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The Mistrials of Reading: Reimagining Law in British Literature, 1787-1819

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The Mistrials of Reading: Reimagining Law in British Literature, 1787-1819

By

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B.A., Haverford College, 2010

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

The Mistrials of Reading: Reimagining Law in British Literature, 1787-1819

By Julian S. Whitney

This dissertation investigates how Romantic-era literature can legislate a code of ethics in a way the law is not always able to do, thus making the literary text an important counter-weight to abusive legal regimes in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Britain. In my project, I argue that trial scenes in Enlightenment and Romantic-era works become an important focal point for a more extended analysis of the legal, political, racial, class, and gender norms of the time. I provide readings of William Blake, William Godwin, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy Shelley, as they challenge the systems of marriage law, masculinist authority, the death penalty, and the transatlantic slave trade.

By showing how these authors problematize notions of justice and judgment, I expose the extent to which law in their writings remains at odds with ethical principles. As a result, I contend that Romantic literature not only reveals the fallacies within the legal system, but also calls for a reimagining of justice that challenges us to re-evaluate the role of ethics in law. My own intervention in Romantic literary studies consists of critiquing literature as a genre with a disciplinary legislative function, one that ultimately helped inform the public view about the legal debates taking place in England at the time. I consider events such as the 1794 Treason Trials and 1795 Gagging Acts in my critique, looking for ways to show how these authors wrote literature to address the crises of literary censorship, government surveillance, slave trafficking and state-sanctioned violence. In a sense, what we discover is that these writers were practitioners of political persuasion who contributed to a greater discourse of legal critique motivated by their collective opposition to English tyranny and the corrupt legal foundations that sustained it. In the end, my project comes full circle – it shows how literature exposes the ethical limitations of law while prescribing how one can re-imagine the parameters of justice and thus better conceptualize a vision of equal rights.

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This dissertation represents the capstone achievement of my graduate education at Emory University and it could not have been completed without guidance, assistance, and patience from so many people. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Deborah Elise White, who has played a critical role in my PhD experience since my first year. She is the core reason that I continued to stay in the program despite my feelings of racial and scholarly isolation. It was not easy being an African-American male writing about British Romanticism in an English Department without strong representation in either category. I remember expressing these concerns to her and I was always impressed by how much she cared about my wellbeing and sense of belonging. No matter how difficult things got, she never wavered and routinely helped me see the importance of what I was doing. I am also indebted to her for making me a much stronger writer. Her critical feedback became quite invaluable to my writing process – she was precise, detailed, constructive and candid. She pushed me far beyond what I thought I was capable of and gave me the opportunity to see just how much I grew over the years. I am thankful for all that she has helped me achieve.

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I had with him. I also appreciated the conversations we would have about graduate school life in general and learned a great deal about how to keep sane amidst all the chaos. There is nothing more important than self-care in graduate school – a lesson he taught me based on experiences he would share from his time as a graduate student. I want to thank Munia Bhaumik as well for the seminars she taught on the intersections of democracy, literature, and law – these were the courses that shaped me into the critic of law I am today. There is indeed great value and purpose in reading literature as a critique of our politics and of our legal systems. What she taught me is that self-critique matters as a principle of living, and that we must exercise our civic responsibility as critical thinkers and writers to confront a world of injustice. Without the courage to challenge our own thinking, we cannot hope to move forward as a people – an important lesson that rings true in our current political era.

Aside from my dissertation committee, there are two Emory faculty members that deserve special mention – David Fisher and Joonna Trapp. I am deeply grateful to both of them not only because of what they taught me about pedagogy, but also because of all the support they gave me during the writing process. They were always available to offer life, academic, and professional guidance, and I cannot count how many times I would stop by their offices to talk about the challenges of the PhD program. And even when I came very close to leaving the program, they were there to reel me back in and remind me that I was here for a reason. They are two of the most caring faculty members I have ever known. In the end, their support enabled me to access the courage I needed to complete this journey.

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difficult trying to establish a network of close friends. The three of them not only took me in as one of their friends, but we soon developed a strong bond that would last for the rest of the program. I look forward to keeping in touch with them in the future, and will never forget their incredible kindness to me over the years. And, of course, I would be remiss to not mention Ben and Caroline's special feline friend – Mama the Cat – who was always a cute and adorable cat to spend time with. I would also like to thank Lauren V. Highsmith, Justin Shaw, Palak Taneja, and Aruni Mahapatra for their friendship during this process. I learned from them why racial solidarity and camaraderie is important to have in spaces of white academic privilege, particularly when there are specific forces within academia that seek to render non-white voices silent. Here is the truth – our voices *must* be heard for the simple fact that our experiences *do* matter. I am grateful to them for teaching me a crucial lesson – that my story is meaningful, and that my identity should never be made invisible.

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this program has been the highlight of my final year at Emory, and I am so glad that I was chosen for this fellowship. Because I never had a major faculty mentor of color to support my own development, I applied for SIRE with one goal in mind– to be a strong mentor of color to other students of color who wanted to pursue research. To this end, I want to also thank the students of my SIRE course who are some of the most inquisitive people I have had the chance to teach – Betsy Benitez, Craig Supcoff, Drew Bryant, Evan Scope Crafts, Jessica Tall, Kyla Smith, Sarah Lee, Marissa Zampino, Sam Rao, Smrithi Ramachandran, and Laramie Smith. Special thanks as well to my two peer mentors who helped make this course possible – Lokita Rajan and Faraz Sewani. Thank you all for making my last class as a graduate instructor an exciting and memorable experience. I know that all of you will go on to do incredible things, and I wish you the very best in your future professional and academic endeavors. The world certainly needs more like you who do intend to change it.

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about the work I was doing, they reminded me that my perspective matters – that working towards a PhD is worthwhile. Some of my fondest memories remain visiting them both in New York and Boston and being there to support them during their own trials of life. The work of the PhD program can sometimes make it seem as if your world is spiraling out of control, but what they taught me is that we are all going through the trials of life together, and that our friendships are what truly sustain us in the end. And there is no greater friend I can think of than Lauren. I want to thank her for being available to talk whenever things got difficult. She would always remind me that I am lovable and capable, and that I could achieve anything I set my sights on. I am indebted to her kindness, generosity, and for the faith she always expressed in my ability to succeed, no matter what the struggle might be.

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Introduction

Legislating Romantic Literature

The Genesis of My Argument

The origin of this project stems from a core question – how can romantic-era texts inform the way we critique legal debates and evaluate ethical issues? Is there a way to use Romanticism to negotiate the terms of how we define justice? If so, can it be said that the literary serves a *legislative* role that can prescribe ethical norms? The goal of my analysis is to argue that romantic literature can be read as an important counterweight to the abusive legal systems of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century England. I establish that Enlightenment and Romantic-era writers were important participants in legal debates about political tyranny, literary censorship, government surveillance, capital punishment, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. By doing so, I show how Romantic literature played an extensive role in shaping how the public understood the principles of liberty and freedom.

In his 1821 essay, *The Defence of Poetry*, Percy Bysshe Shelley describes poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[1] The suggestion that the poet serves a potentially judgment-oriented legislative role by defining the principles of justice is precisely the approach that my project takes methodologically. I situate the literary and imaginative works of romantic writers alongside their political essays to show how they intervened in a number of intellectual debates taking place in England at the time. Writers like William Blake, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Percy Shelley, and Ottobah Cugoano spoke out against social injustice and became important voices for the struggle against patriarchy, slavery, and the death penalty. They were not simply observers to

[1] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "The Defence of Poetry." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat. W.W. Norton & Company, 2002. 535.

what was happening in Britain at the turn of the century, but practitioners of political persuasion. They worked to both challenge the English status quo and call for a broader re-imagining of human rights.

Now, this is not to suggest that these authors *agreed* on how to design a capacious system of ethics to challenge the law. While there are certainly overall similarities that do unite them, there are also points of disagreement and even contention between them. For instance, Godwin and Wollstonecraft do seem quite similar when they use Enlightenment concepts to theorize human equality, but the two diverge over how they approach issues of gender equality. Godwin is concerned with critiquing male class relations in *Things As They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) whereas Wollstonecraft uses *Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) to evaluate women's rights in a way Godwin himself partly overlooks, reminding us that white male authors often conceive of rights from a white male bias. The same is true with Blake and Shelley – both authors problematize the relationship between law, punishment, and ethics in *Vala; or The Four Zoas* (1797) and *The Cenci* (1819), respectively, but tend to overlook the many racial paradigms at play in these debates. Cugoano had already answered this problem by challenging white authorial voices in *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787). Returning to his work suggests that we re-examine the Black Atlantic as a core nexus point for ideas of law, freedom and justice. In other words, he makes clear that justice is the courage to challenge European colonialism, and, for contemporary scholars, to revise the literary canon so that it includes the stories of various subjugated identities.

These authors work together because of the ways in which they prompt us to open ourselves to new approaches to law and ethics. They all agree that freedom is a constantly evolving project, and each one forces readers intellectually to re-evaluate the parameters by which we define 'equality.' Blake mythologizes the evil of political tyranny using *The Four Zoas* and *The Book of Urizen* while Godwin and Wollstonecraft confront political tyranny and male bias in courtroom drama. They invoke the courtroom confession as a rhetorical device and show how rhetoric can influence perceptions of innocence and guilt, something Percy Shelley develops very differently when he guides the conversation into the realm of the death penalty. Shelley challenges Wollstonecraft and Godwin by using Beatrice Cenci's speechlessness to make the point that rhetoric itself is fraught and not always available to the victim – particularly when it comes to legally sanctioned murder. Cugoano continues the thread by introducing a critique of racial oppression and colonialism, arguing that tyranny, death, the unsayable, law and bondage are constitutive of the transatlantic slave trade and its effect on the black body. In other words, my project begins with the abstract theorization of violence and law and ends with a focus on the lasting effect legally sanctioned violence has on persons cast, as it were, outside the law.[2]

My Constellation of Enlightenment and Romantic-Era Texts

My selection of these texts for this project has to do with a need to show how trial scenarios and legal debates in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries become a focal point for a critique of legal, political, racial, class and gender norms of the day. I am interested in exposing how these particular works facilitate a broader discussion about the law as a coercive and corrupt force rooted in murder and violence. These texts interrogate

[2] Having Cugoano appear last may sound counterintuitive since his work is, chronologically speaking, the earliest of the authors, but putting him last was done to show that one must destabilize the European literary canon to better understand it. He challenges Romanticists to revise their notions of British national identity.

the following questions: 1) How do you deal with abusive legal systems that actively seek to repress the imagination, dissent, and freedom; 2) What function can the literary play in helping us to reimagine ethics and law as the ultimate safeguard of human rights; 3) What can contemporary Romanticists take from their layered critique of the English status quo?

To answer these questions, I begin with William Blake by focusing on the ways in which his prophetic books can be read as an allegory of law. Unlike most critics who often read Blake solely for his religious and political symbolism, I focus on the problem of law through different readings of his Urizen figure. Blake conceives of Urizen as a representation of reason, authoritarian rule and coercion. To use Stuart Curran's language from *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, "Urizen [exists] as the mental force of law and order."[3] In my project, I choose to examine Blake's critique of autocratic justice from within *The First Book of Urizen* and *The Four Zoas* to show the full scope of his intellectual growth on political, legal, and ethical norms. *The Four Zoas* is especially difficult to consider in this context due to its incomplete state. Blake never finished it and the text's conspicuous lack of engravings makes it difficult to assess. For me, this is precisely why I have selected it – its fractured nature speaks best to the form of political mythology Blake is constructing. Much like the text, Urizen's will to power is fraught with divisions, contradictions and a flawed concept of total control that eventually collapses within itself.

My reason for selecting the Urizen myth to open the project concerns its quasi-legal overtones. Not only is Urizen figured as the founder of Law, but the image of Los binding Urizen is also one of imprisonment, containment, and restriction. There is a sense that Urizen is being put "on trial" for being a tyrant at the very same time the binding also

[3] Curran, Stuart. *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on The Four Zoas, Milton, Jerusalem*. Edited by Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. University of Wisconsin Press, 1973. 211.

represents a trial of identity and compassion for Los. The two are locked in bitter conflict with each other as they both struggle for agency – a battle that, in the words of Jeanne Moskal, suggests "Blake's concern that forgiveness free itself from the vocabulary of law."[4] That is to say, Blake's preoccupation with Urizen's state of captivity is based on a desire to show us how Los attempts to overcome the regime of law and order. What one learns is that overpowering Urizen is not enough – Los must learn to forgive the tyrant in order to completely renew Urizen's relationship with the multiverse.

Choosing *Caleb Williams* and *Maria* as a continuation to Blake has to do with my intention to bring issues of law and tyranny into sharper focus and on more practical footing. These works analyze tyranny through the type of patriarchy existing within the power relations of the courtroom. Godwin and Wollstonecraft grapple with the real-world implications of how a patriarchal system problematizes class relations and gender roles – meaning that each text is in debate with the other. Not only do they host trials that end in radically different ways for their respective protagonists, but also the authors themselves disagree on the potential for overcoming the privileges of male power. Godwin believes the courtroom confession can assist in undoing many aspects of male bias, but Wollstonecraft believes that, in the case of a woman, there is not much she can do if an all-male judiciary has the power to render her own voice irrelevant.

Most important of all, comparing *Caleb Williams* and *Maria* allows me to connect them to their political counterparts *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). With these writings, I pair *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* to reveal the challenge Godwin encounters as he attempts to reconcile his moral outlook from the former with the corrupt

[4] Moskal, Jeanne. *Blake, Ethics, and Forgiveness*. University of Alabama Press, 1994. 34.

circumstances of the latter. Likewise, I juxtapose *A Vindication* with *Maria* to reveal how Wollstonecraft presents a critique of eighteenth-century marriage law that raises issues of female autonomy, financial independence and how they are implicated within sexist male property laws. Together, these two texts teach us how patriarchy exploited gender roles in the eighteenth-century and used the legal system to make male power a permanent fixture in the marriage contract. Thus, *Caleb Williams* and *Maria* complement each other for two major reasons – they collectively engage the politics of rhetoric and show how courtroom protocol is often at odds with the law's purported pursuit of truth and individual "justice."

The Cenci was chosen to further complicate questions of patriarchy and justice by introducing the issue of capital punishment – a coercive tool of the papal court that further places into question whether rhetoric is always available. I sought to use a text that featured a re-incarnation of the abusive male tyrant (Count Cenci) and wanted to explain what happens when modes of communication break down. While certainly a Godwinite, Shelley clearly takes issue with Godwin's belief in rhetoric. That is, I chose *The Cenci* precisely because Shelley uses Beatrice as a foil to Godwin's thesis that rhetoric can be a freeing agent. *The Cenci* argues that with the failure of rhetoric comes pervasive violence – the idea that law itself is rooted in senseless murder. The Pope is prepared to execute Cenci without trial, and when Beatrice anticipates him, puts her to death instead.

I selected *The Cenci* for another reason as well – to place it into conversation with Shelley's prose essay "On the Punishment of Death: A Fragment." Shelley's prose essay on the death penalty adds to legal debates within *The Cenci* by exposing us to the intellectual and philosophical aspects of Shelley's view of death. That is, Shelley argues

that the state of death is wholly unknowable and thus resistant to binary conceptions of good and evil. I believe his viewpoint is critical to understanding how death and punishment co-operate in *The Cenci*. If people cannot comprehend death in any conceivable way, then death cannot be legislated as punishment and thus the death penalty is rendered completely obsolete.

Shelley's death penalty essay is also helpful in this regard because of its statement about public execution. In Shelley's analysis capital punishment reveals law as a form of violence and shows humanity's willingness to endorse that violence. Shelley condemns "the spectators who feel no abhorrence at a public execution but rather a self-applauding superiority, and a feeling of gratified indignation, as excited to the most inauspicious emotions."[5] The government's abuse of legalized violence is very real, but it only exists because of the "inhuman and unsocial impulses of *men*." In the context of *The Cenci*, Shelley's philosophy of death can be used to fully grasp how punishment exploits the very violence it claims to discipline.

Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* was selected to conclude my project because it serves a tripartite purpose – to critique slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, revise how the European literary canon is constructed, and bring my exegesis of literature and law full circle. Having Cugoano appear last may sound counterintuitive given that his work is the earliest written (as my previous footnote points out), but what makes him well suited as the final chapter is the way his text demands that we revise our understanding of Britain's national identity as it has been traditionally construed in the study of romantic

[5] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "On the Punishment of Death: A Fragment." *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Edited by E.B. Murray. Oxford University Press, 1993.

authors. Blake, Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Shelley all wrote about the slave trade (and condemned it), but from the viewpoints of white authorship. Their voices are a product of distance rather than proximity – which appears to prevent them from exposing the true horror of slavery. I wanted someone who could close that distance – critique colonial hegemony and call out Britain's endorsement of violence and bondage. As a former slave from Grenada who was educated in Britain, Cugoano is perfectly suited to fulfill this role.

Cugoano fits into the scope of my project for a few other reasons as well – he uses a pre-Romantic apocalyptic tradition similar to that William Blake and speaks out against the death penalty as does Percy Shelley. His narrative addresses the issue of free labor and fair wages (like Godwin in *Political Justice*) and explains how literacy and self-education cultivate the ability to reason (like Wollstonecraft in *Maria*). But what sets him *apart* from the others is his willingness to question England's moral leadership more radically, and show how slavery actively undermines the nation's claim to superiority. Now, it is important to point out that Cugoano does, in some limited respects, support England's colonialist agenda, but believes that it can exist without slavery and without exploitation altogether. This is why I find his text fascinating – because it tries to argue that slavery can be decoupled from the proto-imperial project. The question I ask is if this version of Afro-British relations can even exist, and how his reading of biblical law and Christianity affects how he sees Africans becoming part of Britain's national identity.

Cugoano's text also connects us directly to the 1772 *Somerset v. Stewart* British court case, which famously legislated slavery for all to see. In this court case, Charles Stewart, a customs officer, purchases James Somerset, an African slave, in Boston, Massachusetts. Stewart returns to England in 1769 with Somerset, but in 1771, Somerset

escapes. He is eventually recaptured by Stewart, and put on a ship headed to Jamaica for plantation labor. In an attempt to save him, Somerset's godparents manage to acquire a writ of habeas corpus, thus requiring a trial to determine if he was unlawfully imprisoned. The case is significant for my chapter not only because it resulted eventually in Cugoano's own freedom, but also since it challenges current Romanticists to reflect on legal debates about personhood that informed conversations of the Black Atlantic. Lord Mansfield's verdict did not abolish slavery or the slave trade but merely ruled it was not supported by common law in England and Wales. Contrary to what many at the time hoped it did not make slavery illegal or lead to the end of the slave trade. Writing in 1787 Cugoano argues for complete abolishment of slavery at a time when abolition of the slave trade was still the main goal of many abolitionists. Indeed he is the first former slave to make this argument publicly, and his challenge to the limited terms of the debate over slavery make him an essential figure for any larger critique of law and legal debates in this period.

In the end, these texts were chosen because they correspond to one another. I want to synthesize how these writers discussed law and justice to learn how Enlightenment and Romantic-era discourses wrestled with questions of rights and ethics. Each text asks us to consider rights in a different context – political, gender, racial, class, and legal – and view ethics through the prism of narrative storytelling. Literature places us into contact with an extensive array of human perspectives that are needed to conduct a meaningful critique of the laws that impact them. The point here is *not* to reductively suggest that law is innately wrong or that literature presents a complete diagnosis of certain legal issues. Rather, I use literature to reveal other ways of understanding law and justice that might not be apparent

at first glance. My goal is to show how we can learn something valuable from the ways in which these literary texts facilitated debates about the law that could not occur elsewhere.

A Synthesis of Secondary Scholarship

In order to make my argument, I use a combination of secondary scholarship from different intellectual discourses such as romantic studies, law and literature, and British legal history. I focus on synthesizing and comparing different critics to establish what has been argued thus far about Romanticism and law – this initial step is what allows me to ask my own questions about ethics and law in Romanticism that have yet to be answered. I would argue that my own intervention does not come in the form of debating claims from critics in the field, but from exposing how their arguments bring up new issues regarding the use and abuse of law that deserve more attention.

At its core, my project is about reading literature as a form of rhetoric that can tell us more about how to effectively wrestle with important legal issues. Ian Ward views law and literature in two ways: 1) as an exercise in which we read about law *in* literature, and, 2) as an exercise in which we read law *as* literature.[6] I use scholarship that looks at law in the first category – that is, I am concerned with how law is represented and debated in the literary mode. But I also argue that literature can have a disciplinary legislative function as well – it can prescribe ethical norms and systems in ways that law may not always be able to do. Literature gives us a method to critique the law and further challenges us to evaluate the literary in connection *to* the law.

There are a number of scholars who contribute to the way I analyze legal issues in Romantic literature. For instance, Jeanne Moskal's work on ethics in Romanticism allows

[6] Ian Ward outlines a definition of law and literature in the opening to his monograph, *Law and Literature: Possibilities and Perspectives*. He suggests that literature can be used to broach questions about the law that may not come up in actual trials themselves.

me to connect issues of justice and law to expressions of forgiveness in Blake. She, along with Stuart Curran and Leopold Damrosch, argue that forgiveness is central to examining the Urizen myth.[7] To them, law is not operating in the conventional sense of a trial, but as an ideology of reason and order. I acknowledge this point in my chapter on Blake, but try to push the criticism further by articulating that the Urizen myth also represents a rise and fall of political tyranny. Urizen himself is a mythic representation of law as dispassionate, mechanistic and indifferent. His authoritarian rise to power reflects a series of ethical issues *and* shows that law is in need of constant revision.

In order for me to view Godwin and Wollstonecraft within the legal context of the period, I routinely refer to the socio-historical work done by Laurence Stone, Christopher Roulston, Rebecca Probert, and E.P. Thompson.[8] The first three critics inform my writing by offering a comprehensive account of eighteenth-century marriage and property law for my analysis of marriage law and financial independence in *Maria*. They examine how the definition of marriage changed over the eighteenth-century and explain the role of British courts as enforcers of legal patriarchy. E.P. Thompson's seminal work, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) not only provides a much-needed social history for linking Godwin and Wollstonecraft to the 1794 Treason Trials and 1795 "Gagging" Acts, but the study also allows for a critique of censorship and government excess with *Caleb Williams* and *Maria*. Mark Canuel occupies an especially important role within my reading of the death penalty, rhetoric, and silence. Canuel's work on the death penalty in Romanticism adds to my reading of Shelley and Cugoano by showing how late-eighteenth and early-

[7] In *Blake, Ethics, and Forgiveness*, Moskal writes that the ethics of reason and the imagination exist within Los's capacity to forgive Urizen's takeover of the multiverse. She asserts that forgiveness is the true arbiter of justice in Blake's mythos – a point shared by Curran and Damrosch in their assessments of the literature.
[8] Laurence Stone, Chris Roulston and Rebecca Probert conduct socio-historical studies of marriage law in the eighteenth-century. E.P. Thompson focuses on the formation of the working class between 1780-1832.

nineteenth century authors used literature to stage critiques of penal reform. In *The Shadow of Death* Canuel argues that the abolition of slavery and the slave trade were linked to the abolition of the death penalty. He affirms how slavery abolition helped define the contours of penal reform, a point I reinforce in my project. Where I partly challenge Canuel is in his staging of the religious debate over Divine Providence and law. Whereas he at times suggests that religion is not at all distinguishable from conventional law because of its support of slavery, I claim that Cugoano's account of Christianity problematizes this association. That is to say, Cugoano shows through his critique of the colonial regime how the version of Christianity England supports is, in fact, a misreading of the Hebrew Bible that mis-represents Christian ideals.

Eve Tavor Bannet, Elizabeth Bohls, and Debbie Lee help to complete my analysis of Cugoano by focusing on questions of national identity and the Black Atlantic. In Bohls and Bannet, we see an attempt to rewrite the European discourse as inclusive of stories of the disenfranchised and oppressed. They insist that representations of captive spaces must be included for us to understand how the British literary canon has for so long capitalized off of narratives of whiteness. Romanticism cannot be studied without first wrestling with the moral questions of freedom and liberty that also defined the Black Atlantic. With Lee, I reaffirm her argument about whiteness as a characteristic of proximity and distance, and suggest that Cugoano's goal is to collapse the boundaries between African and British. In doing so, I go beyond Lee's initial argument about Romanticism and distance by viewing Cugoano's text as concerned with the role Africans must play to ensure England's future.

The Contours of My Chapter Breakdown

In chapter one of my project, "Mythologies of Tyranny in the *Book of Urizen* and *The Four Zoas*," I examine how William Blake frames the tension between rationalism and legal order by using multiple accounts of Urizen and Los (icons of reason and the imagination) to theorize political tyranny. As a figure of dispassion and the origin of the "one King, one God, one Law" concept in Blake's mythological multiverse, Urizen shows through his existence what Blake finds problematic about a worldview that focuses on a fixed identity over a multi-dimensional one. I define the conflict between Urizen and Los as one of authoritarianism vs. freedom and discuss how the central image of Urizen's "binding" represents a need to free the world from autocratic law. I read the binding as an allegorical prison, and argue that Los runs the risk of recycling Urizenic legal ideology as he works to contain Urizen's influence. In other words, the very power that is designed to suppress tyranny is being used to reinstate it. Thus, the tension between the quasi-legal demand that Urizen be contained and the ethical demand of Los to forgive him allows for a critique of law that shows how these characters problematize the way justice is realized.

The first chapter begins with *The Book of Urizen* to set up the initial parameters of justice and law and at play in Blake's oeuvre. I then use the poem to explain how Blake is constructing the Urizen myth before the tyrant's fall – that being the point at which chaos erupts and order collapses in *The Four Zoas*. Urizen's coup against the other Zoas and his attempt to control the multiverse represents a major power shift with ethical ramifications for him and Los. Blake challenges us to consider what happens when the imagination and reason are co-opted by autocratic influence. For him, the conflict between Los and Urizen

represents something greater in scope – the point at which we must reimagine a system of ethics capable of putting an end to the autocracy that threatens to enslave the imagination.

Chapter two takes the debate about tyranny into a different direction by looking at the issue through the more historically referential writings of Godwin and Wollstonecraft. Titled "Confessional Narratives in *Caleb Williams* and *Maria*," this chapter explores how tyranny manifests itself as hierarchal patriarchy and argues that male power relations corrupt the courtroom and render conventional spaces of justice unreliable. Both authors use scenes of confession (in which the protagonist takes back control of his or her narrative) to challenge courtroom protocol and reveal truths obscured by the law. Godwin and Wollstonecraft expose the limitations faced by lower-class men, on the one hand, and all women, on the other hand, as they try to navigate legal settings dictated by aristocratic and property-owning men. But while Godwin nonetheless imagines a servant (in the form of Caleb) who can ultimately use confessional narratives to his advantage, Wollstonecraft addresses the double standard that places women who narrate their stories at a much more severe disadvantage – particularly when their words are turned against them or dismissed.

The debate over the role of confession in the courtroom is what then facilitates the next part of my chapter – a reading of the class and gender norms at play in each text, and an analysis of each text as a response to the 1794 Treason Trials and 1795 Gagging Acts.[9] I contend that Caleb's relationship with Ferdinando Falkland is reflective of the culture of suspicion and social control that defined the late-eighteenth century. He is not only victim to Falkland's secret police, but also to a much greater system of government surveillance,

[9] Under the William Pitt regime, the British Government sponsored a series of acts and trials designed to suppress public dissent against its policies. In the 1794 Treason Trials, the British Government tried British radicals for crimes of sedition and political insurrection (Thomas Hardy and John Thelwall were among the ones tried and acquitted thanks to Godwin's role). The 1795 Gagging Acts were implemented to restrict the size of public meetings to no more than fifty people and limit the effective power of public protests.

one that monitors his every move. This reflects the way the British Government of Godwin's time used its power to spy on its citizens. The same pervasive culture of silence and censorship applies to Maria in the form of her incarceration. Her voice is silenced and she is incapable of outrunning the pervasive male power of Venables – a point that allows me to show how she remains the property of her husband despite her struggle for recognition.

Chapter three turns to Percy Shelley and views him as a critic of law, violence and capital punishment in his revenge drama, *The Cenci*. While other scholars have examined *The Cenci* as a critique of revenge and violence, my interpretation engages the unsayable, the unsaid, and the unspeakable during a trial confronting incest, rape, and patricide. I use what other scholars have observed about violence in the drama to give a new critique that focuses more on the death penalty as an end to rhetoric. Titled "Crime and Punishment in Percy Shelley's *The Cenci*," I explore how the play's cycle of violence reveals an abuse of the death penalty that conveys the absence of justice either inside *or* outside the law. I suggest that the cycle of violence is not only the result of male hierarchy or gender bias, but also a product of the failure to view the law as anything else *other than* punishment. I then conclude with an analysis of how the papal court's decision to uphold the death penalty shows that law, in the realm of the play, remains rooted in the status quo of murder. Using Shelley's prose essay on the death penalty further shows how his critique of law with vengeance and murder in sixteenth-century Italy speaks clearly to the matter of abusive and corrupt legal regimes in the British legal system of his own day.

The last chapter of my project, "Cugoano's Critique of Law and Slavery in *Thoughts and Sentiments*," confronts the problem of slavery, morality, and law in Cugoano's anti-slavery narrative, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked*

Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, and the landmark British court case, *Somerset v. Stewart.* I juxtapose Cugoano's work with Lord Mansfield's opinion to show how Cugoano exposes the religious, political, and moral hypocrisy of the European colonial project, the slave economy and the abuse of religious principles to enforce it. I do not so much view Cugoano as a writer trying to undercut European hegemony (he actually seems to support aspects of England's colonial mission), but argue that he wants to reimagine colonialism without the slave trade or exploitation of African nations. In this way, the chapter wrestles with Cugoano's desire to reinvent England's national identity and asks whether his idealized picture of Afro-British relations can exist.

But the chapter does not end there. By tackling the issue of national identity, I end with a statement about how Cugoano's text challenges *us* as critics of literature to include the Black Atlantic into our conversations about Romanticism. By doing so, we can continue the needed work of revising and reshaping Europe's predominately white canon, and reimagine a more inclusive form of national identity – one that acknowledges the role Black authors had in constructing the British literary canon. In this respect, Cugoano concludes my project by asking readers to question the current construction of white authorial voices and reframe our understanding of the literary in a way that recasts authors of the Black Atlantic as the true "unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Chapter I

Mythologies of Tyranny in *The Book of Urizen* and *The Four Zoas*

Designing the Myth

William Blake's prophetic poems are characterized by the creation of a core myth that reflects the poet's concerns about reason and its tyrannical agency. As pointed out by Leopold Damrosch in *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth*, Blake viewed reason as the part of the "self" that enslaves, not that which orders the rest."[10] Unlike much Enlightenment thought which asserted that reason should take precedence over all other human faculties, Blake claimed that reason left unchecked would do more harm than good. As a proponent of balance Blake understands reason's utility, but fears what would occur were it to become an excessive faculty enslaving and controlling others. His poetic texts, particularly those that focus on the figure of Urizen, an icon of reason and dispassion, use this scenario to explore the danger of instrumentalized life. For Blake, Urizen is what you get when reason goes astray and, in turn, creates a fallacious way of perceiving the world.

Urizen is a recurring character in Blake's oeuvre, and one that sheds light on what the poet finds problematic about a tyrannical power rooted in self-projection and division. In Blake's shorter works (known as minor prophecies), Urizen is introduced as the demigod, a fallen ruler and lawgiver in eternal warfare with the other gods and most notably, Los, the representation of imagination incarnate. Northrop Frye insists that Urizen's goal is to reduce the world to nothingness and "achieve in human society the kind of social organization consistent with his view of it."[11] Especially with *The Book of Urizen* (1794) and *The Four Zoas* (1797) (the first being illuminated with engravings and

[10] Damrosch, Leopold. *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth*. Princeton University Press, 1980. 123.
[11] Frye, Northrop. *Fearful Symmetry: Study of William Blake*. Princeton University Press, 1969. 221.

second incomplete), Urizen's ascent to supremacy is made possible by the production of an arbitrary system of control meant to prevent change. Power is Urizen's aim, and it cannot be obtained unless he governs with an iron fist, ignorant to the needs of the whole.

Using *The Book of Urizen* and *The Four Zoas* as poetic reflections of Blake's own preoccupation with the connection between reason and tyranny, this chapter illustrates the process by which Blake takes on Urizen's governing philosophy. Blake's *Book of Urizen,* to begin with, establishes how Urizen emblematizes the religious principle of God's biblical directives from the Old Testament to justify the rationale behind the divine right of kings. *The Four Zoas*, in effect, extends this conversation by complicating ideas of divine power through the poem's multiple re-visions of Urizen's binding scene. By considering the two poems together, Blake raises the question of how one achieves justice (and in what form), if the world is defined by tyranny. James Swearingen alludes to the solution when he says that reconciliation derives from "the capacity to apply mercy born from the discretion and compassion of the heart."[12] By linking this idea of mercy as a form of justice to the idea of Los binding Urizen, I argue that Blake's prescription for justice necessitates that Los first forgive Urizen out of love before attempting to bind the Zoa and rehabilitate life.

On the most basic level, *The First Book of Urizen* (hereafter referred to as *Urizen*) is Blake's prophetic emulation of the Bible. Along with *The Book of Los* and *The Book of Ahania* (both published in 1795), *Urizen* is a myth of Creation and the Fall that derives its inspiration from the Books of Genesis and Exodus. The text starts with Urizen who has separated from the Eternals (overseers/regulators of a constantly shifting multiverse) and gone off to establish a world dominated by reason. To combat Urizen's expanding power,

[12] Swearingen, James E. "William Blake's Figural Politics." *ELH*, Vol. 59, Issue 1, 1992, p. 127.

the Eternals assign Los, "the Eternal Prophet," the task of binding Urizen's body to prevent the reduction of the world. *Urizen's* conflict, therefore, involves a confrontation between Urizen and Los, reason and imagination, and the problem of how each one perceives the other. Los looks at Urizen as a king who must be overthrown, but in the process, forgets that the rogue Eternal needs to be reintegrated into the fabric of Eternity. Urizen, sensing Los's fear of inferiority, uses it to his advantage by manipulating the prophet's personal flaw to win this binding struggle.

If the issue here is that Los must restrain Urizen in a world generated by the tyrant himself, then Blake's interest relates to the problem of retaining imaginative autonomy in a space constituted by reason. Instead of conforming to Urizen's authority of punishment, Los must overcome his base instincts and, as Jeanne Moskal illustrates, forgive as "an act of love for the other and moreover an act of creativity."[13] Only by seeing Urizen through a lens of brotherhood can Los avoid the possibility of becoming like the tyrant, resisting his premise that the only way to rule is with an iron fist. Doing so would confirm Los's status as the fallen world's savior and thus allow him to undo Urizenic forms of domination. By fulfilling his objective and bringing about restorative justice, Los's action reflects Blake's core thesis that reason must operate through self-limitation to maintain necessary balance.

The Advent of a Tyrant

Urizen begins with a frontispiece of the patriarch himself as he blindly copies text from the book upon which he is seated. Using his foot to 'read' the characters on the page as if transcribing actual words, Urizen rewrites the text onto two stone tablets (or books?) sitting right next to him. Behind him stand two tombstones reminiscent of the tablets used

[13] Moskal, 8.

by Moses to receive the Ten Commandments from God while on Mount Sinai. By linking Urizen with Moses, the biblical progenitor of law and order, Blake's frontispiece conveys how Urizen derives his ruling privilege from what he considers to be a divine directive. If one couples this idea with the ideas of reason and patriarchy he represents, then it is not hard to see the relationship between cold rationality and the desire to achieve control over others. Mark Barr suggests that the frontispiece acts as "an image of reading, writing, and judgment that sets the tone for the volume."[14] That is, the engraving offers an introduction to the issue of power that undergirds the capacity to read, write, and judge. Urizen's form of tyranny is dangerous because it disrupts the world of the Eternals to enforce an ideology that enslaves thought. In a sense, Blake's placement of the image at the poem's beginning signifies entering Urizen's world, and taking on the ideology that maintains it.[15]

In what is presented as a parody of the biblical creation myth, *Urizen's* first stanza recounts the tyrant's fall from Eternity and illustrates how his treason against the Eternals triggers a scene of quasi-creation. Motivated by the desire to establish a new kingdom, he usurps power and thus expels himself from the multiverse. Urizen's decision to produce a separate world with him as ruler speaks to Blake's concern that, without guidance, reason has the capacity to develop autonomously into an agent of destruction. However, it is also Urizen's fall that initiates the process of formation by which order and structure are born:

> Of the primeval Priest's assum'd power,
> When Eternals spurn'd back his religion:
> And gave him a place in the north,
> Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary.

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[14] Barr, Mark L. "Prophecy, the Law of Insanity, and "The [First] Book of Urizen." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2006, p. 749.
[15] Blake, William. *The First Book of Urizen*. 1794. Houghton Library, Massachusetts. *The William Blake* Archive, http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=urizen.f.illbk.01&java=no. Accessed September 2015.

> Eternals, I hear your call gladly;
> Dictate swift winged words, & fear not
> To unfold your dark visions of torment. *(The Book of Urizen* ll. 1-7)[16]

Endowed with the power to regulate and divide, Urizen's purpose is to demarcate life and design a system of laws consistent with a clear higher vision. In this case, Urizen purports to impose a "religion" of monarchic rule in which he exists as the sole proprietor of order in the multiverse. Aware of the danger his ideology might cause, the Eternals "spurn back his religion" and restrict Urizen's influence to an isolated "place in the north." Indeed, his northern exile is intended to be temporary and can only exist as long as Urizen's ambition continues to reflect the nature of the area he now inhabits: "obscure, shadowy, void, [and] solitary." By banishing Urizen to the north, the Eternals are thus able to police his actions while still legitimating the base necessity he brings as a constitutive part of Eternity. If he can reform his autocratic beliefs, Urizen will return to his rightful place among the others.

Following the first stanza's denotation of *Urizen's* central conflict, the second one features a prophecy from the narrator that seeks to reassure the Eternals and offer stability to an otherwise chaotic situation. Whereas the Eternals appear stricken with fear now that Urizen is on the loose, the narrator hears their "call" and vows to relay their "dark visions of torment" to the reader. More importantly, the narrator encourages them *not* to be afraid of Urizen, as doing so would only reaffirm his power over them. Indeed, Frye also argues for defining tyranny as "the co-operation of parasite and host; no tyrant maintains himself by force, but by trading on his victims' fears."[17] If Urizen derives his organizing control in part from those who fear him, then the prophecy aspires to use "swift winged words"

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[16] Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*. Edited by David V. Erdman. Anchor Books, 1982. Future passage citations are listed in parentheses and are from this edition unless noted in dissertation otherwise.
[17] Frye, 220.

(the tight rhythmic lines of *Urizen* itself) to convey why the tyrant must be stopped. The point here is to show what will happen if this power of reason continues to manifest unchecked.

Once Urizen establishes his own separate realm, the tyrant subsequently moves to rewrite the laws of space and time so that he can wrest the reigns of history from any kind of change. In this sense, Urizen stands for a system of natural laws that supposedly undergirds the regulation of moral and social behavior in human society. He starts by bringing time and space into a world of finite reality in which life is nothing more than evil and corrupt. Doing so thus enables him to contrast his cynical view of humanity with that of the Eternals. Seceding from the Eternals' flexible world, Urizen designs a space governed by the philosophy that he is a sovereign trying to save the world from its own destruction:

Times on times he divided, & measured
Space by space in his ninefold darkness,
Unseen, unknown: changes appeared
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation

Dark revolving in silent activity:
Unseen in tormenting passions;
An activity unknown and horrible;
A self-contemplating shadow,
In enormous labors occupied.

