous chapter, Godwin’s Appendix on the “Prolongation of Human Life” speculates on a future in which the rational mind will be completely “omnipotent over matter,” thus liberating humanity from necessity. At the same time, Godwin’s successive revisions to *Political Justice* show the text moving away from the rationalism of the first edition and towards the empirical language of Locke, Helvetius, and Hume.²³ Writing in 1800, Godwin suggests that *Political Justice* was “blemished principally by three errors”: Stoicism, “Sandemanianism, or an inattention to the principle that feeling, and not judgment, is the source of human actions,” and finally “the unqualified condemnation of the private affections.” “The first of these errors,” Godwin continues, “has been corrected with some care in the subsequent edition of *Political Justice*. The second and third owe their destruction to a perusal of Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature*” (*Collected Novels and Memoirs* 1:54).

²³ All references to the earlier editions of *PJ* in this chapter are taken from the third volume of the facsimile edition of the 1798 version of the text edited by Priestley. The third volume of Priestley’s edition notes all of the changes that Godwin had made to both the 1793 and 1796 editions of *PJ*, thus providing a tangible record of Godwin’s revisions and a means to trace the shifts in his thinking about his politics over the course of the 1790’s.

More traditional criticism often tends to read the anarchism of *Political Justice* either as a “Platonic” rationalism or a proto-utilitarianism²⁴ whose recovery of feeling engenders a principle of “universal benevolence” in Godwin that prefaces nineteenth-century anarchism’s hope for a society based on “mutual aid” (Newman 42). Godwin’s subsequent attention to feeling, moreover, has been interpreted as a byproduct of his relationship with Wollstonecraft, which, it is argued, led him to “soften” his prior emphasis on rational disinterestedness.²⁵ However, such readings tend to emphasize an overall consistency within Godwin’s philosophical project that minimizes the deconstructive potentials implicitly generated within a text that collapses, in its very attempts to accommodate, the antithetical discourses of Platonic rationality and empirical skepticism. Thus, although a critic such as Peter Marshall points to the heightened skepticism of the second and third editions of the text, he also accedes to Godwin’s own view that the “spirit and the great outlines” of the work remain fundamentally unchanged (*William Godwin* 156).

However, if empiricism, as Zuzana Parusnikova argues with respect to Hume, works “against the spirit of foundations” in its “skeptical conclusions concerning the legitimacy of our knowledge,” then Godwin can no longer posit the legislative, normative power of an *a priori* principle as an uncontaminated point of departure for a rational anarchism (4). The inclusion of empiricism within *Political Justice* leads Godwin to uneasily juxtapose the *archē* of justice with a skeptical epistemology that renders this principle uncertain, the contingent or fictive projection of a mind for which reason is no longer *a priori*, and thus incapable of guaranteeing an underlying *archē-telos* through which subjectivity and history could be understood as perfectible. This uncertainty likewise affects the significance of Godwin’s introduction of “feeling” into *Political Justice*: where more orthodox interpretations tend to minimize feeling as incidental to Godwin’s overarching project, feeling bears the potential to substantively unground

²⁴ In “Platonism in William Godwin’s *Political Justice*” (1943), Priestley invokes Godwin’s recurring use of “absolute” principles against the conventional association of *Political Justice* with empirical and utilitarian thought by critics such as C.H. Driver (1931) and Elie Halevy (1934).

²⁵ Philp argues that Godwin’s shift towards the language of sensibility can be explained by his changing circle of friends between 1790-6 and, especially, the influence of Wollstonecraft (189-223).

Godwin's rational politics by displacing and complicating its very foundations. As Pfau suggestively remarks, a closer look at Godwin's transition towards empiricism in *Political Justice* discloses a "growing awareness of its own programmatic impossibility"; hence, "few treatises" would "seem to call for a deconstructive reading more loudly than Godwin's magnum opus" (*Romantic Moods* 115).

Following this deconstructive impetus, this chapter will argue that Godwin's growing awareness of the "impossibility" of a rational anarchism begins to surface in the interstices of this crucial revision of his conceptual lexicon from rationalism to a more empirical approach in successive editions of *Political Justice*. In order to disclose the *an-archic* dimensions within this shift, I depart from traditional definitions that reduce empiricism to an incipiently positivist or utilitarian doctrine that sees knowledge as derived from the senses alone.²⁶ Rather, this chapter takes its cue from Deleuze's radical re-interpretation of Humean empiricism as the starting point for the displacement of any transcendental rational *archē*: "We can now see the special ground of empiricism: . . . nothing is ever transcendental" (*Empiricism* 23). As Bruce Baugh points out, Deleuze's empiricism is "a concern for contingency . . . and a resistance to universalizing abstractions through emphasis on . . . particularity" and experimentation (133). Deleuze's approach to empiricism will allow us to (re)read Godwin's own empiricism otherwise, as an opening gesture towards what Jon Klancher identifies as Godwin's passage from "necessity" to "contingency" ("Godwin and the Genre Reformers" 28-33). Unlike Klancher, however, this chapter sees this transition *within* the very discourse of necessity that Godwin maintains in *Political Justice*; that is to say, for my own argument, Godwin's discussion of necessity in the later editions of *Political Justice* is not opposed to contingency so much as it becomes another means of expressing it.

Nonetheless, insofar as Godwin does not completely abandon the language of perfectibility, *Political Justice*'s turn towards skepticism is not entirely self-consuming. Nor does Godwin's approach to anarchism simply capitulate to the positivist or utilitarian

²⁶ This classical or "textbook" definition of empiricism, as Derrida points out in *Of Grammatology*, produces a reification of experience as the positive ground of knowledge, thus reinstating experience as another form of metaphysical "presence": "Experience has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not" (60).

concern with matters of fact. Rather, Godwin's use of empiricism allows us to reread the programmatic impossibility of perfectibility so as to see it as a thinking that points beyond itself and, as such, remains opposed to "things as they are." In this respect, this chapter argues that one might read perfectibility as less programmatic than "diagrammatic," in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of a future potentiality that "does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 142). In this sense, one might discover that the means of avoiding the more absolutist tendencies of Godwinian perfectibility may be within the very terms of perfectibility itself, albeit a perfectibility whose encounter with empiricism dissolves its status as *archē*. In turn, *Political Justice* can be read as a framework for a more (self-)critical or deconstructive anarchism that, as Sue Chaplin argues, begins to approximate deconstructive approaches to the idea of "justice" (119). If, as Godwin argues, perfectibility requires that "we should never consider the book of enquiry as shut," the task of "unlimited speculation" must be open to "new information" that would be capable of modifying previous knowledge, overturning ideas that have become reified – what Godwin names "institutions" (*PJ* 1:68, 3:241, 1:220). But if enquiry is to be truly unlimited and open to the new, it must also be involved in a restless process of scrutinizing and revising its own foundations.

The chapter that follows unfolds this argument through an examination of several interconnected ideas central to *Political Justice*. I first explore how Godwin's skeptical epistemology reimagines subjectivity through empiricism as a groundless, "Protean" figure in constant flux. I then explore how this idea informs, and complicates, Godwin's definitions of institution and his attempt to re-found anarchism on the basis of perfectibility. Institution functions primarily by "positing" itself as something foundational and permanent, rather than the reified product of contingency and circumstance. To the contrary, Godwin defines perfectibility as that which unfixes thought from institutional stasis. Godwin nonetheless attempts to discipline this "unrestrained" form of thinking within a conception of reason that his own epistemology skeptically dismantles. In the wake of this dismantling, the final section reconsiders Godwin's conceptualization of perfectibility and justice as anticipating more post-anarchist and deconstructive approaches that no longer interpret justice through the

totalizing metanarrative of rationality. The consequence, I argue, is that while Godwin rhetorically remains within the confines of Enlightenment, his sense of justice as an emphasis on the particular or the singular *logically* deprives justice of its legislative authority. In doing so, Godwin opens the possibility of reading perfectibility as a signifier for the *an-archic* (in)completion and ever-renewed task of the political.

2.1 Arrested Development: Epistemology and the Positive Institution

In a prefatory “Note to the Reader” for his 1976 edition of the third version of *Political Justice*, Isaac Kramnick cites a footnote in which Godwin recommends that “the reader who is indisposed to abstruse speculations will find the other members of the Treatise sufficiently connected without express reference to this and the three following chapters of the present book,” namely, “Of Free Will and Necessity,” “Inferences from the Doctrine of Necessity,” “Of the Mechanism of the Human Mind,” and “Of Self-Love and Benevolence.” Kramnick seconds Godwin’s advice by suggesting that further chapters “may be passed over without jeopardy to the more important arguments in the book,” including “The Characters of Men Originate in their External Circumstances” and “The Voluntary Actions of Men Originate in their Opinions” (56-7); in short, Kramnick extends Godwin’s recommendation to suggest that one might overlook the entire epistemology that underwrites Godwinian anarchism.

I call attention to Kramnick’s “Note” less to criticize Kramnick himself than to highlight how conventional approaches to *Political Justice* often marginalize Godwin’s “abstruse speculations” in favour of his more overtly political arguments. Reducing Godwin’s epistemology to a secondary concern for his anarchism proves difficult when assessing his novels and his later emphasis on “individual history” in “Of History and Romance,” both of which foreground the psychological as a complex and irreducible element within the political. As this section will argue, it is precisely those chapters considered secondary in *Political Justice* that find Godwin beginning to problematize his own desire for a rational anarchism. Moreover, Godwin reads against the grain of his own advice by pointing out that the epistemological is primary to understanding the nature and

extent of the influence of institution. In the much expanded and revised fourth chapter to the 1796 and 1798 editions, titled “The Characters of Men Originate in their External Circumstances,”²⁷ Godwin writes that although his first three chapters have “collected a very strong presumptive evidence” against “political institutions” we “can never arrive at precise conceptions relative to this part of the subject without entering into an analysis of the human mind” (*PJ* 1:24-5). Godwin’s political aims are therefore subtended by a rigorous enquiry into the epistemological basis upon which political subjectivity is formed. This epistemology, in turn, would then become the ground upon which classical anarchism will model its vision of society. However, the growing influence of Humean empiricism in *Political Justice* will place this vision in question by implicitly raising the problem of whether such optimism is justifiable within the demands of an epistemology that skeptically abjures the axiomatic role of foundations.

Godwin’s epistemology begins from a skeptical questioning of whether one can ever obtain certain knowledge of any objective “substance” that exists external to the mind: “we know nothing of the substance or substratum, or of that which is the recipient of thought and perception. . . . [T]he common and received opinion, that we do perceive such ground” is “nothing more than a vulgar prejudice” (*PJ* 1:25 n2, 369).²⁸ In the absence of any verifiable, substantial *a priori* in which to ground thought, Godwin follows Hume’s well-known arguments concerning the self as a “bundle or collection of different perceptions” in perpetual flux, rather than a formal container in which ideas inhere. “Ideas are to the mind nearly what atoms are to the body,” writes Godwin, “the

²⁷ See *PJ* 3:141-3. In the 1793 edition, this chapter was originally Chapter 3 of Book 1, and was titled “The Moral Characters of Men Originate in their Perceptions.” Godwin added pages 24-9 to the 1796 edition (*PJ* 3:141), which includes the injunction that an examination of the epistemological and psychological is necessary to arrive at any “precise conceptions” of the political. In a footnote added to the second edition, Godwin criticizes the “overscrupulousness” of the first edition for neglecting a more thorough examination of epistemology, which, following Locke and Helvetius rather than Hume, had simply asserted the absence of innate principles to ground the original equality of individuals at birth (*PJ* 3:142).

²⁸ In the 1796 edition, Godwin added a reference to Boscovich to the second note on *PJ* 1:24-5 (3:141), which only previously contained references to Locke, Helvetius, Rousseau’s *Emile*, and Hartley’s *Observations on Man* (3:142). Godwin likely knew Boscovich’s *Theoria Philosophiae Naturalis* (1763), which had rejected the existence of primary qualities in physics, through his friend Joseph Priestley. See Schofield (2004), 2:71-5. Nietzsche also credits Boscovich’s theorization of atoms as “centres of force,” rather than material entities, with having dethroned substantialist ontologies. See Poellner (1995), 48-57. In the third edition, Godwin then added references to Berkeley and Hume.

whole mass is in a perpetual flux; nothing is stable and permanent; after the lapse of a given period not a single particle probably remains the same” (Hume, *Treatise* 252; Godwin, *PJ* 1:35).²⁹ The mind is a fluid medium in which “there is the unity of uninterrupted succession, the perennial flow as of a stream, where the drop indeed that succeeds is numerically distinct from that which went before, but there is no cessation. . . . [A]n infinite number of thoughts passed through my mind in the last five minutes” (*PJ* 1:411). Though the stream appears unified, it cannot be called “simple” in the sense of indivisible: “there is nothing less frequent than the apprehending of a simple idea.” Rather, this “stream” is an irreducible complexity in which “every perception is complicated by a variety of simultaneous impressions” and “imperceptibly modified by the miniature impressions which accompany it. . . . Of thought, it may be said, in a practical sense, what has been affirmed of matter, that it is infinitely divisible” (*PJ* 1:412-4).³⁰

For Godwin, as for Hume, the mind is “a collection without an album,” “a pure and dispersed anarchic multiplicity, without unity or totality” in which elements are “welded, glued together by . . . the very absence of a link” (Deleuze, *Empiricism* 23; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 324).³¹ Infinite divisibility serves as the *a priori* of thought, the *an-archic* infrastructure presupposed by and against which all abstract or positive features of consciousness will appear: “the resolution of objects into their simple elements is an operation of science and improvement; but it is altogether foreign to our first and original conceptions. . . . We do not begin with the successive perception of elementary parts till we have obtained an idea of a whole; but beginning with a whole, are capable of reducing it into its elements” (*PJ* 1:407). Although described as a “whole,” the empirical mind is not a “totality” since it entirely lacks the constancy and uniformity

²⁹ *PJ* 1: 35-51, which detail Godwin’s idea of consciousness as an unstable “flux,” were added to the 1796 edition, replacing a shorter passage in the 1793 version in which Godwin outlined his thoughts on education (3:142).

³⁰ Godwin first mentions “infinite divisibility” in the second edition of *PJ*, with slight revisions to the punctuation and wording of the passage for the third edition. The first edition reads: “it is perhaps a law of our nature, that thoughts shall at all times succeed to each other with equal rapidity” (*PJ* 3:174).

³¹ “The mind,” Hume argues, “is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations” (*Treatise* 253).

that constitute the formation of ideas as generalities or “elementary parts.” Rather, in its “original conceptions,” the mind is nothing but “delirium, contingency” and does not have the properties of a “pre-existing subject” (Deleuze, *Empiricism* 29). Godwin’s overall picture of the self is not that of a “simple” atomic entity presupposed by liberal traditions, but a complex of impulses, ideas, and affects woven together from disparate strands: “everything . . . may be said to be in a state of flux; he is a Proteus whom we know not how to detain” (*PJ* 1:151).³²

Godwin extends this epistemological insight into a claim that “continual flux appears to take place in every part of the universe. . . . [M]ind, as well as matter, exhibits a constant conjunction of events” (*PJ* 1:412, 368). “The history of the universe,” according to Godwin, is composed of an infinite “train of antecedents and consequences”: “everything in the universe is linked and united together. No event, however minute and imperceptible, is barren of a train of consequences, however comparatively evanescent those consequences may in some instances be found” (*PJ* 1:159, 42). Godwin here adapts a classical doctrine of necessity inherited from Spinoza, Leibniz, Baron d’Holbach, and Roger Boscovich that sees the “universe” as an interimplicated “chain of events, generated in the lapse of ages going on in regular procession through the whole period of our existence” (*PJ* 1:384), an ever-receding series of antecedents that never reaches any definitive terminus. For Godwin, a terminal-point can “never be discovered”: “trace back the chain as far as you please, every act at which you arrive is necessary” (*PJ* 1:377). Such claims would seem philosophically problematic alongside Godwin’s use of empiricism, since his attempt to describe a necessity within the “history of the universe” itself transgresses the skeptical embargo against assuming the objective existence of properties which we can only determine as principles of the mind. According to Frank Evans III, Godwin’s importation of psychological necessity into a supposition about the natural universe transforms his empiricism into a “hardened dogmatism” (640). Yet, Godwin’s paradoxical adoption of Humean terms such as “antecedent” and “consequent” to describe this history, which increasingly replaces his

³² The Protean image of “man” first appears in Chapter 4 of Book 2 (“Of Personal Virtue and Duty”), which Godwin almost completely rewrote for the second edition of *PJ*.

references to the deterministic language of cause and effect in the first and second editions of *Political Justice*, suggests that his view of necessity is not reducible to a dogmatic materialism.³³ On the contrary, because Godwin conflates “necessity” with the infinite divisibility he discerns within the anarchy of the mind, his image of the universe begins to approximate something infinitely self-differentiating, thus rendering any clear distinction between necessity and contingency undecidable.

Godwin’s recognition that the complex *an-archically* precedes the simple within the mind and also within the “universe” itself provides some initial insight into his critique of institutions. Playing off of the etymology of the term itself – institution (*in-statuere*) being formed out of the PIE base *sta-*, which goes into words like stasis, state, statue, static, stagnant, station, stability – Godwin defines the latter as that which is “calculated to give perpetuity to any particular mode of thinking” (*PJ* 1:xxvi; Scrivener 616). In this sense, Godwin does not limit institution to external phenomena such as government; rather, institution describes a way of being or a disposition of thought, a govern-mentality that could be said to be the conditioning possibility for the emergence of more identifiable state apparatuses. Institutions are generalizations that become “habits of a second sort”:

In this state of the human being, he soon comes to perceive a considerable similarity between situation and situation. In consequence he feels inclined to abridge the process of deliberation, and to act today conformably to the determination of yesterday. Thus the understanding fixes for itself resting places, is no longer a novice, and is not at the trouble continually to go back and revise the original reasons which determined it to a course of action. Thus the man acquires

³³ See especially Godwin’s revisions to Book 4, Chapter 9, “Of the Mechanism of the Human Mind,” in the 1798 edition of the text, which replaces most references to cause and effect from 1793 and 1796 with “consequent” and “antecedent” (*PJ* 3: 173). By 1798, Godwin had removed much of the deterministic language he had adopted from French materialists such as d’Holbach. For example in Book 4, Chapter 8 of the 1798 edition, Godwin replaces a reference to the “idea of the universe” as a “body of events . . . connected and cemented in all its parts, nothing in the boundless progress of things being capable of happening otherwise than it has actually happened” with “the experienced succession of antecedents and consequents” (*PJ* 3:171; 1:384). See also Priestley’s Supplementary Critical Notes to Book 4, Chapter 7: “The phrasing in the third edition is modified to conform with the Humean criticism of causality. . . . ‘[C]ause and effect’ become ‘antecedent and consequent’” (*PJ* 3:123).

habits from which it is very difficult to wean him, and which he obeys without being able to assign either to himself or others any explicit reason for his proceeding. This is the history of prepossession and prejudice. (*PJ* 1:65)

Prepossession occurs when one is “engrossed by a particular view of the subject” to the detriment of other perspectives, reifying certain experiences into fixed “resting places” (*PJ* 1:81), hypostases that give thought the appearance of having arrived at a conclusive truth. Institution, in short, is the repose of thought. Such repose is the consequence of an epistemology in which the anarchy of the mind achieves “stasis” through a fictioning of identity via the principles of association, “the property which one thought existing in the mind is found to have, of introducing a second thought through the means of some link of connection between them” (*PJ* 1:405).³⁴ Association “naturalizes” the mind by drawing relationships between discontinuous impressions, facilitating easy transitions that produce the belief in causation and necessity, and imposing constancy on the mind’s delirium by organizing it into a “system” or identity. For this identity to exist, the ideas associated in the mind must also be regarded as separate from the flux of immediate impressions from which it is composed (80), what Hume calls the “*feigning* [of] a continu’d being which may fill those intervals” between impressions, “and preserve a perfect and entire identity to our perceptions,” enabling the mind to “go beyond what is immediately present to the senses” (qtd. in Deleuze, *Empiricism* 82; emphasis mine). As Godwin likewise puts it in a later essay, “we frame propositions, and, detaching ourselves from the immediate impressions of sense, proceed to generalities” (*Thoughts on Man* 244). Although generalities allow one to move beyond the anarchy of the mind so as to make possible any knowledge whatsoever, they also demonstrate a natural tendency of thought to confuse similarity with permanence.

Godwin will also frequently refer to institution as “positive,” a term that has extended significance in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries prior to its canonization as “positivism” by Comte. In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical*

³⁴ Godwin’s extended meditation on association, which begins in the final paragraph of *PJ* 1:404, was added for the 1796 edition (*PJ* 3:173).

Sciences (1816-32), Hegel defines the positive as the fiction of something impervious to change, “quietly abiding within its own limits,” while Schelling’s 1802 lectures *On University Studies* describes the “positive sciences” as discourses that “attain to objectivity within the state” (Hegel, *Logic* §92, 10; Schelling 78-80). Schelling further characterizes the positive sciences as “historical”; that is, as sciences at the service of state power and therefore limited by the prepossessions of their finite historical contexts. Schelling’s sense of positive sciences as “historical” can also be discerned in the French *Encyclopédie*, another influential source for Godwin’s thought. In his entry on “Natural Law,” d’Argis aligns positive laws with convention and consensus, cross-referencing it with private and public civil codes and the laws of nations. Analogously, Louis de Jaucourt frames his article on “Parental Authority” with respect to “the positive laws of God that relate to the obedience of children,” while Romilly’s entry on virtue argues that one “not seek for what constitutes virtue in positive laws, nor in human conventions; these laws are born, altered, and succeed each other, like those who make them.”

Whatever is positive demands obedience through the illusion of permanence, universality, and the non-relativity of its own values. In Godwin’s view, the “history” of political society chiefly consists in the prolonged stasis of old values, whose sedimentation leads the present to conform to the “determinations of yesterday.” Like Paine and the other Jacobin radicals, Godwin sees such determinations exemplified in the quasi-mythical origins and traditions codified in social hierarchies and discourses of national law defended by conservatives such as Edmund Burke. Such “fictions of law,” as Godwin calls them, constitute a “Gothic and unintelligible burden” on the present, instituting the positivity of a history prepossessed and mapped out in advance with reference to a mysterious, unfathomable foundation (*PJ* 2:101). Consequently, Godwin will also draw a suggestive comparison between institution and the biological theory of pre-formation,³⁵ which claims there is a “mystical magazine, shut up in the human embryo, whose treasures are to be gradually unfolded” (*PJ* 1:31). Pre-formation suggests

³⁵ The mention of pre-formation in *PJ* suggests that Godwin was at least partially aware of the debate in biology between pre-formation and epigenesis begun in 1759 by embryologist Caspar Friedrich Wolff. See Mayr (2007), 156-8.

that “nothing more,” writes the Abbé Pluche in his 1732 *Spectacle de la nature*, “will be produced in all the ages to follow. . . . [E]lements always the same, species that never vary, seeds and germs prepared in advance for the perpetuation of everything . . . *Nothing new under the sun*” (qtd. in Lovejoy 243). Pre-formation in biology, like prepossession in thought, is an institution because it compels us to think of life within already established patterns, whether it be of ideas or life-forms. Godwin’s description of pre-formation here echoes what Kant identifies with determinant judgment. Like determinant judgment, pre-formation suggests that “the universal (rule, principle, or law) is given” and “subsumes the particular under it,” thereby restricting knowledge to the limitations and prejudices of what is already known (*Critique of Judgment* 15). In Godwin’s terms, the determinant has a tendency to “fix the human character independently of any species of education” and thus independently of any potential improvement: “How long has the genius of education been disheartened and unnerved by the pretence that man is born all that it is possible for him to become?” (*PJ* 1:43).

2.2 The *Anarchē* of Perfectibility

As we shall see in Chapter 4, in both “Of History and Romance” and his later essay “Imitation and Invention” for *Thoughts on Man*, Godwin explicitly rejects the doctrine that there is “nothing new under the sun.” In *Political Justice*, Godwin’s observation that “flux” constitutes the basic character of both mind and nature already gestures to the radical instability of any form of thought that would institute itself as permanent. Since “not a single particle” within the mind is the same from one moment to the next, institution is constituted on a forgetting of its own contingent emergence from an *anarchic* “ground” that does not prepossess it. Godwin therefore contrasts institutional stasis with a model of thinking as “enquiry” that is itself in flux and open to perpetual revision, the “incessant industry” of a “curiosity never to be disheartened or fatigued, by a spirit of enquiry to which a philanthropic mind will allow no pause. . . . [E]verything most interesting to the general welfare, wholly delivered from restraint, should be in a state of change” (*PJ* 2:231-2). As Alain Thévenet points out, for Godwin “the principal criticism that one can make of government is that it aims at maintaining things in a state and is thus opposed to the flux of life, to the law of change” (29; translation mine).

This more flexible model of thought's "progressive nature" is precisely what Godwin identifies with perfectibility in the second and third editions of *Political Justice*: the "faculty of being continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement" (*PJ* 1:116, 93). Accordingly, Godwin distinguishes perfectibility from "perfection." Achieved perfection, within the context of Godwin's turn towards empiricism, falls within the definition of a "fiction" hypostasized as institution, since it would mean "an end to our improvement" (*PJ* 1:93). Like his skeptical reconsideration of the unstable epistemological ground of the political subject, Godwin's qualification of perfectibility as improvement in the revised second edition of *Political Justice* is a significant shift from the edition of 1793. In the second edition, the discussion on perfectibility in Chapter 5 of Book 1 – titled "The Voluntary Actions of Men Originate in their Opinions" – replaces Book 1 Chapter 4 of the first edition, in which Godwin previously discussed "The Three Principle Causes of Moral Improvement": literature, education, and political justice.³⁶ Although Godwin had used the word "improvement" in 1793, the rhetoric of the earlier chapter remains deterministic, invoking literature, education, and political justice as "causes" by which "the human mind is advanced towards a *state* of perfection" (*PJ* 3:239; emphasis mine). Improvement, in this instance, is a temporary moment through which history passes on its way to an achievable end "state" of perfection. Thus, although Godwin admits that "it is not easy to define the exact proportion of discovery that must necessarily precede political melioration," "when the most considerable part of a nation, either [because of] numbers or influence, becomes convinced of the flagrant absurdity of its institutions, the whole will soon be prepared tranquilly and by a sort of common consent to supersede them" (*PJ* 3:242).

In the revised editions of the text, Godwin theoretically aligns perfectibility with flux rather than a "state of perfection," recognizing, through the growing influence of Hume, how empiricism ungrounds the reliability of any philosophical language of determining causes that could be used to justify an objectively existing state of the world. We have already seen, in our introductory chapter, how this shift in Godwin's thinking

³⁶ See "Omitted Chapters" in the Priestley edition, *PJ* 3:239-47. I discuss Godwin's understanding of "literature" in the first edition of *PJ* in the following chapter.

displaces his view of a perfected state of existence by relegating it to an “Appendix” that is, as Godwin twice warns us, only “mere speculation.” At the same time, Godwin’s skeptical turn in 1796 and 1798 also generates a more anxious counter-desire within *Political Justice* to maintain the *archē* of an “immutable justice” that would be capable of ensuring the “progressive nature” of perfectibility, one that would discipline the potentially self-consuming implications of the unconditional flux of thought (*PJ* 1:186, 155). Through the authority of justice as a “true foundation,” Godwin could then deduce “the moral equality of mankind [sic],” by which he understands “the propriety of applying one unalterable rule of justice to every case that may arise. This cannot be questioned, but upon arguments that would subvert the very nature of virtue” (*PJ* 1:145).

As an unquestionable principle, Godwin appears to situate justice in the form of what Ernst Cassirer identifies as Enlightenment’s fascination with the “concept of the law *as such*.” The law “as such” is opposed to both “theological dogma” and “state absolutism,” because it is a rule that is “not founded in the sphere of mere power and will but in the sphere of pure reason. . . . It is an ‘ordering order’ (*ordo ordinans*), not ‘ordered order’ (*ordo ordinatus*)” (238-40). Godwin extends this idea of justice as a transcendental “ordering order” further where he discusses the individual’s right to private judgment. As Andrew McCann points out, the “public sphere is suspect for Godwin, because its structures faithfully replicate the logic of a state political apparatus antithetical to enlightened public interaction” (“William Godwin and the Pathological Public Sphere” 203). Wherever “universal consent” would establish “absurdity and injustice,” Godwin argues that “the most insignificant individual ought to hold himself free”: “If a congregation of men agree universally to cut off their right hand [or] to shut their ears upon free enquiry . . . in all these cases they are wrong, and ought unequivocally to be censured for usurping an authority that does not belong to them. They ought to be told, ‘Gentlemen, you are not . . . omnipotent; there is an authority greater than yours, to which you are bound assiduously to conform yourselves’” (*PJ* 1:166). Justice is not the product of a consensus between individuals but an exercise of a right to private judgment as the “only legitimate principle” capable of “imposing on him the duty of adopting any species of conduct” (*PJ* 1:181). As such, Godwin suggests that while governments and institutions are themselves the products of convention and a

certain agreement between individuals, truth itself “cannot be made more true by the number of its votaries. Nor is the spectacle much less interesting, of a solitary individual, bearing his undaunted testimony in favour of justice, though opposed by misguided millions” (*PJ* 1:220).

In light of Godwin’s epistemological skepticism concerning foundational principles, this proto-romantic vision of the individual heroically asserting the non-contingent authority of a right to private judgment against the “vulgar mob”³⁷ seems aporetic. Insofar as this right is not subject to “consensus” but, simultaneously, cannot be considered “static” in the same sense as an institution, Godwin anticipates what one might call a “quasi-transcendental” view of justice. The quasi-transcendental, as Gasché argues in his reading of Derridean *différance*, names an originary ground that is neither an origin nor a ground in the traditional sense. Rather, the quasi-transcendental is a “nonfundamental structure” that “simultaneously grounds and ungrounds” (155). The quasi-transcendental is, in a certain sense, *an-archic* insofar as it does not completely negate the transcendental, but deploys the inescapable language of the transcendental to suggest an “outside” or condition that such language cannot fully apprehend within its own boundaries, an anterior rather than “ulterior” principle that is paradoxically “more ‘originary’ than any classical origin” (Gasché 152). Both beyond law and epistemologically unverifiable, what Godwin identifies as justice names both the condition of possibility *and* impossibility of the private judgment that it ostensibly “grounds.”

But Godwin’s quasi-transcendental sense of justice also appears to reconstitute an orthodox metaphysical binary in which justice appears as an ultimate “truth” or *archē* capable of expelling institution as an artificial, hence removable, attribute of human nature: “the vices and moral weaknesses of man are not invincible. . . . Vice and weakness are founded upon ignorance and error; but truth is more powerful than any champion that can be brought into the field against it; consequently truth has the faculty

³⁷ The influence of Milton’s Satan on Godwin, and on anarchism more generally, becomes especially evident in this passage. As Scrivener suggests, Godwin “has not been duly credited for developing the ‘Satanic’ reading of *Paradise Lost*” (618). See also, *PJ* 1:72, 323.

of expelling weakness and vice, and placing nobler and more beneficent principles in their stead” (*PJ* 1:92). Such claims might be said to lend credence to the post-anarchist critique of classical forms of anarchism that simply replace one authoritative *archē* with another. As such, Godwin remains within the hierarchical structure in which the inversion of institution for perfectibility, “stasis” for “flux,” reaffirms the very authority it claims to overthrow. At least initially, Godwin’s rationale for justice as a “true foundation” simply appears unconvincing. Not unlike Kant’s equally strained claim for a “guiding thread of reason” in history to ward off the vertiginous thought that “man’s actions on the world stage” may in fact be “aimless” (“Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent” 120-1), Godwin seems to assert a quasi-transcendental principle of justice and perfectibility for no other reason than a fear that the absence of such principles “would subvert the very nature of virtue.” Perfectibility reserves the right to question everything but its own legislative authority. In this respect, what Deleuze says of Kant’s moral philosophy appears salient with respect to Godwin: “We are legislators ourselves only insofar as we make proper use of [the faculty of reason] and allot our other faculties tasks which conform to it. . . . Reason represents our slavery and our subjection as something superior which make us reasonable beings” (*Nietzsche* 92-3).

However, the very terms of Godwin’s skepticism implicitly raise the question as to whether his irrepressible faith in justice can claim even a quasi-transcendental status for *archē*, or if such foundations can no longer function as anything more than what Reiner Schürmann had identified with *anarchē* as “a blank space deprived of legislative, normative, power.” Such issues become evident with Godwin’s progressive displacement of reason within the conceptual vocabulary of *Political Justice*. Under the sixth section of the “Summary of Principles” added to the 1798 edition, Godwin writes that “reason is not an independent principle, and has no tendency to excite us to action”; rather, “the voluntary actions of men are under the direction of their feelings” (*PJ* 1:xxvi). No longer “independent,” Godwin ungrounds reason’s legitimacy as a principle capable of guiding subjective agency such that it becomes “merely a comparison and balancing of feeling.” At the same time, Godwin wants to maintain reason as a quasi-transcendental means of disciplining feeling: although reason “cannot excite us to action, it is calculated to

regulate our conduct,” and thus “it is to the improvement of reason . . . that we are to look for the improvement of our social condition” (*PJ* 1:xxvi).

Nonetheless, within Godwin’s own epistemological framework, “improvement” can no longer function as an axiom that would secure an enlightened vision of history as teleologically progressive. Since reason is no longer privileged as an autonomous agency within the mind, improvement itself becomes contingent, the chance byproduct of an anarchy of conflicting motivations and affects that can never be completely apprehended within a stable form, only momentarily “balanced” by a rationality that always comes too late to grasp the underlying causes that govern its so-called voluntary actions. Consequently, Godwin sees rational consciousness as “a sort of supplementary reflection” that “seems to be a second thought” rather than something foundational (*PJ* 1:404). Where the first edition of *Political Justice* places the supplementarity of consciousness within a teleological passage from the “involuntary” to the “voluntary” or intentional,³⁸ Godwin’s increased emphasis on an *an-archic* substructure of thought and the loss of reason’s “independence” in his revisions discloses the impossibility of reason’s ability to coincide with itself. Consciousness only “advert[s] to its own situation, and observes that it has it” (*PJ* 1:404) through a process of supplementation that paradoxically separates it from what it is conscious *of*, namely, itself: in order to be self-conscious, consciousness must hollow itself out as an “impartial” other who observes it, rendering the structure of self-knowing incomplete in the moment of its very completion. As Pfau avers, Godwin’s conception of a mind subject to an infinite, uninterrupted flood of thoughts *an-archically* displaces rational consciousness as “forever catching up with its own origin” (*Romantic Moods* 118).

By disclosing the anarchic substructure of thought, Godwin likewise exposes the groundlessness of an Enlightenment subjectivity predicated on the freedom of the (rational) will. In the first edition, Godwin had also rejected the doctrine of free will,

³⁸ In the 1793 edition of the chapter, Godwin writes: “here it may be proper to observe, that, from the principles already delivered, it follows that all the original motions of the animal system are involuntary. In proportion however as we obtain experience, they are successively made the subjects of reflection and foresight; and of consequence become many of them the themes of intention and design” (3:173).

claiming that “all actions are necessary,” but that involuntary actions could be “successively made the subjects of reflection and foresight; and of consequence become many of them the themes of intention and design” (*PJ* 3:173). In all three editions, Godwin thus argues that subjectivity is “founded in actions originally involuntary” (*PJ* 1:65). Godwin identifies voluntary actions as those accompanied by foresight and “decisions of the understanding.” However, such actions are the “effects” of involuntary, sub-representational processes rather than deriving from the intentionality of an ego: “it will be absurd for a man to say, ‘I will exert myself.’ . . . Man is in reality a passive, and not an active being” (*PJ* 1:389). Godwin subsequently undermines the idea that the individual is capable of functioning as its own, autonomous *archē*: “man is in no case strictly speaking the beginner of any event or series of events that takes place in the universe” and cannot be “a cause of that paramount description, as to supersede all necessities.” Thus, Godwin admits that although the mind is a “proper antecedent, it is in no case a first cause” (*PJ* 1:385-6, 420).³⁹ These “methods of operation” remain largely inscrutable for consciousness, such that the volition normally conceived as the product of a rational will seems “accidental” rather than essential: “volition is the accidental, and by no means the necessary concomitant, even of those thoughts which are most active and efficient in the producing of motion. It is therefore no more to be wondered at that the mind should be busied in the composition of books, which it appears to read, than that a train of thoughts of any other kind should pass through it, without a consciousness of its being the author” (*PJ* 1:420).

Godwin here touches upon the vertiginous sense of a self that is largely unaware of itself, a self besieged by a delirium of unconscious traces capable of interrupting and intersecting with consciousness at any moment. Godwin begins to see consciousness as “supplemental” to the anarchy of subconscious processes that compose it, appearing as a

³⁹ In 1793 and 1796, Godwin had written that the mind functions as an “efficient cause,” which he then replaces with the more Humean “antecedent” in 1798 (3:174). Priestley suggests that Godwin eventually moves away from a deterministic stance towards a conception of free will. However, Godwin clearly rejects free will on multiple occasions. Even in the later *Thoughts on Man* where Godwin claims that free will might constitute “the most important chapter” in the “science of man,” he still identifies it as a “delusive sense” that is, at best, socially pragmatic but by no means grounded in the “essence” of man (231, 239). In the final instance, Godwin states that he remains “persuaded . . . that the phenomena of mind are governed by laws altogether inevitable as the laws of matter” (232).

kind of island floating in a delirious sea of memories, sensory traces, and random associations that, because the mind is “always thinking” (*PJ* 1:414), constantly threaten to overwhelm the dictates of the understanding:

One impression after another is perpetually effaced from this intellectual register. Some of them may with great attention and effort be revived; others obtrude themselves uncalled for; and a third sort are perhaps out of the reach of any power of thought to reproduce. . . . If the succession of thought be so inexpressibly rapid, may they not pass over some topics with so delicate a touch so as to elude the supplement of consciousness? (*PJ* 1: 411-2).

Godwin does recognize something of this *anarchē* of consciousness in the first edition of *Political Justice* when he acknowledges that there may exist alongside “the most methodical series of perceptions . . . going on in the mind, . . . another set of perceptions, or rather many sets playing an under or intermediate part; and, though these perpetually modify each other, yet the manner in which it is done is in an eminent degree minute and unobserved” (*PJ* 3:174). However, this insight is tempered by the absence of the majority of his discussion of epistemology in the expanded fourth chapter in Book 1 for the 1796 and 1798 editions to account for his reading of Hume’s *Treatise*.⁴⁰ The 1793 version thus sees Godwin downplay the *an-archic* conception of a mind composed out of the interference of multiple “sets” of perceptions by introducing it as something that “deserves to be remarked[,] by the way” (*PJ* 3:174), but not expanded upon or supplemented by an epistemology that largely remains assumed rather than examined in detail. It is not until the second and third editions that Godwin more obviously broaches the anxious acknowledgement that the constant “effacement” of the innumerable traces of experience and memory within our “intellectual register” suggests the persistence of an elusive and deeply contingent activity capable of intruding upon, and grafting its own ends onto, the ostensibly placid surface of rational consciousness.

⁴⁰ See note 25, above.

2.3 Perfectibility and/as Potentiality

The broader consequences of this epistemological skepticism for Godwin's anarchism and his theories of perfectibility and justice are significant. On the one hand, Godwin argues that the "universe" is in flux, but a flux mechanically disciplined in the form of a linear and teleological course of constant improvement in which mankind is perfected "through various stages of folly and mistake" (*PJ* 1:151). Yet, if both mind and matter are infinitely divisible, neither prepossessed nor preformed and therefore open to perpetual revision and modification, Godwin opens the possibility of reading perfectibility and justice beyond their roles as "archaic" determinants as particularly utopian forms of potentiality or, as Godwin puts it, as "tendency" or "capacity" (*PJ* 1:85). As Rajan remarks, potentiality or capacity is not "inevitably progress, but the possibility opened by the persistence of utopian desire across the impossibility of confirming spirit's hope for a teleological progression" ("Spirit's Psychoanalysis" 190).

The "incessant industry" by which perfectibility deconstructs the "resting places" of the mind exposes a tenuous homology between its own striving and the groundless flux of a necessity permeating all of nature that potentially alienates progress from itself. Despite his belief in progress, Godwin also skeptically observes that "the human species seems to be but, as it were, of yesterday. Will it continue for ever? The globe we inhabit bears strong marks of convulsion, such as the teachers of religion, and the professors of natural philosophy, agree to predict, will one day destroy the inhabitants of the earth. Vicissitude therefore, rather than unbounded progress, appears to be the characteristic of nature" (*PJ* 1:453).⁴¹ Historical necessity, as an unlikely convergence of natural

⁴¹ Godwin's reflection on vicissitude is coupled with some suggestively *critical* remarks against philosophical "optimism," which form part of a chapter added in 1796 ("Of Good and Evil") that replaces the original Book 4 Chapter 9, "Of the Tendency of Virtue." In the latter Godwin had argued, following his rejection of the Hobbesian principle of self-interest in the previous chapter (also omitted from the second and third editions of *PJ*), that virtue "consists in seeing every thing in its true light, and estimating every thing at its intrinsic value" such that "even bodily pain loses much of its sting, when it is encountered by a chearful [sic], a composed, and a determined spirit" (*PJ* 3:321-22). In the second and third editions, Godwin replaced his earlier chapter with a more cautious reply to those (including himself, perhaps) who would derive overly optimistic consequences from the tendencies of virtue and perfectibility, stressing not only their radical uncertainty and rarity, but also anticipating something of Schopenhauer's pessimistic necessitarianism: "It may be worthy of remark, that the support the system of optimism derives from the

philosophy and religion, here appears as something more *an-archic*, an excessive and indifferent agency of “vicissitude” rather than progress. If necessity requires that everything is connected with everything else, then the character of man cannot be fundamentally different from that of nature; that is to say, Godwin could not adhere to the doctrine of necessity if only “man” is progressive, while nature is not. However, if “vicissitude” is the character of nature, then progress itself may be nothing more than an imaginary hypothesis. Godwin’s shifting view of natural history as vicissitude thus pushes the goals of progress and reason further out of historical necessity and into the “abstruse” realm of speculation. Indeed, Godwin suggests that the very definition of perfectibility attests to an analysis interminable in which *archē* dissolves into the evanescent nothingness of an ever-receding horizon: “in many cases the lines, which appear to prescribe a term to our efforts, will, like the mists that arise from a lake, retire further and further, the more closely we endeavour to approach them” (*PJ* 1:92). Moreover, the etymology of the term “vicissitude” itself in the Latin *vicissim*, meaning “turn, change,” suggests the incursion of a non-linear view of time that frustrates the teleological definition of perfectibility. If both psychic and natural history are characterized less by the calm fluctuations of gradual, logical progression, than by an *an-archic* and discontinuous incursion of events, vicissitudinal turns, convulsions, or “revolutions” – a term popular with Godwin’s literary protagonists – then the future cannot be determined in advance.

In the same vein, because Godwin rejects pre-formation as a kind of institution, one might see perfectibility as analogically closer to epigenesis, which describes the progressive development of an embryo out of the amorphous flux of an egg cell, or in Godwin’s proto-Lockean terms, the emergence of the mind from its originary state as “an

doctrine of necessity, is of a very equivocal nature. . . . [T]he rashness of the optimist will appear particularly glaring, while we recollect the vast portion of pain and calamity that is to be found in the world . . . All nature swarms with life. This may, in one view, afford an idea of an extensive theatre of pleasure. But unfortunately, every animal preys upon his fellow. Every animal, however minute, has a curious and subtle structure, rendering him susceptible . . . of piercing anguish. We cannot move our foot, without becoming the means of destruction. . . . It may be said, with little license of phraseology, that all nature suffers” (*PJ* 1:457).

unfinished sketch” through a process of infinite division and self-differentiation (*PJ* 1:36). Epigenesis inscribes a development and a potentiality that can only be unfolded in and as experimentation, what Deleuze defines as the contingent “self-movement and becoming-other” of the empirical subject (*Empiricism* 85). Similarly, for Godwin, perfectibility advances with “a rapidity and firmness of progression of which we are, at present, unable to conceive the idea” (*PJ* 2:486-7); that is, perfectibility unfolds without a concrete sense of the changes it wants, as the contingent working-through of ideas not yet “instituted,” since one cannot tell until “after the experiment, how eminent any individual may be” (*PJ* 1:215). Hence, Godwin writes, “that of which I am capable . . . as to my conduct today,”

falls extremely short of that of which I am capable as to my conduct in the two or three next ensuing years. For what I shall do today I am dependent upon my ignorance in some things, my want of practice in others, and the erroneous habits I may in any respect have contracted. But many of these disadvantages may be superseded, when the question is respecting what I shall produce in the two or three next years of my life. Nor is this all. Even my capacity of today is in a great degree determinable by the motives that shall excite me. When a man is placed in circumstances of a very strong and impressive nature, he is frequently found to possess or instantaneously to acquire capacities which neither he nor his neighbours previously suspected. (*PJ* 1:151)

Though Godwin often frames reason’s potential within an enlightened optimism about the future, he also gestures to a more uncertain potential in referring to unknown “capacities” that arise “when a man is placed in circumstances of a very strong and impressive nature.” Similarly, Godwin elsewhere writes that “capacity” functions in two senses: first, in a quasi-Aristotelian, instrumentalized sense of a form that can be brought out of a certain substance and the use to which this form is applied: “Thus a given portion of metal, may be formed, at the pleasure of the manufacturer, into various implements” (*PJ* 1:150). When Godwin refers to capacity in human nature, however, it becomes “a subject attended with greater ambiguity,” since “it is easier to define . . . the permanent qualities, of an individual knife, for example, than of an individual man” (*PJ* 1:151). We

cannot know our “capacities” in advance of the experiment, and experimentation subjects perfectibility to an “unlimited dissemination” that exposes “progress” to contingency: “the seeds of virtue may appear to perish before they germinate” (*PJ* 1:151, 1:452, 3:289).

