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Abstract

In William Godwin's novel Caleb Williams, the English Squire Falkland's decision to construct his identity in conformity with Italian honour codes not only debases his Englishness but also drives him to persecute his secretary Caleb Williams, who possesses a damning secret that could ruin the Squire's distinguished reputation. The embattled Caleb, who prides himself on his autonomy and English identity, is forced to disguise himself first as an Irish beggar and later as a Jewish peddler, facades that render him, like Falkland, an ethnically anomalous Englishman. The middle-class Caleb's ethnic destabilization at Falkland's hands suggests that Godwin, like many of his more conservative peers, is claiming that the continentally inflected malfeasance of the aristocracy corrupts the bourgeoisie in such a way that the very terms and privileges of Englishness are contested. In this way, Godwin's ostensible purpose of promoting a liberal model of human rights ultimately comes at the cost of reifying xenophobic fears about Italians, Jews, and the Irish.

Keywords

William Godwin, Caleb Williams, anomaly, ethnicity, continental, European, Other, Ireland, Jew, Italy, diaspora, national character, deracination

Cover page footnote

I would like to thank Joseph Bartolomeo and Jordana Rosenberg of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, for their indefatigable support. Their advice on this project has been indispensable.

"An Outlandish, Foreign-Made Englishman": Aristocratic Oppression and Ethnic Anomaly in *Caleb Williams*

Charlie Bondhus

In William Godwin's novel Caleb Williams, the English Squire Falkland's decision to construct his identity in conformity with Italian honour codes not only debases his Englishness but also drives him to persecute his secretary Caleb Williams, who possesses a damning secret that could ruin the Squire's distinguished reputation. The embattled Caleb, who prides himself on his autonomy and English identity, is forced to disguise himself first as an Irish beggar and later as a Jewish peddler, facades that render him, like Falkland, an ethnically anomalous Englishman. The middle-class Caleb's ethnic destabilization at Falkland's hands suggests that Godwin, like many of his more conservative peers, is claiming that the continentally inflected malfeasance of the aristocracy corrupts the bourgeoisie in such a way that the very terms and privileges of Englishness are contested. In this way, Godwin's ostensible purpose of promoting a liberal model of human rights ultimately comes at the cost of reifying xenophobic fears about Italians, Jews, and the Irish.

WILLIAM GODWIN'S most well-known novel certainly inspires scholarly interest, including many recently published provocative studies that read *Caleb Williams* from a multiplicity of critical angles. The diversity of perspectives that these and other scholars bring to bear on this text is not unwarranted, considering that

¹ For a Bahktinian reading that considers the dialogic narratives of *Caleb Williams*, see Ingrid Horrocks, "More than a Gravestone: *Caleb Williams*, *Udolpho*, and the Politics of the Gothic," *Studies in the Novel* 39, no. 1 (2007): 31–47. Daniela Garofalo addresses the intersection of violence, power, and sensibility encoded as "male weakness" in "A Left-Handed Way': Modern Masters in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*," *European Romantic Review* 17, no. 2 (2006): 237–44. Elaine Ayers considers Caleb Williams's failure to obtain an independent self against the more traditionally Gothic narrative of Emily Melville in "Repeating 'A Half-Told and Mangled Tale': Reading *Caleb Williams* Through Emily Melville," *English Language Notes* 42, no. 4 (2005): 24–43. On the problem of public opinion, see Nicolle Jordan, "The Promise and Frustration of Plebeian Public Opinion in *Caleb Williams*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 19, no. 3 (2007): 243–66. I would like to thank Joseph Bartolomeo and Jordana Rosenberg of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, for their indefatigable support; their advice on this project has been indispensable.

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the novel itself is notorious for defying genre categorizations. Monika Fludernik, for example, points out that it has been read as an "English Jacobin novel," canonized as a "Romantic novel," remarked upon as the first "spy novel," considered in relation to the "Gothic novel," and has even been called "one of the first fictional studies of abnormal psychology." However, considering the breadth of criticism on *Caleb Williams*, I find it surprising that none of the extant scholarly literature engages, in a direct and sustained manner, the text's large stake in questions of ethnic anomaly and deracination, and how they reflect trends of xenophobia and concerns about national character in 1790s England.

Readers of Caleb Williams are of course familiar with Squire Falkland's uncomfortable placement, his status as an "outlandish, foreign-made Englishman" whose reading of the "heroic poets of Italy" has caused him to believe "that nothing was so well calculated to make men delicate, gallant and humane, as a temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour" (10). Godwin's wry denunciation of Italian honour codes is, of course, nothing new. Hester Piozzi, for example, characterized the Italian territories as a place where one cannot become truly subjective, "where wit and beauty are considered as useless without a long pedigree; and virtue, talents, wealth, and wisdom, are thought of only as medals to hang upon the genealogical tree, as we tie trinkets to a watch in England." Grand tourists in particular configured contemporary Italy as full of "poverty, corruption, and an extremely underdeveloped intellectual life"—a state of affairs that was perceived as having been brought about by the Italian territories' so-called lack of political freedom—and bemoaned this contrast to its classical heritage and wonders.⁶ Likewise, readers of the novel will also recall that it is because of Falkland's

- ² Monika Fludernik, "William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: The Tarnishing of the Sublime," *ELH* 68, no. 4 (2001): 857.
- ³ Christoph Bode, "Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and the Fiction of *Things as They Are*," in *English Romantic Prose: Papers Delivered at the Bochum Symposium, September 30 to October 1, 1988*, ed. Günther Ahrends and Hans Jürgen Diller (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1990), 96.
- ⁴ William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. David McCracken (1794; New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 20. References are to this edition.
- ⁵ Hester Lynch Piozzi, Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany (1789; Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 56.
- ⁶ Mirella Agorni, Translating Italy for the Eighteenth Century: British Women, Translation and Travel Writing (1739–1797) (Northampton: St Jerome Publishing, 2002), 105–7.

obsession with his Italian-inflected reputation that he persecutes Caleb Williams, who possesses damning evidence implicating the squire in a murder. Therefore it is easy to perceive Falkland as one who, though ethnically English, performs, in a sustained and self-defining manner, the characteristics of a stereotypical (read: "Anglo-imagined") Italian aristocrat. I contend that this conflict between biological ethnicity and outward performance destabilizes the English/Italian binary and thus casts Falkland into an ethnically anomalous position.

Falkland's destabilization, however, extends beyond his self and problematizes the ethnic positioning of his personal secretary, Caleb Williams. Because Falkland's Italian sense of honour is the impetus behind his persecution of Caleb, it is particularly telling that two of the disguises Caleb adopts in order to elude the squire's surveillance require him to divest himself of his Englishness: at one point, he dresses as an Irish beggar, and at another he assumes the guise of an Ashkenazi Jew. Like the Italians, both of these ethnic groups were saddled with considerable political baggage in 1790s Britain, which perceived itself as being beset on all sides by malignant foreign influences. Because Caleb maintains a firm pride in his English ethnicity and the "birthright" it implies while simultaneously representing himself as a member of oppressed and "devalued" ethnic groups, he, like Falkland, becomes recognizable to the reader as a kind of anomalous Englishman. Caleb comes to represent an uneasy fusion between privileged Englishman and disadvantaged Irishman or Jew, a destabilization which suggests that the continentally inflected malfeasance of the aristocracy corrupts the middle class in such a way that the very terms and privileges of Englishness are contested.