His cold horrors silent, dark Urizen
Prepared: his ten thousands of thunders
Ranged in gloomed array stretch out across
The dread world, & the rolling of wheels,
As of swelling of seas, sound in his clouds
In his hills of storied snows, in his mountains
Of hail and ice. (Plate 3, ll. 14-18; 24-28; 33-39)

In this passage, Urizen bends, "divides," and "measures" space through a lonely darkness that alters the physical landscape of his world. The act of redefining the contours of space

not only shifts the black cosmos into an entity "unseen, unknown" and unrecognizable by others, but also reveals the weakness of attempting to provide form without proper vision. For instance, Blake's repeated depiction of darkness ("ninefold darkness," "black winds," "dark revolving," "self-contemplating shadow," repetitions of "unseen" and "unknown"), points to the issue regarding Urizen's desire to create with a lack of visibility. In the same way that the biblical God declares, "Let there be light, " Urizen parodies this phrase with, "Let there be darkness." Both decrees leave unanswered the question of what *could/could not have been* seen before the act of creation, but presumably in Urizen's case, only those who embrace a similar darkness can view the fruit of his labors. If Urizen's creative act is as Stuart Curran argues, "a gloomy fatalism that will be typical of him in his fallen state," then Urizen actually generates a system of anti-creation to prove that the world is doomed to begin with, thereby affirming his role as the sovereign to manage its impending decay.[18]

The images of darkness, particularly in the second and third stanzas, also illustrate the unspeakable nature of Urizen's labors. Aside from the lack of visibility, the process of remaking the world is punctuated by silence: "silent activity" and "cold horrors silent." In a way, Urizen's action bears the proof of "enormous labors" with "the rolling of wheels," but somehow their cyclical sounds evade sensory perception. The text indicates the use of "thunder," "swelling of seas," and "sound in his clouds," but only as metaphors of what is happening. Almost as if the division of the Eternal World defies concrete explanation, the tyrant encodes his flawed perception of life ("dark," "silent," "unknown" and "horrible"), into every natural phenomenon of this hollowed-out realm. As a literary representation of reducing the world to a state of natural law, the scene reflects Blake's idea about how law

[18] Curran, *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, 211.

and tyranny are brought into being. Tyranny is characterized by its despotic abuse of both law and power, much like the Urizenic consciousness here, which creates only to oppress.

In addition to darkness, Urizen employs "the rolling of wheels" to signify how the proposal of mechanical time replaces eternal time as a core governing ideology. That is to say, whereas infinite perception yields perfect balance in the Eternals' world, finiteness is characteristic of Urizen's world. Time is entirely homogenous for Urizen because of what he manages to inject into his cosmos, namely a definitive endpoint to life. While Urizen's vision is fragmented and degenerative, he believes with conviction to be doing the correct thing by offering the world an alternate path to wholeness and unity. The problem at hand is that Urizen's reductive organization ultimately creates authoritarian conformity under a guise of equality. Homogeneity may *appear* consistent with equality on the surface, but it actually translates into a fallacious idea of 'oneness' that prioritizes control over freedom.

Chapter II of *Urizen* identifies the destructive nature of conformity when Urizen's oral invocation of oneness is used to justify his right to rule over others. Here in Chap. II, the reader confronts the moment at which natural law and homogeneity shift into a more social form of tyranny that emerges from the ruler's Books of Brass. The following passage corresponds with Moses on Mount Sinai receiving God's word and law, but Blake parodies the Exodus story by making Urizen's decree the time at which darkness is finally unveiled to the world. In what comes across as a social/religious compact, Urizen declares that he is the one destined to command/direct the new universe:

"Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the Book
Of Eternal Brass, written in my solitude.

"Laws of peace, of love, of unity:
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.
Let each chuse one habitation:

His ancient infinite mansion:
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law." (Plate 4, ll. 31-40)

Like the previous passage, Blake highlights Urizen's "solitude" as a constitutive factor of his productive mode. The tyrant lays claim over his darkness and uses it to fuel the vision held within "the Book of eternal brass." If we look at Urizen's Brass Book as a symbol of his view towards humanity (unforgiving and uncompromising), then Blake wants to say that Urizen fundamentally misunderstands what it means to be human. In fact, his interest in ruling with an iron fist only confirms a failure to properly realize his responsibility as a king. In a sense, Urizen's governing philosophy reflects a more intimate crisis of self that plays out through his re-construction of the cosmos. Unlike the biblical God whose initial words after the Creation are "it was good," the suggestion here is that Urizen sees creation as "bad," or at the very least, misguided.

In *Blake, Politics, and History*, Jackie DiSalvo and G.A. Rosso assert that Urizen, in his attempt to achieve homogeneity, creates a "tyranny of fixed meaning and destiny."[19] This vision of tyranny, in which all share the same purpose and fate, can be seen firsthand in Blake's following stanza when Urizen announces his various laws under the concept of "oneness." Since Urizen believes that multiplicity will, given time, metamorphose into an agent of chaos and destruction, he seeks to forge a system of laws in which change can be averted. For example, Urizen's "Laws of peace, of love, [and] of unity" are all predicated upon the idea that uniformity eliminates the possibility of the tyrant being overthrown. To Urizen, peace and love are only attainable as long as he remains in control. Indeed, Frye's text also makes the claim that Urizen's order is about

[19] DiSalvo, Jackie and G.A. Rosso. *Blake, Politics, and History.* Garland Publishing, 1998. XIV.

"mental uniformity, common sense, and a social product [that allows for] the rule of tyrants over victims." In other words, the only way to maintain an orderly society, on Urizen's terms, is to erase the expression of different points of view.[20] Without any dissent, there is no word other than that of the ruler.

The same methodology applies as well to Urizen's laws of "pity, compassion, and forgiveness." Each word contradicts the concept of punishment that one would clearly try to associate with Urizen's work, but only because ideological conformity, in his mind, invalidates the potential for human error. According to Urizen, you can eliminate the notion of human error by introducing a ruling mechanism that prevents deviation from the norm. This, in turn, allows for a society in which the ruling figure will always be benevolent. Of course, the problem here is that forcing humanity to conform to such a strict set of rules is merely punishment by another means. Even if Urizen believes that the best way to govern is by "One King, One God, one Law," his system ignores the critical element of freedom.

If Urizen desires to dispose of self-critique and deviation so that one cannot alter a world in which uniformity reigns supreme, then his "One King, One God, One Law" idea intends to conflate religious, political, legal, and social conceptions of kingship so that all refer to the same entity. For Urizen, there is no distinction between God and King. He is a combination of both. In this way, Blake aligns Urizen more closely with the traditional conception of English monarchy and the argument that kings are fit to rule because God gives them the power to do so. As a divine mandate, Urizen views what he does as a matter of ensuring that all adhere to his "one command, one joy, one desire," and share "one curse, one weight, one measure." Now, while it may appear appropriate to have

[20] Frye, 222.

people experience the same burden and aspire towards "one desire," Urizen declares such through a coercive means that ultimately displaces the many in favor of one horizon.

The threat of Urizen's *horizon* is what propels Blake's poem into its second major section in which Los, "the Prophet of Eternity," enters to silence the tyrant's howls. As an emissary of the Eternals, Los is sent to end Urizen's obsession with reductive order, make him renounce his ideology of oneness, and convince the tyrant to reintegrate back into the fold of Eternity. Rather than try to oppose Urizen's power over reason, Los should ensure that humanity's state of fallenness does not become a permanent condition. He starts off a craftsman with the power to build, but must transform into an emblem of imagination and exert the strength necessary to reverse Urizenic forms of domination. Unfortunately, he is derailed by the struggle that comes with navigating Urizen's tyrannical world, and desires then to best his opponent by attempting the creative process while trapped inside Urizen's fallen realm. Swearingen refers to this point in the poem as the moment when Los tries to "create a human world in the midst of cosmic uncertainty."[21] With Chap. IV, Blake's idea of creative salvation is challenged when Los tries to conquer Urizen's dangerous cosmos.

Los vs. Urizen: Battle of the Titans

Urizen arrives at a critical juncture in Chap. IV when Blake introduces the turning point of Urizen's binding. Not only does this scene forecast the issue of excess (a cardinal concept that returns in Blake's later works), but also follows Blake's evolution of thought on reason. Spanning the end of Chap. III through Chap. IV, the binding is divided up into three distinct sections. The first one is about Los's initial confrontation with the tyrant. In the second part, Los attempts to bind Urizen. The third segment features a major revision, one that results in two different versions of the binding scene. The two versions (Chap.

[21] Swearingen, 129.

IV [A]) and (Chap. IV [B]) offer an opportunity to discover what Blake felt was lacking in the first draft, and show how his ideas progressed and led him to the second one.

Barr prefaces an analysis of *Urizen* by pointing to the difficulties present in trying to negotiate between two (or more) separate editions of the text: "any reading of *Urizen* is vexed by such lack of a standard text, resulting in a narrative and thematic structure being both fragmented and divided."[22] In other words, by duplicating certain sections of *Urizen,* Blake reveals the fragmented nature of his own thoughts on Los's role in the poem. To be fair, it is entirely possible that Blake never actually arrived at a satisfactory vision for Los in *Urizen*. Not only do these multiple sections confirm Blake's hesitation about the whole binding project, but also his decision to reuse the same material later on in *The Four Zoas* is representative of a problem he could never quite solve. If anything, *Urizen's* version of the binding brings up the problem of excess that would complicate Blake's future visions.

The end of Chap. III details Los's first confrontation with Urizen. After Los views firsthand the bottomless abyss of Urizen's dark world, he stands opposite the tyrant and is anxious for the Eternals to make a move ("And Los round the dark globe of Urizen, /Kept watch for Eternals to confine, the obscure separation alone;" Plate 5, ll. 38-40). In response to the Eternals' inaction, Los tries to move Urizen himself, albeit unsuccessfully and deleteriously. Instead of disturbing the tyrant, Los appears to rent him from his side and, as a result, angers the Eternals by widening the chasms of separation between Urizen/Eternity:

> Los wept howling around the dark Demon:
> And cursing his lot; for in anguish,
> Urizen was rent from his side;
> And a fathomless void for his feet;
> And intense fires for his dwelling.

[22] Barr, 742.

But Urizen laid in a stony sleep
Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity.

The Eternals said: "What is this? Death.
Urizen is a clod of clay." (Plate 6, ll. 1-10)

Upon making contact with Urizen, Los loses control of his senses. He devolves into madness and inarticulately "[weeps] howling around the dark Demon." Frustrated by Urizen's stoicism, he "[curses] his lot" and [rends] [Urizen] from his side." Rather than craft anew a basis upon which to elevate Urizen back into the Eternals' world, Los does the opposite by breaking him down. Indeed, such is the way of Urizen's dark world. An act of creation is turned into a moment of separation. And without the clarity of vision, Los is insane and mute provoking nothing but division. His labors result in a "fathomless void" beneath the feet of Urizen that contains "intense fires for his dwelling." As if producing a smoldering, bottomless prison, Los only manages to separate him from "Eternity" while the king stays in "a stony sleep." In effect, Blake's text implies that Los is separating Urizen from a higher universe, but the engraving we view behind the stanza speaks to a different interpretation.

Urizen's status as a non-standard poem applies as well to the duplicate engravings produced for each plate of text. In fact, these images often complicate (rather than clarify) the ambiguities already present in Blake's poetry. If anything, the engravings possess just as much authority as the text does in providing a way to access Blake's mythos. Take as a specific example Plate 5 (Copy D) in which Los is strung upside down, constricted by the presence of a black snake, trapped within the same fiery prison he creates.[23] Unlike Blake's text, which, rather ambiguously, uses the pronoun "his" in a way that could refer

[23] Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*. 1794. British Museum, London. *The William Blake Archive* http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=urizen.d.illbk.05&java=no. Accessed September 2015.

either to Urizen *or* Los, the engraving clearly depicts Los being held captive in his own prison.[24] If Los is the real prisoner, then what does the engraving suggest about the impact that Los's rending of Urizen has on his psyche? By offering the image as another narrative object, Blake illustrates that the power of imagination can be self-destructive, and even border on self-immolation. Much like an admonition, the illustration re-affirms that, left unchecked, Los's creative principle could become as dangerous as the tyrannical reason he is fighting against. In the fallen world, all human senses are susceptible to corruption and instability.

Perplexed by Los's action, the Eternals themselves are unsure what to make of his labors: "What is this? Death. Urizen is a clod of clay." Again, unlike Blake's illumination in which Los is the focus, the poem paints a different picture of Urizen as a "clod of clay" that lacks shape and form. As the Eternals make clear, he initially cannot be identified. In a way, Urizen's misshapen body thus reflects the inaptitude of his craftsman, Los. We see only a small fraction of what the Eternal Prophet can accomplish, namely because he fails to rehabilitate Urizen's body. As a result, all that comes of it is "Death." Who is being punished by this operation, Urizen or Los? Does "Death" refer to a vacuous state of the imaginative mind (Los) or is it emblematic of Urizen's stale and formless figure? If the verbal text and visual art stand as two narratives meant to be considered together, then maybe they are designed to represent the fluctuating connection between Urizen and Los.

Indeed, the idea that image and text should be examined simultaneously to unpack Blake's meaning applies as well to the next section/engraving. Unlike the previous part in which visual and verbal are supposedly at odds, Blake's next image aligns well with what

[24] Viscomi, Joseph. *William Blake: The Illuminated Books*. Thames & Hudson, 2000. 207.

is described in the text. If the last section was about the initial contact between reason and imagination, this one corresponds to the suffering that befalls Los as a result of his labors:

Los howld in a dismal stupor,
Groaning! Gnashing! Groaning!
Till the wrenching apart was healed.

But the wrenching of Urizen heal'd not
Cold, featureless, flesh or clay,
Rifted with direful changes,
He lay in a dreamless night

Till Los rouz'd his fires, affrighted
At the formless immeasurable death (Plate 7, ll. 1-9)

With Plate 6 (Copy A), Los can be seen howling in pain, as he uses his hands to cover his ears.[25] Surrounded by flames (which, we assume, are his own based on the line "Los rouz'd his fires"), the prophet cannot bear the burnings of his own body.[26] Crouched over, mouth and eyes wide open, Los's physical depiction aligns with the textual description of him in "a dismal stupor." As if intentionally self-referential, the engraving reminds us of Blake's relief-etching process in which he would combine acid, metal, inscription and heat so that he could produce an illumination. But if Los is the one experiencing pain as a result of his own creative enterprise, then the image may very well refer to the excess of the artist who misuses his craft, or as Curran says, "the megalomania that the creative principle is [also] capable of when it takes itself too seriously."[27] After all, Los's "Groaning/Gnashing!" is a consequence of his inexpressible art as much as it is a sign of an excruciating sort of pain.

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[25] Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*. 1794. British Museum, London. *The William Blake Archive* http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=urizen.d.illbk.06&java=no. Accessed September 2015.
[26] Viscomi, 208.
[27] Curran, *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, 220.

But what should one make of the clear juxtaposition between Los's burning body, and the callous, immovable figure of Urizen? As the text shows, Urizen remains "Cold & featureless" as opposed to Los's "affrighted" disposition. What does it mean for Los to be "healed" from the wrenching apart while Urizen remains "heal'd not?" In a way, it seems like Los's body can recuperate from the flames of incineration unlike Urizen's. This clear inversion speaks to the diametric opposition Blake wishes to create between the two. One can return from the "wrenching apart" whereas the other is "Rifted with direful changes," making it impossible for him to return to his earlier form. And even after disabling Urizen's body, Los fails to penetrate "the dreamless night" that shields the tyrant's mental state. In this sense, Los changes nothing, disfiguring Urizen into a "formless unmeasurable death" he must now behold. His howls confirm his failure as sounds that emerge out of disbelief, a signal that he has created the living embodiment of death. To Los, Urizen's unfazed self is a reminder of the claim reason has over the "Eternal Prophet's" scarred, mental psyche.

In the second section (Chap. IV [A]), Blake begins with an illustration of Urizen's binding. He couples the verbal text with an image that depicts the tyrant's skeleton figure, and describes the act of Los restricting Urizen's expanding influence. In a battle of bodies so to speak, Blake outlines what artistic expression looks like at an early stage. In the way that Blake's text is merely a first draft of a latter revision, the [A] iteration of the binding, I argue, is only fragmentary. The binding, in Blake's mind, may be necessary as a form of reintegration back into Eternity, but the risk of substituting Urizen's regime with a second form of tyranny still exists. Indeed, Blake's decision to rewrite this pivotal scene may just

as well speak to the idea that binding [A] too closely resembled an authoritarian order not unlike what Urizen devised, and a tragic prophetic vision Blake refused:

Los, smitten with astonishment,
Frightened at the hurtling bones

And at the surging sulphuerous
Perturbed Immortal, mad raging

In whirlwinds & pitch & nitre
Round the furious limbs of Los;

And Los formed nets and gins
And threw the nets round about

He watc'd in shuddering fear
The dark changes & bound every change
With rivets of iron and brass;

And these were the changes of Urizen. (Plate 8, ll. 1-12)

In Chap. IV [A], Los molds the creative enterprise into a new kind of oppression that runs contrary to Blake's hope for reconciliation. In what resembles more of a revenge tragedy, Los's fear of Urizen motivates him to restrict the tyrant with "nets and gins" that generate a "cap" of sorts on his power. Rather than mediate Urizen's reason, Los circles round him "mad raging" and forms "whirlwinds & pitch & nitre" that corrode Urizen's body until his bare skeleton remains. In addition, Los completes the work with "rivets of iron and brass" that reveal "dark changes" within his debilitated enemy. How is this product any different from what Urizen did to enslave his cosmos? With iron and brass, Los constructs a prison for Urizen that isolates him from the higher realm. His act of anti-creation mimics Urizen and his original design of the fallen world in a way that only reaffirms the operative place of reason and tyranny as principal mechanics that regulate/command an Urizenic domain.

These "dark changes," in effect, become the focus of Blake's related engraving on Plate 7 (Copy D).[28] The image features a skeletal Urizen crouched forward, with his spine and ribcage completely exposed. Based on the contorted placement of his bones, Urizen's arms, legs, and limbs are presumably being held in place by the "rivets of iron and brass." Unlike the previous image in which Los was engulfed by flames, Urizen is surrounded by pitch-black darkness. The particular absence of an actual eye (all we see of Urizen's skull is an empty eye-socket) contrasts as well with the obvious focus on Los's frightened gaze from before. Blake's play on the idea of vision (in a biological and philosophical sense) is especially compelling given how it stages the dilemma of what Los perceives to be actual "changes" to Urizen's body. Is what he sees the same as what the reader does? Whereas a reader of the image may just see a skeletal body, Los "shudders in fear" based on the idea that Urizen's body embodies his failure as an artist. What he sees is nothing more than an act of oppressive containment similar to Urizen's protocol of action that inhibits freedom.

The alternate version (Chap. IV [B]) recasts the binding as a different struggle with an emphasis on mental fortitude and the significance of the eternal mind.[29] Unlike version [A] in which Blake focuses on the physical cost of binding, version [B] focuses on the reverse mental imprisonment that occurs as a consequence of the binding. While

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[28] Blake, *The First Book of Urizen*. 1794. British Museum, London. *The William Blake Archive* http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/object.xq?objectid=urizen.d.illbk.07&java=no. Accessed September 2015.

[29] Blake includes both versions in this edition of *Urizen*, allowing for a side-by-side comparison of the two binding sequences. The first version of Chap. IV features two engravings of Urizen (Plates 7 and 8) that do accompany the text and create the impression that Urizen is the main subject of the binding. This concept is reinforced by the language's emphasis on his corporeal metamorphosis from a tyrant with pale white skin to a lifeless, contorted skeletal shell. Indeed, the line from Plate 7 ("And these were the changes of Urizen") purposely directs our attention to the one being incarcerated. Once we turn to Plate 9, Chap. IV (B), the one being depicted is Los, not Urizen. In this plate, Los struggles to prevent himself from being surrounded and engulfed by the darkness born as a result of his methods. Blake depicts Los wrestling with enclosure, meant to signify the miniaturization of his Eternal Mind. That is to say, the prophet uses his strength to guard from a force that eats at his psyche. What follows with Plate 10 is a visual depiction of Los coming to terms with Urizen's skeletal remains. Urizen's incinerated corpse is no longer the subject, but rather the object of Los' horror and awe. In effect, the two versions complicate the matter of who is really being punished by the act.

Blake uses some of the same imagery, the scene itself is largely rewritten to outline the implications of turning life into, as Barr calls it, "a state best imagined as permanent psychosis."[30] Los's howls of madness return, along with the links of iron and brass, but Blake places a singular amount of attention on the threat of mental vacuity and the danger posed by a binding that tries to eliminate Eternity altogether. In this case, Blake wants to portray the moral bankruptcy of Los's actions and the effects they have on generating a philosophy of societal oppression:

> And Urizen (so his eternal name)
> His prolific delight obscurd more & more
> In dark secrecy, hiding in surgeing
> Sulphuerous fluid his phantasies.
> The Eternal Prophet heavd the dark bellows,
> And turn'd restless the tongs; and the hammer
> Incessant beat; forging chains new & new
> Numb'ring with links, hours, days & years.
>
> Forgetfulness, dumbness, necessity!
> In chains of the mind locked up,
> Like fetters of ice shrinking together,
> Disorganized, rent from Eternity.
> Los beat on his fetters of iron
> And heated his furnaces & pour'd
> Iron sodor and sodor of brass. (Plate 10, ll. 11-18; 24-30)

Here, Blake introduces the central icon of Los's signature hammer and chains. Unlike the previous passage in which we have "nets and gins," this edition has Los submerge Urizen into "more & more dark secrecy" as he beats incessantly on him with a set of "tongs" that are powerful enough to overwhelm the tyrant. Using his hammer, Los "forges chains new & new/Numb'ring with links, hours, days & years," an act that practically mirrors Urizen and his construction of the fallen domain. In the same way that Urizen creates mechanical time earlier on, Los creates a rational measurement of time that brings Urizen's body into the world of the finite. With the word "ring" as a clever play on the circular motion of the

[30] Barr, 748.

binding, Blake redesigns the scene to feature Los as he demarcates a separate realm in the universe to block out Eternity. Thus, Urizen (and Blake) confirm that the world of reason, to an extent, negates the power of imagination by turning it into an agent of false tyranny.

This concept of tyranny can be seen particularly when Blake uses the metaphor of chains/prison to re-imagine elements of the eighteenth-century English penitentiary that were so central to the idea of mental imprisonment. John Bender, who explores the penitentiary in his study, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth England*, argues that English narrative played a critical role in defining representations of confinement: "fabrications in narrative of the power of confinement to reshape personality contributed to a process of cultural representation whereby prisons were themselves both, reconceived and reinvented."[31] In other words, reading specific narratives of the prison in eighteenth-century British Literature redefines how we approach "confinement" and understand its relation to identity and personality. Now, while Bender advances this claim as a means to unpack British *novelistic* discourse, the same rings true for William Blake and *Urizen,* which reimagines confinement through a construction of the binding as both physically and psychologically transformative.

Take, for example, Blake's use of the critical phrase "In chains of the mind locked up." Unlike binding [A] which uses visual art and verbal text to establish a lens for seeing the body as physically enchained, this line from binding [B] confirms that Los's labors do in fact have a reverse effect on his mental state. The deeper Los plunges into the impurity of Urizen's incarceration, the narrower his perception of the imagination becomes. Paired alongside the hot furnace, the "iron sodor," and, the "sodor of brass," one cannot help but

[31] Bender, John. *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth Century England*. University of Chicago Press, 1989. 1.

associate Blake's image with the legal meme of building prison bars/walls. That is to say, the binding project helps to reimagine the penitentiary as a space in which body *and* mind are to be restrained. Of course, this binding is only one example of Blake's preoccupation with reconceiving the prison. Even with the "mind forged manacles" present in "London" from *The Songs of Experience*, Blake calls out the tyranny of religious institutions (in this case, the Church of England) to argue how religious dogma actively seeks to imprison the mind. In Los's case, his desire to restrain Urizen is what remakes his identity and initiates the process by which he imprisons his own mind, like that of Urizen's, rent from Eternity.

If eighteenth-century English narratives work to construct cultural representations of the prison, as Bender claims, then Blake's *Urizen* participates in the discourse by positing the binding as an act of prison making. In other words, the poem formulates a way of looking at the prison as both an institutional and personal practice. With *Urizen*, it organizes an attempt to oppress while also reinventing the identity of the oppressor. Between visual art and the verbal text, two categories Bender views as "cognitive instruments that anticipate, and contribute to institutional formation," I argue that Blake's text and illuminations both work in tandem to create a framework for seeing the prison as shaping the subjects of law.[32] But what happens when only one of these elements is made available to Blake and his vision?

Blake's *Four Zoas* and the Revision of Tyranny

In *Urizen*, Blake uses text and image to describe the relationship between tyranny, reason, and the imagination. While the poem should not be considered conclusive of what Blake thought, the illuminations do lend to a feeling of wholeness that is absent from *The Four Zoas*. Blake scholars are careful not to eschew the importance of Blake's art, but the

[32] Bender, 1.

lack of any finished illustrations for the *Zoas* raises an issue of whether we can even think of the poem as complete. Coupled with a variety of revisions, duplications, deletions, and unfinished sections of the written text, it is rather difficult to decipher where the poem fits in Blake's grand visionary schematic. Northrop Frye referred to the *Zoas* as "the grandest abortive masterpiece in English Literature," attesting to the work's volume and scope.[33] If anything, the poem continues Blake's preoccupation with Urizen's binding, as both scene and characters make a significant return. While Blake himself probably did not arrive at a near-complete solution to the Los/Urizen struggle until *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, the *Zoas* is critical to understanding what Blake felt was at stake in the cosmic battle against tyranny.

He wrote *The Four Zoas* in 1797, a mere three years after *Urizen* and seems to have intended it to stand as a magnum opus, his capstone contribution to the poetic canon of English literature. The poem reflects a crisis of self for Blake during the late-1790s, and one that would, ultimately, lead to his creation of *Milton* in 1804.[34] By itself, the *Zoas* exemplifies an endpoint to a specific phase in Blake's literary career devoted to confronting the tyranny of reason, and achieving balance in his fictional multiverse of ideas. Whereas *Urizen* introduces the concept of authoritarianism, the *Zoas*, in turn, extends this discussion to include the fall of Albion (England) and his recovery of Jerusalem in the apocalypse. Being more so about the internal conflict raging between the autonomous psychic faculties of one's fallen self, the poem strives to define justice as the reconstitution of self that happens when forgiveness rehabilitates the human imagination.

The word 'Zoa' translates roughly into 'living creature' and comes from The First Chapter of the Book of Ezekiel, in the Bible. Ezekiel has a vision of a whirlwind in which

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[33] Frye, 269.
[34] Lincoln, Andrew. *Spiritual History: A Reading of Blake's Vala, or The Four Zoas*. Oxford University Press, 1995. 14.

the likeness of four living creatures appears to resemble the complete form of Man. In the *Four Zoas*, these four creatures are known as Urizen, (the embodiment of Reason), Luvah (the expression of Love and Sexuality), Tharmas, (the representation of the Body), and its counterpart, Urthona, (the manifestation of the Imagination). Together, these four psychic faculties constitute Albion the Perfect Man, a generative reflection of Blake's perspective on idealized humanity. Leopold Damrosch describes their relationship as being "thematic and symbolic, continually reshaped and recommenced like clouds merging and separating in a windy sky."[35] They are not static entities, but rather a fluctuating set of principles and capacities subject to constant redefinition. Hence, the problem of balance comes into play when Urizen disturbs the equilibrium and imprisons the other three Zoas within his fallen world. Thus begins a chain of events in which Blake attempts to realize Urizen's return to balance, and the vision of justice that occurs with his assimilation back into the manifold.

The poem begins with a re-telling of the fourfold myth and a declaration about the Universal Man (Albion) who must be resurrected from his fallen sleep.[36] Blake's collective concept of Albion refers to the perfect unity he sees as existing in every person. The work represents the trial of humanity to achieve brotherhood among its disaffected

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[35] Damrosch, 129.

[36] Aside from Leopold Damrosch's analysis of these opening pages, Brian Wilkie, Mary Lynn Johnson, Andrew Lincoln, and Nelson Hilton have also produced critical scholarship on explicating the Four Zoas myth. In *Blake's Four Zoas: The Design of a Dream*, Wilkie and Johnson unpack the significance that each Zoa (and also its Female Emanation) has in relation to Los and Enitharmon. The monograph indicates how the complex web of relationships (Los and Urthona, Urizen and Ahania, Enitharmon and Tharmas) all contribute to the ways in which Blake designs his imaginative multiverse. Andrew Lincoln's *Spiritual History: A Reading of Vala, or The Four Zoas* concentrates specifically on the elements of Christianity that populate, and define several key parts of the text. He reimagines the role of Christ in Blake's poem, illustrating how his reconversion to Christianity in the late 1790s impacted the revisionary principles of individual *Nights*. Nelson Hilton's *Literal Imagination: Blake's Vision of Words* places Blake's poem in the middle of the debate on Newtonian systems of thinking, understanding, and perception. Hilton reimagines a figure like Urizen as the embodiment of Newtonian science and empiricism, perpetuating an endless cycle of logical, linear, cause-and-effect organization that determines how people think. That is to say, he uses an entity like Urizen to show how Blake designs the *Four Zoas* as a critical method that challenges intellectual and philosophical notions associated with Isaac Newton, and Francis Bacon from the Scientific Revolution.

faculties for the sake of personal liberty. In this way, the *Zoas* expands somewhat from *Urizen* with a grandiose vision of human freedom, and the precedent for realizing Albion's resurrection:

> Four Mighty Ones are in every Man;
> A Perfect Unity
> Cannot Exist. But from the Universal
> Brotherhood of Eden
> The Universal Man. To Whom be
> Glory Evermore Amen
>
> In Eden; in the Auricular Nerves of Human life
> Which is the Earth of Eden, he his Emanations propagated
> Fairies of Albion afterwards Gods of the Heathen, Daughter of Beulah
> Sing
> His fall into Division & his Resurrection to Unity
> His fall into the Generation of Decay and Death & his Regeneration
> By the Resurrection from the Dead (Book I, ll. 1-8;17-23)

The first stanza claims that "Four Mighty Ones are in every Man." Before mentioning the Zoas by name, Blake equates their respective entities with the existence of the human self at large. Each Zoa exists within the human psyche and takes part in a power struggle with the others. Albion, as a result, personifies Blake's belief that individuals strive towards an elevated state of "Perfect Unity" that can only be achieved through "Brotherhood." Blake considers the division of such faculties to be antithetical to the "Universal Man," but how is "Brotherhood" any different from conformity? Like Urizen who seeks to homogenize a way of life and negotiate the particular and universal, Blake's vision of unity calls for one to also accept a certain state of co-operation between these psychic faculties. In a sense, it is Blake's motive to demonstrate how one state of existence differs from that of the other.

The second stanza places the four Zoas within the larger mythology of the world's creation and the overall concept of resurrection that drives the poem forward. In it, Blake announces the birth of several "Emanations" (female counterparts to the all male cast of Zoas) and their function as "Fairies of Albion" designed to carry forth the Word of God

("Daughters of Beulah/Sing"). Afterwards, the stanza highlights Albion's "fall into a [state of] Division & his Resurrection to Unity," forecasting the poem's overall trajectory of chronicling Albion's ebb and flow through a series of nine *Nights*. Each Night looks at Albion's struggle with "Decay," "Death" and "Regeneration" from a different standpoint, but his "Resurrection from the Dead" is critical. Unlike *Urizen*, Blake integrates Christ as a central image in the *Zoas*, one wholly responsible for offering his regenerative power to facilitate reunification. More importantly, Christ is Blake's answer to the question of how to distinguish "Brotherhood" from conformity. Through the redemptive symbol of Christ, Blake intends to prove that Urizen can also rise to play *his* role in the apocalyptic harvest.

Night the First serves as a reintroduction to Urizen's fall. As in the earlier poem, he chooses to secede from balance, but in this case he breaks from Albion's manifold. Doing so leads to a rupture in the natural world that enables him to subdue the other three Zoas and force Albion into a deep slumber. In a way, substituting the Eternals (from *Urizen*) with Albion allows Blake to make a stronger case against the tyranny of reason. The fact that Urizen is a constitutive part of Albion speaks not only to his role in Blake's grand schema of Unity, but also indicates that Urizen's excess interferes with the progress he is otherwise capable of fostering. Indeed, so long as Urizen remains a tyrant, he will never fully understand the magnitude of his purpose. Jeanne Moskal writes that the Urizen of the *Four Zoas* seeks to "homogenize the emotions and the physical universe to legislate conformity."[37] He tries it first on Los by using the gaze to bait the prophet into challenging him to a contest of arts:

> Urizen descended
> Gloomy sounding. Now I am God from Eternity to Eternity

[37] Moskal, 26.

> Sullen sat Los plotting Revenge. Silent he eyed the Prince
> Of Light. Silent the Prince of Light viewed Los. At length a brooded
> Smile broke from Urizen for Enitharmon brightened more & more
> Sullen he lowered on Enitharmon but he smiled on Los (Book I, (ll. 318-323)

Urizen's descent once again doubles as a moment of authoritarian creation. By stating his role as "God from Eternity to Eternity," Urizen declares the rise of a new regulative order to replace Albion's. Los witnesses his descent and thus quietly plots revenge with a silent gaze. Aware of Los's motive, Urizen responds with "a brooded/Smile" to Enitharmon the likes of which only grows brighter. Blake's use of the gaze as a communicative exchange between Urizen and Los not only frames their conflict, but also punctuates the emotion of "desire." The gaze both incites jealousy and conveys the gendered idea that all women do indeed belong to the male tyrant. That is to say, part of Urizen's prerogative as a patriarch is to define the contours of gender relations, assuming a property-like ownership over Los and his wife. The other side of Urizen's gaze corresponds to Satan's temptation of Christ, one that seeks to highlight the personal failings of the human heart. Urizen knows that the Eternal Prophet fears losing Enitharmon, and so, he uses her as leverage to tempt Los into challenging him. Thus, Urizen proves that Los is not immune to the danger of bitter envy.

In the next stanza, the tyrant offers Los a chance to rule the stars if he agrees to do his bidding and submit to his regime. Unpersuaded by Urizen's proposal, Los challenges his adversary to a contest of arts, convinced that his strength will triumph over reason. The prophet forgets that Urizen's claim over the universe fundamentally remakes it, creating a new world order that undermines the power of imagination. Blake's focus on having Urizen clash with Los reappears, but under the deceptive disguise of selfhood, not reconciliation:

> …Lo these starry hosts
> They are thy servants if thou wilt obey my awful Law

> Los answered furious art thou one of those who when most complacent
> Mean mischief most. If you are such Lo! I am also such
> One must be master. Try thy Arts I also will try mine
> For I perceive Thou hast Abundance which I claim as mine
>
> Urizen startled stood by not Long soon he cried
> Obey my voice young Demon I am God from Eternity to Eternity (Blake/Erdman, Book I ll. 327-334)

Urizen seeks to make Los a pawn in his cosmic schema. To an extent, the offer itself does beg the question of whether Los can actually be "bought" by the promise of power. While he denies the offer, questioning Urizen's ability does reveal Los's desire to prove himself to the tyrant. He is not convinced by Urizen's superiority complex, and fails to see him as a ruler fit to govern. Rather than mend Urizen's perverse notion of power, Los confirms it by agreeing to demonstrate his true strength ("One must be master'). As Moskal argues, Urizen succeeds when he imposes a rule of conformity onto others. In this case, the tyrant manages to infect Los with the same emotions of revenge and hatred that motivate him to re-shape the universe in his image. Conforming Los to his worldview (the philosophy that strength alone determines one's fitness to rule) enables Urizen to subvert the imagination, and enlist the help of his adversary in bringing about the conversion to an Urizenic world.

Other than that, Los's deception by Urizen speaks to one of Blake's greater points concerning the premise of sovereignty itself. Urizen functions as sovereign by the way he governs his universe, but this does not mean Blake endorses authoritarianism as a way for managing society. The very idea of humanity's power being divided between four unique faculties (to prevent the overcompensation of one power) speaks to this claim. The phrase "I am also such/One must be master" is indicative of Blake's skepticism towards asserting power to subjugate others. Since Los loses sight of his role by embracing this

idea, Blake aims to discredit the merits of Urizen's faulty position by showing how it contaminates his opponents.

For Blake, defeating the Urizenic ideology means returning to the pivotal function of Urizen's binding. Whereas *Night the Second* and *Night the Third* chronicle the separate fall of each Zoa, *Night the Fourth* (like Chap. IV in *Urizen*) juxtaposes Los and Urizen all over again. Unlike its previous iteration, though, the *Zoas* version is vastly expanded, and even more unwieldy. Featuring several revisions and some newly added sections, Blake's second attempt at the binding leads to frustration regarding the fine line between the ideas of brotherhood and conformity. The fact that Blake kept the binding central to his myth is evidence of its necessity, but his extensive revisions suggest that he was still vexed by the implications of Los's act. If anything, this particular version of Urizen's binding qualifies as Blake's critical bout with the quandaries of how to achieve justice through forgiveness.

The binding scenes for *Urizen* and *The Four Zoas* appear remarkably similar from a presentation perspective. They tend to share some of the exact same language (lines and stanzas) and rely on the interplay of Los's hammer, furnace, and chains to immobilize the fallen tyrant. Both are concerned with the corrupting influence of reason over imagination and consider the extent to which Los becomes more like Urizen. Indeed, Blake offers us a revised binding scene that better reflects the full range of questions he had about how Los could reconstitute Urizen without sacrificing his own identity. *Urizen*, in a sense, is easier to follow because of just two distinct versions of one sequence. Blake's *Zoas* complicates this formula by featuring two different endings for the same binding scene. Given that the two endings represent Blake arriving at different

conclusions on the binding, reading both is the only way to properly grasp the trajectory of his thought-process on Los and Urizen.

To establish the thematic thread that links *Urizen* with the *Zoas*, Blake revisits the motif of darkness that punctuates Los's labors. He reincorporates the furnace from *Urizen* and uses the iron anvil imagery to refocus on the chains of metal that bind Urizen's body. Even the concept of manufactured time returns to remind us of the degree to which Los is imitating Urizen's reductive energy. But now that Los works within the mythology of the *Four Zoas*, his labors consequently jeopardize Albion's resuscitation. In this version, Los travels down a destructive path towards ruination that recasts him as Urizen's dark proxy:

> Then Los with terrible hands seized on the Ruined Furnaces
> Of Urizen. Enormous work: he builded them anew
> Labour of Ages in the Darkness & the war of Tharmas
> And Los formed Anvils of Iron Petrific. For his blows
> Petrify with incessant beating many a rock.
>
> The days & years. In chains of iron round the limbs of Urizen
> Linkd hour to hour & day to night & night to day & year to year
> In periods of pulsative furor. Mills he formed & works
> Of many wheels resistless in the power of dark Urthona
>
> Of Los, absorbed in dire revenge he drank with joy the cries
> Of Enitharmon & the groans of Urizen fuel for his wrath
> And for his pit secret feeding on thoughts of cruelty. (Book IV (ll. 165-169; 180-183; 191-193)

This rendition of the binding clearly establishes Los as Urizen's dark doppelganger. With his "terrible hands," Los seizes the "Ruined Furnaces of Urizen" and proceeds to re-build them for his imprisonment. By now, the "chains of iron" used to restrain Urizen are oddly reminiscent of another metal, namely the Eternal Book of Brass that the tyrant refers to in *Urizen*. Bound together by the duplicitous use of metal to dictate and restrict, both Urizen and Los are more closely compatible than ever before. Even Urizen's separation from the Eternals in *Urizen* coheres with Los's decision to rebuild the furnaces of Urizen under the

"Darkness & war of Tharmas." Without a clear sense of vision, Los rearticulates the same ideology of oppression that precipitates Urizen's fall and devolution into a ruthless tyrant.