Nonetheless, because these seeds only “appear” to perish, Godwin also implies that their loss is never absolute; rather, potentials continue as latencies capable of being realized “at some future period” (*PJ* 1:220). Nor does Godwin’s reference to “seeds” of possibilities buried within the self and society⁴² simply re-inscribe a romantic or organicist ideology that has recourse to a pre-formative rhetoric in which the possible takes precedence over the real or the historical. As Priestley points out in his *Critical Notes* to the third edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin later appears to reverse his attitude towards pre-formation in *Thoughts on Man*, arguing that “every child that is born, has within him a concealed magazine of excellence.” Yet, Godwin also goes on to say that although these seeds of “excellence” are “all there,” they remain “folded up and confused” and cannot be appealed to in the manner of a grounding principle, an identity or “essence” (*PJ* 3:118; *Thoughts on Man* 270). As “confused,” such potentials are both irreducibly non-simple and call for their own epigenesis through experimentation, such that their outcomes always remain uncertain and open to different articulations. This acknowledgement complicates Godwin’s prior confidence, reflected in a passage from 1793 subsequently omitted from the revised versions of the text, that “if the embryo sentiment at present existing in my mind be true . . . it will not fail to shew itself” (*PJ* 3:160). Conversely, in the revised versions of the text, Godwin appears more aware of the contingency of such improvement, that the unfolding and effects of this embryonic truth are not guaranteed.

In this sense, perfectibility can be seen as having a “reflective” rather than determinant value, in Kant’s sense of a mode of judgment “compelled to ascend from the particular in nature to the universal,” and which *an-archically* “stands in need of a

⁴² See especially Shelley’s well-known metaphor of the “future contained within the present, as the seed within the plant” in his “Defence of Poetry” (*Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* 481).

principle” (*Critique of Judgment* 15-6). Godwin will therefore draw a distinction between determinant practices such as Law and more reflective notions of justice:

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, [law] endeavours to reduce the actions of men, which are composed of a thousand evanescent elements, to one standard. . . . If, on the contrary, justice be a result flowing from the contemplation of all the circumstances of each individual case . . . the inevitable consequence is that the more we have of justice, the more we shall have of truth”; “no two crimes were ever alike, and therefore the reducing them, explicitly or implicitly, to general classes, which the very idea of example implies, is absurd. (*PJ* 2:403-4, 347)

Godwin draws out this reflective rather than determinate model of judgment from what he calls the “great principle of natural philosophy” first asserted by Leibniz,⁴³ the identity of indiscernibles. Briefly, the principle of indiscernibles states that no two distinct substances exactly resemble each other or have exactly the same properties. In *Thoughts on Man*, Godwin explicitly invokes Leibniz on this point: “How many men now exist on the face of the earth? Yet, if all these were brought together, and if, in addition to this, we could call up all the men that ever lived, it may be doubted, whether any two could be found so much alike, that a clear-sighted and acute observer might not surely distinguish the one from the other. Leibnitz [sic] informs us, that no two leaves of a tree exist in the most spacious garden, that, upon examination, could be pronounced perfectly similar” (198).

The principle of indiscernibles posits that every individual entity has within itself an interior “seed” of difference that comprises the singularity and irreducibility of the “case.” Conversely, Godwin perceives Law as a “theoretical” discourse that effaces indiscernibles in that it collects “the circumstances of a certain set of cases, and arrange[s] them” and consequently “leaves out such as are particular” (*PJ* 1:343). Law

⁴³ See “Discourse on Metaphysics” in *G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters* (1969), 308.

unfolds through what Foucault calls a “homogenous space of orderable identities and differences” that excludes or marginalizes that which cannot be codified “within a taxonomic area” or a generic structure (*Order of Things* 292, 137). Through its potential both to introduce new epistemic material and to “diversify” prior knowledge, since according to Godwin every new idea that “offers itself to the mind is modified by all the ideas that ever existed in it” (*PJ* 1:114), justice’s concern for the singular opens it to constant revision and supplementation: “In practice . . . those circumstances inevitably arise which are necessarily omitted in the general process: they cause the phenomenon, in various ways, to include features which were not in the prediction, and to be diversified in those that were” (*PJ* 1:344).

In this respect, Chaplin points out that *Political Justice* begins to approximate a deconstructive approach to justice. Godwin’s conceptualization of a justice that is at once situated “beyond” law and focused on the singular anticipates a deconstructive approach in which Derrida similarly distinguishes between law as the mere “general application of a rule” and justice as the encounter with an “event” that, insofar as it cannot be grasped *a priori*, “exceeds calculation, rules, programs, anticipations” (Derrida, “Force of Law” 27). In order to account for the particularity effaced by law, justice cannot itself be “grasped” or represented since it would then become law. Rather, as Newman argues, this deconstructive sense of justice can be called *an-archic* not because it names a principle above all other principles, but because it “functions as an open, empty signifier: its meaning or content is not predetermined” (128). For both Godwin and post-anarchist theory, justice approaches political and legal discourse from a perspective that exposes their groundlessness in order to stress the way that these discourses remain open to perpetual reinterpretation. The “omnipotence of truth” and the universality of justice are thus predicated on the quasi-transcendental “impossibility” of its own omnipotence and universality. Truth does not bring an end to progress, but rather produces further differentiations, suggesting an infinite process of supplementation: “there is no science that is not capable of additions” (*PJ* 1:119). Perfectibility might then be understood less in a teleological sense than as a process of reflective judgment in which “additions which never reach a total and subtractions whose remainder is never fixed” (Deleuze, *Dialogues II* 55). Despite Godwin’s mention of an “omnipotence” of truth, the very logic of

perfectibility implies that there is never a universal truth as such, only what Deleuze calls “heterogeneous processes of rationalization, which are very different depending on the different domains, epochs, groups and people. They never stop aborting, sliding, getting into impasses, but also pulling themselves together elsewhere, with new measures, new rhythms, new attitudes” (158). The only event or experience that would be capable of validating a principle of universal justice would be the future, which is precisely what remains unknown.

If Godwin’s skeptical epistemology renders the foundational rationality and omnipotent truth at the basis of classical anarchism untenable, perfectibility and justice offer the possibility of thinking beyond the “present” that prevents this skepticism from becoming self-consuming. Godwin puts his empiricism to the task of a more speculative enquiry that corresponds to perfectibility as a politics without finality. Thus, in an important revision added to the 1798 edition of the text, Godwin qualifies his earlier confidence concerning the proto-romantic definition of “truth” as a vatic power capable of conceiving “all things, past, present, and to come, as links of an indissoluble chain”⁴⁴ and as enabling the rational subject “to surmount the tumult of passion” and “reflect upon the moral concerns of mankind with the same clearness of perception, the same firmness of judgment, and the same constancy of temper, as we are accustomed to do upon the truths of geometry” (*PJ* 1:396). In 1798, however, Godwin adds a paragraph immediately following this statement that exemplifies his growing skepticism and an awareness that such powers are, at best, are “temporary” and can never therefore reach any kind of closure that is not immediately subject to critique (*PJ* 1:396). “A sound philosophy may afford us intervals of entire tranquility,” Godwin writes, “but the essence of the human mind will remain. Man is the creature of habit; and it is impossible for him to lose those things which afforded him a series of pleasurable sensations, without finding his thoughts in some degree unhinged, and being obliged . . . to seek, in paths untried, and in new

⁴⁴ What Godwin identifies with “truth” in this instance begins to approximate conventional representations of the visionary Romantic imagination and the “Great Chain of Being.” Compare, for instance, Blake’s description of the Bard in his introductory poem to *Songs of Experience* (1794) “Who sees Present, Past, & Future” (E 18).

associations, a substitute for the benefits of which he has been deprived” (*PJ* 1:396).⁴⁵ In short, in 1798 Godwin radically diminishes reason’s capacities in favour of a more skeptical acknowledgment that the mind’s “essence” is not the “uncontaminated point of departure” that will become important for classical theorists of anarchism. Instead, Godwin acknowledges the possibility that the mind’s “progress” is always potentially self-sabotaging. Thus, Godwin jeopardizes any sense of perfectibility as teleology, since the establishment of new “truths” incites the construction of new conventions that would in turn call for their own deconstruction. Reason may never achieve the disinterested tranquility that Godwin calls the “perfectly voluntary state” in which “we may finally obtain an empire over every articulation of our frame” (*PJ* 2:520). Progress can never entirely sublimate its own vicissitudes: taken to the end of its own suppositions, perfectibility must be both self-revising and self-critical. Perfectibility is, in this sense, a thought driven by its own insufficiency.

Even within the more skeptical terms of the revised editions to *Political Justice*, the *anarchē* within the self-revising and self-critical role of perfectibility and justice remains largely implicit rather than explicit. Again and again, Godwin returns to an orthodox Enlightenment rhetoric that circumscribes his anarchism as the desire to substitute traditional forms of authority with the authority of rationality or truth. It will be within the domain of fiction that Godwin will excavate and explore the more *an-archic* potentials within the Protean “system” of *Political Justice*. However, over the course of his revisions to the text, Godwin also invests rationality with an authority that can no longer be justified within the context of its own epistemological suppositions. At the same time, it is precisely reason’s groundlessness that engenders the need for perpetual self-revision, and opens a path to reinterpret and extend perfectibility and justice beyond themselves so as to signify an *an-archic* potential that questions things as they are, as an exposure to that which cannot be determined in advance, or the very opening of a space for what might yet be possible.

⁴⁵ See *PJ* 3:172.

Chapter 3

3 The History of an Error we call Truth: *Caleb Williams*

“In appearance, or rather, according to the mask it bears, historical consciousness is neutral, devoid of passions, and committed solely to truth. But if it examines itself and if, more generally, it interrogates the various forms of scientific consciousness in its history, it finds that all these forms and transformations are aspects of the will to knowledge: instinct, passion, the inquisitor’s devotion.”

- Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

In *Political Justice*, Godwin expresses the standard of an “omnipotent truth” of rational justice and an emphasis on the particular that renders this truth only the truth of its potential for de-standardization or revision. Revision and re-thinking being their own modes of “progress,” perfectibility aims at releasing knowledge from fixed institutional forms by following particulars experimentally, without fully anticipating where they might lead. Although Godwin attempts to protect perfectibility’s capacity for interminable revision from self-revision, his own revisions to the 1793 version of *Political Justice* begin to move away from the conception of reason as an “independent principle” or *archē*, unsettling the possibility of an uncontaminated point of departure from which classical anarchism derives authoritative notions of resistance to institution, and from which it unfolds a rectilinear, teleological version of history.

Godwin’s emergent circumspection with respect to omnipotent truth as the ground of a rational anarchism is intensified with the publication of his first novel, *Things as they Are, or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). Published almost immediately following the first edition of *Political Justice*, the novel’s plot revolves around the eponymous Caleb, a lower-class orphan who begins to suspect that his well-regarded benefactor Ferdinando Falkland once committed murder. When Falkland discovers Caleb’s suspicions, he confesses the murder and forces Caleb to remain in his service under the threat of severe punishment. Chafing under Falkland’s constant surveillance, Caleb secretly departs for London, but is forced to return to defend himself against

trumped-up charges of theft. Failing to convince the court of his innocence, Caleb is imprisoned but eventually escapes, temporarily joining a band of robbers before going into hiding. Despite attempts to leave his past behind, Caleb finds himself relentlessly pursued by Gines, a spy under Falkland's employ, as well as finding himself the subject of infamy in broadsides relating stories of "the notorious housebreaker, Kit Williams" (CW 330). Deprived of his identity and any chance at a peaceful existence, Caleb finally returns to confront Falkland and, in the first version of the ending, again fails to establish his innocence, is imprisoned, poisoned, and goes mad. Godwin, however, in his revised conclusion for the published version of the novel, invents a scene in which Caleb and Falkland appear reconciled through a mutual admission of guilt. Moved by the image of his destitute master, Caleb recants his accusation against Falkland and turns it against himself, which in turn prompts Falkland to publicly confess his crimes. Ostensibly more hopeful than the Gothic histrionics of Godwin's original ending, the published conclusion posits interminable guilt as the price for Caleb's "victory" over his master.

As Kristen Leaver points out, critical approaches to *Caleb Williams* are predominantly oriented around Godwin's own differing appraisals of the novel's purpose (589). In his first preface to the novel, originally withdrawn by the publisher for its overtly Jacobin implications, Godwin states that the purpose of *Caleb Williams* is to reinforce the teachings of *Political Justice*: "what is now presented to the public is no refined and abstract speculation. . . . 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" (CW 55). Godwin's detailed descriptions of prisons, class prejudice, and the corruptions of the court-system convey much of *Political Justice*'s examination "into the extent of the influence that is to be ascribed to political institutions" (PJ 1:2). Thus, earlier critics often read the novel, to use David McCracken's words, as a "means of propaganda" for Godwin's political theories (131).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Along with the studies by Woodcock, Kelly, and Myers cited in the previous chapter, one can also cite Graham (1990), and Bode (1990) as examples of readings that follow McCracken's sense that *Caleb Williams* explicates the basic principles of *Political Justice*.

Implicitly or explicitly, such readings typically assume that the relatively unselfconscious rationalism of the first version of *Political Justice* to be a text consistent with itself, thus locating *Caleb Williams* within the horizon of a classical anarchism that “sees humanity as oppressed by state power, yet uncontaminated by it” (Newman 5).

In his later recollection of *Caleb Williams*’ composition in his 1832 preface to the “Standard Novels” edition of *Fleetwood* (1809), however, Godwin suggestively indicates that the novel is not only an examination of social institutions, but an “analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind,” a “tracing and laying bare [of] the involutions of motive, and recording the gradually accumulating impulses” influencing his characters (“Preface to *Fleetwood* (1832)” 448).⁴⁷ Incorporating Godwin’s later focus on the psychological aspects of the novel, other critics have variously identified Caleb’s unreliability as a narrator, his paranoia, and evident persecution-complex as revealing the extent to which Godwin’s novel can be understood more reflexively as an “internal critique of [Godwin’s] own political theory” that “led him to complicate his rationalist model of political justice” (Handwerk, “Of Caleb’s Guilt” 940).⁴⁸ Such critical perspectives read *Caleb Williams* in ways that come closer to post-anarchism’s acknowledgment that classical anarchism’s desire for an “essential, moral, and rational subjectivity supposedly uncontaminated by power is contaminated, indeed, *constituted* by the power it seeks to overthrow,” and therefore “constitutes, in itself, through its essentialist and universalist premises, a discourse of domination” (Newman 5).

⁴⁷ Parenthetical citations from Godwin’s Preface to *Fleetwood* refer to Appendix A of Handwerk and Markley’s edition of *Caleb Williams* (2000), 443-9.

⁴⁸ For Collings, Caleb’s often pathological behaviour suggests that the novel “reveals the necessary impasses” of *Political Justice*’s “attempt to hurl humanity into a space beyond historical determination” by appealing to a principle of “absolute reason” (“The Romance of the Impossible” 849). Reading *Caleb Williams* in the context of impersonal narrative techniques in realist prose fiction, John Bender similarly argues that the novel undermines the assumptions of Godwin’s anarchism by re-staging the “dominant behavioral ideology . . . of post-Enlightenment culture” as implicated within the “system of domination” it claims to reject (114). See also Rothstein (1975). Psychoanalytic interpretations of Godwin’s first novel have also played a prominent role in complicating or challenging earlier interpretations of *Caleb Williams*’ relation to *Political Justice*. See Storch (1967), Gold Jr. (1977), and Corber (1990). Storch argues that the novel details Caleb’s dangerously neurotic projection of his Calvinist guilt onto Falkland, who serves as a stand-in for God. Gold Jr. and Corber respectively locate the megalomaniacal dimension in Caleb’s search for truth by associating it with Freudian ideas of paranoia, fixation and repressed homosexuality. For a broader discussion of *Caleb Williams* in the context of a history of ideas that sees Romanticism as the troubled site of the “invention” of psychoanalytic concepts, such as transference and the talking-cure, see Faflak (2005).

Following the insights of the latter critics, this chapter suggests that *Caleb Williams* shows Godwin to be his own best critic in deploying a skepticism towards the possibility of Enlightenment that unworks the more classically anarchistic formulations in his first version of *Political Justice*. However, if *Caleb Williams* cannot be said to simply iterate the overt goals of *Political Justice*, the former also does not simply dismantle the latter. Insofar as the previous chapter makes the case that *Political Justice* gradually becomes more or less implicitly engaged in its own self-questioning, *Caleb Williams* renders this questioning explicit by deploying the fictive model of romance as a laboratory for political ideas that remain to be fully worked-through or subjected to experimentation and proof. In this respect, *Caleb Williams* might be seen as a “supplement” to the first edition of *Political Justice*, in which those ideas “worthy to be communicated to persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach” can achieve this communication only through a fictive medium that places those ideas in question. On the one hand, the novel produces a thoroughgoing critique of the ideological foundations of the *ancien régime*, demonstrating the legitimizing relationship between “error” and “superstition” that constitutes the arbitrary power of institution. On the other hand, if, as Godwin’s subsequent revisions to *Political Justice* suggest, rational consciousness presupposes a chaotic and inchoate (un)ground, in which the motives permeating “every single action . . . are innumerable” and “so entangled . . . subtle and variously compounded, that the truth cannot be told,” the Protestant thematics of self-examination that drives Caleb’s narrative can no longer disclose an essential core of truth that would serve as a prelude to a rational “anarchism” (*PJ* 1:155; *Enquirer* 289).

Godwin’s emphasis on the need to revise our perspectives on the past in *Caleb Williams* echoes the “history of political institutions” and the *an-archic a priori* of political subjectivity that makes up the early chapters of the 1798 edition of *Political Justice*. There, Godwin suggests that the project of historical perfectibility cannot begin without returning to the foundations of things as they are and revealing the repressed despotisms within the past, just as the project of rational perfectibility cannot begin without confronting the *an-archic*, empirical *a priori* of thought. With *Caleb Williams*, Godwin’s combined analysis of the ground of institution and political subjectivity discloses that any such return to foundations broaches the (im)possibility of constituting

an *archē* from which political justice could establish a stable point of reference that would ground history as progressive movement towards Enlightenment. Rather, this search for foundations reveals the Protean complexity and subtlety of underlying motivations in which “truth” can only appear, to use Foucault’s terms, as “an ‘invention’ behind which lies something completely different from itself: the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 163-4).

This chapter proceeds first by examining the ways in which Godwin both formally and thematically situates *Caleb Williams* as an analysis of origins, paying specific attention to his decision to sketch the novel from back to front. On the surface, Godwin’s reverse-engineering of *Caleb Williams* from “ultimate conclusion” to “first commencement” (446) exposes the irrational “anarchy” through which institutions legitimize their existence – particularly, the sublime violence that underwrites Falkland’s peremptory dedication to the chivalric code. Moreover, Godwin/Caleb’s shared narrative technique aims to provide the novel itself with a thematic unity in which the misrepresentations of the past are eventually cleared up, in accordance with the more teleological arguments of the first edition of *Political Justice*. Godwin’s retrospective approach to narrative is internally mirrored in Caleb’s desire to uncover Falkland’s guilty secrets and recover his own innocence, reflecting a mutual need for the revelatory discovery of a truth in the past that will serve as the ground for an “enlightened” future.

I then consider how Godwin/Caleb’s return to the foundations of things as they are nonetheless discloses ambiguities that put the truth of its own *archē* under erasure. Focusing in particular on the unsettled ground of Caleb’s anxious “curiosity” that circumscribes his pretension to inhabit an impartial, rational point of departure, the novel’s analysis of institutions becomes a dialectic of enlightenment in which the progressive illumination of the truth appears coextensive with the very structures of institution that it aims to disavow. The search for foundations turns back on itself and becomes a “genealogy” of anarchism’s morals, disclosing the radically ambivalent motives subtending Caleb’s Promethean quest for justice. *Caleb Williams* might then be considered more deconstructively *an-archic* insofar as it thinks “in a most faithful,

interior way – the structured genealogy” of Godwin’s own presuppositions concerning political justice, “but at the same time determine[s] . . . what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression” (Derrida, *Positions* 6).

The closing section of this chapter discusses how this genealogy of classical anarchism *avant la lettre* generates aporias that cause Godwin to revise his earlier conclusion to the novel. I situate the differences between Godwin’s two endings as a shift from the more “negative” anarchy of the first ending towards an idea of “responsible anarchy,” that is, an anarchy that acknowledges that its foundations are not absolute.⁴⁹ Rather than completely undermining Godwinian anarchism, responsible anarchy supplements and extends the idea of perfectibility as a radical model of interminable questioning. I argue that the unforeseeable moment in which Caleb sympathizes with the destitution of his former master less recapitulates the idea of impartiality in *Political Justice* than it gestures towards what Emmanuel Lévinas calls the “irreducible anarchy of responsibility for another,” a responsibility that cannot therefore be thought within the context of a foundational rationality (54).

3.1 The (Im)pure Principles of Ancient Gallantry

In both form and content, *Caleb Williams* is a novel concerned with *archē*. Formally, Godwin signals this concern in his decision to sketch the novel in reverse order: “I felt that I had a great advantage in thus carrying back my invention from the ultimate conclusion to the first commencement of the train of adventures upon which I purposed to employ my pen.” The advantage in “carrying back my invention,” Godwin avers in his later Preface to *Fleetwood*, is that “an entire unity of plot would be the infallible result; and the unity of spirit and interest in a tale truly considered gives it a powerful hold on the reader” (446). Proceeding from the *telos* of an “ultimate conclusion” to the *archē* of a “first commencement,” Godwin asserts a rigorous form of authorial control and thematic

⁴⁹ The term “responsible anarchy” originates with John Caputo (1988), who uses it to describe the ethical possibilities opened by Derridean deconstruction. Post-anarchists, such as Newman, have also appropriated this term. See also Newman, 126-7.

unity that adapts several eighteenth-century literary conventions and genres – in particular, those associated with the Gothic and the Sentimental novel as well as narratives of religious persecution⁵⁰ – for a radical, “epochal” effect: “When I had determined on the main purpose of my story, it was ever my method to get about me any productions of former authors that seemed to bear on the subject. I never entertained the fear, that in this way of proceeding I should be in danger of servilely copying my predecessors. . . . I said to myself a thousand times, ‘I will write a tale that shall constitute an epoch in the mind of the reader, that no one, after he has read it, shall ever be exactly the same’” (“Preface to *Fleetwood* (1832)” 448, 447). Godwin situates his text as epistemologically “revolutionary,” both in the sense of an epochal break with the past and a movement of return that not only describes Godwin’s compositional approach but also orients the perspective of his protagonist. As Caleb remarks from the outset, the purpose of his narrative is to trace “the state of [his] passions in their progressive career” by working back to the “circumstances” that “influenced the history of [his] future life” (*CW* 59). In the process, Godwin/Caleb aims to make visible “what sort of evils are entailed upon mankind by society as it is at present constituted” (“Preface to *Fleetwood* (1832)” 409).

Godwin and his protagonist likewise share in a certain Jacobin rhetoric that aims to dissolve what Paine had identified with “the manuscript assumed authority of the dead,” the archival/textual authority of past traditions (42). In placing what is to be resolved first, Godwin’s concern is not only to generate an accurate description of “things as they are,” but also to trace *how* things came to be as they are through an investigation of their

⁵⁰ Wehrs, for example, sees *Caleb Williams* as both a response to and a subversion of the novels of Fielding and Richardson. According to Wehrs, Godwin’s desire to represent “things as they are” aims to carry through the exposure of social corruption that punctuates eighteenth-century novels, without their tendency to reintroduce a “providential guidance or moral logic” (500). Morse (1982) also sees *Caleb Williams* as the culmination of a series of Gothic “social novels,” including Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*, Charlotte Smith’s *Emmeline*, Bage’s *Hermesprong*, and Holcroft’s *Hugh Trevor*, that make use of Gothic conventions to invent a “prolonged demonstration of the perversity of human nature as a result of the conditioning processes of culture” (24, see also 41-9). Botting (1996) also points to Godwin’s use of Gothic conventions as a means of undercutting the conservatism inherent in earlier examples of the genre (93-8). For more detailed discussions of the textual sources of *Caleb Williams*, including Godwin’s use of tales of religious persecution such as “The Adventures of Mademoiselle de St. Phale” and stories of prisoners from the *Annual Register* and the *Newgate Calendar* see Kelly, 179-208; and Hogle, 263-9.

ground, such that the novel becomes a process of complicating what had previously appeared simple through its deconstruction. This gestures to Godwin's sense of perfectibility as a process of continually going-back to question the "resting places" by which one would act "today conformably to the determination of yesterday" (*PJ* 1:65). However, if the philosophical focus of *Political Justice* is predominantly forward-looking, *Caleb Williams* traces the emergence of institutions in the present through their conditions of possibility, inscribing things as they are within a reflexive process that seeks to account for, rather than simply posit, itself. This process of ungrounding the stability of "today" by analyzing its determination by the archived authority of "yesterday" moves the recursive narrative structure of *Caleb Williams* in the direction of what Foucault calls "problematization," an "analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and 'silent,' out of discussion, becomes a problem . . . and induces a crisis in the previously silent behaviour, habits, practices, and institutions" (*Fearless Speech* 74).

Much of *Caleb Williams* is concerned with the problematization of a specific form of institution, namely, the aristocratic model of social power manifest in the code of chivalry. Falkland's infatuation with the "heroic poets of Italy" and his "temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour" constitute a fascination that precipitates his disastrous encounter with the despotic Tyrrel (*CW* 67).⁵¹ For Burke, the chivalric code is exemplary of that inherited "system of opinion and sentiment" under threat by the "new conquering empire of light and reason." In an attempt to posit chivalry as one of the traditions necessary for maintaining the social bond, Burke uses a language that replicates the logic of *archē*: chivalry is a "principle, though varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs," that has "subsisted and influenced through a long succession of generations even to the time we live in" (Burke 238). As a grounding principle that would remain stable beneath the varied surfaces of its contingent historical

⁵¹ Boulton (1958) goes as far to suggest that Falkland may even be a representation of Burke himself - although this overlooks the fact that Burke himself was not actually an aristocrat, see 227-28. For further discussions of Godwin's engagement with chivalry see Brewer (1999); Butler (1982); Dart (1999), 76-98.

manifestations, chivalry provides the archaic foundation upon which the glorious “character” of early modern Europe subsists throughout “all its forms of government.”

Yet, Burke also acknowledges that the chivalric *archē* is not foundational as such, but rather a “pleasing illusion” that betrays a darker reality that the chivalric code at once acknowledges and disavows. In Burke’s estimation, the palpable advantage of chivalry lies in its capacity to soften the brute exercise of force into “fealty”: “Without force, or opposition, [chivalry] subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance” and “to be subdued by manners” (239). Fealty obtained through “manners” catalyzes an exchange of loyalties that defers violence and maintains social order through the observance of hierarchical distinctions and the sanctioned legal authority of the state. Chivalry expresses “that dignified obedience” and “subordination of the heart” required by fealty in order to convert the sublime violence of power into a mutually humanizing and civilizing “beauty.” As William R. Musgrave points out, chivalry’s “highly aestheticized code of manners . . . serves . . . to palliate the awesome terror of the sublime, thereby enabling the social order to exist” (13). Burke further invests the palliating force of chivalry with archaic force by inscribing it within a political theology that, in order to suppress social violence, asserts a divine “law of laws” and “sovereign of sovereigns” through which “corporate fealty and homage” are founded as virtues worthy of “universal praise” (Burke 262). Any society that abjures the divinity sanctioned through tradition and chivalry inevitably reverts to “anarchy” and barbarism. Burke’s paramount example of such an instance is, of course, the anarchy set loose by the French Revolution: “now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, and harmonized all the different shades of life . . . are to be dissolved. . . . All decent drapery is to be torn off” (239).

In *Caleb Williams*, the conflict between Falkland and Tyrrel represents what Burke sees at stake in the code of chivalry. Described as a “wild beast,” “tyrannical to his inferiors,” “unrelenting, and abrupt,” Tyrrel embodies that “fierceness of pride and power” that Burke identified as needing to be mitigated by chivalric ideals (*CW* 75, 77, 79). Conversely, Falkland’s “polished manners” are “peculiarly in harmony with

feminine delicacy,” and his possession of a “mysterious sort of divinity annexed to the person of a true knight” manifests the highly aestheticized code of manners associated with Burkean chivalry (*CW* 77, 166). As Caleb informs us through the servant Collins, Falkland’s adherence to the chivalric code prevents a duel with the jealous Count Malvesi, while his later attempts to save Emily and the farmer Hawkins from Tyrrel’s persecution as well as smooth over the differences between the two squires, seeks a means of alleviating social violence by “softening” Tyrrel’s despotic tendencies: “By quarreling we shall but imitate the great mass of mankind . . . let us do better. Let us show that we have the magnanimity to condemn petty misunderstandings. . . . [B]y mutual forbearance, let us preserve mutual peace” (89-90).

Godwin likewise frames the conclusion of Falkland’s narrative as providing a story of foundations that would justify the legitimacy and permanence of chivalric ideals. When Tyrrel is found murdered, suspicion naturally falls onto Falkland who, just prior to the discovery of Tyrrel’s body, suffers a humiliating public beating at the hands of his rival. In an attempt to salvage his reputation as a “man of the purest honour” (172), Falkland delivers an impassioned speech in his own defense that sees him acquitted of any wrongdoing: “it seemed as if a public examination upon a criminal charge, which had hitherto been considered in every event as a brand of disgrace, was converted, in the present instance, into an occasion of enthusiastic adoration and unexampled honour” (173). The conversion of “disgrace” into “unexampled honour” gestures to what Collings calls the “principle of convertibility” that mutually informs Burke’s ideas on chivalry and his theory of the sublime. Both chivalry and the sublime function according to a principle of conversion “whereby violence is transformed into a gift: the sublime transforms an apparently physical threat into a moving grandeur, suspending mere terror in aesthetic delight” (*Monstrous Society* 66).

Moreover, for Burke, the conversion of an experience of sublime terror into aesthetic delight occurs through a social, communal affect through which one feels sympathy for the sublime suffering of an individual: “The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, promotes us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer” (*Enquiry into the Origin* 46). In his depiction of Falkland’s

acquittal, Godwin renders explicit the social effects of Burke's principle of convertibility and sublime sympathy. The moving grandeur of Falkland's speech converts the physical horror of murder and criminal disgrace into a moment of "rapturous delight" (CW 173) that sees the role of the victim/sufferer transferred from Tyrrel to Falkland. Not only does Falkland suffer the slings and arrows of an accusation that threatens to tarnish his reputation, Tyrrel's premature death renders "the lustration which the laws of knight-errantry prescribe . . . impossible" (166-7). The scene culminates in a moment of sympathetic sublimity through which murder is converted into reconstituted social cohesion: "a sort of sympathetic feeling that took hold upon all ranks and degrees" (173).

It is precisely such "acquittals" of past institutions that Godwin is keen to problematize by exposing the violence at the site of their positing. As Falkland's "librarian as well as secretary" and erstwhile interpreter of the "errors" and "discoveries" within "the plans of different authors," Caleb is at once an archivist and, as Rajan points out, deeply engaged in hermeneutic processes that enjoin the reader to see the story of Falkland's past as a *text* whose authority can be deconstructed (CW 62; Rajan, "Godwin and Wollstonecraft" 239). "At present," Caleb writes, "I was satisfied with thus considering every incident [of Falkland's past] in its obvious sense. But the story I had heard was for ever in my thoughts, and I was peculiarly interested to comprehend its full import" (CW 179). Going beyond the "obvious sense" of Falkland's text, Caleb seeks to uncover the gaps within Falkland's narrative and, by extension, unmask the false textual authority of institutions whose canonization depends on the repression of the irrational violence implicit in their founding gestures. Caleb thus resolves to become "watchful, inquisitive, suspicious, full of a thousand conjectures as to the meaning of the most indifferent actions" of his master, actions that begin to take on the status of signs "pregnant" with meaning (198-9): "I examined [the story of Falkland's past] in every point of view. In this original communication it appeared sufficiently distinct and satisfactory; but as I brooded over it, it gradually became mysterious" (212, 60, 179-80).

In this context, Falkland's past begins to appear as a palimpsest, a textual surface covering over a prior text whose traces are capable of unsettling this surface.⁵²

Traces of this prior "text" appear within the details of Falkland's narrative and point to the unsettling discovery that chivalry is less antithetical to the exercise of brute power than mutually implicated with it. More specifically, Godwin internalizes the dichotomy of chivalry and barbarism in order to turn it against itself: chivalry's desire to distinguish itself from the violence it claims to prevent transforms this violence into its repressed, "anarchic" ground. As Collings points out, Burke's association of chivalry with metaphors of veiling and illusion invokes a "figural instability that makes it impossible to separate high and low, sacred and profane, permanent and transitory in the way that he would wish." As pleasant illusion, chivalry does not abolish the brute exercise of force so much as disguise it: "beneath its gentle and lovely forms lies the unlovely reality not only of human vulnerability and anxiety but also of unadorned kingly power, which is merely 'mitigated' by deference. Chivalry lends a certain air to brute force, but it does not actually modify it" (Collings, *Monstrous Society* 60, 69).

Focusing on the figural instability inherent in Burke's argument, Godwin carries out the implications of a chivalry that paradoxically claims the status of *archē* while admitting to its own illusoriness. By assimilating the Burkean opposition of chivalry and barbarism into a distinction between surface and repressed depth, Godwin (via Caleb) undermines the legitimacy of institution by exposing its irrational underside. This figural instability can be discerned as a latency within the details of Falkland's past. Even while managing to defer a violent encounter with Malvesi, Falkland reminds the latter that his "temper is not less impetuous and fiery" than that of his competitor, "and it is not at all times that [he] should have been thus able to subdue it" (CW 72). Likewise, upon learning that he has failed to protect Emily from Tyrrel's persecution, culminating in the former's premature death, Falkland admits that his "notions of virtue and honour . . . could not prevent [him] from reproaching the system of nature, for having given birth to such a monster as Tyrrel. He was ashamed of himself for wearing the same form" (157).

⁵² See Spivak's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, lxxvi.

The context of this passage suggests that Falkland's "shame" applies to the human species; however, one can also read Falkland's ignominy as symptomatic of a deeper anxiety in which the difference between Falkland and Tyrrel has been interiorized as a distinction between a pleasant chivalric "surface" and an aggressive, Tyrrel-like "depth" within Falkland himself, such that the two squires could be said to constitute two dimensions of the same "form."

Godwin further hints at this repressed violence by pointing to an unsettling dichotomy within the chivalric code itself, a duplicity in which the "pure principles of ancient gallantry" are contaminated by their opposite. In his description of Falkland's youth, Collins remarks that "young men of rank divide themselves into two classes – those who adhere to the pure principles of ancient gallantry, and those who, being actuated by the same acute sense of injury and insult, accustom themselves to the employment of hired bravoos as their instruments of vengeance. The whole difference, indeed, consists in the precarious application of a generally received distinction" (68). Collins suggests that Falkland's "undaunted spirit and resolute temper" places him firmly on the side of "pure gallantry" (72). Nonetheless, the very distinction between two "classes" of chivalry points to a heteronomy that casts doubt on Falkland's claims for chivalry's purity as anything more than pleasing illusion. The opposition between good and bad forms of chivalry already implies an impurity within the chivalric code, since Falkland assumes the sanctity of a distinction that is at best "precarious," always potentially menaced by its own repressed violence. Seemingly posed as antithetical to one another, the two classes of chivalry represented by Falkland and Tyrrel share the "same acute sense" of insult, suggesting that the distinction between chivalry and mercenary revenge is one of degree rather than kind, so that Burke's view of chivalry as a pleasing illusion becomes a means of sentimentalizing chivalry as *archē* in order to avoid the darker connotations with which it is intimately connected. The unsettling proximity of chivalry to its anarchic "other" is specifically noticed by the poet Clare who, on his deathbed, warns Falkland of his "impetuosity" (94).

The repressed violence at the heart of the chivalric code also shifts the meaning of the sympathetic sublimity that allows Falkland to be acquitted of murder. Rereading this

moment in light of Falkland's later confession to having murdered Tyrrel, the sublime spectacle of Falkland's defense generates a moment of sympathetic identification that works to reestablish the values already sanctioned within an existing group identity. As Jacques Khalip comments, Burke's model of the sympathetic sublime "coordinates spectators to experience its otherness as a quality that is intrinsic to the hygienic and aesthetic necessity of those practices in the first place." Hence, "although seemingly more vulnerable" to the experience of suffering, sympathetic sublimity serves to coordinate subjectivity "with the normative values of a particular group . . . one that is justified by mass violence or other traumatically sublime moments" (107, 108). The self-consciously aestheticized and sentimental structure of Falkland's past that hides an irrational core of unadorned violence recalls Godwin's image of a history that "labours under the Gothic and unintelligible burden" of past institutions in *Political Justice* (*PJ* 2:101). Godwin's reference to the Gothic highlights how the chivalric code betrays its own status as a pleasant symbolic fiction ordained by divine decree through an effacement of the anarchy that sustains it. Hence, after Caleb draws out a confession that reveals Falkland as a murderer, Godwin turns the Burkean principle of convertibility against its own foundations by showing Falkland's conversion from a "beneficent divinity" (217) into the repressed Gothic underside of a divine violence: "You little suspect the extent of my power. . . . You might as well think of escaping from the power of the omnipresent God as from mine!" (225).

As the Gothic embodiment of institution's claim to possess an "insurmountable power" (235), Caleb observes that Falkland has become a "copy of what monarchs are" (261). As such, Falkland comes to personify institution as a system of mutually reinforcing religious, economic, psychological and judicial discourses whose hierarchization of social reality allows aristocratic power to maintain its dominance through the illusion of permanence. As Falkland informs Caleb: "I wear an armour, against which all your weapons are impotent" (235). Godwin shows that the conventions that grant Falkland his unimpeachable social status determine what counts as "truth" within things as they are. The opposition between the "pure principles" of chivalry and anarchy deploys certain "rites of purification and exclusion" that grant chivalry the status of something given, so that any questioning of chivalry itself can only be understood as

“monstrous” and must therefore be silenced or confined to preserve the integrity of the social bond (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 3, 10). As Falkland warns Caleb, “call as loud as you will, no man on earth shall hear your cries; prepare a tale however plausible, or however true, the whole world shall execrate you for an impostor” (235).

In the second and third volumes of the novel, Godwin demonstrates the extent to which institutions are capable of deploying such repressive distinctions, providing an extended meditation on the consequences of exposing the secret violence at the heart of instituted power. After drawing a confession of murder from Falkland, Caleb must “attest every sacrament, divine and human, never to disclose” his knowledge (214). Forced to remain within Falkland’s employ and placed under constant surveillance, the price of Caleb’s desire to “gratify a foolishly inquisitive humour” (215) is, initially, silence: “I was his prisoner. . . . All my actions observed; all my gestures marked. I could move neither to the right nor the left, but the eye of my keeper was upon me. . . . I withdrew in silence” (224-5). However, Caleb’s subsequent attempts to quit Falkland’s estate, first by appealing to Falkland’s seemingly benevolent brother-in-law Forester, and then by escaping to London, subject him to more overt forms of institutional repression. After departing for London, Caleb is called back to Falkland’s estate on false charges of theft. Despite appealing to an idea of impartial justice that looks beyond the prejudices of instituted law and arguing that Falkland had planted the evidence against him, the judge Forester finds Caleb guilty and sentences him to prison. Explaining his verdict, Forester reiterates the chivalric binary that relegates any refusal to conform to “established boundaries of obligation” (217) as something monstrous that, like Burke’s histrionic descriptions of the French Revolution, threatens to destroy the very fabric of society: “Vile calumniator! you are the abhorrence of nature, the opprobrium of the human species, and the earth can only be freed from an insupportable burthen by your being exterminated!” (256, 258).

Caleb’s failed appeal to a justice capable of “defeating by a plain unvarnished tale all the stratagems of Vice” (243), along with Forester’s sense that the monstrosity of Caleb’s crime is not his “dishonesty” but his impertinence in bringing an accusation against his social betters, suggests that it is not enough to speak truth within the current state of

things as they are. Rather, adapting Foucault's terminology, the subject has to be "within the truth" (*dans le vrai*) – that is to say, capable of speaking from within the instituted system of conventions that determine what can be identified as "truth," innocence, and guilt in one's own time (*Archaeology* 224). By invoking *Political Justice*'s notion of impartial justice as a principle that transcends "the ground of real difference" between "a man of rank and fortune" and "a poor country lad" (*CW* 255), Caleb places himself in a theoretical perspective that is not "within the truth" of things as they are and, as such, can only be recognized as radically transgressive and inhuman: "pursued by a train of ill fortune, I could no longer consider myself as a member of society. I was a solitary being, cut off from the expectation of sympathy, kindness, and the good-will of mankind" (343).

As Foucault makes clear in *Madness and Civilization*, one of the consequences of not speaking "within the truth" of one's time is that the subject is placed, voluntarily or involuntarily, alongside other social outcasts who have been relegated to the status of non-beings subjected to the constraints of institutional power: criminals, the insane, social and racial minorities (Foucault 10). Taking on the Protean status of prisoner, refugee, temporary companion to a band of virtuous thieves (306-28), as well as disguising himself as both an Irish (333-5) and a Jewish peasant (352-63), Caleb appears emblematic of the violent exclusionary processes that Godwin sees as part of the legacy of institution. Of these excluded groups, Godwin redeploys the increasingly popular Gothic trope of the robber-band as the literary representation of a certain anarchism, whose determined struggle against instituted power for the good of humanity sees them defined as criminals.⁵³ As the robbers' spokesman Captain Raymond remarks, "we, who are thieves without licence [sic], are at open war with another set of men who are thieves according to law. . . . A thief is, of course, a man living among his equals" (307). Occupying the ground of a justice beyond law, Godwin's thieves represent the embryonic possibility of a utopian existence without institution based upon virtue, equality and

⁵³ The model for the virtuous outlaw in Gothic fiction seems to have been Schiller's Karl Moor, the protagonist of his 1781 play *Die Räuber* (translated into English as *The Robbers* in 1792), a text with which Godwin was familiar. See the entry for Schiller under 26 February 1795 in Godwin's diary. For a broader discussion of the novel of banditry (*Räuberroman*) as one of the primary genres of early European Gothic fiction, see Murphy (1935).

mutual benevolence, an idea Shelley later picks up for his fragment “The Assassins” (1814).⁵⁴

However, Godwin also points to the severe limitations of this form of classical anarchism. While throwing into relief the injustice by which institutions criminalize whomever might disagree with them, Caleb also acknowledges that the “uncommon energy, ingenuity, and fortitude” of the group is ultimately “thrown away upon purposes diametrically at war with the first interests of human society” (319). Similarly, for Caleb, to expose the secret at the heart of institution is to risk a double-bind that, in either direction, culminates in alienation: either one is silenced within an actual institution such as the prison, or one remains free of institutions but is forced to lead a “counterfeit” existence as a criminal, “for the purpose of eluding the inexorable animosity and unfeeling tyranny of [our] fellow man” (333).

3.2 A Fatal Impulse

Despite the overall sense of hopelessness in Caleb’s narrative, his experience of the palpable horrors of institution rests upon the conviction that his vigilant dedication to a quasi-transcendental “truth” will convert the injustices of the present into a future justice. Caleb’s role as a reader who seeks to discredit the aesthetic ideologies of the *ancien régime* allows Godwin to inscribe “a model of reading as the unearthing of truth and the correction of past (mis)representations” (Rajan, “Wollstonecraft and Godwin” 241). Yet, insofar as this model of reading sees institution as a kind of “illusion,” Godwin and Caleb’s mutual desire to desubliminate the “romance” of chivalry also engenders the very logic of sublimation that it wants to renounce, aestheticizing anarchism as a truth uncontaminated by power. Caleb wants to counter the irrational history of political institutions with a redemptive, teleological vision of history in which obstacles that

⁵⁴ Like Godwin’s virtuous thieves, Shelley’s “Assassins” refers not to a group of professional murderers but to a small “congregation of Christians” who, “acknowledging no laws but those of God . . . modeled their conduct towards their fellow men by the conduct of their individual judgment,” displaying an anarchistic “contempt for human institutions” (254). Shelley’s story introduces a mysterious figure of a “Wandering Jew” who, not unlike Caleb, threatens to collapse the utopian existence of the group. The fragment has been reprinted as Appendix A in Berendt’s edition of Shelley’s early Gothic novels *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* (2002), 253-70.

appear insurmountable in the present are rationalized and overcome: “I am incited to the penning of these memoirs only by . . . a faint idea” that “posterity may . . . be induced to render me a justice which my contemporaries refuse. . . . [U]ltimately mistakes will be cleared up, justice done, and the true state of things come to light, in spite of the false colours that may for a time obscure it” (59, 192).