I use the term "anomaly" to describe Caleb's and Falkland's positioning because this concept implies a type of challenge to established categories that is less stringent than Victor Turner's narrowly defined "liminality" and "marginality," yet is not as

Victor Turner characterizes "liminars" as being "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony." Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), 95. Though I agree that both Caleb and Falkland are "betwixt and between" ethnic poles, the fact that liminars, as Turner explains elsewhere, have a "cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity" renders such a reading untenable, as neither Falkland nor Caleb is lucky enough to achieve such a resolution. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 233. Turner describes "marginals"

amorphous as Julia Kristeva's "abjection." In Purity and Danger, Mary Douglas defines anomaly as "an element which does not fit a given set or series"; like "uncleanness" it is "matter out of place."8 More usefully, Douglas describes the anomalous—and the related concept of "ambiguity"—in terms of Sartre's viscosity: "It is like a cross-section in a process of change. It is unstable, but it does not flow ... it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own substance flowing into the pool of stickiness ... to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity." The viscous substance is clearly separate from the "I," yet when one touches this substance, the boundary between the self and the alien material blurs. This hypothetical encounter with viscosity is strikingly similar to Caleb's and Falkland's ethnic positioning in the text. Though both of these men are and always will be "English" in the literal sense, their performative acts that the text identifies as "Italian," "Irish," or "Jewish" still "cling" to our perceptions of them and destabilize the borders between English self and non-English other. In the same way that Douglas "risk[s] diluting [her]self into viscosity," Falkland "dilutes" his character as a respected English squire by "dipping into" a stereotypically Italian set of beliefs and actions. In the same way that "long columns" of viscous material "falling off my fingers" suggest the self "flowing into the pool of stickiness," Falkland's embracing a classical model of virtue and reputation threatens to draw him into the realm of the European other. Likewise, the studied thoroughness of Caleb's ethnic disguises "attack the boundary" between English self and Irish or Jewish subaltern, calling into question Caleb's proud status as an Englishman.

as those "who are simultaneously (by ascription, optation, self-definition, or achievement) of two or more groups whose definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another" (*Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 233). In some sense, both Caleb and Falkland fit into this category since both struggle to balance the "cultural norms" of English masculinity with the norms of other ethnic groups. However, we cannot classify either character as being a member of a different ethnic group. Though Falkland draws his personal values from the "heroic poets of Italy" (10), he never actually identifies himself as an Italian. Similarly, though Caleb disguises himself as an Irishman and as a Jew, his motivations are purely functional; he does not attempt to claim membership in either group, and is bitter about the need for disguise.

⁸ Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger (1966; New York: Routledge, 1984), 38, 41.

⁹ Douglas, 39.

The essential difference between Falkland and Caleb is that Falkland's ethnic destabilization is far more extensive. Where the squire has voluntarily forged his identity out of his reading of the "Italian heroic poets," Caleb assumes Irish and Jewish personas for a purely practical reason: he is attempting to elude surveillance. However, the endangering of Caleb's autonomy in the first place challenges his privileged position as a middleclass Englishman living after the 1689 passage of Britain's Bill of Rights. His disguising himself as an ethnic other effectively dramatizes and exaggerates this instability, thus producing a caricatured representation of larger concerns about the maintenance of national identity in the face of continentally inflected aristocratic hegemony. In this article, I will consider how Godwin, in writing a romance with the ostensible intention of promoting a liberal model of human rights, attempts to meet his aims by deploying stereotypical perceptions of Italians, Jews, and the Irish. He intends, in doing so, to highlight how the aristocracy's and the government's disregard for the rights of the common people is symptomatized by the discursive denationalization of those in authority, which in turn leads to the discursive denationalization of citizens. In my analysis, I reveal how Godwin's use of this technique engages and enables period fears about English national "purity" and ethnic integrity, and how such concerns connect not only to the actual historical moment in question, but also to larger concepts of anomaly, ethnicity, their overlap, and the resulting class and political fallouts. In so doing, we should also cultivate a better sense of how "devalued" ethnic groups who were not directly subjugated under the imperial project were troped and (mis)represented in fiction to achieve a political end that was meant to benefit the more privileged group at the expense of reifying stereotypes about those whose ethnicity placed them at a social disadvantage.

Italian Malfeasance and the English Aristocracy

Before considering Caleb Williams himself, clarifying his antagonist's position within the narrative framework is necessary, since it is Falkland's actions that set off the events in Caleb's life. Textually, Falkland's anomalous condition is most clearly mapped out during his time abroad in Italy, when he teaches the beautiful young Lucretia English so that she can better appreciate British poetry (12), and later placates her jealous lover

Malvesi with rational discourse. The true brilliance of the Malvesi episode lies in its avoidance of mapping Falkland and Malvesi along clear axes of "Englishness" and "Italianness." After calming his assailant, Falkland tells Malvesi: "I feel the utmost pleasure in having thus by peaceful means disarmed your resentment, and effected your happiness. But I must confess you put me to a severe trial. My temper is not less impetuous and fiery than your own, and it is not at all times that I should have been thus able to subdue it. But I considered that in reality the original blame was mine. Though your suspicion was groundless, it was not absurd" (15, emphasis added). 10 For the most part, this is the language of self-possession and rationality, in a word, "Englishness." The first sentence is quaintly polite to the point of being ridiculous, while the last two sentences are dominated by reason and a mature willingness to share the blame in what was clearly a misunderstanding. However, the portion of Falkland's monologue that I italicized betrays a streak of "wildness," a foreshadowing of his darker, "uncivilized" nature that casts doubt upon his character. This is borne out in the second paragraph of Falkland's harangue, as he confesses that he would have accepted Malvesi's challenge to a duel if the challenge had been issued publicly because "the laws of honour are in the utmost degree rigid ... if the challenge had been public, the proofs I had formerly given of courage would not have excused my present moderation; and, though desirous to have avoided the combat, it would not have been in my power" (15–16). Here, Falkland betrays a sense of honour that is centred on status and reputation, an attitude that, as we have seen, was instilled in him through his reading of the Italian heroic poets, whose ideals "were illustrated in his conduct, which was assiduously conformed to the model of heroism that his fancy suggested" (10). Despite this, Falkland just as quickly shifts his rhetoric into a rational context by articulating the moral of his

The "fiery and impetuous temper" to which Falkland alludes is not his inborn temperament, as a casual reading of the above passage might suggest, but one constructed by his immersion in chivalry. The servant Collins relates to Caleb how Falkland "was once the gayest of the gay ... [and his gaiety was] chastened with reflexion and sensibility, and never lost sight either of good taste or humanity ... [yet his] youth, distinguished from its outset by the most unusual promise, is tarnished. His sensibility is shrunk up and withered by events the most disgustful to his feelings. His mind was fraught with all the rhapsodies of visionary honour" (9).

and Malvesi's near-encounter: passion and a sense of honour trump reason and free will when facing an immediate threat to reputation. Therefore, Malvesi should learn a lesson about the dangers of precipitancy (16). Although he has averted a literal duel here, Falkland has betrayed the presence of a duel in his own breast, a duel between "rational English" and "chivalric Italian" ideologies.

Falkland's encounter with Malvesi is admittedly anticlimactic, yet its principle purpose is merely to illustrate the squire's potential for chivalric violence. This in turn helps to set up the connection that Godwin is establishing between Falkland's absorption of Italian honour codes and his gradual degeneration into a petty tyrant. Fludernik has similarly observed that Falkland is constructed by his reading of romance, claiming that "the system of romantic inequality corrupts and ruins both the master and the servant" in that "it forces the master to exercise his power to the hilt, giving the machine one more fatal turn; and it forces the oppressed to become artful in their legitimate defence, thereby corrupting their (supposedly) native innocence and truthfulness."11 This connection between chivalric ideology and aristocratic tyranny is significant because Caleb's deracination is brought about as a direct result of the squire's Italian cruelty. This link is established in no uncertain terms, most notably when Caleb first disguises himself in the accoutrements of an Irish beggar, describing his "costume change" in particular detail: "I selected the worst apparel I could find, and this I reduced to a still more deplorable condition by rents that I purposely made in various places ... I had rendered my appearance complete ... I said, This is the form in which tyranny and injustice oblige me to seek for refuge; but better, a thousand times better is it, thus to incur contempt with the dregs of mankind, than to trust to the tender mercies of our superiors!" (233-34). He makes a similar statement when he describes his adoption of a brogue, bitterly claiming that "such are the miserable expedients and so great the studied artifice, which man, who never deserves the name of manhood but in proportion as he is erect and independent, may find it necessary to employ for the purpose of eluding the inexorable animosity and unfeeling tyranny of his fellow man!" (238).