Blake's role reversal continues in the second stanza, as Los (not Urizen) is the one who demarcates space and time. The binding results in a production of "mechanical time" ("days and years," "hour to hour," "day to night," and, "year to year") not unlike what the fallen tyrant pursued in *Urizen.* Circling round the dark demon, Los brings Urizen back to the world of fixed limits, essentially performing the king's work for him. The "wheels" of labor used to propel the "periods of pulsative furor" are strikingly reminiscent of Urizen's wheels from the previous poem when he initially converted the world into his own image. All of these markers speak to Blake's conviction that the creative enterprise can modulate into an agent of destruction given the right circumstances. Los perpetuates Urizen's cycle and is thus complicit in the disintegration of Albion's balance. Fueled by the power of the "dark Urthona" (a false specter of the same Zoa that grants Los his abilities), the Prophet, in effect, uses vengeance to energize his binding process and overwhelm the fallen tyrant.

This transformation in Los's character can be seen especially with the inclusion of an additional three lines that help to frame the power of "dark Urthona" at work. The core myth of Blake's poem destines Los to deliver truth and correct Urizen's misdeeds, but the scene concludes with Los "absorbed in dire revenge" and "[drinking] with joy the cries of Enitharmon." He uses "the groans of Urizen" to jumpstart his process and "feeds on cruel thoughts" to sustain his wrath. Given that Los needs Enitharmon (for her ability to inspire the Eternal Prophet and offer balance), dismissing her tears relates back to his own selfish intentions. Indeed, Blake's construction of female Emanations to counteract the excessive tendencies of their male counterparts is essential to achieving Albion's reawakening. One

cannot realize unity without the female presence as a catalyst for the Universal Man. As a result, Blake's first foray into the *Zoas* binding leaves Los misled by Urizen's temptation.

Blake's *Four Zoas* binding scene features a prototype ending that concludes *Night the Fourth* with a clear image of Los failing his mission. In this version, Blake sheds light on the duplicitous relationship between the two characters by having Los behold the error of his final product. If the binding represents a way to enslave Urizen within his own idea of mechanized time, then Los witnessing his completed image functions as a reverse form of mental imprisonment. The oppressed becomes the oppressor and vice versa. Los's self-righteousness finally sees the embodiment of his excess through Urizen's new likeness. It confirms that Los operates as a mirror of the tyrant whose power now enslaves humanity:

> The Prophet of Eternity beat on his iron links & links of brass
> And as he beat round the hurtling Demon. Terrified at the Shapes
> Enslaved humanity put on he became what he beheld
> Raging against Tharmas his God & uttering
> Ambiguous words blasphemous filled with envy firm resolved
> On hate Eternal in his vast disdain he labored beating
> The Links of fate link after link an endless chain of sorrows (Book IV, ll. 202-208)

As a critical and recurrent line in Blake's *Zoas*, "he became what he beheld" illustrates to the reader that Los is indeed Urizen's doppelganger, taking on the form of the tyrant in an attempt to subdue him. By looking at the reflective surface of his anvil, "terrified at shape and form alike," the image Los sees is one that remakes the prophet; his understanding of Urizen's tyranny translates into the self-realization that he also promotes conformity. Los proves through example Urizen's conviction that even the Eternal Prophet can be brought down to the level of a tyrant. If Blake had hoped to imagine Los as an answer to the issue of whether one could exercise freedom from conformity, then his first construction of this binding suggests that such liberty is impossible. Rather, Blake's unrefined vision reminds us of Mark Barr's thesis that tyranny "is something that rises up to entrap any and all who

allow themselves to be entrapped by it."[38] Los falls victim to the egotism of selfhood, and thus enables himself to be used by Urizen for the design of proving humanity's weakness.

With *Night the Fourth*, the question is not whether Urizen can be reintegrated into Albion's fourfold form. On the contrary, Blake must confront the new conundrum of how to prevent Los from becoming the new Urizen. What Blake discovers at this period of the *Zoas* writing process, I argue, is that Los cannot hope to bind Urizen alone. Rather, Los is in need of the Divine Power (thus, Blake's apparent reconversion/return to Christianity in the late 1790s) as a catalyst to cultivate his imaginative vision. Given that Blake's refined ending to *Night the Fourth* incorporates the imagery of Jesus Christ (who has been absent), Christ's 'new law' of forgiveness in the New Testament is ultimately what emerges as what seems to be his final answer to tyranny. Upon returning to revise part of the text (which includes *Night the Fourth*), Blake discovers that the image of Jesus Christ is entirely essential to unlocking the regenerative capacity of Los's powerful imagination.

In the second ending, Blake professes his faith in Christ and advances the premise that only through the Savior can Los construct the necessary limits without isolating what Urizen represents. To convey Christ's message of forgiveness, Blake rewrites the binding scene to include Jesus as a constitutive part of establishing limits. He refers to the story of Lazarus' resurrection and highlights the war of good and evil taking place inside Albion's heart. Rather than associate good/evil with either Los or Urizen, Blake uses the symbol of Christ to illustrate that these elements are constructive of every human being. The point is not to destroy them, but rather to maintain a set of limits keeping both in delicate balance:

> The Saviour mild & gentle bent over the corse of Death
> Saying If ye will Believe your Brother shall rise again
> And first he found the Limit of Opacity & named it Satan

[38] Barr, 749.

> In Albion's bosom for in every human bosom these limits stand
> And next he found the Limit of Contraction & named it Adam
> While yet those beings were not born nor knew of good or Evil
>
> Then wondrously the Starry Wheels felt the divine hand. Limit
> Was put to Eternal Death Los felt the Limit & saw
> The Finger of God touch the Seventh furnace in terror
> And Los beheld the hand of God over his furnaces
> Beneath the Deeps in Dismal Darkness beneath immensity (Book IV ll. 270-280)

Earlier in the poem, the Daughters of Beulah witness Los dominating Urizen from above. Seeing his blind excess, they seek out Christ who eventually descends upon Los to offer a new way of approaching the Zoa. Noticing his failure so far to re-habilitate Urizen, Christ establishes "the Limit of Opacity" and "the Limit of Contraction," both personified by the figures of Satan and Adam. But unlike orthodox Christianity, which situates the two ideas within the reductive dichotomy of good vs. evil, Blake contends that these lines are not so clearly opposed. Satan and Adam, Opacity and Contraction, Good & Evil, all exist as dualities inside Albion with not-so perfectly defined roles. Much like the Four Zoas, these limits stand "in every human bosom" and are in a perpetual state of flux, making it impossible to see a figure like Urizen as inherently evil. After all, Blake iterates that neither Satan nor Adam could have "[known] of good or evil" before their respective births, speaking to his notion that all of humanity enters the world in much the same way.

In the second stanza, Los witnesses the "Finger of God touch the Seventh Furnace in terror," exposing the prophet (and, to an extent, Blake) to the realization that Christ is a representation of humanity's ability and inclination to forgive. Moskal writes that this time of spiritual transition for Los (and Blake) confirms the fact that forgiveness is actually about "the mending of broken relationships…[as well as] the matter of the

individual's relations to truth."[39] In this case, forgiveness applies to Los's own willingness to pardon Urizen for his errors and acknowledge the good in him. Indeed, one would imagine that the period at which Los "[beholds] the hand of God over his furnaces" is the also the moment at which he recognizes the truth that the binding is not about exacting revenge. Of course, the final revision also teaches one that accepting forgiveness does not come without a price to pay.

Los may have heard Christ's message of forgiveness, but this does not prevent the binding from being a failure. Rather than signify victory, Christ's intervention shows Los the error of his ways. The point is not to reverse the damage but to prepare Los for seeing himself as transformed by the act. At its core, the binding speaks to victory of reason over imagination, thereby setting up Urizen's future return in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Since *The Four Zoas* is incomplete, the second ending of *Night the Fourth* should not be understood as conclusive of the Urizen saga. Rather, the revised ending represents Blake's significant realization that art can just as well change the artist. The poem does not necessarily speak to a clear answer as to how to confront tyranny, but instead chronicles Blake's internal apocalypse and the transformations of vision that will assist him in the creation of his future prophetic books:

> In terrors Los shrunk from his task. His great hammer
> Fell from his hand his fires hid their strong limbs in smoke
> For with noises ruinous hurtlings & clashings & groans
> The immortal endured. Tho bound in a deadly sleep
> Pale terror seized the Eyes of Los as he beat round
> The hurtling Demon. Terrified at the shapes
> Enslaved humanity put on he became what he beheld
> He became what he was doing he was himself transformed (Book IV Second Portion ll. 280-287)

[39] Moskal, 68.

In Blake's final iteration of the binding, he retains some material from a previous revision while adding a new critical line at the end. The passage chronicles Los as he shrinks from "his task" with his "great hammer" falling from his hands. Unlike Urizen's body, which is "bound in deadly sleep," Los suffers "hurtlings & clashings & groans" as he tries to work through the pain generated by Urizen's "pale terror" stare. Los's act causes the "enslaved humanity" to put on the "terrified shapes" induced by the prophet's disfiguring of Urizen. As in the previous version, Los takes on the characteristics of the tyrant he seeks to defeat. But with the addition of "he became what he was doing, he was himself transformed," the stanza emphasizes that even in the wake of Christ's intervention, there is a certain damage done to Los's psyche that we did not necessarily see in the *Book of Urizen*. He is transformed from liberating prophet to tyrant-deity, remade entirely by his uncompromising selfhood.

In the end, Christ's presence cannot save Los from the inevitable fear that he must face when coming to terms with his own creation. Shrinking from the task of forgiveness guarantees that Urizen's mechanical cycles of nature and history will continue on into the future. Despite trying to wake the tyrant, Los's efforts are futile as "the immortal endures" every noise of ruin that he enunciates. No matter how hard he tries, Los must accept the error of his way and submit to the fact that his binding has changed him more than Urizen. The same is true of Blake. While the *Zoas* may go farther than *Urizen* in trying to confront the powers of tyranny, Blake falls short of his intended goal. On the contrary, he concludes *Night the Fourth* with one final stanza that sees Los and Urizen as a duality that will return later on.

One can only speculate whether Blake would have returned to *Night the Fourth* to revise key components of his myth for a third time. Given that Urizen does indeed return, in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, I would argue that Blake likely felt the need to draft a new myth that could avoid the mistakes made in the *Zoas*. That is to say, whatever answer he hoped to find regarding the Urizen dilemma would not come out of this unfinished work. It may be that the *Zoas* allowed Blake to confront the reservations and concerns he had about the Los/Urizen struggle in a way that made it more manageable in future projects. Regardless of the extent to which Blake applied aspects of the *Zoas* to *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, this last stanza reaffirms his lasting uneasiness toward the two characters. Seizing control of Los's body, Urizen forces him to perform a spastic dance that confirms his subversion to reason and power. While inconclusive, the stanza speaks to Blake's continued interest in Urizen:

> Spasms seized his muscular fibres writhing to & fro his pallid lips
> Unwilling moved as Urizen howled his loins waved like the sea
> At Enitharmon's shriek his knees each other smote & then he looked
> With stony eyes on Urizen & then swift writhed his neck
> Involuntary to the Couch where Enitharmon lay
> The bones of Urizen hurtle on the wind the bones of Los
> Twinge & his iron sinews bend like lead & fold
> Into unusual forms dancing & howling stamping the Abyss (Book IV, ll. 292-299)

Los's imprisonment is the very antithesis of freedom. Without control over his own body, the Eternal Prophet cannot act independently. "Unwilling," Los's contrived spasms cause "his muscular fibres" to writhe back and forth as he has no choice but to witness firsthand with "stony eyes" Urizen's howls and Enitharmon's shrieks. Being that his actions are all "involuntary," Los no longer has any sense of free will. Urizen directs his every move. In a sense, this scene is Blake's most vivid representation of tyranny at work. Los is forced to endure intense physical pain, the likes of which is only matched by the emotional scars of his separation from Enitharmon. The stanza is quite circuitous in that it recalls the

images of Los's bodily suffering from the illuminations in *Urizen*, complete with Los's haunting, unsettling stare. Even more so, the ending of *Night the Fourth* cycles back to its inception by virtue of Los being the one to suffer through involuntary captivity. Originally intended for Urizen, Los's body binding labors are reversed, and now forced unto him.[40] His spurts of madness even recall the inarticulate howlings of despair that followed his binding from *Urizen.* In effect, while the stanza leaves one with more questions than answers regarding the clear lack of resolution, the scene does connect with earlier portions of *Urizen* to offer forth the idea that Blake is constructing a progressive myth open to change and revision. I would argue that *The Four Zoas*, while incomplete, actually serves a much larger purpose in that it bridges the gap between Blake's early and late works to create one giant mythos.

Deciphering the Unfinished Myth

If *The Four Zoas* chronicles Los and his negotiation with reason as personified by Urizen, then to what degree does *Blake* also refine his position on tyranny and reason as a result of writing the poem? While some critics may argue that the work speaks only to the period of visionary crisis in Blake's life (which is largely true), the *Zoas* reflects a critical growth in Blake's examination of the mind's psychic faculties.[41] Whereas his minor

[40] In other words, *Night the Fourth* begins with a clear focus on Urizen's binding, but the *Night* turns into a referendum on Los by the end. In the same way that Los spends the entire *Night* binding Urizen's body in a display of defiance, Urizen returns the act by contorting Los's body in an unexpected reversal of roles. The tyrant reasserts his prerogative as king and seizes Los's body to prove that the Eternal Prophet is subject to his power, just as he suggested at the beginning of *Night the First*. Viewing *Night the Fourth* as a circuitous chapter helps to reinforce the imagery of Urizen's "cycles of history" and the way they govern his universe.

[41] Andrew Lincoln highlights the poem's change in title (*Vala* to *The Four Zoas*) as one example of the sort of visionary crisis Blake experienced. In his eyes, the name change reveals an early indication of Blake and his indecision regarding the poem. Leopold Damrosch considers Blake's spiritual crisis in the context of an excerpt from a letter written by Blake to his friend, Thomas Butts. In it, Blake claims to have "Emerged into the light of Day [to still] Embrace Christianity and Adore him who is the Express image of God." Blake continues to say that "I have Conquered and shall still Go on Conquering/Nothing can withstand the fury of my Course among the Stars of God." For Damrosch, this letter signifies a spiritual rediscovery that Blake is experiencing as he begins to make the transition from The *Four Zoas* to his successful project with *Milton.*

poems could be criticized for putting faith in the imagination without understanding its tendency for excess, Blake's *Zoas* correctly reveals the excesses of imagination when motivated by selfhood. While James Swearingen asserts that "a grand vision of human liberty is seen in the late works," I argue that Blake's *Four Zoas* is special for its skepticism towards liberty.[42] As *Night the Fourth* shows, reason must be part of the dialogue on liberty for the concept of Albion to exist, one brought to life by Blake's own revisions.

To re-iterate, Leopold Damrosch reminds us that the Zoas exist as an ever-shifting system of relationships within the human self. While he is not implying that the Zoas lack specific identities, the idea of a constantly fluctuating design is essential to understanding why Los fails to reintegrate Urizen back into Albion. It is reductive to view Urizen solely as a tyrant, which is precisely what Los does. He is not a concrete being that can be easily relegated to one specific function; rather, Urizen is the subject that happens to assume the role of tyrant based on circumstance. If Los can fall (as he does), then so can Tharmas, or Urthona and Luvah (which they do). Albion's fractured psyche is what generates the very conditions under which the Zoas must operate. Because Los fails to see the particularities of the scenario, he is quick to pass judgment on Urizen and suffers as a consequence of it.

And yet, Urizen exists as a theoretical model that other eighteenth-century authors are also responding to, even if unconsciously. In Blake's case, Urizen embodies a specific critique of reason, patriarchy, and tyranny. Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin are two writers that extend the conversation initiated by Blake, bringing it to bear on more immediate social and political problems, and addressing it in the trials of their novels. Both writers advance a critique of rationalism, and more so, a commentary on the

[42] Swearingen, 125.

patriarchy that appropriates it. Whereas Blake sees Brotherhood as an antidote to the problem of tyranny, Godwin and Wollstonecraft focus on the explicit issue of 'brother' hood and the role it plays in producing an oppressive masculine ideology that informs the trial scene. In this way, the two rationalists break from Blake's perspective on brotherhood and take the conversation about patriarchy in a new direction that reimagines the Urizenic ideology through a grounded approach to masculine power in the courtroom.

Chapter II

Confessional Narratives in *Caleb Williams* and *The Wrongs of Woman*

Critiques of Patriarchy in the Eighteenth-Century Gothic Novel

William Blake mythologizes radical tyranny by using the male patriarch (Urizen), arguing for Brotherhood as an antidote to oppression and conformity. With William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, (brother)-hood (that is, exclusive male power) becomes the object of critique. Whereas Blake defines the Urizenic ideology (e.g. coercion, reason and oppression), Godwin and Wollstonecraft look at institutional male hierarchy in a way that exposes the courtroom scene as a place of oppressive injustice. In *Things as They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, Godwin dramatizes the persuasive testimony of Caleb as Caleb tries to convince readers of his innocence.[43] In *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* we see Wollstonecraft use Maria to examine the gender bias and male prerogative that undergirded the actual justice system of late eighteenth-century England. As James Jenkins and Diane Hoeveler indicate, "late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century gothic fictions did largely reflect the historical shifts and legal reforms of the time period."[44]

Godwin and Wollstonecraft acknowledge the male bias in jurisprudence (one that, ultimately, obscures the use of reason in the courtroom), but the two disagree on how one should address the law's excesses. In *Caleb Williams*, Godwin offers the confession as a form of defense in the courtroom that can positively impact a verdict and undermine the class and gender hierarchy. Yet the cost seems enormous and Caleb's words only become

[43] For this chapter, I will be referring to the original and published endings of the manuscript. While Godwin chose not to publish his initially drafted ending, it reveals his conflicted attitudes about the nature of justice at the novel's end.

[44] Hoeveler, Diane Long and James D. Jenkins. "Where the Evidence Leads: Gothic Narratives and Legal Technologies." *European Romantic Review,* Vol. 18, Issue 3, 2007, p. 326.

effective when they most resemble the language of the authority he opposes. With *Maria*, Wollstonecraft challenges Godwin in that she implicates gender and uses the female confession to reveal how the male justice system still reserves its authority over which confessions should be valued. To her, the confessions most overlooked by male judges, and most vital to equality under the law, are those told by women.

Given that *Maria* was written after *Caleb Williams* (and published posthumously by Godwin in 1798), the figure of Maria works as a response to Godwin's figure of Caleb and his premise that confessions can undo patriarchal norms. Despite Caleb's run-in with a pervasive system of social control, the novel's ending eventually shows that he is somewhat successful in relaying his confession to the audience. While he succeeds in a highly problematized way, Caleb's confession does have an impact. With Maria, Wollstonecraft argues that gender complicates the courtroom confession even further by showing how an all-male judiciary can invalidate a woman's right to reason. To her, Godwin does not give enough attention to the underlying hierarchal constraints that affect women specifically.

By comparing *Caleb Williams* and *Maria*, this chapter exposes the debate Godwin and Wollstonecraft have regarding the prospect for justice in a male-dominated hierarchal system. Bridget M. Marshall, for example, invites one to consider the "formal testimonial and confessional structures of courtrooms."[45] She views them as crucial to deciphering the question of how penal systems function. Unlike Marshall who is more concerned with events taking place inside the courtroom, however, I contend that these novels are trial-like in their larger structure. In other words, legal testimony and confession do not start at the inception of a courtroom drama, but rather at the very beginning of the work itself.

[45] Marshall, Bridget M. *The Transatlantic Gothic Novel and the Law, 1790-1860*. Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011. 1.

Trials do not so much dominate the Gothic novel, as it is the novel itself that takes on characteristics befitting of actual trials, including its more general meaning of adversity.[46]

In *The Art of Alibi: English Law Courts and the Novel*, Jonathan Grossman speaks to this claim by arguing that "legal trials have not taken over Caleb's life; life has become trial-like."[47] That is to say, Caleb's life experience from his opening confession to the final trial places him between a rock and a hard place, in which he must defend his actions and then go about proving his innocence. Yet by doing so, he only reinforces his position as an outsider challenging the system. Proving his innocence makes him look, and, by the end of the novel, even feel guilty. Grossman's statement applies to Maria as well, whose own life in an asylum confirms the extent to which the struggle to survive becomes her trial. By writing novels that place the main character in a variety of confessional-related scenarios, Godwin and Wollstonecraft show that effective legal critique requires a reader to think outside the boundaries of what happens in the courtroom. Caleb and Maria tell stories to challenge those boundaries.

Each novel begins with a narrator who tells a story about his/her engagement with the justice system, reimagining their reader as the jury responsible for deciding the merits of the tale. Beginning with a rhetorical plea suggests that both Caleb and Maria want only to be judged by those who listen to their stories. They do not consider the legal process to be reliable, and fear that it will misconstrue their narratives. Caleb indicates as much with this opening remark: "My enemy has shown himself inaccessible to entreaties and untired

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[46] In *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Ian Watt discusses how novels of the eighteenth-century featured a narrative method of "formal realism" through which authors would attempt to describe the private experience of the characters (174). That is, with the rise of the eighteenth-century novel came a heightened focus on the subjective and inward experience. Caleb and Maria's respective confession narratives would qualify as such as they relay their personal thoughts and private feelings to the reader.

[47] Grossman, Jonathon. *The Art of Alibi: English Law Courts and the Novel*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. 53.

in persecution. My fame as well as my happiness, has become victim. Every one, as far as my story has been known, has refused to assist me in my distress, and has execrated all of my name."[48] Seemingly alone and without defenders, Caleb turns to the reader as a way to ensure that his story is told unfiltered (or so we assume), and to preserve the integrity that he believes has been tarnished by his enemy. Caleb refers to himself as a victim, one who is subject to a larger network of social control that manages to overwhelm/subjugate him.

But Caleb's opening statement is not only for literary effect. By introducing Caleb through his fear of silence and censorship, Godwin addresses a pertinent concern that had influence over his writing. Namely, a vast skepticism of the "growing number of coercive techniques available to the government of the day [including] imprisonment…the use of a police force…and the dissemination of (false) information in newspapers, pamphlets, and circulars."[49] In light of the 1794 Treason Trials, in which the British Government tried British radicals for crimes of sedition and political insurrection (Thomas Hardy and John Thelwall being two suspects who were eventually acquitted), we see Godwin as one who uses *Caleb Williams* to critique the British Government's policies of suppression and coercion.[50] What Godwin expresses through Caleb's struggle to find a voice is the kind of blanket corruption that infiltrated Britain's police force and enabled a pervasive system of

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[48] Godwin, William *Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams.* Penguin Books, 2005. 5. All future references to this novel, unless otherwise noted, are to this edition and referred to using parenthetical citation.

[49] Bailey, Quentin. "Extraordinary and Dangerous Powers": Prisons, Police, and Literature in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* Vol. 22, No. 3, 2010, p. 532.

[50] Godwin himself played an essential role in the acquittal of Hardy and Thelwall. During the public debates that led up to the Treason Trials, reformers and conservatives argued about the issue of truth vs. fiction, and the notion that commonsense should prevail over wild exaggerations and groundless accusations. Godwin's pamphlets, especially *Cursory Strictures on the Charge Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the Grand Jury, October 1794*, helped Hardy and Thelwall's defense by making the argument that one should separate fact from fiction in order to properly evaluate the accused and reveal the truth of the case.

social control that monitored and threatened ordinary citizens. Caleb, in effect, speaks so that he might unveil the tactic of subversion/coercion that defined Godwin's England.[51]

His opening remark resembles a testimony, using the power of persuasion to influence how the audience perceives his character. Caleb says that his story has fallen on deaf ears, suggesting that he attempted previously to ask others for help and found no one to aid him. Instead, these very forces have assisted in the desecration of his reputation. As Tilottama Rajan argues, this opening testimonial is Caleb's last attempt at the "unearthing of truth, and the correction of past mis-representations."[52] He believes himself mistreated, and seeks justice through channels unaffiliated with the penal system. And by labeling his employer, Ferdinando Falkland, as "my enemy," he reveals a need to define his adversary in a way he feels the law failed to do. As a result, Caleb uses this testimony to govern and negotiate the terms under which his audience understands him and the enemy he opposes.

Maria's opening statement takes a different approach. Rather than assume the first person perspective of Caleb's testimonial, Wollstonecraft employs a third-person narrator to describe Maria's character. The heroine is absent, and thus incapable of speaking to the reader. Given that the memoir's opening reads as a retrospective description of Maria, her absence may imply that she somehow has been prevented from speaking for herself. In an

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[51] E.P. Thompson, in *The Making of the English Working Class,* addresses specifically the rise of a "Radical Culture" in England that propagated a new sort of political self-consciousness within English working-class communities. As a result of social and intellectual shifts in British culture (i.e. the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment), collectivist values of self-respect, social organization and communal self-interest began to find their way into the larger public discourse. Thompson refers to Thomas Paine's influential *The Rights of Man* (1791) as one such work that gained prominence due to its thesis that Political Revolution is equally likely and permissible (e.g. French Revolution) when a government does not protect the rights of its people. In effect, Thompson shows that the growth of a new British class economy in the 1790s meant an increased attention towards the chasms in social class that were developing. Coupled with, as Thompson describes it, a "confluence of sophisticated political Radicalism and a more primitive and excitable revolutionism," 1790s England saw a gradual crescendo of social unrest and political skepticism towards the English monarchy" (711). William Pitt's 1794 Treason Trials was implemented as a way to suppress British Radicalism and push back political dissent.

[52] Rajan, Tilottama. "Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel." *Studies in Romanticism,* Vol. 27, No. 2, 1988, p. 241.

alternate vein, Maria's very absence may be the mechanism that enables Wollstonecraft a chance to have her voice heard. The task of persuading the reader thus falls to her indirect narrator, one who writes that Maria is "a gentle…girl, with a kind of indolence in her temper, which might also be termed negative good-nature."[53] While the line suggests an emotional sensibility, the words "gentle" and "indolence" convey Wollstonecraft's soft criticism regarding Maria's unassertive and dependent disposition. These are values, as one learns from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that Wollstonecraft herself does not revere.[54] While these character traits may be understandable, Wollstonecraft's description introduces the problem of how to rationalize Maria and her dilemmas. Who is responsible for Maria's wrongs? Is she culpable, or the legal patriarchy?

These testimonials may not take place inside a courtroom, but they do structure an impression of how we should judge these characters. As Hal Gladfelder indicates, both of these novels illustrate "the degree to which criminal discourses, by the end of the century, had become enmeshed with the novelistic tradition itself…permitting a radical critique of the law as an instrument for the enforcement of oppressive gender and class relations."[55] I would argue that by beginning with testimonies intended for persuasive practice, Godwin and Wollstonecraft use their novels to iterate that criminality and the trial scene transcend courtroom protocol. They cause readers to question what is true and consider the role that

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[53] Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman.* Oxford University Press, 2009. 5. All future references to this novel, unless otherwise noted, are to this edition and referred to using parenthetical citation.

[54] In the Introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft addresses her readers, particularly women, regarding the need to respect the female sex as "rational beings" rather than "attractive creatures living a state of perpetual childhood unable to stand alone" (73). She discusses the need for women to practice self-dependence while also dismissing feminine phrases used condescendingly by men such as a "weak elegancy of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners" (73). Given that the phrases and descriptions cohere with the narrator's description of Maria, one sees how Wollstonecraft conducts a critique of the female condition that falls in line with her philosophical view from *A Vindication*.

[55] Gladfelder, Hal. *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Xii.

class and gender relations can have when determining the prospect for justice. Indeed, the two authors complicate how we view the Gothic novel as a prison of unheard testimonies.

Barnabas Tyrrel and the Figure of the Godwinian Patriarch in *Caleb Williams*

If one were to juxtapose Blake and Godwin's respective constructions of the male tyrant figure, then Barnabas Tyrrel would be, in some respects, analogous to Urizen. The two share a will to power racked by personal insecurity, one that ultimately leads to a common need for self-preservation. In Tyrrel's case, his inferiority to Falkland and treatment of his niece, Emily Melville, reveals his obsession (not unlike Caleb's) with controlling his self-narrative. By making Tyrrel's name a pun on the word tyranny, Godwin highlights the male imperative that defines his relationship with Emily. For instance, when Emily confesses her affection for Falkland, Tyrrel has her arrested for running away to him. When questioned about his harshness, Tyrrel responds: "Ass! Scoundrel! I tell you she does owe me, owes me eleven hundred pounds. – The law justifies it. – What do you think laws were made for? I do nothing but right, and right I will have" (85). Tyrrel is invoking the family laws of eighteenth-century England that treated the head of household as sovereign."[56] He functions effectively as one patriarch with the legal power to control his property (Emily) for his own selfish interests and intents. In this case, allowing Emily to pursue Falkland is tantamount to Tyrrel losing control over his status as sovereign and the influence that it grants to his narrative agency.

[56] In *Family, Sex, and Marriage: In England 1500-1800*, Lawrence Stone discusses how families of the eighteenth-century were considered by the British government to be political entities modeled after the idea of a male sovereign who overlooks his subjects. He describes the conjugal family unit as being directed and "accompanied by a positive reinforcement of the despotic authority of husband or father – that is to also say of patriarchy" (109). In other words, the male head of household had the power and authority to subordinate those living with him to his will and discretion. In effect, the nuclear family of eighteenth-century England served as a modified microcosm of state-sanctioned patriarchy. By reserving authoritarian dominance over woman, Stone writes, the husband/father "possessed the power to manipulate the distribution of all his property" (113).

With Tyrrel, Godwin designs an icon of male tyranny to preface what will happen to Falkland. Presented as the prototypical authoritarian, Tyrrel's hatred of his rival speaks to a larger insecurity regarding Falkland's stainless reputation. He is envious of Falkland, driven by the belief that his narrative has been over-written unfairly because of the public trust his enemy enjoys. We are first introduced to him through Caleb's retelling of a story he hears from the administrator of Falkland's estate, Mr. Collins. Collins tells him a story about Falkland's past, one mediated to us through Caleb's questionable appropriation of a first-person perspective. Given that Falkland's past is being told from two different points of view, Godwin raises the issue of which narrative constitutes a truthful retelling. Should we assume that Caleb has an ulterior motive, and what does Collins' storytelling suggest?

When Caleb inquires about Falkland's erratic behavior, Collins shares a story that delves into Falkland's past. But because Caleb assumes authority over the narrative we are reading, Collins' intent is somewhat obfuscated. Could it be that by choosing to relay this story, he hopes to portray Falkland sympathetically? Or does he tell the story to fill Caleb with suspicion about his new boss? What we *do* know is that Caleb uses the story to plant a seed of doubt in the reader's mind regarding Falkland's character, but he never explains what Collins intended. At this point in the novel, Godwin promotes what Victoria Meyers and Robert Maniquis qualify as a reading of "educated resistance, by which readers resist the text's moral and construct its tendency against the grain."[57] By integrating two central storytellers into the novel's main plot, Godwin encourages his readers to remain skeptical of any narrative that lays claim to truth. In fact, Caleb's retelling of Collins' retelling only speaks to Godwin's point that, regardless of the

[57] Maniquis, Robert and Victoria Meyers, *Godwinian Moments from the Enlightenment to Romanticism*. University of Toronto Press, 2011. 11.

storyteller, neither individual can be fully trusted. Truth is not necessarily something that can be found through any sort of retelling.

We also learn from Tyrrel that his resistance to Emily's love for Falkland (despite Falkland's lack of interest) comes from an ulterior motive to match her with a man by the name of Mr. Grimes. Feeling subverted by Emily's defiance, Tyrrel condemns his rival in an attempt to show how Falkland shattered his reputation: "Time was when I was thought entitled to respect. But now, debauched by the Frenchified rascal, they call me rude, surly and a tyrant" (56-57). Tyrrel's account speaks to a hatred for Falkland based on what he depicts as a lived experience of daily public ridicule. The problem with this statement is that it complicates how we should view Tyrrel. Is he really the tyrant of Caleb's imagination or simply a victim of Falkland's secret machinations? Indeed, the idea that one man is the root cause of another man's anguish is not that unusual if we recall Caleb's description of Falkland as an enemy responsible for his unhappiness. In effect, the scene asks the reader to consider whether Tyrrel's feelings are purposely intended to be reminiscent of Caleb's.

If this is indeed the case, then Caleb may very well be using the example of Tyrrel to expose the public slander he endures from Falkland. In the same way that Tyrrel sees a reshaping of his public persona ("they call me rude, surly, a tyrant"), Caleb is also marred by public humiliation. Both characters cite Falkland as the root cause of their anguish and struggle equally to be taken seriously by those who trust him. In a sense, Godwin calls in-to question the concept of narrative authority. Who should we believe, and based on what precedent? While Caleb may be telling his story to clear his name, one could also say that he simply hopes to slander the public stature of a man he considers undeserving of praise.

In Chapter VII, Tyrrel scolds Emily for her disobedience and repeatedly urges her to consider Grimes. Whereas she wants to act autonomously (even though this would also mean placing herself under the rule of another man), Tyrrel assumes the position of male-sovereign to overrule her self-interest. As a result, Godwin exposes Emily's naivety about marriage, and Tyrrel's fear of having his authority undermined. In response to him, Emily says, "Indeed I will not be driven any way that you do happen to like. I have been used to obey you and in all that is reasonable I will obey you. But you urge me too far...Grimes is well enough…but he is not fit for me and torture shall not force me to be his wife" (57). One could argue that Emily practices resistance through declaration in that she believes one's desires trump obligation. But given Tyrrel's reaction of establishing the terms of her marriage, he clearly derives power from the ability to force Emily to obey him in accordance with law.

Rebecca Probert identifies changes in marriage law that underlines the role of state as well as familial control over marriage. In her text, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century*, she focuses on the important Clandestine Marriages Act of 1753, arguing that the law "has been seen as a watershed in the history of the legal regulation of marriage, marking the change from a pluralistic kind, in which multiple forms of marriage were accepted, to a more restrictive approach."[58] For those in eighteenth-century England, the 1753 Act altered the definition of marriage from that of a private/personal rite to a type of bureaucratic transaction. As she notes, marriage became increasingly regulated by the state apparatus and subject to prescriptions outlined by

[58] Probert, Rebecca. *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. 2.

English canon law.[59] Given the 1753 Act's role in redefining marriage more as a contract in line with state patriarchy, Tyrrel's authority over his word is potentially inscribed within a larger critique of the state.

For Tyrrel, Emily's personal feelings are irrelevant as marriage is more of a social responsibility than a choice. When he notices her focus on self-fulfillment and happiness, he iterates that marriage is a duty: "Do you not think that any body is going to marry you, whether you will or not. You are no such mighty prize. I assure you. If you knew your interest, you would be glad to take the young fellow while he is willing " (58). Aside from how Tyrrel devalues Emily as "no such mighty prize" (Falkland has no interest in her any way), he explains to her that marriage is not about a woman's desire. On the contrary, he claims that "interest" should dictate the ways in which women marry men. This could be financial or otherwise, but the will of the head of household determines it. In this way, one begins to understand the concept of marriage as a means to imprison women.

While Godwin changes his novel's focus to that of Caleb and Falkland, Emily is a perfect prototype for thinking about marriage as it relates to Maria in M. Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*. As Chris Roulston acknowledges in her study on marriages of the eighteenth century, "the word "wedlock" is apposite, in that certain depictions of married life lock identities into place in specific sexual constructions that efface or even minimize the possibility for movement."[60] Whereas Godwin only touches the surface of gender role dynamics in eighteenth-century marriage and law, Wollstonecraft situates women right in the epicenter of her critiques on marriage law, patriarchy, and moral autonomy. With her, we see a targeted emphasis on the role women have in evaluating systems of male power.

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[59] Probert, 166.
[60] Roulston, Christine. *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France*. Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010. 10.

Maria Venables and Her Prison of Unheard Testimonies in *The Wrongs of Woman*

Godwin's novel moves away from marriage following Emily's demise toward the end of Volume I. But in Wollstonecraft's work, marriage takes center stage. Maria suffers in the asylum as a result of her ill-fated marriage to George Venables, an abusive husband who serves as the tyrant-figure of the novel. Maria's story begins with her lamenting over being separated from her infant daughter. The narrator speaks to how Maria "mourned for her child, lamented she was a daughter, and, anticipated the aggravated ills of life that her sex made inevitable." (69) We are alerted right away to the double standard between women and men – Maria fears for her daughter's future (if she is still alive) because she is female and thus vulnerable to a pervasive system of male control. Maria's own confinement is an instance of such control, one that threatens both her mental stability and faculty of reason.

The prison itself personifies male control even before George Venables is referred to by name. We learn that despite her captivity, Maria is determined to escape her cell for the sake of her child: "Now she endeavored to brace her mind to fortitude, and to ask her-self, what was to be her employment in this dreary cell? Was it not to escape, to fly to the child, and to baffle the selfish schemes of her tyrant – her husband" (70)? Realizing that one is likely to go insane from doing nothing, Maria fortifies her mental faculties and thinks of a way to escape to confront her husband. Though, the idea of escape itself it two fold: she is not only fixated on fleeing the prison of bars and cells, but also the prison of wedlock. To what extent, then, does Wollstonecraft want us to reconsider how we view the prison and its role as an institution of legal patriarchy that attempts to rob women of their autonomy?

In "The Walls of Her Prison": Madness, Gender and Discursive Agency in Eliza Fenwick's *Secrecy* and Mary Wollstonecraft *The Wrongs of Woman,*" Patricia Cove argues that Maria must "construct a narrative authority following her confinement."[61] In other words, Maria's incarceration applies not only to this asylum, but also the novel within which she makes her case. The point is for her to reach someone beyond the pages of the text, as if her actual words are trapped within the confines of this work. You could say that *Maria* the material novel is her real prison, not the fictional asylum that exists within its pages. Much like Jemima, the cell-keeper who listens to Maria's stories, the reader fills a similar role in that reading her words results in a type of liberation from the page. In this sense, Maria reaches beyond her prison-cell to offer her confession.

Patricia Cove asserts that Maria intends to escape from the prison of narrative and expressive confinement. That is to say, rather than think of a prison as just a physical or material locale, one should apply the term to the novel itself. This formulation enables for us to see how Maria's wish to reassert agency involves convincing her readers that prison includes textual boundaries. Even in John Bender's *Imagining the Penitentiary*, he speaks about "eighteenth-century prison reform [finding its form] in the spheres of novelistic and literary discourse, where, through material of language, the emergent structure of feelings took shape…and became conscious experience."[62] In this case, Bender is arguing that the eighteenth-century novelistic discourse featured representations of the 'prison' that would later be restructured into a living juridical order.[63] For my argument, Bender reveals to us

[61] Cove, Patricia. "The Walls of Her Prison": Madness, Gender and Discursive Agency in Eliza Fenwick's *Secrecy* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman." European Romantic Review*, Vol. 23, Issue 6, 2012, 681.
[62] Bender, 1.
[63] That is to say, eighteenth-century novels portrayed prison in a way that would influence the structure and form of actual penitentiaries later in the same century. He argues that works such as Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), along with novels by Henry Fielding and Oliver Goldsmith,

that confinement applied to the power relations of narrative authority at play in texts such as *Maria*. Maria's attempt to subvert the power of the penitentiary through persuasive and narrative authority proves that the prison is most deadly when robbing one's actual voice.