This redemptive or “divinatory” model of reading (Rajan, “Wollstonecraft and Godwin” 245) is mirrored in Godwin’s suggestion that planning the novel from conclusion to commencement will create a unified plot, as well as in Caleb’s self-described “mechanical turn” as a “natural philosopher” who “could not rest till [he] had acquainted himself with the solutions that had been invented for the phenomena of the universe” (CW 60). By “collecting the scattered incidents of [his] history” and annexing “to appearances explanations which [he] was far from possessing at the time” (194), Caleb aims to rearrange the past into a coherent, linear plot in which “one sentiment flows, by necessity of nature, into another sentiment of the same general character” (212), thereby granting his memoirs a “consistency which is seldom attendant but upon truth” (59). In this context, what Godwin identifies as the novel’s “analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind” follows a more classical idea of analysis as a process in which discontinuities are “rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal [their] continuity” (Foucault, *Archaeology* 8). Beginning from its ending and retracing this ending back to its foundations, the novel presents itself in the form of a hermeneutic circle⁵⁵ that both confers direction and meaning on events while simultaneously claiming to reveal an “original figure” always already immanent to these events. As such, Caleb suggests that the archiving of his own past will confirm an anthropology of reason’s progress by vindicating his blasted reputation: “these papers shall preserve the truth; they shall one day be published, and then the world shall do justice on us both [Falkland and Caleb]” (421).

⁵⁵ See also Rajan (1990), which expands her prior discussion of *Caleb Williams* in “Wollstonecraft and Godwin.” In the former work, Rajan places the novel within the broader romantic context by connecting it with Schleiermacher’s idea of hermeneutics as a form of “divinatory” reading. See also Pfau (2006): “as Godwin’s retrospective account suggests, all detail in *Caleb Williams* must be subordinated to the novel’s overall purpose and design” (134).

Caleb's mixed rhetoric of hermeneutic uncovering and polemic overcoming demonstrates Foucault's sense that traditional models of historical continuity "provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness. Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity" (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 12). Caleb's identification with the natural philosopher claims the archaic status of an uncontaminated point of departure, an impartial, neutral observer "with total neglect of the suggestions of self-regard" (427). "Draw[ing] . . . from the stores of [his] own mind," Caleb sees himself as a sovereign *cogito* that is "sufficiently contemplative" and "master of itself," even at the price of radical alienation (271, 274). In turn, Caleb perceives justice not simply as something excluded from the conventions of the present, but as an "eternal truth," an "unalterable equity" that recalls *Political Justice's* sense of justice as an "unquestionable" quasi-transcendental principle (*CW* 353, 173; *PJ* 1:146).

Nonetheless, this unquestionable rule shows itself to be less beyond institution than an alternative form of power that sees Caleb assert those binary distinctions that come to be identified with classical versions of anarchism. Caleb thus posits the self-mastery of his own "simple . . . nature" over against the illusory, "artificial society" of institution, while equally emphasizing a rigid moral binary in which "innocence and guilt are the most opposite to each other. I would not suffer myself to believe, that the former could be confounded with the latter" (273, 243). Yet, by inscribing Caleb as a representation of political justice within a narrative whose very analytic draws the reader towards a questioning of foundations, Godwin invites us to see through Caleb's desire to plot a history that adequately communicates an inscrutable principle of rational justice, or what Rajan calls a "substantialist ontology of the text" that would locate a transcendental signified of truth ("Wollstonecraft and Godwin" 239).

This conception of justice as a transcendental signified begins to unravel in moments where Godwin exposes not only the violence of institution, but also the profoundly ambiguous, non-rational and imaginary (un)ground of any anarchist politics that would claim the *archē* of a "truth" excepted from power. Formally, the recursive

structure of Godwin's narrative already points to the tenuousness of its foundations, since recursiveness presupposes a compositional principle that interiorizes a gap between existential "fact" and narrative "value." As Hume had argued, because the causal relationship between facts is supplied by the mind rather than objectively existent, the continuity of phenomena can only occur retroactively as a process of "narrative composition."⁵⁶ Narrative composition, according to Hume, names the process by which the mind makes use of the associative principle of causality as "the most usual species of connection" through which "the historian traces the series of actions according to their natural order, remounts to their secret springs and principles, and delineates their most remote consequences" (*Enquiry* 103). The more causal associations are established between disordered experiential data, the more "lively" the idea becomes for the subject. The livelier the idea, the more "reality" it has for the subject as a reasonable belief.

Like personal identity, however, the continuity of events is the product of the imagination rather than the disclosure of an objectively verifiable truth. The "natural order" of which Hume speaks is always already a kind of artifice in which, as Deleuze points out, "I confer to the object more coherence and regularity than I find in my perception." From a Humean perspective, "there is no complete system, synthesis, or cosmology" – or, in Godwin's terms, any "unified plot" – "that is not imaginary." Insofar as fiction is constitutive of human nature, Hume inscribes an irreducible aporia in which the imagination uses the very principles that would discipline it in order to transcend its own limits: "to oppose its own nature and to allow its fancies to be deployed has become the nature of the mind" (*Empiricism* 78, 83-4). Because narrative composition presupposes the absence of any underlying substance or transcendent *archē*, there are no absolute criteria by which one can definitively separate "reasonable belief" from delusion. Rather, as Jeffrey Bell states of Hume, "the excesses of delusion, the tendencies that may very well undermine and transform one's reasonable beliefs into fits of

⁵⁶ See also Pfau (2006), 128-33. Pfau argues that Hume's "expurgation of causality from the domain of [positive] knowledge" renders the "domain of 'literature' itself as an existential condition of being" (132). Pfau goes on to compare the use of retroactive causation in *Caleb Williams* to Michael Dummett's investigation of the paradox by which effects can be said to precede their causes; see Dummett (1978), 319-32. For a further discussion of Hume's theory of "narrative composition" in relation to eighteenth-century fiction, see Christensen (1987).

madness, remain presupposed by these very beliefs” (*Deleuze’s Hume* 5). In this respect, the figural instability that characterizes the “Gothic” reversal in which institution is shown to conceal a repressed violence also infiltrates the self-privileging standpoint of Caleb’s dedication to a rational politics, showing this politics to presuppose the delusive tendencies that it would externalize as forms of false consciousness.

The unsettling proximity of reason and delusion is a persistent feature of Caleb’s “anarchism” throughout the text. From the outset, Caleb states that the same curiosity that facilitates his “mechanical turn” as a natural philosopher also generates an “invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance” (60). Not unlike the shared sense of insult that destabilizes the antithesis between chivalry and the irrational violence that chivalry claims to disavow, Caleb reveals that his claim to an impartial, transparent scientific knowledge is inextricably entangled with notions that characteristically resist complete disclosure, namely, imagination and affect: “my imagination must be excited; and when that was not done, my curiosity was dormant” (60). Just as Hume suggests that a belief becomes “reasonable” through the lively association of ideas into causal chains, Caleb “pant[s] for the unraveling of an adventure with an anxiety, perhaps almost equal to that” of Falkland, suggesting that Caleb’s own analysis into the irrational ground of institution is formulated to repeat precisely the affective and fictive character of its “groundless” adversary, the romance (60). Tellingly, when Caleb is forced to take on a variety of disguises to avoid detection in the third volume of the novel, he becomes a writer of fiction. Even more suggestive than Caleb’s turn to fiction is that he becomes a writer only after a failed attempt at authoring a treatise of moral philosophy (357): fictionalizing becomes the default means of covering over lacunae in his own moral reasoning, exposing the unreliability in Caleb’s systematic pursuit of justice and the unification of his history as plot. If natural philosophy mirrors the aim and the activity of romance, and romance as institution disguises its Gothically unintelligible origins, Caleb is ensnared in the aporetic idea that the search for the hidden *archē* of things as they are proves to be the greatest resistance to the *archē* of freedom and justice he seeks.

The mutually contaminating relationship between natural philosophy and romance anticipates a process in which the novel undermines the status of a rational anarchism by

showing this anarchism to be a discourse that incorporates conflicting assumptions or, as Caleb remarks, a “contention of opposite principles” (198). Caleb’s desire for romance produces a “magnetical sympathy” between himself and Falkland, such that Godwin presents the two characters “not simply as social antagonists but also as doubles” (*CW* 186; Rajan, *Supplement* 184). Just as Clare identifies Falkland as a “fool of honour and fame . . . who would have purchased the character of a true, gallant, and undaunted hero, at the expense of worlds,” Caleb’s curiosity demands an “almost equal” display of “insurmountable fortitude” that would also see him “destined for a hero” (172, 385).

Romance persistently contaminates an analytic whose aim is precisely to expel the romantic, suggesting that reason’s desire for disenchantment contains the seed of its own reversal. As Falkland’s double, Caleb’s disclosure of the sublime violence at the basis of institution also appears as the romanticized surface of a non-rational “curiosity” to which it is genetically linked: “The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterized the whole train of my life, was curiosity. It was this that gave me my mechanical turn” (60). “Prior” to natural philosophy as its condition of possibility, curiosity would appear to be the motive force necessary for a natural philosopher to discover the “solutions to the phenomena of the world.” Yet, Caleb also describes curiosity as something more ambivalent, an inexplicable “anxiety” (60), “restless propensity” (187), a “perturbation of mind” (180), a “fatal impulse that seemed destined to hurry me to my destruction,” and an “insatiable desire” that “seems as if it were capable of fully compensating any injuries that may be suffered in the career” (198-9). Projecting the deceptive image of its own satisfaction, the curiosity of the natural philosopher appears as a compensatory fiction for a latent compulsiveness that anticipates Schopenhauer’s will or Freud’s death-drive, that is, an aimless, necessitarian, and passionate impetus at the heart of existence that vitiates reason’s legitimacy as an “independent principle.” This compulsiveness resituates reason’s legitimacy not as the “constitution and affirmation of a free subject,” but as Caleb’s “progressive enslavement” to the “instinctive violence” of a “rancorous will to knowledge” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 163). As Caleb remarks, “curiosity, so long as it lasted, was a principle stronger in my bosom than even the love of independence” (224), suggesting that his self-awareness is at once a belated and anxious reaction to affective sources that

remain *an-archically* prior to rational deliberation, sources that appear both hostile to and inextricable from the very autonomy it would claim for itself.

As the “spring” of Caleb’s existence, curiosity symptomatically gestures to the trace of a non-knowledge in the heart of knowledge, disclosing the darker side of Godwin’s rejection of free will in *Political Justice*. Such traces become evident at crucial moments in the text in which Caleb appears subject to a “confused apprehension” (188) and “an uncontrollable destiny” (208), foregrounding what Foucault calls “the accidents . . . the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations” that subtend a knowledge that cannot “detach itself from its empirical roots . . . to become pure speculation,” but rather “releases those elements of itself that are devoted to its [own] subversion and destruction” (146, 163). One such miscalculation becomes the catalyst behind the climactic turn in the novel in which Caleb is discovered breaking into a locked chest in Falkland’s private apartment in the midst of a house fire. Seized by an unknowable “infatuation . . . too powerful to be resisted” (210) and describing the scene as being “like a dream,” Caleb admits that he is unable to “account for my having plunged headlong into an act so monstrous” (212). Caleb’s subsequent attempt to rationalize his actions as “a short-lived and passing alienation of mind” (211) betrays a partially acknowledged inability to grasp his motives other than through a belated cognition that can only assert its rational priority in hindsight. That is to say, reason appears on the scene too late to actually corroborate an enlightened view of the subject as capable of rationally deliberating upon and choosing between a given set of alternatives, what Godwin previously identified with “perfectly voluntary action” in *Political Justice*, or “action as proceeds from actually existing foresight and apprehended motive.” Rather, Caleb’s “fluctuating state of . . . mind” (198) attests to the ineluctably “mixed” character of consciousness as “imperfectly voluntary action,” which “proceeds upon a motive, out of sight” (1:67). Insofar as Godwin sees voluntary actions as proceeding from feeling rather than reason, the independence presupposed by a “perfectly voluntary action” can only ever be a retrospective narrative composition across a temporal gap that divides consciousness from its ostensibly rational origins.

An acute example of such “imperfectly voluntary action” appears after Caleb analyzes Falkland’s pained reaction while auditing a murder case apparently similar to his encounter with Tyrrel. Observing how Falkland “suddenly rose, and with every mark of horror and despair rushed out of the room,” Caleb becomes immediately convinced of his patron’s guilt. Retiring into a garden, Caleb then finds himself suddenly overwhelmed by conflicting feelings:

My mind was full, almost to bursting . . . my thoughts forced their way spontaneously to my tongue, and I exclaimed in a fit of uncontrollable enthusiasm, “This is the murderer.” . . . I felt as if my animal system had undergone a total revolution. My blood boiled within me. I was conscious to a kind of a rapture for which I could not account. I was solemn, yet full of rapid emotion, burning with indignation and energy. In the very tempest and hurricane of the passions, I seemed to enjoy the most soul-ravishing calm. (207)

Like natural philosophy and romance, the inter-implication of opposed terms in this passage – “conscious” but unaccountable “rapture,” “burning” solemnity, tempestuous calm – discloses the troubling concession of a consciousness founded upon what it is not, and a decision as to Falkland’s guilt that is founded by its own absence of foundations. Moreover, Caleb’s suggestion that his “mind was full” explicitly recalls Godwin’s comment in *Political Justice* that “the mind is always full” (*PJ* 1:408), an insight that formed part of an empiricist epistemology in which the clear distinction of “simple” concepts is the delayed resolution of an *an-archic* flux.

The delirious “hurricane of passions” within a “soul-ravishing calm” likewise gestures to the paradoxical mixture of something libidinal in Caleb’s adherence to a justice that claims the status of pure reason. Thus, “the instant” Caleb decides to “place [himself] as a watch upon [his] patron,” he states that he “found a strange sort of pleasure in it”:

To do what is forbidden always has its charms, because we have an indistinct apprehension of something arbitrary and tyrannical in the prohibition. To be a spy upon Mr. Falkland! That there was danger in the employment served to give an

alluring pungency to the choice. I remembered the stern reprimand I had received, and his terrible looks; and the recollection gave me a kind of tingling sensation, not altogether unallied to enjoyment. The further I advanced, the more the sensation was irresistible. (180)

The “strange sort of pleasure” that underwrites Caleb’s sense of impartial justice generates a dialectic that, like the uncertain boundary between chivalry and barbarism or natural philosophy and romance, shows the antithesis between prohibition and transgression as the projection of a single axis of mutually reinforcing terms. Caleb implies that his transgressive desire increases in proportion to the perceived omnipotence of the law it aims to violate, so that Caleb’s fidelity to the truth paradoxically overlaps with a covert dimension of guilty enjoyment.⁵⁷ Insofar as this enjoyment is encrypted within a curiosity that facilitates both natural philosophy and romance as seeking/inventing “solutions” to the “phenomena of the world,” Godwin broaches the unsettling sense that such enjoyment may not be a “short-lived alienation of mind,” but inherent within an epistemological edifice that posits a rule of absolute justice.

Various miscalculations throughout the latter volumes of the novel further subvert Caleb’s desire to construct a “progressive” history, demonstrating how the feigned passage between events becomes indistinguishable from a series of errors. As Caleb remarks, if “one sentiment flows, by necessity of nature, into another sentiment of the same general character,” then an “error, once committed, has a fascinating power, like that ascribed to the eyes of a rattlesnake, to draw us into a second error” (212, 187). While running an errand for Falkland, Caleb’s effort to “survey . . . the various circumstances of [his] condition” finds him veering off-course towards Forester’s estate, which only serves to exacerbate Falkland’s suspicion that Caleb plans to disclose his secret (227, 231). Likewise, as Alex Gold Jr. points out, Caleb’s constant misconstruing

⁵⁷ Daffron (1995) also compares Caleb’s perverse enjoyment to Foucault’s idea of mutually reciprocating “spirals of power and pleasure” in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*. Foucault uses this spiral imagery to thematize how the “medicalization of sexuality” functions with respect to the intimate relation between observer and observed. According to Foucault, the observer’s power to draw out his subject’s sexual pleasures gives the observer a kind of pleasure; conversely, the isolation of the subject’s sexual pleasures also encourages these very pleasures, mingling pleasure and power in an intimate dialectic of mutual examination.

of “obvious events,” eventually reaches “a state in which he interprets even the most accidental distresses as if Falkland contrived them” (“It’s Only Love” 149), even going so far at one point as to grant Falkland power over nature itself. Thus, when Caleb finds himself in the middle of a hail-storm after his failed escape to Ireland, he exclaims that although “there was no strict connection between these causal inconveniences and the persecution under which I laboured . . . my distempered thoughts confounded them together” (348). As Collings argues, Caleb *needs* to project Falkland as an omnipotent, God-like figure in order “to reach this state of [ethical] heroism; only if the world is a system of total oppression can he become the singular pillar of truth” (“The Romance of the Impossible” 859).

Caleb’s distempered conflation of unrelated events, the inexplicable nature of his motivations, irrational miscalculations, and paranoid sense of nature itself plotting against him, reflects an increasingly skeptical approach to foundational models of thinking that will appear in the revised version of *Political Justice*. In *Caleb Williams*, this skepticism reflects a distemper in the very structure of an epistemology that can no longer separate “within the mind, reason from its delirium, its permanent, irresistible, and universal principles from its variable, fanciful, and irregular principles” (Deleuze, *Empiricism* 84). This contradiction destabilizes the novel’s more classically anarchistic claims for an uncontaminated point of departure that sees power, error, delusion, and irrationality as external impositions that cover over a rational essence that would redeem history as continuity. Rather, Godwin shows the political psychology of classical anarchism to be radically unstable, a Protean figure not only entangled in the very power-structures it claims to abjure, but embroiled in an epistemological dilemma that sees fiction as a principle of human knowledge that ultimately cannot be “corrected, and even less eliminated through reflection” (Deleuze 82).

3.3 Split-Ends: From Defeatism to “Responsible Anarchy”

The affective and imaginative *anarchē* that permeates Caleb’s search for justice unsettles the rational model of classical anarchism by re-situating it in the context of a “poetics of political thinking” that, as Davide Panagia says of Humean empiricism, “requires the capacity to correct or revise” and a “political vocabulary that is not juridical” (95). The gradually intensifying emergence of this non-judicial vocabulary throughout the novel complicates and undermines Caleb’s desire to compose a redemptive narrative that clearly separates him from Falkland, innocence from guilt, truth from error, and reason from unreason, a complication that ultimately sees Godwin revise his own conclusion to the text. As Rajan comments, if the novel progressively deconstructs the opposition between Falkland and Caleb, then “an ending based on that opposition must have come to seem a repression of the novel’s moral complexities” (“Wollstonecraft and Godwin” 240).

In Godwin’s original ending, Caleb loses his final trial against Falkland, is subsequently imprisoned, poisoned, and finally descends into madness. To the contrary, Godwin’s revised ending stages a moment in which Caleb, moved by the destitute appearance of his master, acknowledges his own selfish motives, prompting Falkland to finally confess his past crimes in a scene of reconciliation through an admission of mutual guilt. Three days after this encounter, Falkland dies, and Caleb is forced to live on as the “devoted victim of conscious reproach” (429). It could be argued that the Gothic pessimism that characterizes the novel’s original ending might represent a more realistic outcome in terms of Caleb’s failed revolt against institution, and is therefore more anarchic in its deconstruction of Enlightenment subjectivity. Donald Wehrs, for instance, sees the sympathetic turn of the published ending as an exercise in bad faith because it reenacts the improbable moment of spontaneous sympathizing that characterizes Falkland’s acquittal in the first volume of the novel. Reading *Caleb Williams* in the context of eighteenth-century genre conventions, Wehrs points out that the revised ending makes use of the narrative structure that Godwin had earlier enjoined readers to see as false by staging the latter scene in near identical terms to those of Falkland’s acquittal. Just as Collins describes the conversion of Falkland’s potential “disgrace” into

“enthusiastic adoration,” Caleb states that “I came hither to curse, but I remain to bless. I came to accuse, but am compelled to applaud. I proclaim to all the world, that Mr. Falkland is a man worthy of affection and kindness” (431). Thus, despite Godwin’s wish to expose the “unwillingness of eighteenth-century ‘realistic’ fiction to trace the ‘practical effects’ of the ‘existing constitution of society,’” Wehrs argues that Godwin’s literary “revolt, like Caleb’s, never moves beyond its dependence upon what it reveals to be duplicitous” (499, 500).

Yet, if Godwin’s published ending demonstrates bad faith in its repetition of a point of view already deconstructed earlier in the novel, then Caleb’s final madness in the original ending is no more “realistic” than the melancholy Falkland previously deployed as a defense mechanism to safeguard his reputation. Caleb’s final destitution could therefore also be interpreted as a repetition of Falkland’s earlier romance. In this respect, the overt Gothicism of the original ending seems calculated to have an effect similar to that of Falkland’s melancholy; namely, to aestheticize Caleb’s resistance to institution through martyrdom. The “harmonized madness” that Caleb feels when he sees Falkland serves as a ground for Caleb to affirm his earlier oppositional distinction between innocence and guilt, as well as corroborate his “unaltered” status as truth-teller: “What a sight was this to me? . . . it gave double vehemence to the tide of my fury. . . . I must either suffer the penalties of a false accuser; or go on, resolute and unaltered, in the prosecution I had begun” (CW 435-6). Consequently, during the first version of the trial, Caleb remains “perfectly self-possessed,” while “[his] confidence at every instant increased, till [he] felt all the satisfaction of undoubting certainty” (436).

Repositioned upon the *archē* of this “undoubting certainty,” Collings remarks that Godwin’s first ending negatively validates the fantasy of Caleb’s ethical heroism, while simultaneously exposing “the failure of this fantasy, its impotence in the face of what it opposes. The novel is caught between two closed orders, tyranny and resistance, without indicating any way beyond them” (“The Romance of the Impossible” 856). The text underscores this sense of hopelessness by having Caleb remark that his increasing distress proportionally restores Falkland’s health, creating an image of a mock-perfectibility in which it “plainly appears . . . that persecution and tyranny can never die”

(440). Such a conclusion ironically fulfills Caleb's earlier desire that the memory of his story to be "consigned to oblivion" (397) in which resistance is overwhelmed by defeatism.

If Godwin's first ending effects a certain closure of the text's desire for political justice, the complex scene of reconciliation in the published ending signals an important revision of Godwin's anarchism as well as a formal and thematic interruption of the entropic telos of the first ending. On the one hand, Godwin's rewriting of the conclusion of a text conceived from its conclusion to its originating circumstances also formally revises and displaces his point of origin, disrupting the "unity of plot" that would lead an "ultimate conclusion" unproblematically back to the *archē* of its "first commencement." On the other hand, Godwin's revision presents a moment of self-critique that approximates what Lévinas identifies as "the irreducible anarchy of responsibility for another" (76). Rather than perceive anarchism through the violent forms of political overthrow or self-sacrifice, Lévinas associates "anarchy" with an exposure to the Other through "proximity": "[justice] derives from an anarchic signification of proximity" (81). Proximity refers not to the shared space between two equivalent terms, but to an intensive encounter in which consciousness is affected despite itself by its exposure to another as "a contingency that excludes the [rational] *a priori*": "Absolving himself from all essence, all genus, all resemblance, the neighbour . . . concerns me for the first time (even if he is an old acquaintance, an old friend, an old lover, long caught up in the fabric of my social relations)." The unexpected incursion of the Other in proximity does not occur through a process of mutual recognition that could be mediated by any predetermined contract or exercise of autonomous "free will" on the part of the rational subject. Rather, proximity occurs directly through the passivity of sensibility and an encounter with the "face," which finds its most radical disclosure as "nudity, non-form, abandon of self, aging, dying" (Lévinas 86, 88).

Exposure to the face of the Other in proximity unravels rational intentionality through the disclosure of a sensibility that Lévinas associates with passivity, an impoverishing of that power for "beginnings and principles" through which the subject posits itself as *archē*. Lévinas therefore counter-intuitively finds "freedom" on the side of passion rather

than action, in the moment one *loses* the initiative that would ground the subject as a substantial “perseverance in Being.” Thus, “anarchic liberation,” Lévinas writes, “emerges, without being assumed, without turning into a beginning, in inequality with oneself,” such that in its responsibility for another “the self does not pose him/herself, but loses its place” (124). Moreover, because the *anarchē* of responsibility dissolves the activity of the originating subject into a radical passivity, it also disrupts the temporality associated with the activity of consciousness and its historical self-representations, “the time that marks historiography, that is, the recuperable time, the recoverable time, the lost time that can be found again,” or in Godwin’s terms, the time of a historical consciousness that eludes contingency by reassembling the past into a plot (Lévinas 36).

Not unlike Lévinas’ description of proximity, Falkland’s appearance in Godwin’s revised conclusion bears the status of a contingency that completely destabilizes Caleb’s rational composure: “I can conceive of no shock greater than that I received from the sight of Mr. Falkland” (426). Where the image of Falkland in the first ending causes Caleb to reaffirm the “undoubted certainty” of his moral rectitude in alienation, Falkland’s corpse-like appearance in the revised ending leads to an unexpected reversal in which Caleb is exposed to Falkland in proximity, as a “face” as it (barely) appears in “aging, dying”: “His visage was colourless; his limbs destitute of motion, almost of life. . . He seemed not to have three hours to live” (426). The shock of this appearance of Falkland as a “face” dissolves the *a priori* of Caleb’s unyielding certainty and subverts the utilitarian calculus that would see the exposure of Falkland’s crime as a means of increasing the general good:

I thought I had entered coolly into the reason of the case. . . . It appeared before my mind to be a mere piece of equity and justice, such as an impartial spectator would desire. . . . But all these fine-spun reasonings vanished before the object that was now presented to me. “Shall I trample upon a man thus dreadfully reduced? Shall I point my animosity against one, whom the system of nature has brought down to the grave?” . . . It is impossible. There must have been some dreadful mistake in the train of argument that persuaded me to be the author of this hateful scene. (427)

Falkland is no longer perceived as an omnipresent institutional power but rather as a *subject*, a finite being also vulnerable to persecution. The image of Falkland's "insensibility" becomes an unspoken address that summons Caleb beyond the monological opposition between anarchism and institution and into a dialogical scene of responsibility.

Unlike the sympathetic moment that reconstitutes the status quo and represses the violence of institution in the first volume of the novel, the unraveling of Caleb's "fine-spun reasonings" in Godwin's revised conclusion deconstructs the simplified opposition between anarchism and institution and acknowledges the mutual violence of their respective absolutism. Although Falkland praises Caleb for "greatness and elevation of mind" for justifiably exposing the crimes of the past, Caleb states that he "records the praises bestowed on me by Falkland, not because I deserved them, but because they serve to aggravate the baseness of my cruelty" (433). Implicated in the cruelty that his view of political justice sought to remove, Caleb finds himself incapable of simply projecting (and expiating) the cause of his madness onto a power that invades and suppresses him from without. Rather, the published ending sees Caleb forced to "endure the penalty of [his] crime" (433). If Caleb's earlier descent into psychosis reduces him to a mute gravestone and ensures that no "ghosts walk today," his survival in the revised ending also prolongs Falkland's existence as a specter of past wrongs that can neither be completely exorcised from the present, nor entirely redeemed in the future: "his figure is ever in imagination before me. Waking or sleeping, I still behold him. He seems mildly to expostulate with me for my unfeeling behaviour. . . . Alas! I am the same Caleb Williams that, so short a time ago, boasted that, however great were the calamities I endured, I was still innocent" (433).

The collapse of Caleb's "innocence" towards the mutual responsibility of acknowledged guilt dissolves the barrier that would preserve a space for an uncontaminated point of departure through which anarchism might verify its moral and rational ground. On the one hand, this leads Caleb to admit that his prior sense of acting in accordance with an impartial principle of "equity and justice" was not in fact impartial but an "overweening regard for self" (434). For Myers, this indicates a shift in moral

perspective in which Godwin turns away from his embrace of Caleb's rational subjectivity in his original ending towards a critique of this same subjectivity as "egoistic vindictiveness" in the published conclusion. As a result, Myers suggests that the "sympathy that Caleb evinces in the sight of Falkland in the second [ending] leads to his achievement of the primary Godwinian virtue of impartiality" in *Political Justice* (623). Yet this would be to attribute an agency and an identity that can appear only as the belated remainder of a consciousness that figures the impossibility of the self coinciding with itself. For at the very moment that Caleb suggests that self-regard "explains" his errors and his actions throughout the text, his acknowledgement paradoxically forces him to confront the dissolution of this very selfhood: "I began these memoirs with the idea of vindicating my character. I have now no character that I wish to vindicate" (433-4). The loss of character betrays Caleb's selfhood as the projection of an identity that falls apart in the very moment of its positing, articulating Lévinas' sense that, faced with its responsibility towards another, "the self does not pose him/herself, but loses its place." Unlike Godwin's first ending, Caleb's loss of place is, in this instance, "not an abdication of the self now alienated and slave to the other, but an abnegation of oneself fully responsible for the other" (Lévinas 69). Caleb is called to assume a responsibility that signals the possibility of thinking beyond the vicious cycle of law and its transgression.

Although dispossessed of his essential identity, Caleb's survival also allows Falkland to survive, albeit in a different form than in Godwin's first ending. Where the latter associates Falkland's survival and Caleb's madness with the interminable hypostasis of institution, Falkland's spectral "figure" announces a *revenant* whose insistent but mild expostulations divest the novel of its ostensible return to origins. Falkland's status as a spectre likewise contributes to this formal disruption/revision of the novel's sense of closure, for, as Derrida reminds us, the spectre is that which "returns" and unsettles the recuperative model of temporality that Caleb wishes to deploy from the outset (*Spectres of Marx* 39). The final haunting of Godwin's novel thus marks the impossibility of returning to a conceptually solidified version of the past that would see all mistakes cleared up. Rather, insofar as a spectre always returns, it incessantly forces us to recall the misinterpretations, misreadings, and errors that complicate the search for foundations. At the same time, the (re)appearance of Falkland as a *revenant* evokes a more *an-archic*

conception of justice as “infinite” responsibility which, as the revised conclusion of *Caleb Williams* suggests, is a task that is only just beginning.

Like *Political Justice*, Godwin’s revisionary approach to *Caleb Williams* complicates any straightforward reading of Caleb in the terms of classical anarchism. In disclosing a non-rational desire for power at the heart of Caleb’s “inquisitive spirit,” Godwin acknowledges a profound ambivalence haunting the ends of Enlightenment and its confidence in the autonomous self-possessed subject as the *archē* of political justice. But if perfectibility can be read more broadly as a name for the persistent necessity of revising assumptions and a structure of consciousness whose “Protean” nature leaves it open to new discursive material, *Caleb Williams* also presents an important rethinking of Godwin’s faith in justice as reason, as well as opening a space for a history *and* a justice different from a teleological view of progress that anticipates his later essay “Of History and Romance,” which is the subject of the following chapter. In particular, Godwin advances an idea of history that would be capable of accounting for “individuality” alongside a revised conception of romance. Romance becomes a means by which to explore individuality in its historical role as a contingency that disrupts the universalizing tendencies of eighteenth-century historiography, resituating history itself *an-archically* as the “open.”

Chapter 4

4 “The Falsehood of History and the Reality of Romance”: “Of History and Romance”

“As to a great degree we may subscribe to the saying of the wise man, that ‘there is nothing new under the sun,’ so in a certain sense it may also be affirmed that nothing is old...”(198)

- Godwin, *Thoughts on Man*

In *Caleb Williams*, Godwin’s investigation into the irrational origins of institution yields an increasingly reflexive meditation on the ambiguities that attend the mind that seeks to reestablish these origins on purely rational grounds. What appears, rather, increasingly approximates a literary genealogy that unsettles the founding presuppositions of classical anarchism. Caleb’s appeal to the absolute *archē* of a justice uncontaminated by power is paradoxically capable of achieving its coherence only *a posteriori*, as a construct that becomes indiscernible from the fictions it would disavow. Moreover, Godwin’s psychological analysis of his protagonist’s motives shows how this construct points behind the figure of the autonomous moral subject towards an *an-archic* (non)ground of fluctuating motives, compulsions, and anxieties that compel this subjectivity and elude its conscious grasp. *Caleb Williams*’ revised conclusion takes this uncertainty into account by drawing towards the idea of a more “responsible anarchy” that denies the martyrdom of Godwin’s first ending. Formally and thematically displacing the novel’s point of origin, the novel’s revised ending points beyond itself toward an anarchism whose task has only just begun, marking the literary as the very “place” of classical anarchism’s displacement.

This displacement calls for the complementary reconsideration of Godwin’s prior understanding of literature and its relationship to things as they are. The process of writing and revising *Caleb Williams* shows Godwin implicitly moving towards a different literary paradigm that will further challenge his assumptions concerning the *historical* possibilities of anarchism. The collapsing distinctions between truth-falsity, innocence-

guilt, natural philosophy-romance in *Caleb Williams* decisively undermine Godwin's own prior distinction between "literature" and "romance" in the first edition of *Political Justice*. Godwin had argued that literature refers not to literary fiction per se, but any work that stimulates the "diffusion of knowledge through the medium of discussion, whether written or oral." Literature therefore includes authors such as Newton and Locke and is directly opposed to the "dreams of romance." Romance, in this instance, appears as a form of false consciousness that simply distorts political realities, whereas literature's purpose is to "extirpate . . . prejudices and mistakes" (*PJ* 3:240-41). It is telling, however, that Godwin chose to excise this discussion of literature from the revised editions of *Political Justice*. Indeed, after *Caleb Williams*, it is no longer possible for Godwin to maintain any simplified antithesis between Enlightenment literature and ideological romance and, consequently, between the "uncontaminated point of departure" claimed by classical anarchism and the irrational "fictions" of institution.

It is in his unpublished 1797 essay "Of History and Romance" that Godwin explicitly theorizes *Caleb Williams*' implicit deconstruction of the opposition between literature and romance, providing a striking account of fiction's dialogical relationship with history. This chapter explores this emerging dialogue as the development of a more *an-archic* view of history's relationship to literature in Godwin that looks forward to a post-Nietzschean historiography that Foucault names "effective history" as opposed to "traditional" history. For Foucault, traditional history involves "a comprehensive view" of history as a "consoling play of recognitions" that retraces "the past as a patient and continuous development," the "teleological movement" of man's progress. As argued earlier, this teleological "evolutionary idealism" also informs the pragmatic anthropologies of anarchism in its classical forms, including Godwin's own original formulations of perfectibility. "History becomes effective," on the contrary, "to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being." If traditional history sees its object as an "ideal continuity," effective history, or "genealogy," emphasizes the singular tangles of passions, impulses, errors, and events that traditional history obscures under the generality or identity of the concept. Where traditional historians take "pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place," effective history affirms knowledge as perspective. Perspectivism accounts for a sense of

historical knowledge as irreducibly interpretative: there are no historical phenomena, only historical interpretations of phenomena. Effective history emphasizes history as an “art” of interpretation, expressing a subterranean complicity between historical “truth” and aesthetic invention that undermines traditional metaphysical suppositions (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 153-7).

This chapter contends that “Of History and Romance” can be situated as a nascent theorization of an effective history and, as such, constitutes a significant development in Godwin’s theory of literature and its changing relationship to both history and anarchism. In particular, Godwin theorizes a conception of “individual” history that opens a means of reading history more *an-archically* as genealogy, rather than as a documentary model of anthropological progress, an actuarial collection of facts and dates, or through the privileged lens of the historian as impartial observer. In this respect, Godwin stages his argument as a critique of the positivist historiographies favoured by the Scottish Enlightenment. What Godwin understands by the “individual” is not the abstract, atomized, individual; rather, prefaced by the skeptical turn of the recently revised *Political Justice*, Godwin’s concern in “Of History and Romance” lies with the “subtle peculiarities” within the fluxile “empire of motives” subsisting beneath the normative figuration of the autonomous subject (“HR” 458). Godwin’s exploration of individual history can be considered “molecular” in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense that an object is not a self-identical substance so much as an informal composite of imperceptible inclinations, impulses, half-formed ideas, and only partially-apprehended perceptions (*A Thousand Plateaus* 213). The molecularity of the individual corresponds to a micropolitics of history contrasted with the statistical and normative patterns that typify what Godwin calls “general” history. Individual history will draw upon connections and disjunctions on the molecular stratum of the individual, a figure whose aims are difficult to assimilate under a “principle” that would subsume the particular into the universal. In turn, Godwin deploys the discontinuity of the individual as a means of exploring, primarily through the fictive medium of the romance, the conflicted substructure of a history that can no longer be gathered into the linear, evolutionary paradigm of classical anarchism.

Godwin's "effective" view of history further challenges the institutional striation of discourses associated with positivist approaches. As Godwin argues, although the "positive" methods of historiographers such as Hume and William Robertson appear to cultivate heterogeneity through a diversity of content, they ultimately absorb the singularity of an individual life into standardized patterns of behaviour ("HR" 454). Thus, despite the fact that Godwin's revisions to *Political Justice* increasingly reflect the influence of Humean empiricism, "Of History and Romance" strives to maintain the critical force of an empirical skepticism while resisting its tendency towards a positivistic reification of fact. What Godwin conceives of as romance serves as an interdisciplinary framework capable of reaffirming the singularity of the individual as a historical power, an idea that reflects Schlegel's conception of romance (*Roman*) as the emergence of the "new and striking" from "arbitrary and strange connections" that fuse "processes of thinking, poetizing, and acting." Such processes do not take a definitive "form" but are "still becoming," which Schlegel understands to be the very definition of romance (32). At the same time, Godwin shows how disciplinary transferences between history and romance preclude relativistic approaches that would simply colonize history as literature; rather, loosening the borders between history and romance renders their relation subject to an interminable questioning. Godwin thus conceives of the connection between history and romance as a kind of "dissensus," to use Bill Readings' term for a relation "structured by a constitutive incompleteness" that "seeks to make its heteronomy, its differences, more complex" rather than subsume these differences into an overarching identity (*University in Ruins* 185, 190).

In this respect, Godwin's sense of individual history can be read less as turning away from the political towards more traditional ideas of romantic subjectivity⁵⁸ or pragmatic anthropology reflected in later forms of classical anarchism, than as a turning toward the self as a radical singularity whose discovery is irreducible to substantive notions of the in-dividual as ground. I propose that Godwin's sense of individual history prefaces something of Nietzsche's discussions concerning individuality and its relation to

⁵⁸ See, for example, Siskin (1994) especially 39-42.

history in his *Untimely Meditations*. In “On the Uses and Abuses of History for Life,” Nietzsche argues that the individual as singular, unequal, and incommensurable, is a properly historical power, since history is itself created through the incommensurability of one moment with another: “each one bears a productive uniqueness within himself as the core of his being; and when he becomes conscious of this uniqueness, a strange radiance appears around him – that of the unusual” (143). This individual, Werner Hamacher suggests, is an “unaccountable excess” that dissolves the determinations of the present and opens the future as a task to be accomplished (150). Paradoxically, breaking towards the future always involves the return of the past, not as the repetition of a former present, but the past in its individuality, in its resistances to and within the present. As Godwin writes, “it is thus, and thus only that we shall be enabled to add, to the knowledge of the past, a sagacity that can penetrate into the depths of futurity,” whose depths illumine events that “though they have never yet occurred, are within the capacities of our nature” (“HR” 457).

Furthermore, this “effective” version of history prefaced by “Of History and Romance” can also be linked back to the Deleuzian Hume invoked with reference to *Political Justice*. Although appropriated by opposed philosophical traditions, both Hume and Nietzsche share certain “structural” affinities that are also discernible in Godwin, namely, a fundamental skepticism towards abstract and foundationalist conceptions of rationality, an emphasis on the psychological rather than the metaphysical, and an acknowledgement of the passions as primary rather than secondary motivation for ethical actions.⁵⁹ Where Hume and Nietzsche crucially differ, however, is in their respective approaches to history, which, as this chapter will elaborate, finds Godwin leaning more towards a Nietzschean view that attends to the Protean historicity of individuality, rather

⁵⁹ One can compare, for instance, Hume’s emphasis on psychology over metaphysics with Nietzsche’s favourable description of psychology as the “queen of the sciences.” See especially the conclusion to Book I of Hume’s *Treatise*, 177 and Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 24. On the comparison between Hume’s and Nietzsche’s view that the passions, rather than reason, are chiefly responsible for moral distinctions, compare Hume’s comment in the *Treatise* that reason is in itself nothing but a “calm passion” (530 n13) with Nietzsche’s remark in the *Will to Power* that reason is not an “independent entity” but “rather a system of relations between various passions and desires” (387). For other readings comparing Hume with Nietzsche, see Gemes (2006), 191-208; Leiter (2002); Beam (1996); and Hoy (1986), 20-38.

than the fixed entity that Hume identifies as “so much the same, in all times and places” (*Enquiry* 55).

The argument of this chapter follows the development of Godwin’s essay as it shifts from an opposition between two “species” of history – general and individual – to the complex intertwining of history and romance. Although Godwin’s essay has been recognized as significant by recent critics such as Klancher, as well as being reprinted in three paperback editions of two of Godwin’s novels, the deconstructive possibilities of the essay’s shifting terms have not been sufficiently addressed.⁶⁰ Following the Nietzschean orientation outlined above, I suggest that Deleuze’s distinctive understanding of *simulacra* provides one means to conceptualize the effect of Godwin’s shifting terminology within the essay and his negotiation with the permeable boundary at which historical truth becomes romantic, and romance becomes historical. For *simulacra*, in Deleuze’s sense, describe a creative potential inherent in the false to overturn ideas that have become reified as *archē*. Gesturing towards the role of individuality and *simulacra* in history opens a means of approaching Godwin’s historical fictions with an eye towards a more *an-archic* literary paradigm, the *anarchē* of literature itself in its capacity to recover dissenting, counter-factual perspectives otherwise occluded by the static continuity of so-called “factual” history.

4.1 General History, or Nothing is New Under the Sun

Godwin begins “Of History and Romance” by discerning “two principal branches” of history: “the study of mankind in a mass, of the progress, the fluctuations, the interests and the vices of society; and the study of the individual. The history of a nation might be written in the first of these senses, entirely in terms of abstraction and without descending so much as to name one of those individuals of which the nation is composed” (453).

⁶⁰ See Klancher (1998), 21-38. Klancher’s central argument involves tracing a passage from the necessitarian framework of *Political Justice* to an emerging theory of historical contingency in “Of History and Romance.” In the latter, Godwin sets aside the empirical category of the “probable” for the “possible,” producing what Klancher calls “Godwin’s reflex,” his “awareness of an ‘outside’ . . . that cannot be made self-conscious or be incorporated into the narrative that would explain it. This reflex can be called ‘materialist’ not because it finally grasps ‘real history’ but because it grasps the escape of the real in even the most self-conscious narrative ambition” (34).

This first branch refers to “general” history, which Godwin associates with Hume’s *History of England* (1754-62), Robertson’s account of the reign of Charles V, Scotland, and America (1792, 1794) and the works of Voltaire (“HR” 460). Hume typifies the methodology behind the generalist approach when he famously suggests that history’s “chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature.” Once discovered, such principles show us that humanity is “so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular” (*Enquiry* 55). Robertson’s *History of Scotland* (1759) carries Hume’s idea of universal historical principles even further, portraying the Act of Union as a historical *telos* that effectively abolishes all remaining cultural differences between England and Scotland: “the distinctions which had subsisted for many ages gradually wear away; peculiarities disappear; the same manner prevails in both parts of the island; the same authors are read and admired; the same entertainments are frequented by the elegant and polite; and the same standard of taste and of purity in language, is established” (313).⁶¹

With its emphasis on a “natural” progression whose teleology is centered on anthropological and civil progress and the discovery of universal constants (*archai*), general history treats history as a technology, in Heidegger’s sense of a demand that nature – as history – “supply energy which can be extracted and stored.” History becomes a “standing-reserve” from which principles of human nature are expedited, which in turn “enframes” or encloses individuality according to a law of repetition and application (*Basic Writings* 320-5). This approach, Godwin suggests, rests upon the abstract “logical deduction and calculation of probabilities” (“HR” 462).⁶² Probability becomes a technology for the reduction of contingency so as to account for the “fluctuations” with which general history is concerned. Fluctuations are not, however, the “fluxes” of

⁶¹ For a more detailed account of Hume and Robertson’s contributions to nation-building and its specific relationship to eighteenth-century philosophies of sensibility, see Gottlieb (2007), 26-60.

⁶² See Poovey (1998). Poovey elaborates on the development of statistical methods in relation to moral philosophy in eighteenth century Britain can be connected to the emerging institutional model of liberal governmentality. Such methods “assumed that one sought knowledge about the particulars of subjectivity in order to understand the *regularities* of the moral universe that underwrote (most) human beings’ willingness to submit to government” (148). A similar perspective can also be found in Hacking (1990), who traces the emergence of modern methods of “statistical inference” whose “roots . . . lie in the notion that can improve – control – a deviant subpopulation by enumeration and classification” (3).

thought intimated by Godwin's discussion of epistemology in *Political Justice*; rather, fluctuation "in general" describes the momentary absence of regularity, a permissible, statistical variation of incidental details incorporated within a macrostructure.