Godwin's decision to represent continentally inflected aristocratic oppression as productive of a broader deracination reflects

¹¹ Fludernik, 863, 887.

period concerns about English national character and its potential degeneration in the face of foreign influence. These fears have been well documented, though the European other in such discourses is usually France. Robin Eagles, for example, points out that, in the years leading up to the French Revolution, "much that was adopted by the English élite as their own was continental in origin, and its subsequent aping by the middling sorts meant that English culture as a whole was coloured by the attitudes, fashions, and opinions of France."12 On a purely dynamic level, I would suggest that Falkland's adoption of Italian manners and Caleb's resulting hardship is reminiscent of the more popular discourse of "Frenchification" because in both cases a nebulously defined English "aristocracy" is corrupted via continental influence and is consequently seen as "present[ing] a distinctive threat to a virtuous polity, for they [foreign manners] seeped into the body politic from above, through social and cultural patronage and political power, corroding both national manners and martial might."13 However, Falkland is neither modish nor effeminate, as the "Frenchified" English aristocrat is typically depicted. Nor is he legibly monstrous to anyone but Caleb, thus making it difficult to read him against the Reign of Terror of 1793–94, during which there was a "persistent evocation of the monstrous to describe Robespierre's supporters and their work" by such English writers as Helen Maria Williams and John Moore.¹⁴ Furthermore, Godwin's proclaimed intent, that Falkland's murder of Tyrrel "should be seen in some measure to have arisen out of his virtues themselves," along with his hope that readers would understand Falkland as "the tenant of an atmosphere of romance, so that every reader should feel prompted almost to worship him for his high qualities" (337), goes a long way towards explaining the author's decision to construct Falkland as influenced by the old chivalric values of Italy. Therefore, even though the process of aristocratic corruption in Caleb Williams bears mechanical similarity to the more popular narrative of French infiltration—which itself

¹² Robin Eagles, Francophilia in English Society, 1748–1815 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 4.

¹³ Kathleen Wilson, "The Good, the Bad, and the Impotent: Imperialism and the Politics of Identity in Georgian England," in *The Consumption of Culture* 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (New York: Routledge, 1997), 255.

¹⁴ Deborah Kennedy, Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 113.

would certainly have been recognizable and disturbing to readers in 1794, as England fought a war with revolutionary France—Godwin chose to deploy an Anglo-imagined Italy as the source of continental otherness because it provides a clearer exemplar of the chivalrous honour that defines Falkland's character.

In terms of the aristocracy's influence on the middle class. the text alone makes it abundantly clear that Falkland's actions have a profound effect on Caleb's identity. In the highly political preface to the novel, Godwin writes that "it is now known to philosophers that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society" (1), and Caleb closes the first chapter by commenting that "my heart bleeds at the recollection of [Falkland's] misfortunes as if they were my own. How can it fail to do so? To his story the whole fortune of my life was linked; because he was miserable, my happiness, my name, and my existence have been irretrievably blasted" (10). Godwin focused his critique of societal injustice primarily on the aristocracy because, I claim, he recognized the latter's prominent role in systemic hegemony: at best, the aristocracy was a bad moral example to the "middling classes," but at worst, it actively oppressed its dependents. And by highlighting certain members of the English aristocracy's absorption of Italian values, Godwin was able to mobilize popular assumptions about Italy and the encroachment of continental thinking to bolster his point that the ruling classes were contributing to the effacement of a national identity characterized by liberty. Hence, if we consider Falkland through the historical lenses that Eagles, Wilson, and Godwin himself have provided, we can see that a significant part of Godwin's intent with Caleb Williams—the novelistic analogue to Political Justice—is to draw attention to how the aristocracy's adoption of continental values contributes greatly to the unravelling of national integrity, as played out by Caleb, a member of a non-elite class.

"Different Species of Aristocracy": Falkland and Tyrrel

Because I have emphasized that Falkland's actions against Caleb stem from his continentally informed ideas, it might be tempting to suppose that his foil, the brutish Squire Tyrrel, is meant to be understood as a standard of English nationalism. Tyrrel occupies an interesting and potentially problematic position in the text in that he scorns Falkland as "an outlandish

foreign-made Englishman," and seems to identify himself as a member of "the old English votaries of beef and pudding" (20). However, reading Squire Tyrrel as Godwin's model of "correct" English manhood is untenable since he is ultimately as much a caricature of aristocratic monstrosity as Falkland, albeit of an opposite temper. From the moment he is introduced, Tyrrel is painted as "insupportably arrogant, tyrannical to his inferiors, and insolent to his equals" (17). When he quarrels with his dependent, Hawkins, and the latter prepares to take legal action against the squire, the narrator bemoans Hawkins's inevitable failure, commenting that "wealth and despotism easily know how to engage those laws as the coadjutors of their oppression which were perhaps at first intended [witless and miserable precaution!] for the safeguards of the poor" (72). Furthermore, Tyrrel's decision to imprison his cousin Emily Melville because she refuses to marry the coarse Grimes is a typically Gothic moment; indeed, Emily Melville's fortitude anticipates Ann Radcliffe's Emily St Aubert, and Tyrrel's astonished yet gruff response to Miss Melville's firmness (54-55) calls to mind a Montoni or a Montalt.

Even Tyrrel's physical vigour—which provides a convenient counterpoint to Falkland's bookishness—is described in suspiciously monstrous terms, as he is alternately characterized as a "whelp-lion" (17), "that hero of antiquity, whose prowess consisted in felling an ox with his fist, and devouring him at a meal" (17), "a tyger, ... a rural Antaeus" (18), a "wild beast" (19), and one whose "courtship was like the pawings of an elephant" (21). The bestial extremity of Tyrrel's character becomes particularly relevant to my discussion if one jumps ahead in the text for a moment, and considers Daniela Garofalo's view that "[Falkland's] murder of Tyrrel functions on a historically significant level as the shift from an overtly patriarchal culture to a more modern and superficially benign power. Modern patriarchal figures abjure public violence and present themselves as the impartial and just administrators of a universal law, while founding their power on a violence that remains hidden, yet suspected."15 Along these lines, I would therefore suggest that Tyrrel, like Falkland, is more of a type than a three-dimensional character. This reading reveals not two rival squires so much as two rival systems of oppression, and ultimately the replacement of the overt one with the covert one.

¹⁵ Garofalo, 238-39.

173

At first glance then, the decidedly "uncontinental" criminal nature of Tyrrel may appear to problematize my reading of the novel since his monstrosity prevents the reader from seeing the problem of aristocracy as being reducible exclusively to European influence. I am not claiming that Godwin is presenting continentally inflected corruption as the sole cause of malfeasance; rather, my purpose is to make a methodological claim, to draw attention to how Godwin deploys concerns about foreign influence on the aristocracy in order to highlight his main points about social injustice and the role of class in it. Considering Garofalo's troping of Tyrrel and Falkland, I suggest Godwin is saying that the problem of aristocratic hegemony has always existed, but the current aristocratic character is that of a covert, Italianinfluenced Falkland. Indeed, Godwin placed all members of the wealthy, landed class into the broad category of "aristocracy" in Political Justice, dismissively writing that "it is not necessary to enter into a methodical disquisition of the different species of aristocracy, since, if the above reasonings have any force, they are equally cogent against them all."16 Therefore, Tyrrel's gruffness and misogyny is just as undesirable as Falkland's preoccupation

Having outlined the terms of Falkland's continental influence, raised its historical-political implications, and provided some background on Godwin's construction of the landed aristocracy, I will now focus on Caleb himself, and the textual and political significance of his ethnic disguises.

The Irish Uncanny: Caleb as Colonized Subject

In the same way that Godwin's decision to attribute Falkland's guiding values to Italian influence was quite calculated, it is no accident that Caleb disguises himself specifically as an Irishman. Ireland in the 1790s can perhaps be best understood in relation to England as simultaneously a kind of pseudo-colony and an uncanny double—a reminder of Albion's heritage as a rural, Catholic nation. George Cooper, for example, who travelled to Ireland a mere five years after the publication of *Caleb Williams*, articulated the uneasy resemblance between Ireland and premodern England by looking through a lens of papal influence.

Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on the General Virtue and Happiness, ed. Raymond Abner Preston, 2 vols. (1793; New York: A.A. Knopf, 1926), 2:15.