Then, there is the imprisoning of one's mind. In the first four chapters, Maria uses her self-narrative to persuade Jemima into offering her books for intellectual nourishment and stability. Maria understands that mental malnourishment will lead only to insanity, so she manipulates Jemima's sympathy to gain access to literary works like Dryden's *Fables* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Knowing that Wollstonecraft was a strong disciple of female education, rationalism, and the Enlightenment ideology is especially important here given Maria's intention to read as a means of retaining her sense of reason.[64] She discovers very early that the asylum is designed to ruin her mind, so reading functions as a way to undermine the penitentiary, and resist attempts by the institution to silence and confine her.

Wollstonecraft's choice of *Paradise Lost* is especially fitting if we consider how it relates to Maria's self-fashioning as an intellectual rebel and rational self-critic. In Milton's epic, Satan devises a plan to escape from the world below and overthrow God.

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provided a depiction of power and confinement that would nurture a reconsideration and reinvention of the prison for the future. Rather than focus solely on the legal sphere, Bender iterates that English narrative was instrumental to the cultural formation of penitentiaries. This places the eighteenth-century English novel in a causal (rather than reactive) relationship with social and legal institutions.

[64] The image of women reading is critically important to Wollstonecraft. Even with *The Wrongs of Woman*, Maria is not alone in her preoccupation with the practice. For instance, Chapter Five deals with Jemima and her past, one that also features reading as a coping mechanism. At one point, Jemima explains that she lived with a literary man, thus obtaining access to books. She says, "that I now began to read, to beguile the tediousness of solitude, and to gratify an inquisitive, active mind" (99). Learning about her own experience with books not only helps to shape her mind, but also clarifies for us why she feels the need to assist Maria. As a cell-keeper who can relate to Maria's situation, she sympathizes and chooses to help her. This scene falls in line with Wollstonecraft's principles of arguing that women should be given the opportunity to self-educate so they can be independent and hone their intellectual faculties. For her, reading is the key to becoming self-conscious and ready to exert control over one's life situation. If we were to go even further and consider the importance of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* then the practice of reading becomes significant beyond educating one's mind. Wollstonecraft argues in the *Vindication* that "were women more rationally educated, could they take a more comprehensive view of all things, they would be contented to love but once in their lives" (195). This critique, given the circumstances, may very well be meant for a character like Maria or Jemima given the mistakes they both make in finding love.

One could very well compare this scene to Maria's plan to escape prison and confront her husband. In the case of Satan, he plots to replace God as the ruling patriarch. In the case of Maria, she has the will to subvert the patriarchal arms of prison and marriage. Whereas Milton's Satan is fighting to be liberated from God's cosmic system, Maria fights to be freed from the bars, cells, and shackles of male hierarchy. Both characters face a similar sense of confinement that motivates them to confront the status quo. The one key difference is that Satan hopes to establish a new status quo while Maria seeks to exist outside of its juridical parameters.

Catriona Mackenzie takes the practice of reading a step further when she analyzes its role as a conduit for self-governance within the prison. She iterates that self-education, according to Wollstonecraft, allows "women to think and act as autonomous moral agents and to envisage the social and political organizations required for them to do so."[65] If one were to imagine Maria reading *Paradise Lost* as a political text, then it makes some sense that she would want to understand Satan's dilemma of autonomy through her own. Given the poem's preoccupation with models of political organization and tyranny, Maria's own attraction to the poem highlights her self-education in areas related to "the present state of society and government" (78). Maria learns about tyranny from Satan's quarrel with God, an intellectual exercise that teaches her how to recognize and resist authoritarianism. But unlike Satan who wants to emulate tyranny, Maria sees the flaw in tyrannical regimes.

Up until now, Wollstonecraft exercises a third-person perspective to mediate what Maria experiences in the asylum. Once the novel shifts to Volume II, Maria's first-person voice narrates her marriage with Venables. She understands him to be the embodiment of

[65] Mackenzie, Catriona. "Reason and Sensibility: The Ideal of Women's Self-Governance in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft." *Hypathia* Vol. 8, No. 4, 1993. 36.

male hierarchy and legal tyranny, a figure whose status as husband and sovereign enables him to abuse and mistreat his wife. For Wollstonecraft, Venables embodies a construct of patriarchy that seeks to preserve itself. Like Tyrrel, Venables is also afraid of losing what power he has over Maria. But most critically, this marriage allows Wollstonecraft to offer a critique of eighteenth-century marriage law and its restrictive treatment of women. This means that Wollstonecraft uses Maria's marriage not only to expose the sexist patriarchal aims of the marital institution, but also point out Maria's complicity in allowing herself to be willfully co-opted into a marriage contract devised specifically to suppress her agency.

Maria's Marriage to George Venables and the Personification of Male Tyranny

Conceived as Wollstonecraft's figure of male tyranny, Venables promises Maria a life of happiness only to grant her despair and misery. At the end of Volume I, Maria says she should have "noticed his selfish soul to be spared the misery of discovering that I was united to an heartless unprincipled wretch" (123). Given that Maria is addressing her daughter directly, one might imagine her wanting to speak candidly about the danger of ill-advised relationships. And to do this, Maria first admits to her mistake of believing Venables, and allowing herself to be deceived by his words. Fittingly, Maria's acknowledgment speaks to the title of the novel, namely that she is also culpable for the wrongs inflicted upon her.

Volume II begins with the newly married couple traveling to London. Chapter IX, in particular, features Maria as she witnesses her husband's foul behavior firsthand. Aside from her description of George's numerous affairs, these reflections are significant in that they show Maria equating marriage with prison. Early in Chapter IX, for instance, we see Maria reminisce about her relative youth, and wonder whether marrying young was much

of the problem: "I could not sometimes help regretting my early marriage; and that, in my haste to escape from a temporary dependence, and expand my newly fledged wings, in an unknown sky, I had been caught in a trap, and caged for life" (128). She describes herself as a trapped animal, one who marries Venables to escape from a prison of "temporary dependence." Of course, she neglects to consider the potential implications of what marriage will require her to sacrifice. She moves between two different examples of property and dependence: the first being dictated by her parents (benefactors), and then the second being determined by her husband who assumes complete marital control.

Chris Roulston addresses this very problem of marriage as a power complex in his study. By saying that "the novel enabled certain writers to engage in a political critique of the marital institution *through* the narration of marriage," she points to Wollstonecraft as a critic who reimagines marriage in order to critique it.[66] In other words, narrating marriage presents us with a way to deconstruct its legal foundation, especially in terms of property, authoritative dominance, and its privileging of the male prerogative. Wollstonecraft gives us a marriage (in George and Maria Venables) that relies on these three tenets to exist. He is empowered by the law to dictate the terms of his union with Maria and thus reaffirms a sense of dominance through his abusive nature. Laurence Stone acknowledges as well the reality that "by marriage, the husband and wife become one person in law – and that "one person" was the husband."[67] Regardless of whatever hopes and dreams Maria had about a free life, her marriage signifies sacrificing her will and submitting herself over to George.

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[66] Roulston, 7.
[67] Stone, Laurence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800*. Harper & Row Paperback, 1977. 136.

While Venables can certainly be blamed for his destructive conduct and behavior, Maria's naïve marriage fantasy affirms that she fell victim to his lies and deceit. Once she experiences George disregard her health in favor of gambling and promiscuity, she comes to terms with her status as property: "My husband's fondness for women was of the gross kind, and indulgences…entirely promiscuous. My health suffered…could I have returned to his sullied arms, but as the victim to the prejudices of mankind who have made women the property of their husbands?" (129-130). Maria uses the word "prejudice" to refer to George's hereditary privilege. Echoing Wollstonecraft's 1790 response to Burke, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, her idea of prejudice refers specifically to the argument (central to Burke) that tradition, custom, privilege, and rank dictate social norms. In *The Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft critiques Burke's defense of such norms by alluding to the way in which this thinking creates a false justification for society's control of women. Rather than accept Burke's status quo, Wollstonecraft uses Maria to make a larger point regarding the systemic male sexism that underpins social structures.

Towards the end of Chapter X in Volume II, Maria actually advances a critique of marriage as she shows how the law favors men. Unlike earlier in the novel, when Maria clearly felt empowered to subvert male tyranny, she now anticipates her own fate when asserting that she will remain forever married to Venables. Motivated initially by the prospect of liberty and self-improvement, Maria now reveals her dwindling faith in the belief that things will improve: "Marriage had *bastilled* me for life. I discovered in myself, a capacity for all the enjoyment of pleasures that existence affords; yet, inhibited by the partial laws of society, this fair globe was, to me, an universal blank" (137). Alluding to the Bastille fortress not only testifies to her experience of marriage as an

arbitrary and unjust prison, but also hints at a revolutionary potential that remains unrealized. As she shows a proclivity for adventure and intellectual curiosity, the vast discoveries of "this fair globe" escape Maria because of "partial laws of society" that confine her. The book of the world is one she will never read. Thus Maria's marriage will only lead her down the path to perdition, as she now accepts her isolation from the world.

Wollstonecraft's critique continues when Maria assesses marriage in its economic and psychological implications: "Such are the partial laws enacted by men; for, only to lay a stress on the dependent status of women…she is much more injured by this potential loss of the husband's affection, than he by that of his wife" (137). Protecting male privilege is one reason for these "partial laws:" the larger concern is that defining women as property thus prevents them from breaching the contract. Women remain the property of their husbands and therefore are unable to leave abusive relationships. This would explain why Maria, as of her entry into the asylum, could not leave Venables on her own, even after she tried for divorce. The law does not recognize her self-proclaimed status as a rational being, and so, she must live a confined life within this institution until Venables ultimately divorces her.

Of course, Maria's main concern has less to do with a marriage contract and more to do with the double standard facing women who use reason to critique marital abuse. At the end of Chapter X, Maria claims that women are despised for exercising rational ideas: "A woman [who resigns] what is regarded her natural protector, is despised, and shunned, for asserting the independence of mind distinctive of a rational being" (139). Maria views herself as a rational being whose concerns warrant attention from the patriarchy. This

question of rationality and legal recognition will prove to be critical when Maria goes on trial at the novel's end.

The Public Interrogation of Ferdinando Falkland and the State of "Things As They Are"

The first semi-trial (more like public interrogation) of *Caleb Williams* occurs right after Emily dies from weakness. Several days later her funeral services are held. After the funeral a public assembly takes place (which Tyrrel is knowingly barred from). Defiantly, Tyrrel attends the party and confronts Falkland, at which they have a physical altercation. Later that evening, Tyrrel is found dead on the street. Consequently, Falkland appears before a gathering of the community in which his peers question him as they try to uncover the identity of Tyrrel's murderer. We learn from the interrogation that Falkland's social status protects him from any serious inquiry, resulting in a farcical questioning that only plays at the idea of justice. It also reveals, in concert with Godwin's ideas on trials and justice, that the status quo ("Things As They Are") governs how people are treated under the law. Falkland gets a free pass because of his social position, one that manipulates the public's perception of him to his benefit.

The public hearing takes up only two pages of Godwin's novel. It is neither a long nor very informative event. The magistrates begin by visiting the known facts of the case, but what we learn is not very helpful: "Mr. Falkland, it appeared, had left the rooms, right after his assailant…he had been attended, by one or two of the gentlemen…it was proved, that he had left them upon some slight occasion…[and] he had already mounted his horse and ridden home" (104). The court knows very little, and there are gaps in terms of Tyrrel and how the conflict played out. But despite these factual holes, the justices proceed by allowing Falkland to give a defense and persuade his peers that he is innocent.

In *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin defines 'justice' (as it relates to the principles of society) as "a general appellation for all moral duty."[68] He uses the term when discussing the relationship between morality and the responsibility one has to the "mass of individuals." Godwin claims that one's conception of justice should come from what benefits the whole. Justice, therefore, is a rule of conduct that Godwin believes should always "tend to the improvement of the community."[69] That is, something is 'just' when it contributes to the well being of the political body. With this idea in mind, what can we consider best for Falkland's peers? Would the community benefit from learning about his true nature, or does it exercise its "moral duty" by believing (however falsely) that Falkland is innocent of murder? How do we define justice in this content? Are the magistrates realizing Godwin's notion of justice by letting Falkland defend his reputation, or does the definition itself fall short when applied to Falkland's scene and his desire for vindication?

Without any interjection from the magistrates, Collins reads Falkland's defense. It addresses nothing about the crime; rather, the statement discusses his good reputation and reaffirms his image of innocence. As opposed to judging him based on the known facts of the case, the audience falls for Falkland's narrative of philanthropy and goodwill. He asks his audience to consult what they *already* know about his character, making the statement less about facts or evidence, and more concerned with having people relate to him. Rather than offer cause for suspicion, Falkland wants to be evaluated solely on the basis of deeds done and contributions made. By doing this, he changes the question of justice from 'who murdered Tyrrel' to 'can I defend my reputation in the interest of the whole community?'

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[68] Godwin, William. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Oxford University Press, 2013. 52.
[69] Godwin, 58.

Once the letter finally discusses Tyrrel, it does so in the context of Falkland's own suffering and the pain he endures from having his reputation questioned. Quite simply, he says, "Reputation has been the idol, the jewel of my life. I could never have borne to think that a human creature should believe that I was a criminal" (136). Falkland suffers, but it is as a result of his obsession with reputation. He idolizes it in a way that obfuscates any actual quest for truth, replacing this murder case with a simple question of character. If anything is unjust, Falkland claims, it is the fact that he would even be considered a criminal. If we return to Godwin's definition of justice from *Political Justice*, we can see how Falkland's letter inverts the community's understanding of a just outcome. Rather than make it about Tyrrel, the letter turns the question of justice into a matter of whether the community will now afford Falkland *his* due justice by believing his defense and affirming his reputation.

Still, his commitment to reputation is questionable at best. Why would he concern himself more with the integrity of his own name than the death of Tyrrel when he even says, "His life was precious to me, beyond that of all mankind." (105). Tyrrel once stated that others see him as a tyrant. Given that he cannot defend his name in the court of public opinion, who is there to push back against the community's automatic embrace of Falkland? Godwin shows the reality of the scene: the hearing is much less about a crime, than about reinforcing the extent of Falkland's benevolence. In *Political Justice*, Godwin states that one common maxim people use to comprehend justice is "that we should love our neighbor as ourselves."[70] Of course, he goes on to say that regardless of how popular a principle this might be, it is not "of philosophical accuracy." The community's love for

[70] Godwin, 53.

Falkland is precisely the issue, as they cannot bring themselves to view him as anything other than the person they know him as.

In the end, Falkland's performance presents the question of whether his peers will convict someone with no *known* history of malpractice. If they were to do so, what would such a decision say about the law (and the community's welfare) if Falkland's name were ruined? Godwin's sub-title, "Things As They Are," suits this hearing rather well since the quest for justice is hindered by a preexisting consensus concerning believability and sympathy. The hearing only serves to bolster everyone's confidence in his image.

With Falkland's name officially cleared, the question of who murdered Tyrrel still remains unanswered. A few weeks later, the 'actual' assailant is discovered. It happens to be Mr. Hawkins whose clothes were found in a ditch covered in blood. The authorities do a search of his home and find the handle for a knife that matches the broken part of the knife lodged in Tyrrel's body. Hawkins and his son are indicted with the accused confessing guilt. The two are tried and executed.[71] Unlike Falkland, Hawkins' reputation is ruined by what the public considers "a piece of barbarous and unpardonable selfishness" (108). To the public, Hawkins refused to come forward initially and thus

[71] In *Political Justice*, Godwin talks about the limitations of punishment (particularly the death penalty) and its conflict with the principles of morality. In Chapter I of "Book VII: Of Crimes and Punishments," he sees punishment as "the voluntary infliction of evil upon a vicious being, not only because the public advantages demand it, but because there is apprehended to be a certain fitness and propriety in the nature of things, that render suffering…the suitable concomitant of vice" (362-363). Godwin makes clear his opposition to any kind of punishment on the basis of it not being necessary in the pursuit of justice. In fact, he places punishment in juxtaposition to morality by suggesting that the voluntary nature of the former makes it motivated by vice. In terms of the novel, Falkland coerces Caleb with the death penalty to buy his silence. Falkland's use of the death penalty is not motivated by a moral purpose for the common good since the only interest he considers with his own decision is his own. More importantly, Godwin disagrees with the use of punishment because he sees it in direct opposition to the benefit of the whole. As he describes it, "to punish any man upon any hypothesis for what is past and irrecoverable and for the consideration of that only must then be ranked among the wildest conceptions of untutored barbarism" (363). In short, Godwin's perspective on punishment means he would be opposed to Caleb *and* Falkland being punished.

forced a man of honor and great worth to endure public scrutiny in his place. They do not know that Falkland organized the evidence for Hawkins to take the fall.

By managing Tyrrel's murder so that citizens would remain unaware of his deceit, Falkland stages an elaborate ruse to preserve the one thing he idolizes most: his name. He takes advantage of others' trust, proving that he is not who he claims to be. As Meyers and Maniquis write, Falkland's evil deed speaks to "secret crime, the habit of secrecy seeping into personal history and corrupting public institutions."[72] Falkland's criminal behavior is entangled with a shady personal history in a manner that recasts his character as contrary to what the public knows. Could it be that Caleb, the storyteller, is doing this to invalidate Falkland so that the audience sees him as Caleb does when their stories intertwine later on? By entertaining the notion that Caleb wants to define Falkland in a way that elicits sympathy for his own predicament, one learns that neither story can be trusted. The act of interrogating each character's motives thereby shows Godwin's concern with truth. Caleb and his story are just as fraught as Falkland and his confession. Neither can be trusted since self-interest informs each narrative, calling us to criticize the implicit biases of both. As a result, Godwin wants his readers to complicate, problematize and resist whatever form of truth the text constructs. By reading against the grain Godwin teaches us how the process of reading necessitates a healthy skepticism of the motives that help construct a narrative.

Exposing the Truth: Caleb's Trial for Theft and Ferdinando Falkland's Public Deception

Volume One ends with Caleb asking a burning question: based on Collins's story, did Falkland murder Tyrrel? Volume Two begins as Caleb considers the merits of the tale by stating that he merely repeated Collins's narrative to the audience: "I do not pretend to

[72] Maniquis and Meyers, 4.

warrant the authenticity of any portion of these memoirs, except so much as fell under my own knowledge…" (111). He suggests that one should question the "authenticity" of the story, yet bases his entire investigation of Falkland's records on this very narrative. He indicates that no attempts were made to "adapt it to the precepts of [his] own taste," and yet Collins told a story that Caleb appropriated using his own voice. Can we trust what Caleb says, or does this line simply expose his main flaw, that being a dangerous and invasive curiosity?

To satisfy his desire for self-edification, Caleb elects to search through Falkland's personal belongings. Upon sifting through a case of drawers, he sees a letter composed by Benjamin Hawkins (the father) to Falkland about Tyrrel. In the letter, we learn that Tyrrel jailed Ben's son, Leonard, and looks to Falkland for counsel. After learning of Hawkins's secret correspondence with Falkland, Caleb disposes of the paper and chooses to confront Falkland the next day. Admitting that he read the letter without permission, Caleb asks about Hawkins's hanging and, thus, makes Falkland aware of his suspicion. Over the next couple of days, Caleb carefully observes Falkland in an attempt to find evidence to justify his suspicions. The turning point happens when a peasant is tried for murder at Falkland's estate, and Falkland rushes out of the room in response to the proceeding. Caleb comes to the decision that Falkland's outburst confirms his role in the Tyrrel murder case (in that it parallels the exact nature of the peasant's case). That is to say, Falkland cannot stomach a murder trial occurring on his own estate when he also happens to be Tyrrel's murder, and to have let another be executed for it.

After the trial ends, Caleb confronts Falkland once again. Falkland confesses to it: "Look at me. Observe me…I am the blackest of villains. I am the murderer of Tyrrel. I'm

the assassin of the Hawkinses" (141). Right before this confession, Falkland requires Caleb to keep the news a secret or face punishment of death. Caleb agrees to be silent but this becomes an incredible burden to bear once Falkland warns him of what may happen were he to run away. At this moment, Caleb becomes an unknowing victim of the state, an unfortunate victim of Falkland's social control. Even as he submits to a letter of resignation, claiming to be "the master of my own actions," Caleb remains unaware of the powers that continue to determine his life circumstances (158). Only a couple of days after leaving, Caleb, to his surprise, receives a letter from Valentine Forester, Falkland's brother-in-law, to return to the estate. Caleb is to stand trial for theft of a particular "item" that is never named.

Unbeknownst to Caleb, the trial he participates in signifies the start of a pervasive system of social control, coercion, and ubiquitous surveillance that will come to dominate his life. In a sense, there is no better example of Falkland's machinations than the letter of contempt Forester writes. Masquerading as an honest quest for justice, Forester's letter issues an ultimatum to Caleb: "If you are either villain or rascal, you will perhaps endeavor to fly; if your conscience tells you, 'You are innocent,' you will out of all doubt return… If you come, I pledge myself, that, if you clear your reputation, you shall not only be free, to go wherever you please, but shall also receive every assistance in my power to give (166). Forester plays on Caleb's own insecurity as he suggests that an innocent man should have no qualms about appearing for his trial. Well aware that Caleb is desperate to confirm his innocence, Forester creates a scenario in which Caleb is baited into clearing his name and exposing Falkland's duplicity. More than anything else, Caleb agrees to

stand trial so that he can convince others of his innocence while bringing Falkland to justice for his murder.

Hal Gladfelder notes that Caleb is also baited into returning because the trial is the only place where he can be heard. Caleb sees the trial as an opportunity to reconstruct the truth in his favor. He assumes that the proceeding will enable him to speak openly. But as Gladfelder shows, "the plain fact is that Caleb has no other recourse than the coercive law to get anyone, including Falkland, to listen to him."[73] Contrary to Caleb's illusion of freedom, his reality is one of constriction. Forester's letter confirms that Caleb is caught right in the middle of Falkland's deadly spiral, one fueled by Caleb's own insecurities. In other words, Caleb is driven to consult the justice system because he wrongly assumes that it is designed specifically for the purpose of revealing truth. This would serve as the definition of coercion in that Caleb is unwillingly forced to take part in a trial stacked against him.[74]

The trial occurs in Chapter X of Volume Two. Caleb reenters the estate convinced that the truth will reveal itself so long as he "trust[s] only in the justice of the parties" and sticks to his agenda of exposing Falkland as a fraud" (170). He places confidence in the system and presumes that the audience can be persuaded with a compelling testimony. Of

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[73] Gladfelder, 224.

[74] As with punishment, Godwin voices equal concern for the use of coercion. In his chapter on "Coercion as A Temporary Expedient," Godwin iterates, "Coercion can at no time either, permanently, or provisionally, make a part of any political system that is built upon the principles of reason" (385). In effect, he conveys that the "principles of reason" are antithetical to coercive tactics because the latter runs against the collective whole of the community. Given that Godwin argues for the improved state of society, his opposition to "coercions in the name of the state" has to do with the excessive power of the state. In the case of *Caleb Williams*, Falkland represents the abusive state apparatus that Godwin himself is skeptical of. He does not trust the state to use coercion for the benefit of a society. Rather, Godwin believes that one's private judgment should dictate questions of morality, duty, and justice. According to him, coercion merely interferes with a citizen's right to exercise judgment in line with reason: "Has coercion any tendency to enlighten the judgment? Certainly not. Judgment is the perceived agreement or disagreement of two ideas, the perceived truth of falsehood of any proposition" (386). Forester's letter may stage Caleb's trial as a choice for his private judgment, but the letter's implication that Caleb *must* appear to defend himself is an affront to Godwin's idea of private judgment. Because Caleb fears what will happen if he does not show, his choice to return to Falkland's estate is not one of private judgment. The fear of punishment is what clouds his decision.

course, he overlooks the nature of the trial. It is not, as Godwin would certainly prefer, a question of reconciling private judgments. The trial, on the contrary, is solely about the individual against the state. By viewing the trial as a conflict between two individuals (rather than the state vs. the individual), Caleb fails to see the institutional corruption at play here. He is misled by his own naivety: there is no agreed-upon, generalizable truth to unearth. Falkland is not at all interested in reconciling private judgments with Caleb. There is no desire to discern an innocent man from a guilty one. The reality is such: Falkland and Forester, as models of a state apparatus, plan to use this trial to control and determine conceptions of justice, guilt, and innocence. Whatever kind of justice Caleb is searching for, he will not locate it in the context of a trial designed to bury him. As Godwin says, "it is not within the power of a political system to secure to us the advantage of eternal truth, benevolence, and justice."[75]

This trial shares a few similarities with Falkland's hearing from Volume One. The audience is still very much sympathetic to Falkland and his reputation. The reader notices this on two occasions, the first being when Caleb claims that Falkland already knows that he is innocent: "'Mr. Falkland is not deceived; he does know that I am innocent.' I had no sooner uttered these words, than an involuntary cry of indignation burst from everyone in the room" (176). Astounded that Caleb would make such an assertion, the audience's reaction automatically reveals the person they favor. Caleb, despite knowing the truth behind what Falkland did, must shield himself from an unpopular/defensive position. Of course, trying to convince Falkland's supporters of his deceit would invert the trial's agenda, something Forester and Falkland are conscious of. Either way, Caleb is at a disadvantage.

[75] Godwin, 58.

The second instance of audience partiality occurs when evidence is used to undermine Caleb's credibility. Several articles of property are brought forth and shown to have been in Caleb's possession. The verdict depends on whether Caleb stole these items.[76] He is asked about how these articles (missing banknotes, three gold repeaters, diamonds, and property of Falkland's late mother) ended up in his custody. Caught off-guard, Caleb then responds with "it is a question I am wholly unable to answer" (177). While the reader sees the problem (Caleb does not know how these artifacts appeared in his possession and cannot explain the reasoning), the optics suggest otherwise. To the jury, Caleb admits to his guilt by not answering the question. But when he asserts that Falkland intentionally planted the evidence in Caleb's possession to frame him, the audience erupts. While Caleb is correct, this suggestion of Falkland's impropriety causes a violent response: "I no sooner had said this than I was again interrupted by an involuntary exclamation from everyone here. They looked at me with furious glances as if they could have torn me to pieces" (177). Caleb's own reasoning backfires on him: the audience's reaction reveals that there is a concerted effort between Forester, Falkland, and the jury to deny Caleb any sympathy or credibility.

Caleb also refuses to ever share the essential piece of evidence that he discovered, not just in the courtroom but also to the reader. To what extent may Caleb be withholding

[76] In *Political Justice*, Godwin also discusses the use, qualifications and, uncertainty of evidence in criminal court cases. While he talks less about the status of individual objects/artifacts, he identifies the misleading nature of testimony. More specifically, he writes, "before the intention of any man can be ascertained in a court of justice from a consideration of the words he has employed, a variety of circumstances must be taken into the account" (401). According to Godwin, words alone are not enough. Credibility can only be properly assessed from the tone of one's responses and the gestures that accompany it. The problem is that Godwin's concern with intention and circumstance actually works against Caleb since the jury forms a set of preconceptions about Caleb's credibility based on how he talks about/presents himself. We can assume that class plays a crucial role here, as Caleb's class rank results in a remarkably different speech pattern that makes him less convincing. The jury does not believe him from the start, so why should they sympathize with him? Even though Caleb carefully reads the gestures of the jury (acclimating his disposition to fit what he thinks they *want* to see), the audience judges Caleb and Falkland based on who they like more.

information deliberately to avoid incriminating himself? If he were to admit that he saw a critical document without Falkland's permission, the revelation would undercut how he is perceived in the eyes of the jury and the reader. Might Godwin be suggesting that Caleb's testimony to us has also not been entirely honest? After all, Caleb never admits a sense of personal guilt to the reader until the very end of the work. By not saying what he needs to say, Caleb places rhetoric at the center of our discussion on credibility and persuasion. He knows that he is not entirely without fault, but does not want to concede that crucial point and risk compromising his narrative. In other words, Caleb's decision *not* to disclose anything related to this essential evidence is the true indicator of his own guilt and deception.

If the trial proves anything, then, it is that Caleb's version of rhetorical persuasion pales in comparison to the tripartite performance on display from the other three agents in the courtroom. Every question posed by Forester places Caleb on the defensive. He is not prepared to counteract the hostility or confront his opponent. Whenever the jury shows its deference, they consistently re-affirm trust in Falkland's position with skepticism towards Caleb's. Ultimately, the trial is orchestrated in a way Caleb fails to see. In her article, '"A Plausible Tale"': William Godwin's Things As They Are," Yasmin Solomonescu looks at this idea by saying that the problem at hand is plausibility. She asserts, "Plausibility relies on a narrative's conformity with what an audience knows or expects of any human actors, including their passions, motives, abilities, and deeds."[77] In other words, the audience has no reason to believe Caleb because they do not share a rapport with him as they do with Falkland. The only impression of Caleb that resonates is the one that Falkland provides. It forces the jury to make prejudgments based on preconceived notions of each human actor

[77] Solomonescu, Yasmin. "A Plausible Tale": William Godwin's "Things As They Are." *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 25, Issue 5, 2014. 595.

in the courtroom. Simply put, Caleb seems to assume that the jury is impartial, when, in fact, their vocal predisposition to Falkland and his towering prestige shows otherwise.

To them, Falkland is the ideal landowner – just and honorable. His history of clear philanthropy attests to his goodwill. His "passions, motives, abilities, and deeds" are both seen by the public regularly and serve as examples of his true nature. If they knew that he only cared about reputation, they would view him differently. What Caleb fails to realize, in a way, is that partial judgment, social position, pervasive control and public stature *are* the driving factors that sustain this justice system. That is to say, the very system he trusts to unearth the truth and protect his name is the one that looks out only for those in power.

In the end, Caleb is deemed guilty based on a lack of evidence to conflict with the prevailing narrative against him. His testimony is considered un-persuasive and incapable of disproving that he committed a robbery. In his own words, the "robbery of which I was accused appeared to them atrocious from its magnitude, and, any sparks of compassion… were totally obliterated by indignation at my supposed profligacy in recriminating upon a worthy and excellent master" (182). Caleb lost in part because of his overly simplistic view of Falkland's penal system, failing to see his former master's intent of luring him back to be put on trial. The severity of the robbery is not only too great, but also any supposition of a crime against Falkland is persuasive enough to warrant a prison sentence. The trial shows that Caleb is a helpless subject before the extraordinary power of the state. He suffers like the Hawkinses, thrown into the same prison. But his time in jail is only the beginning of a greater induction into the system of social control, one that strips him of any sense of identity.

On the Run as a Fugitive: Caleb's Encounter with Falkland's System of Social Control

Chapter XI of Volume Two begins with Caleb talking about having never actually seen a prison in person. The opening paragraphs describe his awe at the structure: "massy doors, the resounding locks, the gloomy passages, the grated windows and the look of the keeper (184). Like Maria, he comes to revile the penitentiary and wishes to escape. The most compelling aspect of his desire for freedom is how closely Caleb's escape plan resembles that of Maria's. In *The Wrongs of Woman*, Maria chooses to befriend Jemima and use her to escape. Caleb makes a similar decision when he chooses to "ingratiate him self with his keeper" (200). He too uses personal narrative to seduce his attendant into eliciting sympathy for his situation. Both employ methods of rhetorical persuasion to affect those around, making each novel a compilation of narratives and meta-narratives that persuade on many different levels. While Caleb is still seeking to seduce his readers as he plots a plan to win over the cell keeper, Maria seducing Jemima signifies winning over her reading audience.

Solomonescu offers a helpful exegesis for thinking about how Caleb's detainment teaches him to grapple with rhetorical tenacity. She iterates, "Prison is thus a key moment in his development of verbal as well as mechanical ingenuity [referring to his assembly of various tools to escape]. By the time he escapes, he is no longer seeing the world as fixed, but cultivating a rhetorical adaptability and dexterity."[78] Caleb's time in prison occupies a large role: it shows him how to navigate within a world in which he has no direct control. He now sees that there are no fixed truths for him to depend on. But his time behind bars comes with a price. By the time Caleb escapes, he has constructed an illusory conception of confinement and freedom. That is, his incarceration produces a sort of naivety about

[78] Solomonescu, 600.

the system. He might consider himself free based on no longer being in a prison, but his time as an outlaw functions as a prison by another means, one he cannot see.

Caleb flees captivity only to confront Falkland's secret police and their ubiquitous surveillance of his every move. To begin, Caleb is first robbed and attacked by a group of thieves who take his clothing. Soon afterward, a mysterious man finds Caleb and offers to give him shelter, turning out to be the captain of thieves. When the Captain (a sign of law and order in the group) questions his subordinates for their foul behavior, he singles out a man by the name of Gines.[79] Gines, who spearheaded the attack (and is under secret order from Falkland), is expelled from the group. Caleb is admitted in his place. Then, a couple of days later, Caleb comments on nearly being murdered in his sleep by an assassin working with Falkland: "but I know that they [the thieves' band] concluded with the idea of someone, an agent of Mr. Falkland, coming to assassinate me…The notion became too terrible as I started, opened my eyes and beheld an execrable hag before mentioned hovering over my with a butcher's cleaver" (239). This moment shows Falkland's extra-legal prowess at work. His power comes from being able to infiltrate each part of society.

In effect, the assassination attempt reaffirms Caleb's prisoner-like status. Falkland's power extends to even the most lawless of places as he still manages to care-fully monitor, control, and harm his victim. This form of power is precisely the object of Godwin's own political critique. Through Falkland, Godwin critiques the British Govern-ment's authority to survey the lives of others. As long as one lives within the political system that his writings describe, the individual will forever be a prisoner to the state. Falkland's prestige and influence over the law is not the only thing at issue here. What

[79] Depending on the edition of *Caleb Williams*, this character's name is translated as either Gines or Jones. I will be referring to him as Gines in accordance with the Penguin Classics version of the text.

Godwin really fears is the state's power to violate private discourse and make extra-legal authority part of life in England. This unrestricted power is the real criminal offense he thinks one should be worried about.

Caleb's wanted poster is yet another example of the state exercising control over a person's life. At this point in the novel Gines is trailing Caleb's movements closely while offering a reward for his capture. He no longer has any control over his narrative because the wanted poster defines him to the public. Realizing that England is not safe, Caleb attempts to get on a ship bound for Ireland when captors pursuing another criminal apprehend him. Even though Caleb manages to bribe them for his freedom (before they find out that he too is a criminal), this helps little as he is soon turned in by a neighbor and taken to court. Falkland does not show up to the trial, thus allowing Caleb to go free. But once he does, Gines catches him and sends him directly to Falkland. When the two meet, Falkland asks Caleb to lie for him by writing a letter claiming that his accusations against him are false. Caleb refuses to do so and Falkland lets him go. But soon after, Falkland sends Caleb money in an attempt to bribe him. Caleb takes the money and then tries to leave the country by traveling to the Netherlands. Before he can do so, Gines catches him and tells Caleb that leaving the country will result in him being captured and executed. Caleb must return to Falkland's estate for one final trial to prove his innocence.

Two Gothic Courtrooms: Maria Venables, Caleb Williams, and the Journey for Justice

Godwin and Wollstonecraft both conclude their respective novels with a final trial between the main character and a representative judicial entity. In *The Wrongs of Woman* Maria must go before an all-male judiciary as she faces the charge of adultery for a secret romance with Henry Darnford. In *Caleb Williams,* Caleb returns to Falkland's estate from

London to take on his debilitated former master. These ending trials raise the question of whether truth and justice can arise from legal discourse, or remain impossible to achieve because of a corrupt judicial process. Each character goes on trial to challenge the system in play, leading to radically different outcomes that ask us to consider the law's influence.

For Maria, she must figure out how to justify her violation of Venables's marriage contract by explaining that she left because of marital abuse. When the trial begins, Maria issues a written statement to be read before the judges. In it, she says that her absence can be traced to the fact that her husband abdicated his responsibility as a protector: "Married when scarcely able to distinguish the nature of this engagement…I can prove a number of infidelities which I overlooked…The man thought of bartering my person…and urged his friend of whom he borrowed money to seduce" (171). The letter tries to disqualify him as a respectable husband, pointing out that Venables encouraged the man to take Maria from him – a testament to her lack of agency. The statement indicates that Maria did not decide to abandon Venables so much as she merely reacted to his serial neglect. While he is very much to blame, her argument does not persuade the magistrate so easily. In fact, this trial raises the issue of whether an all-male judiciary can even empathize with the sorrows of a woman. The verdict hinges on whether her narrative experiences can trump marriage law.

Caleb faces a different set of issues with his final trial. Determined to reveal Falkland as a fraud and establish his own innocence, Caleb uses the Postscript of his account to address the final confrontation between he and his former master.[80] He sees his critical objective as exposing Falkland's schemes and convincing the jury that he is a victim. The problem is that Falkland's newly debilitated condition (one that could be real or staged) is hard to read. Caleb admits that it is much harder to, in good conscience, accuse his enemy

[80] For this segment, I am referring to the ending in the version Godwin published.

of a crime looking upon him now: “Shall I trample upon a man, thus dreadfully reduced? Shall I point my animosity towards one whom the system of nature has brought down to a grave? Shall I poison, with sound the most intolerable to his ears, the last moments of one like Falkland? It is impossible” (330). Caleb fears that accusing Falkland as he looks now would recast himself as a new tyrant. He takes Falkland’s frail demeanor seriously, never questioning whether this could be a performance. Despite anxiety, Caleb persists in trying to expose Falkland’s earlier deception. To Caleb, he is the only one who can grant justice.

In a sense, both Caleb and Maria construct testimonial defenses that depend on an emotional connection with the court. They need their stories to resonate with the audience in order to stand a chance of approval. The two even discuss their lives as outlaws in very similar ways: Maria highlights she was “hunted like a criminal from place to place” (172) whereas Caleb says that he “threw [himself] as a fugitive upon the world in silence (332), both assuming a kind of outcast subject position that redefines them as victims rather than violators of the law. Neither can argue with the fact that he/she defied legal precedent, so each works to explain such behavior as a result of being persecuted by the justice system.

Maria, for one, uses her situation as a persecuted woman to critique the patriarchy that subordinates wives to their husbands. She knows what the law is (“the laws sanction, and make women the property of their husbands”), but also believes that her child’s death un-does the contract she had with her husband (“The death of my babe dissolved the only tie which subsisted between me and my, what is also termed, lawful husbands”) (172). Maria’s identity is never determined by her status as a wife; rather, she looks to mother-hood as an indicator of who she is. She looks at her daughter as the only contract that bound her to George, and says this union can no longer be honored with the child’s death.

In Caleb's case, he argues that Falkland left him with no other option but to be the villain. He points to unfounded accusations and his imprisonment as instances of injustice that destroyed his name: "I was accused of a villainy that my heart abhorred. I was sent to jail. I will not enumerate the horrors of my prison, the lightest of which would make heart of humanity shudder" (332). Caleb has already chronicled the events of his imprisonment to a reading audience. Here, in front of a courtroom audience, he shifts his narrative by stating that prison-life was too traumatic for him to recount the details. Caleb performs differently, using the unspeakable nature of his testimony to garner sympathy from the jury. This rhetorical strategy is thus reminiscent of Falkland's earlier use of hyperbole.

Most of Caleb's testimony revolves around the un-said or what cannot be said. He believes that the pure shock value of his phrases will rally the courtroom to his cause. In a way, Falkland's hyperbolic rhetoric about Tyrrel shortly after his death served very much the same function. This would suggest that Caleb is likely adopting Falkland's rhetoric as a vehicle to accomplish his own goals. The same is true when Caleb discusses his journey as a fugitive being pursued by Falkland's secretive police: "In London I was harassed and repeatedly alarmed…Did all these persecutions persuade me to end my silence? No: I had suffered them with patience and submission. I did not make one attempt to retort them up on their author" (333). Caleb interjects self-righteousness into his appeal (the idea that he was too good a person to reverse his persecutions unto Falkland), referring to his patience and submission as virtues. He imitates Falkland here as well, proving that he observed his tactics and learned how to manifest such rhetorical strategies. Caleb manages to articulate Falkland's language, using it to serve his own interests.