Ascertaining "the causes that operate universally upon masses of men under given circumstances," general history deploys probability as a way of describing the manner in which details are distributed. Although mainly concerned with "the progress and varieties of civilization," Godwin argues that general history has "many subordinate channels into which it has formed itself," involving subjects as diverse as the "arts of refinement and pleasure," "the history of wealth and the history of commerce," the "progress of revenue and the arts of taxation," "the varieties of climates," "the succession of archons and the adjustment of olympiads," as well as the "examination of medals and coins" ("HR" 454). To be sure, whatever is sufficiently general is capable of admitting a wide range of empirical cases. As Deleuze points out, "empiricists are not wrong to present general ideas as particular ideas in themselves," yet such general ideas are only particular "as long as they add the belief that each of these can be replaced by any other," thus abolishing individuality itself (*Difference* 1). Each given particular is considered formally equivalent and therefore substitutable: the quantitative equivalence of particulars is correlative to a qualitative order of resemblance. Hence, Godwin says that general history emphasizes "points of similitude" between cultures and discourses in tracing the teleological "progress of mankind from the savage to the civilized state" (454).

Accordingly, the general historian judges the relative progress, customs, and "vices" of cultures or nations by analogy, which constitutes a fundamental element of a logic that ties together generic and specific differences under a common identity or *archē*. Synchronically, any cross-section of cultures or nations will reveal the same generic processes. Diachronically, the present becomes an analogue of the past: "General history will furnish us precedents in abundance, will show us how that which happened in one country has been repeated in another" ("HR" 456). With its focus on precedent, general history follows the logic of a determining judgment that *Political Justice* had associated with biological predetermination and law. Accordingly, Godwin writes that history becomes the mere "collation and comparison of successive ages": successive ages are

spatially juxtaposed as simultaneous presents (454-5). The hegemonic tendencies of this presentism are exemplary in Robertson's interpretation of the Act of Union, which Evan Gottlieb identifies as a "panegyric to assimilation": "shifting verb tenses from the past to the eternal present by the end of his first clause, Robertson's very grammar conveys the idea that Britishness is both an ongoing process and an identity that has already been achieved" (54).

From a theoretical perspective, the generalist dependency on analogy, presentism, and assimilation falls into irresolvable difficulties. As Deleuze points out, generality "must essentially relate being to particular existents, but at the same time it cannot say what constitutes their *individuality*. For it retains in the particular only that which conforms to the general" (*Difference* 38; emphasis mine). Despite the ostensible universality of its principles, or because of them, Godwin suggests that general history is incapable of providing "clear ideas" about the difference of the particular qua individual. Rather, generality tends towards an amorphous, formally indistinguishable, "mass" of individuals whose particularity "is no sooner accumulated than it perishes" ("HR" 455). If every individual case is equally exchangeable under a general *archē* of probability, analogy, resemblance, and equivalence, then individual elements co-exist in a "labyrinth of particulars" that tend towards homogeneity (455). This is to say that general history is largely indifferent to the category of the *event*, insofar as event signifies something new that, in Deleuze's terms, creates a "fundamental disturbance of the present" (*Difference* 38). In a similar fashion, Godwin subsequently points to the general historian's "unspeakable abhorrence" for "whatever would disturb by exciting our feelings the torpid tranquility of our soul" (454). In his later *Thoughts on Man*, Godwin returns to the themes in "Of History and Romance" in an essay entitled "Of Imitation and Invention," which could be understood as an echo of the distinction between general and individual history from the earlier, unpublished, work. Like general history, imitation operates on the premise that there is nothing new under the sun, that "we are all apes, fixing our eyes upon a model, and copying him, gesture by gesture" (*Thoughts on Man* 252). General history's indifference to the singular nature of the event renders it such that "the most calamitous, and the most stupendous scenes are nothing but an eternal and wearisome repetition," echoing Blake's critique of natural religion's sense of the universe as the

“dull round” of a “mill with complicated wheels” (*Thoughts on Man* 254; Blake, “There is No Natural Religion” E 2). Godwin’s point is not that history ought to ignore catastrophes, but that general history does not properly engage the calamitous, properly *an-archic*, nature of events at the level of their particularity, thereby reducing both their ethical and historical significance. The extraction of general principles from finite facts, without recognizing that such principles are always themselves dependent and subject to revision, leads to the claim that the knowledge of history is exhausted, or exhaustible, by the bellwether of positive knowledge and determined in advance by what we already know.⁶³

For Nietzsche, such generalized representations of history demonstrate the violence through which the “individuality of the past” is “forced into a general form and all its sharp angles and lines broken to pieces for the sake of . . . comparison” (*Untimely* 68). General history secures the individual through its very “de-individuation,” absorbing its singularity into an ideological stereotype. Thus, Godwin notes, “the excellence indeed of sages, of patriots, and poets, as we find it exhibited at the period of their maturity, is

⁶³ Further solidifying the connection to institution and assimilation, Godwin likewise emphasizes general history’s preoccupation with nationhood. A paradigmatic example is Hume’s widely-read 1753 essay “Of National Characters,” in which he redeploys his earlier arguments on sympathy in the *Treatise* in terms of the formation of national identities. Repeating the *Treatise*’s general idea of the sympathies as a “propensity” to “receive by communication” the “inclinations and sentiments” of another, Hume argues that individuals demonstrate a strong “propensity to company and society” in which “like passions and inclinations . . . run, as it were, by contagion” (*Treatise* 316; *Philosophical Works* 3:230). This “propensity” initially takes shape in terms of local attachments and habits that, through “contagion,” are transformed into ever widening spheres of sentiments that would unite individuals into “one political body”: “their intercourse must be so frequent, for defence, commerce, and government, that, together with the same speech or language, they must acquire a resemblance in their manners, and have a common or national character, as well as a personal one, peculiar to each individual” (*Philosophical Works* 3:230). While ostensibly making room for the “personal,” this personality is only abstractly or formally defined in terms of its resemblance to other individuals under the generalized template of national character. As Julia Wright points out, the nation here functions as a related set of ideologies enforcing a “homogenous community” that “consistently elides individuality within the category of ‘national character’ . . . and co-opts cultural work to further the national agenda rather than challenge, complicate, or supplement it” (*Blake* xv). As Godwin remarks, because the generalist’s “mighty minds cannot descend to be busied about any thing less than the condition of nations,” they efface the individual for the general category of national character, restricting their view of the individual to “the public stage” (454, 458). The public stage establishes the individual within a typology of national character roughly patterned after the (neo)classical values of the Greek *paideia*: poet, sage, and patriot. In a similar manner, Nietzsche writes that the historical individual is discernible “only under three forms of existence: as philosopher, as Saviour, and as artist” (“We Philologists” *Complete Works* 8:115; translation modified). Under the auspices of national character, however, these figures become idealized social representations created to serve national interests.

too apt to overwhelm and discourage us with its lustre” (456). This individual without individuality renders the “excellence”⁶⁴ of individuality a burden. One is at best a secondary possessor of the excellence of poets, sages, and patriots. The consequence is that the individual itself vanishes through the impossibility of the present ever living up to the institutional model of the (past) individual. Discouraged by the lustre of an institutionalized form of individuality handed down from the past, the individual can no longer distinguish itself in the present as a historical power of future potential. We become incapable, Godwin says, of any “contemplation of illustrious men, such as we find scattered through the ages” or the “ascendancy of the daring and the wise over the vulgar multitude”: the burden of our unworthiness is too great. The individual “sinks into the deepest and most invariable lethargy of soul” since “if he only associates, as most individuals are destined to do, with ordinary men, he will be in danger of becoming such as they are” (456-7).

4.2 Individual History, or Nothing is Old Under the Sun

Nietzsche identifies the institutional form of the individual that preoccupies the general historian with “a race of eunuchs” whose task is to “stand guard over history to make sure that nothing comes of it other than stories – but certainly not an event!” (*Untimely* 84). Generality anesthetizes the *an-archic* force of the event in its individuality and, vice versa, individuality itself as an event capable of unsettling the fixity, continuity, and similitude that governs general history. Godwin thus proposes “individual history” as a second “species” of history that enables “us to view minutely and in detail what to the uninstructed eye was too powerful to be gazed at” (“HR” 456). Individual history returns to the site of *Political Justice*’s focus on the singularity of the “case,” re-invoking the Leibnizian principle of indiscernibles and microscopic differences as the proper locus of *an-archistic* thought.

⁶⁴ Godwin’s use of “excellence” also gestures to Readings’ sense of the term as an empty signifier fastened to the techno-bureaucratization of the University: “excellence brackets the question of value in favor of measurement [and] replaces questions of accountability or responsibility with accounting solutions” (*University in Ruins* 119). The “excellence” of the individual empties the individual of historical value/content, establishing a neutral medium capable of translating radically different idioms into a common principle.

Individual history can first be described as an art of descent or de-sedimentation, much in the sense that Foucault attributes to Nietzsche's use of the term *Herkunft*. Nietzsche deploys the term *Herkunft*, Foucault explains, wherever he seeks to identify "not the exclusive generic characteristics of an individual, a sentiment, or an idea" but "the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 145). In a similar manner, Godwin wants to avoid "the generalities of historical abstraction" by arguing for an individual history capable of descending into the "materials of which [history] is composed," in order to "mark the operation of human passions . . . observe the empire of motives whether groveling or elevated" and "note the influence that one human being exercises over another" (457). The individual, as the subsequent revisions and extension of epistemology in *Political Justice* has already shown, only appears as a unity on its surface, but is in reality an irreducible *anarchē* of infinitely divisible and heterogeneous "materials." As such, Godwin resists approaching individuals as cogwheels at the service of great moments in history that direct the vast "machine of society," for what Deleuze calls the "silent plurality of senses" that subsist within each individual or event, a deep structure of singularity that develops in following man into his "closet" ("HR" 456, 458; Deleuze, *Nietzsche* 4). Individual history is sensitive to the internal pluralism that subtends and is capable of *an-archically* disturbing generalities, opening the way for an empiricism that would be adequate to the task of historical interpretation without (over) generalization.

Godwin's criticism of the Scottish historiographers constitutes the desire to maintain a philosophical skepticism towards foundations without resorting to a positivist version of empiricism that would lead to a restricted view of history as the exhaustive collection of facts. Rather, Godwin replaces the naturalization of history as anthropological progress that colours more orthodox anarchistic perspectives, with the complex nature of an individual's history. Reminiscent of Blake's "Auguries of Innocence," Godwin writes: "naturalists tell us that a single grain of sand more or less on the surface of the earth, would have altered its motion, and, in process of ages, have diversified its events" (467). Godwin here iterates a certain aspect of his view of necessity from *Political Justice* that "everything in the universe is linked and united

together. No event, however minute and imperceptible, is barren of a train of consequences” (1:42). In the context of its history, necessity is less a chain of fixed laws than a sequence of unpredictable antecedents generating uncertain outcomes. Godwin acknowledges that minor perturbations are capable of producing macroscopic transformations within a network of increasing complexity. If general history suggests a global system of imitation tending towards equilibrium, individual history focuses on local perturbations that increase the complexity, rather than the homogeneity, of the “system of the universe.”

The art of descent also implies the repetition of a certain “native” psychology. “The mind of man does not love abstractions,” writes Godwin, so individual history must appeal to a “genuine and native taste as it discovers itself in children and uneducated persons” that “rests entirely in individualities” (455). Besides Godwin’s distinctively romantic tropes, in the context of *Political Justice* the “native taste” of the mind rests in particulars because the empirical imagination is in “perpetual flux” (1:35). Individual history causes this flux to return by unworking and de-sedimenting the habits and prepossessions that comprise the institution of the self. To return to the “native taste” of the mind does not, however, mean imitating the child or uneducated person, nor does it require complete destruction of general principles. As Godwin states, the calculation of probabilities serves as a “whetstone upon which to sharpen our faculty of discrimination,” developing habits and models of thought inseparable from the cultural education of the individual (462). Individual history does not therefore reject general principles out of hand, but serves as a means of recognizing that such principles are limited in ways that prevent knowledge from grasping individuality. Generalities are only capable of perceiving the historical pressures exerted by the institution on the individuals it aims to assimilate. The individual historian’s desire to return to the “genuine and native taste” of the child and the uneducated can be understood rather as a process of deconstructing or unlearning habits of thinking that would obscure an approach to history in which there is “nothing old under the sun.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Here we might also note a further connection between Godwin and Blake. As Saree Makdisi points out, a similar process of “unlearning” can be found in Blake’s idea of a revolutionary Jesus who “supposes every

Godwin metaphorically identifies his method for unlearning institutions of thought and descending into the “pre-history” of the self as a kind of magnetism: “we go forth into the world; we see what man is; we enquire what he was; and when we return home and engage in the solemn act of self-investigation, our most useful employment is to produce the materials we have collected abroad, and, by a sort of magnetism, cause those particulars to start out to view in ourselves, which might otherwise have lain for ever undetected” (455). The magnetic “starting out” of particulars develops enquiry towards what Percy Shelley later calls the “unapprehended relations of things” circulating beneath the generalizing and classifying mechanisms of ordinary perception or “reason” (*Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* 480, 484). In the very process of approaching singularities “already there,” these same singularities call for their own invention. What is individual is never given from the start in seeing what man “is.” Enquiry only begins through a proto-genealogical return to what man “was,” to the past through which his present being emerges. Returning to what man “was” does not mean seeing the past as a means of justification for the institution(s) of the present. In the movement of descent, Godwin suggests that enquiry must have a productive relationship with the materials collected, giving “energy and utility to the records of our social existence” rather than reproducing a “mere chronicle of facts, places and dates”: “He that knows only what day the Bastille was taken and on what spot Louis XVI perished, knows nothing. He professes the mere skeleton of history. The muscles, the articulations, every thing in which the life emphatically resides, is absent.” Godwin arrives at the paradoxical and proto-genealogical conclusion that “there is nothing more uncertain, more contradictory, more unsatisfying than the evidence of facts” (457, 462).

Thing to be Evident to the Child & to the Poor & Unlearned.” Blake’s implicit suggestion is that “our very ‘learning’ is what stands in the way of our reading . . . with all the freshness of a child, whose ‘rouzing’ faculties are uninhibited by paradigms of reading and by literary and aesthetic conventions, and perhaps even by the regulations of ‘State Trickery’ itself” (Blake, “Annotations to Berkeley’s *Sirius*” E 664; Makdisi, “The Political Aesthetic of Blake’s Images” 111). In a similar fashion, Nietzsche sees unlearning in the form of an “active” forgetting symbolized by the figure of the child in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: “the child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game” (27). Active forgetting deploys the figure of the child as a metaphor for a return to a “pre-history” through which the individual is a historical power capable of creating new values that portend a future.

As Klancher and Rajan respectively argue, it is in this sense that Godwin aligns with Hans Kellner's notion of "counter-factual" history and provides an opening for a "romantic" or literary approach to history that stresses the contingency of historical processes rather than permanence of nations and governments (Rajan, "Introduction" 19; Klancher, "Godwin and the Genre Reformers" 27).⁶⁶ Godwin identifies the combined sense of the counter-factual and the contingent as "historical license" (*licentia historica*): "the noblest and most excellent species of history, may be decided to be a composition in which, with a scanty substratum of facts and dates, the writer interweaves a number of happy, ingenious and instructive inventions, blending them into one continuous and indiscernible mass" (462-3). Yet, Godwin's sense of historical license is not "revisionist" in its approach to the past. Historical revisionism connects to historical license only in the sense that both refer to events that may not have occurred. The focus of historical revision, however, is not merely to propose alternatives to the past but to effectively replace it as actual history. Thus what Godwin calls "license" is to be distinguished from what Lubomir Dolezel calls the "distorted history" of revisionism: "Distorted history is a tool of totalitarian ideology for enforcing its image of the past. Counterfactual history is a tool of historiography to help us understand better the actual past" (800). Distorted history, to the contrary, applies itself to the "permanent rewriting of history, following the shifts in political power," that actively attempt to "remake the actual past" by using revisionist methods such as "erasing every historical agent who became *persona non grata*" (Dolezel 797).

Distorted history isolates an alternative to history but subsequently re-writes it *as* history, erasing elements of the actual past that disturb its ideological mastery. The inability to traverse its own blind spot, so to speak, renders general history both unaware of its own finitude as an epistemological model, but also unaware of its real historical effects. By effacing the individual *persona non grata*, general history closes down the

⁶⁶ In the introduction to her edition of Mary Shelley's *Valperga* (1990), Rajan helpfully aligns Godwin's sense of counter-factual history in "Of History and Romance" and *St. Leon* with the Leibnizian postulate of "possible worlds," showing that "once imagined . . . counterfactuals cannot develop fantastically [i.e. entirely in the domain of "romance"] but must unfold necessarily, according to the logic of the 'set' or series to which they belong" (20).

perspectives that would expose its own absence of foundation or *archē*. To the contrary, individual history takes the *an-archic* figure of the *persona non grata* obscured by “the history of negotiations and tricks . . . corruption and political profligacy” as its very content (461). As such, individual history reconfirms the affinity between history and human agency. The individual is not a static form positioned within a sedentary structure, but a “vector in a multi-dimensional space” of potentials (Dolezel 800). To approach the complex of individual actions carried out by multiple individuals is to engage how the tissue of potentials shifts through the actions of the historical agent. Dismissing potentialities as merely fictional or insignificant for not being materially actualized in a particular situation is precisely to distort history, since every actual occurrence is itself saturated with virtual alternatives, the fabric of which historian Hugh Trevor-Roper calls the “the total pattern of forces whose pressure created the event” (13).

This total pattern of forces approaches Godwin’s metaphor of a “magnetic field” through which particulars start out in their individuality, and describes its interwoven composite of “ingenious and instructive inventions” with the “scanty substratum” of facts and dates. The substratum of facts appears to the eye of the individual historian not as positive data that can be synthesized into a general principle so much as a heterogeneous collection of “broken fragments” and “scattered ruins” that lack clear significance or connection, forming a network of particulars difficult to fully unravel (“HR” 462). The problem that calls for historical license, which eventually feeds into romance, is in establishing connections among these fragments that does not sublimate their particularity, but brings heterogeneous parts together to emphasize their “magetical virtue”; that is, heterogeneous elements functioning together as a unity *of* their parts.

The production of this “peripheral” totality, to use Daniel W. Smith’s term, neither unifies nor totalizes but “has an *effect* on these parts, since it is able to create non-preexistent relations between elements that in themselves remain disconnected, and are left intact” (xxiii). In this respect, the individual historian can also be compared to a kind of *bricoleur*. The *bricoleur* is contrasted with the “Engineer,” who, as Derrida explains, represents the subject as a mythical totality, “the absolute origin of his own discourse and would supposedly construct it ‘out of nothing’” (“Structure, Sign, and Play” 232). The

“myth” of the Engineer traverses both general history and the theoretical construction of the liberal subject in the eighteenth century. As John Milbank points out, the subject-as-Engineer is discernible in Adam Smith’s conception of individuals as a set of “unrelated individual starting points – persons and properties sprung from nowhere” (41). This conception of the individual *ex nihilo* is at odds with Godwin’s view of necessity as well as a broader philosophical perspective which, as he states in an unpublished essay “On Miracles,” “cannot understand the producing of something out of nothing” (*Essays Never Before Published* 260). Sprung from nowhere, the Engineer marks the general form of the individual that denies its historicity; if the Engineer promotes the in-dividual in the sense of being an atomic *punctum*, there is nothing that makes this in-dividual an “individuality.”

The peripheral figure of the individual, once composed, is neither closed nor finished. Rather, the individual is a composite of inclinations and anxieties that fluctuates with the total pattern of forces and relations that create it. The sense in which Godwin refers to the individual can be supplemented by Nietzsche’s idea of individuality as a historical trope for the production of the new or the different, implicated in its magnetic capacity to start out from the “universal, green pasture happiness of the herd” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 41). Indeed, Godwin sees the “lethargy” of the liberal subject as equivalent to one who associates only with “ordinary men” and is “in danger of becoming such as they are.” General history cultivates this danger by reducing individuals to ordinary men under a law of imitation. On the contrary, for Godwin the individual dissolves the institution(s) of the present in the direction of a future not yet invested by forms of imitation. The individualities excavated by a return to the past must also be discerned as productive of a future rather than another present: “we shall be enabled to add, to the knowledge of the past, a sagacity that can penetrate into the depths of futurity” (457). In a similar vein, Nietzsche argues that “only he who builds the future [has] a right . . . to pass judgment on the past”; that is, it is only insofar as one is capable of creating a future that the individuality of the past starts out in its “magnetical virtue” (*Untimely* 94). This “oracular judgment” of the past “as an architect of the future” exposes the institution to both pre-historical and post-historical senses against which the “ground” of the present becomes radically uncertain. If the imitative law of general history produces an image of

time as an all-encompassing present, then individual history develops a conception in which, as Deleuze argues, “only the past and future inhere or subsist in time. Instead of a present which absorbs the past and the future, a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum” (*Logic of Sense* 164-5).

Through a method of descent, individual history subdivides the abstract generality of the present into pre- and post-historical tendencies that are constantly dividing the present from within. In contrast to the circular time of a perpetual now, Deleuze refers to the subdivision of the past and future as that of a “straight line,” echoing Nietzsche’s idea that “*the individual is the entire life up until now in one line and not its result*” (qtd. in Hamacher 154). Nietzsche’s sense of the individual as composed in a “straight line” follows a distinctively Nietzschean interpretation of destiny that can be linked to Godwin’s understanding of necessity. As Deleuze points out, for Nietzsche, destiny is not the abolition of chance but its affirmation: “necessity is affirmed of chance in as much as chance itself is affirmed” (*Nietzsche* 26). Similarly, Godwin suggests that a “true history” will consist of the “delineation of consistent, human character, in a display of the manner in which such a character acts under successive circumstances, in showing how character increases and assimilates new substances to its own, and how it decays, together with the catastrophe into which by its own gravity it naturally declines” (466). Although there is a necessity through which the individual unfolds, such necessity does not ground the individual in a secure future that could be known in advance. Instead, the past and the future appear unsettling: “the man who does not want to become part of the masses,” Nietzsche argues, “needs only to stop being comfortable with himself” (*Untimely* 127).

This unsettling marks a second aspect of individual history’s magnetism identified by Godwin, namely, that the individual produces a libidinal spark that leaps from the individuality of the past towards capabilities not yet realized within the present, affecting the potential for a repetition of a past that was, from the perspective of general history, inexistent: “there must be an exchange of real sentiments, or an investigation of subtle peculiarities, before improvement can be the result. . . . [T]here must be friction and heat, before the virtue will operate” (458). What is transmitted is not the “same” of the general but the very historical inequality, the difference, of individuality as such. Thus, Godwin

argues that the reader will “insensibly imbibe the same spirit, and burn with kindred fires” as the inequality that individuates the poet, sage, or patriot (456). It is this unconscious transmission that Godwin identifies as “influence” in his essay “Of Choice in Reading” for *The Enquirer*, written slightly prior to “Of History and Romance.” The reader of Shakespeare or Milton, for example, “communicates a portion of the inspiration all around him. It passes from man to man, till it influences the whole mass” to a point at which “every man . . . is changed from what he was” (140). In the context of Godwin’s sense of necessity connecting everything to everything else, “influence” can be discerned in its root sense as a fluid inflow affecting human destiny and an imperceptible action at a distance that exerts changes. As Godwin suggests, it is only through individual history that we “feel ourselves impelled to explore new and untrodden paths” (456). This affective transmission through literature foreshadows Godwin’s claim for “romance” as a power for creating and forming history, one that will eventually lead to an even more paradoxical idea that romance itself is the true form of history.

The recondite circulation of influence refers individuality less to deliberative inter-subjective communication than to affect, in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of imperceptible, intensive relations that are not the property of subjects but “go beyond the strength of those who undergo them” (*What is Philosophy?* 164, 174). Godwin’s development of individual history as magnetism invests history with intensive relations beneath the imitative forms that it will assume for general history. This is to say that the magnetic invests a certain desire in history through which the discourse of the individual ruptures the “torpid tranquility” of a general-historical typology of individuals without individuality or history *en masse*. Adapting a term used by Bergson, Deleuze calls this process “fabulation,” a laicized mythmaking function proper to art that creates affective connections between individuals which serve as the germ for future potentials (*Essays Critical and Clinical* 3).⁶⁷ This affective magnetism, catalyzed by the “sharp edges” of

⁶⁷ Deleuze adapts the term “fabulation” from Bergson’s *Two Sources of Religion and Morality* (1935). Bergson refers to the “fabulation function” as a property of closed or static morality. In this context, fabulation is a function of the imagination that creates “voluntary hallucinations” through which we posit the existence of gods, spirits, etc. For Bergson, fabulation is essentially negative in that it fosters strict obedience to these images of gods as a means of effecting social cohesion. Conversely, Deleuze suggests

the individual, renders history the domain of *simulacra*. *Simulacra*, as Deleuze points out with respect to Plato, do not refer to bad copies in relation to a presupposed model; rather, the *simulacrum* “harbors a positive power which denies *the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*” (*Logic of Sense* 256, 262).⁶⁸ *Simulacra* must be raised from the depths of general history in which they are suppressed or ignored towards its surface, releasing what Deleuze calls the “power of the false”: “Far from being a new foundation, [the *simulacrum*] engulfs all foundations, it assures a universal breakdown . . . an un-founding” (*Logic of Sense* 262). The power of the false is distinct from revisionist distortions of history. The latter operate within the dialectic of models and copies insofar as they destroy historical actualities in order to “conserve and perpetuate the established order of representations” (*Logic of Sense* 266). The *persona non grata*, however, is more of a *simulacrum* insofar as it harbours the potential to challenge general and distorted historical narratives alike.

Just as *simulacra* have a tendency to overturn the relation between true and false, Godwin radically displaces the “truth” of what calls itself history and the falsehood of the “fable”: “I ask not, as a principal point, whether it be true or false? My first enquiry is, ‘Can I derive instruction from it? Is it a genuine praxis upon the nature of man? Is it

that “we ought to take up Bergson’s idea of fabulation and give it a political meaning” through which it takes on a more creative and transgressive sense.

⁶⁸ Deleuze’s “creative” conception of *simulacra* is to be distinguished from Jean Baudrillard’s more pessimistic reading of the term. In *Simulations* (1983), Baudrillard stages Plato’s definition of *simulacra* as the consequence of postmodernity’s substitution of signs for the real, thereby erasing any reference to an external or historical model of reality (4). Instead, signs endlessly circulate in relation to one another, standing for nothing but themselves, ultimately becoming interchangeable in an immaterial simulated universe Baudrillard terms the “hyperreal.” In the absence of any external referent, Baudrillard suggests that our existence is limited to naïve realism, futilely maintaining the shattered representational link between image and world, or becoming a neutralized “sponge” that transiently absorbs the ceaseless exchange and circulation of signs amongst themselves. Where Baudrillard agrees with Deleuze is on the basic definition of *simulacra* as evading the representational matrix of model and copy. However, Baudrillard’s sense of *simulacra* as “hyperreal” tends towards a nostalgia for a lost real. For Deleuze, who stages his discussion with respect to Nietzsche, the task is to “to make the *simulacra* rise and to affirm their rights” (*Logic of Sense* 262). This requires first the recognition that the model is itself a simulation: there is no “model” that was lost and thus nothing to lament. On the basis of this idea, Deleuze suggests that *simulacra* open a space for creation, a “life” of the false that “carries the real beyond its principle to the point where it is effectively produced,” thus creating as of yet unseen combinations of potentials from the destitution of “reality.”

pregnant with the most generous motives and examples? If so, I had rather be profoundly versed in this fable, than in all the genuine histories that ever existed” (461). The question concerning romance is not what it means (interpretation) but how it functions (experimentation).⁶⁹ Through the experimental figure of “meaning as use,” individual history opens a transvaluation of history. The fable that sustains general history is precisely its claim to represent history truthfully, while the individual historian’s interweaving of facts with “ingenious and instructive inventions” constitutes a “genuine praxis upon the nature of man,” gesturing to the power of the “false” *simulacrum* to affect “real” history. Godwin thus inverts the charge that romance misrepresents historical personages and events and leads readers to confuse fiction with history (464-5). Rather, Godwin counter-intuitively argues that “the graver and more authentic name of history” is more susceptible to deluding its readers since, as a discourse, history claims to represent actual states of affairs.

With an eye to how history is genealogically over-determined by competing perspectives, Godwin challenges both the evidential claims of individuals “who lived upon the spot” and the idea that “the true history of a public transaction is never known till many years after the event”: “Whitlock and Clarendon . . . differ as much in their view of the transactions, as Hume and the Whig historians have since done. Yet all are probably honest. If you be a superficial thinker you will take up with one or another of their representations, as best suits your prejudices. But, if you are a profound one, you will see so many incongruities and absurdities in all” (465).⁷⁰ The “superficial” thinker is literally a thinker of representational surfaces and their generalities, whereas the “profound” thinker descends into substrata of history’s diverse materials and exposes the incongruities through which history’s claim to truth is ungrounded by the very evidence it seeks to legitimize as truth. As the method through which particulars otherwise unnoticed come into view, individual history unsettles the very dialectic internal to general and

⁶⁹ See also Deleuze (2000), 129.

⁷⁰ According to Handwerk and Markley’s note in their edition of *Caleb Williams*, “Bustrode Whitlocke (1605-75) and the Earl of Clarendon (1609-74) wrote opposed accounts of the Glorious Revolution, as Hume and the Whig historians later did” (465 n1).

individual history, thus exposing history to a non-historical Outside in which individual history becomes indiscernible from “romance.”

4.3 Between Individual History and Romance

According to Godwin, if the individual historian’s sense of “historical license” renders history “too near a resemblance to fable,” “romance then, strictly considered, may be pronounced to be one of the species of history” (464). This implies that romance can be initially considered a species of individual history. In the very next sentence, however, Godwin further distinguishes romance’s approach to the individual: “the historian is confined to individual incident and individual man, and must hang upon his invention or conjecture as he can” where “the writer of romance collects his materials from all sources, experience, report and the records of human affairs; then generalizes them; and finally selects, from their elements and the various combinations they afford, those instances which he is best qualified to portray” (464).

Godwin’s description of romance in this passage is nearly identical to his earlier sense of individual history as the process of seeing what man is, enquiring what he was, (re)producing the materials collected, and causing them to stand out in their particularity “by a sort of magnetism” (455). The question remains: in what sense is individual history different from romance, since they name nearly identical processes? Earlier in the essay, Godwin also criticizes general history for studying humankind as a “mass” when individual history itself allows for history and romance to interweave facts with “instructive inventions” into “one continuous and indiscernible mass.” Near his conclusion, Godwin will shift the meanings of his terms even further, claiming that the “writer of romance . . . is to be considered the writer of real history; while he who was formerly called the historian must be contented to step down into the place of his rival, with this disadvantage, that he is a romance writer, without the ardour, the enthusiasm, and the sublime science of imagination” (466). Romance passes from a subordinate position in which it is not a “genre” but a species of history to a *simulacrum* of individual history. Godwin then appears to overturn the relation between history and romance entirely, such that the former becomes subordinate to the latter. In his conclusion,

however, Godwin again reasserts the advantage of history over romance: “[The historian] indeed does not understand the character he exhibits, but the events are taken out of his hands and determined by the system of the universe, and therefore, as far as his information extends, must be true. The romance writer, on the other hand, is continually straining at a foresight to which his faculties are incompetent, and continually fails” (467). Even still, Godwin describes the regained advantage of history over romance as “imperfect” and thus unstable.

Rather than perceive these terminological exchanges as mere inconsistencies, it can be argued that Godwin pushes his terms to the point where they change their nature and are reversed into *simulacra*. As Deleuze points out, *simulacra* produce an effect of resemblance, but “by totally different means than those at work within the model. The *simulacrum* is built upon a disparity or upon a difference . . . If the *simulacrum* still has a model, it is another model, a model of the Other from which there flows an internalized dissemblance” (*Logic of Sense* 258). The masses studied by general history involve accumulations of particulars organized according to an imitative principle that restricts its diversity of content to a theoretical framework that posits nothing new under the sun. On the contrary, the indiscernible mass through which “the falsehood and impossibility of history” shifts to “the reality of romance” describes an inventive *becoming*. When history descends from generalities and encounters the excess of the individual, it dissimulates into impossibility. It is no longer possible to tell the “truth” in the sense of the conventional, national, or institutional narratives. However, the point at which history encounters its own internal dissimilarity via the individual and is caught in the overt act of “making up fictions” also opens a potential a line of flight upon which romance renders palpable a fragile, even utopian, dimension through which *simulacra* are raised from the depths of history to their romanticized surface. As Deleuze suggests, “a creator is someone who creates their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities . . . Without a set of impossibilities, you won’t have a line of flight, the exit that is creation, the power of falsity that is truth” (*Negotiations* 132).

As a genealogical process, individual history is a diagnostic of history, exposing the *an-archic* tangle of motives, passions, and influences through which (general) history

betrays itself as “fable.” Along with individual history, romance then becomes the work of searching out what Godwin had identified with his “metaphysical dissecting knife” in his later recollection of *Caleb Williams* – that is to say, the work of tracing the obscure “involutions” of character that renders history more *an-archically* as a network that is difficult to unravel. At the same time, because this metaphysical dissection discloses the protean substructure that underwrites the “fable” of instituted versions of history, romance also discloses potentialities, patterns of forces, internal trajectories of “perfectibility” that are capable of sending history in a different direction: “we shall not only understand those events as they arise which are no better than old incidents under new names, but shall judge truly of such conjunctures and combinations, their sources and effects, as, though they have never yet occurred, are within the capacities of our nature” (457). History and romance maintain an elective affinity that is magnetic rather than synthetic, an affective charge that results in both discourses exerting attractive and repulsive forces upon one another that maintain their relationship as *an-archic* or in dissensus. Godwin’s introduction of romance reflexively de-stabilizes history’s relationship to itself, while his return to history at the conclusion of the text highlights the impossibility of simply transcending history for romance. To paraphrase Deleuze, individual history does not move solely within its own discourse but inspires new “affects” that constitute a non-historical apprehension of history itself, while romance is in turn made responsible to the history or necessity – the complex “system of the world” – in which it is enmeshed (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 164). The individual hovers between the “conceptual personae” of history and an “aesthetic figure” proper to romance, “two entities that often pass into one another, in a becoming that carries them both into an intensity that co-determines them” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 66). Godwin identifies this intensity as the “magnetical virtue in man” through which history and romance partake of an “exchange of real sentiments.”

Godwin’s unsettled terminology expresses that romance and history cannot definitively occupy the same figurative level so as to be reducible to one another. Rather, the twisting argumentative course of Godwin’s own essay deconstructs the opposition between history and romance so as to open the possibility of reading both discourses *an-archically*, with and through one another. In the first instance, romance appears

subordinated to the genre as a “style” through which history reasserts the significance of the individual. Romance is a species of history insofar as it can be used to illustrate the epistemological truth-claims of individual history. However, Godwin recognizes that even individual history is subject to generic constraints that romance is not, namely the discovery or conjecture of evidence capable of forming a model that refers to an actual past. The presence or absence of evidence constrains individual history to models that are more or less plausible for the representation of the past, whereas romance is not restricted to making truth-claims concerning an actual past. The operative question, as Godwin maintains, is not “whether it be true or false” but “Can I derive instruction from it?” (461). This question opens romance to a distinctive relationship with its historical materials, allowing for *simulacra* to rise to the surface via potential combinations otherwise foreclosed by general history. Nonetheless, it is precisely history’s so-called constraints that allow romance to function as counter-factual, and hence to some degree bound up with the factual – that is to say, romance can be understood as an explication of the virtual or magnetic pattern of potential forces that shape historical events, rather than simply imaginary or a projection of possibility beyond all necessity. If Godwin sees in romance a certain negative capability, in Keats’ sense of a discourse capable of being in “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (*Selected Letters* 41-2), then history lends romance a capable negativity within the vicissitudes that constitute the “system of the universe.”

In this respect, romance cannot be discerned through anticipated expansions of historical knowledge: “the romance writer, on the other hand, is continually straining at a foresight to which his faculties are incompetent, and continually fails” (467). While the historian regains a certain “imperfect” advantage over the writer of romance in this regard, the constraint on the romance-writer’s powers of extending truth towards what Godwin calls “the system of the universe” is precisely what renders its own truth, or power of the false, non-totalizable (467). Godwin thus distinguishes his approach from those who would treat romance as an “object of trade among booksellers,” whose circulation as commodities produces a kind of general history of literature in which “the critic and moralist, in their estimate of romances, have borrowed the principle that regulates the speculations of trade” (463). The reduction of literature to market principles

re-territorializes potential sites of novelty within a homogeneous field that levels the “individuality” of literature itself: “Nothing can be more unreasonable,” writes Godwin, “than for me to take into account every pretender to literature that has started in it. In poetry I do not consider those persons who merely know how to count their syllables and tag a rhyme; still less those who print their effusion in the form of verse without being adequate to either of these” (464). To see romance as a power of the false and the singular as a historical power, neither romance nor the individual can be considered according to the logic of economic exchange. Only generalities, because they are abstract, are exchangeable for one another. Rather, Godwin identifies the individual or singular character of romance: “I recollect those authors only who are endowed with some of the essentials of poetry, with its imagery, its enthusiasm, or its empire over the soul of man. Just so in the cause before us, I should consider only those persons who had really written romance, not those who had vainly attempted it” (464). This intensifies Godwin’s sense of romance as individual: of all those literary works that come out, very few are worthy of being considered romances.

Romance does not attain a definite form but remains, as Schlegel likewise defines the romantic, in perpetual becoming. Romance subtracts itself from history as that which no historical knowledge or imitative form can definitively circumscribe. Paradoxically, Godwin suggests that in failing history, romance also exceeds it: “to write romance is a task too great for the powers of man, and under which he must be expected to totter. No man can hold the rod so even, but that it will tremble and vary from its course” (466). Romance is a trembling of discourse that pushes history to its limit and makes visible its individuality. Romance’s “failure” is not a limitation, but derives from an experience too powerful, something that overflows and de-regulates the faculties that can serve as a condition for experimentation. Romance does not claim to represent the way the past “actually” was as in revisionist accounts, but rather unearths the imperceptible texture of individual events and circumstances that constitute history’s becoming. The shift from history to romance is not literal but indirect, occurring by virtue of a repetition that opens individualities otherwise elided by general history. In this regard, Godwin effects a radical inversion of fidelity and betrayal with respect to the dialectic of fictional romance and true history; indeed, romance shows its fidelity to history by virtue of its betrayal.

Only in betraying the “letter” of history is one capable of approaching the individual “spirit” of its creative stimulus, the magnetic spark through which history enters into a becoming-romantic. Conversely, insofar as general history remains faithful to reproducing a “mere chronicle of facts, places and dates,” it betrays “true history.” The paradox is that general history is not true history precisely because it lacks romance, while romance is true history because it incessantly betrays its historical evidence. Godwin thus theorizes a romance that does not seek to replace history, but provide a means of setting history “adrift” through the dual process of diagnosing the institutions of the present and exposing individualities in the past that literature grants a distinctive historical potentiality.

At the same time, however, the conclusion of “Of History and Romance” abruptly checks romance’s desire to simply posit the possible within the cloistered domain of a literature that transcends or evades the materiality of the historical. To posit romance over history would be to simply institute the literary, thus truncating the interminable unworking that Godwin locates as the *anarchē* of perfectibility. In doing so, Godwin theorizes a new paradigm for his own writing of literature and of the place of history in literature in a negative dialectic that avoids institutional stasis. Indeed, the novel written immediately following “Of History and Romance,” *St. Leon, a tale of the sixteenth century* (1798), puts Godwin’s new understanding of history and romance into practice.

Chapter 5

5 Gambling, Alchemy, and Anarchy in *St. Leon*

The previous chapter explored how “Of History and Romance” extends *Political Justice*’s critique of generalization into a more complex reflection on the *an-archic* and undecidable relationship between history and literature. Where Godwin earlier saw romance in a more conventional Enlightenment sense as a form of a false consciousness to be dispelled by the rationality of “literature,” “Of History and Romance” reinterprets romance as a way of understanding both history and romance otherwise by accounting for the *an-archic* potential of the “individual” while unsettling any simplistic binary distinction between history and fiction. In turn, Godwin challenges the Scottish Enlightenment’s view of history as an actuarial collection of facts that would dissolve individuality within an overarching template of the same. By loosening history from the restrictions placed upon it by the disciplinary armatures of such methods, individuality becomes an *an-archic* site for reflecting on the contingency and potentiality within a history that is still becoming. As the primary figure through which romance enters history, individuality historicizes romance so that the latter becomes answerable to the complex of particulars and “materials” out of which history is composed. Conversely, Godwin deploys romance in the mode of the counter-factual so as to work within history’s unrealized potentials, thus unworking the reified aspect of what claims the status of historical “truth.” History and romance thus find themselves unsettled by their mutual translations and transferences in and through one another, with each term inhabited by its other in a productive tension that approximates Derrida’s *an-archic* view of literature as the “unlimited right” to question (*On the Name* 28).

This chapter further examines Godwin’s shifting attitudes towards the utopian potentials released through fiction and its critical dialogue with history as it appears in his 1799 novel *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*. The novel tells of the Count Reginald de St. Leon, a French aristocrat whose addiction to high-stakes gambling sees him lose his inheritance and bring his family to ruin. Exiled to rural Switzerland, St. Leon and his young family find temporary repose in a life of pastoral tranquility. Six years of

domestic peace are shattered, however, with the arrival of a mysterious stranger who teaches St. Leon the secrets of alchemy. Far from providing lasting happiness, St. Leon's acquisition of the philosopher's stone leads to both public and private disaster. Promising absolute secrecy to the stranger, St. Leon becomes an object of persecution and subsequently alienates his family. After the death of his long suffering wife Marguerite and a near fatal run-in with the Spanish Inquisition, St. Leon eventually travels to Turkish occupied Hungary in an attempt to use his alchemical knowledge for philanthropic purposes. But St. Leon's attempts at financially and politically emancipating the Hungarian populace also backfire, culminating in the financial ruin of the country and his imprisonment at the hands of Bethlem Gabor, a misanthropic nobleman who exploits St. Leon's alchemical knowledge for his own dark purposes. Despite escaping Gabor and reuniting with his estranged son Charles near the conclusion of the novel – a reunion tempered by the fact that Charles does not recognize his father, who has taken the elixir of youth and now travels under the pseudonym D'Aubigny – St. Leon finds himself “the outcast of [his] species,” wandering from country to country under assumed names with “neither connection nor friend in the world” (358, 396).

As a fictional working-through of the ideas in “Of History and Romance,” *St. Leon* is a text designed to explore the dissensus between things as they are and things as they could be. That St. Leon largely fails in his attempts at putting his alchemical knowledge to proper use has led many critics to read the novel as an apologia for the failure of Godwin's political anarchism. With the increasingly vehement reaction to the Terror, the proximity of Wollstonecraft's untimely death in 1797, and the public backlash that greeted Godwin's candid memoirs of his late wife,⁷¹ earlier critics situate *St. Leon* alongside *Political Justice*'s displacement of reason for feeling as a meditation on the importance of the familial affections and the failure of an anarchism founded on pure reason. As Pamela Clemit points out, alchemy in late eighteenth-century discourse is often deployed as a metaphor by conservatives who saw the French Revolution as organized by cabal of philosophical “Illuminati,” who “aimed at the destruction of all

⁷¹ *The Memoirs of the Author of the Vindications of the Rights of Women* (1798).

family ties in the name of universal philanthropy” (*The Godwinian Novel* 92).⁷² As with *Caleb Williams*, Godwin’s preface to *St. Leon* provides evidence for interpreting the novel this way in its emphasis on the importance of the “domestic and private affections”: “For more than four years, I have been anxious for opportunity and leisure to modify some of the earlier chapters of [*Political Justice*] in conformity to the sentiments inculcated in [*St. Leon*]. . . . I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of man . . . and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice” (52). Critics such as Wallace Austin Flanders, J.T. Boulton, and D.H. Monro thus tend to read alchemy, in B.J. Tysdahl’s words, as a symbol for “those aspects of society that Godwin wants to criticize,” whether it be *St. Leon*’s Falkland-like obsession with chivalry and reputation, alchemy as a representation of the Enlightenment’s enthusiasm for pure reason, or esotericism as an analogue for the destructive effects of secrecy on domestic life (Tysdahl 86).⁷³

That *St. Leon* embodies both conservative and revolutionary tendencies, however, suggests a more complex figure than such interpretations might allow. Described as “an equivocal character, assuming different names, and wandering over the world with different pretences” (*St.L* 447), Godwin opens the possibility of different readings of *St. Leon*, who is not simply “one” character. In this sense, *St. Leon* less represents an identifiable position to be accepted or rejected – what Godwin would call an institution in *Political Justice* – than an experiment with the counter-factual in which Godwin skeptically confronts the impasses of whatever claims to posit itself, including the romance of a perfected being that *Political Justice* had placed as the (im)possible horizon of an *anarchē* oriented towards the future. Unlike *Caleb Williams*, which deconstructs the essentialist aspects of “classical” anarchism within the parameters of “things as they

⁷² See also Kelly, 212-3.