He claimed that "the effect of Catholic superstition on the Irish is to plunge their minds in the darkness and gothic ignorance of the 13th century. Had Great Britain still continued the prey of papal tyranny, it is probable that it would have been at present buried in that same gloomy ignorance. We should not have been able to boast of our Bacon, our Locke, or our Newton."¹⁷ Here, Cooper acknowledges England and Ireland's shared heritage, proclaims England's cultural superiority, and locates the source of that superiority in the Reformation. However, it is even more interesting to consider how Cooper cites outmoded codes of conduct and the corruption of the Irish gentry as causes of the peasantry's poverty. The excesses of chivalry are responsible for "the slack system of morality which is so observable in Ireland," 18 and this lack of morals among the gentry prevents an outpouring of charity. Cooper also maintains that the moral bankruptcy of the aristocracy leads to a general "indolence" among the Irish people, since "there is nothing which is so calculated to palsy the arm of virtuous industry as the pride of birth." Furthermore, he might as well be describing Falkland when he writes "with the rich, a relaxed system of morality is aided by the artificial varnish of fashionable manners and those advantages which I have allowed that the laws of honour may and do carry with them, notwithstanding their mixture of evil."19

Caleb's beggar disguise obviously identifies him as one of the Irish poor, one who would be recognizable as victimized by the gentry. While his clothing and bearing are apparent indicators of this, my point is further borne out by Caleb's learning how to speak with a brogue while in prison (238), in the company of other oppressed men who were, by and large, incarcerated merely for being "victims of suspicion" (180). Caleb's identification with the Irish underclass is striking not only because he literally is a victim of the gentry but also because his victimization is what caused him to disguise himself as a legibly oppressed individual to begin with. I suggest therefore that Caleb's Irish persona calls his own nationality into question and also brings Falkland's foreignness into sharp relief by correlating the latter with the Anglo-Irish oppressors. To clarify, I would not go so far as to say

¹⁷ George Cooper, "Letters on the Irish Nation Written during a Visit to That Kingdom in the Autumn of the Year 1799," in *The English Traveler in Ireland*, ed. John P. Harrington (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991), 192.

¹⁸ Cooper, 187.

¹⁹ Cooper, 192, 193.

that Godwin is shifting tactics here and attempting to represent Falkland as Irish—at this point, he has put too much labour into explicitly connecting Falkland with Italy to make such a move. Rather, there is an interesting subtextual dynamic that can be read as a reinforcement of the novel's themes of deracination and contamination. Essentially, Godwin is subtly framing the Falkland-Caleb conflict within the context of class struggle in Ireland. Whether or not this is a conscious move on the author's part is not particularly relevant. What does matter is that this move connects Godwin's fiction more closely to historical concerns about how England was shaped by its "others," and how this influence rendered "precarious," in Godwin's opinion, the nation's "claims to civilization." Put plainly, Caleb's dressing himself up as a disadvantaged Irishman invites the reader to parallel English aristocratic hegemony with Irish aristocratic hegemony. Such a juxtaposition forces to the surface buried doubts about the presumed superiority of English civilization over Irish civilization, and the source of these doubts lies in the behaviour of an ethnically destabilized aristocracy.

The link between English and Irish oppression becomes still more apparent when one considers what Cooper omits—namely, that at this time the Irish gentry was largely Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. And since the Irish Anglo-Protestant ascendancy generally defined itself as a distinct class, neither entirely English nor entirely Irish, Cooper's omission is not too surprising. Indeed, Cooper's failure to recognize the Irish aristocracy's Anglo connections is a prime example of Samuel Madden's witty summation that these individuals were "envied as Englishmen in Ireland, and maligned as Irish in England." Though they were by and large wealthy, Protestant, and politically powerful, the Anglo-Irish were still seen as somehow "less than English." They were certainly more Anglo than Ireland's Catholic peasantry, yet they were still stereotyped as "bellicose and bibulous." While the Anglo-Irish would provide an interesting case study for

²⁰ Caroline Reitz, "Bad Cop/Good Cop: Godwin, Mill and the Imperial Origins of the English Detective," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 33, no. 2 (2000): 177–78.

²¹ Samuel Madden, *Reflections and Resolutions Proper to the Gentlemen of Ireland* (1738; reprint, Dublin, 1816), 96.

²² Ian McBride, "'The common name of Irishman': Protestantism and Patriotism in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 246.

scholars examining the complicated intersections of privilege and disadvantage, I am primarily interested in considering how Godwin's invocation of this group—and the anomalous position it implicitly occupies—contributes to the destabilization of the novel's characters and what this destabilization suggests about perceptions of English national character on a larger sociohistorical scale.

It is true that Caleb's disguise identifies him more readily with the Irish-Catholic peasantry in terms of class and (lack of) privilege, yet he is still not literally Irish, and this is key to understanding him as an anomalous figure. Even though he performs an Irish identity, Caleb remains an Englishman in blood and in spirit; he may speak with a brogue, but he uses plain, "manly" speech in an attempt to counter the power-tainted rhetoric of the public that persecutes him.²³ Similar to Falkland, who performs in a stereotypically Italian manner but remains English in the literal sense, Caleb's problematic national identity renders him—similar to the Anglo-Irish—borderless. However, where Falkland occupies a secure, privileged position as a member of the landed gentry who has chosen to construct his identity around continental honour codes, Caleb, as a result of Falkland's decision to be governed by "Italian" manners, is forced to disguise himself as an Irishman and thus decentralize his English identity. To clarify Caleb's position then, he is an Englishman by blood but an Irishman by performance—which is anomalous in its own right—yet this synthesis of ethnic backgrounds also necessarily identifies him with the ruling Anglo-Irish even though his appearance and performance necessarily make him readable as a member of the Irish peasantry.

The people whom Caleb meets while disguised clearly sense something unusual about him. When he attempts to flee to Ireland, for example, he is arrested before making his escape simply because his disguise causes him to be mistakenly identified as a different wanted man. In purely narrative terms, this moment is easily dismissed as a contrivance—it is simply coincidence that two Irishmen robbed the Royal Mail while it was en route from Edinburgh, and it is simple misfortune that Caleb supposedly resembles one of the suspects. The bounty hunters who seize Caleb declare that his "accent, together with the correspondence of [his] person, would be sufficient to convict

²³ Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s: Literature, Radicalism, and the Public Sphere* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 75.

[him] before any court in England" (240), yet when he reads the description of the suspect, Caleb discovers that the wanted man is not only shorter than him, but also of a different complexion (242). Furthermore, when brought before the justice of the peace, Caleb drops his brogue and resolves to speak in his natural voice, a rhetorical move that ought to eliminate any uncertainty about his innocence in the matter at hand. Though both the magistrate and the bounty hunters quickly begin to question their assumption that Caleb is the man they are seeking, they still resolve to send him off to Warwick, where his supposed accomplice is being imprisoned, for the purposes of positive identification. Despite Caleb's expostulation spoken as usual "with an earnestness" that is mistaken for "insolence" (244), the judge remains implacable.

The seeming illogicality of the magistrate's decision can be accounted for if one reads it as a reaction to Caleb's failure to occupy a boundary category: Caleb is not guilty of the crime that he has been accused of, but it is clear to the judge that he is not innocent either, and his lack of innocence is established through his inability to fit into demarcated groupings. The judge and the bounty hunters are unable to fathom, for example, how one who appears to be a beggar has come into legitimate possession of fifteen guineas. More provocatively, there is a disconnect between his beggarly "habiliments" and his skin, which is discovered to have "all the sleekness of a gentleman" (243). And of course there is the matter of his disappearing brogue. Douglas points out that cultures deal with social anomalies in a variety of ways, ranging from using anomalous symbols "to enrich meaning or to call attention to other levels of existence" to labelling them "dangerous" and attempting to "physically control" them. 24 As a being who defies categorization, one who is "matter out of place," Caleb is treated in the latter fashion by those in authority. Even the context surrounding Caleb's capture—he was picked up while boarding a ship that was preparing to leave for Ireland—engages the question of anomaly, as this episode revolves around issues of border violation and containment. To clarify what is at stake should Caleb succeed in fleeing England, it is necessary to move ahead in the text for a moment and read this moment against Caleb's later encounter with Gines at the harbour.

Close to the end of the novel, Caleb again tries to flee England by ship, this time to Holland, and is intercepted by Falkland's

²⁴ Douglas, 40.

shifty manhunter. Gines explains that Falkland has determined that Caleb is free to wander England, Scotland, and Wales, but if he attempts to take to the sea he will be arrested immediately. Gines specifically states that "it is my business now, do you see, for want of a better, to see that you do not break out of bounds ... beware the salt seas ... you are a prisoner at present ... a prisoner within the rules; and the rules with which the soft-hearted squire indulges you are all England, Scotland and Wales. But you are not to go out of these climates. The squire is determined you shall never pass the reach of his disposal" (313, emphasis added). At first glance, Caleb's inability to leave Great Britain seems to problematize his status as an anomalous figure whose borders are shifting and uncertain. However, what we can conclude from these episodes is that it is acceptable for Caleb to cross the figurative "bounds" of race, class, and ethnicity, but it is unacceptable for him to cross the more literal "bounds" of the channel. Since Falkland (via Gines) constructs Great Britain as Caleb's "prison," and because a crossing of the channel would put Caleb beyond "the reach of [Falkland's] disposal," crossing the literal boundary of "salt water" would, presumably and somewhat paradoxically, resolve Caleb's uncertain identity, as there would be no further need for him to disguise himself as an Irishman in order to avoid detection and hence he would no longer occupy an unstable ethnic position.