Likewise, Maria relates her desire to love Darnford to a conflict between marriage fidelity, and the need for women to decide what is best for them: "…She must be allowed to consult her conscience, and regulate her conduct, in some degree, by her own senses of right" (172). Maria is proposing a rather radical notion; she believes there are instances in which a woman must follow her moral compass, regardless of the law. She invokes "con-science" as a superior faculty to be obeyed, one that "regulate[s] her conduct" outside any paradigms of male intervention. Simply put, this is Wollstonecraft's strongest example of a feminist statement in line with her claims from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It is clear that she believes women have the moral and intellectual capacity to make choices independent of men. Women are entitled to self-determination and should be afforded the chance to support themselves.

This version of female autonomy (moral, intellectual, and financial) is what drives Maria to ultimately claim a divorce from Venables. To her, divorce is the legal strategy to leave her husband and subvert the sexist property laws that bind women to men. She also justifies her rationale by pointing out the independence she would acquire from being left to her own will: "I claim then a divorce and the liberty of enjoying free from molestation, the fortune left to me by a relation [her uncle] who was well aware of the character of this man with whom I had to contend" (173). Gender is just one issue at play here. Notice that she relates "liberty" to "the fortune left to [her] by a relation." Inheriting her relation's money would leave Maria with an unprecedented amount of personal/financial freedom, freeing her from male control. This action would enable Maria to realize Wollstonecraft's philosophy of female autonomy; that is, a system in which male legal hierarchy protects men and women alike, giving her the chance to be self-sufficient and financially secure.

At the end of this trial, she appeals directly to the jury for such freedom: "I appeal to the justice and humanity of the jury: a body of men whose private judgments must now be allowed to modify laws that must be un-just, since definite rules can never apply to in-definite circumstances" (173). Wollstonecraft's use of the term "private judgments" helps to mirror Godwin and his argument that private judgment is the only faculty that can lead to justice. Just like Godwin's belief that private judgment should override law in favor of morality, we see here as well that individual conscience (rather than legal process) should reveal what is just and unjust. Maria wants the jury to recognize that current marriage law does not apply to her case. In effect, she hopes to influence and redefine their conceptions of justice so that women apply to the categories of liberty, legal protection, and humanity.

In the final stretch of Caleb's trial, Falkland reacts to his opponent's indictment of his character with an emotional confession that leaves the case unresolved and without an acceptable sense of closure. Throwing himself into Caleb's arms, Falkland commands the audience once again with an outburst that may either be authentic or staged: "I have spent a life of the basest cruelty to cover one act of momentary vice, and also, to protect myself against the prejudices of my species. I stand now completely detected. My name will now be consecrated to infamy while your heroism and your virtues will be forever admired" (335). What makes Falkland's sudden confession perplexing is the question of whether he offers himself as the culprit out of sincere guilt or because of a calculated desire to try and move the audience in a particular way. This ambiguity is representative of Godwin's desire to problematize truth and intention when mediated through a rhetorical framework.

What prevented Falkland from expressing this kind of personal self-hatred the last time he confronted Caleb in the courtroom? What changed to elicit this emotion and does

he intend to gain anything from displaying his guilt? One possibility might be that maybe Falkland recognized himself in Caleb's use of rhetoric, thereby prompting a need to come clean about his misdoings. This would mean that Caleb brought Falkland to justice by the act of showing his errors through example. But here is another possibility, namely that Falkland used his frailty to deny Caleb a victory. Falkland's confession raises many more questions than answers, leaving Caleb dumbfounded and feeling guilty about his actions.

Caleb clearly does have some success in that his courtroom performance prompts a reaction from Falkland. But he seems to succeed in a highly problematized way. In fact, Caleb's rhetoric has the opposite effect. Falkland, not Caleb, is the one who leaves a final impression on the jury. Falkland is the one who commands the room at the very end. This is not to say that Caleb's words do not strike an impact, but that even when he supposedly wins (by getting Falkland to admit guilt), he loses. As a result, is this only about rhetoric?

One could argue that Caleb and Falkland reconcile their differences given how the confession ultimately reveals guilt, but Falkland's death just three days later instills Caleb with the feeling that he has now murdered his former master. The trial does not illuminate whether Falkland chose to confess so that he could leave Caleb filled with remorse. To be fair, Caleb's so-called victory over Falkland does not read as such, especially since Caleb blames himself for the ordeal: "I have been his murderer. I thought that were he to die I'd return once again to all that makes life worth possessing. I thought that if Falkland's guilt were established, fortune, and the world, would smile upon my efforts. Both of the events were accomplished; and it is now only that I am truly miserable" (336). Caleb's remorse has less to do with Falkland, and more to do with the fact that he was chasing a vision of justice that never existed. He clearly wanted to punish Falkland for his actions, but God-

win reminds us that punishment is never just nor justified. His definition of punishment is "a voluntary infliction of evil upon a vicious being," revealing that Caleb's goal was only to punish Falkland in a way he *felt* was just (362). Caleb assumes causing pain will result in the satisfaction he wants. *Political Justice* teaches otherwise: "it cannot be just that we should inflict suffering on any man, except so far as it tends to good" (365).

Maria's trial, by extension, also ends on a somber note when the judiciary decides to rule against her plea for divorce. Arguing that one should not substitute sentiments and feelings for rational thought, the magistrate declares Maria's request unlawful: "the judge in summing up the evidence, alluded to 'the fallacy of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation of the marriage-vow…if women were allowed, to plead any feeling as an excuse for palliation of infidelity, it's opening a floodgate for immorality" (174). The judiciary sees Maria as feeling rather than thinking. In other words, she does not give them a rational basis for her divorce claim because, according to the court, she only seeks to excuse her own infidelity. Rather than recognize the wrongs done to her, the magistrate generalizes wrongs of women to mean wrongs done to men, exemplifying the system of male power. Maria's claim for freedom is discarded because it threatens the status quo.

In the end, the judiciary strikes down Maria's case because of the potential it has to upend the structures of marriage. According to the justice, "too many restrictions could not be thrown in the way of divorces if we wished to retain the sanctity of marriage. And, though they might bear a little hard on a very few individuals, this was for the good of the whole" (174). The court's stance remains that the stability of marriage is more important than the grievances of one individual. While the judge concedes that Maria may very well

have a case to make, he is not willing to legitimize it at the expense of unraveling the idea of patriarchal marriage. The system chooses not to honor Maria's demands because doing so would call into question the law's capacity to maintain the traditional hierarchy of both gender roles. The judge fears that threatening what is currently in use would be fatal for a society in which he can imagine no other systematic alternative. Maria fails to win a form of freedom because the legal system cannot revise the framework that sustains patriarchy.

Picking Up the Pieces: How to Negotiate with the Indecisive Verdicts of the Courtroom

Neither novel ends with the assurance that justice has been served. Caleb manages to expose Falkland's duplicity, but a feeling of remorse haunts his final thoughts. Maria's confrontation with the judiciary results in a failure to secure her divorce claim. Is it likely that Godwin and Wollstonecraft both disagree with the premise that justice can be won in the courtroom? It seems as though the two authors arrive at one common conclusion: that the very concepts of innocence and justice are fraught. Both characters may design stories based on the idea of innocence, but neither narrative grants the sort of freedom they want.

For Caleb, rhetoric never overcomes social class. In fact, he underestimates social class by never fully considering the way it likely informed the jury's perception of him. If the novel is about more than rhetoric (which I believe it is), then the reality is that Caleb's fault lies with failing to understand the ways in which rank predetermines how a person is treated and evaluated by peers. Caleb assumes that mastering the art of persuasion is what one needs to realize justice. In a way, his mishap reveals an important opposition between the Godwin of *Caleb Williams* and the Godwin of *Political Justice*. With *Political Justice* Godwin articulates a philosophy of justice that does not come to fruition in his later work, *Caleb Williams*. The moral resolve found in *Political Justice* is questioned by a pervasive

sense of ambiguity that haunts the ending to *Caleb Williams*. In the end, Caleb's standing (or lack thereof) over-rides his rhetoric, and enables Falkland to command the courtroom.

Indeed, the same could also be said of Godwin's original, and unpublished ending for *Caleb Williams*. While not chosen as the 'official' end to the novel, Godwin's initially written manuscript ending concludes with a similar degree of doubt. In it, Caleb Williams goes on trial, and fails to prove Falkland guilty. Rather, the magistrate overseeing the trial silences Caleb and dismisses his case. As a result, Caleb is thrown into prison where none other than Gines presides as the warden. He soon goes mad and lives the remainder of his prison sentence in delirium. While the verdict turns out to be swift and decisive, the judge clearly taking Falkland's side illustrates yet another layer of bias in the system. No matter the ending, Caleb fails to create the outcome he had hoped for when he first went on trial.

Referring to the overall events of *Caleb Williams*, Jonathan Grossman offers us an interesting prognosis for Caleb's condition. Resisting the temptation to view Caleb at any point in time as 'free' or 'liberated,' Grossman claims that Caleb's actions "become a sort of odd prison: he is trapped within the most predictable of criminal life stories."[81] Return, for example, to my premise that the novel itself is trial-like, and then the truth also begins to reveal itself. The fact is that the novel becomes a quasi-prison from which Caleb's own voice (and Maria's, as well) never escapes. One could say that Caleb and Maria's rhetoric double as chains that bind them within textual prisons. Even with Godwin's un-published ending, Caleb's words break into fragments, thus making his veracity a potential problem regardless of the ending. Put simply, Caleb is *less* innocent than when he started his story.

With Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, the question of how to interpret the ending seems to be equally difficult, and not only because it remains unfinished. In her quest for a form of

[81] Grossman, 39.

freedom, Maria challenges marriage law and witnesses her life story fall on deaf ears. She attempts to argue that maternity and rational discourse are deeply intertwined, but the part of the ending we read features a justice system that stops her from changing her life. Both novels express legal skepticism and question the nature of justice as a concept that can be realized within a patriarchal medium. While the beginning of *Caleb Williams* presents the confession as a potential means to challenge the law, both endings fail to provide a sort of reassurance in its capacity. The same is true of *Maria* in which the justice system sustains itself without fracturing, speaking to the reality that the patriarchy is not easily destroyed.

Chapter III

Crime and Punishment in Percy Shelley's *The Cenci*

British Romanticism and the Failure of Rhetoric

Godwin and Wollstonecraft view the power of rhetoric as a mechanism to combat legal force, but what happens when language itself breaks down completely? Godwin's own unpublished ending to *Caleb Williams* in which Caleb goes mad (thus rendering language and testimony unreliable) prompts us to imagine the consequences when rhetoric fails to act. While Caleb and Maria are both mistreated by the legal patriarchy, they still manage to speak and persuade. In his book, *Five Long Winters: The Trials of British Romanticism*, John Bugg argues that this political writing of the late-eighteenth century very much continued into the Romantic era. According to him, echoes of Godwin "emerged in the following years, including the recurrence of tropes of gagging and silencing, broken communication, and fractured speech."[82] While his study focuses on Wordsworth and Coleridge specifically, the same applies to Percy Shelley who also seeks to evaluate and challenge the arguments outlined by Godwin and Wollstonecraft's novels.

While Shelley may be somewhat removed generationally from the writing of both Godwin and Wollstonecraft, he inherits a similar skepticism of law. The 1794 Treason Trials and 1795 Gagging Acts extended their influences well into the early nineteenth century bringing a renewed focus on political reform and resistance to the draconian Pitt Regime. Britain's political self-consciousness thereby set the stage for new debates to

[82] Bugg, John. *Five Long Winters: The Trials of British Romanticism*. Stanford University Press, 2013. 5. In his book, Bugg argues that the British Government's repression of the 1790s contributed to the intellectual development of Romantic literature. Using the 1795 Gagging Acts as a point of departure, Bugg focuses on the culture of silence and censorship that defined literary writing of the period. He highlights the role that William Pitt's legislation played in attempting to repress political dissent, showing how prison and surveillance techniques not only animated writers such as Godwin and Wollstonecraft, but also set the stage for authors like Wordsworth and Coleridge to comment on political repression, silencing and gagging.

take place regarding the function of literature as a conduit for legal critique. Shelley, in particular, takes the conversation in a new direction with his 1819 writings, signaling an interest in trying to examine England's political self-identity.[83]

As James Chandler notes, 1819 was a significant and prolific year for Shelley: "he wrote his two dramatic masterpieces, *Prometheus Unbound,* and *The Cenci*, as well as the great *Ode to the West Wind*. It was in 1819, too, that Shelley produced most of the radical poetry that would later inspire English labor movements…*The Mask of Anarchy* and then his extraordinary tract, *A Philosophical View of Reform*."[84] Indeed, the year was for him a time of political self-discovery in which he would address revolution, justice, reform, and the law. While certainly a Godwinite, Shelley uses this period to establish his own idea of political reform that places him in partial opposition to the rationalists he admires. Whereas both Godwin and, to a partial extent, Wollstonecraft hope that rhetoric can be used effectively in the most repressive and corrupt of circumstances, Shelley implicitly argues that they overlook moments of speechlessness in the process. To him, a law is only as effective as the language that instantiates and supports it. In the case of *The Cenci*, Shelley shows how fractured/absent speech makes it virtually impossible to rely on the legal process to achieve justice, especially when it is underwritten by the penalty of death.

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[83] In his book, Bugg describes the 1795 Gagging Acts as legislation that "underwrote by threat of death the broader program of surveillance and prosecution that the Pitt ministry pursued across the 1790s, and the immense response to the new laws indicates that they were viewed as the most chilling of the ministry's judicial strikes" (22). The Gagging Acts encouraged citizens to be complicit in the culture of suspicion and secret plots by undermining faith and confidence in the capacity for governmental reform. This included, as Bugg writes, spreading "the rhetoric of paranoia" in order to destabilize the reform societies that had been established during the decade. For example, the British Government would actively repress England's print and literary culture so as to combat dissenting views and regulate the public flow of information (30).

[84] Chandler, James. *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism*. University of Chicago Press, 1998. 9.

Other critics have discussed *The Cenci* as a cautionary tale of revenge, an allegory of political revolution, and a cynical critique of punishment. My approach to the drama is different in that I want to argue how its surface-level revenge plot belies a deeper concern Shelley has with the reasoning used by the patriarchy to justify the death penalty. In other words, Shelley complicates how we understand capital punishment by generating a drama that, at times, suspends and/or dispenses with rhetoric altogether. Rather than see rhetoric as available to anyone, Shelley iterates that it is selective and even inaccessible to those who are excluded by the rule of law. In *The Cenci*, Shelley dramatizes how the culture of capital punishment hinders rhetoric so that the monstrous crime of rape is silenced and not heard.

Percy Shelley and the Culture of the Death Penalty

In his piece, "Essay on the Punishment of Death: A Fragment," Shelley is a skeptic of capital punishment, arguing that we should reconsider the relationship between crime and state-sanctioned executions. He claims that, first and foremost, "whether death is good or evil, a punishment or a reward, or whether it be wholly indifferent, no man can take it upon himself to assert."[85] To Shelley, death is incalculable and wholly unknowable, a part of life that cannot simply be understood as "good or evil, [a matter of] punishment, or reward." It is too grand a concept for humanity to fully comprehend, thus making it too difficult to deploy as a justifiable form of punishment. Shelley treats the death penalty as an imperfect kind of broken rhetoric that is too ambiguous to be confidently relied upon.

[85] Shelley, "On the Punishment of Death: A Fragment," 463. Hereafter referred to using parenthetical citations.

Mark Canuel reaffirms this line of inquiry in his own work, arguing how the piece boldly asks the question of "what *death* is" in order to draw our attention to Shelley's real purpose of showing that "death as an impossible object of knowledge [makes it as well] a clearly impossible form of punishment."[86] The 'culture' of the death penalty for Shelley also jeopardizes the chance for citizens to become critical readers of the laws that govern them. If anything, Shelley is against normalizing the death penalty so that citizens are not deceived into thinking of it as a definable and understandable measure of retributive justice. He also attributes a certain level of sanctity to human life, claiming that the "infliction of punishment would merely confirm all the inhuman and unsocial impulses of men." (463) He is not against finding ways to address crimes, but believes that sanctioned death is barbarism.

Deborah Elise White views the essay from a different though related perspective. Rather than see it as a sole condemnation of punishment, she contends that it operates also as a critique of revenge. By relying on the death penalty, the government educates its citizens to think the path to a just society is through vengeance. According to White, "by educating citizens to sadism, and revenge, the government undermines the very *habitus* of citizenship. Such an institution that, like the death penalty, even *appears* vengeful provokes consequences that are at odds with its own '"governing"' intention."[87] In other words, the intent of the law (the preservation of order and justice) is at odds with the reality of what it creates: a precedent that ultimately destabilizes the foundation of what it means to legislate punishment. What we learn is that Shelley is against the death

[86] Canuel, Mark. *The Shadow of Death: Literature, Romanticism, and the Subject of Punishment.* Princeton University Press, 2007. 127.
[87] White, Deborah Elise. *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History*. Stanford University Press, 2000. 115.

penalty's dangerous presupposition that death should be an acceptable kind of retribution. Normalizing it to the public would only make it impossible for citizens to know that its basis is flawed and rooted in violence.

The idea that one cannot truly *know* seems to be the main point of Shelley's essay. Punishment is something we can never have complete authority (or control) over. Matters of life and death transcend our own understanding of crime and punishment, thus creating a vacuum in which we attempt to legalize an act that is entirely ungovernable. Institutions of government, according to Shelley, which "originate from…barbarism and violence are bloody in proportion, as they are despotic." (463) In effect, governments that rely on death as a method of punishment thereby reveal their true natures as agents and sponsors of tyranny.

Of course, the other thread is to read Shelley's critique of revenge as a rejection of the kind of violence that propels *The Cenci's* narrative structure. In the play, Beatrice and Count Cenci exist simultaneously as provocateurs, and victims of the death penalty. They exercise it in different regards, and confirm together a cycle of violence that Robert Miles addresses in his own essay on *The Cenci*. Speaking of the text as part of the Gothic, Miles writes about "the vicious circles of transgression and violence, [perpetuated by] an age of conspiracy administered through Pitt's spy networks and suspension of habeas corpus."[88] I consider the word "conspiracy" suggestive here, as it seems to echo the *spirals* of broken speech and fractured law that continuously revolve around Shelley's drama. They determine how the play unfolds and dictate the characters' motivations and interactions with one another.

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[88] Miles, Robert. "The Cenci: Gothic Shelley." *Romantic Circles Praxis*. November 2015. https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gothic_shelley/praxis.2015.gothic_shelley.miles.html. Accessed May 2016.

Understanding *The Cenci* as an endless cycle of dramatic violence is what enables Shelley to conduct his critique of the death penalty. It is not just the law that needs radical revision, but also the political and social infrastructure that supports it. That is to say, the conspiracy to murder the Cenci is just as fraught as the ruling to execute Beatrice at the drama's end. Even though Beatrice's murder plot may seem like an honest attempt to break out of what norms confine her, she ends up inhabiting the same subject position as her father. Shelley interprets this cyclical return as proof of the fact that legislating death merely reiterates the system of patriarchy and creates a new issue: how to address the law's rhetorical fissures – how to break out of its norms without reiterating them.

Shelley and *The Cenci's* Preface: Judging Beatrice

In *The Gothic and the Rule of Law, 1764-1820*, Sue Chaplin examines the preface as a textual device that prepares us for the main text while remaining distinctly apart from it. She argues that prefaces function as "troublesome supplements to works that are *not* closed and complete, but which require…a mediation between the 'inside and the outside' of the conceptual systems that they articulate."[89] That is to say, prefaces mediate between reader, text, and author but, in return, complicate how we should approach works that remain un-solved or incomplete. Shelley's "Preface" to *The Cenci* operates in much the same way as a play that employs a legal discourse the author himself fundamentally opposes. The play ends with a scene that sacrifices change in favor of the status quo. How then does Shelley prepare us for an unresolved end result that largely defeats the desire for political reform?

He starts by explaining the point behind this drama: "the highest moral purpose of it is teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of

[89] Chaplin, Sue. *The Gothic and the Rule of Law, 1764-1820.* Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, 2007. 38.

itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind."[90] Shelley is quite benevolent towards human nature, believing in the innate human qualities of goodness and righteousness. He concedes that antipathies and sympathies are natural to the self, but asserts that a full understanding of each faculty must be present for individuals to take advantage of their better angels. You could say the Preface humanizes the characters before it critiques them. Further along, Shelley makes it clear that "revenge, retaliation, and atonement are all pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would have also not been a tragic character."[91] Before the drama begins, Shelley states his opposition to a myriad of specific antipathies ("revenge, retaliation, atonement") placing him in line with the same Shelley of an "Essay on the Punishment of Death: A Fragment." However, he acknowledges that these are also characteristics that make Beatrice the compelling character she is, and, even more so, a character we *should* empathize with. The problem is not with Beatrice herself but rather the role she is forced to play and the circumstances she must learn to handle.

This coercion becomes apparent in the penultimate paragraph of the Preface in which he acknowledges the confines of her circumstance. He attests to her vivacity and gentleness, which, in his mind, far outweigh her crime of parricide: "Beatrice Cenci does appear to have been one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell without destroying one another: her nature was simple and profound. The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which

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[90] Shelley, Percy. *The Cenci: A Tragedy, in Five Acts*. Edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. W.W. Norton & Company, 2002. 142. Hereafter referred to by page numbers, scene, or line number unless otherwise noted.

[91] Shelley, "Preface" to *The Cenci*, 142.

circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world."[92] That is to say, she can only function within the small confines and restrictions that have been placed on her. She, as a woman and property of her father, cannot break out of the patriarchal mold that made her into the felon and sufferer we see in the drama. According to Shelley, her "crimes and miseries" are merely by-products of her role as the actress who *must* use mask and mantle to express her grief. This does not exempt Beatrice from Shelley's critique, but enables us to contextualize her suffering and discover that not all the choices she makes are her own.

If we are to interpret *The Cenci* not just as a portrait of a failed attempt at political revision and legal reformation, but also as a testament to the pervasive influence of authoritarianism in its most despicable forms, then we should acknowledge that Shelley might be challenging his audience to do more than simply critique tyranny and punishment. As Joshua Lambier writes, "A revolution may well put an end to autocratic despotism and to rapacious/power seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in the ways of thinking."[93] For Shelley, the issue at stake is whether the public can redefine the parameters of how to talk *about* punishment.[94] With *The Cenci*, we see Shelley making the first step in this attempt.

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[92] Shelley, "Preface" to *The Cenci*, 144.

[93] Lambier, Joshua D. "Shelley's Aesthetic Dimension: The Politics of Resistance and Reform," *Romantic Circle Praxis*, September 2015. https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/shelley_politics/praxis.2015.shelley_politics.lambier.html. Accessed May 2016.

[94] Shelley's interest in having the public re-shape discussions about punishment comes, in large part, from a critical investment he shares with Godwin and his desire for public intervention into matters of punishment, crime and retributive justice. In *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Godwin elevates the issue of both capital punishment and morality by insisting that these topics are supposed to be debated and challenged by a wider critical audience. Like Shelley, Godwin believes that a reform in the way we understand crimes and capital punishment can only occur through public freewill: "the justice of punishment therefore, in the strict import of the word, can only be a deduction from the hypothesis of freewill" (363). In other words, political institutions are not designed (nor can they be relied upon) to properly critique punishment.

Unmasking the Motives of Count Francesco Cenci

The cycle of dramatic violence, in many ways, starts with the first exchange of the drama. Cenci and Cardinal Camillo rendezvous privately to discuss a recent murder committed by the Count. Camillo says that Cenci's murder will be ignored if he agrees to relinquish some of his possessions, but then highlights that Cenci has already bribed the church for clemency, making his pervasive influence a grave concern in the play:

> *Camillo:* That matter of the murder is hushed up
> If you consent to yield to his Holiness
> Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate. –
> It needed all my interest in the conclave
> To bend him to this point: he said that you
> Bought perilous impunity with your gold;
> That crimes like yours if once or twice compounded
> Enriched the Church, and respited from hell
> An erring soul which might repent and live (Act I, Scene I, ll. 1-9)

At first, Shelley comments on the archaic, almost feudal, design of the Church and how it works as a legal institution, showing that the Church benefits financially from Cenci's violation of the law. The fact that Cenci could "bend him [the Pope] to this point" is characteristic of the culture of coercion and backroom surveillance that Shelley saw in Britain's political culture in the late eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries.[95] While the drama is set in Renaissance Italy, the Church's corruption is intended to reflect Shelley's own criticism of England's political institutions. In the drama, tyranny takes the explicit form of autocratic despotism, and its merciless attempt to control the tides of law.

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[95] John Bugg and James Chandler address this very point in their respective works, *Five Long Winters* and *England in 1819*. Bugg connects the repressive politics of 1790s Britain with, as he puts it, the creation of both "socially embedded silence, [and] formations and portrayals of interruptions in social communication" (5). That is to say, Shelley's focus on exposing the Church's culture of political corruption in *The Cenci* is a direct reflection of how the English Church and state conducted their backroom political dealings. Chandler use 1819 as a point in time where intellectual and literary culture critiqued Britain's political identity: "Much literary work *of* England in 1819 seems concerned with its place *in* England in 1819 – concerned, that is, with a national operation of self-dating…that is meant to count as a national self-making, or remaking" (5). He refers to Shelley as one such author who uses works like *The Mask of Anarchy* and *The Cenci* to discuss the real-world circumstances of Britain at a crucial time of national self-making.

Cenci himself relishes in his power over revenge and death. Without any remorse, he explains to Camillo how he rationalizes what other men call crime. Rather than feel an immediate sense of shame or misery, Cenci views revenge as the honest expression of the nature of men. He craves personal indulgence, and derives joy from seeing others in pain:

> *Cenci*: As to my character for what men call crime
> Seeing I please my senses as I list,
> And vindicate that right with force or guile,
> It is a public matter, and I care not
> If I discuss it with you…
>
> All men delight in sensual luxury,
> All men enjoy revenge; and most exult
> Over the tortures they can never feel –
> Flattering their secret peace with others' pain
> But I delight in nothing else. I love
> The sight of agony, and the sense of joy
> When this shall be another's, and that is mine.
> And I have no remorse and little fear,
> Which are, I think, the checks of other men (Act I, Scene I, ll. 68-72; 77-85)

In a sense, he provides the reader a clear understanding of why he eventually goes on to rape his daughter. Fueled by a sadistic lust for power and control, Cenci defines crime as a "right" central to his self-gratification. But by generalizing "sensual luxury," "revenge," and also "torture" as things that "all men" enjoy, he casts a dangerous shadow of male prerogative, taking on this role of a tyrant who feels justified in his of act violence. In *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire*, Stuart Curran comments on this scene as the moment that we learn that "Cenci is no longer capable of distinguishing between good and evil, but, views himself as the deformed image of God, who [commands] all things to serve his un-natural wishes."[96] In other words, male prerogative becomes a way for Cenci to see himself as an unclean image of God whose interest lies in satisfying his urges at the expense of all else. He accepts even to himself that he is nothing more than

[96] Curran, Stuart. *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire*. Princeton University Press, 1970. 119.

an irate monster whose lack of "remorse or fear" transforms him into a malevolent patriarch.

Cenci's words speak to a greater concern with the relationships between sexuality and political power. As the paternal figure in the play, Cenci's sadism is representative of a deeper desire to maintain a certain kind of hierarchy and order. Shelley casts him as the unruly patriarch who, in his own twisted way, uses power and sexuality to exert male control over others. That is to say, his sexual proclivities should not be viewed only as the result of his incestuous desires, but also as characteristic of a strategic attempt to control/destroy women's bodies. In other words, the only way for Cenci to preserve male dominance is by destabilizing the female bodies that threaten him.

Such is the case when Beatrice confronts Cenci at the banquet in Scene III. Cenci, in celebration over his sons' deaths, threatens revenge against anyone who wants to bring him to justice ("Enjoy yourselves. – Beware! For my revenge/Is as the sealed commission of a king/That kills, and none dare name the murderer." Sc. III, ll. 96-98). While trying to persuade her father to repent, Beatrice urges Cenci to acknowledge his crime and surrender himself to God. In a sense, she inhabits the role of the innocent and just. As opposed to her father, Beatrice seeks what is right and thereby forms the perfect antithesis of him. Of course, this juxtaposition is what ultimately sets them at odds with each other. By seeing Cenci as pure evil, Beatrice offers us the chance to sympathize with her investments in righteousness before the rape occurs:

> *Beatrice:* Retire thou impious man! Aye hide thyself
> Where never eye can look upon thee more!
> Wouldst thou have honour and obedience
> Who art a torturer? Father, never dream
> Though thou mayst overbear this company,
> But ill must come of ill. –Frown not on me!
> Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging looks

> My brothers' ghosts should hunt thee from thy seat!
> Cover thy face from every living eye,
> And start if thou but hear a human step:
> Seek out some dark and silent corner, there,
> Bow thy white head before offended God,
> And we will kneel around, and fervently
> Pray that he pity both ourselves and thee. (Act I, Scene III, ll. 146-159)

In this section, Shelley crafts intimacy of another variety. He exhibits how Beatrice commands a deeply intimate understanding of Cenci's darkness. In fact, her speech is populated with images of light and shadow to emphasize differences in their respective outlooks. She orders him to "hide thyself/where never eye can look up-on thee more," an expression that urges him to retreat from the light and save others from having to look upon his dark disposition. Similarly, she bids him to "hide thyself, lest with avenging looks/My brothers' ghosts should hunt thee from thy seat": invoking the idea that his sons will hunt him from the afterlife to punish him. The Gothic imagery does much to cast Cenci as *inhuman* and out of step with any concrete type of morals. She then asks that Cenci "cover thy face from every living eye" and "seek out some dark and silent corner," urging that he exile himself for his crimes. But once Beatrice brings in the image of God and forgiveness with "bow thy white head before offended God," it becomes clear that she takes on the cloth of judge in this exchange by delivering a sentence on her father.

The power dynamic shifts as Beatrice sentences Cenci to exile. She challenges her father's iniquities and condemns him for shamelessly committing murder. In other words, Shelley introduces us to another scene in which the punishment of death receives critique. But by assuming, at least rhetorically, the role of judge and excoriating Cenci's crimes, she also exposes *herself* to critique later on in the play when she internalizes her oppression to use as a catalyst for Cenci's murder. As Michael Simpson writes in his text on *The Cenci*, the fact that "Beatrice and Cenci merely exchange the roles of perpetrator

and victim [means] that Beatrice promiscuously becomes capable of incorporating a range of roles."[97] This complicates how the reader should view Beatrice because her roleplaying (and mask-wearing) eventually becomes a liability when she actively seeks out an audience to be sympathetic. In fact, this complication occurs right after Act II starts since Beatrice's rape off-stage forces her be both victim and avenger when trying to express her un-heard pain.

Deciphering the Broken Rhetoric of a Speechless Act

It is implied from Cenci's last exchange with Beatrice at the end of Act I that he has threatened her ("Thou painted viper! Beast that thou art! Fair and yet terrible! I also know a charm [that] shall make thee meek and tame/Now get thee from my sight!" Sc. III ll. 165-168). At the start of Act II, Beatrice enters to find Bernardo and also Lucretia, as she attempts to evade Cenci. The breakdown of her rhetoric amidst a concerted effort to describe his threat leaves her in a complicated position – if Beatrice has been robbed of the capacity to use rhetoric to talk openly about him, how can she go about persuading her audience as to her potential endangerment? One could argue that her body does not bear the threat of intimidation alone; rather, it functions as a hollowed-out vessel through which her damaged speech emerges. Beatrice's dialogue with Lucretia shows that her body is no longer her own as Cenci's threat affirms his ownership over her. Every failed attempt to say the un-specified one word shows that Cenci has dominated her completely:

> *Beatrice:* What is it that you say? I was just thinking
> 'Twere better not to struggle any more.
> Men, like my father, have been dark and bloody,
> Yet never – O! Before worse comes of it
> 'Twere wise to die: it ends in that at last

[97] Simpson, Michael. *Closet Performances: Political Exhibition and Prohibition in the Dramas of Byron and Shelley*. Stanford University Press, 1998. 385.

> It was one word, Mother, one little word;
> One look, one smile. (*Wildly*.) Oh! He has trampled me
> Under his feet, and made the blood stream down
> My pallid cheeks. And he has given us all
> Ditch water, and the fever-stricken flesh
> Of buffaloes, and bade us eat or starve,
> And we have eaten. – He has made me look
> On my beloved Bernardo, when the rust
> Of heavy chains has gangrened his sweet limbs,
> And I have never yet despaired – but now!
> What would I say? (Act II, Scene I; ll. 53-57; 64-73)

Beatrice refuses to enunciate "one word," and Shelley's decision not to outright specify it creates a sense of ambiguity as to why she avoids using it. She clearly suspects something disastrous will happen to her soon: "Before worse comes of it/'Twere wise to die." But in her mind, the potential crime is indescribable, much like Cenci's "one look, one smile." It works as a silent threat, something that cannot be put into words, but riles the body as if it is imminent. Beatrice's claim that Cenci "has trampled me/Under his feet, and made the blood stream down/My pallid cheeks" almost seems to prefigure the rape that will happen in between the end of Act II and start of Act III. While Beatrice and Lucretia are frequent victims of Cenci's abuse and torture, her statement "Men, like my father, have been dark, and bloody/Yet never – O," suggests one of two things: that Cenci told her specifically he would rape her or that Beatrice knows of his intention based on his previous behavior. To Shelley, the drama of Beatrice's predicament lies in her inability to directly confront what she believes will inevitably happen to her: an assault she cannot avert, or struggle against.

Stuart Curran recognizes that this is the moment at which the pendulum of powers shifts back in the favor of Cenci. Cenci's threat, he contends, enables "her world to be plunged into confusion, and she with it. Where once she pitted herself against her father's evil, now she is herself the battleground, isolated and self-defeating."[98] Curran argues she

[98] Curran, *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire,* 114.

has reached the point of nihilism: Beatrice's moral compass is now in question as a moral chaos, one she cannot resist, seeks to redefine her character. While James Chandler writes that this internalized oppression aligns her closely with Caleb Williams and his predicament ("in both cases, we confront a character patient beyond what we can imagine with repeated acts of abuse and persecution…"), I would argue that these "acts of abuse and persecution" facilitate completely different outcomes.[99] For Caleb, his internalized oppression does eventually serve as a vehicle that very much enables him to indict Falkland at the end of the novel. True, Godwin leaves us with a similar sense of irresolution, but Caleb's oppression, at least in the final version of the novel, does not destroy him beyond an act of remorse. For Beatrice, her internalized oppression backfires later on in a way that prevents her from eliciting sympathy from her own audience.

There also appears to be a fundamental difference in the initial consequence of the oppression they both feel. For Caleb, the 'culture of silence' Falkland imposes on him has the opposite effect: it actually provokes rhetoric in response. Even though Falkland uses a threat to control/subdue Caleb, he merely emboldens Caleb to convince those around him of his innocence. For Beatrice, the opposite is true: the rhetorical power she expressed for her critique of Cenci before his threat is stifled somewhat, prefiguring a loss a speech that will characterize her speech later on. She speaks only as a way to account for what cannot be uttered: what she does iterate is not enough to fully express the oppression she suffers.

Once we arrive at the beginning of Act III, in which Beatrice speaks to her mother about committing suicide, the rape has occurred. Like the previous passage, she continues to discuss her inability to say the actual word, and implicates the law in curious ways that reveals her lack of trust in the justice system's ability to acknowledge/address the crime. I

[99] Chandler, 510.

would argue that Beatrice uses this opportunity to expose one of the justice system's central flaw: that being its difficulty in classifying Beatrice's rape a crime since it happens within the context of a familial relationship. That is to say, she ultimately chooses to murder the father because she does not believe the legal system is designed to act in her favor. If rape as the crime transcends the rhetoric available to Beatrice, then the law would be the last place to seek refuge since it is rooted in a rhetoric informed by the patriarchal bias that silences her.. By setting up death as her only resort, Beatrice forecasts how the death penalty will determine her fate and that of Count Cenci:

> *Beatrice:* I hide them not.
> What are the words which you would have me speak?
> I, who can feign no image in my mind
> Of that which has transformed me. I, whose thought
> Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up
> In its own formless horror. Of all words,
> That minister to mortal intercourse,
> Which wouldst thou hear? For there is none to tell
> My misery: if another ever knew
> Aught like to it, she died as I will die,
> And left it, as I must, without a name.
> Death! Death! Our law and our religion call thee
> A punishment and a reward…Oh, which
> Have I deserved? (Act III, Scene I; ll. 107-119)

The passage starts with yet another question: "What are the words which you would have me speak?" In responding to Lucretia's idea that she is hiding her suffering, Beatrice says that she is not. Rather, there are no words to express the magnitude of that which she now suffers. However, Beatrice's speechlessness extends beyond a lack of words. She says the rape has also prevented her from even forming a mental image to use to explain her grief: "I, who can feign no image in my mind/Of that which has transformed me." While we are meant to view her rape as a sexual violation, she expands it to encompass a more profound distress. And in that process, Beatrice plays an active role in defining her rape as an obscene event of quasi-mystical proportion. By depicting her mind as, "like a ghost

shrouded and folded up/In its own formless horror" she attaches a mysterious transcendental quality to not just the rape, but also the pain that comes as a result. This is then followed by yet another type of question: "Of all words/that minister to mortal intercourse,/Which wouldst thou hear?" Language is not enough to describe Beatrice's suffering (or rather, what purpose would it serve if used?), and yet her rhetorical questions are meant to highlight her loss of rhetoric. Here, we see that Beatrice's loss of rhetoric has more to do with a decision she makes *not* to say the word rape (or, potentially, incest) out of fear of what the implication might be for her down the line. She is conscious that rhetoric can be used against her.

John Bugg offers an interpretation of Beatrice's silence in line with this argument. Rather than see her as someone who restricts her vocabulary out of shock, his analysis argues that she understands the weight of words better than anyone else. Beatrice avoids using certain words because she fears how they may be used against her: "perhaps most directly related to the conditions of repression are representations of characters who, are afraid to speak, who have stories to tell but are wary of telling them."[100] Beatrice could very well fall into this category. To what degree might the use of words like 'rape' or also 'incest' unsuspectingly invite other characters to read a certain complicity in her act? Is it possible that uttering the words would force Beatrice to think of herself as responsible for the rape? Based on Beatrice's next line ("if another ever knew/aught like to it, she died as I will die"), the implication seems to be that Beatrice fears the death penalty for speaking.

So, in a sense, she suffers from the shock of the rape *and* the fear that speaking up about it might jeopardize her further. If we read the next line, "And left it, as I must, without a name," the question of reputation (not unlike with Falkland) also turns out to be

[100] Bugg, 6.

an issue. Beatrice cannot criticize Cenci without dishonoring herself in the process since she carries the Cenci name as well. His influence, in effect, stretches far beyond the crime he commits. Cenci's presence is ubiquitous and representative of a greater paternal power that dictates the drama. Beatrice's mind and body are trapped within Cenci's hierarchy of patriarchal control, making it impossible for her to escape the enduring drama of violence without submitting to it herself. She speaks about how law and religion define death as "a punishment and a reward," setting up the skeptical critique Shelley makes of the death penalty – that we do not actually know whether death is a punishment or reward.