⁷³ See Flanders, 536-7; Boulton, 226-32; Monro, 98-101. Reflecting on the connections between *St. Leon* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* noted by Walter Scott in 1818, Brewer suggests that Godwin and Shelley’s respective novels articulate the ways in which “reveries can be dangerous in the case of individuals who are prone to neglect practical or personal considerations,” while Don Locke argues that the novel’s use of alchemy is a “hackneyed” Gothic conceit, and that the real emotional interest of the novel lies with Godwin’s sympathetic representation of the domestic affections in the blameless Marguerite (Brewer, *Mental Anatomies* 183; Locke, *The Fantasy of Reason* 146-7).

are,”⁷⁴ *St. Leon* explicitly gestures towards the speculative figure of perfection in the Appendix to *Political Justice* as a romance, which “Of History and Romance” understood as “real” history only in its failure to institute itself *as* (general) history. But if Godwin provides the materials for us to read *St. Leon* in terms that would censure his Promethean ambitions, this approach limits the novel by privileging notions of domesticity and utility that would also institutionalize the novel by aligning it with a specific set of conservative values that suspend the reflective and ungrounding movement associated with perfectibility. For as Derrida points out, “the law of the house (*oikos*), of the house as place, domicile, family” is a figure within the etymology of *archē* and remains attached to its logocentrism (*Archive Fever* 1-2). Consequently, as Justine Crump remarks, to “derive a commonplace condemnation” of *St. Leon* would be to “impose orthodox sentiments” onto a “radical philosopher,” thereby reducing the novel to a “static . . . ahistorical piece of didacticism” in which the reader prejudices *St. Leon* according to values already instituted, rather than a site for critical reflection on the “archaic” status of such values (“Gambling, History, and Godwin’s *St. Leon*” 404).

Rather than perceive *St. Leon* from a didactic position that rejects the *archē* of a rational anarchism for a structurally equivalent domestic *oikos*, this chapter explores how Godwin employs the gambler and the alchemist not as positions or institutions, but as “individualities” whose existence on the margins of accepted social, moral, and economic institutions provides a means for Godwin to critically explore utopian possibilities in a history that remains *an-archically* contingent. Following *Caleb Williams* and the revised versions of *Political Justice*, *St. Leon* finds Godwin continuing to skeptically confront the impasses within his own idealism, as he rigorously exposes the detrimental effects of *St. Leon*’s selfish desire for fame. Yet, this skepticism does not entail an automatic endorsement of domestic values. For if, as Godwin writes in the novel’s preface, “the foundation of the following tale is such as, it is not to be supposed, ever existed” (51), then one might legitimately ask whether the domestic affections can serve as the moral

⁷⁴ As Godwin writes in his later preface to the first edition of *Fleetwood*, “Caleb Williams was a story of very surprising and uncommon events, but which were supposed to be entirely within the laws and established course of nature, as she operates in the planet we inhabit. The story of *St. Leon* is of the miraculous class” (47).

archē of a tale that is admitted to be *an-archically* groundless from the outset, or whether such foundations can be interpreted as one historical or structural position among several within the novel and, as such, are contingent and subject to critique.

For the same reasons, one might question whether St. Leon's character can be posited in such a manner that we might pass "ethical sentence" on the novel, as Godwin elsewhere argues in his criticisms of didactic fiction in *The Enquirer*.⁷⁵ As an amorphous, Protean figure who assumes multiple identities, St. Leon is implicitly connected with *Political Justice*'s description of the *an-archic* flux of ideas and sensations in the mind prior to their sedimentation into habits, prejudices, and concepts, just as Godwin's use of alchemy gestures to a chemistry not yet established upon firm scientific and philosophical foundations.⁷⁶ As such, I suggest that St. Leon might be usefully read in terms of what Deleuze, after Lévi-Strauss, calls a "floating signifier," that is, a figure whose value is "in itself void of [any determinate] sense and thus susceptible to taking on any sense," "a displaced place without an occupant" that structurally relates signifier and signified – or, in Godwin's terms, romance and history – in a process of continual imbalance and readjustment. Like the floating signifier, St. Leon belongs neither to history nor to romance, but rather "to both series at once, and never ceases to circulate through them. [The floating signifier] therefore has the property of always being" *an-archically* "displaced in relation to itself, of 'being absent from its own place'" and, as such, addresses both the historicity "of all finite thought" as well as the "promise" of "aesthetic

⁷⁵ See "Of Choice in Reading" in *The Enquirer* (1798), in which Godwin criticizes "moral" authors and readers of texts who emphasize the "ethical sentence to the illustration of which the work may most aptly be applied" rather than the dialogical process by which a reader actively participates in the creation of a meaning that "cannot be completely ascertained but by the experiment" (121). Where the "moral" of a text suggests that the reader plays a passive role in simply revealing a meaning already presumed to be fixed within the text, Godwin's emphasis on "experiment" might be said to anticipate Roland Barthes' notion of a "writerly" text that aims "to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (*S/Z* 5). For a more detailed discussion of Godwin's theory of reading, see Rajan (1988), 223-5.

⁷⁶ As Malouin had already suggested in his 1751 article for the French *Encyclopédie*, "*alchemy* has been maligned in most chemistry books." Venel's article on chemistry in the same year still makes use of alchemical symbols, but nonetheless defers any discussion of alchemy itself to an entry on "hermetic philosophy." By 1799, Lavoisier had already published the first modern organization of chemical nomenclature in his *Methode de nomenclature Chimique* (1787), stabilizing chemistry as a modern scientific discourse. Thus Lavoisier's collaborator Fourcroy could claim in 1800 that "chemistry is a science distinct and separate . . . it can no longer be mistaken for alchemy" (qtd. in Chaouli 98-9). See also, Bensaude-Vincent and Stengers (1996), 13-27.

invention” (Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* 49, 51). “Floating” with “half-formed purpose” (*St.L* 414) across Europe, St. Leon’s nomadic existence becomes a floating signifier through which Godwin gauges the possibility of experimenting with ideas in history. As Jeffrey Mehlman comments, such (im)possibilities avoid closure precisely insofar as the floating signifier allows for “symbolic thought to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it” (23).

Anarchē itself, which Schürmann defines as a “blank space deprived of legislative, normative, power,” can also be called a floating signifier; but the term likewise gestures to how Godwin deploys fiction in order to transform perfectibility into a form of “symbolic thought” that continues to operate even across the barrier of its own unverifiability. Further, the concept of the “floating signifier” seems appropriate for a discussion of alchemy for its connections to Levi-Strauss’s discussion of mana, which is also a “magical” substance whose precise meaning remains indeterminate.⁷⁷ At stake in such a reading is the very means of understanding the central metaphors of *St. Leon* alongside a revised version of perfectibility that persistently ungrounds its own positing, while providing *anarchē* with a creative turn that evades reducing the text to a fixed *archē* or “ethical sentence.” In this respect, Godwin’s text does not seem to encourage either total acceptance or dismissal of St. Leon. Rather, as St. Leon himself avers, because his alchemical knowledge renders him “eternal” and “inexhaustible,” it signifies something permanent only in referring to a perfectibility that incessantly ungrounds and moves beyond itself towards “something yet unthought,” something that “must be attempted,” and always “the subject of more than one experiment” (147, 245).

This chapter explores St. Leon as a “floating signifier” through the alternately historical and romantic tropes of the gambler and the alchemist. Such tropes within *St. Leon* see Godwin first approaching history in terms of “individualities” incapable of being incorporated within instituted social forms, a perspective that will be significantly radicalized in his later novel *Mandeville*. I proceed first by discussing how Godwin thinks through the *anarchē* of individual history via gambling and its relationship to eighteenth-

⁷⁷ See Lévi-Strauss (1950, trans. 1987).

century moral discourse, a discourse that includes the domestic affections as the sentimental adjunct of a fundamentally conservative political and emotional economy. As Crump points out, in eighteenth-century “moral writings about play,” gambling “acted as a sign for the element of contingency, which . . . had pervaded faith, commerce, and the social order,” giving way to “a new kind of society in which the value attached to property, rank and morality” is considered relative “rather than absolute” (“The Perils of Play” 27-8). “Deep play” thematizes contingency by rendering the gambler a *simulacrum* whose individuality haunts the emergence of bourgeois commercial society. Likewise, while the text is often justifiably critical of St. Leon’s destructive habits, certain details suggest that Godwin is also hesitant to institute the domestic as the text’s moral *archē*, as in the novel’s later depiction of St. Leon’s son Charles. Charles, the embodiment of Marguerite’s ethos of domestic care earlier in the novel, later returns as a member of the Crusades who criticizes his father’s attempts to rescue Hungary for inhibiting the Christians’ military-colonial enterprise. Such ambiguities within the text raise the question of whether the domestic can be posited as the transcendental signified of the novel, or whether the domestic is itself one system of values among others and therefore must be read critically.

The chapter then focuses on St. Leon’s transition from gambler to alchemist, a transition that plays on a series of ideological associations emphasized by conservative writers such as Burke. On the one hand, if one views St. Leon as an instituted version of classical anarchism, it can be argued that Godwin’s text is primarily interested in showing how history deconstructs the “romance” of a rational politics, demonstrating through St. Leon’s various failures how such anarchism cannot inhabit a synchronic point of view uncontaminated by the vicissitudes of power it claims to oppose. History thus exposes alchemy to a reverse transmutation in which the utopian master-narrative of classical anarchism becomes paradoxically indiscernible from its destructive opposite in “anarchy.” Such reversals are evident both in St. Leon’s failure to provide lasting stability to the Hungarian economy and his capture at the hands of Bethlem Gabor, who forces St. Leon to use his alchemy to finance his band of vicious marauders. Moreover, Godwin foregrounds a conceptual “gap” between romance and history through the

structural and narrative lacunae generated by alchemy's problematic investment in secrecy, which divides the alchemical project from itself at its very foundations.

On the other hand, because Godwin sees romance as equally capable of deconstructing histories that have become instituted, I suggest that Godwin asks us to read his alchemical romance as a floating signifier that remains equivocal and thus open to a potentially endless process of revision and reinterpretation. The consequence is that Godwin's novel not only deconstructs the essentialist pretensions of a classical anarchism that would ground itself on a politics of pure reason, but can also be read as the individual history of a Protean figure who is "progressively unbound" from the institutions of "nation and family" (Rajan, *Romantic Narrative* 171).

5.1 Just Gaming: Gambling as *Simulacrum*

St. Leon's role as a floating signifier finds its initial contextual anchoring in an institutional version of "romance" that both *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* had already placed in question: the hierarchical and aristocratic model of society associated with the *ancien régime*. Born into "one of the most ancient and honourable families of the kingdom of France" and influenced by the "Italian writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," St. Leon clearly echoes Falkland's fatal attachment to outdated chivalric traditions (54-6). In particular, the historic meeting between Francis I of France and Henry VIII of England at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1523 is a decisive event in the young St. Leon's life, a "fairy scene" that personifies his aristocratic ethos: "I lived in the fairy fields of visionary greatness, and was more than indifferent to the major part of the objects around me. . . . If Heraclitus, or any other morose philosopher who was expiated on the universal misery of mankind, had entered the field of Ardres, he must have retracted his assertions, or fled from the scene with confusion" (56, 57).

The expulsion of Heraclitus, the "dark" philosopher for whom life is defined as the pure flux and the anarchic warfare of coexisting opposites,⁷⁸ heightens the sense of

⁷⁸ "We must recognize that war is common, strife is justice, and all things according to strife and opposition" (B80); "War is the father and king of all" (B53). See Barnes (2002). As we shall see in our

self-mystification in St. Leon's attempt to convert history into the moving grandeur of romance. St. Leon's experience in the Field at the Cloth of Gold stirs an ambition to join under the standard of Francis I's military campaign in Italy. As in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin discloses the manner in which the aristocratic ethos disguises the Heraclitean violence at its core. In particular, Godwin focuses on how an analysis of history at the level of the individual exposes the (un)ground of aristocratic values. Godwin juxtaposes St. Leon's aestheticized descriptions of the military – “the noise of the cannon . . . the inspiring sounds of martial music . . . the standards floating in the air . . . the armour of the knights; the rugged, resolute and intrepid countenances of the infantry; all swelled my soul with transport” (64) – with the anarchy of the “individual” experience of warfare itself, which sees opposites collapse into the fog of Heraclitean war: “it was a vain attempt, amidst the darkness of the night, to endeavour to restore order. . . . We were already almost completely overpowered, when the succours we expected reached us. They were, however, unable to distinguish friend from enemy. . . . Our blows were struck at random” (69).

Godwin further thematizes this anarchy through the incursion of a random event that radically changes the course of the French military campaign, setting the stage for St. Leon's emergence as a gambler. “Recollecting a stratagem of a similar nature by which Cyrus formerly makes himself master of the city at Babylon” (66), Francis orders his army to divert the river leading into Pavia. Following a “general historical” notion that sees “mankind . . . so much the same, in all times and places,” Francis deploys an imitative stratagem that depends on a view of history as a homogenous pattern of predictable events that ignores the singularity of the “case” in favour of an abstract, ahistorical principle. However, Francis' plan falls apart after the river unexpectedly bursts through the dam constructed by the French army, causing the fortune of the battle to be “utterly reversed” (69-70). Recalling Godwin's point in “Of History and Romance”

discussion of *Mandeville*, Godwin suggestively returns to the figure of Heraclitus to disclose the *anarchē* of historical antagonism while marking the return of a darker version of the doctrine of “necessity” put forth in *Political Justice*.

that “a single grain of sand more or less on the surface of the earth, would have altered its motion, and . . . diversified its events” (467), the incursion of a contingent particular that *an-archically* undermines Francis’ general-historical view of time as a stable continuity in which knowledge of antecedent conditions positively determines the future. Rather, in the wake of Francis’ humiliating defeat and imprisonment, St. Leon observes upon his return to France that “the chain of . . . ideas was interrupted and the fortune of the kingdom had received a grievous check” (75), marking the force of an event that “disrupts any pre-existing referential frame within which it might be represented or understood” (Readings, *Introducing Lyotard* xxxi). The unforeseeable nature of the event unsettles the instituted referential framework through which the aristocracy hypostasizes itself as “eternal” rather than conventional: “far indeed,” admits St. Leon, “was I from anticipating the disgraceful event, in which this [chivalric] elation of heart speedily terminated” (71).

Godwin contextualizes this sudden irruption within the hypostasized continuity of chivalric ideals alongside a broader shift in “referential frames” that discloses the contingent (un)ground of institution. Godwin marks this change through a paraphrase of Burke’s famous comment that the collapse of the traditional aristocratic social structure gives way to a society ruled by “calculators, economists, and sophisters”: as St. Leon similarly remarks, the King’s defeat in Spain inflicts “a deadly wound to the reign of chivalry, and a secure foundation to that of craft, dissimulation, corruption, and commerce” (74). The emergence of commercial civil society effectively puts an end to the stability of aristocratic fortunes within a social economy based on hereditary wealth and “cultural capital”⁷⁹ achieved through military honours. Godwin focuses on a specific consequence of this shift, namely, the emergence of “deep play” among sixteenth-century French aristocracy: “the nobility of France exchanged the activity of the field for the indulgences of the table; that concentrated spirit which had sought to expand itself upon the widest stage, now found vent in the exhibition of individual expense: and, above all:

⁷⁹ I borrow this phrase from Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to a type of social relation expressed in attitudes, knowledge, skill, and education that are capable of conferring both power and status. See Bourdieu (1997), 47-50.

the sordid and inglorious passion for gaming” (75). Godwin addresses the effects of this discursive transformation through St. Leon’s shifting responses towards gambling and the ways in which gambling rises within and alongside a commercial and moral paradigm that institutes itself through a rejection of “deep play,” just as the previous aristocratic “chain of ideas” had established its veracity through an abjection of the Heraclitean anarchy within its historical substructure.

Within this transition, St. Leon’s conflicted emotional responses to gambling manifest the implicit uncertainties within both aristocratic and bourgeois approaches to gambling. Following Thomas Kavanagh’s discussion of the rise of gambling among the French nobility in the sixteenth century, critics such as Justine Crump, Gregory Maertz, and Paul Hamilton point out that cultural attitudes towards gambling are symptomatic of an “epochal” displacement from the stratified, hierarchical structure of feudal society towards a market economy based on liberal and utilitarian principles.⁸⁰ At least initially, gambling is perceived by the aristocracy as a means of reaffirming “its prestige and its independence of any limiting financial considerations” (Crump, “Gambling, Contingency, and Godwin’s *St. Leon*” 397). With the emergence of a new commercial model that measures wealth through accumulation and the efficient use of resources rather than on a social hierarchy predicated on rank and in the *archē* of the King as God’s representative on earth, reckless expenditures through gambling dangerously exposed the nobility to the possibility of social decline: “money itself had become the most crucial signifier, interchangeable for ‘all that’s desirable’”; hence, “in the new commercial world, ‘Distinction’ itself was a marketable commodity. If rank, influence, and power were to be bought, to fritter away the means for such elevation in gambling was a culpable error” (Crump, “The Perils of Play” 15). As Georges Bataille observes, for the classical theorists of utility who challenged the social logic of aristocratic distinction, “the most appreciable share of life is given as the condition . . . of productive social

⁸⁰ Maertz (1993) interprets *St. Leon* as an allegorical representation of the epistemological transition from alchemy to chemistry as well as the economic shift from feudalism to capitalism. My own reading is closer to Crump’s suggestion that *St. Leon* is not allegorical but “explicit . . . in its account of paradigm shifts” and therefore constitutes a “conscious programme designed to expose the essential contingency of these paradigms” (“Gambling, History, and Godwin’s *St. Leon*” 405). See also Kavanagh, 42; Hamilton (2003), 79.

activity.” Thus, “pleasure, whether art, permissible debauchery, or play, is definitively reduced” (117). Commercial society recognizes only “the right to acquire, to conserve, and to consume rationally, but . . . excludes in principle *nonproductive expenditure*”; that is, any expenditure that is not “the minimum necessary for the conservation of life and the continuation of individuals’ productive activity” (Bataille 118). Hence, utilitarian writers such as Bentham argue that deep play is pernicious to the calculus through which the greatest happiness is determined for the greatest number. As Bentham writes in his 1802 *Theory of Legislation*, in deep play the utility of what one stands to gain from the wager is always radically disproportionate to the disutility of what one stands to lose, so that “if I gain, my happiness is not doubled with my fortune; if I lose, my happiness is destroyed; I am reduced to indigence” (106n).

The disutility of deep play is not only linked to fiscal concerns, but also to a strictly regulated utilitarian economy of “happiness” that, as Rajan argues, becomes manifest in the emerging institution of the nineteenth-century “Novel” and its post-Malthusian “fear of debt and bankruptcy” (*Romantic Narrative* 151).⁸¹ Within this utilitarian ethos, gambling becomes less a means for the nobility to assert their rank than a pathology that opens the way to distinctively anarchistic social effects. As St. Leon avers, “gaming, when pursued with avidity, subverts all order and forces every avocation from the place assigned to it” (102). More specifically, the phenomenon of gambling foregrounds the way in which the new bourgeois commercial paradigm made possible a “random and meaningless redistribution of wealth” that actively “threatened to subvert the ascendancy of the ruling classes.” While early eighteenth-century moralists had predominantly “expressed their fears *for* aristocratic gamblers who risked their wealth,” those writing in the revolutionary period began expressing “a fear *of* elite gamblers . . . as an explicitly political menace to the state” (Crump, “The Perils of Play” 16). Such moralists viewed the Jacobin adherence to universal principles of pure reason that would assert the formal equivalence of every individual akin to the gambler’s worship of chance. Burke explicitly links social anarchy with gaming when he writes that the “great

⁸¹ Rajan (2010) specifically locates this economic fear in Victorian novelists such as Dickens. See 148-55.

object” of republican politics in making all men theoretically equal was “to metamorphose France, from a great kingdom into one great play-table, and to turn its inhabitants into a nation of gamblers” (*Reflections* 362).⁸²

The gambler was also commonly linked with a philosophical perspective that extended from economic and social concerns to a cosmology that unmoored the very foundations of being itself. In particular, deep play became regularly linked with the figure of the “Epicurean,” a purveyor of the atomist philosophy of Epicurus. Fielding, for instance, explores the confluence of Epicurean philosophy with gambling through the character of Booth in *Amelia* (1751), a novel which, according to his diary, Godwin had read in late October 1799.⁸³ Epicureanism, a forerunner to both skepticism and empiricism and what Louis Althusser would later call “aleatory materialism,” envisions a universe whose origins and progress are *an-archically* contingent.⁸⁴ The Epicurean universe is based on the chance irruption of an infinitesimal swerve or *clinamen* that breaks the parallel fall of atoms, which in turn generates the formation of existing entities against the background of a void. Althusser points to how Epicurean philosophy discloses an *an-archic* “non-anteriority of meaning” in which creation is the product of unexpected “encounters” rather than pre-existing laws (169). As such, the gambler figures into an ideological matrix that indicates not only moral “anarchy,” but also the ontological *anarchē* associated with the atomist *clinamen*, whose status as an infinitesimal change or differential in the direction of an atom’s downward fall approximates Godwin’s sense that “a single grain of sand more or less on the surface of the earth, would have altered its motion” (“HR” 467).

⁸² In a similar vein, clergyman Jeremy Collier’s *Essay on Gaming* (1713, 1720) perceives the professional gamer as “instructed in the Leveling doctrine” of Wat Tyler and Jack Straw, the proto-anarchist leaders of a Peasants’ Revolt in the late fourteenth century, while Eliza Haywood’s *Female Spectator* (1745) satirized both the Jacobin and the gambler by describing a visit to an “*Topsy-Turvy Island*” where “All Ages, all Degrees, all Sects . . . all Reserve – all Pride of Birth – all Difference in Opinion is here entirely laid aside” in their “Adoration to the Goddess Fortune” (qtd. in Crump 8).

⁸³ See also Crump (2000).

⁸⁴ As Sylvia Berryman points out in her entry on “Ancient Atomism” for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Epicurus and Lucretius argue that “all perception is true” or that knowledge comes from the senses since sensible knowledge is caused by the impact of a “film” of atoms sloughed off by external objects. Likewise, Epicurus skeptically endorses the possibility of multiple valid explanations for certain phenomena, “acknowledging that we may have no evidence for preferring one explanation over another.” On the connection between ancient atomism and “aleatory materialism” see Althusser (2006).

As a symbol for the destruction of traditional social ties through an exposure of the “non-anteriority” of their meaning, the gaming table was also viewed as a distorted *simulacrum* of intersubjective relations that endangers both the welfare of the individual gambler as well as that of his neighbour. The gambler thus appears within much eighteenth-century moral discourse as an “isolated individual, denying his . . . familial ties, as well as his social and economic responsibilities.” It is “in this perceived singularity,” Crump observes, that “we may locate the root of the threat” that the gambler represents:

In an age when value, social rank, and even language achieved meaning only through relational networks, in circulation, the gambler’s apparent isolation presented a perilous problem. . . . By withdrawing himself from ‘circulation’ in a social or emotional sense, the gambler called into question a social system in which selfhood could only be inferred by its relation to money, rank, and family ties. The potential for chaos is apparent. The gambler, as conceived by the moralists, is a spectre: a deracinated . . . amoral – ‘unsocial’ – individual. (21)

For eighteenth-century moral writers, the gambler functions as a *simulacrum* that discloses a palpable anxiety towards the excesses generated by and within the emerging bourgeois commercial structures that sought to control or expel their effects. Instead, not unlike Godwin’s inquiry into the “disquietingly random processes” that underwrite consciousness in *Political Justice*, the gambler figure exposes the *anarchē* “that lay behind the new speculative financial practices,” threatening to disrupt the “visible, orderly circulation of capital” (Crump, “The Perils of Play” 11; “Gambling, History, and Godwin’s *St. Leon*” 402). Although eighteenth-century moral discourse abjects the gambler as an “external” figure through which a utilitarian economics stabilizes its own moral and social institutions, the *an-archic* randomness of “play” makes explicit the groundlessness of the very founding gesture of this moral economics, arising as a Blakean contrary, to borrow Pfau’s terms, “surfacing within and disrupting the master-narrative of [an emerging] nineteenth-century liberalism” (“The Melancholic Gift”). The gambler is not merely an “anarchist” in the narrow sense of threatening social disorder, but a more *an-archic* negativity that is also, in some sense, *critical*: the gambler, as St.

Leon puts it, is a “malignant genius” that haunts the margins of moral and speculative commercial norms with the non-anteriority of their foundations (97).

Godwin deploys the *an-archic* framework within *St. Leon* to similar effects. St. Leon first sees gambling as a form of nonproductive expenditure that reaffirms his place within the aristocratic hierarchy. Gambling appears as a cultural practice “in which . . . a man” can “display his fortitude,” and “when gracefully pursued,” exemplifies “the magnanimity of the stoic, combined with the manners of a man of the world” (78). St. Leon’s social rank is not only determined by the possession of wealth, but also on the aristocratic privilege of periodically relinquishing this wealth in “unproductive social expenditures such as . . . games” (Bataille 123). Thus, although St. Leon’s indiscriminate spending drains his hereditary coffers, gambling “did not tarnish [his] good name”: “I was universally ranked among the most promising and honourable of the young noblemen of France” (80).

Under the “liberal benevolence” of Marguerite’s father the Marquis de Damville, however, St. Leon’s attitude towards gambling shifts from “stoic magnanimity” to a “struggle of conscious guilt and dishonour” (94, 97). The Marquis becomes a spokesman for the principles of a bourgeois economics, whose privileging of “reason and common sense” (77), “parsimony” and “frugality” (97), reverses the value of deep play so that it appears as a moral vice. Determined to curb St. Leon’s reckless expenditures, the Marquis stresses adherence to a “rigid economy” that scrupulously avoids “idle pomp and decoration” (96, 93), which, in the eyes of the Marquis’ quintessentially liberal ethos, can only appear as a “monstrous deformity” (82) Tacitly evoking the rejection of gambling within a utilitarian economy that exposes the aristocrat to downward social mobility, the Marquis warns St. Leon against the dangers of nonproductive expenditure in a society “where attention and courtship are doled forth with scales of gold” (83). In turn, the aim of St. Leon’s gambling changes from the disinterested display of wealth to a desire to recover his losses and improve his social standing. Unable to resist the lures of the table, St. Leon now plays for the “express purpose of improving his circumstances,” a purpose that he readily admits to be idiotic for staking his very survival on the turn of a card (98). Echoing Bentham, St. Leon laments how deep-play works the gambler’s “hopes . . . into

a paroxysm” before an “unexpected turn arrives, and he is made the most miserable of men” (99).

Godwin likewise discloses how gambling functions as a *simulacrum* of “proper” social relations of sympathy and benevolence that become central to his discussion of the domestic affections. Unlike the soldier, who fights with “a man with whom he has no habits of kindness,” the gambler “robs, perhaps, his brother, his friend . . . or, in any event, a man seduced into the snare with all the arts of courtesy, and whom he smiles upon, even while stabs” (77). In warfare one not only battles with strangers and defends oneself against personal harm, but one is also capable of differentiating friend from enemy – although, as mentioned above, Godwin reveals that this is not always the case. While the blurring of sides in warfare momentarily annihilates all distinction into Heraclitean randomness, gambling can be considered even more *an-archic* precisely because it underhandedly *simulates* the “orderly circulation” of sympathetic sociability, rather than erasing it altogether. Gambling becomes a *simulacrum* of the ethical ground of the social for eighteenth-century moral philosophy, as in the explications of sympathy found in Hume and Adam Smith, a perspective that Godwin will more radically deconstruct in *Mandeville*. For such thinkers, sympathy functions as the social glue that enables individuals to interact in positive, ethical ways through an affective attunement to the good of others: “the sentiments of others can never affect us, but by becoming, in some measure, our own; in which case they operate on us, by opposing, and encreasing [sic] our passions, in the very same manner, as if they had been originally deriv’d from our own temper and disposition” (Hume 378). However, as David Marshall argues, because eighteenth-century moral philosophy predominantly defines sympathy as an attempt at replicating another’s sentiments in one’s own mind, sympathy is “already an aesthetic experience . . . in the realm of fiction, mimesis” (21). By highlighting the disjunction between a fictive surface and a “depth” of hidden, potentially subversive motivations, deep-play throws into relief how the sympathetic affections can become indiscernible from *simulacra*. In Deleuze’s terms, gambling articulates how the *simulacrum* is built upon an *an-archic* “disparity or upon a difference. It interiorizes a dissimilitude” and “produces an *effect* of resemblance” in which sympathy cannot be grounded by a benevolent or universal principle. Like the *simulacrum*, gambling pretends

to a model of sympathy while following “a model of the Other, from which there flows an internalized dissemblance. . . . That to which they pretend . . . they pretend to underhandedly, under cover of . . . a subversion, ‘against the father’” (Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* 258).

5.2 *Archē-Oikos*: The Domestic Affections

Because the *simulacrum* is by definition “against the father,” St. Leon’s ungovernable passion for gaming eventually causes him to neglect his domestic responsibilities, culminating in the loss of his family fortune. Domesticity, manifested in the “angelic goodness” (105) of Marguerite, serves as the emotional correlate of the Marquis’ bourgeois economics, and the *archē-oikos* around which the novel attempts to neutralize the groundlessness of deep play. As the Marquis comments, it is only by retiring within the “circle of [his] own hearth” that St. Leon will “be found no contemptible or unbeneficial member of the community at large” (84, 93). Where the Marquis councils fiscal prudence in line with the “rigid economy” predicated on utility against the unproductive expenditure that sees money annexed to contingency, Marguerite entreats her new husband to “dismiss [the] artificial tastes” of chivalry for the common sense “dictates of sentiment or reason,” for “the moderate man is the only free” (123, 124).

Despite such warnings, St. Leon returns to the gaming-table in Paris and, in a final paroxysm of gaming, brings his family to ruin. In their subsequent exile to Switzerland, however, Marguerite perceives the family’s sudden pecuniary modesty is morally beneficial: “the splendour in which we lately lived has its basis in oppression. . . . I put in my claim for refinements and luxuries; but they are the refinements and purifying of intellect, and the luxuries of uncostly, simple taste” (124). “With a soul almost indifferent, between the opposite ideas of riches and poverty” (88), Marguerite appears as the epitome of the bourgeois subjectivity and regulated human behaviour emphasized by a female Romantic tradition Anne Mellor identifies with an “ethic of care.” According to Mellor, an ethic of care “insists on the primacy of the family or the community and their attendant practical responsibilities” and promotes “a social change that extends the values of domesticity into the public realm” (3). Care adopts a Burkean model of society rooted in the household, albeit away from Burke’s emphasis on patriarchy. For Burke, the

domestic is the “germ . . . by which we proceed toward a love of our country and to mankind”: “We procure reverence to our civil institutions on the principle upon which nature teaches us to revere individual men; on account of their age; and on account of those from whom they are descended” (*Reflections* 202, 185). Wollstonecraft likewise sees the family as a fundamental structure upon which to model society. Contrary to Burke, however, Wollstonecraft posits reason rather than tradition as the “natural” inheritance of the individual, which facilitates a “model of political authority” based “on the *egalitarian* rather than patriarchal family” and “the equality – and perhaps even the superiority – of the female in creating and sustaining the domestic affections and, by extension, the health and welfare of the family politic” (Mellor 66-7).

Although more closely associated with liberal or reformist traditions, Godwin’s representation of care in *St. Leon* contains the logical germ of a later anarchism grounded in the conviction that humanity possesses an inherently moral or rational essence, what Newman identifies as classical anarchism’s broader capitulation to a “harmony model of human relations” that “opposes the natural authority of society to the ‘artificial’ authority” of institutions (44, 50). Temporarily swayed by Marguerite’s influence, *St. Leon* goes against the grain of Godwin’s empiricism to claim the existence of “intrinsic qualities . . . that of which power cannot strip us, and which adverse fortune cannot take away” (130), while appealing to a “gratification” consisting of “inartificial, unbought amusements” (138). *St. Leon*’s praise of “intrinsic qualities” recalls Caleb’s insistence on a hypostasized or instituted notion of a “simple nature” beyond both institution and the vicissitudes of circumstance. Insofar as the domestic arranges a space in which not a single “article” does not “rest its claim to be there upon a plea of usefulness” (265), the household becomes the microcosm for the “great principle of harmony in the universe,” the *archē* upon which “human life” can be viewed “in all its parts regularly and systematically connected” (217, 193). Hence, Godwin frequently refers to the domestic in the novel as a “circle” that incipiently contains and is contained by the greater circularity of an organic and harmonious totality: “We were formed to suffice to each other within our little circle” (265).

While providing an egalitarian alternative to aristocratic patriarchy, the sentimentality associated with the domestic affections remains profoundly conservative in restating a “harmony model” of society with reference to (feminine) sentiment or care rather than (masculine) reason. According to G.A. Starr, sentimental novels largely pose the domestic as “an appealing alternative, but not . . . a real threat” to the “existing scheme of things”: “despite the presence of various egalitarian motifs,” sentiment largely functions as “an emblem of the ultimate stability . . . of the status quo” (191-4). Moreover, insofar as the domestic claims to be self-sufficient, it can also serve as “a haven secure from the world” (Starr 194) that could be interpreted as equally ahistorical and autonomized. Since the domestic maintains its autonomy only, as St. Leon avers, in erecting a barrier that separates “us from all that is new, mysterious, and strange” (143), Godwin also implies that domesticity can operate as a form of autonomization that retreats from the “gamble” necessary to effect political justice (Rajan, *Romantic Narrative* 149). Although insisting on the natural priority of the domestic affections, Godwin also discloses something of this conservatism, and perhaps his own ambivalence towards the domestic as a sufficient alternative to things as they are.

Though Godwin stresses the positive attributes of the domestic, he also portrays these attributes ambivalently in describing them as forms of “self-complacency and self-satisfaction” (85), terms that can have both positive and negative connotations. Godwin gestures to this ambiguity in a later essay titled “Of Self-Complacency” in *Thoughts on Man*, which returns to his prior discussion of “voluntary actions” in *Political Justice*. While self-complacency is aligned with “the feeling of self-approbation . . . found inseparable from the most honourable efforts and exertions in which mortal men can be engaged,” Godwin also suggests that this feeling is coextensive with the “*delusive* sense of liberty” that accompanies all our “voluntary actions”; that is, complacency includes an awareness that subjective agency is a fictive (re)construction rather than its foundation (343; emphasis mine). At points, St. Leon suggestively apprehends the negative connotations of this self-complacency through the appearances of the positive, observing that Marguerite’s stoic optimism, while admirable, betrays a tendency to accept things as they are, even in the face of absolute poverty: “Her patience I considered a little less than meanness and vulgarity of spirit. It would have become her better, I thought, like me, to

have cursed her fate, and the author of that fate; like me, to have spurned indignant at the slavery to which we were condemned; to have refused to be pacified” (120)

Equally ambiguous is Godwin’s portrayal of the domestic affections both as the natural, moral *archē* of society and also as a figurative construction without “substance.” Marguerite herself is focalized through a narrative voice that renders her a textual construct woven out of the writings of Petrarch, Dante, and “the letters of Eloisa and Abelard” (86, 105). But Godwin also frames the harmonious world of the domestic in a rhetoric that implies aspects of self-mystification that refer back to the mimetic structure of sympathy articulated by Hume and Smith: for it is only within a “happy age of delusion” that St. Leon is “capable of a community of sentiments” (189). This fiction admits a certain bad faith into the novel’s representation of the domestic, highlighting its status as a temporary “forgetfulness of anxious care” (266) akin to the transient intervals of tranquillity to which Godwin had limited the scope of “truth” in his revisions to *Political Justice*. Within the revised context of a skeptical epistemology that disclosed flux as the *an-archic a priori* of the subject and of “necessity” itself, the harmonious qualities of domestic care appear as what Frederic Jameson calls a “symbolic resolution,” or, in the language of *Political Justice*, the “simplification” of an underlying flux (42). As Godwin’s references to Petrarch and Dante imply, the domestic can be read as troping a social text whose organic harmony simplifies underlying psychic, social, and historical antagonisms, and must therefore be interpreted critically.

Godwin registers a level of psychic antagonism through St. Leon’s unaccountable distaste for his ostensibly achieved domestic happiness. St. Leon’s perverse resistance to happiness during his time as a manual labourer in Switzerland are most explicitly linked to his aristocratic prepossessions, what St. Leon calls his “spark of true nobility” (120). Nonetheless, Godwin also indicates that St. Leon’s prepossessions are not absolutely determining, but rather give symptomatic shape to a more unreadable, *an-archic* “will” that subtends its conscious and explicitly ideological representations. Like the “fatal impulse” that guides Caleb’s unquenchable curiosity, St. Leon speaks of his “ambition” as a restless “passion pent up within me,” “an uneasiness, scarcely defined in its object” that “burns for something more unambiguous and substantial” (61, 200). This anxiety

ceaselessly resurfaces to unsettle his domestic tranquility: “I might learn to be contented,” writes St. Leon, but “I was not formed to be satisfied in obscurity and a low estate” (137). But St. Leon’s anxiety is not entirely reducible to his guilt over the recklessness and ideologically motivated forms of aristocratic self-aggrandizement in warfare and deep play. Another dimension of St. Leon’s “ambition” also emerges in his confrontation with abject poverty in Switzerland, a crisis brought about by natural events that no longer appear guided by a principle of harmony but rather appear closer to *Political Justice*’s image of a more *an-archic* universe governed by “vicissitude” (*PJ* 1:453). Deploying the Gothic trope of nature as sublime violence, a freak storm destroys St. Leon’s meager crop, leaving the family on the brink of starvation. While Marguerite maintains a stoic sense of domestic duty in caring for her dejected husband while upholding a sense of “hope and prospects,” St. Leon acknowledges how such hopes may actually obscure the desperation of their actual circumstances: ““You talk idly of the future, while the tremendous present bars all prospect to that future. We are perishing by inches. We have no provision for the coming day! No, no; something desperate, something unthought of, must be attempted!” (*St.L*147). In this instance, the text questions the “complacency” of domestic values whose positing as *archē* produces a certain closure of the future. Indeed, in order to avoid becoming a mere repetition of things as they are, this future necessarily remains “unthought” and thus calls for some form of ambition, a gamble implicitly connected with Godwin’s emphasis on experimentation, that the domestic forecloses by definition with its emphasis on scarcity and accumulation.

On the level of social and historical antagonism, Godwin also unsettles the domestic “harmony model” of relations by figuratively associating it with Switzerland, which renders St. Leon’s pastoral life an ideologeme⁸⁵ coextensive with Godwin’s criticisms of national character and repressive government regulation in “Of History and Romance” and *Political Justice*. As Rajan points out, Godwin did not share the view of

⁸⁵ I use this term in Jameson’s sense of a “conceptual or semic complex which can project itself variously in the form of a ‘value system’ or . . . in the form of a protonarrative, a private or collective narrative fantasy” (102).

Republican thinkers who identified Switzerland as a realized social utopia (*Romantic Narrative* 145, 147).⁸⁶ Thus, although St. Leon describes Switzerland's natural landscape as eliciting a sense of a "great principle of harmony" in the universe, the text goes on to deconstruct this harmony by exploring "Switzerland" as a political signifier in which the *archē-oikos* of domestic care is implicitly connected with Swiss government's xenophobic laws. When his crops are destroyed, St. Leon is refused the government compensation provided to his neighbours simply because he is a foreigner: "I advanced my claim with the rest. . . . The harsh and rigorous answer I received was, that they had not enough for their own people, and could spare nothing to strangers. Upon this occasion I was compelled to feel what it was to be an alien" (132). As a result, St. Leon loses his property and, shortly thereafter, finds himself imprisoned under false pretences (153-4). By locating the romance of domestic care within the shared ideological "environment" of the oppressive and ethnocentric policies of the Swiss government, Godwin discloses a dimension of social, economic and political dislocations that undermines the text's overt positing of the domestic as an *archē* uncontaminated by the vicissitudes of history. St. Leon's experience in Switzerland foregrounds how the term "domestic" cuts across both the private and public spheres; Godwin had also used the term in the 1798 edition of *Political Justice* to describe both "man in his individual character . . . the pursuits and attachments which his feelings may lead him to adopt" as well as "principles of . . . domestic policy," reflecting Godwin's sense that institution is not merely an "external" imposition on subjects but rather "insinuates itself in our personal dispositions, and insensibly communicates its own spirit to our private transactions" (*PJ* 1:3, 12, 4). Deeply intertwined with the private, institution renders it difficult to pinpoint the "benevolent" source of the domestic affections, and thus equally difficult to predict the ways in which these affections will manifest, both psychically and socially.

Godwin further complicates any straightforward acceptance of the domestic as the moral *archē* of the novel when he later re-introduces St. Leon's estranged son, Charles. In the early stages of the novel, Charles is clearly presented as his mother's son, the

⁸⁶ Rajan cites Helen Maria Williams' *Tour of Switzerland* (1798) as one such example of how Rational Dissenters saw Switzerland as a "Republican utopia" (147).

byproduct of a domestic education in care and stoic resolve. Even on the brink of starvation in Switzerland, the nine year-old Charles echoes his mother's unshaken confidence in an existence governed by a benign principle: "I know that God is good; but for all that, one must not expect to have every thing one wishes. Though God is good, there are dreadful misfortunes in the world, and I suppose we shall have our share of them" (144). Charles likewise advocates a domestic ideal of sympathetic disclosure between family members so that, as St. Leon says of his own relationship to Marguerite, all "distance vanishes, [so that] one thought animates, one mind informs them" (86). On a tour of France, the sixteen year-old Charles thus berates his father for refusing to divulge the source of his recovered wealth, arguing that "a just and a brave man acts fearlessly and with explicitness . . . he lives in the face of day, and the whole world confesses the clearness of his spirit" (209). Such explicitness echoes Godwin's view in *Political Justice* that "unreserved communication" is necessary in the "pursuit of truth." Explicitness, Godwin argues, is of "unquestionable advantage" because it avoids a "duplicity" designed to "keep up the tenor of conversation, without disclosing of either our feelings or opinions" (*PJ* 1:294). In refusing to "assign the source of this extraordinary accession" (*St.L* 162), St. Leon appears guilty of a duplicity that would install a "cold reserve that keeps man at a distance from man," predictably ending with Charles' estrangement (*PJ* 1:294).

Yet, Charles' domestic education is curiously offset by his later reappearance in the text as a member of the Crusaders, suggesting that the former is less exemplary of a "principle of harmony" in the universe than a historically situated system of values that is both contingent and capable of generating unexpected, even regressive, effects. Charles returns to the narrative when he liberates St. Leon from the dungeons of Bethlem Gabor. Not recognizing his father, who had taken the elixir of youth prior to arriving in Hungary and now appears younger than his own son, Charles rebukes the former St. Leon's attempts to rescue the Hungarian populace from famine "at a time when, but for his inauspicious interference . . . perhaps every strong town in Hungary, were on the point of falling into the hands of the Christians" (415). Charles has, in essence, become what St. Leon had been as a youth in the French army, a "muster-roll of a man" (85) whose values St. Leon himself has reconsidered and subsequently left behind. Moreover, Charles'

cavalier attitude towards his father's attempt to bolster Hungarian independence exhibits little of the "care" that formed the cornerstone of his domestic education. As Rajan argues, in this scene it is not St. Leon who appears immoral, but rather Charles himself, "who, despite epitomizing his mother's middle-class self-reliance . . . remains fixated in the ethos of the Crusades" and thus within a general historical form of instituted thinking that hypostasizes past values (171).

Though morally laudable, the domestic affections are not as unequivocal as they appear in *St. Leon*. As the sentimental extension of a bourgeois economics that also remains within the horizon of classical anarchism's harmony model of society, the domestic affections tend towards what Bataille calls a "restricted economy," a closed economy through which the bourgeois self preserves itself through accumulation in conditions of scarcity, but also, as Derrida notes in his translation of Bataille's terminology into an economy of signification, claims that all meaning can be accounted for (Bataille, *The Accursed Share* 1: 39; Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 342-6). Conversely, Godwin presents an image of the gambler as an element of nonproductive expenditure that exposes the contingency of the domestic and utilitarian values by rereading these values through an "individual" which functions as the "outside" or repressed interior of these systems.

5.3 Reverse Transmutations: Alchemy and "Anarchy"

At the heart of the novel's exploration of anarchism's historical possibilities, however, is not the ideological figure of the gambler but rather his romantic *semblable*, the alchemist. Godwin's depiction of alchemy, which re-presents the historical figure of the gambler in the form of a romance, now sets out to explore anarchism's (im)possibilities within the historical.

Living in impoverished but pastoral conditions for six years, St. Leon's domestic happiness is disturbed by the sudden appearance of Zampieri, a vagabond on the run from the Inquisition who teaches St. Leon the secrets of the philosopher's stone and of immortality. St. Leon's transformation from gambler to alchemist plays on a related set of ideological associations within eighteenth-century scientific and moral discourse. By

the time of *St. Leon*'s 1799 publication, alchemy had been relegated to the status of a pseudoscience, while moral discourse increasingly associated gambling and alchemy as dangerous metaphors for revolutionary anarchy. For Burke, the Jacobin revolutionary is also the "alchemist and empiric," reckless "projectors" whose "wild, visionary theories" of a utopia governed by reason alone effectively abandoned "anything that is common" in social and moral traditions (*Reflections* 341-2).⁸⁷ Both gambling and alchemy refer to symbolic activities that resist bourgeois models of production, what Lewis Call identifies with anarchic forms of "anti-production" (94). Gambling and alchemy mutually break with normative models of rational exchange, and as such become the site of that which cannot be exchanged within a domestic or utilitarian economy. According to Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Isabelle Stengers, similar criticisms were levied against sixteenth-century alchemists such as Paracelsus, whose *De Vita Longa* (1566) and *De Transfigurione Metallorum Libellus* (1593) were both familiar to Godwin.⁸⁸ According to Bensaude-Vincent and Stengers, Paracelsus himself was perceived as a kind of anarchist in his opposition of "the authority of [scholastic] doctrines to what he considered the authority of experience," and for seeing "himself as an innovator in a future-oriented field." Paracelsian alchemy was seen to be anarchic precisely because it posed itself as a kind of empiricism that privileged the experiential over established metaphysical and religious institutions (*A History of Chemistry* 25-6).