In support of this, I consider Joanne Tompkins's provocative challenge to Homi Bhabha and other postcolonial critics who claim, along a psychoanalytic axis, that "a contingent, liminal identity is, for a colonized subject, a useful tool for manipulating power relationships and relocating one's self in a subject position(s) of one's own choosing." While it is true that Caleb is not a colonized subject per se, the fact that first, his identity has been repressed and reconstituted by the influence of a hybridized patriarch, and second, that he constructs himself as an essentially "colonized" individual with his Irish disguise, positions him in a similar fashion. Caleb's use of disguise also calls to mind Bhabha's far more famous concept of colonial mimicry, which he describes as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." Bhabha refers to

²⁵ Joanne Tompkins, "Breaching the Body's Boundaries: Abjected Subject Positions in Postcolonial Drama," *Modern Drama* 40, no. 4 (1997): 502.

²⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; New York: Routledge, 2005),

this state as one of "ambivalence" in which the "colonial subject" who performs the act of mimicry becomes "a 'partial' presence," meaning that the mimicking subject is both "incomplete' and 'virtual." Bhabha's description of colonial mimicry is certainly reminiscent of Caleb in that his disguise renders him "virtually" Irish and, by extension, only "partially" English—"almost the same, but not quite." Likewise, Tompkins's contention that "the latent disorderly nature of the abject refuses both the neat, easy categorisations of colonizer/colonized and the free-flowing, shape-shifting movement across boundaries"28 is strikingly relevant to Caleb Williams, particularly since "colonizer" Falkland is just as "abject"—to borrow Tompkins's terminology—as "colonized" Caleb, and all of Caleb's "shape-shifting" ultimately leads to failure. Although Tompkins is using the terms "liminality" and "abjection" rather than "anomaly," her argument applies to my own in that all of these terms are being used in their current contexts to parse out the position of a "border" subject in relation to his movement through and across boundary space. I therefore cite Tompkins's findings to suggest that Caleb's status as a person who cannot be categorized does not give him free rein to cross boundaries in an attempt to re-establish an independent subject position. Caleb's violation of the ethnic boundaries is acceptable in Falkland's world because it is the primary mechanism by which Caleb is kept in an anomalous, disempowered position. As a deracinated Englishman—read "colonized subject"—it is part of Caleb's nature to remain unsettled and perpetually in search of a satisfactorily constructed self. A literal border-crossing, however, remains out of the question, since it would presumably free Caleb from persecution and undercut the primacy of Falkland's power. Judith Butler writes that "all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and ... all margins are accordingly considered dangerous."29 Caleb can occupy the margins of ethnicity, since such occupation keeps him in a position of vulnerability, yet he cannot pass through the physical margins of Falkland's sovereignty, since to do so would be to undermine his master's "omniscience." The anomalous subject's border-crossing potential then, only applies to the immaterial and the metaphoric—psychological borders can

²⁷ Bhabha, 123.

²⁸ Tompkins, 506.

²⁹ Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 168.

be crossed, yet physical boundaries are impassable. A marked and despised Caleb is left to wander within the corrupt patriarchy's proscribed boundaries. Because he has been marginalized and circumscribed, it makes sense that Caleb should next represent himself as a wandering Jewish peddler once his Irish disguise has been rendered useless.

The Anglo-Jewry: Diaspora and Destabilization

In 1805, Benjamin Silliman, an American on errand in London, observed of the Jews: "this dispersed and despised people exhibit a living proof of the truth of prophecy ... and are a striking monument of the wrath of God; they are every where mingled with the nations, and yet remain separate."30 Along similar lines, Frank Felsenstein maintains that the eighteenth-century English image of Jews-especially Ashkenazi peddlers-was that they were all vagabonds, that "like the Wandering Jew of legend, they are to be seen as perpetual aliens whose raison d'être may only be signalized through their difference from the host group and their apparent incapacity to assimilate ... their outlandish garb and lowly status are to be seen as markers of their perpetual alienation, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy that in the countries to which they have been dispersed they may find no ease or rest."31 Considering the Jewish diaspora's long history of marginalization and the controversy surrounding Jewish readability or lack thereof—particularly when inhabiting Christian countries such as England—it is not thematically surprising that Caleb disguises himself as such. Nor, considering the stereotypical image of the Jewish peddler as a trickster and a fence,³² is it surprising that Caleb "learns" his Jewish disguise from one of the robbers with whom he had been hiding earlier in the novel. His "talent for mimicry," which helped him to contrive a brogue earlier, now allows him to "copy their [Jews'] pronunciation of the English language," and he even travels to "a quarter of the town in which great numbers of this people reside, [to] study their complexion and countenance" (254). After he performs his "research," Caleb states that "it is unnecessary to

³⁰ Cited in David Katz, The Jews in the History of England, 1485–1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 293.

³¹ Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 64, 65.

³² Felsenstein, 70-71.

describe the particulars of my new equipage. Suffice it to say, that one of my cares was to discolour my complexion, and give it the dun and sallow hue which is in most instances characteristic of the tribe to which I assumed to belong" (254-55). Here, Godwin/ Caleb takes it as a given that his readers will know what a Jew's "equipage" looks like. Considering that Caleb's source on Jews consists of a robber and the occupants of a Jewish ghetto, it would likely be obvious to readers in the period that Caleb is disguising himself specifically as an Ashkenazi peddler. Todd Endelman's *Jews of Georgian England* (1977) confirms this, as the author relates that "the popular image of the Sephardi Jew [from the Iberian Peninsula] was an opulent stockbroker and that of the Ashkenazi Jew [from Germany and Eastern Europe] a ragged old-clothes man." Endelman proposes that this stereotype had currency because there were more Ashkenazi than Sephardi Jews in London in the eighteenth century, and thus there were proportionally more poor Ashkenazi than there were poor Sephardi.³³ Because of their numbers and their characteristic occupation as hawkers, the lower-class Ashkenazi were more visible to native-born Britons; and the (contestable) fact that most of the Jewish poor were Orthodox³⁴ likely made them more "legibly" Jewish.

If Godwin could assume that his audience would know what an English Ashkenazi Jew looked like, then it is likely that he could trust readers to form a mental image of an impoverished hawker, selling old clothes, cheap jewellery, or other knick-knacks.³⁵ The "Jewish" Caleb embodies this stereotype to an extent; however, he becomes a somewhat different sort of hawker: a hawker of literature, albeit a type of literature that Garrett Sullivan characterizes as "wares' churned out on demand and marketed by 'speculators." ³⁶ Caleb claims:

My qualifications I estimated at a slender valuation. I was not without a conviction that experience and practice [in writing] must pave the way to excellent production. But, though of these I was utterly destitute, my propensities had always led me in this direction; and my early thirst of knowledge had conducted me to a more intimate

³³ Todd Endelman, The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 171.

³⁴ Endelman, 189.

³⁵ Endelman, 180-81, 184.

³⁶ Garrett Sullivan, "A Story to Be Hastily Gobbled Up': Caleb Williams and Print Culture," *Studies in Romanticism* 32, no. 3 (1993): 324.

acquaintance with books ... if my literary pretensions were slight, the demand I intended to make upon them was not great. All I asked was a subsistence ... the reasons that principally determined my choice, were that this employment called upon me for the least preparation, and could, as I thought, be exercised with least observation. (257)

Caleb's "slender valuation" of his literary talents and the options that they afford him is strikingly reminiscent of the Ashkenazi Jews' reasons for engaging in street peddling. In the same way that Caleb is "utterly destitute" of "experience and practice," most Jewish immigrants to London were "penniless and unskilled," largely because they had scant opportunities to learn a craft in Germany,³⁷ from which the majority came. Caleb feels that he is capable of eking out an existence as a writer primarily because of his "early thirst of knowledge" and "intimate acquaintance with books"; Jewish immigrants generally hawked because it was the only trade they or their families had known. Peddling was also attractive to newly arrived Jews because it required very little startup capital. Similarly, Caleb's realization that "the little money with which I had escaped from the blood hunters was almost wholly expended" and that "this employment called upon me for the least preparation" (256, 257) are other factors in his decision to write for a living. Both Caleb and the Ashkenazi peddlers, then, are represented as impoverished, unskilled labourers whose choice of occupation is largely influenced by the informal education they received earlier in life: in Caleb's case, a childhood spent reading (notably, he never refers to having written anything during his formative years), in the peddlers' case, practical knowledge likely gained from observing their parents at work.