William Hazlitt, who takes a different approach to capital punishment, is also concerned with the idea of what the death penalty actually achieves. He says, "one end of punishment is to satisfy this natural sense of justice in the public mind, and then to strengthen the opinion of the community by its act."[101] Capital punishment, he contends, is about playing on the public's imagination, making it seem as if the death penalty is a system through which right and wrong can also be discerned. That is to say, rather than encourage citizens to think of alternative ways for justice, the state deliberately uses punishment to build a public consensus around the idea that severe penalties satisfy the demands of justice and deter crime. Interestingly enough, this would explain why Beatrice is also under the impression that death is the only way to take revenge and achieve justice in her own way. She too thinks Cenci's death will satisfy a "natural sense of justice" that, in her mind, was created in response to the pain she felt. The issue is that this premise seems to be the kind of thinking that Shelley argues *against* during the second half of the drama.

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[101] Hazlitt, William. "On the Punishment of Death." *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*. Edited by William Ernest Henley. Nabu Press, 2012. 468.

Later on in the section, Beatrice conspires with Orsino and Lucretia about how the three can murder Cenci. Orsino initially proposes that Beatrice accuse Cenci of rape and incest and let the law indict him. In response, Beatrice argues that such a plan would not work given that others would not believe her story. As already alluded to above, she fears being called hysterical and being undermined:

> *Orsino*: Accuse him of the deed, and let the law
> Avenge thee.
>
> *Beatrice*: Oh, ice-hearted counselor!
> If I could find a word that might make known
> The crime of my destroyer; and that done
> My tongue should like a knife tear out the secret
> Which cankers my heart's core;
>
> If this were done, which never shall be done,
> Think of the offender's gold, his dreaded hate.
> And the strange horror of the accuser's tale,
> Baffling belief, and overpowering speech;
> Scarce whispered, unimaginable, wrapt
> In hideous hints…Oh, most assured redress! (Act III, Scene I; ll. 152-166)

The word represents the bitter truth that "cankers [her] heart's core." What Beatrice fears is Cenci's retaliatory power: "the offender's gold, his dreaded hate." Might it be possible for him to bribe those in power? Could he use his influence to throw out the accusations? Aside from that, Beatrice feels that "the strange horror of the accuser's tale" would be enough to sink her story. People would see her as delusional and interpret both her "baffling belief" and "overpowering speech" as "hideous hints" of a madwoman. This sounds eerily like Maria in Wollstonecraft's work, a character whose place as a woman in an insane asylum makes it harder for others to accept her narrative. Beatrice's worries are certainly valid, and they speak to a larger point echoed by Harrison when she writes "that

Beatrice lacks much of the vocabulary she needs to define and defend herself."[102] Beatrice cannot access the rhetoric needed to defend herself, but in the world of the play what rhetoric could she use? While it is true that her speechlessness defines her character in a way that weakens her argument, I think the reason for this is deeper than simply being afraid to say the word 'rape.' Rather, the overall issue at hand is that there is no rhetoric strong enough to incriminate her father and deliver justice in the context of her society. For a woman in her situation, rhetoric itself is fraught with deception and cannot be relied on at all.

In other words, Beatrice is driven to murder her father because she discovers that rhetoric itself is a tool of the patriarchy. Whenever Beatrice talks about this 'one little word,' the reader assumes that she is referring to rape. She knows the word, but cannot say it. If this is true, then Shelley's decision to omit the word from the play speaks to a larger point about the limitations of rhetoric. Contrary to critics who have argued that Beatrice loses favor with her audience as a result of the decision to murder Cenci, the real tragedy is that revenge was always her only outlet. There *is* no other option for her, which is Shelley's entire point. The cycle of violence ensures that she will become its victim.[103]

We see the beginning of her transformation when she decides to murder her father by hiring two outlaws, Olimpio and Marzio, to carry about an assassination while Cenci sleeps. It is suggested from her initial discussion with Lucretia and Orsino that they certainly know about the consequences: "*Lucretia*: "For the jealous laws/Would punish

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[102] Harrison, Margot. "No Way for a Victim to Act?: Beatrice Cenci and the Dilemma of Romantic Performance." *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 39, No. 2, p. 193.

[103] Beatrice's victimhood is also guaranteed by Cenci's plans for her future. Her rape is just the beginning of the cycle of violence. We learn, for instance, that Cenci wants to impregnate her with the hope that Beatrice will give birth to a male child while continuing to rape her. Doing so would not only seal Beatrice's fate but also make her involuntarily apart of Cenci's desire to preserve the hierarchy of male influence and power.

us with death and infamy/For that which it became themselves to do" (Act III, Scene I, ll. 229-231). Capital punishment looms over them and yet the three agree that death is the only 'reward' Cenci deserves. In a sense, their act speaks directly to Stuart Curran's point about the work being a cesspool of evil: "In the world of *The Cenci* evil is the only force. Good can exist as a principle…but good, transferred into action, into a force, as a deterrent to evil, becomes evil."[104] One could argue that Beatrice, out of a desire for justice, chooses to murder Cenci because she believes the act will liberate her. She takes upon herself the implementation of the death penalty, which, without the state's support, is merely murder. But Shelley's point is ultimately that the mediation of the state makes no difference. The death penalty cannot bring about positive change because the system itself is governed by the archaic notion of revenge. Beatrice falls prey to this and thus re-emerges as a direct reflection of her father and the patriarchy that enables him.

Beatrice's transformation becomes clear when she scolds Olimpio and Marzio for failing to assassinate Cenci the first time. When the two outlaws return to Beatrice to report, they admit to their failure. While this may appear like cowardice, to what extent do they exhibit a conscience that Beatrice no longer has? When asked to kill a sleeping man, Olimpio and Marzio both describe how they hesitated because of what it would mean to murder a vulnerable Cenci:

> *Olimpio:* We dare not kill an old and sleeping man;
> His thin grey hair, his stern and reverent brow,
> His veined hands crossed on his heaving breast,
> And the claim innocent sleep in which he lay,
> Quelled me. Indeed, indeed, I cannot do it.
> *Marzio:* But I was bolder; for I chide Olimpio,
> And bade him bear his wrongs to his own grave
> And leave me the reward. And now my knife
> Touched the loose wrinkled throat, when the old man

[104] Curran, *Scorpions Ringed with Fire,* 137.

> Stirred in his sleep, and said, "God! Hear, O, hear,
> A father's curse! What, art thou not our father?"
> And then he laughed. I knew it was the ghost
> Of my dead father speaking through his lips,
> And could not kill him. (Act IV, Scene III, ll. 8-22)

The irony of this moment is that Olimpio and Marzio, the two 'outlaws' of the drama, are also the only characters to show sympathy and hesitation. Their role as outsiders confirms the internal spiral of dramatic violence that traps Beatrice and the Count. In a way, their hesitation represents the last remnant of sympathy right before senseless violence engulfs them as well. Olimpio argues that seeing Cenci sleep with "his veined hands crossed on his heaving breast/And the calm innocent sleep in which he lay," convinces him that killing him is wrong. Marzio tries to urge him, but then resists after he hears Cenci talking in his sleep while having a nightmare: "I knew it was the ghost/of my dead father speaking through his lips/and could not kill him." Their hesitation reflects the conscience of the audience: we know that Cenci is an evil person and that Beatrice is also in pain, but the prospect of murdering a helpless man reminds us of ethical imperatives at stake in this drama. Robert Miles describes this moment as the time at which the audience learns of its own messy ethical contradictions: "We feel at once that Beatrice [is] justified and wrong in taking her revenge. Through our sympathetic engagements with her issues – and the rights and wrongs of the actions taken – we finally come to realize our dark heart, and our own inner caverns."[105] Shelley treats this scene as a moment of self-evaluation for the audience: just how much violence can we stomach before the spiral merely feeds back into itself? Olimpio and Marzio are almost extensions of the audience's doubt, pawns in a corrupt scheme that quickly get pulled back into the spiral by the architects of the murder.

[105] Miles, "The Cenci: Gothic Shelley," *Romantic Circles Praxis*.

When Beatrice scolds Olimpio and Marzio for failing to murder Cenci, she simply affirms that she has fully replicated the evil incarnate of her father's paternal power. With no sense of empathy for *their* predicament, Beatrice (much like Los and Urizen) becomes that which she despises. Rather than acknowledge the problematic nature of killing some one in his sleep, Beatrice does not feel a sense of guilt because she has given herself fully over to the passion of retribution. In other words, she cannot see the ethical contradictions at play in the same way that Olimpio, Marzio, or the readers do.[106] Her revenge transforms into the definitive driving force of her character, causing her to lose favor with others and the audience. By seeing herself as an avenger, Beatrice foregoes any attempt to figure out or self-inspect the hypocrisy of her vengeance, making it impossible for her to break free:

> *Beatrice:* Miserable slaves!
> Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man,
> Found ye the boldness to return to me
> With such a deed undone? Base palterers!
> Cowards and traitors! Why, the very conscience
> Which ye would sell for gold and for revenge
> Is an equivocation: it sleeps over
> A thousand daily acts disgracing men;
> And when a deed where mercy insults between…
> Why do I talk? Hadst thou a tongue to say,
> "She murdered her own father," I must do it!
> But never dream ye shall outlive him long! (Act IV, Scene III, ll. 22-31)

The compelling part of Olimpio and Marzio's dissidence is that it introduces the potential to break from the conspiracy of violence. Their ethical crisis (however short-lived) works as a fleeting divergence from the logic that has propelled the drama thus far. But Beatrice still remains in control of the narrative. By bribing Olimpio and Marzio, she copies Cenci

[106] In a commentary on this chapter, Deborah Elise White insists that this moment also serves as a reaffirmation of the patriarchy. By eliciting sympathy for Cenci by way of the ghostly dead father, she argues, the two outlaws idealize the image of the father at the expense of Beatrice's pain. It not only ignores Beatrice's suffering, but also shows how patriarchy remains deeply interlinked with scenes of sympathy in the text.

from earlier in the drama and re-constitutes the culture of silence and secrecy that propels the acts of punishment. Her calls for redemption and reconciliation have been replaced by callousness and disregard for the rule of law she once championed: "Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man/Found ye the boldness to return to me/Which such a deed undone?" It also appears rather ironic that she would scold the outlaws for choosing conscience over a monetary bribe: "Why, the very conscience/Which ye would sell for gold and for revenge is an equivocation." That is to say, they would rather prioritize partial conscience in favor of the fatherly figure than acknowledge her right to self-defense. Beatrice very much signifies Shelley's idea of resistance (which he talks about in *A Philosophical View of Reform*) but the social and political change resistance is meant to generate also runs the risk of becoming mindless anarchy that cannot be undone.[107] In Beatrice's case, she resists control only to bring about insurrection against the patriarchy that ultimately murders her.

What, then, does this suggest about Shelley's opinion on resistance and tyrannical government? I would argue that Beatrice's transformation is not necessarily a rejection of resistance, but rather a cautious critique of its potential shortcomings. Shelley supports an overhaul of institutional dogma, but also recognizes the cost of change itself. In his study, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public*, Andrew Franta argues that Shelley's notion of political change has more to do with the capacity for future revolutions rather than that of his own time period: "In Shelley's eyes, poems not only become the objects

[107] In *A Philosophical View of Reform*, Shelley assesses the history of political revolutions and reforms that have shaped the culture of social and cultural change. He uses examples such as the French and American Revolutions to address the British Government's need for institutional change. While written after *The Cenci*, and unfinished, Shelley's polemic offers us a way to understand the underlying political implication of Beatrice's actions. She functions as an agent of institutional change by challenging the patriarchy, but in many ways, she falls short because the engine of resistance she represents loses control over its direction. It is clear that Shelley means to critique Beatrice's method for achieving liberation; her decision to resist to the point of murderous insurrection is where she fails.

of a future reading, but vehicles that enable future readings of present conflicts."[108] While Franta talks specifically about Shelley's poetry, the same is true of *The Cenci*. In much the same ways that "Ode to the West Wind" forecasts future readings of Shelley's oeuvre, the conflict of *The Cenci* suggests that, even if Beatrice fails, future generations will read about her own struggle and advance the cause for liberty. Even if *she* fails to defeat authoritarianism, *we* will continue the struggle for rights and liberty in our own time period. In effect, the story of Beatrice's resistance lives on the minds of those who read about her pursuit for justice.[109]

I do not mean to suggest that Beatrice should be seen solely as a martyr. Rather, it should be noted that her quest for revenge is Shelley's way of highlighting that resistance can indeed become its own form of tyranny. When Beatrice insists towards the end of the passage, "Why do I talk? Hadst thou a tongue to say,/"She murdered her own father," she asks why it is necessary to argue about a murder that, in her mind, makes sense. It is quite unclear as to whether Beatrice is declaring that she will murder Cenci by her own hand or if she is merely using theatrics to coerce Olimpio and Marzio into doing it. She snatches a dagger from one of them, which could imply either honest commitment or a performance. Regardless of her intent, Beatrice unknowingly embodies the tyrant in this moment. What she fails to see (because of her suffering) is that this choice she makes to kill Cenci in his

[108] Franta, Andrew. *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public*. Cambridge University Press, 2007. 113.
[109] Shelley himself points out in the Preface to *The Cenci* how the Cenci case is still discussed in his time. In a sense, his idea of futurity applies to his own time period as well: "On my arrival to Rome I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest…All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart" (141). The degree to which the story of Cenci is a subject of discussion in his time speaks to the way in which he is simply rewriting a story that has taken on a life of its own. Therefore, Shelley knows that Beatrice's resistance will live on in the minds of her readers because it lives on in his and will be retold through the text of the play.

sleep confirms that she is also willing to use coercion and secrecy to her benefit. As a consequence, she reimagines/completes the vicious cycle of violence that Cenci started.

The Breakdown of Beatrice and the (Un)-Guilty Conscience

In Mark Canuel's discussion about Shelley's essay on the death penalty, he makes a critical gesture towards *The Cenci* that emphasizes the role of conscience and Beatrice's refusal to admit guilt. He highlights that the audience is in a difficult position given that it must simultaneously condemn Beatrice's patricide *and* the violent punishment Beatrice is forced to endure. Without using the word 'conscience' at all, Shelley actually points to its central significance: "the polemic invokes the power of conscience without naming it; the death penalty extinguishes the '"vital principle within us"' of good and evil – what we may interpret as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong."[110] While briefly alluded to in the aforementioned passage, Beatrice's breakdown of conscience can be seen explicitly when questioned about Cenci's death. Savella, the Pope's legate, finds Cenci's body right outside his chamber and then asks Lucretia and Beatrice if they played a role in his death:

> *Beatrice:* Guilty! Who dares talk of guilt? My Lord,
> I am more innocent of parricide
> Then is a child born fatherless…Dear Mother,
> Your gentleness and patience are no shield
> For this keen judging world, this two-edged lie,
> Which seems, but is not. What! Will human laws,
> Rather will ye who are their ministers,
> Bar all access to retribution first,
> And then, when heaven doth interpose to do.
> What ye neglect, arming familiar things
> To the redress of an unwonted crime,
> Make ye the victims who demanded it
> Culprits? 'Tis ye are culprits! (Act IV, Scene IV; ll. 112-124)

[110] Canuel, 128.

One way to read the section would be to say that Beatrice avoids giving Savella a straight answer because she knows that she is guilty. Of course, by continuing to circle around his question, she only raises more suspicion as to her complicity. However, Canuel interprets her rhetoric somewhat differently. Rather than see it as a mere cover-up, he suggests that, on a deeper level, her patricide has made it impossible for her to even recognize that what she did makes her guilty. So when Beatrice exclaims, "Guilty! Who dares talk of guilt," it exposes her lack of self-awareness and confirms that she does not see Cenci's death as an actual crime at all. That is to say, the patricide suspends her capacity for self-critique and, in this process, convinces her that the "ministers" of "human laws" are the real "culprits." When Beatrice calls out ministers of the law for, "[barring] all access to retribution first," she not only alludes to murdering Cenci, but also speaks to her idea that the law both fails to take on patriarchal power, and then obstructs justice by outlawing what she feels is a legitimate right to retaliate against her father.

While I agree with Canuel's premise that turning herself into an executioner warps Beatrice's sense of right and wrong, it seems as though the murder reverses her conception of evil and good rather than outright extinguishes it. She does distinguish between good and evil, although their associations get inverted: she views her patricide as righteous and just whereas evil comes in the form of male ministers who hypocritically condemn retribution they themselves were sent to execute. In a sense, the issue here concerns the rhetoric of crime itself. Based on the line, "'Tis ye are culprits," Beatrice views anyone who failed to protect her and yet questions her motives as innately evil. She signifies and performs the role of victim because, in her mind, there is a strong distinction

between the punishments she endures (un-justified) and the punishment her father receives (justified).

Hazlitt contends that punishment is most beneficial "when it arises out of, and co-operates with that strong sense of right and wrong," but if Beatrice's scenario complicates the foundations of right and wrong, can we even rely on Hazlitt's logic? (Hazlitt, 468) Part of why she resists guilt so vociferously is because Beatrice knows that the death penalty would be the punishment. The fact is that, in the matter of *The Cenci*, there is no weight behind wrong, right, and punishment, because the underlying structures that support each of these pillars are fundamentally flawed. 'Right' and 'wrong' do not exist in such a context since Beatrice can no more recognize her own error than can the justice system can treat her rape as an actual crime. This is not to say that ethics are irrelevant to matters of punishment, but that there are cases of ambiguity in which the rhetoric of right and wrong breaks down.

The same logic applies when Beatrice condemns the justice system even before she is suspected of murder. When Savella inquires about Cenci's death, he assures her that he is not judging Beatrice out of suspicion, but merely wishes to pursue the facts. Beatrice is not convinced, automatically assuming that he suspects her. The irony of Beatrice's state-ment is that she admits harboring resentment towards Cenci and thus raises concern about her knowledge of the murder. By refusing to acknowledge her guilt, Beatrice reveals that, in her own mind, the crime of rape outweighs any act of revenge she takes against others:

> *Beatrice:* And yet, if you arrest me,
> You are the judge and executioner
> Of that which is the life of life: the breath
> Of accusation kills an innocent name,
> And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life

> Which is a mask without it. 'Tis most false
> That I am guilty of foul parricide:
> Although I must rejoice, for justest cause,
> That other hands have sent my father's soul
> To ask the mercy he denied to me,
> Now leave us free: stain not a noble house
> With vague surmises of rejected crime;
> Add to our sufferings and your own neglect
> No heavier sum: let them have been enough:
> Leave us the wreck we have. (Act IV, Scene IV; ll. 141-154)

The most interesting part of her statement actually occurs halfway through the passage: "I must rejoice for justest cause/That other hands have sent my father's soul/To ask [for] the mercy he denied to me." In a sense, Beatrice is correct. She did not literally murder Cenci by killing him herself. That is to say, there is a cognitive dissonance in her mind based on the fact that, to her, the "other hands" means hers are clean. She does not feel responsible, in part because orchestrating and executing the murder are two very different things. And since she feels that the mercy afforded to him was not extended to her, the murder itself is just recompense for the crime that went unanswered. Without a feeling of self-justification, Beatrice is but a "mask," the forgotten face of violence that has no identity, no core. In this way, she becomes the mirror image of her father – a person whose quest for justice led her to commit an act that is anything but just.

The figure of the mask is also useful for thinking about Shelley's view of violence as a faceless performance devoid of principle or conviction. To him, the mask reflects the grotesque and, coupled with his own views on execution, characterizes Beatrice as a face-less assassin: "The spectators who feel no abhorrence at a public execution, but rather the self-applauding superiority, and the sense of gratified indignation are surely excited to the most inauspicious emotions." (Shelley, 465) To an extent, Beatrice falls under this category of spectator. She feels no abhorrence at Cenci's death, but feels a "gratified

indignation" once he is dead. She is a spectator to the drama that she caused and revels in a "self-applauding superiority" that believes in the idea that murdering Cenci meant overcoming him.

This self-perception is particularly true with the beginning of the passage in which she accuses Savella of being "judge and executioner" if he were to indict her and ruin her innocent name. The idea here is that if Beatrice were to be accused of murder, she would, in effect, be robbed of "the life of life," otherwise the innocent reputation and honor of her name she relies on. In a sense, she exposes her vulnerability with this line: it is essential that she be perceived as innocent because anything other than that would threaten the fabrication of innocence she has created for herself. The moral inadequacy of the world she inhabits applies to the core of Beatrice's heart as well. She has taken on the corrupt form of violent extremism and its deceptive mask of fractured innocence. Or rather, the paternal powers that have forced her to wear the mask that now deprives her of meaning outside of the murder itself. She is not only unwilling to admit guilt ("Tis most false/That I am guilty of foul parricide:"), but also unable to do so because of the blemish a confession would put onto the Cenci name.

The irony of this moment is that despite all of her attempts to liberate herself from Cenci's captivity, she merely reinforces her reliance on the Cenci name in the end. By not admitting to her complicity Beatrice undermines exactly what she says: "stain not a noble house/With vague surmises of rejected crime." How can she make such a statement when her patricide all but confirms that the Cenci's "noble house" has been stained with blood? Moreover, the act warrants suspicion upon all those with ties to Cenci. Margot Harrison's article attempts to address this quandary with a question of her own: "Does Beatrice form

a conscious decision to deny her role in the murder to the authorities and to confess to the "desire" and the "interest," but not to the deed?[111] Indeed, her use of the phrases "rejoice," and "justest cause" intimates a quasi-confession of sorts – she admits to a hatred of Cenci that inspires others to imagine her collusion in the murder. If she were forming a decision to deny her role in the murder, then that would mean Beatrice believes that the "desire" *to* murder is not a convictable crime. Unless she commits the murder, she plays no role in it.

The problem is that this passage confirms that Beatrice has lost the power to make the important distinction between the imagined truth of her innocence and the literal truth of her guilt. She does not feel culpable because, in her mind, the actual act of murder fails to supersede the higher crime of her internal suffering. Beatrice's internalized oppression, in effect, takes precedence over everything else. But the in-explicable nature of Beatrice's suffering is also what prevents it from being taken literally by the authorities. She deals in the metaphysical realm of pain while the rest of the world (and law itself) deals in just the material. This separation is what makes it impossible for her suffering to ever register beyond the confines of her own imagination – Her rape is intangible to the rest of the world.

At the end of Act IV, Lucretia and Beatrice learn they will be taken to Rome for a courtroom trial led by the Pope. In the final moments of the scene, they juxtapose the idea of being innocent to the eyes of God and guilty to the eyes of man. Beatrice asks Lucretia not to be afraid, as their higher innocence will surely defeat any accusations:

> *Beatrice:* Why not to Rome, dear mother? There as here
> Our innocence is an armed heel, to trample accusation. God is there
> As here, and with his shadow every clothes
> The innocent, the injured, and, the weak; and such are we (ll. 159-164)

[111] Harrison, 200.

Beatrice's faith rests in what she considers to be the protection of God and her status as an "injured and weak" victim, whose own suffering at the hands of Cenci is transparent and undeniable. Again, her self-conception of innocence is rooted in a belief that her "desire" (rather than action), combined with the ambiguity of the murder itself, is not enough to accuse her of a crime. Lucretia feels the exact opposite.

In a divergence that could expose Beatrice's own naivety about the justice system, Lucretia scoffs at Beatrice's confidence and implies that the opposite will happen. Rather than be seen as innocent, the justice system's reliance on punishment will dictate how the women are treated:

> *Lucretia:* Ha, they will bind us to the rack, and wrest
> Self-accusation from our agony!
> Will Giacomo be there? Orsino? Marzio?
> All present; all confronted; all demanding
> Each from the other's countenance the thing
> Which is in every heart! (ll. 171-176)

By resorting to the agony of torture, Lucretia iterates, the Pope can coerce everyone to give in. Unlike Beatrice, she fears the power of the patriarchy and understands that it is committed to rooting out the perpetrators of the crime. The issue with Beatrice is that, for the entire drama, she has played the role of judge and jury with respect to her own idea of innocence. She cannot challenge her own actions because she refuses to recognize herself as part of the conspiracy. Beatrice's imagined innocence is what prevents her from seeing that she has both violated the rules of the patriarchy and yet participated in its cyclical violence. She is responsible for the cycle of revenge, which, taken into a daughter's hands, threatens the construct of male hierarchy, and yet remains tainted by it.

<u>False Testimony in the Courtroom Trial of Beatrice Cenci</u>

Act V picks up with a brief exchange between Orsino and Giacomo as they reflect on their potential fates. Orsino decides to flee the country and live in exile so as to escape

punishment. Giacomo stays, and eventually encounters Beatrice once she has been sent to her cell after the trial. But before that, Beatrice and Marzio testify before the judges in the most pivotal moment of the entire drama. Marzio confesses to the crime and lists Beatrice as one of his accomplices, a true statement that she is quick to refute. Rather than agree to any part of Marzio's story, Beatrice rejects the entire narrative and labels Marzio a liar. In doing so, she uses false testimony, lies to the judges, and fails to bring anyone to her side:

Marzio: I strangled him in his sleep.
First Judge: Who urged you to do it?
Marzio: His own son Giacomo, and the young prelate
Orsino sent me to Petrella; there
The ladies Beatrice and Lucretia
Tempted me with a thousand crowns, and I
And my companion forthwith murdered him.
Now let me die.
First Judge: This sounds as bad as truth. Guards, there,
Lead forth the prisoners!
Enter *Lucretia, Beatrice, and Giacomo, guarded.*
Look upon this man;
When did you see him last?
Beatrice: We never saw him.
Marzio: You know me too well, Lady Beatrice.
Beatrice: I know thee! How? Where? When?
Marzio: You know 'twas I
Whom you did urge with menaces and bribes
To kill your father. When the thing was done
You clothed me in a robe of woven gold
And bade me thrive: how I have thriven, you see.
You, my Lord, Giacomo, Lady Lucretia,
You know that what I speak is true. (Act V, Scene II; ll. 12-29)

It is difficult to imagine that Beatrice honestly believes Marzio is lying. She did not know about him before the plan to murder Cenci, but was introduced to him prior to the attempt at assassination. She authorized it and "tempted" (bribed) Marzio and Orsino with money as compensation. The fact that she openly denies knowing Marzio leaves one to believe it can only be to protect her name. To confirm Marzio's testimony would only mean to then put oneself at risk. But Marzio's focus on the truth ("You know that what I speak is true")

is particularly important given that Beatrice's speechlessness seems to also apply within a courtroom setting. Earlier in the drama, she was defined by her incapacity to use the word "rape" or "incest" to convey what happened to her. Here, her speechlessness manifests itself in the form of being unable to admit what she *knows* is true. That is to say, Beatrice's theatrical "performance" of the unspeakable leads to another rhetorical prison from which she cannot escape. And yet, there looks to be a reason as to why she chooses not to speak.

Aside from the obvious reason (self-preservation), Beatrice seems to avoid saying anything because of the extent to which she will bear the full responsibility of actions that were taken by many. She is not all to blame. Lucretia, Marzio, Orsino, Camillo, Giacomo and Cenci are all culpable for what has transpired. The conspiracy to murder Cenci works beyond just one person. She was not the only one to plan the murder and yet she is forced to answer for the entire conspiracy. While Marzio simply wants Beatrice to admit her role in the murder, her blood relation to Cenci automatically implicates her as the source of all the distress. The judge presiding over the trial even treats Beatrice as the mastermind of it all. In other words, for the law to function there needs to be a criminal at the source of the crime to convict. As a result, the trial reincarnates the spirit of Count Cenci into the judge who presides over this case, thus extending the range of injustice felt by the Cenci family.

The judge's role is peculiar – he quickly sides with Marzio's testimony and uses a series of rhetorical gestures to signal the need for punishment. When Camillo steps in and declares Beatrice innocent ("I would pledge my own soul/That she is guiltless" ll. 61-62), the judge immediately retorts with "Yet she must be tortured." The resort to torture seems to reflect one of Shelley's main critiques of the legal system Beatrice faces: it relies heavily on an exploitation of human suffering assumed to be just. The term "must"

(which will become more important later on) is problematic. It presumes that regardless of the type of situation, torture is a *necessary* and built-in mechanism of the legal process. That is to say state-sanctioned torture cannot be divorced from the state's idea of justice any more than the death penalty can. The patriarchy depends on the use of torture and penalty of death because it has to. Without them, there *is no* structure of the law.

However, the consequences are to undermine the foundations they seem to put in place. Deborah Elise White and Mark Canuel argue that capital punishment's unstable foundation makes it impossible for any kind of government to regulate. In White's case, torture and state-sanctioned killings cannot be used to effectively measure truth, error, and ethics (which is precisely what the courtroom in *The Cenci* tries to do): "Judgments of truth and error can have no lasting authority over [the] values of right and wrong when the legibility of the law and its legislation remain in conflict."[112] In other words, the ambiguity of torture as a model of enforcement, combined with the ambiguity of its aims and intentions, creates a result in which it cannot be trusted as a convincing authority on matters of truth and deception. Shelley's issue with torture is that, like capital punishment, it does not have a strong basis in any self-critical authorship or context. Likewise, Canuel asserts much the same: executions are problematic, based in large part "on the flawed text of capital punishment: its uncertain authorship and its faulty construction." [113] The very legal mechanisms used to facilitate structure, order, consistency and stability are deeply flawed and dangerously unstable. And yet, this instability is why the state (i.e. the Judge and Pope) must depend on them: that is, the state's instability generates more, not less, dependence on violent means.

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[112] White, 119.
[113] Canuel, 128.

Nowhere is this instability more evident than in the judge's rationale (and, later on the Pope's) for why torture must be used. In response to Camillo's following statement of Beatrice's innocence ("she is as pure as speechless infancy"; line 69), the judge reinstates the need for torture because the Pope demands it. Camillo's description of Beatrice as the speechless infant is meant to imply purity in that she could not possibly contain the desire for revenge (and the rhetorical capacity to plot it). But the phrase also seems to suggest to the reader that her speechless demeanor is exactly why she cannot deftly persuade a judge and the audience as to her innocence. When the judge claims that torture is necessary to a pursuit of justice, he shows the Pope (or papal system), like Beatrice herself, only knows how to answer crime with more violence:

> *Judge:* Well, be her purity on your head, my Lord.
> If you forbid the rack. His Holiness
> Enjoined us to pursue this monstrous crime
> By the severest forms of the law; nay even
> To stretch a point against the criminals.
> The prisoners stand accused of parricide
> Upon such evidence as justifies
> Torture. (Act V, Scene II; ll. 70-77)

In this passage, the judge ventriloquizes the indomitable will of the Pope. Despite what is said about Beatrice's alleged "purity," the judge maintains his desire to "pursue this monstrous crime/by the severest forms of the law." He disregards any type of clemency and suggests that there is enough evidence to justify torture (Marzio's word). Beatrice even questions the judge's treatment of Marzio's testimony as concrete evidence ("What evidence? This man's?" line 78), which may reflect the idea that the trial is not so much about truth at all. The judge's willingness to side with Marzio's testimony over that of Camillo's does imply that the judge (and by association, the Pope) is greatly concerned with the threat patricide poses to the legal order. That is to say, without any way to verify,

confirm, or falsify either testimony, the judge's decision to uphold torture exposes how ill prepared the justice system is to address the problem. There is no precedent other than the use of human suffering, making the entire trial suspect and incapable of achieving justice.

This is not to suggest that Beatrice's rhetoric has no effect at all. She does raise an important question regarding the fact that testimony can never be fully authenticated. It is always partial (including her own), and to a degree, unreliable. The judge even appears to agree somewhat with her (Judge: "Even so"; line 79), conceding that a single testimony is not representative of the entire situation. But according to him, the accusation of patricide is enough ("nay even/To stretch a point against the criminals/The prisoners stand accused of parricide") to authorize the use of torture. The issue with Beatrice's questioning of trial protocol is that the same critique could be made of her: why should *her* words carry more weight than those of someone else, especially when she has already admitted to harboring hatred toward Cenci? While it may be true that everyone hates Cenci (including the Pope) Beatrice's acknowledgement of her hate makes it impossible for her to escape skepticism.

There is also the issue of Beatrice's own testimony and the extent to which it does not address the murder itself. Rather, she focuses on rationalizing her hate and explaining how her pain transcends mortality. Once again, she never mentions the term "rape," but is calculated in the way she frames the event as the murdering of her innocence. In this way, Beatrice argues that a murder occurred, but different from the one being litigated in the courtroom. Unfortunately, this metaphysical murder is not recognized in the eyes of those in the court, and so Beatrice's plea falls on deaf ears. Her testimony tries to make the trial about what she endured (a murder of the spirit) but, in turn, fails to persuade her listeners:

> What evil have we done thee? I, alas!
> Have lived but on this earth a few sad years
> And so my lot was ordered, that a father

> First turned the moments of awakening life
> To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope; and then
> Stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul;
> And my untainted fame; and even that peace
> Which sleeps within the core of the heart's heart;
> But the wound was not mortal; so my hate
> Became the only worship I could lift
> To our great father, who in pity and love,
> Armed thee, as thou dost say, to cut him off; (Act V, Scene II; ll. 118-129)

Shelley peppers Beatrice's testimony with several images that suggest a murder occurred: the quick transition of "moments of awakening/to drops," the quasi-sexual imagery of the unidentified object (knife/penis) "[stabbing] with one blow my everlasting soul," the slow expiration of "that peace/Which sleeps within the core of the heart's heart," a surreal type of wound that "was not mortal" and, finally, Cenci's death itself from the idea of "cutting him off." These images imply that Beatrice differentiates between the mortal death of her father and the supernatural death of her own spirit. The former was done to kill Cenci and put an end to his reign of tyranny, so to speak. According to Beatrice, it was the only way to deal with a visceral "hatred" that had been created as her idol of "worship." She concedes only that she wanted Cenci dead, that was all she could pray for given the situation. There was no other recourse for her to take, especially since Cenci intended to continue raping her. The problem is that by admitting to playing a key role in his murder and confessing to complicity, she makes herself vulnerable to indictment later on.

The passage establishes that Beatrice, despite her activist hatred, is not completely in control of her own actions. As she states at the beginning, she had "lived on this earth a few sad years/And so my lot was ordered," suggesting that her fate was predetermined by unfortunate circumstance. Her father's lasciviousness "poisoned" her youth and corrupted her "untainted fame." In essence, Beatrice's rhetorical strategy is to describe her hatred as a veiled cry for help, a justified expression of internalized hostility and oppression. She is

even engaging the unspoken by characterizing her wound as "not mortal." It goes beyond any conventional articulations of pain, dropping to the "core of the heart's heart" where it eats away at her. One might also imagine that the task of recounting this story to the court is painful itself, speaking to Margot Harrison's notion that to 'act' in this play means to 'suffer' as well (196).

Beatrice concludes her statement with a critical line: "And thus his wrong becomes my accusation/and art thou the accuser (ll. 130-131)?" On the one hand, she must pay for his sexual crimes and cruelty. Cenci's violation becomes her burden to bear and his crimes immediately shift onto her. On the other hand, she must continue to defend her reputation even after Cenci's death. That is to say, the shift in blame from father to daughter actually confirms that Cenci's influence lives on in the form of this trial. Beatrice cannot escape it because male hierarchy is pervasive, consuming, and, omnipresent at all times and places. She is forced to play the victim no matter the situation and considers the justice system to be complicit in accusing those who suffer. As in Maria's trial, there is no way for the male judge to empathize with a woman whose suffering lies outside the boundaries of what the court chooses to acknowledge as crime. Beatrice fails to bring the judges to her side since she cannot redefine the court's built-in conception of crime so that it responds to her pain.

The trial ends on a similar note of indecision. Marzio suddenly admits to guilt and claims that Beatrice is innocent. He is tortured (and dies) while she remains resistant to any accusation of guilt. After deciding that further inquiry will not yield an answer, the judge incarcerates Beatrice (but decides not to torture) while the Pope tries to resolve the issue With the Pope, Shelley returns to capital punishment in the final scenes of the

drama. The Pope argues that Beatrice must die establishing the death penalty as a necessary precedent for upholding a tenuous legal foundation. While he does not *disagree* that Cenci's death was deserved, the Pope's decision to implement the death penalty exposes a cautious concern for the delicate fragility of law. If Beatrice is allowed to murder her father (upending male hierarchy) without consequence, what might stop someone else from overthrowing the Pope? In other words, Beatrice's action only re-instates the cycle of dramatic violence while the Pope's action makes clear that the same cycle underlies the stability of the patriarchal power that oppresses her. By concluding the play with an execution, Shelley forces his audience to ask whether the death penalty can give closure.

Beatrice's Incarceration and the Closing Rhetoric of Capital Punishment

Giacomo, Lucretia and Bernardo (who all know the truth) encourage her to confess so that she can avoid needless torture. When pressed again by the judge, Beatrice, in defiance, refuses to admit complicity or remorse. But unlike her previous statements in which she would deflect the accusations, her final dialogue directly addresses her father's murder. While she does reiterate the speechlessness of an 'unutterable' act, she does so in a way that calls out the law's selective classification of crime and injustice. That is to say, rather than admitting guilt, Beatrice goes further by speaking right to the essence of sexist male hierarchies – that men derive power from being able to define the contours of crime:

> *Judge:* Art thou not guilty of thy father's death?
> *Beatrice:* Or wilt thou rather tax high judging God
> That he permitted such an act as that
> Which I have suffered, and which he beheld;
> Made it unutterable, and took from it
> All refuge, all revenge, all consequence,
> But that which thou hast called my father's death?
> Which is or is not what men call a crime,
> Which either I have done, or have not done;

> Say what ye will. I shall deny no more.
> If ye desire it thus, thus let it be… (Act V, Scene III; ll. 77-87)

The passage is somewhat similar to other statements Beatrice has made. For instance, she rejects the idea of guilt based on a premise that transcends the court itself: that her rape is, in fact, an act of divine injustice. But more significantly, by suggesting that the judge "tax high judging God/That he permitted such an act as that/Which I have suffered/And which he beheld," Beatrice critiques the Christian orthodoxy that ignores the crime and allows it to go unheard/unanswered. By invoking God as the divine judge, Beatrice undermines the theocratic dogma that overlooks rape (or legalizes it via property rights) in exchange for a preservation of male power. Indeed, her statement calls out the justice system's hypocrisy of only prosecuting the crimes *it* considers egregious (or a direct threat to the institutional order of patriarchy). And while Cenci played a strong role in silencing Beatrice right after her rape, she blames God (or rather, the Pope!) for permitting such an act without coming to her defense. It was not so much Cenci that robbed her of "revenge," but rather the legal system that 'enabled' him and censured her once the murder plot had been revealed to all.

This emphasis on male power and fraught conceptions of crime manifests itself in the second half of the passage when Beatrice argues that ambiguity (not certainty) defines the reality of her murder plot. Unlike the first half, in which Beatrice iterates that her rape is undoubtedly a crime of the highest order, this section raises a question about the role of evidence itself. To Beatrice, her body (and the pain it endures) is proof enough that Cenci raped her. In her mind, the only concrete evidence available is the incarcerated body within which she is forced to languish. Outside of this, there is no proof to show that she is in fact the one who master-minded Cenci's murder: "Which either I have done, or have not done." In other words, Beatrice knows that the judges have no tangible/ tactile

evidence beyond Marzio's testimony, and yet, will convict anyway because of how desperately they *need* to link a person's name to the murder, and in doing so, contain the guilt of the murder to a single agent rather than to the complex web of power relations that the play has revealed. The fact is that *everyone* is guilty in this murder, but the law has to isolate punishment to an individual. The line "If ye desire it thus, thus let it be" is emblematic of her larger point that the justice system does not require the presence of evidence to convict her. If the perceived integrity of the system is on the line, it can resort to personal "desire" as a justification for punishment. By saying "I shall deny no more," Beatrice concedes that the judges do not need a confession to sentence or to kill her.