In *St. Leon*, the ideological framework associated with alchemy initially evokes Godwin's own prior conceptualization of "reason" or "justice" in its most speculative and utopian form as an immutable, non-contingent *archē*. The conversion of base matter into gold becomes an analogy for the human and social transfiguration envisioned by Godwin in his Appendix "On the Prolongation of Human Life," with its hypothesis that the mind

⁸⁷ For a more detailed discussion on "projection" as a metaphor for speculation as "theory" see Simpson (1993). For the connections between gambling, speculation, and alchemy in *St. Leon*, see Rajan (2010), 150.

⁸⁸ In their discussion of *St. Leon* in their general introduction to the first volume of Godwin's collected works, Marilyn Butler and Mark Philp argue that Paracelsus serves as the basis of Godwin's characterizations of both Zampieri and St. Leon: like Godwin's fictional alchemists, Paracelsus was "driven by suspicion, bigotry, and intellectual enmities through Switzerland and southern Germany" (*Collected Novels and Memoirs* 1:31). Godwin also dedicates a section to Paracelsus in his later history of the occult, *The Lives of the Necromancers* (1834), 243-5.

will eventually transcend and control matter and, correspondingly, transcend institutions:

Every thing that I see almost, I can without difficulty make my own. . . . ‘Wealth! Thy power is unbounded and inconceivable. All men bow down to thee! The most stubborn will is by thee rendered pliant as wax; all obstacles are melted down and dissolved by the ardour of thy beams! The man that possesses thee, finds every path level before him. . . . He can assign to every individual in a nation the task he pleases, can improve agriculture, and establish manufactures, can found schools, and hospitals, and infirmaries, and universities.’ . . . Time shall generate in me no decay. . . . [F]or me the laws of nature are suspended. (*St.L* 53, 187-8)

This passage evokes both Godwin’s earlier speculations concerning anarchism as the rational transcendence of matter, as well orthodox idealist and romantic tropes that see the human imagination as capable of evaporating “disagreeables”⁸⁹ and reordering reality in accordance with its own desires. As Schelling writes of alchemy in his *Stuttgart Seminars*, such a process culminates in “an entirely healthy, ethical, pure, and innocent nature . . . freed from all false being” (242). “Triumphant over fate and time,” alchemy decontaminates the body of history, sublimating the alloy of human finitude through a knowledge that humanizes the Divine: “He [the alchemist] possesses the attribute which we are ascribed to the Creator of the universe: he may say to a man, ‘Be rich,’ and he is rich” (187). Collapsing the distance between intention and actualization, the alchemist appears as the positing of an absolute self-presence of a *logos* or *archē*; or, as Michel Chaouli puts it, alchemy “performs the sort of total synthesis towards which the organic-symbolic notion of poetry strives” (84).

Yet, in making use of the “false” or *simulacral* being of a gambler-turned-chemist in an echo of his earlier Appendix, Godwin recalls his skeptical displacement of reason in *Political Justice* in order to cast doubt on a rational perfection capable of

⁸⁹ “Disagreeables” is Keats’ term, from his well-known letter in which he writes that the “excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth” (60). Alchemical metaphors for the imagination are well-known in Romantic literature, especially Coleridge’s famous description of the imagination as an alchemical process of *solve et coagula* (dissolution and coagulation) in the *Biographia Literaria*. For a discussion of the relationships between alchemy and romanticism, see Roberts (1997).

bringing about a society without institution. Something of this doubt is signaled by Zampieri's description of alchemy's potential as ambivalent and reversible rather than incipiently positive: "God has given it for the best and highest purposes. . . . [But i]t might be abused and applied to the most atrocious designs. . . . It might overturn kingdoms, and change the whole order of human society into anarchy and barbarism" (*St.L* 165). Moreover, there is the curiously destitute appearance of Zampieri himself, which causes St. Leon to question the esoteric foundations of his alchemical "gift": "why was he so poor, possessing, as he pretended, inexhaustible wealth? Why was he unhappy, with so great talents and genius, and such various information? . . . Never was there a man more singular, and in whom were united greater apparent contradictions" (171, 165). Like the gambler, the alchemist is presented as an asocial "singularity" whose knowledge is capable of subverting "all order" and forcing "every avocation from the place assigned to it" (102). As a unity of contradictions, alchemy appears both as the "unbounded" power of genius and an abject powerlessness, a possession that is also a dispossession. Through such aporias, Godwin shows how the foundations of alchemy appear inherently self-contesting, rather than generating the autonomous and autoaffective being envisioned by St. Leon.

Godwin further discloses this essential uncertainty through alchemy's emphasis on secrecy: "the condition by which I hold my privileges" writes St. Leon, is "that they must never be imparted": "I commit to this paper my history, and not the science of which it is the corner-stone" (54, 186). St. Leon goes on to point out that he must also conceal that he has any secrets to hide, inscribing the text with a doubly-negative writing that not only hides, but simultaneously hides its own hiding (186). In *Political Justice*, Godwin had criticized secrecy for generating a "cold reserve" between individuals, as opposed to the sympathetic communion of souls made possible through the domestic affections. However, secrecy also produces a structural gap within the narrative voice that directly conflicts with St. Leon's claim that his story is the very model of "absolute truth and impartiality" (88). If a narrative of "absolute truth" by definition promises complete disclosure, then St. Leon's fidelity to the "*great secret*" renders his narration, as Paul Hamilton remarks, "systematically unreliable" (*St.L* 53; Hamilton 79).

Narrative unreliability overlaps with the conceptual unreliability of secrecy whose

condition of possibility is also its impossibility. The secret, as St. Leon suggests, functions as the condition of possibility for the positing of a utopian anarchism in history. Yet, because the secret must remain secret, it becomes the index of its own impossibility as posited historical “truth”: the secret makes possible the historical use of alchemy only on the condition that it withdraws from history. For “exhaustless wealth, if communicated to all men” would lose all value and “would be but an exhaustless heap of pebbles and dust” (186). Godwin later reuses this formulation almost verbatim in his later discussion of alchemy in his *Lives of the Necromancers* (1834),⁹⁰ but it also refers back to “Of History and Romance,” specifically that essay’s description of how the totalizing methods of the general historian produces a “mass” of particulars that “crumbles from his grasp, like a lump of sand . . . as fast as he endeavours to cement and unite it” (“HR” 455).

Similar to general history’s reduction of its materials to a single amorphous mass, the universal positing of alchemical knowledge would produce a reverse transmutation in which money itself would become worthless. Such destructive potential likewise recalls Godwin’s sense in *Political Justice* that the actual institution of perfection would, in fact, put an end to perfectibility. Echoing the gradualism of the earlier text, St. Leon notes the alchemist’s role as a “projector” interested only in achieving “ultimate objects,” rather than carefully considering “the steps between.” This lack of consideration is “an omission of high importance,” since “every thing in the world is conducted by gradual process” (193). Like gambling, alchemy circumvents the “gradual process” of the universe in bestowing immediate wealth without passing through the intermediaries of labour or exchange, which, in Godwin’s description, also implies a suspension of the laws of nature. Because nature “will not admit her everlasting laws to be so abrogated” (186), the consequence of realizing that which perfectibility deems unrealizable exposes alchemy to the possibility of a reverse transmutation in which, as Collings puts it, “Godwin identifies utopia with disaster” (“The Romance of the Impossible” 868).

By emphasizing the failures of St. Leon’s (world-)historical projects, Godwin

⁹⁰ “If the power of creating gold is diffused, wealth by such diffusion becomes poverty, and every thing after a short time would but return to what it had been” (44).

anticipates something of the post-anarchist critique of a classical anarchism's notion of a "human essence constituting a pure revolutionary identity" as both "dubious," but also, perhaps, ". . . immanently dangerous" (Newman 52). Utopia becomes indiscernible from anarchy in the adverse effects that follow whenever St. Leon attempts to directly apply the romance of "ultimate objects" to the vicissitudes of history. In the early stages of the novel, St. Leon thus interprets alchemy in an "institutional" way by focusing on his prejudices. Zampieri goads St. Leon into accepting the "gift" of alchemical knowledge through an appeal to his aristocratic and patriarchal prepossessions: "'Go, St. Leon!' added the stranger, 'you are not qualified for so important a trust. . . . Go; and learn to know yourself for what you are, frivolous and insignificant, worthy to have been born a peasant, and not fitted to adorn the rolls of chivalry, or the rank to which you were destined!'" (165). Recalling his original reasons for gambling, St. Leon first sees alchemy as a form of aristocratic exhibitionism, a "golden key" that will "unlock the career of glory" and "buy shouts and applause from all the world" (211). Eager to restore his family to its former position within a social hierarchy whose foundations are secured by wealth rather than heredity, St. Leon takes his son Charles on a tour of the German courts so as to "initiate him . . . in scenes of distinction and greatness" (202). Yet, St. Leon's excessive display of wealth raises the suspicions of his peers, who question the mysterious origins of St. Leon's sudden affluence in light of his shady reputation as a ruined gambler in exile (204). St. Leon's subsequent refusal to account for the source of his wealth provokes further disaster, estranging his son Charles and exacerbating a growing rift with Marguerite that will end in her untimely death during childbirth.

After the death of his wife and his escape from execution at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition, however, St. Leon attempts to deploy his alchemical knowledge more productively and closer to the doctrines of benevolence and incremental change argued in *Political Justice*. Now several years younger and travelling under the pseudonym Chatillon, St. Leon sets out to rescue Turkish-occupied Hungary by investing in a series of public-works projects (365). Unlike his earlier use of alchemy, St. Leon's plan to bolster the Hungarian economy depends on subtlety rather than vulgar displays of wealth: "It was my purpose to stimulate and revive the industry of the nation: I was desirous of doing this with the least practicable violence upon the inclinations and

freedom of the inhabitants” (364). Without any “private or personal object in view” (377), St. Leon now attempts to practice alchemy at the level of individual history, that is to say, as a micropolitics from within the diversified minutiae of a society, rather than imposing it monolithically from outside. At the same time, in executing his “plan of public benefit” without permission from “the sovereign of Constantinople,” St. Leon finds himself classified as a political anarchist. As the Turkish bashaw comments, “you say, that you wish to be the benefactor of his subjects, and the judge of your own proceedings: such sentiments are direct rebellion against the glorious constitution of Ottoman” (376). St. Leon’s philanthropy introduces a form of social benevolence unsanctioned by political and religious institutions and, as such, threatens to expose the “arbitrary character of . . . the maxims of the Turkish government” (377).

But Godwin goes on to demonstrate how even the most refined use of alchemy is dissimulated by the vicissitudes of history that “Of History and Romance” had identified with the complex “system of the world,” and *Political Justice* with the flux of “necessity.” As in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin shows how the “uncontaminated point of departure” claimed by St. Leon becomes inscribed within the very institutions it wants to transcend. While successful in implementing his alchemical stimulus package, St. Leon generates an “increase of . . . precious metals” (364) that results in massive inflation, plunging the country back into poverty. When the Hungarian populace eventually turns against him, St. Leon is then forced to appeal to the very government he had previously undermined for protection (374-7, 394). A similar result occurs where St. Leon, disillusioned by his failures at philanthropy, tries to befriend misanthropic noble Bethlem Gabor. Manipulating St. Leon’s desire for companionship, Gabor imprisons him and offers him an unpalatable alternative: either reveal his secret, or supply Gabor and his band of marauders – an inverted, Gothicized image of the virtuous robbers in *Caleb Williams* – with an endless reserve of money to fund their murderous expeditions. St. Leon’s betrayal suggests that even the “intrinsic” virtue of human benevolence against the artifices of the state remains subject to the vicissitudes of power: “When I became sensible of the precarious situation in which I stood towards the powers of the state, could I have fallen upon a more natural expedient, than the endeavour to cover myself with the shield of friendship? . . . But this expedient would almost infallibly lead to the placing

myself sooner or later in the power of the man whose friendship I sought” (394). Such instances magnify Godwin’s growing sense that there can be no rational principle capable of detaching itself completely from the historical “necessity” in which it is always already caught up, anticipating Newman’s post-anarchist view that “morality, truth, and knowledge do not enjoy the privilege of being beyond the grasp of power. They are not pure sites uncontaminated by power but, on the contrary, are effects of power: they are produced by power, and they allow power itself to be produced” (83). In *St. Leon*, alchemy cannot achieve the status of a sovereign *archē*, but rather appears as an “effect of power” that deconstructs classical anarchism’s desire to posit an essence prior to existence. St. Leon’s experiences in Hungary demonstrate how, in raising certain attributes of the human to the status of an uncontaminated *archē*, classical anarchism reintroduces the very forms of alienation it wants to overcome.

5.4 “The World is Open”: Alchemy and *Anarchē*

Like the original conclusion to *Caleb Williams*, the utopian disasters of *St. Leon* would seem to acknowledge that the desire for an “uncontaminated point of departure” is inevitably self-destructive. *St. Leon* could then be read as an ironic meditation on the failed logic of classical anarchism. After being rescued by Charles, St. Leon thus suggests that he has exhausted the possibilities of his philosopher’s stone, and will subsequently abandon “all ambitious and comprehensive views” (413). Moreover, St. Leon writes that his miscarried attempts at becoming “the benefactor of nations and mankind, not only had been themselves abortive, but contained in them shrewd indications that no similar plan could ever succeed” (413). It is difficult to read this passage and not see alchemy as an analogue for the “similar plan” of *Political Justice*, whose failure seems to have become *fait accompli* with the conservative reaction against politically radical versions of Enlightenment. In this respect, *St. Leon* exposes how classical anarchism’s utopian aspirations for a society without institutions is an “abortion,” while St. Leon’s decision to abandon “comprehensive views” would appear to anticipate the post-anarchist repudiation of classical anarchism’s essentialist meta-narrative.

However, in the passage above St. Leon also states that he only abandons his speculative ambitions “for the present” (413), gesturing to a perfectibility within alchemy

also implicit in Bensaude-Vincent and Stengers' description of alchemy as a "future-oriented field." This perfectibility is evident in Godwin's reading of alchemical method in his *Lives of the Necromancers*. Although Godwin acknowledges this method can afford opportunities to the "artful imposter," he also sees potential in it as the historical manifestation of a perfectibility that is still becoming. Foregoing the more extravagant metaphysical claims of hermetic philosophy, Godwin describes alchemy as a radically contingent and experimental "gamble" in process:

The art . . . is in its own nature sufficiently mystical, depending on nice combinations and proportions of ingredients, and upon the condition of each ingredient being made in exactly the critical moment . . . and it was often found, or supposed, that the minutest error in this respect caused the most promising of appearances to fail of the expected success. . . . [Thus alchemy appeared] ever on the eve of consummation, but as constantly baffled when . . . most on the verge of success (43).

To borrow Chaouli's terms, Godwin's emphasis on the empirical, experimental, and processual side of alchemy is to read alchemy "chemically," insofar as chemistry consists in "narrowing its scope to a finite set of elements and combinatorial operations that, however, give rise to an infinity of possible objects" (84) rather than seeking the "total [alchemical] synthesis" of the human and the divine. Godwin's "chemical" perspective on alchemy in the *Lives* also brings it closer to his theory of individual history and romance, in which the finite "materials" are combined to disclose counter-factual potentials through which history can be seen otherwise. In this respect, Godwin's mention of alchemy discloses how history cannot be reduced to a closed order of facts in which certain past forms of knowledge are simply identified as "false"; rather, the past consists of potentials whose realization has been missed or only partially grasped. Moreover, at several points in the novel itself Godwin actually refers to St. Leon as a chemist or as studying chemistry (227, 266, 285, 354), suggesting that, like history and romance, chemistry and alchemy cannot be divided into a simple opposition that would sanction any straightforward application of an "ethical sentence" to the text.

Thinking "chemically" about alchemy, Godwin's novel persistently associates the

latter with experimentation (218, 243, 245-6, 256, 359, 372), which repositions the alchemist closer to the *an-archic* figure of the *bricoleur* rather than an engineer who applies a pre-existing technology. Indeed, Rajan points out that if Godwin depicts alchemy as a technology, the actual *techne* of St. Leon's alchemical practice, like the absent foundations of the tale itself, is curiously missing from the text (171). The only moment in which it appears as though the reader will be granted access to the technology behind St. Leon's production of gold occurs when he is imprisoned by Bethlem Gabor. Promising his captor ten thousand ducats, St. Leon asks Gabor to retrieve a chest that ostensibly contains his "great secret," the philosopher's stone or a secret reserve of treasure. Yet, St. Leon's chest contains "not gold, but the implements for making and fashioning gold": "crucibles, minerals, chemical preparations, and the tools of an artist" (401-2). As in Godwin's later description of alchemy for the *Lives*, St. Leon's chest contains finite implements whose use-value remains indeterminate and open to speculation, receiving meaning only through and "by the experiment" of their potential combinations.

Not unlike the scenes surrounding Falkland's chest in *Caleb Williams* that tantalize with the possibility of meaning rather than meaning itself, Gabor's "sullen and gloomy" (401) reaction to the instruments in St. Leon's chest begs the question as to whether alchemy's "*great secret*" actually hides a latent *archē* that would allow us to institute the text, or if the secret rather functions as the absent cause for a foundation that never existed as such. For in depriving the reader of the technological "corner-stone" of St. Leon's narrative, Godwin also deprives us of the *archē* that would allow us to fix its meaning. Likewise, because St. Leon is forced not only to hide the secret but also to hide that he has anything to hide, the double-negative raises the possibility that there may have been nothing hidden in the first place, revealing what Schürmann calls the *an-archic* "blank space" behind normative and hegemonic symbolic constructions of power. The indeterminate set of implements and devices at the heart of St. Leon's secret suggests what Colin Davis calls "the experience of secrecy as such, an essential unknowing which underlies and may undermine what we think we know" (377). In this context, the secret becomes the "productive opening of meaning" rather than a concealed "determinate content" to be recovered within the positive order of knowledge. The experience of

secrecy as such presents the secret as a metaphor for that which is eminently “absent from its own place”: the secret “is not a puzzle to be solved” but rather “the structural openness or address directed towards . . . the not yet formulated possibilities of the future” (Davis 377-8). The structural openness of the secret in turn yields the “gamble” of St. Leon’s pursuit of an absolute that generates the potential for experimentation, recalling Schlegel’s definition of romance as something that “can never be completed” because it is “still becoming,” and Godwin’s sense of the romance writer’s “straining at a foresight to which his faculties are incompetent” (Schlegel 32; “HR” 467). For if one of the goals of the alchemist is to liberate the inner content or potential of natural processes by transforming base matter into its opposite, alchemy also emancipates the form of something that remains to be worked through.

If such potential seems largely absent from St. Leon’s use of alchemy early in the novel, the second half of the novel gestures in the direction of a more *an-archic* principle of “structural openness.” The death of Marguerite, St. Leon’s final settling of accounts with his daughters and the arrangement of his son’s marriage, along with the gradual loss of his identity as “St. Leon” after taking the elixir of youth, casts his narrative as the progressive “unbinding” of the institutions of identity, “nation and family” (Rajan, *Romantic Narrative* 171): as St. Leon puts it after the death of his wife, “I was prematurely dead to my country and my race” (303). Reading the novel conservatively as a rejection of anarchism for the domestic affections, Marguerite’s untimely death exposes St. Leon’s self-serving ambitions and condemns his alchemy for destroying “that communion of spirit which is the soul of the marriage-tie”: “For a soldier you present me with a projector and chemist, a cold-blooded mortal, raking in the ashes of a crucible for a selfish and solitary advantage” (226-7). At the same time, however, if the character of the domestic economy is to preserve itself by foreclosing “all that is new, mysterious, and strange” Marguerite’s disappearance from the text is also a hinge, a moment of closure that is simultaneously an opening that clears a space for something new to emerge.⁹¹ According to St. Leon, Marguerite’s death constitutes “the great crisis” (296) of his history, a term which not only refers to a period of emotional difficulty but is also

⁹¹ On the double-logic of the hinge see Derrida (1998), 78-82.

etymologically linked with decision, and therefore with a kind of freedom opened through the individual's separation (*cision*) from institution. As St. Leon writes, "my being now alone, and detached from every relative tie, left me at liberty to pursue my projects with bolder enterprise" (304). The freedom of this "bolder enterprise" is no longer that of the absolute freedom asserted by St. Leon earlier in the novel, a freedom that would posit itself as universal *archē*. To the contrary, St. Leon now resolves to "take care" (304) in the deployment of his alchemical knowledge so as to make romance responsible to the complex minutiae of history, while introducing possibility into a history that might otherwise remain bound to things as they are.

Having secured both his daughters' inheritance and his son's marriage, Godwin's conclusion shows St. Leon working free of the last of his "relative ties" and continuing his "eternal" existence beyond the conclusion to the text itself. Unbound from the *archē* of the patriarchal, national, familial, and racial identity that defines him earlier in the novel, St. Leon manifests an anonymous existence that mirrors Caleb's loss of "character" at the conclusion of *Caleb Williams*. Where Caleb loses his character in a moment of "magnetic sympathy" with Falkland that renders it impossible to clearly distinguish justice from injustice, St. Leon's anonymity manifests the *anarchē* of an equivocal, Protean existence that resists positing under a law of generality. As such, St. Leon is not a character so much as a floating signifier through which Godwin critically reflects upon the credibility of multiple positions throughout the novel and, in a conclusion in which St. Leon addresses the as yet unformulated possibilities of the future. St. Leon's continuance beyond the conclusion of the text gestures towards a future that approximates what Derrida identifies with empiricism as a "strategy without finality" engaged in "calculations without end" (*Margins of Philosophy* 7), a structural openness that allows the reader to speculate beyond the "pleasing termination" of the narrative (449). From a paradoxical "position" outside things as they are, St. Leon enables a critical perspective that sees history in terms of its potential – that is to say, the potential also latent in romance as a means of seeing history becoming other than what it is.

In *St. Leon* Godwin discloses an anarchism caught up in the impossibility of its own positing. Read with an eye to passing "ethical sentence" on the novel, this impossibility demonstrates the failure of any attempt at rearranging world-history by

attempting to posit the “romance” of classical anarchism directly within the complexity and materiality of history. Yet, to acknowledge this impossibility does not simply put an end to the need for political justice; rather, in *St. Leon* Godwin suggests that anarchism and political justice must be rethought in the context of the dialogical relationship between history and romance. Such rethinking also renders the ostensible domestic moral of the novel up for questioning, while recasting perfectibility in the form of a potentiality that appears more hopeful than in Godwin’s previous novel. At the same time, however, if *St. Leon* manifests an anarchism revised according to a principle of hope, this hope must be read against the acknowledgement of its own absence of foundations, that its realization is always somehow missed. As with Godwin’s speculation on perfection in his Appendix to *Political Justice*, the utopian dimension of his revised anarchism in *St. Leon* necessarily shares in an *an-archic* negativity that remains skeptical of any affirmative programme for a society. Yet, the conclusion of the novel suggests that the failure of utopia paradoxically brings out the necessity of its survival in the hope that things might be different than they are, a hope, moreover, that is always by definition a “gamble” and an experiment that generates possibilities out of its impossibility.

Chapter 6

6 “Not Competent to Exercise those Rights . . . Claimed by Every Sane Member of the Community”: *Mandeville*

“This essay is also out of touch with the times because here I am trying for once to see as a contemporary disgrace, infirmity, and defect something of which our age is justifiably proud, its historical culture”

-Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*

In *St. Leon*, Godwin deconstructs the utopian assumptions of his own philosophical anarchism, a deconstruction already at work in both his revisions to *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*. By making St. Leon into a figure for hope, however, Godwin’s second novel is a re-writing, albeit a skeptical one, of anarchism’s utopian possibilities within the domain of the counter-factual rather than an outright rejection of these possibilities. Conversely, Godwin’s late novel *Mandeville, a tale of the seventeenth century* marks his most recessive foray into the “closet” of individual history, and most radical confrontation with the obscure face of the *persona non grata* in its dissensus with general history, or, as one character names the title character near the conclusion of the novel, the *non ens* (non-entity) and *hors de cour* (“dismissed case”) “not competent to exercise those rights . . . claimed by every sane member of the community” (*Mand.* 318). As such, *Mandeville* constitutes Godwin’s most radical literary examination of what Newman identifies with the post-anarchist “war model” of social relations in which “society itself can have no stable meaning – no origin, and no grand dialectical movement towards conclusion . . . free from conflict and antagonism.” Rather, this model discloses what Mandeville himself will call the historical and social reality of “eternal war,” or, as Newman avers, “the dark, turgid, violent struggle of silent forces; the conflict of the multitude of representations which are precariously held in check by notions such as human essence, morality, rationality, and natural law” (*Mand.* 124; Newman 51).

Published in 1817, Godwin’s novel explores the afflicted psychology of Charles Mandeville, a Royalist during the turbulent Cromwellian period of British history. At three years old, Mandeville witnesses the slaughter of his parents in the Irish rebellion of

1641, and is subsequently raised in the gloomy ancestral home of his shut-in uncle Audley and educated by fiercely anti-Catholic minister Hilkiah Bradford. At Winchester Academy, Mandeville first encounters the eloquent and popular Clifford, who becomes his arch-nemesis and inadvertently thwarts Mandeville's every attempt to become "something substantive in the *dramatis personae* of society" (*Mand.* 123). The novel culminates in Clifford's proposed marriage to Mandeville's sister Henrietta, the only character that Mandeville feels connects him to the world beyond his tortured psyche, and climaxes with a violent encounter between the two rivals that accidentally leaves Mandeville grotesquely scarred.

Possibly a reflection of Godwin's increasing financial destitution, the reactionary political atmosphere, and the increasing insanity of George III, the dark focus of the novel disappoints any sense of the romance or hope that can still be found at the conclusion of *St. Leon*. Instead, *Mandeville* seems to emphasize what D.H. Monro calls Godwin's literary focus on "the wretchedness of the man . . . cut off from sympathetic communion with his fellows" (7). Accordingly, critical reactions contemporary with the novel invoked Mandeville's similarities with Byron's tortured and misanthropic loners, whose similarly themed philosophical drama *Manfred* is published in the same year. James Mackintosh's opinion in *The Scots Review* is paradigmatic, describing *Mandeville* as "an exposition of a mind radically diseased, and only very slightly acted upon by any peculiarity of outward circumstances" (qtd. in Clemit, "Introduction" 59). More recent criticism has largely perceived the novel within this horizon. William Brewer cites *Mandeville*'s proximity to Rousseau's *Confessions*, arguing that "Mandeville, like Rousseau, is partly the victim of his own hyperactive imagination" and that his unaccountable hatred of Clifford "has no more basis in reality than Rousseau's delusion" that Diderot and the other French *philosophes* were secretly plotting to ruin him (*Mental Anatomies* 55). Reading the novel through a psychoanalytic perspective, Handwerk argues that Mandeville's hatred for Clifford is a displacement of the "primary trauma" of his childhood, and Godwin's text subsequently enacts a "rigorously repetitive structure" that can be called "genuinely insane": "At every turn of events, the same ideological oppositions recur, the same behavior results, the same outcome ensues – defeat and frustration for Mandeville" ("History, trauma" 78-9). The final breakdown and

confrontation with Clifford is read as “a full erasure of historical consciousness, an entrapment within an eternal, unvarying present” in which Mandeville “blurs past and present, seeing repetition everywhere and equating Henrietta and Clifford with their historical types, the Duke of Savoy and his queen” (Handwerk 80; *Mand.* 316). For Handwerk, Mandeville’s interiority forecloses historical reality, such that the “history [that] repeats itself as Mandeville’s tragedy” appears as “farce” for the reader, while Mandeville’s attempt to explain his magnetic antipathy with Clifford through the image of “mysterious . . . properties interchangeably irreconcilable and destructive to each other” is “essentialized” and “ahistorical” (*Mand.* 140; Handwerk 78, 80).

However, to conceive Mandeville as a pathological other attenuates Godwin’s insistence on the individual as the singular locus of the historical and deploys a standard by which the pathological is judged from the perspective of the normal, privileging Clifford’s characterization of Mandeville as a dismissed case within the novel itself: “Mandeville is sick; and we are well” (293). Focalizing the novel entirely as a product of Mandeville’s aberrant psyche has the effect of distancing the *anarchē* of the individual and the historical in a manner that Godwin had resisted in “Of History and Romance.” Moreover, this interpretation tends towards a reading in which the novel unfolds teleologically, tracing the *archē* of a primal scene to its emergence as psychosis, a process that always reaches a dead-end, insofar as it is only capable of understanding the novel in terms of personal history rather than analyzing the contradictions that the *persona non grata* is negatively capable of evoking within the historical itself.

This chapter argues, to the contrary, that Mandeville is not foreclosed from the historical but rather serves as the index of a confrontation with the *anarchē* of history through a *persona non grata* that challenges the reactive forces of counterrevolution and Restoration ideology, exposing the deeply inegalitarian underside through which the *archē* of the “good” and the “normal” are legitimized. In this context, it is not simply Mandeville who is a pathological figure; rather, as Rajan argues, through the figure of Clifford (and others) Godwin also expresses the pathology inherent in what defines itself as the good, forcing his readers to perform a genealogy of morals (“The Disfiguration of Enlightenment” 175). The *anarchē* proper to Mandeville’s individual history might be

said to follow closer to an observation made by Nerval: “Melancholic hypochondria, it is a terrible affliction – it makes one see things as they are”; that is, it is Mandeville’s “abnormal” psyche that brings us face to face with the *anarchē* of history itself (qtd. in Rosset, *Joyful Cruelty* 76). Consequently, even at the height of psychosis in his final, violent confrontation with Clifford, Godwin will nonetheless connect Mandeville to the “faceless” of history – the slaves of the West Indies (217). Mandeville gives voice to an *an-archic* refusal of institutional positing, embodying a nonproprietary existence that haunts civilization with its discontents.

Further, reducing Mandeville entirely to the pathological other neglects the distinctive “vitality” to which Godwin refers throughout the novel that allows Mandeville to be thought as a figure of resistance: “Could I then, sink, palsied and unresisting, under this oppression? Ambition, as I have said, was the vital spirit, that fed my life, and preserved my corporeal frame from putrefying. . . . I felt within me powers answerable to this destination. I could not therefore, if I might, retire into a corner” (140). Far from sink “unresisting” into a melancholic torpor that would shut him off entirely from the world like his uncle, or succumb to the tepid happiness of the “obscure and rural life” represented by Henrietta, Mandeville refuses any recourse towards a terminal state that would dissipate the tension that constitutes his individuality (148). On the contrary, Mandeville represents the *an-archically* excessive dimension of a historical individuality that, in Nietzsche’s terms, resists inclusion and thus challenges “the universal, green pasture happiness of the herd” and their desire for “security, safety, contentment, and an easier life for all” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 41). In this context, the repetition that informs the novel is less a repetition of the same than expressive of a field of repeated struggles, setbacks, and betrayals, a series of antagonisms that live on without the promise of resolution, what Mandeville identifies as “eternal war.”

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I investigate the ways Godwin establishes the psychological interiority of the novel only to unsettle it, gesturing back in the direction of *Political Justice*’s emphasis on the contingency of external circumstances. I here follow Rajan’s suggestion that external circumstances render the ideological positions within the novel difficult to locate, such that the history within the novel becomes a scene of

perpetual dislocation (“The Disfiguration of Enlightenment” 177-8). I extend this notion through Maurice Blanchot’s sense of the “neuter,” which characterizes the space of literature as a radical displacement of the unified interiority of the self. Second, I elaborate on the ways in which Godwin distinguishes Mandeville from what I am calling institutional “types” within the novel, Audley and Hilckiah, who both represent specific figures within a genealogy of morals. I connect this typology into a discussion of what Godwin calls “rebelliousness” in an essay in *Thoughts on Man*, in which Godwin begins to think of a non-rational *anarchē* within human nature itself. I argue that this essay, largely ignored by critics, is crucial to a discussion of *Mandeville* and the vitality within Mandeville’s refusal of the different types of stasis that Audley and Hilckiah represent in the novel. Third, I focus on Mandeville’s relation to Clifford, who functions as the most contemporary figure in the novel’s genealogy of morals. I argue that Clifford embodies a sympathetic morality of happiness and universal inclusivity that characterizes modern liberal-democratic values symbolized through Restoration ideology. “Restoration” here refers both to the re-establishment of the monarchy on the accession of Charles II in 1660 after the collapse of the Commonwealth, as well as a theoretical-political force of regression. I then investigate how Godwin’s comparison of Mandeville with the “weeping philosopher” Heraclitus poses a challenge to this restorative morality by perceiving history not as sympathetic but antipathetic. Rather than see Mandeville’s invocation of antipathies as “essentialized,” I argue that Mandeville becomes Godwin’s most explicitly “post-anarchist” figure, an index of what Newman identifies as post-anarchism’s genealogy of historical and social relations that “unmasks rift behind closure, discord behind harmony, war behind peace” (49). Moreover, Mandeville’s Heraclitean antipathy returns to the site of Godwin’s prior necessitarianism in *Political Justice*, only now as the dark ground of a perfectibility that can no longer be guaranteed but that, nonetheless, does not culminate in traumatic stasis.

Finally, I investigate the significance of Godwin’s abrupt conclusion to the novel, which finds Mandeville disfigured and compared to the slaves of the West Indies. I theorize this comparison with respect to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minorization,” which gestures in the direction of a subversive potentiality otherwise foreclosed by seeing Mandeville as merely pathological and cut off from history.

Although a minoritarian literature fundamentally gestures to the solitary and unique element that does not fit within an overall majoritarian structure, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that through the minority figure “everything takes on a collective value,” involving what Kafka called a collective “of dissatisfied elements” (Deleuze and Guattari 17). Through this collective assemblage, physically marked by a grotesque scar on Mandeville’s face, Mandeville enters into a “becoming-minor” whose disfiguring renders him unrecognizable within the political and prolongs rather than resolves the *an-archic* dissensus within history.

6.1 Armed Neutrality

On the surface, Mandeville appears to be a pathological figure entirely cut off from history. Mandeville also seems furthest from the optimistic anarchism of *Political Justice*, and even more radically dissociated from the bonds of sympathy than St. Leon. Wandering around the isolated and gloomy ancestral mansion of his shut-in uncle, Mandeville develops a habit of “endless rumination” that leads to paranoid fantasies in which “every thing around was engaged in a conspiracy against [him]” (*Mand.* 24, 60). Mandeville thus frequently refers to a metaphoric barrier, an “entrenchment,” that separates him from “creatures wearing the human form” (93). Indeed, near the conclusion of the novel, Mandeville is identified both as a non-being (*non ens*) and a dismissed case (*hors de cour*), existentially and legally void.

At various points in the novel, however, Godwin complicates Mandeville’s interiority. Beginning with his birth in 1638 at “Charlemont, in the north of Ireland,” Godwin quickly shifts Mandeville’s narrative to describe the ways in which his personal origin is already caught up in a “singular concurrence of circumstances” (14). Rather than mark his birth or the Irish revolt as the *archē* of a strictly private history, Mandeville points out that “Ireland was a country that had been for ages in a state of disturbance and violence” arising from the conflict between local “habits of living” and “the policy of English Administration,” extending to Elizabeth’s weakening of the national military, James I’s attempt to “reclaim the wild Irish” through colonization, and Charles I’s appointment of the unpopular Thomas Wentworth as Lord Deputy in 1633 (9-10). In

what will become an analogue for his own mind, Mandeville notes that the “state of the Irish mind” at the time of his birth is the sedimentation of “all the individual circumstances, and all the bitter aggravations that attended each act of oppression” (11). Mandeville gestures to the fact that while the Irish nation maintained an “external indication of tranquility and submission,” the “core of their thoughts was dread and aversion,” sentiments that could not be publicly confessed and subsequently, not “fully analyze[d]” (10).

It is not, therefore, only Mandeville’s psyche that appears divided at the traumatic moment of his parents’ murder; rather, furthering the argument of “Of History and Romance” that sees history constituted as manifest generality and latent individuality, Godwin suggests that history itself is fissured into conscious text and unconscious subtext, the latter of which is not separate from its textual surface but an antagonism at its very “core.” This repressed core recalls Godwin’s sense of the *an-archic* flux subtending rational consciousness and the paradoxical “essence” of an individual history that evades general historical analysis. For Mandeville is not separated but rather implicated from the start in a deep history whose complications make it difficult to locate an anchoring point capable of organizing history as progressive. Mandeville’s traumatic experience of the Irish uprising only partially functions as a primal scene, in the restricted sense of an event of childhood trauma that would account for the individual’s future psychosis. Rather than historicize Mandeville’s past, a primal scene of this order suggests the existence of an original term that can be repeated, an event capable of being isolated from the historical repetitions in which it is formed. However, Mandeville’s gesture to the “ages” of violence in British-Irish history that exceed his own past, reflects Godwin’s earlier sense of necessity as a chain of concatenating events that extends indefinitely into the past in *Political Justice*. There is less an origin in a primal scene than a historical complexity in which Mandeville is already caught up.

A consequence is that the national, political, psychic, and religious identities within the novel resist easy mapping. Born of English colonizers on Irish soil, when his parents are slaughtered by the colonized, Mandeville is saved by an Irish Catholic peasant woman who temporarily becomes a surrogate mother, but he is then raised in the

ancestral mansion of a distant relative and an anti-Catholic Protestant minister, rendering his identity as fragmentary as his memories of the trauma itself. When Mandeville later attempts to join a royalist insurgency against Cromwell under Penruddock and Wagstaff, he further discovers that “the name of Mandeville had never been engaged on either side of the late calamitous wars, and that, particularly at my early period of life, I should do more wisely to hold myself neutral” (116). Conventionally, such neutrality might imply impartiality or indecision, a detachment from the political. Mandeville’s motive for joining the Royalists is not a belief in the cause of restoring the monarch, but a desire to clear the “blemish that had passed over [his] name” while a student at Winchester, where he was mistakenly accused of possessing anti-monarchist cartoons (112). Further, Mandeville’s disapprobation of Clifford, who eventually joins the same group of royalists and unwittingly assumes the position initially promised to Mandeville, is enough to make the latter abandon the group.

Mandeville’s brief appearance on the political/world-historical map thus does not reveal any substantive ideological commitment but rather raises the question of the shifting and ideological nature of commitment itself in a novel in which allegiances are constantly being displaced. Even when the earlier antagonisms of the Irish become “published” through the institutional “medium” of Parliament that sees Catholics and Protestants working together against the British, Godwin emphasizes the obstinate remainder of a “deeper discontent” between religious factions within the Irish themselves. This discontent explodes from within as the uprising quickly degenerates into a “scene of cruelty and massacre” (11, 17). Similarly, Mandeville loses his position of secretary within the royalist group because his family’s historical neutrality is based on Presbyterianism, which is seen as less favourable to the royalist cause than Clifford’s Episcopalian background and Papist relations (122). Later in the novel Clifford likewise shifts his earlier sympathies for the house of Stuart by converting to Catholicism and, to Mandeville’s horror, is praised in the mostly Episcopal court of the restored Charles II (252). As Rajan points out, the political loyalties that drive history within the novel appear to be generated at random, creating multiple antagonisms that cannot be fixed by ideological binaries (“The Disfiguration of Enlightenment” 178). As the examples of Ireland and the royalists suggest, “stable” positions themselves appear internally fissured,

dividing arbitrarily with shifts in circumstance: “the purpose of the cavaliers and the Presbyterians became nominally the same, the restoration of the monarchy in the family of Stuart. But the nearer they grew to a seeming agreement, the greater was their fundamental antipathy to each other” (*Mand.* 80-1).

This lack of committed positions from which to fix the ideological boundaries in the novel further shifts the sense in which Mandeville’s family name is considered to be “neutral.” Given the artificiality of the ideological maneuvering within the novel, Mandeville’s neutrality seems to refer less to impartiality than to what Blanchot calls the “neuter,” which refers to a “relation always in displacement and in displacement in regard to itself, displacement also of that which would be without place” (*The Step Not Beyond* 5). *Mandeville*, in this sense, presupposes a displacement of identities that *Caleb Williams* had only acknowledged at its conclusion. As that which cannot be placed, the neuter does not, like the spectator of “objective disinterestedness,” “move toward a surer world, a finer or better justified world where everything would be ordered according to the clarity of the impartial light of day. He does not discover the admirable language that speaks honourably for all. What speaks in him is the fact that, in one way or another, he is no longer himself; he isn’t anyone anymore.” As Bruns points out, contrary to the either/or, multiple choice of a public sphere with clearly delineated discursive positions, the neuter designates the more paradoxical space of the neither/nor – “neither this nor that, ‘the pure and simple no’ or difference in itself” (22). With the neuter the “first person” of the subjective “I” situated over against the world of objects dissolves and becomes an anonymous “third person,” “myself become no one, my interlocutor turned alien; it is my no longer being able, where I am, to address myself and the inability of whoever addresses me to say ‘I’” (Blanchot, *Space of Literature* 28). This more vertiginous neutrality becomes palpable after Clifford unexpectedly joins Penruddock’s insurgency. Faced with another disruption of his attempt to forge a historical identity beyond his familial neutrality, Mandeville does not withdraw to the calm position of an impartial observer, but rather falls into a groundless neutrality that suggests the erasure of any definite position whatsoever: “on the narrow line between being and no-being. . . . I had not an inch of ground to stand on. I looked round; and my head turned giddy; I fell” (123).

Mandeville's "neutrality" is thus not reducible to an identity per se but gestures to the complex nature of an individual's history that puts the subject in question. Moreover, as Blanchot argues, the neuter refers to a distinctively *literary* enunciation, or in Godwin's terms a romance, that dislocates narrative as the expression of an archaic subjectivity. Formally, the neuter in *Mandeville* appears through the frequent intrusion of a third person perspective in which Godwin's "historical" voice appears to displace Mandeville's personal voice, as exemplified in Mandeville's detailed descriptions of the "ages" of discontent preceding his birth. Further, while experiencing one of his visionary recollections of his parents' murders, Mandeville says that "all this . . . came mixed up, to my recollection, with incidents that I had never seen, but which had not failed to be circumstantially related to me. It would indeed have been difficult for me to have made a separation of the two" (44).

Mandeville's visions are thus not *strictly* a private matter but connected with circumstances of which he is not the author, investing the individual with a history of the neuter that unfolds at the very heart of the first person. In this respect, the intensive focus of the first-person deprives the reader of distance from a history that institution otherwise disavows, but does not settle in the personal psyche as a fixed identity. Instead, Mandeville's visionary scenes express what Deleuze and Guattari call a "delirium" through which his unconscious is directly invested with the sociopolitical and the historical. This delirium sets the whole of history adrift, affecting peoples, races, climates, what Rimbaud refers as "bad blood" (*mauvais sang*) and a "bastard race" within history (*Anti-Oedipus* 84-9). According to Deleuze and Guattari, such delirium is not, as Freudian psychoanalysis might argue for instance, centered on our personal Oedipal triangle, but has the potential to invoke the faceless of history, an impure or "bastard" race that resists general history.

At the same time, Mandeville's "neutrality" is not *not* a private matter either; that is to say, this neutrality does not suggest a simple eradication of identity for history, since this neutrality paradoxically *is* Mandeville's identity, such that even those events of the Irish massacre that Mandeville did not experience directly nonetheless remain "circumstantially" related to him. Thus, while the neuter renders the location of the

subject untenable, it also gestures towards a more *an-archic* sense of subjectivity that, at the very moment it can no longer relate to itself as a rationally autonomous being or to others, appears in its irreducible singularity. The neuter renders the subject nothing other than its own impossibility, “subject” being the very name for the paradoxical non-place, the very non-relationship or non-coincidence to itself, which Nancy identifies with an “existence deprived of essence and delivered to this inessentiality” (*Experience of Freedom* 81). This “neutral” subject cannot be fixed according to standard political or moral oppositions, and is only “posited” negatively as a resistance to the hegemonic processes legitimized by general history. In Blanchot’s terms, neutrality can only be discerned in terms of a “great refusal” (*le grand refus*), an aversion or turning away from any rational discourse that privileges harmonic integration or redemptive closure, and sees instead “the return of the refuted, that which erupts *anarchically*, capriciously, and irregularly each time” (*Writing of the Disaster* 76; emphasis mine).