Nevertheless, readings of Caleb's Jewish disguise are complicated not only by his choice of subsistence but also, as with the Irish disguise, by the fact that he is not actually Jewish. His financial and motivational similarities to the historical Ashkenazi Jews are ultimately skin-deep, much like his contrived "discoloration." This disconnect between racial "trappings" and actual performance is noted by Caleb's printer, who also happens to be Gines's brother. "We none of us know what to make of the writer of these articles," the printer exclaims, "he writes poetry and morality and history: I am a printer and corrector of the

³⁷ For this and all other claims in this paragraph about Jewish immigrants, see Endelman, 179.

press, and may pretend without vanity to be a tolerably good judge of these matters: he writes them all to my mind extremely fine, and yet he is no more than a Jew" (264). Though the last part of this passage is certainly the most inflammatory, the easily overlooked first sentence is striking as a plaintive testament to Caleb's status as an anomalous figure. Caleb may "peddle" commodities like a Jew, yet his productions of "poetry and morality and history" identify him as an individual who is more educated than the average "no more than a Jew" Ashkenazi, who, as a result of poverty, lack of opportunity, and the demands of the family business, would have had very little secular education.³⁸ For the printer, this is "as strange as if [Caleb's productions] had been written by a Cherokee chieftain at the falls of the Missisippi [sic]" (264), a rhetorical move that effectively ushers Jews under the large tent of "foreign savages." "What is one to make of such a person?" the printer seems to ask; how can one categorize an individual who does not respect socially constructed boundaries and expectations?

Gines's brother is not the only individual who notes Caleb's shifting ethnic borders. At one point, a nosy old woman notices "Jewish" Caleb leaving an inn in Southwark during the early hours of the morning. When she asks the landlady and the inn staff about "the Jew who had slept there the night before" (262), no one knows to whom she is referring, since Caleb apparently adopted his disguise after checking in. Based on the time of day that the old woman saw him leaving, the landlady concludes that it must have been Caleb, yet she can offer no explanation for his Semitic appearance. What is of most interest in this segment is the language Godwin employs. "It was very strange," Caleb relates, "they compared notes respecting my appearance and dress. No two things could be more dissimilar. The Jew-Christian, upon any dearth of subjects of intelligence, repeatedly furnished matter for their discourse" (263, emphasis added). The utter "dissimilarity" between Caleb's natural appearance and his contrived one, and the uncomfortable synthesis of him as "the Jew-Christian" could, especially when taken alongside the printer's incredulity, be read as an example of continental "others" infiltrating England's national borders. In this case, Caleb's synthesized appearance and synchretistic performance can be understood as representing a fusion of native Englishman with naturalized Jew.

³⁸ Endelman, 187-89.

Caleb's Anglo-Jewish appearance feeds into and off of national concerns about the social position of Jews in Georgian England. Felsenstein, for example, reminds us of "the widely held belief that rich and poor Jews illicitly conspire[d] to sustain one another at the expense of the indigenous English."39 Caleb's status as a wanderer makes it is even more intriguing to consider, as Felsenstein does, the writings of Henry Francis Offley, who in 1795, after making predictable "the Jews killed Christ" accusations, wrote "they were driven from society, and became vagabonds on the face of the earth."40 Additionally, Offley compares the nature of the Jewish diaspora to the peddling profession, writing "certainly the Jews almost ever since the destruction of their kingdom by Titus Vespasian, have been without a fix'd abode, and have been scattered all over the earth, neglecting the Lord their God ... Even to England, if we confine ourselves alone, a Country professing the greatest humanity to strangers and foreigners—we see them wandering about the streets, particularly in the metropolis of London, in the most menial occupation, that of carrying a bag at their back, and crying old cloaths from door to door, the objects of universal ridicule and contempt."41 "Such utterances," according to Felsenstein, "reinforce the notion that the separation of the Jews is so ordained from above as a manifestation of heavenly displeasure and as a perpetual reminder of the truth of the Christian faith."42 The large influx of Jewish immigrants throughout the eighteenth century stirred up "pious" fears that a heavy concentration of Jews in the nation would contravene the will of a God who had intentionally scattered the descendants of "Christ's executioners." This discourse was particularly popular in 1753, when the Commons was reviewing the proposed Jew Bill.⁴³ William Romaine, for example, argued that if the Jews were to "become native free-born Englishmen they then cease to be Vagrants, and find such a Rest, as will frustrate, so far as Man is able, the Truth of God's infallible Prophecies."44

³⁹ Felsenstein, 216.

⁴⁰ Henry Francis Offley, *Richard Brothers, Neither a Madman Nor an Imposter* (London, 1795), xvi–xvii.

⁴¹ Offley, 8-9.

⁴² Felsenstein, 66.

⁴³ Felsenstein, 68.

⁴⁴ William Romaine, A Modest Apology for the Citizens and Merchants of London Who Petitioned the House of Commons against Naturalizing the Jews (London, 1753), 8.

Underneath these sanctimonious rationalizations run the familiar fears of a destabilized English national identity. David Katz reads the Aliens Act of 1793—which subjected immigrants, many of whom were Jewish at this time, to close governmental scrutiny—as a challenge to the Anglo-Jewry's loyalty. He writes that the Act "was but a symbol of the general feeling that revolution was a foreign import and as such its purveyors ought to be strictly watched,"45 a claim implying that Jews were, at least to an extent, shuffled under the large categorical umbrella of continental foreigners. Such approaches to London Jews suggest that the diaspora was understood as a potential threat to the stability of English national identity. By identifying the embattled Caleb with the Ashkenazi Jews, Godwin unavoidably invokes these swirling discourses; and by representing his aristocratically oppressed protagonist as an anomalous fusion of Englishman and Jew, Godwin mobilizes fears about Jewish cultural encroachment in order to strengthen his point about middle-class corruption at the hands of the continentally corrupted gentry.

Here I will pause to relate one particular historical moment that provocatively symptomatizes such fears. While George Gordon's role in the riots of 1780 that bear his name has been well-documented, less attention has been paid to his conversion to Judaism in 1787 and his life afterward. In the same year as his conversion, he was vigorously prosecuted at both Versailles and London for libel against Marie Antoinette. Katz editorializes that this was a slight offence in comparison to the 1780s riots, 46 a claim that implies Gordon's prosecutors had ulterior motives. It was the ostensible opinion of his contemporary biographer, Robert Watson, that Gordon's conversion was the real reason why the London court was so quick to prosecute him in the libel case. 47 After being found guilty, Gordon fled to Holland, where his reputation as one who was "popular with the revolutionary elements" caused the Dutch to extradite him promptly back to England.48 While the 1793 Aliens Act seemed to assume that all foreigners were suspect since revolution was constructed as a "foreign import," perhaps Gordon's well-known pro-revolutionary

⁴⁵ Katz, 285.

⁴⁶ Katz, 307.

⁴⁷ Robert Watson, *The Life of Lord George Gordon: With a Philosophical Review of His Political Conduct* (London, 1795), 75.

⁴⁸ Katz, 307.

sentiments contributed especially to the Act's implications that the Jews had Jacobin sympathies. Furthermore, Gordon's ill-fated flight to Holland might have inspired Godwin, since Caleb twice attempts to flee to Holland and is frustrated in both attempts.⁴⁹

When Gordon was rearrested, both his religion and his performance of it became a topic of prurient conversation in the London periodicals and among the British glitterati. The Gentleman's Magazine reported in 1787 on Gordon's "lodg[ing] in one of the dirtiest houses in Dudley street, where the Jews chiefly inhabit,"50 while the London Chronicle speculated that Gordon's beard was four inches long. 51 More provocatively, Horace Walpole recounted how at one particular dinner party where Gordon was a subject of conversation, one of the guests commented on his "Mosaic beard" and that "it was lucky when converts wore distinguishing marks by which they might be reconnoitred."52 This remark points to a fear of Jewish infiltration while at the same time, via the use of the conditional "when," tacitly suggests the existence of a clandestine subculture of unreadable Britons-turned-pseudo-Jews who need to be monitored or "reconnoitred." Furthermore, considering earlier-cited concerns that the aristocracy's continentally inflected mannerisms could and did trickle down to the middling classes, someone of Gordon's social standing would have been recognizable as a harbinger of broader "decay."