Once the death sentence is decided, the final scene starts with Camillo speaking to Bernardo about the Pope's rationale for why the culprits must die. Camillo tries to relieve Beatrice's punishment by talking to the Pope, but fails to persuade him. While explaining the Pope's reasons to Bernardo, Camillo teaches us that the move to execute Beatrice was less about her than it was about the flimsy institutional fabric of hierarchy that her murder plot threatened to unravel. Rather, the decision to go through with her execution reflects a broader instability regarding the systemic powers that be. The Pope is one such example of this, an authority figure who could also be over-thrown by another if Beatrice's patricide were left unchecked. The fact that the Pope must place the systems of male hierarchy ahead of Beatrice's own injustice shows how flawed these institutions are:

> *Bernardo*: And yet you left him not?
> *Camillo:* I urged him still;
> Pleading, as I could guess, the devilish wrong
> Which prompted your unnatural parent's death.
> And he replied: "Paolo Santa Croce
> Murdered his mother yester evening,
> And he is fled. Parricide grows so rife
> That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the young
> Will strangle us all, dozing in our chairs.

> Authority, and power, and hoary hair
> Are grown crimes capital. You are my nephew,
> You come to ask their pardon; stay a moment;
> Here is their sentence; never see me more
> Till, to the letter, it be all fulfilled." (Act V, Scene IV; ll. 14-27)

Using the example of Paolo Santa Croce, the Pope suggests that patricide is on the rise. It "grows so rife/That soon, for some just cause no doubt, the young/will strangle us all," an admission of fear that the young will soon try to dethrone the old. But at the same time, it does seem like the Pope's frustration is personal: he fears not only the upending of patriarchy but also his own power.

Standing by the death penalty is effectively the Pope's way of admitting that there is no alternative other than to use violence. Michael Simpson highlights this contradiction when he compares Beatrice's punishment project to that of the Pope's: "Why she must be punished for executing a project that is not only compatible, but also identical with that of the Pope's design is because the agency of this project is just as important as the project itself."[114] In other words, what real difference is there between Beatrice's resort to execution, and the Pope's intent to execute Cenci? But also, what real difference is there between her murder of Cenci and his execution of *her*? The laws may sanction one and not the other, but the outcome still remains the same. Both parties rely on a form of radical violence that is ungovernable and uncontrollable. Neither use of violence can be justified because the rhetoric of each death penalty is fractured: Beatrice murders out of revenge whereas the Pope issues a legal murder to protect a corrupt system. The ethical paradigms of both examples are fraught and without clear pathways to resolution: a query that circles back to the issue of rhetorical ambiguity.

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[114] Simpson, 387.

The Pope's decision to execute Beatrice is based on a need to stabilize the judicial system after her patricide threatened to destroy it. But in reality, the exact opposite occurs in that his response to the murder is anything but stabilizing. On the contrary, the Pope, in his own rhetoric, concedes to knowing that the system he leads is faulty. In fact, his belief that patricide will soon overtake society seems to somewhat portend the downfall of male hierarchy in its current form. To Shelley, this shift in power could also be interpreted as a revolutionary change/reform in which the young violently replace the old. If anything, the Pope's death sentence reads more like a stopgap measure: a decree that will delay, but not stop, the march towards inevitable generational change. Indeed, this vein of thinking does cohere with Shelley's messages of political change/rebirth, from several of his other 1819 works. But in the case of *The Cenci*, one core question remains un-resolved: Is Beatrice's death at the end a blow to revolution or a cue for readers to assume the mantle of reform?

Shelley's Final Message of Continued Resistance and Future Reform

To answer this question it might be useful to return to Andrew Franta's premise of Shelley and futurity. His analysis focuses on how works like, *Prometheus Unbound, Queen Mab*, *The Mask of Anarchy*, "Ode to the West Wind," and his *Defence of Poetry* speak to a common theme of political futurity and generational change. In each instance, he contends that Shelley is writing for a reader yet to be, an audience from, and of, the future: "For Shelley, this notion that a poet should take on the project of writing contemporary history comes from the conviction that poetry has a special purchase on the future."[115] Taking this stance means to acknowledge that, for Shelley, the author's task is to set up debates of the future. The same is true of *The Cenci,* in that its inconclusive ending stresses just how unresolved the issue of the death penalty is and will continue to

[115] Franta, 120.

be. In the text itself, Beatrice's death may illustrate the dark end of her struggle against tyranny, but outside the text, it works differently – as a clarion call (not unlike the trumpet from "Ode to the West Wind") of action to the audience. The idea here is to inspire future readers to continue the fight against tyranny and resist injustice in its ugliness: not only the brutality of patriarchal power but also of the death penalty that enforces it. Beatrice suggests as much in her last moments when she calls on her audience to live beyond the execution.

In her final statement before the hanging, she echoes a phrase uttered by the Pope, ("They must die") and modifies it to "No mother, we must die." Her words imply that she knows the reason for their execution: it *must* be done out of precedent and to preserve the system of male power that is: "Since such is the re-ward of innocent lives" (line 110). While one could criticize Beatrice for clinging to false innocence until the very end, her statement that "our murderers live" is quite true: the one who murdered them (the Pope) along with the spectators who view ("the spectators who feel no abhorrence at a public execution, but rather self-applauding superiority"), are the real killers. Her plea at the end ("Live ye, who live subject to one another/As we were once, who now…") is equally ambiguous: she does not complete her sentence leaving her rhetoric open to interpretation. Beyond that, the plural noun, "ye," is unclear with regards to reference. It could possibly be referring to her spectators, or a future reader yet to exist.

If one were to accept the latter interpretation, Beatrice might be speaking to future readers of today. The comparison she draws between herself and "ye" suggests that in the future, others may end up in the same predicament as she and Lucretia. Shelley definitely seems to be using this moment to address future generations and remind them that

Beatrice lives on in the minds of those who read about her struggle. He is speaking not only to audience members of the day but also reaching out to future readers that will, in time, arise in life to continue the fight for liberty. To quote "The Cloud", if Shelley's message of change and revolution "[passes] through the pores of the oceans and shores/I change, but I cannot die," than the core concept of liberty that pervades his text will adapt to future circumstances, but never fade away. Beatrice's own quest for revenge could be construed as precisely that – a journey for liberty and equality that just fell short.

Reforming the future is what Shelley's *The Cenci* calls on us to do. If Beatrice is a radical reformist who seeks to restructure the annals of power, then it becomes our charge to take up the rhetoric of reform and resist injustice wherever it threatens our freedom. To Shelley, injustice took the form of literary censorship, government surveillance and state sponsored abuse of the justice system. It also took the form of patriarchy. Beatrice was a victim of such crimes, and as James Chandler says, "Shelley's aim is to show that this sympathy of the spectator with Beatrice has its basis in a twofold recognition: the first phase is the spectator's recognition of him-self or herself in Beatrice."[116] Only through this reciprocal identification with Beatrice can the reader realize that an assault on her liberties is an assault on ours as well. Viewing our reflection through the prism of Beatrice's struggle is what jumpstarts the march towards a future justice that Shelley prophesies.

[116] Chandler, 510.

Chapter IV

Cugoano's Critique of Law and Slavery in *Thoughts and Sentiments*

Bridging the Gap Between Punishment and Slavery

Punishment and slavery are not that far removed from each other, as Mark Canuel discusses in *The Shadow of Death*: "Both the abolition of slavery and the slave trade were linked to the abolition of the death penalty…reformers regularly – even to this day – refer to the second, just as often as the first, simply as "abolition.""[117] The two are related in that slavery (and the slave trade) are both punishments by another means often resulting in the "execution" of murder. While Romantic authors such as Blake and Shelley were certainly aware of the transatlantic slave trade taking place during the turn of the century, neither is in the best place to devise a critique of it that escapes the privilege(s) of white authorship.

For these white authors, slavery was a matter of distance and proximity. The slave trade kept slavery physically distant from Britain and, thus, prevented mainland European writers from fully comprehending its impact. True, the *rhetoric* of slavery exists in works like Blake's *The Book of Urizen* and Wollstonecraft's *Maria* – the bindings of Urizen and Maria's marriage to Venables – but neither reimagining of slavery does justice entirely to the racial subjugation, colonization and forced exchange of black and mixed individuals.[118]

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[117] Canuel, 142.

[118] It is important to point out that Blake, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Shelley all wrote about the slave trade occurring in Africa and the West Indies. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft discusses how women are forced to live as slaves to their husbands, making the comparison to African slaves: "Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them…only to sweeten the cup of men?" In this example, Wollstonecraft is critiquing specifically the sugar trade and its role in preserving the slave economy. Percy Shelley participated in the boycott of West Indies sugar for tea, resulting in British grocers stopping the sale of West Indies sugar in favor of

To address this quandary, Paul Youngquist and Frances Botkin advise that readers focus less on the writings of the white bourgeois,[119] but rather examine the "unremembered histories of diasporic Africans and creole cultures in the West Indies."[120] While writers like Blake and Shelley are certainly constitutive of British Romanticism, focusing exclusively on their works effaces the ignored (and often forgotten) histories of *Black* Romanticism, a discourse within the period that identifies how slavery, race, colonialism, empire, and law form the dark understories of the literary works of the era. Racial displacement and subjugation were not just collateral effects of British colonialism, but also central to Britain's sense of national identity. Themes of liberty, freedom, nationalism and escapism (which we often associate with Romanticism) are not limited to concepts of revolution and patriarchy, but are fully embedded within racial narratives and slavery too.

This dimension is certainly the case with Quobna Ottobah Cugoano's (John Stuart in England) abolitionist work, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787). Cugoano, an African slave who was sold into slavery at thirteen, and forced to work on a plantation in the Lesser Antilles, critiques slavery and the slave trade, exposing the hypocrisy of certain European ideas on

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sugar from India. In his poem, *Queen Mab*, Shelley evokes plantation slave labor in the image "to the sound of the flesh-mangling scourge…all polluting luxury and wealth." In Blake's poems he routinely alludes to slavery: the opening to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* begins with "Enslav'd the Daughters of Albion weep," a reference to the early 1790s abolitionist discourse. There is also the recurring image of chains and bondage that we find in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and his Urizen myth. And with Godwin, he specifically addresses the West Indies slave trade in *Political Justice* – to him, slavery is a manifestation not only of violence, but also a reflection of the lust for power and the corruption it creates.

[119] Of the writers in my dissertation, the one who would not qualify as bourgeois is Blake. It is also important to mention that Cugoano's critique is not so much directed at Blake, Godwin, Wollstonecraft or Shelley but the British middle-to-upper class that benefit from the sugar trade without paying any mind to slavery at all.

[120] Youngquist, Paul and Frances Botkin. "Introduction: Black Romanticism: Romantic Circulations." *Circulations: Romanticism and the Black Atlantic*. *Romantic Circles Praxis*, 2011. https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/circulations/HTML/praxis.2011.youngquist.html. Accessed October 2017.

liberty and freedom.[121] He, along with Olaudah Equiano and Mary Prince, re-visits his own story of enslavement and captivity in a way that invites his readers to ask how abolition is constitutive of a larger preoccupation with romantic conceptions of humanity, justice, and freedom. He not only critiques the religious abuses and colonialist principles that create a culture of racial inferiority, but also uses the same logic of reasoning, philosophy and morality adopted by major European thinkers to make his case. Thus, Cugoano reuses the European ideology with an African perspective to argue for racial recognition and make a critical point – that slaves of the Black Atlantic are part of Britain's identity.

Cugoano, however, is not another typical abolitionist. On the contrary, he actually distinguishes himself from other writers of the time period by integrating different genres into his critique of slavery. Hoyles indicates how Cugoano adopts several unique styles in his writing: "Cugoano's way of writing involves a variety of [modes] from autobiography and history through to biblical commentary/argument. He is sometimes an Old Testament prophet, sometimes a Christian evangelist, moving in and out of demanding justice…And recommending mercy."[122] Indeed, he is not unlike William Blake in that he condemns what is immoral and un-just, but not without also demanding that we forgive and extend mercy to our enemies. In his mind, all people are connected by a common humanity that endows them with the same hunger for freedom. That is to say people who read his narrative while experiencing political, gender, class, and racial oppression can all unite

[121] Hoyles, Martin. *Cugoano Against Slavery*. Hansford Publication Limited, 2015. 107. Hoyles contends that Cugoano uses his narrative to critique colonialist appropriations of Christianity and the Bible, both of which were used by advocates of the slave trade to justify the enslavement of black people.
[122] Hoyles, 151.

under a shared interest for liberty and equality. His story is not just for the enslaved, but also, for anyone who can relate to the greater mission of finding freedom in one's life.

This mission is critically important given the circumstances that surround the way Cugoano acquired his own freedom. In 1772, Chief Justice Lord Mansfield, of the Courts of England and Wales, presided over the *Somerset v. Stewart* trial, a court case that would decide the future of slavery in England. Charles Stewart, a customs officer, bought James Somerset, an African slave, while in Boston, Massachusetts. Stewart returned to England, in 1769, with Somerset, but two years later, Somerset escaped. After being re-captured by Stewart, Somerset was imprisoned on a ship bound for Jamaica to be sold into plantation-labor. Somerset's godparents applied for a writ of habeas corpus to save him, meaning he would be brought to trial to determine whether his imprisonment was lawful.[123] Not only is Lord Mansfield's decision important for the legality of slavery in England, but it also had a significant impact on Cugoano's position. As an African slave who had been shipped to Grenada to work on a plantation, the ruling (which decided that English Common law did not support or justify slavery) applied to his status as well, freeing him from captivity and leading to his literary collaboration with Olaudah Equiano.[124] In other words, Cugoano and his literary production came are a true result of the *Somerset v. Stewart* case.

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[123] Wise, Steven M. *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial that Led to the End of Human Slavery*. Da Capo Press, 2005. The irony of the *Somerset v. Stewart* ruling is that it only established that a slave could not be seized by his master and forced against his will to leave England and that a slave could get a writ of habeas corpus, but Mansfield's judgment was widely considered to be the moment at which slavery was abolished in England.

[124] Hoyles suggests that Equiano and Cugoano may have both joined the *Sons of Africa* in England, an abolitionist group whose members published newspaper articles condemning slavery. If it is true that Equiano and Cugoano were members at the same time, then Equiano may have edited parts of *Thoughts and Sentiments.* This would imply a level of collaboration between them in terms of how they approached the slavery debate.

Whereas Godwin and Wollstonecraft argue that law actively limits giving voice to their main characters, *Somerset v. Stewart* offers an instance where law had the opposite effect: its emancipatory language enables Cugoano to cultivate a powerful voice against slavery. Their fictions show how law can silence the oppressed. In this case, law disrupts the status quo of the slave trade. However, Cugoano's thesis is how *limited Somerset v. Stewart* finally is, as it did not really abolish slavery at all. The idea that England simultaneously restricts human rights and rules in favor of them is where Cugoano makes his critique. He asserts that no matter how profoundly flawed Britain's relation to slavery may be, the nation still has the capacity to resolve such contradictions through the strength of its own institutions and people. For Cugoano, the issue is whether England can see that slavery is destined to end and bring Africans into British national identity and restore respect for African nations on the African continent.

The Conflict Between Christianity and Slavery

Cugoano's critique of the slave trade begins not with the law that allows it, but the misuse of Christian principles that try to rationalize it. His narrative begins with a critique of the colonialists' misreading of the Bible – an abusive version of Christianity (according to Cugoano) that attempts to justify black suffering as divinely ordained. Cugoano's point is that slavery cannot be just because it defies reason, violates common humanity, undermines equality and contradicts the Bible. Cugoano's opposition is to the colonial idea that African slaves cannot be human, but his other point is that mistaken religious dogma distorts how people view the idea of equality. His opening paragraph makes clear that for him Christianity is on the side of abolition:

> As several learned gentlemen of distinguished abilities, as well as eminent for their great humanity, liberality and candor, have written various essays against that infamous traffic of the African Slave Trade, carried on with the West-India planters and merchants, to the

> great shame and disgrace of all Christian nations wherever it is admitted in any of their territories, or place or situation amongst them…It is therefore manifest, that something else ought yet to be done; and what is required is evidently the incumbent duty of all men of enlightened understanding, and of every man that has any claim or affinity to the name of Christian, that the base treatment which the African slave undergo, ought to be abolished.[125]

The decision to direct his ire toward Christian nations and Christian people who fail to live up "to the name of Christian" is a deliberate one. As Elizabeth Bohls writes, "The contradiction between Christianity and the slave trade was at the heart of the abolitionist case."[126] While the slave trade was about financial trafficking and the exploitation of African slaves, Cugoano constructs his case against the commercial enterprise by suggesting how faux Christian morals are to blame. One cannot call oneself a Christian, he argues, and subscribe to the concepts of liberty and freedom if those ideals are being upheld at the expense of a group of people who are being kidnapped, enslaved, and tortured. Moreover, by placing the responsibility at the heels of "all enlightened men," his critique applies not only to the slaveowner and slave trafficker, but also to the passive and enlightened citizens of England who turn a blind eye. And while Blake, Shelley, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft all discuss slavery in their works, Cugoano's proximity to slavery is a factor that lets him take the debate farther than the privilege of whiteness allows. The real solution to slavery includes proving that the system affects the British upper class as well.

In other words, Cugoano's point is to collapse the distance between the white man and the African slave, redefining the concept of human freedom to be an idea that applies to all people equally. White men, he argues, should have an investment in the abolition of slavery because it is related to a more capacious conception of human rights that includes

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[125] Cugoano, Quobna Ottobah. *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*. Penguin Classics, 1999. 9-10. All references to the text are hereafter cited with parenthetical citations unless otherwise noted.

[126] Bohls, Elizabeth. *Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770-1833*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. 130.

their liberty as well. In *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery*, Dierdre Coleman makes a similar argument: "The fact is that issues of slavery and human rights formed part of an international, revolutionary agenda for Europe, with abolitionists arguing for an extension of rights to men of Africa."[127] That is to say, the fight for abolition was not at all divorced from the revolutionary events occurring in Europe at the time; in fact, one might argue slavery was representative of the struggle for human rights in a way that some male British writers overlook.[128] Rather than see slavery as something happening far away, (and thus in a separate reality), Cugoano connects it with the language of revolution in Europe.

Debbie Lee also refers to the psychological distances at play in the slavery debate, but focuses more on the complicity of slave owners (rather than enlightened men): "Slave owners, up until the eighteenth century, seemed to have both in their favor. They asserted that, because of geographical remoteness of the colonies from Britain, they were absolved of any crime against Africans."[129] Here, we see a similar problem to that of *The Wrongs of Woman* and Maria's situation, namely that a lack of empathy governs how the slavery de-bate is perceived. Geographical proximity contributes not only to a gap in experience and understanding, but also helps reinforce the falsehood that slavery cannot be considered an actual crime since the slave colonies are separate from Britain. The irony is

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[127] Coleman, Deidre. *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery.* Cambridge University Press, 2005. 66.

[128] Indeed, Wollstonecraft makes this very point in her critique of Edmund Burke in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. She challenges Burke's sexist notion that men have an exclusive right to reason and power with women only having sensibility. Wollstonecraft offers a more capacious definition of human rights that argues in favor of women having the intellectual capacity to reason as well. In this way, Wollstonecraft is actually akin to Cugoano in her critique of *white* male privilege. You could also make the argument that this applies to Blake as well, who employed sexist views in his formation of Los and Enitharmon. For him, the woman's responsibility in art was to support the man rather than assume a state of independence herself separate from him. Blake's own idea of gender roles is in direct opposition to a broader view of rights too.

[129] Lee, Debbie. *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. 13.

that the slave-colonies occupy a sort of pseudo-space given how British colonialism establishes them as a part of the British empire and yet still *apart* from it. The colonies are the property of the British Empire, yet their inhabitants are not extended the same freedom as those living on the mainland. When Cugoano speaks about condemning the disgraceful Christian nations, the nations that permit slavery "in any of their *territories*," he is talking specifically about the extended geographic territories of major European countries, thus working to collapse the geographic boundaries that allow the suffering of slaves to go unheard by the English.

Cugoano's rhetorical tactic of exposing European moral hypocrisy and pointing to the ways in which slaveholders pervert Christianity extends to his redefinition of equality and justice as well. He appropriates the language of freedom and contends that those who profit off of slave labor are actually in direct violation of human liberty. They betray their ideals in exchange for economic benefit, and, as a result, forego the moral authority to try and decide if one is deserving of equal treatment. If one is devoid of sensibility, then he is thus incapable of making a rational judgment about the right for African slaves to be free:

> But such is the insensibility of men, when their own craft of gain is advanced by the slavery and oppression of others, that after all the laudable exertions of the truly virtuous and humane, towards extending the beneficence of liberty and freedom to the much degraded and unfortunate Africans, which is the common right and privilege of all men, in everything that is just, lawful and consistent, we find the principles of justice and equity, not only opposed, and every duty in religion and humanity left un-regarded (22).

There are a number of critiques written into this passage, the first of which is the problem that arises when slaveholders use religion to justify oppression and suggest that the use of punishment against slaves is the will of Divine Providence. In other words, Cugoano sees that the institution of slavery hinges on an interpretation of the Bible that views slavery as permissible. Cugoano challenges the belief when he recasts freedom and liberty as "rights

and privilege[s] of all men," including African slaves. Embedded within this type of logic is a biblical and Christian argument *against* slavery. Unlike slaveholders, Cugoano thinks of the Bible allegorically by arguing that Christ's teaching of equality and humanity really applies to *all* people. To him, any interpretation of the Bible that endorses slavery actually misses the greater message of what God's "justice" means – equal treatment to all people.

Mark Canuel affirms this critique when he addresses the function religion and law has in helping protect the slave trade: "the very commitment to God's justice looks barely distinguishable – if distinguishable at all – from a simple support of conventional law and its provisions for protecting the system of slavery."[130] Colonialists who claim to see God's justice at work in the slave trade are masking their support of "positive" law. This is quite different from what Cugoano calls for – that England will *suffer* God's 'justice' if they do not stop slavery. Deborah Elise White suggests as well that Cugoano's enlightened vision of equality is entirely underpinned by his own version of Christianity, one that views God as the arbiter who will annihilate England if it does not abolish its endorsement of slavery and the slave trade.[131]

Cugoano and the Process of Reading Imperial Critique

In my second chapter, I discussed the role reading had for Maria and her pursuit of intellectual freedom and social independence. For Wollstonecraft, the act of reading is the solution to rising above a predetermined social status, the formative element women need to refine their rational faculties and develop critical self-awareness. Cugoano sees

[130] Canuel, 162.

[131] In response to this chapter White suggested that Cugoano argues that slaveholders view the idea of "God's justice" as support for the status quo of slavery while he views God's justice as a belief that he will punish those who oppress and enslave others. In this way, Cugoano's work functions as a critique of colonial hegemony *and* as a text that preaches apocalypse to all European nations that endorse colonialism.

reading in a related but different way in that what he *reads* in *Thoughts and Sentiments* is the Bible and he uses it to critique the systemic fallacies of defenders of slavery and the slave trade. But for him, reading offers yet another advantage. It not only helps him to develop a moral compass, but also educates him on how to make rational and ethical judgments in opposition to the slave trade. In the same way Maria uses reading to critique male power, Cugoano uses it to critique colonial appropriations of Christianity by using his own biblical readings to reform British ethical norms:

> After coming to England, and seeing others write and read, I had a strong desire to learn, and writing, which soon became my recreation, pleasure, and delight…I have endeavored to improve my mind in reading, and have sought to get all the intelligence I could, in my situation of life, towards the state of my brethren and countrymen in complexion, and of the miserable situation of those who are barbarously sold into captivity, and unlawfully held in slavery…I have both obtained liberty, and acquired the great advantages of some little learning, in being able to read and write…In this respect, I am highly indebted to many of the good people of England for learning and principles unknown to the people of my native country (17).

In this passage Cugoano uses himself as an example. That is to say, if he can learn the act of reading and writing, so too can any African slave if given the opportunity. Cugoano is, at once, addressing two different audiences: the first being white readers by asserting that it is entirely possible for Africans to 'civilize' themselves. The second audience would be other African slaves in that he signals to them that reading will make them self-conscious of their captivity, thus informing a better argument for freedom. In his case, reading made him able to see his "brethren's" state of existential suffering while also rewarding him with liberty. Eve Tavor Bannet describes this moment as his argument for cultural appropriation: "But there was also another [element] to Cugoano's argument: the suggestion that black people could learn to use…white people's "civilization to their own

advantage."[132] While this is a power play on Cugoano's part in that he is calling for a *re*-appropriation of what has been denied to African slaves for so long, his solution presents a new set of potential problems.

Cugoano's intention is not lost among his readers. He is "indebted" to the English because of the profound influence learning to communicate had on his identity. Indeed he is calling for Africans to learn the master's tongue in order to surpass him. While I do not believe Cugoano is suggesting that the antidote to the slavery crisis is to merely adopt the cultural mannerisms of Europeans, his narrative does problematize how one views British imperial culture as 'civilized.' Or rather, his suggestion prompts us to ask whether British imperial culture *should even* be held to the standard of 'civilized' when British law is also to blame for his countrymen's enslavement. This in-consistency represents somewhat of a blind spot for Cugoano: he chastises the British colonial enterprise for enslaving Africans and yet finds himself enthralled within the same spiral. While he is writing as a freed man his dependence on British customs exposes that he is not completely free from its impact.

In fact, Cugoano's newfound literacy cannot be divorced from British colonialism given how deeply embedded it is within the fabric of imperial discourse. His gratitude for being given the opportunity to read can be thought of in two ways: as paying deference to the British Empire, thus affirming its civilized stature, or as a way to advance the concept that *all* African slaves possess the innate capacity to master while intellectual rhetoric. By being open to multiple interpretations, I argue that this passage accomplishes a third task: it exposes the degree to which Cugoano is self-aware about how racial paradigms are still inextricably linked to imperial norms regardless of whether one is freed or not. This is not

[132] Bannet, Eve Tavor. *Transatlantic Stories and the History of Reading 1220-1810*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. 147.

to undermine Cugoano's unique success in adopting the aspects of English culture for the sake of self-critique, but rather to illustrate that, in his mind, the quest for racial liberation *does not end* with emancipation. Reading is simply the first step in one's quest for liberty.

In their book, *Romanticism, Race and Imperial Culture 1780-1834*, Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh show how the concept of "British" Romanticism itself needs to be reevaluated for its implicit connections to an imperialist project. They argue that since the period is critically based in white identity and colonialist rhetoric, reading authors such as Cugoano and Equiano enable us to unveil the period's racist origins while simultaneously expanding our definition of what constitutes, Romanticism: "Rather, to read Cugoano and Equiano in reference to this other history is to re-stage the past, and to re-read that history *as* other, to de-familiarize the terms, tendencies [and conditions] of its elaboration into an exclusive, capitalized canon."[133] In other words, Cugoano's literacy takes on new meaning when considered in the broader context of being an attempt to reclaim history for oneself: it is a way to "restage the past" under a different set of terms and conditions that works to redefine Romanticism as something inseparably linked to notions of empire. So, in a way, Cugoano's scene of reading accomplishes two things: it reframes how we understand this idea of 'British' Romanticism because it forces us to negotiate with the pervasive parts of imperial and colonialist culture that we still too often avoid when reading Romantic texts.

We actually start to see Cugoano challenging imperialist discourse when the work shifts into making a broader critique of history and law. His entire point is that by reading one learns to question how Britain uses Christianity to manipulate history and law to then

[133] Richardson, Alan and Sonia Hofkosh. *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780-1834*. Indiana University Press, 1996. 332.

create a false precedent for slavery's justification. Those of enlightened stature, he writes, should be in a position to see how there is no basis in history, law, or religion to persecute people based on skin color. In effect, Cugoano argues that British imperialists rely a false premise of biblical history to justify the crimes they commit against the black population:

> The learned and thinking part of men, who can refer to history, must know, that nothing with respect to color, or any mark or curse from any original prediction, can in anywise be more particularly ascribed to Africans than to any other people of the human species, so as to afford any pretense why they should be more evil treated, persecuted and enslaved than any other…But there is nothing set forth in the law as a rule, or any thing recorded therein that can stand as a precedent, or make it lawful, for men to practice slavery; nor can any laws in favor of slavery be deduced thence, for to enslave men, be otherwise, than as unwarrantable, as it would be unnecessary and wrong, to order and command the sacrifices of beasts to be still continued (34 and 41)

In this passage Cugoano critiques the idea that history and the Bible must dictate violence against African slaves. He calls for his reader *un*learn the racist precedent and knowledge that says Africans are, by virtue of skin color, naturally inferior to their white counterparts, and even other "people of the human species." The slaveholder is the one who creates the conception of difference and uses it to rewrite history. Likewise, law is also without clear precedent for enslavement, channeling Lord Mansfield's majority opinion for *Somerset v. Stewart*. Steven Wise identifies three types of laws were at play in *Somerset*: "its moral weight and the reputation of its author ensured that *Somerset* haters and lovers both would agree that it stood for three [decisions]: Natural law rejected slavery, English common law prohibited it, and only positive law supported it."[134] Ottobah Cugoano appears to invoke at least two of the three categories here: laws in

[134] Wise, 200. In his book, Steven Wise mentions the lack of a definitive physical court document: "Because of the period's primitive court reporting, we don't know Lord Mansfield's exact words. It would have helped had a written decision been prepared." (180). The lack of an official text, given that the judgment was delivered extemporaneously, means that we can never know what the document itself said, but only the impact that it had on slavery in England. It was interpreted to mean that British common law did not support slavery, and that without justification from the court, it could only be considered illegal. When Cugoano talks about a lack of precedent in history and law, he is referring to the fact that the law of the Hebrew Bible (for Christians, the Old Testament) does not endorse slavery. As a result, the only law that defends slavery is positive law; or, in other words, the law of the slaveholder.

favor of it are forms of "positive law" that seek to establish slavery as having precedent despite being in violation of natural rights. Indeed, when he writes that "nothing is set forth in the law as a rule" to authorizing slavery, he is referring first to biblical law and then, by extension, the common law. In effect, the "learning and thinking part of men" may very well refer to the English judges themselves; that is, only individuals learned in history can know that there is no such precedent to justify the cruel and unusual treatment of human beings. This law, in Cugoano's mind, sets the standard beyond what positive law of the slaveholder can do.

Of course Cugoano's critique of British and biblical law is part of another strategy to help Britain reimagine itself as something other than an imperial nation. Only someone of Cugoano's unique background (African and British) could, at once, bring our attention to British imperial hypocrisy while also believing in the nation's capacity to move past its immoral sins. In his introduction to the work, Vincent Carretta addresses his point: "From this viewpoint, Cugoano can more easily appropriate traditional ways in which the British saw themselves and then redefine those ways to support his argument."[135] In essence, he is not trying to completely deconstruct the imperial origins of Britain's identity, but actually seeks to *reveal* its true colors *to* the British. He appropriates a rhetorical voice that is both appealing to readers' feelings and emotions while doing so with a strong reliance on logic and authority. And he can be an authority on the slave trade precisely because he refers to two separate, yet related voices: the voice of the freed slave and that of the British citizen.

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[135] Carretta, Vincent. "Introduction" to *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery*. Penguin Classics, 1999. XXIV.

About halfway through the work, Cugoano compares the perverted religious ideas of misguided defenders of slavery to his own thoughts of justice. The work's second part, in several ways, works as Cugoano's suggestion for how one should go about reconciling the transgressive element of slavery with God's "just law." In doing so, Cugoano actually brings us back to the type of rhetoric one finds in William Blake, although in service of a different purpose and cause. Whereas Blake's quasi-religious mythography entails the critique of tyrannical norms, Cugoano's evangelism highlights how slaves are included in God's protection and thus deserving of proper treatment. While Blake employs the language *of* enslavement for discussing Urizen's binding, Cugoano contends that God is a freeing force. In this way, it is through God's equal protection that slaves receive deliverance from the corrupt master:

> The whole law of God is founded upon love, and the two grand branches of it are these: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*...Our Divine Lord and *Master Christ* also teacheth men to *forgive one another their trespasses*, and that we are not to do evil because others do so... The just law of God requires an equal retaliation and restoration for every injury that men may do to others, to show the greatness of the crime; but the law of forbearance, righteousness and forgiveness forbids the retaliation to be sought after, when it would be doing as great an injury to them, without any reparation or benefit to ourselves.
>
> And so, likewise, when a man is carried captive and enslaved, and maimed and cruelly treated, that would make no adequate reparation and restitution for the injuries he had received, if he was even to get the person who had ensnared him to be taken captive and treated in the same manner. What he is to seek after is a deliverance and protection for himself, and not a revenge upon others (50 and 52)

Cugoano's passage actually prefaces some of the same major concerns that would occupy Blake and Shelley in their works. Like Blake, Cugoano professes forgiveness and defines it as a divine law of Christ's teachings. The two agree that while revenge is seductive and easily executed, it only perpetuates the cycle of barbarism. No matter how severe the pain might be, according to Cugoano, one must choose perseverance over revenge. The idea is to rise above the moral vacuity of slaveholders, not adopt the same measure that will then

transform you into one. Like Shelley as well as Blake, Cugoano is critical of revenge and contends that it merely obfuscates the pursuit of justice because there is no benefit to those who practice it. And yet, Cugoano's apocalyptic revenge rhetoric against England does also suggest that he is drawn both to discourses of punishment and forgiveness. He writes that, "The just law of God *requires* an equal retaliation and restoration for every injury" which means Cugoano will not allow England to walk away without answering to their crimes. I would argue that while Cugoano is certainly supportive of forgiveness, he also believes it is unacceptable for colonialism to be spared what it truly deserves. Cugoano is therefore a believer in God's rule of just forgiveness, but not without fair retribution for the cruel and unspeakable treatment of African slaves by the destructive agents of English imperialism.

True, Cugoano himself is quite angry at the way the British has misappropriated Jesus Christ's teachings for their economic interests, but he also understands that the way forward is to work to transcend these categories altogether. In other words, Cugoano is at once critiquing the religious norms of imperialist Britain while also developing his own version of God's just law. Vincent Carretta describes it in terms of how he uses the word "Christian" to elevate himself and his readers above ethnic differences: "The name "Christian" not only enables him to transcend his dual identities but also allows him and his audience to replace ethnic difference with religious likeness [and invoke] a call for action with the possibility for the values of reconciliation, harmony, and hope."[136] Revenge places people at odds, and, in so many ways, exacerbates the problems of racial difference. Cugoano sees this and seeks to reframe the conversation to be about religious likeness and ethical values, not racial angst and opposition. In doing so, he shows his

[136] Carretta, xxviii.

audience that justice should not be restricted by racial identity given that the ethics of harmony and hope is all about the idea of humanity.

In a following passage, Cugoano brings the issue of revenge and justice into direct conversation with captivity and slavery. Even in this instance, he argues that no degree of cruelty should lead one to seek revenge. This is not to say that he is without sympathy for other slaves, but rather that his focus is more so on the systemic issues of institutional and racial violence that sanction such behaviors. He wants to confirm that slavery is inhuman:

> Wherefore the honest and upright, like the just Bethlehem Joseph, cannot think of doing evil, nor require an equal retaliation for such injuries done to them, so as to revenge themselves upon others, for that which would do them no manner of good. Such vengeance belongs unto the Lord, and he will render vengeance and recompense to his enemies and the violators of his law (53).

Here, Cugoano makes a similar critique of violence but does not entirely explain how one goes about seeking protection from it. He argues that even were a man to be enslaved and cruelly treated, such act would not justify exposing his assailant to the same treatment. At the end of the paragraph, Cugoano indicates that the Lord "will render vengeance…to his enemies and the violators of his law," but does not explain how this process works. While it makes sense to suggest that Cugoano is referring to a sort of divine justice that can only occur beyond the realm of positive law, it does little as a blueprint for resistance. Without taking away from the fact that he is making a moral argument (that slaves must practice a form of nonviolent resistance in Christ's image to avoid becoming like the oppressor), the matter of *how* to prevent these atrocities is still left quite open. Mark Canuel suggests that the purpose behind this statement is to demarcate the different standards of justice at play here: "The fact that [Equiano and Cugoano] observe the punishments applied to slaves by white slaveowners…simply demonstrates that whatever mediums of justice we may have,

they may not be the same as God's, whose standards are ineffable to us."[137] While I agree, in one sense, that Cugoano's overall point is to establish the existence of a judgment most separate from human comprehension, this approach does little to propose how slaves may possibly inhabit justice in other ways. Is faith in God Cugoano's only mechanism for how one achieves justice, or are there alternate ways to widen his philosophy of human ethics?

Cugoano and Lord Mansfield on the Death Penalty and Criminal Law

One way to answer this question would be to examine how Cugoano discusses the death penalty in order to challenge the foundation of institutionalized violence. He speaks out strongly against capital punishment, and, like Shelley, rejects the premise that death is an appropriate means to punish criminals. But unlike Shelley, Cugoano interprets death in particularized terms by linking it first to issues of penal reform, and then exploring how it relates specifically to the criminalized black body. In *The Cenci* Shelley grapples with the role of patriarchy and gender norms when dealing with capital punishment. Cugoano sees capital punishment more in terms of the slaveowners being analogized to the executioner, and thus granted unchecked authority to arbitrate the denial of humanity. Doing so makes the black slave into the lawless criminal and represents the racist slaveowner as his judge:

> No such thing can be supposed; no man upon earth ever had, or ever can have, a right to make laws where a penalty of cutting off by death is required as the punishment for the transgression thereof: what is required of men is to be the doers of the law, and some of them to be judges of it; and if they judge wrongfully in taking away the lives of their fellow-creatures contrary to the law of God, they commit murder (55).

[137] Canuel, 162. There are interesting parallels between this conception of justice, and the one Shelley offers us in the previous chapter. Cugoano and Shelley agree that there is a limit to what the human self can define as "justice." Shelley makes this point in his prose essay on the death penalty when he suggests that capital punishment (and the judgment to declare such) is something human beings do not have the power to regulate. The critical difference is that, unlike Cugoano, Shelley does not attribute justice to be the prerogative of God. In other words, he does not place the same degree of stock in the Bible as Cugoano.

Much like Shelley, Cugoano also interprets the death penalty in relation to merely human customs as a form of murder. Death as criminal punishment is not only barbaric, but also, according to Cugoano, a violation of human rights. This is because the death penalty goes against an individual's belief in the value of human life. But again, what does Cugoano in this passage mean by "the law of God?" In one sense, it can refer to the idea that the body is sacred: no person has "a right to make laws where a penalty" involves destroying it. To him, only God has that right. In another sense, "the law of God" may actually be referring to something more basic – the interpretation of Christianity as a religion that opposes and condemns unnecessary murders. That is to say, Cugoano's version of "the law of God" is, in its simplest form, a *Christian* rebuke of positive law that values the life of each person.

And yet, the more fascinating part of this passage is how Cugoano begins with the idea of universal humanity in order to make the broader point that the black body is being legislated as a uniquely captive space. Elizabeth Bohls notes "Writers' identities and their stakes in the slavery debate involve skin color, as well as nationality, occupation, and free or enslaved status."[138] I would add to this list, legal status. The problem he identifies is the fact that while men are required "to be doers of the law, and some of them to be judges of it," the decision to execute black slaves is itself an extra-legal offense. It exceeds the type of decision a person is able to make because no individual has the right to decide whether execution is warranted. In this way, Cugoano cuts right into the core concern with slavery law – that is turns slaveowners into agents of the law who can legally murder their slaves.

Not only that, Cugoano takes issue with the judicial authority of judges as well. In the passage, he accedes to the premise that men are required to judge the law but does not

[138] Bohls, 7.

include executions as part of their jurisdiction. If executing a man means denying him the natural right to live, then it goes against Cugoano's belief in common humanity and equal treatment. Indeed, his legal skepticism is apparent from his resistance to the idea that men are capable of passing judgment against another person's life. But this argument is simply part of Cugoano's larger thesis. The main issue he has with the death penalty as an aspect of criminal law is the following: "But it is an exceeding impious thing for men to say that they can make any criminal laws of civilization as binding with a penalty of death for any thing just what they please." (54-55). What Cugoano is critiquing is not only the immoral practice of execution in the context of slavery, but also the practice of using death penalty charges to resolve criminal disputes. It is unfair, he argues, to assume that punishment, as a juridical practice, must be applied to any situation regardless of the type of criminal act.