This *an-archic* refusal implicitly raises the question of the value of the history from which Mandeville is excluded. In the third volume of the novel Mandeville resolves to become “acquainted with the history of the world,” reading of Greek and Roman statesmen such as Themistocles and Aristeides, Socrates and Plato, and the Roman generals Fabricius, Scipio, Cato and Brutus (215). Though Mandeville fleetingly “glowed with exalted sympathy” towards the “glorious world” depicted by history, he ultimately concludes that he can form “no part of it” (215). However, the history from which Mandeville sees himself excluded is also described as “for the interest of the general,” recalling Godwin’s idea of “general history” as an institutionalized record of the past “excellence . . . of sages, of patriots, and poets, as we find exhibited at the period of their maturity” (*Mandeville* 216; “HR” 456). In particular, Mandeville distinguishes himself from the general history of the institutional exemplars philosophically grounded in the Platonic conception of the Statesman as the “shepherd of men” whose definition, as Deleuze points out, “literally fits only the *archaic* god” that establishes a transcendent norm by which to judge good and bad imitations of the model (*Logic of Sense* 255; translation modified, emphasis mine). If the “true statesman” is the “well-grounded claimant” within general history, Mandeville’s inability to recognize himself within this history and his designation as *non ens* sees him closer to *simulacra*, those false claimants

who participate least in the eminent model of the Good and thus participate least in “history.”

As I discuss in more detail later on, it is Clifford, an almost divine figure seemingly capable of shepherding individuals and judging good and bad imitations of a model, who appears as the historically well-grounded claimant. For Godwin, however, the general history of the well-grounded claimant is not historical enough, in that it reduces singularity to the form of the general. Consequently, it behooves the reader to question whether the “history” from which Mandeville is excluded, and excludes himself, is precisely a history which he *ought* to resist, namely a general or institutional form of history that would otherwise remain unquestioned. Insofar as the neuter is a paradoxical “indifference” to traditional moral distinctions, it opens towards the potentiality of a nonproprietary, “inhuman,” perspective that subsequently opens the possibility of reading history otherwise.

In order to discern how Mandeville can function as an anarchic figure in this respect, one can turn to the ways in which Godwin explicitly distinguishes Charles from more “institutional” figures within the novel: Audley and Hilkiah. Both of these characters can be constructed within a genealogy of morals as institutional-historical “types” from which Mandeville diverges.

6.2 Individual History as Institutional Typology: Audley, Hilkiah

After narrowly escaping the massacre in Ireland, Mandeville is remanded to the custody of Audley and Hilkiah, and subsequently relocated to an isolated ancestral estate. As the reader shortly discovers, this “striking scene of desolation” is an external projection of Audley’s self-institutionalization after a failed adolescent romance with his lowborn cousin, Amelia Montfort. The romance is prohibited by Audley’s father (Charles’ grandfather), a Commodore and “naval adventurer” whose hyper-masculine disposition and contempt for “knowledge and refinement” renders him both physically and mentally opposed to Audley. “A son as would be most unwelcome to his father,” Audley suffers

from a physical deformity that renders him both “scarcely equal to the most ordinary corporeal exertions,” and “unequal to contention . . . sinking, as without power of resistance under any thing that presented itself in the form of hostility” (25). Audley’s attempt to marry Amelia is doomed from the outset, culminating in a subterfuge that leads Amelia to marry another and Audley to complete psychic breakdown: “He remained a statue of despair. . . . In this one event he had lost everything . . . now all things were the same to him. . . . He was the shadow of a man only” (39-40).

Audley’s breakdown functions as a metaphor for a post-revolutionary/post-Napoleonic melancholia⁹² that reflects Godwin’s own disappointment in the missed opportunities and unrealized potentials expressed in *Political Justice*. In Freudian terms, Audley’s unsuccessful resistance to his father culminates in a “profoundly painful dejection” leading to the “cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity” and “an impoverishment of [the] ego on a grand scale” that mirrors the destitution of revolutionary potentiality (*On Metapsychology* 252, 254). In this respect, Amelia not only represents a lost love-object, but also a revolutionary threat to the hereditary institution represented by the dictatorial Commodore. This threat is symbolized both in her status as a “degraded branch” of the family tree and in her unique capacity to break through Audley’s tendency towards inertia: “she declaimed earnestly, but sweetly, against the supineness and indolence that she saw growing upon him; she told him, that now was the age at which he ought to shore mind with observations, and make trial of that activity which talents like his required” (75). Amelia serves as the catalyst for a revolutionary possibility within Audley’s individual history that is eventually thwarted. The subterfuge by which the Commodore arranges Amelia’s marriage to Lieutenant Thomson during Audley’s rare excursion to London suggests the capacity for this revolutionary potential to work at cross-purposes: while the event of revolution suggests a de-stabilization of prior institutions, allowing Audley to temporarily

⁹² Pfau (2006) reconstructs the Romantic period in terms of a tripartite chronology of “moods,” beginning with “paranoia” in the 1790s, passing through a period of “trauma” from 1800-1815, and culminating in the “melancholy” of the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic era from 1815-1840. *Mandeville*’s publication in 1817 suggests that it can be classified as a “melancholic” text, although one situated close enough to the traumatic mood of the previous era to register its effects.

abjure the “prison-life under his father’s roof,” it does not protect against the emergence of new institutions or the persistence of old institutions in new forms (32). Further, Audley’s physical description as being born “too soon” echoes Godwin’s earlier caution with respect to revolutionary ideas in *Political Justice*. Such ideas, Godwin argues, have to be strategically announced in order to prevent their misuse or misinterpretation within a public sphere given to a “fallacious uniformity of opinion” (2:465).

Godwin presents Audley’s exhausted resignation not merely as symptomatic of institutions but as institutional in itself, further exemplifying the ways in which his affective dissent from the *archē* of the Father can become rigidified. Melancholia signifies a kind of resistance to institution through ascetic withdrawal. However, in Audley’s case, it becomes an alternative form of institution through a mortification of life, which in turn serves as a bulwark against both historical and existential flux.⁹³ As Mandeville observes, Audley “loves his sadness, for it had become a part of himself,” suggesting that his internalization of personal trauma does not have an unsettling effect but rather emphasizes stasis: “The course of Audley’s life had been uniform; and this had infused into him a sort of *vis inertiae*, a disposition opposite to that of ‘such as are given to change’ In reality he rather vegetated than lived” (40-1, 32).

In the wake of losing both Amelia and the potential for individual history that she represents nothing is left but a “blank,” an existence entirely bereft of meaning and purpose: “the whole world would be a blank to him, where [Amelia] was not present” (75). This “blank” exemplifies what Nietzsche identifies with a pessimism in which “life has grown silent” so that “nothing will grow or prosper any longer” (*Genealogy of Morals* 3.26). As Deleuze points out, Nietzsche’s diagnosis of this pessimism is

⁹³ Rajan (2002) reflects on a similar problem in a discussion of melancholy in relation to Mary Shelley’s *Mathilda*. Here Rajan takes up Kristeva’s distinction between melancholic withdrawal and abjection as “survival, whether the expulsion of the other or the abjection oneself as other” (230). On the one hand, melancholy is characterized by a “letting-go of life” that, while introjecting and thus refusing to mourn its trauma and re-integrate itself into the social or historical, nevertheless “withdraws from the activity of abjection,” thereby protecting itself “from any . . . aggression against the other or self-destruction.” If melancholy becomes “nonviolent” it loses its “lifeline to eros” or desire (230). This “protective” model of melancholy severed from eros, what Kristeva identifies as depressive “de-eroticization” in which the subject commits suicide “without the anguish of disintegration” applies to Audley, while Mandeville’s persistent aggression comes closer to abjection. See also Rajan (1994).

connected with a specific moment in the genealogy of morals, namely, the moment after the collapse of the Enlightenment ideals of “progress, happiness for all and the good of the community; the God-man, the moral man, the truthful man, and the social man.” Genealogically, Audley’s *vis inertiae* expresses an advanced stage of European nihilism in which “man” finally prefers “not to will, to fade away passively, rather than be animated by a will which goes beyond [itself]”: “if possible, will and desire are abolished altogether; all that produces affects and ‘blood’ is avoided; no love, no hate; indifference; no revenge . . . in short, *absence of suffering* - sufferers and those profoundly depressed will count this as the supreme good” (Deleuze, *Nietzsche* 151-2; *Genealogy of Morals* 3.17). The philosophical type corresponding to this exhaustion is Schopenhauer’s ascetic who, after extraordinary personal suffering, “retire[s] into himself” to attain a point of absolute self-denial that would finally raise him “above all suffering, as if purified and sanctified by it, in an inviolable peace” (*World as Will and Representation* 392-3). The ascetic type is the extremity of a nihilistic instinct that wishes to diminish the flux of the historical for institutional(ized) stasis. Audley represents the way in which even a purely individual history ultimately becomes a form of institution.

Mandeville himself points to certain similarities with Audley: “in the gravity of our dispositions we considerably resembled each other” (53). Like Audley, Mandeville finds his only possibility of social and human connection through a female relative derailed and is preternaturally favourable to misanthropic solitude. Thus, upon arriving at his uncle’s ancestral mansion, Mandeville observes the “desolateness of the scene, the wideness of its extent, and even the monotonous uniformity of its character” as “favourable to meditation and endless reverie,” complementing his “habitually visionary” tendencies (24-5, 60). However, Mandeville points out that his external resemblance to Audley belies a more important difference: “there was a difference between me and my Uncle. . . . [H]e desired no novelty, or none of an extrinsic sort, and shrunk from all disturbance . . . not such was the condition of my existence. I hoped for, and I dreamed of, pleasures yet untasted” (53). Contrary to Audley’s desire for immutable stasis through the extinction of the will, Mandeville remains open to the contingency of the encounter that, as Godwin writes in “Of History and Romance,” would “disturb by exciting . . . the torpid tranquility of [the] soul” (454).

Consequently, the “monotonous uniformity” of Mandeville House takes on a different significance whether it is approached from the perspective of Mandeville or of Audley. On the one hand, the desolation of the environment is a projection of the stasis of Audley’s melancholia and emanates from a perspective of resignation; on the other hand, this same environment for Mandeville provides the occasion and “source . . . of many cherished and darling sensations,” whose intensity accompany his “meditation and endless reverie”: “there was I know not what in the sight of a bare and sullen heath, that afforded me a much more cherished pleasure, than I could ever find in the view of the most exuberant fertility” (24-5, 44). This confusion of the landscape with Mandeville’s traumatic memories manifests itself as a violence of the sensible, a felt difference that gestures to a past that pervades the sensible and lives on in the present.

The difference between Mandeville and Audley is reinforced in the ways they react to their respective traumas and the type of historical memory this reaction signifies. Initially, Mandeville’s consideration of his sensations as “cherished and darling” seems curious, since the bleakness and “corruption” of the natural environment induces a repetition of the traumatic memory of his parents’ death:

the scenes which immediately preceded my quitting the shores of Ireland, lived in my mind. I thought of them by day; I dreamed of them by night. No doubt, the silence for the most part pervaded my present residence, contributed to this. All was monotonous, and composed, and eventless here, all that I remembered there, had been tumultuous, and tragic, and distracting, and wild. I saw in my dreams – but indeed my days, particularly that part of them which was passed in wandering alone upon the heath, were occupied to a greater degree in visionary scenes – I saw, I say, in my dreams, whether by night or by day, a perpetual succession of flight, and pursuit, and anguish, and murder. (44)

Although Mandeville claims that he finds little pleasure in the “richest and most vivid parterre,” the memory of the Irish revolt has an exuberance of its own, an affect and effect contrasted with the repetition of the same characterized by Audley’s reaction to his personal trauma, which renders “all within him . . . a blank; and he was best pleased, or

rather less chagrined, when all without him was a blank too” (39). The repetition Mandeville experiences as a collapse of the past into the present is not an internal and external blanking in which everything is submerged in the same, but is depicted as a proliferation and omnipresence of memories, an *an-archic excess* rather than lack of historical consciousness. The chaotic register of the unconscious at this moment paradoxically becomes a structuring possibility for an *an-archic* epistemology of *all* experience that refocuses history according to its antagonisms.

Later in the novel, Mandeville counter-intuitively describes this excess as a “vital spirit that fed my life and preserved my corporeal frame from putrefying” (140). Where Audley’s melancholia is informed by an internalization and multiplication of pain that weakens him to a “mere shadow,” Mandeville bears a more explosive potential that strongly contrasts with Audley’s “unenterprising apathy” (64, 43). The *an-archic* potential of this ambition is spelled out in Godwin’s later essay “On the Rebelliousness of Man,” whose thematic resonance with *Mandeville* suggests that the essay could be read as a later reflection on the novel. Godwin begins the essay with the assumption that “man is a rational being,” but notes that “our nature, beside this, has another section” in which

we resign the scepter of reason . . . and, without authority derived to us from any system of thinking, even without the scheme of gratifying any vehement and uncontrollable passion, we are impelled to do, or at least feel ourselves excited to do, something disordinate and strange. It seems as if we had a spring within us, that found the perpetual restraint of being wise and sober insupportable. . . . A thousand absurdities, wild and extravagant vagaries, come into our heads, and we are only restrained from perpetrating them by the fear, that we may be subjected to the treatment appropriated to the insane, or may perhaps be made amenable to the criminal laws of our country. (94)

In line with the principles first put forward in *Political Justice*, Godwin sees that this rebellious impulse must be restrained through the rational exercise of “laws of morality” rather than institutions. Such laws consist of those “inexorable rules” of convention

through which “I am rendered familiar with my fellow-creatures, or with society at large.”

But Godwin’s concern in the essay is less to discover the means of controlling this rebelliousness so much as to reflect on “why the bare thought” of the desire to do something “disordinate and strange” takes “momentary hold of the mind” (97). Significantly, Godwin conceives of this *an-archival* aspect of human existence as operating “even without the scheme” of the passions, suggesting that rebelliousness is not limited to individual psychology but may be considered *ontological*, something endemic to human existence as such. As Godwin writes, “there is a black drop of blood in the heart of every man, in which is contained the *fomes peccati*,” a tinder-box of sin canonically associated with concupiscence, but principally defined as that which inhibits perfection in mortal existence (100). Rebelliousness is not an external intrusion to the “harmonious” constitution of subjectivity and society expressed in classical anarchism, but is existentially constitutive of human nature. Godwin conceives of the *fomes peccati* as the volatile potentiality of a will that both turns away from representation while simultaneously harbouring the capacity to break through the ordered surface of reality at unexpected moments.

Though focusing on its pathological manifestations, Godwin obliquely suggests that rebelliousness might also be an opening towards the “new” by estranging the individual from general historical norms. Godwin identifies three principles that can be said to account for rebelliousness that imply some kind of potential for derailing the normal: the “love of novelty,” the “love of enterprise and adventure,” and the “love of power,” or the impulse that “instigates a child to destroy his playthings” (97-8). Rebelliousness seems to imply a potential for de-familiarization and distinction that accords with Mandeville’s ambitiousness. Likewise, Godwin’s description of rebelliousness strikingly anticipates the Freudian uncanny (*Unheimliche*) as something paradoxically both foreign and familiar (“The Uncanny” 241). For Godwin suggests that one of the main causes that gives birth to the “feeling of discontent” that characterizes rebelliousness is a “not being at home,” where home is defined as “the place where a man is principally at his ease”: “No unwelcome guest can intrude; no harsh sounds can disturb

his contemplations; he is the master” (*Thoughts on Man* 102). Insofar as Godwin sees this loss of mastery as a section of our nature, no such mastery is possible without radically de-naturing humanity itself. Rebelliousness implies an immanent loss of mastery in the home of the self, an unsettling of the domestic already evident in both *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon*. Mandeville appears to be a direct literary manifestation of this “not being at home” with oneself: his “soul was chaos,” incapable of being domesticated in the manner of Audley, Hilkiah, or as I will discuss in more detail later on, Clifford and Henrietta (*Mand.* 311).

If Audley represents a thwarted revolutionary potential that has now withdrawn, Mandeville’s tutor Hilkiah represents an element of “Sandemanianism” that Godwin had rejected in his revisions to *Political Justice*, an extreme form of Protestantism in which rational dissent has become institutionally dogmatic. “Imbued with all the prejudices that belong to the most strait-laced of the members of his sacred profession,” Hilkiah represents the world to Mandeville through a particularly religious lens of a classical anarchism that Godwin has already placed in question. Hilkiah’s social aims are to “level all distinctions between the rich and the poor, the young and the old, and to introduce a practical equality among the individuals of the human race” against the Catholic “idolatry” of the Pope’s “despotic authority” (21, 46, 50). Hilkiah’s view reflects not only the austere rationalism of Godwin’s early works but indicates a more fanatical element within the wider project of European modernity that marks a convergence of the secular sciences with Whig notions of progress that, like Caleb in Godwin’s first novel, draws upon simplified oppositions between emancipation and oppression, reason and ideology, slavery and individual rights.

Two related tropes emerge within this quintessentially “modern” discourse: 1) a rigorous ideal of self-discipline and self-denial, echoed in Mandeville’s observation that his tutor “had all his passions subdued under the control of his understanding,” and 2) a fidelity to a Kantian conception of “duty” towards an abstract law of reason, expressed by Hilkiah’s “imperious mandates of Go there, or Do this” (46, 58). As Kant argues in his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, the condition of possibility for moral agency and autonomy is to be found in a formal “principle of volition,” a practical law that must

be purified of empirical considerations if it is to be considered truly universal (13). Any action considered moral must therefore be accomplished “for the sake of the moral law,” and duty is defined as that which acts “from pure respect” or out of “conformity” with this law (Kant 2, 15). Similarly, Hilkiah’s severity and emphasis on “humility” as “a cardinal virtue of a Christian, without which it was impossible to enter into the kingdom of God,” embodies a fanaticized version of a strategy that would legitimize Mandeville as a modern subject/citizen through an instrumentalized notion of the “common usefulness of life,” which Mandeville, as Caleb eventually does in the revised version of the earlier novel, finds “hard to flesh and blood” (55, 58).

Godwin questions this fanatical discourse through Mandeville’s internal resistances to Hilkiah: “I submitted indeed outwardly . . . but I retained the principle of rebellion entire, shut up in the chamber of my thoughts” (59). Despite an emphasis on practicality, Hilkiah’s appeal to an “imperious” law of reason appears to Mandeville as “vague and imprecise,” “wholly unsusceptible of being applied to use”: “If I desired to correct myself in conformity to its admonitions, I knew not where to begin. I understood that it was querulous and severe, but that was all. It inspired into me painful emotions; but if furnished me with no light to direct my course” (56). This follows from the Kantian understanding of duty as compliance with a universal practical law without empirical content. As Deleuze points out, this practical law “does not tell us *what* we must do . . . it merely tells us ‘you must!’”: such a law cannot be known since “there is nothing in it to be known” (*Kant’s Critical Philosophy* x). The pure practical law to which Hilkiah appeals takes on the mysterious value of a rational imperative that appears entirely irrational, since the practical law can only prescribe actions “under the bare influence of authority” and not according to “actions chosen by their performers” (*Mand.* 56). Moreover, the pure practical law of reason becomes “vague” precisely because any instantiation of it necessarily exposes it to the vicissitudes of history and contingency.

At the same time, Mandeville expresses how Hilkiah’s conception of duty and autonomy in fact leads to an abstract leveling that imperils the *an-archic* potential of individuality as such. The cardinal virtue of “humility” is proffered under the auspices of conformist and self-denigrating behaviour that privileges a formal or general equivalence

of individuals over the singular “case” of an individual’s history: “unless we emptied our hearts of all merit and presumption, and confessed that in ourselves we were entirely abominable and worthless, we could form no expectation of [God’s] favour. . . . He plainly told me, that a person of the most loathsome and offensive appearance might, in the sight of God, be among the excellent of the earth, and be ranked by omniscience with his most chosen saints” (55). In this sense, while Hilksiah’s classically anarchistic perspective exposes and displaces the injustices perpetuated by Catholicism’s fidelity to the single authority of the Pope, it nonetheless maintains the space of this authority as “reason.” As Deleuze points out, “reason appears and persuades us to continue being docile because it says to us it is you who are given the orders. Reason represents our slavery and our subjection to something superior which makes us reasonable beings” (*Nietzsche* 92).

With Hilksiah the excessive and ambiguous rebelliousness that distinguishes Mandeville from Audley is thus understood as “pride and self-conceit” (55). Hilksiah’s lessons on humility appear naturally averse to what Mandeville perceives as his “inborn pride of soul,” “which, like an insurmountable barrier, seemed to cut me off for ever from every thing mean, despicable and little” (101). Mandeville thus perceives his forced domestic labour under Hilksiah less in terms of humility than humiliation, a desire to eliminate the conditions by which one could distinguish oneself from the common. This pride of soul expresses a distinctive crossing of a potential that is at once inhibiting and differentiating, an obliquity that resists positing within the leveling framework of modern rationality. Unlike traditional notions of the rational soul as a static “essence,” Mandeville compares his inborn pride with “the eternal descent of the waters in a foaming cataract,” composed of “convulsions and earthquakes,” the rebelliousness of a soul “not at home” with itself and off its “centre”: “I was, in some inexplicable way, a captive . . . robbed of that mysterious and inestimable freedom in which [my spirit] could feel at home, at its ease, and resting, so to express it, upon its proper centre” (68). This indwelling de-centering potential persists out of a “neutral” feeling of individuality otherwise foreclosed in Hilksiah’s image of a society that replaces the archaic “despotism” of the Catholic Pope with the equally problematic, “ensorious and cynical,” idea of rational virtue: “When Mr. Bradford . . . issued his imperious mandates of Go there, or

Do this . . . I felt convinced that I was repeated in an manner unbecoming and unjust; and, my neck never having been bowed to the condition of a slave, my whole soul revolted at the usurpation” (58-9).

Mandeville’s “soul” is thus conceived as the index of a singularity, a “*peculium* . . . of which no creature that lived was a partaker”: “I did not find myself one of a tribe, whose feelings were common with each other, and who might have afforded me the example of a cheerful or a careless submission; I dwelt in a monarchy of which I was the single subject” (55, 62). Dwelling in the monarchy of a single subject, Mandeville expresses something of *Political Justice*’s aversion to the public sphere and Godwin’s preference for the private exercise of judgment, in that *peculium* etymologically refers to that which is “of one’s own.” However, Mandeville’s “neutrality” suggests that this privacy is no longer defined in terms of the rational freedom of deliberative judgment, but as something closer to what Blake calls “energy” in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, something that emerges “from impulse: not from rules,” an energy Mandeville also names an “essential characteristic” of his nature (E 43; *Mandeville* 61). Indeed, Mandeville contextualizes “the agitations, the agonies, the bitter repinings” of his soul as the “satanic rebellions of [his] soul against the God that made [him],” obliquely drawing a comparison to Milton’s Satan and thus bringing him closer to Blake, who deploys the same figure in *The Marriage* as a being that resists the tyranny of the angelic Good.

Despite certain formal similarities, the *peculium* of the single-subject monarchy is not identical with the *punctum* of the modern individual. The latter operates under the premise of a rational, autonomous being capable of freely interfacing with other equally autonomous beings within a transparent social medium. Historically, the *peculium* refers to a Roman law by which a master grants his slave a partial, temporary possession of property or a certain range of goods that could be withdrawn at any time, accentuating the *contingency* of the subject of rights claims rather than a guaranteed, abstract universality.⁹⁴ *Peculium* is also etymologically linked to the “peculiar,” the singular or

⁹⁴ See Patterson (1982), 182-9.

remarkable. Though Mandeville generally conceives of his peculiarity as cutting him off from society, it also grants him a negative capability to see the peculiar everywhere, a “love of novelty” that de-familiarizes the everyday: “Many a stranger arrived at our postern, who, to the nicety of a critic in language, would have been a stranger no longer. But it was not so to me. The very butcher who came once a week . . . did not, even by the unvaried regularity of his approaches, altogether divest himself of the grace of novelty” (53). Here the *peculium* is also connected with a kind of grace, less in the sense of any directly religious meaning, than with reference to the irruption of something irreducible to rational calculation. As *peculium*, Mandeville cultivates a “pathos of distance” that, as Deleuze avers, distinguishes itself both from “the Kantian principle of universality and the principle of resemblance so dear to the utilitarians” as an *an-archic* “difference or distance in the origin” (*Nietzsche* 2).

Not unlike the shift in perspective by which Mandeville extracts more intense sensations from the same landscapes that reflect Audley’s passivity, Mandeville also draws radically different lessons from Hilkiah’s pedagogical representations of classical Greek and Latin literature and the violence depicted in John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*. Hilkiah approaches the stories of Ovid and Virgil with a “clear apprehension of their grammatical construction” and “the passages in which he most seemed to delight, were those, in which these poets bore the most resemblance to certain passages of sacred writ” (46). Ovid and Virgil are great poets only with respect to their degree of resemblance to or imitation of the *archē* of the Bible, and within a purely technical idiom that emphasizes institutionalized literary convention. Mandeville, to the contrary, receives different “sensations” from Ovid and Virgil and is “electrified . . . with their beauties” (46).

Like the libidinal spark induced by individual history in “Of History and Romance,” Mandeville receives an affect or feeling of intensity from literature that exacerbates rather than sublimates his rebelliousness of soul. For Mandeville the act of reading is not primarily one of passive reception or moral instruction; rather, literature produces an enlivening affect of a rebelliousness that has not yet been simplified in the form of a moral. This affectivity is further exemplified in Mandeville’s reception of

Foxe's apocalyptic "Acts and Monuments of the Church," a sixteenth century account of the Catholic oppression of Protestants and Christian martyrs from the Inquisition to the Marian Persecution of Calvinist dissenters under Mary I (1555-8). Hilkiiah intends Foxe's book to horrify Mandeville with the purpose of creating an anti-Catholic sentiment in Mandeville as fervent as his own. While Foxe's "representation of all imaginable cruelties" does produce "a strange confusion and horror in [Mandeville's] modes of thinking," this confusion is doubled with a "deep conviction that the beings thus treated, were God's peculiar favourites . . . the boast and miracle of our mortal nature" (52). As with Audley, the chief difference between Hilkiiah and Mandeville's interpretation of the Book of Martyrs is in the value each respectively places on suffering. Hilkiiah values the suffering depicted by Foxe as part of the corrupt history of Catholicism that a progressive liberal theology displaces and leaves behind. As such, the suffering of the martyrs is part of a critique of ideologies that leads towards an Enlightenment that asserts the "practical equality" of individuals. In short, Hilkiiah maintains the idea that historical conflicts are progressively resolvable while Mandeville, to the contrary, identifies directly with the suffering of the martyrs themselves. Rather than serving to illustrate ideology, the "boast and miracle" Mandeville associates with profound suffering bears an unsettling and strangely liberating potential in its ineluctable, "raw," presence.

Although Mandeville's characterizations of Hilkiiah's fiery sermonizing and Audley's withdrawn resignation appear as polar opposites, both express a strikingly similar desire to turn away from the suffering and becoming that shapes individual history for the respective stases of melancholic resignation and the leveling effect that approximates classical anarchism. While not without their respective influences on Mandeville, both Audley and Hilkiiah emphasize a certain entropic trajectory that culminates in "institutional" points of view that also stir in Mandeville a rebelliousness that resists both the acquiescence of melancholy and an abstract version of rationality that would reduce "individual" existence to a cog in the machine of civil society.

6.3 Sympathy, Antipathy, and Eternal War

Though Mandeville eventually comes to view Hilksiah as “an enemy,” neither he nor Audley evoke the “bitter and implacable hatred” that Mandeville directs at Clifford, with whom he declares an unspoken vow of “eternal war” (56, 144, 124). When Mandeville first meets him at Winchester, Clifford outlines his basic philosophy of life in a lengthy discourse occasionally broken by Mandeville’s own voice (85-9, 95-6). Among Clifford’s popular attributes are his acceptance of poverty as a moral virtue and his unflinching optimism. Despite being born in “an iron age, and . . . called on to witness, or to hear of a multitude of crimes,” Clifford insists that “I will not play the weeping philosopher. What I cannot alter, I will learn to endure. I have but one life, and that, as far as I can without injury to others, I will make a happy one” (95). Clifford’s desire to live according to what Mandeville calls “a cheerful and careless submission” to things as they are appears as a more sympathetic, liberalized, version of Hilksiah’s strict Protestant morality. Like Hilksiah, Clifford emphasizes the subjection of the passions to reason and creates a further inversion of the value-positing eye that sees the “rich man” as “the only slave,” the “one true nobility” descending from “Heaven alone,” and the “truly independent man” as one who “has the fewest wants. He fears no change of fortune, has no anxieties about the sufficiency of his income . . . the uncertainty of the elements, or the revolution of empires” (85). In clear contrast to Mandeville’s chaotic soul, Clifford associates his soul with “fair weather” and a health that “maintains the evenness of his spirits through every stage of his journey. . . . Of this miscellaneous household he is thoroughly master, and has all his passions under subjection” (85-6, 87). In Clifford, Godwin sketches the general historical image of an autonomous being capable of neutralizing the uncertainties, anxieties, and “revolutions” that dominate at the level of individual history, exemplifying a rational soul completely “at home” with itself and thus capable of existing “as well in a cabin as in a palace”: “his gaiety was never-ceasing and eternal” (85, 83).

Clifford’s Episcopalian rather than Presbyterian background, as well as his Papist relations, situate him as an ideological *via media* between Hilksiah’s stern Protestantism and traditional Catholicism, following from the Anglican tradition that considers itself both Reformed and directly descended from the early orthodox churches. Significantly,

Hilkiah's death in the text is almost immediately followed with the introductions of the more benign figures of Clifford and Henrietta, who also correspond with Mandeville's sense of "entering on a new epoch" (69). In this respect, Clifford does not merely function as the object of Mandeville's personal disapprobation but is situated in the novel as the emergence of a new historical figure, whose concern with "happiness" displaces the asceticism of duty.

This figure constitutes a specific element within a genealogy of morals that Nietzsche identifies with the "men of the present" (*Zarathustra* 18). For Nietzsche, the last men supplement the leveling doctrine of asceticism with an ideal of "sympathetic affections," whose "tremendous objective" is the obliteration of "all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand*" (*Daybreak* 175). Such objectives recall Godwin's critique of general history as a mass of selfsame particulars that "crumbles . . . like a lump of sand" in reducing the individual to an abstract law of equivalence that ignores the "sharp edges" at which the individual resists inclusion into the general ("HR" 455). Unlike Hilkiah's ascetic and externally imposed law of reason, Clifford represents a more contemporary model of institution: the liberal-democratic imperative of sympathy that, as Khalip argues, "solicits alterity through mutual recognition or likeness," a recognition that becomes prerequisite for a universal obligation of social acceptance, "happiness" without stress (99). For Nietzsche, this imperative ensures that the "men of the present" survive the longest, since their desire for happiness aims precisely at conserving their own aims as the highest expression of human culture. Thus, the "men of the present" are also "the last men," because they can no longer imagine anything beyond themselves: "'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink" (*Zarathustra* 18).

Mandeville thus perceives Clifford's cheerful submission to things as they are as the institutional positing of a "stationary creature, as perfect in one generation as in all that are to succeed" (90). Clifford embodies a kind of distortion of Godwin's earlier sense of political justice and an institutionalization of perfectibility as a "perfection" that would inscribe the end of history. The particular ideological seduction of Clifford, as an embodiment of Nietzsche's last men, is precisely in his claim to be universally accepting:

“the discourses of Clifford . . . appeared almost divine. He charmed, as it were, our very souls out of our bodies. It was like what is fabled of Orpheus; mute things seemed to have ears and you would have expected the very beasts of prey to lay down their savage natures and obey him. . . . He talked like one inspired” (*Mand.* 89). The prescience of mystification in Clifford’s language signals the darker undertone of a “soft” crusade to procure universal assent precisely through an Orphic suspension of humanity’s latent rebelliousness. Thus, Mandeville perceives Clifford’s eloquent paean to sympathy and universal happiness as both mystifying and promoting servile behaviour, as Clifford’s emphasis on poverty subsequently becomes “fashion” amongst the students at Winchester, a “blessed inheritance” for those impoverished while those who do possess wealth seek to carry “about them a brand of slavery” (90).

Through Mandeville’s eyes, the discourse of happiness espoused by Clifford reveals itself through conformist behaviour and a pragmatism that ironically suspends the life of thought that Godwin had previously associated with perfectibility. While Mandeville superficially agrees with Clifford’s criticism of wealth as a potentially corrupting influence, he does not conclude in turn that poverty must be the highest moral virtue, since this would be merely to reverse positions without affecting the structure of the opposition itself. Not unlike St. Leon, Mandeville claims that those who would “engender arts and sciences” and “penetrate into the abysses of his own nature, ought not to be exposed to unmitigable poverty,” since the “poor man [is] strangely pent up and fettered in his exertions,” caught in a Malthusian nightmare of bare subsistence that ultimately will “depress his heart, and corrode his vitals” (90). Mandeville deconstructs this conception of poverty as virtue by noting that if wealth enslaves the individual, then “poverty [does] the same” by rendering the individual unable to do anything other than “endure” (91).

Mandeville thus interprets Clifford’s influence as similar to that of a “mountebank” and an “enchanter” whose leveling doctrine debauches rather than affirms “the character of his equals” (91). Self-denigration and universal equality contain the

secret assertion of their contrary, namely, the assertion of the superiority of the moral values Clifford represents. Not unlike Rousseau's "happy slaves"⁹⁵ or Nietzsche's last men, the social ideal represented by Clifford appears in the guise of those whose desire is to preserve their own comfortable security, and whose ostensible "benevolence" manifests the violence of normalization. Indeed, for Mandeville it is precisely Clifford's "air of benevolence, and all-beaming kindness and affection" that constitutes the most galling aspect of his character (309).

Elsewhere in the novel, however, Mandeville describes the sympathetic in positive terms, as the ideal space in which like meets like in a field of rational "communication and common discussion with a sober and healthful mind" that "removes us to a due distance from the object, which we see falsely and distorted only because we are too near to it" (145). Sympathetic discourse opens the possibility of reflective distance by which the "airy nothing" that characterizes the *an-archic* flux of the imagination gains some form of consistency in being posited as a "local habitation, and a name" (145). The sympathies thus function in concert with an Enlightenment hermeneutic by which the obscure or distorted can be translated into the clarity of rational truth, leading to the formation of a *sensus communis* in the Kantian sense of a universal communication by which the subject both knows and feels that his or her experiences are understandable and shared by others.⁹⁶ Yet Mandeville ultimately sees the validity of this sympathetic positing as equally distorting since, if one feels otherwise, one cannot express this feeling unless it becomes displaced according to accepted social codes that

⁹⁵ For Rousseau's discussion of the "happy slave," see his "Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts" (1750) in *Basic Political Writings*, 3-4.

⁹⁶ Kant's conception of *sensus communis* is outlined in the *Critique of Judgment*, specifically with respect to the transcendental deduction of the universal validity of judgments of taste. For Kant, common sense is first defined as a "subjective principle . . . which determines what pleases or displeases, by means of feeling only and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity" (238). Common sense is also the "effect arising from the free play of our powers of cognition," or the free movement between the faculties of imagination and understanding "so far as they refer to a *cognition in general*," a mental state that presents itself with a feeling of a ground common to everyone (217-9). As the determining ground for cognition in general, common sense admits of universal communicability, not through the concepts of the understanding – the formal categories through which experience is constituted – but through feeling. But for Kant, common sense is not reducible to "pleasure" in the estimation of a beautiful object; rather, common sense as ground is "antecedent to the pleasure in it" and thus it is only under the *presupposition* of common sense that this pleasure arises (238-9).

allow it to be read by others: “I can hardly describe to my friend the thing that torments me, in the wild and exaggerated way in which I view it with closed doors” (145). This reintroduces a radical cleavage between public and private that questions the Enlightenment conception of the public sphere as a universal space of intersubjective communication, as well as questioning the morality of sympathies offered by writers such as Adam Smith. If, as Smith suggests in the opening of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a morality of sympathy requires that one identify with the other as the imaginary double of the self by which we “conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments . . . and become in some measure the same person with him,” Mandeville perceives an asymmetry between himself and others that appears insurmountable in its radical incommunicativeness (Smith 9). Mandeville’s self cannot be communicated sympathetically because it is simultaneously a non-self, an anarchic turbulence not at home with itself, and hence incapable of recognizing its own torments as sympathetically mirrored in the other: “perhaps all this proves me to be a monster, not formed with the feelings of human nature, and unworthy to live. I cannot help it” (44).

If a central attribute of Clifford’s character is his eloquence, Mandeville admits that he “cannot put [his] soul into [his] tongue” and that an “openness of heart” is a “violation of [his] nature”: “I was not born with the talent of an ancient bard, and could not pour out in copious and unexhausted streams, the unpremeditated verse. On the contrary, I was like the lawgiver of the Jews, ‘slow of speech, and of a slow tongue’” (91, 248, 243). Through Mandeville, Godwin suggests that sympathetic openness can actually be a form of violation, a paradoxical *demand* to “freely” express oneself that is ultimately coercive. This again points to Smith’s conception of sympathy as imagining oneself “as it were into [the] body” of another in order to feel “something which, although weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike” the other’s sensations (Smith 9). Indeed, the sympathetic penetration of another’s mind unintentionally implies something like an imaginary intrusion that utilizes the external symptoms of suffering in another to imagine their effects in its own fashion. As David Marshall notes, such intrusion renders it difficult to discern whether the possibility of sympathizing with another’s feeling is not simply our own construction, betraying the impossibility of any completely successful sympathetic accord (169). In a similar vein, Khalip argues that while “sympathy supports ethical

models of intersubjectivity that solicit alterity through mutual recognition or likeness, while keeping the self intact,” it also “regulates and redeems community through violence and promotes self-interest through global indifference” (99). Clifford’s bewitching eloquence repeatedly oversteps the limits of a certain propriety that causes his sympathetic listeners to become indifferent to the reality of historical antagonisms. As Clifford says, “I cannot have a universe made on purpose for me; so I will even make the best of that upon which fortune has thrown me. Then, hey, boys for a game at foot-ball!” (*Mand.* 95-6).

Paradoxically, it is Mandeville’s inability to “posit” himself within discourse, rather than Clifford’s overbearing readiness to speechify at any occasion, that more radically confronts the vicissitudes of history rather than deferring such vicissitudes “for a game at foot-ball.” Mandeville’s silence exemplifies the individual history of the *persona non grata* whose traces are obscured but never completely effaced within general history. Mandeville’s only entrance into history will be through the traces of his disappearance, as in the false rumours surrounding his disaffection from the Royalist insurgency. These traces mark the obstinacy of a history that refuses positing within progressivist and sympathetic ideologies and, through romance, have the effect of exposing its immanent and irresolvable antagonisms by virtue of the very “falsity” of Mandeville’s (non)historical existence as *non ens*. But unlike the more hopeful, if skeptical, conception of romance in “Of History and Romance” and *St. Leon, Mandeville* suggests a different, more traumatic and nightmarish, vision of the romantic.

Mandeville expresses the irresolvable nature of such antagonisms in his scorn towards “vindication” of any kind: “most of all, I thought scorn of the idea of vindicating myself, of making appeal, as to the scales of a balance. . . . Slowly to win one’s way by special pleading into the good opinion of those who regarded one with aversion, was, I deemed, the basest of all degradations” (138). The so-called balance of sympathies is for Mandeville always radically unbalanced, involving the supplication of one party to regain the good opinion of the other, which nearly always entails the coercion by which a minority is reabsorbed within the majority from which it departs. Moreover, any successful instance of sympathetic benevolence is at best a *simulacrum*: any achieved

balance can only be an external effect that functions as the displaced sign of a deeper, irreconcilable aversion. Mandeville thus invokes the pertinent question of why one ought to reconcile oneself to the majority simply because it is the majority, a reconciliation that can only ever be the *simulacrum* of a failed encounter between unequal parties. This becomes especially visible in the proposed marriage between Clifford and Henrietta, which symbolizes an ostensible end to the antagonisms and “rebelliousness” within the text, promising a utopian future in which “every day would be peace, every day would be happiness” (294). As Godwin suggests through Mandeville’s frenzied hallucination of Clifford and Henrietta as the “Duke of Savoy and his Queen,” the marriage not only suggests a leveling out of the animosities within the text, but also the resolution of historical dissention. Clifford and Henrietta’s marriage is seen as the “boast of the present age,” marking an ostensible conclusion of the antagonisms of the past through their overcoming in the present via Restoration (298).

However, it is the same sympathetic and Restorative model that will institutionalize Mandeville for being “under the dominion of a deplorable malady” and as “one who could never become useful to society,” but for this very reason is to “be treated with the most exemplary tenderness, while [his] prejudices and [his] groundless fancies were on no account to become a law, to the sane and effective members of the community of mankind” (298). Mandeville is to be sympathized with only on the condition of his abjection, exposing how the ideology of universal acceptance in fact contains a radical form of exclusion, namely, an exclusion of excessive *fomes peccati*, the rebelliousness of and within the individual that would resist the last man’s search for green pasture happiness. Though Mandeville yearns to become a figure within a world-history whose normative values for acceptance are reflected in Clifford, the “root” of his aversion is not personal “envy” but “a sort of moral disapprobation”: “I felt like one of those animals that are said to derive from nature a moral antipathy to some other species” (83, 141).

As Mandeville remarks, such aversion goes deeper than the personal, for if there exist “sympathies and analogies drawing and attracting each to each fitting them to be respectively sources of mutual happiness, so, [he] was firmly persuaded, there are

antipathies, and properties interchangeably irreconcilable and destructive to each other, that fit one human being to be the source of another's misery. Beyond doubt [he] had found this true opposition and inter-destructiveness with Clifford" (141). Despite its apparent insouciance, sympathetic morality sees any instinct that is not sympathetic as unnatural and pathological, abjecting the antipathetic for the sake of grounding the institution of the normal, the common, and the good. To the contrary, Mandeville insists that antipathies may be equally "natural" and "lawful" as sympathies, reasserting the insistence of a rebellious darkness at the heart of existence. But asserting the right of the antipathy to exist does not imply an equalization that could lead to the reconciliation of opposites, since any such resolution would appear strictly to be on the side of the sympathetic. Rather, the consequence of rendering antipathies existences in their own right is to reaffirm a fundamental asymmetry or irresolvable conflict. It is to declare eternal war: "an eternal decree had been made between Clifford and me, I was deeply convinced that his bare existence was essentially the bane of mine" (140-1).

Mandeville's assertion of the antipathy between antipathy and sympathy clarifies Clifford's earlier refusal to play the "weeping philosopher" (95). As Pamela Clemit points out, the "weeping philosopher" is a reference to Heraclitus, specifically as represented in Diogenes' *Lives of the Philosophers* and Juvenal's satires. According to Diogenes, whose *Lives* Godwin also quotes on Plato in the novel, the legend of Heraclitus' "misanthropy" originates from his refusal to make laws for the Ephesians "because the city was already immersed in a thoroughly bad constitution" and his preference for playing dice and "walking about the mountains" over dealing in public affairs (*Lives* 376). Indeed, Mandeville expresses a similar distaste for the public sphere that extends to the human species itself (235). The comparison between Heraclitus and Mandeville can be fruitfully extended farther than Mandeville's obvious disapprobation of the public sphere, however. Mandeville's description of himself as "restless . . . and dark of soul" recalls Heraclitus' reputation in antiquity as an obscure and dark philosopher for his cryptic aphorisms and his assertion of the flux of eternal becoming ("fire") as the mutually terrifying and uncanny *logos* of all things: "We both step and do not step in the same rivers. We are and are not" (*Mand.* 173; Heraclitus Frag. 20). This *logos* is not the *logos* of "presence," however, since it clearly violates the metaphysical

archē of non-contradiction, instead emphasizing how what one ordinarily identifies as static qualities of things are inextricably linked in a relation of unceasing contest, and whose “history” is defined as the violent succession in which one force periodically gets the better of the other.

Following from this idea is the notion that strife (*polemos*) is the universal expression of *logos*: “It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife” (Frag. 80). At several points in the text, Mandeville expresses a similar conception of war as the common inheritance of history, relating that he has “hardly a notion of any more than two species of creatures on the earth . . . the one, the law of whose being it was to devour, while it was the unfortunate destiny of the other to be mangled and torn to pieces by him” (44).⁹⁷ Moreover, Mandeville associates his turbulence of soul not only with a Blakean “energy” but also with “that fire which seemed to be in me the first principle of existence, and which, though raked up, and hidden with ashes, could never, I thought, be utterly extinguished, while one pulse continued to beat within me” (247).

By defining strife in terms of “justice,” Heraclitus distinguishes eternal war from a simple lack of order. As Nietzsche points out, Heraclitean strife is justified to the extent that the philosopher who properly beholds “this eternal wave-surgings and rhythm of things” sees precisely “lawfulness, infallible certainty, every equal path of Justice. . . . Where injustice sways, there is caprice, disorder, irregularity, contradiction; where however law and Zeus’ daughter, Dike [justice] rule alone, as in this world, how could the sphere of guilt, of expiation, of judgment, and as it were the place of execution of all condemned ones be there?” (*Philosophy in the Tragic Age* 5). Strife is justified to the extent that it fundamentally denies the existence of any other world than that of becoming, the flux of an ineluctable “justice” that recuperates Godwin’s necessitarianism

⁹⁷ Godwin here could also be said to be invoking Hobbes’ state of nature, but he also anticipates Schopenhauer’s well-known aphorism that uses the image of fish devouring one another to argue for suffering as the overwhelming law of existing things. However, as the case of Mandeville’s difference from Audley clearly shows, the consequences Mandeville draws from the Heraclitean *logos* is different from the consequences drawn from the same principles by pessimistic philosophy. As Nietzsche points out, it is Anaximander, rather than Heraclitus, who can be called the proper precursor to Schopenhauer’s pessimism (*Philosophy in the Tragic Age* 46-7).

in *Political Justice* within the more fatal paradox of an absolute indeterminacy that is also absolutely determined. To acknowledge the existence of a world beyond this flux – that of permanence, immutability – is for Heraclitus precisely the root of “disorder” in that it rests on the assumption of something that somehow transcends the vicissitudes of its necessity, obfuscating the fact that the individual is always part of reality, and that the antagonism by which the individual strives to overcome the bounds of this necessity is internal to the *logos* as such. For Heraclitus, the human is “necessity down to his last fiber, and totally ‘unfree,’ that is if one means by freedom the foolish demand to be able to change one’s *essentia* arbitrarily, like a garment” (Nietzsche 63).