Even though the presence of markers such as Gordon's "Mosaic beard" is desirable because these markers make it easier for the majority to be aware of who is anomalous and who is not, this does not prevent these same markers from being perceived as emblems of monstrosity. A *London Chronicle* reporter observed at Gordon's trial that "his Lordship made a very grotesque figure ... he was wrapped up in a great coat, his hair lank as usual, his beard about three inches long, extending under his chin and throat, from ear to ear, and differing from the colour of his hair." The reporter's choice of the word "grotesque" is particularly striking: one definition of "grotesque" is "shockingly incongruous or inappropriate" (*OED*). This "incongruity" not only invokes the

⁴⁹ Katz, 270, 313.

⁵⁰ Gentleman's Magazine 57 (1787): 1120–21.

⁵¹ London Chronicle 4855 (8-11 December 1787): 558.

⁵² Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 15 December 1787, in Walpole, *Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis, et al. (London: Cumberlege, for Yale University Press, 1937–83), 33:587–88.

⁵³ London Chronicle 4877 (26-29 January 1788): 103.

uncanny nature of the anomalous figure, but is also a synonym for "dissimilarity," the term that the gossip and the landlady applied to Caleb's contrasting physical appearances as he entered and left the inn in Southwark. Hence it is likely that Godwin is situating Caleb as such a figure not just because he disguises himself as a member of an ethnic group that is in and of itself characterized as anomalous, but more importantly because he is, like Gordon, an Englishman performing a Jewish identity. As a final note on Gordon, it is a fitting testament to the impossibility to categorize him that, after he died in Newgate Gaol, London's Jews refused to inter him, and his body was instead buried quietly in the St James cemetery at Hampstead Road.⁵⁴

Wandering Jew/Wandering Englishman: Caleb the Mythic

Simply in terms of tropes then, it is not difficult to develop a comparison of Caleb Williams to the stereotypical image of a vagabond Anglo-Jew. In addition to his discoloration and hawking profession, Caleb has been uprooted from his home and forced to wander without rest as punishment for offending a deity—in this case the sublime, seemingly omniscient, and godlike Falkland. Furthermore, Caleb's repeated constructions of England as a land contaminated by foreign influences of which he is no longer a part, when read alongside millenarians' and so-called "philo-Semites" conflations of London with Zion,55 strengthens the likening of Caleb to a Jew exiled from the Promised Land. Tempting as it is to conclude that Godwin's protagonist is being constructed exclusively within the framework of eighteenth-century English anti-Semitic stereotypes, it is perhaps more accurate—and certainly helps to mediate this critical leap—to suggest that Caleb has as much in common with the legendary Wandering Jew as he does with the historical Anglo-Jewry. I realize that highlighting such a distinction between "fact" and "fiction"—especially when the fact was commonly seen as a logical outgrowth of the fiction—can be problematic. Sullivan touches on this issue when he writes that the sensational halfpenny pamphlet the Most Wonderful and Surprising History, and Miraculous Adventures of Caleb Williams "is circulated and consumed not as a fiction, but as an anonymous statement of

⁵⁴ Katz, 310-11.

⁵⁵ Felsenstein, 222.

fact."⁵⁶ This is why I am less interested here in drawing distinctions than I am in simply providing as thoroughgoing a reading as possible. The purpose of visiting the narrative of the Wandering Jew is not to say that Caleb has more or less in common with him than he does with the Anglo-Jewry, but rather to illuminate how Caleb's Jewish disguise is mediated by "fact," "fiction," and the uneasy fusion of the two.

Briefly, the story of the Wandering Jew is a Christian legend in which a particular Jew struck, spat on, or in some other way insulted Christ while he was carrying the cross to the place of crucifixion. In response, Christ cursed the Jew to forever wander the earth, never to settle or die until the Second Coming. As he travels, the Jew preaches Christianity, cautions those he encounters against blasphemy, and refuses to accept financial relief even from the wealthy.⁵⁷ Interpretively, I agree with Felsenstein's summation that the myth of the Wandering Jew "both asserts the values and beliefs of the Christian host group and at the same time preserves and perpetuates the alien or exocultural otherness of the Jew. By constantly acknowledging the magnitude of his crime, the Jew affirms fundamental Christian verities, while also connoting the unhappy fate of those who fail or refuse to recognize what he now views as the true faith."58 The Jew's "zeal to proselytize" during his wanderings "is an essential canon of Christian rather than Jewish teaching," while his intolerance for blasphemy and refusal to accept alms "suggest qualities that were popularly thought to be distinctly Christian and as distinctly un-Jewish." Nevertheless, Felsenstein quickly points out, "in his purgatorial state of wandering his inescapable otherness as a Jew is perpetually reaffirmed."59 While it is not inaccurate to state that the legend of the Wandering Jew, which existed as a European folktale even before the thirteenth century, 60 was easily read in the period alongside the current and prior conditions of the historical Jews, period representations of the Wandering Jew differ from stereotypes of the Anglo-Jewry in two key ways, and it is

⁵⁶ Sullivan, 323.

⁵⁷ I am paraphrasing and redacting an account of the legend that Felsenstein quotes from an undated, though verified as eighteenth-century, copy of the prose chapbook *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, which exists in the Solomons Collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

⁵⁸ Felsenstein, 60-61.

⁵⁹ Felsenstein, 61.

⁶⁰ Felsenstein, 59.

this pair of dissimilarities—in addition to the Wandering Jew's obvious status as a fusion of Jew and Christian—that invites the current comparison to Caleb Williams. First, the Wandering Jew was regarded as more sympathetic and respectable than real Jews partly because "his long gown and flowing beard" depicted him as "one who retains characteristics that are (at least vestigially) quasi-biblical and prophetic" whereas "the real Jew in his physical and spiritual impoverishment manifests for the Christian world the present fallen position of those who were once God's chosen people."

This contrast was certainly noted and common in the 1790s; Godwin himself would later engage the figure of the Wandering Jew more directly in his second novel, St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century (1799), in which the eponymous protagonist notes the mysterious stranger's "wretched appearance," which "excite[s] [his] compassion," while at the same time recognizing that "he was no common beggar or rustic. Ruined and squalid as he appeared, I thought I could perceive traces in his countenance of what had formerly been daring enterprise, profound meditation, and generous humanity."62 During his time with this figure—who is never actually identified as a Jew and initially goes by the fake name Zampieri-St Leon is confounded by this "most ambiguous and impenetrable of mortals" (158). He does not know what to make of his guest's apparent poverty in light of his claims to possess the secret of "inexhaustible wealth," his unhappiness in spite of his "great talents and genius," and his lack of friends even though he claims to be 'perfectly innocent and of consequence so respectable" (171). St Leon also attempts, unsuccessfully, to uncover "Zampieri's" true nationality and history (170). As a type of the Wandering Jew, "Zampieri" is recognizable as an anomalous figure partly because his powers and longevity place him at the margin of human and not-human, partly because he is host to so many contradictions, and partly because, like the disguised Caleb, he lacks a clear pedigree. Indeed, a large part of the Wandering Jew's mythology, whether represented in popular legend or in Godwin's novels, is the tension between his lack of a home and his ability to simultaneously fit in and stand out wherever he goes. He has a "remarkable facility with languages," Felsenstein

⁶¹ Felsenstein, 79.

⁶² Godwin, St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century, ed. William Brewer (1799; Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006), 155. References are to this edition.

writes, and "is able to converse with ease in any tongue, learned or vernacular, a talent that may be understood as miraculous confirmation of the magnitude of his message." In contrast, the Jewish peddler was typically represented as having only minimal knowledge of spoken English, preferring instead his "gibberish" Yiddish. 63 Because the eighteenth-century English could and did dovetail the myth with the reality, because of Caleb's "legendary" status among the English polity and his "talent for mimicry," and because of Godwin's apparent interest in the mythological figure, I believe that to consider Caleb Williams within the milieu of Anglo-Jewry, one must also consider his kinship with the Wandering Jew.