In Lord Mansfield's majority opinion on *Somerset v Stewart*, he approaches crime and slavery from a different perspective. According to one oral report of his verbal ruling, he focused on the nebulous relationship between master and slave depending on region of the world. Doing so influenced his idea of whether James Somerset was a criminal or not:

> The power of a master over his slave has been extremely different, in different countries. The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political; but only positive law, which preserves its force long after the reason, occasions, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory; it's so odious, that nothing can be offered to support it, but positive law. Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from this decision I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore the black must be discharged.[139]

The important thing to remember about *Somerset v. Stewart* is that before the court ruling came to be interpreted as an intervention in debates about abolition, the court case was

[139] Usherwood, Stephen. "The Black Must Be Discharged – The Abolitionists Debt to Lord Mansfield." *History Today*, Vol. 31, Issue 3, 1981. One point Stephen Wise makes in his own book is that *Somerset v. Stewart* was never intended to be a ruling that would decide the fate of slavery or the slave trade. It was only viewed as such by abolitionists and slave supporters, meaning public perception influenced how it was received.

actually about whether James Somerset was a fugitive criminal. He escaped from Charles Stewart, so the point of the case was to determine whether he was still Somerset's legal property. Lord Mansfield suggests doubt about the very idea of Somerset being a criminal in the first sentence: "the power of a master over his slave has been extremely different, in different countries." The point here is that, despite how widely practiced slavery might be, there is no consensus of the relation between master and slave across borders. In fact, there is no consensus within England itself given how English common law states nothing of the institution. And even though positive law may authorize it, Mansfield sees the law as antiquated: "only positive law, which preserves its force long after the reason…is erased from memory." Mansfield, in this ruling, is not just saying that slavery is devoid of moral or political reason, but also that the weight of the institution no longer lives up to the current time period. If the tenets of slavery cannot be supported, then it is impossible to rule James Somerset as a criminal.

And while the original intent of the ruling does not entirely seem to be widespread abolition, Mansfield appears to predict how the public will react when he says "Whatever inconveniences…may follow from this decision…" He seems to know how England will, inevitably, interpret the verdict: as a rebuke of slavery and precedent for thereby outlining its immorality and illegality. Steven Wise speaks to this very point in his study: "Whether he intended it or not, Lord Mansfield had struck off an abolitionist spark. Britain not only became convinced that Mansfield had abolished slavery in the mother country, but then it lighted Scotland, America, [and] finally even the West Indies."[140] There had been a global reaction to the court ruling that triggered ripple effects in other parts of the world. Indeed, the criminal case had become a matter of moral sanctity in the minds of

[140] Wise, 193.

abolitionists. And while the case itself did not directly involve the death penalty, its rebuke of slavery meant the condemnation of immoral actions that were used to uphold the institution. In this way, Mansfield's verdict lives up to Cugoano's belief of how judges *should* address the debate.

There is also the issue of how Mansfield's opinion effectively negates the positive law premise that black bodies are inherently captive spaces. Later on in the text, Cugoano critiques the slave trade from an economic perspective, and the *Somerset* ruling helps him by challenging slavery's capitalist foundation. Elizabeth Bohls reminds us how "slavery's captive spaces were the modern product of a capitalist economy and a colonial society," a commercial enterprise that saw black bodies for their labor output.[141] With the *Somerset v. Stewart* verdict, Mansfield wrestles with the chief concern of the slave trade: while it was surely immoral, the system was a commercial benefit to British merchants and the British crown. By ruling in favor of James Somerset, Mansfield declared that the black body was no longer a captive space to the British economy. This point ultimately supports Cugoano as he launches his own rhetorical challenge to the pervasive trafficking of African bodies.

Cugoano's Critique of Colonialism and the Slave Trade

After Cugoano discusses the death penalty, he modulates into a dialogue about the slave trade specifically. His critique reimagines the British mercantile system as a form of civil oppression and introduces his immediate concern with the colonialist enterprise. The author uses this section to understand how the commercial avarice of slave trafficking is a humanitarian violation of the highest level. But rather than make his argument only about natural rights and liberty, Cugoano uses this opportunity to conduct an historical exegesis

[141] Bohls, 2.

of colonialism itself. Above all else, he wants to show how European colonialism broadly is responsible for creating a world in which the African *slave* exists. More importantly, he hopes that educating his audience on the history of colonialism will bring them to critique the aspects of capitalism that support the wealth of British people living across the ocean:

> But this must appear evident, that for any man to carry on a traffic in the merchandise of slaves, and to keep them in slavery; or for any nation to oppress, extirpate and destroy others; that these are crimes of the greatest magnitude, and a most daring violation of the laws and commandments of the Most High, and which, at last, will be evidenced in the destruction and overthrow of all the transgressors…It may be said with confidence as a certain general fact, that all their foreign settlements and colonies were founded on murders and devastations, and that they have continued their depredations in cruel slavery and oppression to this day (61-62).

The passage echoes Cugoano's earlier comments on the need to recognize slavery as a moral offense, but expands the criticism of slavery to wider criticism of colonialism. Nations are responsible for "[oppressing, extirpating, and destroying] the lives of distanced populations and these acts should be condemned. Thus, the argument for freedom is one that depends on a more capacious understanding of colonialism. Despite Cugoano's reverence for the civilization that taught him how to read, he is still aware that European colonialism takes rights away from other nations and races, in order to bolster the rights of another. Debbie Lee contends in her own research that this moment is the point at which the concept of Romantic "alterity" is created in works of the Romantic imagination: "Alterity means 'difference,' but it also encompasses the idea that because the self is responsible, ethical, and human, it preserves the difference of the other and acknowledges the relativity of subjectivity."[142] Put another way, alterity signifies what is 'different' or 'foreign' from a person's experience, and that difference becomes key for many Romantic authors in their conceptions of subjectivity. However, I would expand on

[142] Lee, 36.

Lee's thesis by asserting that alterity should *also* signal the need to acknowledge injustice when it happens. That is to say, Cugoano participates in the discourse of alterity, showing us how Europeans treat African slaves and indigenous peoples as the 'other.' Where Cugoano goes further than Lee is in the connection he makes between alterity and violence. There is violence associated with the process of defining Africans and indigenous populations as 'other.' The idea of the 'other' is not only a construct of white supremacy, but also a key part of what makes the slave trade a criminal act. That is to say the slave trade is only made possible *because* of the violence done to indigenous people in the Americas. Slave trafficking is not something that happens within a vacuum: it is only one part of the colonial regime. In fact, the slave trade is quite simply a byproduct of a systemic chain of violent acts being done because of European imperialism.

His most striking observation is that all "foreign settlements and colonies" were in some form of another founded on the basis of violence and murder. In my third chapter, it was Shelley showing that law was rooted in cyclical violence. Here Cugoano understands cyclical violence to include the colonial advance of (so-called) civilizations. In this case, he is saying foreign settlements and distant colonies can be traced back to a period of oppression. And the fact that slavery continues to exist is evidence of the reality that colonial violence is also being constantly re-enacted. In this way, we can see how Blake, Shelley, and Cugoano are similar: they all use their texts to expose a dimension of unending violence that oppresses the disenfranchised.

And yet, Cugoano's critique of colonialism brings up another important point: the extent to which his focus on the slave trade and the violence of colonialism remakes what is considered Romanticism. By drawing our attention to colonialist occupation, he proves

that the generation of a British identity is rooted in discourses of colonial disruption. Yes, Blake, Shelley, and Cugoano are similar in that they outline different elements of cyclical violence, but what distinguishes Cugoano from his white counterparts is the way in which he uses colonialism to challenge white authorship. In a way, he is able to do what Shelley and Blake are unable to do – expose the racist ideologies at play in the construction of the British literary canon in the period. That is to say, his lesson on colonialism is not only an important critique of imperialism, but also enables us to recast narratives of Romanticism as well. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh make this point: "Analyses of how literature in this era is implicated in nationalist, racist and colonialist discourses must play a critical and productive role in the ongoing revaluations of the boundaries of British Romanticism [in the literary canon]."[143] He understands that white authorship exercises dominance over the British historical narrative. By implicating Britain's colonialism history as a part of its legacy, he successfully recasts how one should examine the literary canon. Put simply, he shows how Romanticism and its discourses of freedom and critique of law cannot ever be decoupled from the cultures of imperialism, nationalism, and the pervasive global empire.

Indeed, what he wants to do is destabilize the literary and political institutions that constitute Britain's identity. It is not enough for British citizens to acknowledge that slave trafficking is a problem – they must come to terms with the history of colonial oppression and work to create a new system of natural rights. Cugoano argues that the government is responsible for facilitating this process. In fact, he is convinced that Britain's government is capable of living up to its professed ideals of equality and liberty, but only if the people

[143] Richardson and Hofkosh, 4.

are willing to rewrite the compact of personhood. When he critiques Britain for endorsing the colonialist machine, Cugoano exposes the hypocrisy of laws that protect slaveowners:

> But it is otherwise with the Colonians, the great depredators, pirates, kidnappers, robbers, oppressors, and enslavers of men. The laws as reaching from Great Britain to the West-Indies, do not detect them, but protect the opulent slave-holders; though their opulence and protection by any law, or any government whatsoever, cannot make them less criminal than violators of the common rights and liberties of men. They do not take away a man's property, like other robbers; but they take a man himself, and subject him to their service and bondage, which is greater robbery, and a greater crime, than taking away any property from men whatsoever. And, therefore, with respect to them, there is very much…wrong in the present forms of government (71).

The turn to government oppression recalls Godwin in his own work on tyranny from both *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice*. The two agree that the British government strips the lower classes of their "common rights and liberties" to protect the rich and powerful, thus making law complicit in the denial of human rights. But unlike Godwin who focuses on social class and male privilege, Cugoano takes up the refusal of "rights and liberties" to slaves as the exemplary injustice constituting "things as they are" (the subtitle of Godwin's novel). He critiques the government for its refusal to recognize slavery as a violation of the property rights it claims to uphold even as the idea of property rights is applied abusively to support the slaveowners responsible for the worse violations of such rights. Here, Cugoano is arguing that the government is responsible for legislating a code of ethics to protect the oppressed. Any institution that is not working in the interest of the disenfranchised is effectively betraying the cause of the common good even according to its own traditional criteria in which the protection of property is the government's key responsibility. In this case, the British government sponsors laws that protect the pseudo property of the slaveowner over the real property of slave in his own person. In doing so, it normalizes a culture of violence against the "other." Given the degree to which the government fails in its responsibility to protect the oppressed, we see literary texts (and

Cugoano's own text) inherit new meaning by becoming the legislators of equality and common humanity.

The passage itself reflects the way in which the literary becomes the legislative. If we look at the way Cugoano critiques criminality here, he argues that human bondage is a crime far beyond that of robbery. And yet, the British government does not recognize this nor does it seek to acknowledge the humanity of slaves. Like Godwin, Cugoano is talking about the limits of political power, and the need for citizens to revise how the government responds to acts of oppression. Godwin's vision was to educate citizens through literature and have the literary text function as the mechanism for political change. In a way, I think Cugoano is achieving a similar task with the way he attempts to call out colonialist crime.

Since the British government is unwilling to label slavery a criminal affair, it falls to the literary voice to do so instead. In his *Defence of Poetry*, Percy Shelley speaks about poets being the "unacknowledged legislators of the world," emissaries of justice, equality and ethics at a time of political instability and institutional oppression. His use of the term "legislator" to describe the poet's function is quite significant, given his own role in using poetry to communicate a political message. The same could be said here of Cugoano with the way he uses his *Thoughts and Sentiments* to profess a new gospel of human rights. By linking slavery and the government's indifference to it as criminal acts, Cugoano actually recasts his literary work as a disciplinary entity capable of defining the contours of justice and morality. According to him, the true criminals are those who believe that denying the slave a right to humanity is sanctioned by law and divinely ordained. And when this form

of thought becomes common, that is when literature is needed to serve as a moral voice.[144]

Richardson and Hofkosh address the idea when they argue that by reading African writing in this context, "we too can learn to re-adjust the relations, proportions and values of our own cultural conformity."[145] In this case, Richardson and Hofkosh are referring to a concept of whiteness, one that affords white scholars and readers the intellectual privilege to dictate the relevance of literary and cultural texts. They argue authors like Cugoano are in a unique position to help mostly white Romanticists reconsider the degree to which the literary canon is a result of white cultural conformity – that is to say, an underlying desire for the works we read to affirm a broader sense of white dominance. By reading Cugoano we learn to destabilize white cultural conformity and re-orient the "relations, proportions, and values" of the literature we read. For example, Cugoano's critique of criminality is an instance in which he points out the danger of white slaveholders who have the capacity to design an image of the black criminal. The idea of literary cultural appropriation is part of Cugoano's broader strategy, which is to re-appropriate Britain's concept of blackness and restore it to a place where Africans have the power to arbitrate the values of their identity.

Even before this is possible, Cugoano wants to expose the degree to which the colonial practice of slavery is actually at odds with Britain's broader vision for equal rights (much as he argues that it is actually at odds with its vision of property rights). I

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[144] The essential difference with Cugoano's work is that (unlike the works of Blake, Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Shelley), it is not fiction or poetry. *Thoughts and Sentiments* is written as a public rebuke to slavery and addresses Europe's colonial enterprise through the use of different instances from the continent's history. It is an historical account of slavery and colonialism, a commentary on the Bible, and, most importantly, an autobiography of Cugoano's own life. The text does not rely on literary metaphor or mythological metaphors to make its point – it draws directly from the history and events of the time period.

[145] Richardson and Hofkosh, 331.

would argue that his critique of British imperialism is rooted in a respect for what he sees as the greater ideals of liberty that have been obfuscated by the slave trade. That is to say, Cugoano can see the iniquity of British slave trafficking while still believing in the nation as a beacon for equity. His condemnation is not without a desire for reconciliation because he insists that all people possess a shared belief in the idea of common humanity:

> As this enormous iniquity is not conjecture, but an obvious fact, occasioned by that dreadful and wicked business of slavery, were the inhabitants of Great Britain to hear tell of any nation that murdered one hundred thousand innocent people annually, they would think them an exceeding inhuman, barbarous, and wicked people indeed, and that they would be surely punished by some signal judgment of Almighty God. But surely law and liberty, justice and equity, which are the proper foundations of the British government, and humanity the amiable characteristic of the people, must be entirely fled from their land, if they can think a less punishment due to themselves, for supporting and carrying on such enormous wickedness, if they do not speedily relinquish and give it up (76).

At the beginning of the chapter I indicated that Cugoano wants to collapse the boundaries of distance between citizen and slave. For him, the real crime is one of omission – people go largely unaware of the brutality slave trafficking brings. The first sentence here argues that British citizens would immediately condemn genocide and call for the punishment of any perpetrators were they to learn another nation had acted exactly as they themselves are acting. His appeal to the citizen (in many ways, the reader) is about a broader call to civic awareness and engagement, the idea that people have the power to identify violence and demand their government to do better.[146] As Martin Hoyles puts it, a shared belief in a sense of common humanity results in "common descent [meaning] that all people have an equal desire for freedom."[147] Regardless of race, class, religion or background, the

[146] This point is especially important when considered within the context of Cugoano's public profile as both a member of Sons of Africa and an outspoken abolitionist. He circulated his work not only to British people but also other prominent writers such as Edmund Burke. His works were not being written in a vacuum, nor were they written for the purpose of self-affirmation. *Thoughts and Sentiments* is just one example of a work that he wrote aimed at both the larger public and particularly members of the British elite who benefited directly from the slave trade. Cugoano's narrative is more akin to a jeremiad on the state of slavery and the slave trade, a public diatribe that wrestles with the difficult history of colonialism.
[147] Hoyles, 155.

concept of freedom is one that transcends our differences and unites us under a common cause. In this way, the "inhabitants of Great Britain" have the vision to exercise a moral conscience in the absence of political will. Shortly afterward, Cugoano suggests that Britain is rooted in principles of "law and liberty, justice [and] equity," but that they must re-discover how these principles apply to non-Europeans. Likewise, he attests to humanity as the "amiable characteristic of the people," claiming that Europeans are both culpable and punishable, if they allow these atrocities to continue. There is more at stake here than just the livelihood of African slaves – Cugoano is concerned that the slave trade will compromise England's moral leadership and undermine its capacity to make Africans equal to British citizens.

What this passage also makes clear is that Cugoano is not only speaking about the justice of abolishing slavery. Slavery may be one example of injustice, but his appeal to a white readership means that the concept of justice is actually more capacious that one can see at first. On one hand, he speaks on behalf of black slaves who yearn for freedom. But, on the other hand, his message also resonates with poor whites and anyone who generally feels oppressed. Eve Tavor Bannet contends that Cugoano is simultaneously speaking for a specific racial group (African slaves) while embodying other voices that live through an analogous suffering: "By speaking for these others, Cugoano designed the possibility of a transatlantic, trans-ethnic, trans-tribal, and transcontinental alliance between several types of disenfranchised groups." In other words, his rhetoric of reconciliation applies to what he sees as most important – the capacity for different racial groups to share similar stories of oppression and transcend boundaries to ally against pervasive forms of social injustice.

To support Bannet's point, Cugoano makes clear that his text is not just about slavery. He is also concerned about the poor in England, and believes that slavery, the wealth gap, and fair wages are very much part of the same problem. Toward the end of the text, Cugoano touches upon the sugar trade:

> I know several ladies in England who refuse to drink sugar in their tea because of the West-Indies slavery…Should it cost the West-Indians more money to have their manufactories carried on by the labors of freemen than…with slaves, it would be attended with greater blessings and advantages to them in the end (102-103).

Here, Cugoano advocates wage labor as an alternative to slave labor. He argues (like Godwin in *Political Justice*) that fair wages may make the sugar trade more expensive, but argues for long term economic benefits. In this way, Cugoano is able to connect the slave trade to issues of economic wealth and show how slavery is related to the class divisions within England that affect poor whites as well. On the issue of fair wages, he makes it clear that slaves should be able to enter into an agreement that guarantees them a yearly wage if certain preconditions are met: "Those who had been above seven years in the inlands or elsewhere, if they had obtained any competent degree of knowledge of the Christian religion, and the laws of civilization…that they should immediately become free…and that their owners should give them reasonable wages for their labor" (131). In this case, knowledge of Christianity is necessary to being paid a fair wage because Cugoano sees it as a way to evaluate a slave's full acceptance of British religious custom.

And yet, Cugoano's particularized use of the slave trade to make his point testifies to the fact that figures of bondage and repression in the eighteenth-century context can be, and, indeed, must be related back to slavery. The terms "slave," "master," and "bondage" that Blake might use as a way of describing the relationship between Los and Urizen is actually rooted in slave discourse. Anne Mellor writes this when speaking about

Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*: "When Blake started *Visions* with this line ("Enslav'd, the Daughters of Albion weep"), he directly alluded to the fierce political debates of the 1780s and 1790s that deal with the British slave trade, the institution of slavery in the British colonies, and abolition broadly."[148] Blake was referencing the historical specificity of the transatlantic slave trade, representing it allegorically through his poetic mythos. The fact that his poems are greatly saturated with images of characters being bound and chained shows that he was operating within an imperial discourse of sorts. The same is true of Wollstonecraft and her views on marriage as a form of slavery: "Throughout the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft uses the term *slavery* in both a literal and metaphorical sense. She thinks that the institution of marriage in England in 1792 is legal slavery, no different in form from that imposed on Africans in the American colonies."[149] In her mind, British wives were no different from slaves in that they were *bound* by law to serve their husbands. They were not recognized as people, but, rather, as property tethered to the legal body of the husband. The husband was considered the "master" and the wife, his subordinate. I do not mean to say Blake and Wollstonecraft were writing narratives of bondage in the same vein as Cugoano, but that there stories are in some way ensconced within the discourses of slavery. In other words, Cugoano's slave narrative gestures forward through its signature concern with freedom and racial equality.

Upon reviewing the Romantics in light of Cugoano's work, we see how their texts borrow from the anti-slavery discourse. In this way, the authors are more similar than one might think given their differences in racial experience. The very fact that Blake, Shelley, Godwin and Wollstonecraft invoke slavery in their writings reinforces how slavery is part

[148] Mellor, Anne. "Sex, Violence, and Slavery: Blake and Wollstonecraft." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 1995. 345.
[149] Mellor, 364.

of British culture – a social and legal issue that finds itself rearticulated in various ways. I would argue that what these authors take from the anti-slavery discourse is a shared focus on narratives of erasure, specifically along class and gender lines. In other words, while it is unlikely that authors other than Blake read Cugoano, there is no question that the trans-Atlantic slave trade and abolition movement influenced their thinking more broadly. This point reaffirms why it is so important that we place Cugoano's work in conversation with those of the Romantics. As Youngquist and Botkin note, "Black Romanticism remembers the forgotten ancestry of British culture, recovering the important role Africans, and other diasporic commoners play in the cultural production called Romanticism."[150] Cugoano is a critical writer *because* his work teaches us how central anti-slavery works are to exposing the imperial workings of the Romantic Movement. Romanticism should not be thought of as the purchase of white authors, but expanded to include diasporic narratives that are not normally part of the discourse. Only by looking at Romanticism in this way can we begin to understand and fully realize the universal gospel of justice that it attempts to articulate.

Somerset v. Stewart and Romanticism of the Black Atlantic

Cugoano posits himself within diasporic and late eighteenth-century literature and thus reveals how the transatlantic slave trade speaks to ideas of freedom and morality. He comes into conversation with later romantic authors, teaching us how Black Atlantic texts shaped Romanticism. But is there a way to suggest that *Somerset v. Stewart* can also offer us a new way to look at the slavery debate? Should Mansfield's ruling be part of a greater discussion about slavery among contemporary Romanticists? Mansfield's ruling seems to be characteristic of Enlightenment thinking in the way it rationalizes Somerset's freedom:

[150] Youngquist and Botkin, *Romantic Circles Praxis*.

> Compassion will not, on the one hand, nor inconvenience on the other, be to decide; but the law: in which the difficulty will be principally from the inconvenience on both sides. Contract for sale of a slave is good here; the sale is matter to which the law properly and readily attaches, and will maintain the price according to agreement. But here the person of the slave is the object of enquiry; which makes a very material difference. The now question is, whether any dominion, authority or coercion can be exercised in this country, on a slave according to American laws? The difficulty of adopting the relation, without adopting it in all its consequences, is indeed extreme…and absolutely contrary to the municipal law of England (Usherwood, 509)

What makes Mansfield's opinion pertinent for thinking about Romanticism is the ways in which it problematizes slavery law and issues of personhood. He admits that slavery is, at its heart, a commercial institution that England recognizes ("Contract for sale of a slave is good here"). At the same time, he complicates how personhood is viewed by not referring to James Somerset as Charles Stewart's property. Nor does he say that England has authority to label him a slave the way America does. Mansfield believes there is a critical difference – the colonies legislate slavery differently from England and so there are limits on what English law can mandate. Even though American slave law may define Somerset as a slave, England's deference to American law would mean overstepping its boundaries and going beyond what is supported by Common law. Were this to happen, it would set a dangerous precedent for acting outside the dominion of British law. In effect, this reading of Mansfield's opinion suggests how critiques of colonialist law existed within the British legal system, and shaped how the public saw the relation between law, race, and property.

Somerset's chief legacy for Britain may be that it determined common law had no legal jurisdiction over black chattel slavery in the Americas, but this did not result in total abolition. Indeed, the ruling re-affirms that there exist certain limits to what law can do as a freeing agent. In a sense, this is what makes Cugoano important. His work proves that English law does not go nearly far *enough* in dismantling the slave trade or slavery itself. *Somerset* is therefore significant legally because its conservative view on the slave trade

(one that preserves the status quo of geographic proximity between Britain and the American colonies) is what prompts Cugoano to make his case. To him, common law fails by *not* taking a stronger position against the slave trade. It only sustains colonial hegemony and ensures that the basic fabric of the empire is maintained. Cugoano actively responds by going beyond the limitations of what British common law can do. In the final passages of *Thoughts and Sentiments*, he outlines a strategy for combating colonialism by proposing a slavery-free contract of racial relations between Europeans and Africans. The problem is that Cugoano's solution amounts to a more benign type of the colonial project.

Cugoano and the Outline to Defeat Colonialism

At the end of the narrative, Cugoano oscillates between critiquing colonialism and making the larger argument that the British Empire must remain intact to end slavery. His premise presupposes that the slave trade is a corrosive part of the British government, and one that must be eliminated for Britain to restore its moral authority. But what makes this ambition somewhat problematic is Cugoano's belief that the core of Britain's colonialism (bringing European custom and Christianity to undeveloped African nations) must remain for the good of the African people. While he may be opposed to the institution of slavery, Cugoano still identifies with the colonial project and believes in England's capacity to re-deem Africa. In effect, Cugoano is calling for Britain's redemption from the slave project so that it can bring morals to Africa and then re-make the continent into England's image:

> To put an end to the wickedness of slavery and merchandizing of men, and to prevent murder, extirpation and dissolution, is what every righteous nation ought to seek after; and to endeavor to diffuse knowledge and instruction to all the heathen nations wherever they can, is the grand duty of all Christian men. But while the horrific traffic of slavery is admitted and practiced, there can be but little hope of any good proposals meeting with success anywhere; for the abandoned carriers of it on have spread the poison of their iniquity wherever they come, at home and abroad. Were the iniquitous laws in support of it, and the whole of that oppression and injustice abolished, and the righteous laws of Christianity, equity, justice and humanity established in the room thereof, multitudes of

> nations would flock to the standard of truth, and instead of revolting away, they would count it their greatest happiness to be under the protection and jurisdiction of a righteous government (107).

There is no question that Cugoano still sees Britain as a fundamentally righteous nation in that it has the power to "diffuse knowledge and instruction to all the heathen nations." He believes in the European 'civilizing' project and claims that spreading Christianity to Africa, without enslaving its inhabitants, is "the grand duty of all Christian men." To be Christian is to spread the gospel of Jesus to uncivilized nations, bringing a moral compass to Africa that would benefit the African people long-term. In this passage, Cugoano reveals how he remains a disciple of eighteenth-century European colonial ideals, believing that Britain's influence over other countries can be done benevolently and without sacrifice. The matter at hand is whether this form of proselytizing solves the proto-imperial project or merely reinstates it in a more benign form. That is to say, is colonialism reliant on a type of violence and racial oppression? What does colonialism become when violence and erasure are thus taken out of the equation? Is this even possible? Cugoano suggests that Britain should, by all means, pursue its colonial agenda insofar as it includes making the African population an equal partner in European trade. The issue with Cugoano's idealism is that it generates a level of skepticism as to whether what he calls for is anything more than utopian fantasy.

The end of the passage suggests that, were slavery to end and Christianity flourish in Africa, then the continent would be pleased "to be under the protection and jurisdiction of a righteous government." Cugoano argues it is in Africa's self-interest to be associated with Britain as the empire would be both leader and protector to the undeveloped world. I would argue that his logic reveals an interesting conundrum: That Cugoano's exposure to British colonial education makes him unable to imagine a scenario in which Africa can be

civilized on its own. Despite his background in the West Indies, Cugoano adopts a benign colonialism that still has its roots in the same ideology – that Britain is superior to the rest of the world and, more specifically, the African continent. And because Cugoano chooses not to see Christianity as a *colonial* force, he believes that it can only help to bring Africa closer to a civilized status. So, in a sense, Cugoano makes a softer colonial statement that, as Bannet puts it, suggests the supposed "cultural and intellectual inferiority of Africa and African slaves by their supposed lack of religion, commerce, and civility."[151] In effect, the passage shows how Cugoano is still comfortable with the idea of England as a moral icon that can teach other countries how to be civil by exposing them to the Christian teachings.

Mark Canuel's section on religion and Divine Providence is particularly helpful in the way that it exposes the very tension surrounding Christianity that we see playing itself out in Cugoano's work. Without suggesting that there is a right or wrong way of applying and interpreting Christianity, Canuel highlights the difficulty of navigating different ways of understanding Providence: "A great deal of complexity…comes from…the tension between different accounts of Providence and the extent to which Providence then permits a number of human actions. If so, is anyone justified in opposing it?"[152] Canuel is concerned with the risks that come with *any* use of providential justification. For example, Cugoano, in his narrative, clearly does not believe Christianity authorizes slavery. But he *does* think that exposure to Christianity is reason enough for Britain to colonize Africa. Likewise, he does *not* believe Christianity mandates human suffering, but *does* believe Christianity is a critical part of becoming civilized. Put simply, where do

[151] Bannet, 147.
[152] Canuel, 162.

you draw the line? I do not mean to say Cugoano is extremist in his application of Christianity, but do wonder if there are a number of fallacies associated with his own use of Christianity to justify colonial and proto-imperial actions.

If anything, Cugoano's passages proves that such terms (Christianity, equity, justice, and, humanity) are relative and somewhat unreliable. While Cugoano may see a clear difference between colonial notions of Christianity and ethical notions of Christianity, the differences may not be so apparent to others. The same is true of justice and humanity – it turns out that these ideas are also malleable and subject to interpretation depending on the ideology that appropriates them. This is not to say that Cugoano is unaware of this: on the contrary, his text routinely points out the hypocrisy of perverting legal, ethical and religious concepts just for commercial gain and claims of cultural superiority. It is the fact that his account can differ from that of another that should concern us. In essence, I believe Cugoano does this because he *wants* us to learn how to identify the ways in which certain principles can be appropriated for different means. The text is not only about condemning slavery and outlining a way to achieving equal rights, but also about teaching readers the rhetorical tools to do each task.

For Cugoano, destroying colonialism involves revoking the "iniquitous laws" that are responsible for preserving the slave trade. Now, this is something Cugoano also refers to in other sections of the work, but here he outlines how this will impact other nations as well. While it is true that Cugoano's critique is leveled mainly at Britain, the argument he makes is intended for all European nations. *Thoughts and Sentiments* is meant for a global audience, not just British citizens. In fact, we can see here that Cugoano is actually trying to elevate Britain above immorality by making it into an example of justice for

Europeans to imitate. When he writes, "Multitudes of nations would flock to the standard of truth" if Britain were to restore "Christianity, equity, justice, and humanity" to its government, the implication is that Britain's abolition of the slave trade would have global repercussions and invite other European nations to do the same. In a way, we already know that this is a reality given how much Mansfield's opinion triggered slavery debates across the Atlantic.

The surprising part of this passage (and the one that follows) is that Cugoano only wants to make Britain a better country capable of transcending its imperial origins. He harbors anger toward slavery, but thinks there is merit in European expansion. He critiques the origins of colonialism, but believes that Britain is in the best position to preach the gospel of common humanity. He is angry at the way African slaves are treated, and yet he argues that there are invaluable lessons that they can learn from Europeans. He sees himself as a devout Christian, chastising the kind of 'Christian' thinking that authorizes black subjugation. Cugoano is unique because he is concerned with the degree to which blacks *and* whites have been deceived by dogmatism, colonialism, and perpetual violence. He brings us full circle in that this text reminds us of how cyclical punishment can be – just as Africans are caught in a cycle of oppression and suffering, colonialists have yet to find a way out of the cyclical violence they commit. No one is free from the institutions that bind him or her. But Cugoano sees a way out, and the suggestion he gives is for white slaveowners to look at Africans as humans just like them:

> We would wish to have the grandeur and fame of the British Empire to extend far and wide; and the glory and honor of God to be promoted by it, and the interest of Christianity set forth among all the nations wherever its influence and power can extend; but not to be supported by the insidious pirates, depredators, murderers and slave-holders. And as it might diffuse knowledge and instruction to others, that it might receive a tribute of reward from all its territories, forts and garrisons, without being oppressive to any. But contrary to this the wickedness of many of the White People who keep slaves, and

> contrary to all the laws and duties of Christianity which the Scriptures teach, they have in general endeavored to keep the Black People in total ignorance as much as they can, which must be a great dishonor to any Christian government, and injurious to the safety and happiness of rulers (108).

The first sentence affirms that Cugoano ultimately bears allegiance to Britain: "we would wish to have the grandeur and fame of the British Empire to extend far and wide." He is a patriot to his nation's ideals, but believes that such ideals can exist without the slave trade altogether. The fact that he openly uses the word 'empire' and encourages them to extend their influence "far and wide" confirms that he clearly identifies with the imperial project, believing in England's potential for global moral leadership. Cugoano even implies that it is possible for Britain to keep its "territories, forts and garrisons without being oppressive to any": the notion that Britain can spread its doctrines across the globe without the use of force. Instead of keeping "the Black People in total ignorance," Cugoano asks that British slaveholders educate them so that they might contribute to the wealth of the country as a whole. If they were to teach slaves how to read and write, they would learn that black people have the same faculties of reason and thought as other British citizens. Now, one issue this brings up is the question of whether Cugoano is actually advocating a different form of colonial ideology: that is to say, would not educating African slaves to be British just constitute another kind of British hegemony? After all, even if the slave trade were to be decoupled from English culture, would not British methods of education take its place as a method of conversion?

What I intend to suggest here is that even though Cugoano's commitment to equal rights is unquestionable, readers need to challenge the way he looks at Britain as the de facto savior nation. The passage reads much like others in this sense: the author is convinced that Britain can 'save' itself from itself. In a way, this is to be expected since

Cugoano's Christian ethics influence the way in which he views England as a redemptive nation. But part of that may be as a result of the converting influence Britain has had over him as well. In other words, even as a critic of colonial regimes, he cannot escape the fact that he is a product of one. He advocates for British education of the slavery subject since he too was taught how to read by his master. In fact, the argument he makes that teaching Africans to read and write will ensure "the safety and happiness of rulers" speaks directly to his notion that educated Africans are vital to the public good of the country as a whole.

One way to work through Cugoano's over-identification of Britain with the savior is to approach educating Africans from a different standpoint. Rather than see it primarily as another form of cultural assimilation, there is an extent to which Cugoano may support this because doing so will begin the process of remaking Britain. In other words, not only would cultural assimilation collapse the boundaries of 'otherness,' but this would also de-stabilize the concept of both national identity and racial alterity. One thing Cugoano frequently reminds us of is that Africans and other indigenous ethnicities of the Black Atlantic *are* part of British culture. If anything, the slave trade has effaced them from their rightful place as constitutive of an inclusive British national identity. There is also another objective: by reminding people in England of the horrors of slavery, he hopes his narrative will encourage British citizens to call for the abolition of slavery. After all, why would a civilized country want to play part in preserving the most inhuman practice of violent cruelty? Cugoano's love of Britain has to do with his belief that the nation is much too civilized and advanced to want to oppress other populations. If Britain were to overcome the distance between African slave and the white slaveholder (which Mansfield

fails to do), then it would set an example for all other European nations to imitate – this is Cugoano's solution for how to make Britain the best.

As a result, the passage teaches us that Cugoano wants Britain to move away from the slave trade because it contradicts the nation's dedication to equity and morality. The Mansfield opinion ultimately fails to challenge the status quo, because it does not really address the issue of slavery itself. The slave trade can only truly be abolished once Africa is considered an equal partner and (former) slaves are defined as British citizens. That means the future of Britain is inextricably linked to the future of the African race. Here, we see Cugoano is concerned with the future of Afro-British relations and how history itself will judge them, but also with the future of "Britain" as something other than the preserve of white identity and culture.

Cugoano and the Rhetoric of Cultural Inheritance

Thoughts and Sentiments ends with Cugoano suggesting that Britain must stop the slave trade before the call for abolition becomes too great. He is convinced that slavery is destined to fail and warns Britain to not ignore the voices of liberation that grow louder in response. Like Shelley, Cugoano also invokes the imagery of autumn leaves and suggests that the rhetoric of abolition will continue to reverberate throughout Europe, regardless of what Britain does.[153] Cugoano focuses on the coming end of slavery and implicitly threatens England with collapse if it fails to ally itself with the movement of history. It is in his final paragraph that he brings his apocalyptic rhetoric to a triumphant conclusion:

> O ye inhabitants of Great Britain to whom I owe the greatest respect; to your king! To yourselves! And to your government! And tho' many things which I have written may seem harsh, it cannot be otherwise evaded when such horrible iniquity is transacted: and tho' to some what I have said may appear as the rattling leaves of autumn, that may soon

[153] The same image occurs in Book V of Edward Young's *The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality*. Cugoano himself footnotes Young in the very last paragraph of his work.

> be blown away and whirled in a vortex where few can hear and know: I must yet say, although it is not for me to determine the manner, that the voice of our complaint implies a vengeance, because of the great iniquity that you have done, and because of the cruel injustice done unto us Africans (110-111).

In Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," the rustling of autumn leaves prefigured the change of political regimes, the emergence of a revolutionary voice to challenge the status quo. It seems as though Cugoano's use of autumn leaves serves a similar function: he argues that while the autumn leaves "may be blown away and whirled in a vortex where few can hear or know," this will not deter change from happening. The "voice of our complaint implies a "vengeance," meaning that the call for abolition will only grow louder and more severe, necessitating that England act on behalf of its most oppressed and vulnerable. But there is another purpose to the "rattling leaves of autumn": rather than see them exclusively as the voice of Cugoano, they more so represent his voice *on behalf* of slaves who cannot speak. His closing passage reminds us that the language of abolition was not limited to England: it applied to all of Europe and especially to the colonial nations that held territories across the Atlantic. Moreover, the "voice of our complaint" is justified, meaning that the African slaves who yearn for freedom are within their right to demand more from Britain after the savagery and "great iniquity" of British colonialists. Indeed, Cugoano channels the voices of the unheard just as much as he does the voices of those who have already died. To him the rustling autumn leaves represent the ongoing struggle for equality, one that transcends the eighteenth century. The abolition of slavery is just the beginning of a greater struggle.

In his final paragraph, he makes clear that the sound of liberty will echo inside the ears and minds of all. There is no way to stop this: not only is the imagery very characteristic of what one would expect from the Romantic poets, but Cugoano also looks at freedom as an unstoppable force that will destroy any obstacle in its path. Indeed, what

we see is Cugoano prophesying that Britain itself will fall beneath the wave of freedom if it dare stand in the way. But more importantly, if the autumn leaves represent a change in British culture, then what is really changing is the notion of what nationhood is to Britain:

> And it ought to sound in your ears as the rolling waves around your circumambient shores; and if it is not hearkened unto, it may yet arise with a louder voice, as the rolling thunder, and it may yet increase in the force of its volubility, not only to shake the leaves of the most stout in heart, but to rend the mountains before them, and to cleave in pieces the rocks under them, and to go on with fury to smite the stoutest oaks in the forest (111).

The sound of revolution is apparent in Cugoano's final statement. He insists that the great voice of freedom will "rend the mountains before them and cleave in pieces the rocks under them." It will grow louder and louder until one can no longer resist the sound. In these lines he is revising the apocalyptic pre-romantic tradition he found in a writer like Young (whom he quotes), and declaring that the future of Britain's national identity and the future of the British empire depend on whether Britain chooses to abolish slavery. The passage describes the collapse of the old world order and the rise of a new world order. In Cugoano we see a lesson being taught that extends to current Romanticists who still view the British literary canon through the lens of whiteness. In a sense, the British canon does not "belong" to middle-class white authors or the imperial institutions that maintain them. Rather, it is constituted by the voices of the Black Atlantic, the voices of Afro-British and indigenous cultures that strive to overcome the regime of colonial oppression. What helps to make Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments* a revolutionary work is the ways in which it brings the Black Atlantic into the manifold of the British literary canon.

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