Heraclitus’ false, arbitrary “freedom” is typified in Clifford’s conversion to Roman Catholicism and his association with the opportunistic Lord Digby. As Horace Walpole points out in his *Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors* (1806), Digby “wrote against popery and embraced it; he was a zealous opposer of the court and a sacrifice for it; was conscientiously converted in the midst of his persecution of Lord Strafford and most unconscientiously a persecutor of Lord Clarendon. . . . He spoke for the Test Act, though a Roman Catholic, addicted himself to astrology on the birthday of true philosophy” (*Mand.* 222; Walpole 2:25).⁹⁸ Mandeville, however, finds himself unable to arbitrarily throw off his *essentia*: “I cannot bend: I can break; I was the iron man . . . no compunction, no relenting, no entreaty, no supplication could approach me: I was deaf as the uproar of conflicting elements, and unmelting as the eternal snows that crown the summit of Caucasus” (123, 184). If Clifford defines himself by deciding to become blissfully ignorant of the “iron age” in which he is born, Mandeville’s description of himself as an “iron man” suggests that he fully embodies the multitude of crimes disavowed by the last men. Godwin’s Heraclitean metaphor of Mandeville as both

⁹⁸ Shifting his allegiance from the royalists to the parliamentarians, Digby became part of the committee for the impeachment of Lord Strafford in 1641, a royalist who was eventually sentenced to death. He also spoke out against Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon, who was a moderate royalist and advisor to Charles I. Digby likewise supported the “Test Acts” of 1673, a series of penal laws designed to impose civil handicaps on Roman Catholics and nonconformists, despite being a Catholic himself. In spite of his reputation for conveniently switching sides, Samuel Pepys remarks that Digby nonetheless found himself embraced by the Court: “the king, who not long ago did say of Bristol that he was a man able in three years to get himself a fortune in any kingdom in the world and lose all again in three months, do now hug him and commend his parts everywhere above all the world” (4:19).

“eternal” and in “eternal uproar” acknowledges the darker aspects of a freedom that cannot emancipate itself from its own necessity and, as such, refuses the Enlightenment figure of a subject that transcends his empirical determinations.

Mandeville embodies the profoundly Heraclitean thought in which total indeterminacy and total determinacy, flux and necessity, are forever conflated, unsettling the *archē* of the universe itself: “For me the order of the universe was suspended; all that was most ancient and established in the system of created things was annulled; virtue was no longer virtue, and vice no longer vice” (253). This paradoxical anti-principle of pure chance and absolute determinacy produces a more tragic perspective on Godwin’s earlier conception of necessity. As Percy Shelley perceptively notes in his 1816 “Remarks on *Mandeville*,” “the events of the novel flow like the stream of fate, regular and irresistible, growing at once darker and swifter in their progress: there is no surprise, no shock: we are prepared for the worst from the very opening” (*Literary and Philosophical Criticism* 3). Any shock, in this context, presupposes an ordered state and that within this state certain exceptions can occur, that which Godwin rejects as “contingency” with respect to reason’s “delusive sense of liberty” in *Thoughts on Man*. Rather, the fatality implied by the Heraclitean *logos* makes no assumption concerning an order from which such an exception could stand out. As such, the determination of “fate” becomes equivalent to a domain of chance that has relinquished any connection to a prior *archē*: every reality is necessary, but this necessity is itself, paradoxically, the mark of the fortuitous.

Shelley’s description of *Mandeville* likewise follows Godwin’s “reductionist” approach to the novel. In his preface, Godwin reveals that the original impetus for the novel was a modified version of “the story of the Seven Sleepers” and “the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood”: “I supposed a hero who should have this faculty, or this infirmity, of falling asleep unexpectedly, and should sleep twenty, or thirty, or a hundred years at a time. . . . I knew that such a canvas would naturally admit a vast variety of figures, actions and surprises” (7). However, the closer Godwin considers this “vast variety of figures, actions, and surprises” the less palpable its execution appears: “I should therefore have had at least a dozen times to set myself to the task of invention, as it were, *de novo*. I judged it more prudent . . . to choose a story that should be more strictly one, and should

so have a greater degree of momentum, tending to carry me forward, after the first impulse given, by one incessant motion, from the commencement to the conclusion” (7).

Godwin’s original plan would appear to render *Mandeville* something closer to *St. Leon* in its focus on a single romanticized figure traversing a multiplicity of historical potentialities, or a complication of pathways through the historical. Besides Godwin’s pragmatic concerns about such a labyrinthine narrative structure, Godwin’s decision to reduce the narrative from a complex course through various historical periods to “one incessant motion” indicates a passage from *St. Leon*’s promise of a distant significance in history to *Mandeville*’s darker premise of a history that no longer holds any promise of alteration. Nonetheless, as Rosset argues, this *an-archic* logic does not suggest institutional stasis so much as the fact that, from the Heraclitean perspective, “if everything that exists is essentially the product of chance it follows that what exists cannot be modified by any intrusion . . . by any ‘event’ (insofar as no ‘event,’ in the sense of something exceptional intervening in the field of chance, could ever occur)”; that is, if the real is “nothing fixed, nothing already constituted or stopped in its development” then “the real is not, in itself, subject to alteration” by the external intrusion of “shocks” or surprises that would disrupt an underlying order (*Joyful Cruelty* 14-5).

The monotony of Mandeville’s incessant movement is not contrary to the notion of flux; rather, it foregrounds the paradox that the world is unable to alter its form because it is formless, a fatality in which “everything is always the same therefore means that everything is always equally fortuitous, ephemeral, and changeable” (Rosset 15). This is to say that, in being identified with the weeping philosopher and the figure of eternal war, Mandeville manifests the traumatic knowledge that there is no *archē* to history. Far from suggesting that this renders reality simply absurd or uninteresting, however, the absence of *archē* justifies the universe as an aesthetic rather than moral phenomenon. As Deleuze points out via Nietzsche, Heraclitus justifies “existence on the basis of an *instinct of play*,” the play of chance and necessity, creation and destruction in the absence of *archē* (*Nietzsche* 23). This “play” that keeps the *anarchē* of the Heraclitean universe radically open in its indeterminacy and incompleteness rather than pessimistically closed is implicated in Mandeville’s refusal to succumb to events that

would institutionalize him either as a sympathetic or pathological figure, his radical promise to disrupt any attempt at institutional stasis. Referring to Henrietta and Clifford's marriage plans, Mandeville affirms an unceasing "rebellious" potential: "I know they think, the moment I hear of their execrable crime [Henrietta and Clifford's marriage] I shall become transfixed and insensible. . . . They are mistaken. There is a vivifying principle within me, that they remember not"; "from the state of a man, palsied with astonishment and horror, which was the first effect, I mounted into supernatural energy" (311-2, 313).

Mandeville's refusal of historical positing through the *an-archic* identity of determinacy and indeterminacy maintains a distinctive relationship to historical memory that further challenges the idea that history can be described according to any *archē* that would give it significance in terms of progress or happiness. The collapse of the opposition between chance and necessity also corresponds to further breakdowns in the opposition between memory and forgetfulness, past and present, history and romance. As Rosset points out, just as necessity is no longer defined by a loss of contingency (and vice versa), "forgetfulness is characterized not by a loss of memory but rather by an omnipresence of memories which, at the time of forgetting, flood the mind. . . . There is forgetfulness not when memories disappear (a situation that never happens) but when all memories appear indifferently with each one claiming equal rights of recognition" (12-3). Mandeville's numerous moments of "forgetting" in the present are similarly characterized by a deluge of "detached circumstances" from the past that cannot be discerned clearly and distinctly, causing the past radically to insist itself within the present.

The "forgetting" of the present does not point to a lack but to an excess of historical consciousness particularly distinct from the consciousness represented by so-called "historical" figures such as Clifford and Henrietta. Henrietta represents the possibility of an "obscure and rural life" whose path through the "vale of existence . . . leaves no traces behind it":

The being that passes through this tranquil scene knows nothing of kings, and ministers, and intrigues of a court . . . and is never told of the factions and wars to the right hand and the left, in which we tear one another to pieces with a thousand barbarities. He dates his years from no public epoch, the rise and fall of kings, but marks the lapse of time only by the succession of the seasons. And at length he sinks into the grave by a gentle decay, without the recollection . . . of one day that he would wished to have been other than it was. (148-9)

Henrietta's "bewitching" portrait is of a life entirely at peace with itself in the dull round of natural cycles capable of eluding history. Although Mandeville sees Henrietta as his only chance for a "normal" existence, he comes to recognize that the possibility of life that she offers is illusory, a temporary attempt to calm a "sickness" that is not merely personal malady but the *an-archic* trace of the eternal war that characterizes everything that is: "All this was fiction . . . and not adapted to real life. Man is not one of the different species of animals that we see, that can sleep away life upon a sunny bank. . . . Man is a creature . . . one of whose most constant characteristics is a sense of uneasiness" (149). The soothing melodies Mandeville hears in Henrietta's voice are "the song of the Sirens," both seductive and potentially ruinous (149). Surprisingly, Mandeville uses the same formulation to later describe Holloway and Mallison's underhanded attempts at bilking him out of his inheritance, drawing an unlikely parallel between Henrietta's "bewitching" sympathies and Mallison's unscrupulous venture capitalism as different dimensions of the same general historical ideology (245).

For Mandeville, the collapsing of the past into the present means not that the past is not reducible to the present but that it is the irreducible margin of every present: "in the margin of every precept were painted the scenes of Kinnard, the murder of my father and mother and the whole assembly of those among whom they lived, and all the unspeakable horrors of the Irish massacre" (309). Mandeville's dual resistance to Clifford and Henrietta can thus be read less as a resistance to history than the *insistence* of the historical through the resistance of an individual history that cannot align itself with general history: "They think that the world is theirs; that they walk, crowned with

garlands, and welcomed with choruses of joy, that they have no enemy to contend with. By heaven it is not so! I will pursue them forever” (311-2).

This refusal is further implicated in the dissensus between Mandeville’s individual history and romance, echoing the Heraclitean paradox that the flux of becoming and of eternal war renders existence an aesthetic phenomenon that repeatedly questions itself. Mandeville’s studies of Homer, Dante, and *Orlando Furioso* are persistently interrupted by involuntary memories of Penruddock and Clifford, “without appearing to require any reference or association from the ideas of the author” (22). Conversely, Mandeville’s (un)natural antipathy to Clifford is refracted through an associated series of literary references from Shakespeare and from the Book of Job, recalling Godwin’s understanding of association in *Political Justice* as a paratactical series of disparate ideas whose connections are largely “involuntary” or non-conscious. Godwin’s Biblical reference is perhaps the most telling, since Mandeville will also later compare his “condition” to “that spoken of in Job” (173). The passage to which Godwin refers comes from God’s response to Job from the whirlwind regarding creation, specifically the description of His creation of the horse in a panorama of other animals: the wild ass, the wild ox, the ostrich, and birds of prey. As John Hartley points out, in the Old Testament these animals are associated with the desert and the steppe, “the habitation of adverse . . . spirits,” “unruly and demonic to mankind,” reflecting something of Mandeville’s own sense of existing in a “moral desert” (Job 39:19-25; Hartley 504, 510-6; *Mand.* 125, 131). As G.K. Chesterton explains, the fact that God here radically affirms the most unruly as an expression of his own infinite wisdom/power gestures in the direction of an *an-archic*, Heraclitean conception of the universe, since God unfurls this “demonic” panorama of creatures precisely in order to contradict the “mechanical and supercilious comforters of Job” who previously attempted to “justify the universe avowedly upon the ground that it is a rational and consecutive pattern.” To the contrary, God affirms the reverse: “God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything . . . , the positive and palpable unreason of things” (“The Book of Job”).

Both Henrietta and Clifford appear as analogues of Job's supercilious comforters, while Mandeville seems to embody the "positive and palpable unreason" of the universe. The "romance" of the Book of Job generates an image of the antagonisms of "real" history, as well as the ontological *anarchē* of existence itself, otherwise disavowed by the general histories content to describe the deeds of Themistocles and Aristeides, Socrates and Plato, Fabricius, Scipio, Cato and Brutus (215).

6.4 "An Inferior Race for All Eternity"

In *Mandeville*, Godwin suggests that confronting the *anarchē* of history cannot be measured by its capacity to make itself "known" within general history or through sympathetic morality. Rather, *anarchē* remains extrinsic to institutional recognition, affirming both the palpable inexplicableness of history and the continuance rather than resolution of eternal war. Godwin's violent and abrupt conclusion to the novel is a forceful expression of this *anarche* and its resistances to and within the historical. In the final scene of the novel, Mandeville's eternal war finally manifests in a scene of physical violence. In a last ditch attempt to prevent Clifford from marrying his sister, Mandeville and a few hired horsemen ambush Clifford and his train during the night. In the ensuing commotion, Mandeville is accidentally wounded, leading to Godwin's abrupt conclusion:

The sight of my left eye is gone; the cheek beneath is severed, with a deep trench in between. . . . The sword of my enemy had given a perpetual grimace, a sort of preternatural and unvarying distorted smile, or deadly grin, to my countenance. . . . Before, to think of Clifford was an act of the mind, and an exercise of the imagination; he was there but my thoughts went on their destined errand, and fetched him; now I bore Clifford and his injuries perpetually about with me. Even as certain tyrannical planters in the West Indies have set a brand with a red-hot iron upon the negroes they have purchased, to denote that they are irremediably a property, so Clifford had set his mark upon me, as a token that I was his for ever. (325)

No longer an “act of mind,” the connective scar tissue between Clifford, Mandeville, and the slaves of the West Indies brings the material-historical wound of British colonialism into proximity with a seemingly insular war between private individuals. Godwin’s reference to slavery, while surprising in a novel otherwise entirely localized in the British Isles, links to specific historical circumstances which render the scar not only a physical disfiguring but also a figurative tearing open of the novel that places Mandeville alongside the “faceless” of history.

Not unlike the connection between the earlier Irish uprising and the more contemporary Act of Union, Godwin’s reference gestures to the outbreak of slave revolts in the Barbados (1816-23) that would have been topical in the minds of his readers, possibly recalling as well the Haitian revolution led by Toussaint L’Ouverture (1797-1803), and the best-selling 1789 autobiography of former west-Indian slave Olaudah Equiano.⁹⁹ *Mandeville* is also published in the frustrated interregnum between the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the passing of the Act of Abolition in 1833, a period of increasing tension in the push towards eventual (legal) emancipation. In one sense, Mandeville’s scar can be understood as a means of obtaining redress, insofar as Clifford’s wrongs become manifest in the form of a physical disfigurement. This would allow Mandeville to finally enter into the world of discourse, his wound being evidence for a tort that would publicly damage Clifford’s reputation. However, historical circumstances suggest that reading Mandeville’s scar as emancipating in a legal context is not yet a possibility. The more immediate sense to Mandeville’s “victory” over Clifford ambiguously consolidates, rather than emancipates, Mandeville’s role as a slave, suggesting an inability to put an end to historical antagonisms. Rather than negate Clifford’s “wrong,” Godwin’s metaphor appears to redouble it.

Paradoxically, Mandeville becomes connected to the faceless of history at the precise moment that he would enter history, creating an oscillation between presence and absence that can be related to what de Man calls “disfiguring” or “de-facement.” In his

⁹⁹ See C.L.R. James’ classic account of the Haitian revolution (1938) and Equiano’s self-published *Interesting Narrative* (1789).

readings of Shelley and Wordsworth, de Man describes figuration as the element in language that allows for representation, anchored by the binaries of subject and object and naturally illustrated through optical or specular icons, the sun-eye as the emblem for (self)knowledge, expressed through the “face” as the sign or identity of the *anthropos* (*Rhetoric* 75). Citing the 1805 *Prelude* in which Wordsworth writes of the way his “mind hath look’d / Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven,” de Man links the “speaking face” as the “necessary condition for the existence of articulated language” by which “man can address and face other men” with the act of “looking” by which the mind gazes upon a speaking face (87-90). According to de Man, Wordsworth’s connection between the eye and the face expresses the way in which “language originates with the ability of the eye to establish the contour, the borderline, the surface which allows things to exist in the identity of the kinship of their distinction from other things,” a kinship which ultimately depends on “a process of totalization” by which things are gathered into the “larger, total entity” of the face, “as the combination of parts which the mind . . . can lay claim to” (91). Figuration is the process of giving “face” or significance to that which is otherwise “senseless” through the lucidity of a language “of repose, tranquility, and serenity,” a “solar language of cognition that makes the unknown accessible to the mind and the senses”: “the otherness of a world that is in fact without order now becomes, for the eye, a maze made accessible to solar paths” (78-80, 110). However, de Man locates moments in both Wordsworth and Shelley that show this figuration undone “to the precise extent that it restores” or seeks to restore itself (119). This paradoxical moment of self-erasure is a disfiguring that begins to unravel a figure of meaning in the same moment it is posited as a phenomenon, marking a “loss of face” that entails the disfiguring of the specular, transcendental *archē* that would guarantee meaning as self-presence beneath the divergences of meaning by signifiers, signaling an irreducible incoherence of the random and efficacious processes that gives rise to the phenomenal effect of meaning.

In the revised finale to *Caleb Williams*, Godwin dramatizes a metaphorical loss of face that sees Caleb come to the threshold of a “responsible anarchy.” In *Mandeville*, however, defacement is literalized. Mandeville not only loses the sight of his left eye, but is also given a “preternatural and unvarying distorted smile” across his left cheek by

Clifford's sword (324). Literal defacement brings about a paradoxical "materialization" of the historical traumas within the text. Materiality does not mean a return to the bare positivity of the brute fact, however, which can always be recuperated within general history. Rather, the scar bears a materiality in de Man's sense of a "deep, perhaps fatal, break or discontinuity," that Derrida glosses as "a very useful generic name for all that resists appropriation" and hence, eludes any promise of closure (de Man *Aesthetic Ideology* 79; Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon" 154). At a meta-textual level, the scarring of Mandeville the character is simultaneously a defacing of *Mandeville* the text, which concludes with the abrupt violence of the wound itself and whose materialization lacks (self)restoration or redemption in any traditional sense. For Godwin does not reveal the consequences of Mandeville's actions other than as the permanence of a scar that forever disjoins any final balancing of wrongs. Mandeville's scar becomes the material trace of that which undoes the domestic "triple knot of unrivalled happiness" with Henrietta and Clifford that would close in on itself through the obscure and rural life, exposing it to the *anarchē* of history (294).

If de Man's notion of disfiguring refers primarily to rhetorical figures and leaves aside any historical connection to the slaves of the West Indies, Mandeville's defacement could also be read through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature." According to Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature is primarily composed of three elements. First, "minorization" arises from a marginalized position within a major language rather than from 'minor' languages themselves, thus affecting the major language "with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (*Kafka* 16). Throughout *Mandeville* Godwin exemplifies this coefficient of deterritorialization in Mandeville's marginal status and his inability to enter into the majority discourse represented through Clifford, as well as his incapacity to stake out a stable position within the shifty political landscape of the novel. In another sense, the very perspective of the novel itself can be called a deterritorialization of Godwin's own preferred political standpoint. By focalizing the novel through a "pathological" royalist such as Mandeville, Godwin forces an encounter with the political instability of the past and the present from the anterior of his avowed republican sympathies. In turn, the volatility and extreme antipathetic nature of

Mandeville's character generates a disquieting effect that challenges even the most sympathetic readers.

The second characteristic of minorization according to Deleuze and Guattari is that it is thoroughly political. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the "cramped space" of the minor "forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating in it" (*Kafka* 17). The "whole other story" vibrating through Mandeville is an intensification of the *an-archically* unsettled historical and political field in which the novel unfolds, vividly materialized in Mandeville's scar, and opening a "line of flight" that connects the personal to the political. Third, following from the connection that renders an individual history irreducibly political, minorization engenders a "collective enunciation": "what each author says individually constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement" (*Kafka* 17). On the surface, the collective enunciation appears to be difficult to identify in Mandeville, given that he finds himself unable to enter into sympathetic communication with anyone. Collective enunciation is not constituted on the sympathetic communication between "similars," but on the more paradoxical communication that only occurs across a radical disjunction, the scar along which the volatile mix of personal and historical antipathies interact directly with one another rather than through the intercessor of sympathetic reason. While maintaining a certain skepticism minorization nonetheless creates what Kafka calls an "assimilation of dissatisfied elements" through which literature "produces an active solidarity" between individual histories that, collectively, demonstrate the intolerability of existing institutions (qtd. in Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 17). In this respect, Mandeville is not absolutely cut off; rather, his marginalization in the text as *non ens* or *hors de cour* opens the possibility of a collective enunciation with the slaves of the West Indies as "dissatisfied elements" within world-history.

Mandeville is equally not to be understood as a representative of slavery in the sense that he would function as a subject that speaks "for" a specific social group that has been repressed. As an *an-archic* figure of eternal war and irresolution, Mandeville does

not achieve redress from the social structure from which he is excluded, just as for Deleuze and Guattari a minority is not defined primarily by a desire to be included by the majority. While necessary in its own way, the struggle for “rights” is the index of a more subterranean antagonism that does not base itself on the *archē* of an identifiable social group awaiting public recognition. Rather, as Daniel W. Smith points out, the gesture of minorization is that the “people” are “constituted on a set of impossibilities in which the people are always missing, in which the only consciousness is consciousness of violence, fragmentation, the betrayal of every revolution, the shattered state of the emotions and drives . . . ; that is, a lived actuality that at the same time testifies to the impossibility of living in such conditions” (xliii).

Godwin’s conclusion exemplifies precisely this intolerability and impossibility, which materializes the drama of the entire novel as an anarchistic challenge to the majority. Insofar as the marriage of Henrietta and Clifford is seen to be the “boast of the present age,” Mandeville’s minoritarian status effectively robs the present of the self-satisfied illusion that “every day would be peace, every day would be happiness.” The minor figure instead reveals the catastrophes entailed by very illusion that there could be resolution, the fact that such an idea, no matter how sympathetic or universal, always involves a certain hegemonic violence. Consequently, Mandeville’s connection to slavery opens a point of “nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones” through which individual history draws a line of escape, not into the eternal stasis of the present, but a barbed and irregular line in the shape of a scar that resists the liberal, as well as classically anarchistic, dream of universal harmony and inclusion (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 27).

To briefly conclude, *Mandeville* can be said to be Godwin’s most *an-archic* text. Although sharing concerns that are pervasive throughout Godwin’s career, *Mandeville* goes furthest in the direction of presenting *anarchē* not only as a psychological but also as a historical and even existential (anti-)principle. It brings certain elements of *Political Justice*, particularly the conception of necessity and the freedom of the particular to deviate from the conventions of the present, to their most radical extremity. In turn, perhaps not entirely consciously, Godwin produces a critique of institution even farther

reaching than in his previous works. *Mandeville* includes an intense skepticism towards the most contemporary and the most accepted modes of institution: the liberal doctrine of universal inclusion, rational intersubjectivity, and sympathy for the “other.” Through Mandeville, Godwin engages in a genealogy of morals that places these values in question, culminating in the distinctive moment of literary anarchism that Blanchot associates with *le grand refus* through which another history is glimpsed, the history of the Other’s anarchistic NO to things as they are: “‘We are delivered over to another time – to time as other, as absence and neutrality; precisely to a time that can no longer redeem us . . . an unstable perpetuity in which we are arrested and incapable of permanence, a time neither abiding nor simplicity of the dwelling-place.’ Time of the exile” (Blanchot, *Infinite Conversation* 44; Bruns 30).

Chapter 7

7 (In)Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Romantic Anarchism

“Anarchism,” writes Woodcock, “is a creed inspired and ridden by paradox, and thus, while its advocates theoretically reject tradition, they are nevertheless very much concerned with the ancestry of their doctrine” (*Anarchism* 35). It is in view of anarchism’s inspiration from and encounter with its own paradoxes that it produces within its own tradition texts that must be concerned, not only with rejecting things as they are, but also with opening a space that would allow an investigation into anarchism’s foundations. The purpose of this study has been to examine, through the philosophical and literary texts that lay the foundations for anarchism in Godwin, the antagonisms within these foundations between a more recognized Enlightenment discourse and an emerging skepticism that unworks the possibility of a purely rational model of politics. Thus, although the classical discourse of political anarchism that Godwin inaugurates often remains within the horizon of an orthodox metaphysics, a closer examination of the tensions generated by Godwin’s own texts shows a distinctively critical perspective that anticipates many of the anti-foundationalist arguments of contemporary theorists who reread anarchism through post-structural theory. Godwin’s need to express his politics through literature results in an important reflexive shift that necessitates a corresponding reflexivity in anarchist politics, a connection not yet sufficiently recognized by Godwin’s political and literary interpreters alike.

It is not only the paradoxes that arise within Godwin’s texts, however, that call for a reinterpretation of anarchism at its “origins.” If Godwin appears as a privileged point of entry, it is because of his historical relationship to anarchism and the potential to reevaluate both the concept of anarchy and the genealogy of the movement itself at its conceptual beginnings. What concerns me in these final pages is how one might reread the possibilities of a “romantic anarchism” through the idea of *anarchē*. In doing so, I want to stress how a conception of anarchism as *anarchē* overlaps with broader romantic concerns with the dilemma of freedom, as well as with romanticism’s distinctive

relationship to a radical “negativity” that might be called *an-archic* in thinkers such as Hegel and Schelling. In this manner, one might begin to rethink the way that anarchism has hitherto been attached to romanticism through a sentimental reading of history as the fall from the pure immanence and harmony of society located in the past and the need to recover this society at the far goal of time. Insofar as the idea of *anarchē* renders such notions interminably problematic, the conventional relationship between romanticism and anarchism may also be subject to reconsideration.

Godwin shares a set of conceptual topoi with both Enlightenment and romantic traditions, British and otherwise, that have also been linked with social, political, and literary goals that could be called anarchistic. Nonetheless, as these topoi shift in emphasis from Enlightenment rationality to the romantic “imagination,” such goals have largely been interpreted within the framework of orthodox notions that see the latter as fostering nostalgia or longing for a lost pre-capitalist or pre-industrial collectivism. Thus, Charles Taylor argues that the fundamental principles and goals of anarchism seem to belong exclusively to “those thinkers who stand in a romantic or expressionist tradition of whatever kind” (542). Taylor’s assimilation of anarchism, romanticism, and expressionism likewise underwrites Malcolm Löwy and Robert Sayre’s discussion of romantic anarchism in *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (2001). According to Löwy and Sayre, one can discern a “libertarian, anarchist, and anarcho-syndicalist Romanticism, which takes its inspiration from collective pre-capitalist traditions of peasants, artisans, and workers qualified to lead a struggle that targets the modern state as much as it does capitalism per se” (80). A contemporary exemplar of this libertarian/anarchist stream of romanticism can be found in the work of Gustav Landauer who, in Löwy and Sayre’s estimation, shares with classical German romanticism “a deep nostalgia for medieval Christianity,” and a desire to create “on the basis of a marriage between modern *Zivilisation* and premodern *Kultur*, an authentically new society, without state or social classes” (82). This particularly romantic combination of nostalgia and hope, according to Richard Sonn, allows one to identify anarchists as “*revolutionaries* in the original sense of the term . . . they wished to ‘revolve’ back to a more harmonious society. The anarchist rejection of contemporary society was nearly total; their proposed alternative fused elements of a remembered past with a vision of a utopian future” (3).

Those elements of romanticism's often explicit anti-modern pathos are, in this respect, situated almost entirely in terms of what Peter Marshall identifies as the "mainstream" social anarchism occupied by "mutualists, collectivists, communists, and syndicalists" (*Demanding the Impossible* 6).

One can discern the contours of this conventional version of anarchism among more overtly political figures of romantic poetry, such as Blake and Percy Shelley. Critics like Marshall and John Mee have located anarchistic political strains within Blake as participating in both republican and antinomian traditions of dissent.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the most direct poetic statement of the futural dimension of this type of romantic anarchism appears in the concluding lines of Act III in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Finally released from (self)torment after Jupiter is overthrown by his own progeny, Prometheus directs the Spirit of the Hour to announce humanity's emancipation from tyranny:

The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
 Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
 Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
 Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise: but man
 Passionless? — no, yet free from guilt or pain,
 Which were, for his will made or suffered them,
 Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
 From chance, and death, and mutability,
 The clogs of that which else might oversoar
 The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
 Pinnacled dim in the intense inane. (III.iv.193-204)

¹⁰⁰ Despite Blake's explicit anti-rationalism and anti-empiricism, Marshall sees certain similarities between both Blake and Godwin's respective criticism of social injustices. See Marshall (1994) and (1992) 97, 151. For further discussions of the complex network of influences and forces that inform Blake's connection to the popular radical movements in the romantic period, see also Mee (1994) and McCalman (1988).

The utopian image of the “sceptreless man” liberated from the chains of necessity clearly echoes Godwin’s confidence in the progress of human perfectibility.¹⁰¹ Shelley also follows Godwin, and anticipates later anarchists such as Proudhon, in opposing his vision of the sceptreless man to parochial notions of anarchy as mere disorder. Thus, in a work such as “The Mask of Anarchy,” Shelley sees the classic philosophical and political signifiers of order in “God, King, and Law” as the true arbiters of social chaos.

This anarchistic politics is not only a feature of certain strains of British romanticism, but can also be found in post-Kantian notions of “freedom” articulated by early German idealist philosophers. This approach finds one of its earliest expressions in the aptly titled “Oldest System-Program of German Idealism,” an anonymous fragment written in Hegel’s hand but variously attributed to Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin.¹⁰² The “System-Program” outlines a new philosophy of nature, ethics, politics, and aesthetics. The program of Idealism’s new politics, in particular, bears a distinctively anarchistic tendency: “there does not exist any idea of the state, because the state is something mechanical; just as there is no idea of a machine. Only that which is [an] object of freedom is called [an] idea. Hence, we must also move beyond the state! – For every state must treat free human beings like a mechanical set of wheels; and that it must not; therefore, it shall cease to exist” (“System-Program” 154).¹⁰³ Associating freedom with the Idea and the state with the “machine” recapitulates a conventional romantic binary – likewise evident in Blake, Coleridge, and Shelley – that privileges the “possible” or the imaginary over the actual or the empirical.

As the examples of Blake, Shelley, and the “System Program” suggest, several prominent figures of what comes to be associated with the British and the European

¹⁰¹ For a general discussion of Godwin’s political influence on Shelley see Cameron (1962), 77-87.

¹⁰² More detailed explorations of the debate concerning the authorship of the “System-Program” can be found in Krell (2005), 16-45; Pfau (ed., 1988), 182 n1.

¹⁰³ The anarchistic bent of the new politics may have been suggested by Hölderlin, whose other writings seem to express the most stridently anti-statist attitude of the possible authors of the fragment. Aside from having been part of a group of politically active republicans that planted a “Tree of Freedom” in Tübingen’s market square, Hölderlin’s epistolary novel *Hyperion* specifically identifies the State as “the coarse husk around the seed of life, and nothing more. . . . [L]et it not obstruct you, and you will come, come with your all-conquering ecstasies” (23-4).

romantic tradition gesture towards the possibility of a society without institution, closely approximating the ends (if not the means) of later nineteenth-century thinkers of anarchism. Yet, as the complex recursive structure of a novel such as *Caleb Williams* suggests, anarchism's revolutionary dimension can also be thought as a problematizing movement that is not simply the desire to recover a lost origin in the future: once Caleb "returns" to the origin of his narrative, joining the two ends of his tale in a circular movement of revolution, he finds that this origin perhaps never existed in the first place, or that it had appeared to exist only in its displacement through the "revolutions" that typify the procedure of the text itself. *Caleb Williams* is one example of how what is revolutionary in romantic anarchism may be considered less part of an expressivist or aestheticist tradition than more closely attuned with what Khalip calls "an endless overturning of manifest existence" that "cannot conceptually coincide with something like an origin" (174).

There are further indications in the writings in romantic theory that recognize a more profoundly *an-archic* negativity within the very definition of the romantic and the romantic approach to the complex dilemma of freedom that remains irreducible, even resistant, to the more explicitly professed desires concerning the idealist marriage of *Zivilization* and *Kultur*. As mentioned in our previous discussion of Godwin's "Of History and Romance" and *St. Leon*, Schlegel sees the romantic as that which is fundamentally unfinished, "still in the state of becoming: that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected" (Schlegel 32). While approaching the romantic from a radically different perspective, Godwin's increasing skepticism as to the viability of a political justice predicated on rationality more and more appears to reach a different kind of acknowledgement, one that sees perfectibility as an interminable process of self-revision precisely because it cannot ground itself in an "uncontaminated point of departure." At the same time, Schlegel's definition of the romantic, like Godwin's, is not characterized by a sentimental longing for a lost origin that once coincided with itself, but rather is oriented towards a future that remains unknown, and is therefore receptive to individuality and to the new as potentials capable of disturbing the values instituted in things as they are.

Of the possible authors of the “System-Program,” it is Hegel who appears to depart most drastically from the fragment’s subversive, anti-statist politics. Hegel’s well-known discussion in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821) hailed the “State” as an embodiment of Spirit in the political. Unlike the models of civil society proffered by the Scottish Enlightenment, Hegel saw the State not as a means of protecting individual rights but as an “end in itself” through which freedom “enters into its highest right” (§ 258). Yet, nineteenth-century anarchists such as Bakunin were also profoundly influenced by Hegel, and appropriated the dialectical thrust of Spirit’s historical progress towards absolute knowledge for their own philosophical purposes. As David Weir points out, Bakunin had studied Hegel for several years and was especially taken with the ideas of the Young Hegelians, particularly those of Feuerbach. Like the Young Hegelians, Bakunin wanted to adopt Hegel’s methodology while moving away from its statist conclusions, investing the dialectic with a revolutionary force predicated on the Feuerbachian dictum that “theology must be replaced with anthropology” (Weir 27). However, as argued in the introduction to this work, this adaptation of Hegel towards an anarchistic notion of “progressive action in history” remains theoretically conservative in that it replaces the *archē* of God with that of man.

Rather than reduce Hegel to the evolutionary idealism adopted by certain classical anarchists, theorists such as Adorno, Nancy, and Žižek – to name only some of the most prominent – gesture toward the possibility of a different Hegel, one that might be recognized as more *an-archic*. Using logic strikingly reminiscent of Godwin’s critique of general history, Adorno’s revision of Hegel in his *Negative Dialectics* attempts to move the dialectic away from an “identitarian” model that assimilates the particular under the universal and assumes the reconciliation between thought and the objects that it claims to know. The refusal of identitarian thought calls for a dialectics that no longer aims “to achieve something positive by means of negation,” as in Bakunin’s post-Blakean view of anarchism as a revolutionary negation that would realize society’s immanent, “natural laws” (*Negative Dialectics* xix). To the contrary, dialectic becomes “negative” to the extent that it names “the consistent sense of non-identity. [Dialectics] does not begin by taking a standpoint. My thought is driven to it by its own inevitable insufficiency” (Adorno 5). Thought’s insufficiency to itself means that dialectic never arrives at a

foundation or a sense of completion, but rather takes on the role of an antagonistic, dispossessed form of critical reflection that persistently disrupts the positivity of *archē*.

Similarly, Nancy's discussion of the "restlessness" of the negative in Hegel points to an explicitly *an-archic* logic. For Nancy, the properly "Hegelian thought does not begin with the assurance of a *principle*. It is simply identical to the restless. . . . The restlessness of thought first means that everything has already begun: that there will therefore be no foundation" (*Hegel* 8). In identifying the fundamental restlessness of the negative, Nancy touches upon something of the paradoxical coincidence of contingency and necessity that comes to the fore in Godwin's turbulent depiction of history in *Mandeville*. As Nancy suggests, where the upsurge of the finite in its contingency breaks the necessitarian "thread of history," Hegel's identification of negativity with the very becoming of history means that "this [break] happens of itself, because [history's] very continuity is only division and distension. . . . The finite figure thus presents, each time, only itself – itself and its infinite restlessness" so that "every beginning . . . is not a beginning" (8).

Finally, arguing against conventional representations of Hegel as *the* philosopher of systematic closure and the panlogistic identity of the Concept, Žižek rereads "absolute knowledge" as denoting "a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of identity . . . a final consent to the fact that the Concept itself is 'not-all'" (*Sublime Object* xxix). Absolute knowledge becomes for Žižek an affirmation of contingency insofar as it names precisely the paradoxical moment in which the subject acknowledges a radical loss, the failure of any such attempt at closure. *Anarchē* might be understood, in this context, as another means of exemplifying the logic of the "not-all": if the term *archē* signifies the metaphysical locus of the one-all, the repose of an originating "one" that grounds and determines the "all" that issues from it, *anarchē* is by definition not-all. The not-all, which Žižek appropriates from Lacan's formula of feminine sexuation, resists a "masculine" logic that posits the withdrawal of an original presence or a normative law that reason gives to itself as *archē*. Instead, to use Bruno Bosteels' terms, the not-all suspends the universality of the paternal/masculine signifier and shows how the consistency of *archē* can only be achieved by foreclosing "a key element which

paradoxically incompletes the structure by being included out. This structure is not-all: there is always a gap, a leftover, a remainder. . . . [The social] is . . . constitutively incomplete, fissured” (128).

Post-anarchist thinkers such as Newman have fastened upon Žižek’s distinctive approach to Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to rethink anarchism as *anarchē*. Without explicitly using the term, Newman deploys the idea of the not-all to argue that a post-structuralist return to anarchism can only begin in earnest where the social is reconceived “as a series of signifiers founded, like the Lacanian subject, on a constitutive lack. . . . [I]t can never form a closed identity, because there is always a Real that remains unsymbolizable . . . and thus, remains open to different political signifiers” (Newman 147). Absent from Newman’s appraisal, however, is Žižek’s insight into how the logic of the not-all might also be found in Hegel, which is to say, how this ostensibly post-structuralist theorization of the social’s incompleteness was anticipated within the philosophical, literary, and historical dilemmas encountered by romantic writers.

The conception of a remainder that *an-archically* “incompletes” the social is also at the heart of Schelling’s middle-period philosophy. Jürgen Habermas’ suggestive comment that Schelling’s middle work, which spans from the 1809 essay on freedom, the “Stuttgart Seminars” of 1810, and the three incomplete drafts of his *Ages of the World* (1811, 1813, 1815), contains “barely concealed anarchistic consequences” is yet to be explored in significant detail by much of the secondary literature, and is completely absent from contemporary post-anarchist theory (46). The focus of Schelling’s earlier philosophy of “Identity” sought to demonstrate ways in which opposed Spinozist and Fichtean philosophies of nature and freedom constituted two “sides” of the same Absolute. Yet, in arguing that the purportedly opposed philosophies of absolute (objective) necessity and absolute (subjective) freedom function as complementary, Schelling remains idealist in his desire to see this complementarity as arising from an unconscious identity, a “pre-established harmony” that is neither real nor ideal but their *archē*, or “common source” (*System of Transcendental Idealism* 208). Positioning the Absolute as the hidden source behind exterior manifestations of the disjunction of subject and object, Schelling proposes a providential vision of history not incompatible with the

evolutionary idealism in classical anarchist theories of history: for the early, idealist Schelling, historical events disclose the “progressive . . . revelation of the absolute” in which freedom finally transcends necessity (209).

With the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, however, Schelling begins to think of the Absolute less in terms of an harmoniously unfolding *archē-telos* than something radically self-divided and “subject to suffering and becoming” (66). The Freedom essay explicitly poses the vexed question of the originating “ground” of thought that challenges the utopian expectations of Enlightenment rationality and introduces metaphysical entanglements that lead Schelling to complicate his own prior idealism. For Schelling, rationality is not coextensive with “what is original”:

nowhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy (*das Regellose*) had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground. (29)

In questioning what precedes the rational organization of the world, Schelling places this organization in question by dissociating “what is original” from its conventional association with “order and form.” As the incomprehensible but “necessary inheritance” of existing beings, Schelling’s original anarchy bespeaks an existence before existents that, appearing to have been brought to order, nonetheless “still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again” (29). As an irreducible remainder that conditions the possibility of the Absolute’s “self-revelation” into order and form, anarchy figures as a negativity that precludes freedom’s ability to completely free itself from necessity, or rather, circumscribes this freedom as possible only on the basis of its own impossibility, on a “Real” whose remainders can never be completely eradicated.

Moreover, Schelling transposes the tortured relation within the Absolute between its self-revelation and the “dark” ground into the existential structure of human freedom as such. Where Schelling suggests the Absolute *must* effectively reveal itself as order and

form by sublimating the anarchy of its dark ground, the contingency of human freedom allows for this hierarchy to be overturned, such that the ground can appear as the “highest” value. This proto-deconstructive potential within human freedom is what Schelling identifies as the freedom for “evil,” which, in its simplest terms, describes the freedom to elevate the individual part over the organic harmony of the whole.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, Schelling’s definition of evil cannot merely be dismissed within moral terms that would simply juxtapose it with the good. For evil remains irreducible to anarchy in the sense of a mere lack of order; that is, evil is not what “lacks” or is deficient in the good. Rather, as Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt point out, because evil is for Schelling associated with the necessity and materiality of the ground, it has a “positive, vital force” in which “all the powers that are typically associated with the good, such as rationality, rigour, and probity, come to serve the most brutal and selfish impulses, the ever-varying whims of physical desire” (xxiii).

This insight bears several different consequences for a romantic theory of *anarchē*. On the one hand, evil can be the index of a deconstruction of reason itself. Schelling’s definition of evil might then illuminate the “anarchism” of a character such as Caleb, whose curiosity names the ground of a freedom in which the powers of “natural philosophy” and political justice are inverted to serve a darker impulse at the heart of Enlightenment subjectivity. In this respect, as Pfau argues, Schelling’s re-conception of freedom as a power for evil rather than being grounded in the project of rationality inaugurates a philosophical challenge to Enlightenment – carried out in more explicit terms by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche – that shows its projects “(Liberalism, Utilitarianism, Cosmopolitanism) and their concrete political programs (electoral, legal, and economic reform, emancipation, liberation, Rights of Man, etc.) to be resting on terminally unstable foundations” (“Beyond Liberal Utopia” 94).

¹⁰⁴ One of Schelling’s more interesting examples involves a comparison between evil and disease. Disease is for Schelling a “misuse of freedom,” describes the freedom by which a part of the body acts “for itself” rather than in harmony with the rest of the organism (*Philosophical Investigations* 18, 34-8, 66). Disease is, in a sense, the anarchic ground of the body. For Žižek, Schelling’s notion of evil describes the paradoxical figure of a “universal singularity,” “the point of utmost contraction, the all-exclusive One of self-consciousness, *and* the embracing All. . . [E]ach of them is in the same breath posited as united with its opposite, as its opposite’s inherent constituent” (*The Indivisible Remainder* 39, 45).

On the other hand, because evil has a kind of vitality, it might also name a more subversive potentiality “that threatens actively to undermine” the “palliative normativity that legitimates the whole” (Love and Schmidt xxiv). As such, “evil” may very well also describe characters such as St. Leon and Mandeville, whose negative ab-normality resists inclusion into the “whole” and thus forces a rethinking and potential reorganization of what legitimizes itself as whole. Indeed, by the time of his 1815 *Ages of the World*, Schelling critiques those idealisms that show a “predilection for the affirmative” and deny or repress the existence of “something inhibiting, something conflicting . . . this Other that which, so to speak, should not be and yet is, nay, must be . . . this No that resists the Yes, this darkening that resists the light” (6). Schelling’s language opens the possibility of thinking anarchy in a rather different sense than vicarious revolutionary freedom or mere disorder; instead, anarchy begins to appear as an index of what Rajan has identified as a distinctively romantic “crossing of potentiality and inhibition” that resides in neither absolute idealism’s utopian vision of freedom nor in the “absolute determination” of positivist versions of materialism (“Spirit’s Psychoanalysis” 188). In this sense, one might begin reconsidering romantic anarchism through an intellectual history that runs through the radically different approaches of writers like Schelling, Hegel, and Godwin, whose *an-archic* remainders have begun to appear within contemporary reconsiderations of anarchism.

This study has attempted to demonstrate that Godwin’s work anticipates contemporary approaches to anarchism, specifically in its moments of resistance to the reification of “institutions,” whether in society or in the very forms of thought that would ground anarchism itself. In doing so, Godwin’s scrutiny of the foundations of his own thought generates a literature whose tensions suggest a rational anarchism interminably haunted by its own *anarchē*, exposing the radical uncertainties within the anarchist hope for a society without institution. At the same time, such uncertainties do not simply assert the bankruptcy of anarchism as a political philosophy. Rather, it is to acknowledge the antagonisms both found within and generated by a form of thought that paradoxically claims an absence of foundations as its very foundations, and whose negation of *archē* is, as Bruns puts it, nothing other than the “mobility . . . of uncontrolled questioning, without beginning or end” (21).

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