Like the legendary vagabond, Caleb does become somewhat of a problematic folk hero in the text. After his escape from the robber's den, for example, he overhears bar patrons exchanging tall tales about one "Kit Williams." One man describes "Kit" as "a devilish cunning fellow" known for "breaking prison no less than five times," while a "buxom" barmaid relates how Kit "made his way through stone walls, as if they were so many cobwebs" (236, 237). This same barmaid seems to harbour what could be described as a schoolgirl crush on "Kit," as she dwells on his reported handsomeness and cleverness, and claims that she prays for his successful escape from his pursuers (237). Similarly, Caleb later encounters a hawker who is selling the aforementioned sensational pamphlet, which the latter describes as "the most wonderful history, and miraculous adventures of Caleb Williams ... how he first robbed, and then brought false accusations against his master; as also of his attempting divers times to break out of prison, till at last he effected his escape in the most wonderful and uncredible [sic] manner; as also of his travelling the kingdom in various disguises, and the robberies he committed with a most desperate and daring gang of thieves" (268). When Caleb reads the pamphlet, he discovers that he "was equalled to the most notorious housebreaker in the art of penetrating through walls and doors, and to the most accomplished swindler in plausibleness, duplicity, and disguise" (269). Similar then to how an English person can sympathize with the "Biblical-looking" Wandering Jew while simultaneously castigating real Jews, these narratives' tendency to present a heavily mythologized account of Caleb Williams and his exploits produces both a kind of

⁶³ Felsenstein, 79.

artificial sympathy and an "exo-cultural otherness." Essentially, these tales can cause a "starstruck" barmaid and her ilk to see the largely fictitious "Kit" Williams as a lovable scoundrel, while the circulation of these narratives places the actual Caleb Williams in an oppressed position. The "common" people may get a prurient thrill out of consuming these yellow accounts, yet the real Caleb is forced to see "a million of men, in arms against me" (270) and his "whole species as ready, in one mode or other, to be made the instruments of the tyrant" (277). Accepted as Caleb may be as a romantic figure, his narrative's reliance on criminal episodes and defiance of the squirearchy still render him inexorably other, the same way that the Wandering Jew's sufferings can be pitied while his grievous act of blasphemy and essential borderless nature label him as a deserving victim. The Caleb Williams of popular imagination is as mythic and culturally fluent as the Wandering Jew, yet the Caleb Williams who seeks shelter and human sympathy is suspected of being a thieving peddler. In this way, Caleb's anomalousness extends even beyond the boundaries of ethnicity and into the uneasy borderland of constructed "fact" and a folkloric "fiction" which is dynamically similar to that of a notably un-English mythological figure.



After his Jewish disguise is rendered useless, and after undergoing a few more misadventures in London, Caleb decides to hide in the Welsh countryside. While some of his motivations are simply expedient—he hopes to remain "hidden from the world" until Falkland's death—his interest in pursuing a life of virtuous domesticity is unmistakable. Not only has Caleb at this point developed a "kind of disgust" for the "metropolis," since he has "spent so many hours of artifice, sadness, and terror" in London, but also he believes that retirement to a rural setting will allow him the opportunity to "methodise and improve the experience which had been accumulated, cultivate the faculties I in any degree possessed, and employ the intervals of these occupations in simple industry and the intercourse of guileless, uneducated, kind-intentioned minds" (288). And indeed, Caleb the labourer initially thrives in Wales. In addition to assisting the schoolmaster "who did not aspire to the sublime heights of science [Caleb] professed to communicate" (290), he begins working on "an etymological analysis of the English language" (294). Between

these labours and the idyllic time that he spends with his new friend, the maternal Laura Denison, Caleb is "provided with sources both of industry and recreation, the more completely to divert [his] thoughts from the recollection of [his] past misfortunes" (295). His conduct and work ethic in this chapter naturally position him as a good member of the bourgeoisie, 64 and his etymological project can be easily read in this context as an attempt to reaffirm his English identity after spending so much time in disguise. Furthermore, his longing to be a part of Laura's family (292)—literally as well as figuratively, since at one point he imagines settling down with Laura's eldest daughter (293)—only heightens his potential to regain full membership in the respectable middle class.

Laura, a less-studied character, is the daughter of "a Neapolitan nobleman" driven out of his country "upon suspicion of religious and political heresy," who fled with Laura "like Prospero in the Tempest ... to one of the most obscure and uncultivated regions of the world" (290), which turns out to be Wales. Laura's status as an exile and her Italian pedigree are downplayed; her upbringing by a Welshman and his family after her own parents died when she was an infant essentially precludes any acquirement of the "Italian" vices that plague Falkland. Though she successfully educates herself in areas that are "proper" for a young woman she "taught herself to draw, to sing, and to understand the more polite European languages"—her lack of "society, in this remote situation, but that of peasants" means that "she had no idea of honour or superiority to be derived from her acquisitions" (291). Rather, she "pursued [her education] from a secret taste, and as the sources of personal enjoyment" (291), instead of as "medals to hang upon the genealogical tree," which is the case, according to Hester Piozzi, in Italy.65 This accounting of Laura's character, combined with the way in which Falkland "imbibed" his values from reading rather than from having been born with them, solidifies the notion that, for Godwin, faulty ideas of "honour

⁶⁴ For a good survey of eighteenth-century bourgeois values, see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); and Shawn Lisa Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century English Periodical* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁶⁵ Piozzi, 50.

193

or superiority" are acquired rather than innate. In addition to downplaying the racist overtones of Godwin's reliance on Italian stereotypes, this move more importantly adds further support to the argument that Godwin invokes ethnic stereotypes in order to criticize upper-class hegemony rather than to launch a wholesale attack on a particular culture.

Nevertheless, Laura's perception of Caleb is eventually tainted when she discovers Falkland's pamphlet. She treats seriously the squire's spurious claims largely because her deceased father's letters "spoke of Mr. Falkland in the highest terms of panegyric," and her dedication to her father's memory causes her to look upon Falkland, whom she has never actually met, "with the sentiments of unbounded esteem" (294). Even more interestingly, it seems that Laura's father did not personally know Falkland either, as the text relates that "he had been acquainted with the story of count Malvesi, and with a number of other transactions, redounding in the highest degree to the credit of the gallant Englishman" (294). Rather, therefore, than reading this episode as reflective of her father's shortcomings as a "Neapolitan," I suggest that Laura's uncritical reverence of Falkland can be taken as an example of the destructive influence of aristocratic reputation. Although she does not refer directly to the Wales interlude, Nicolle Jordan suggests that public "plebeian" opinion in the novel "stymies individual integrity and leads to the gross miscarriage of justice,"66 an assessment that certainly rings true in the case of Laura's and others' perceptions of Caleb. Most significant, however, are the implications latent in Laura's decision to trust a pamphlet and her third-hand knowledge of Falkland over Caleb's protestations of innocence. This moment not only clarifies the inherent power of upper-class reputation but also provides another example of how this power corrupts the middling classes. Falkland's malfeasance makes Caleb's deracination necessary, and it clouds the judgment of the public more broadly, causing Caleb's potential sympathizers to betray him on the basis of Falkland's reputation or—in the cases of Mr Spurrel and the robbers—because of their desire for a monetary reward. In the same way that Falkland has circumscribed Caleb's physical autonomy, his mere name forecloses Laura's ability to judge Caleb's character on her own. Caleb may suffer the most and undergo the greatest transformations

⁶⁶ Jordan, 244.

because he is the direct victim of Falkland's rage, but this episode in "wild and uncultivated" Wales confirms that toxic aristocratic influence penetrates into even the most isolated, pastoral regions of Britain.

Nevertheless, this does not efface the way in which Godwin relies on stereotypical representations of Italians, Jews, and the Irish to make his point. By labelling Falkland's malfeasance as "Italian" and by dressing Caleb specifically as an Irishman and a Jew,⁶⁷ Godwin engages discourses of otherness and cultural infiltration that were particularly germane to the period in which he lived. Godwin's representation of these ethnicities and their intersection with English national identities are reflective of English concerns about the influence of highly visible cultural others who were not directly implicated in the imperial project. Caleb Williams, then, is more than just a "spy novel" or a fictional representation of English Jacobin values; it is an intriguing look at how foreignness was troped in the turbulent 1790s, and how such stereotypical representations were deployed in service of political goals not only by conservative sects but also by selfidentified radicals.

83

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⁶⁷ While Caleb does attempt a few other disguises—at one point he appears as "the son of a reputable farmer of the lower class" (253), at another he appears "twisted and deformed" (267)—none of them is ethnically inflected, and those particular disguises are therefore beyond the scope of this study.