

*Erotic Friendship*

Erotic friendship is as central as elegiac friendship to the literature of the long eighteenth century. If we attempt to revise Sedgwick's notion of homosocial relations in erotic terms, we are not really violating the spirit of her analysis. As she famously outlined in that volume, "in any male dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power."<sup>1</sup> I want to reduce the complexity of this argument because it now seems unnecessary. It does not surprise us to hear that male relationships can be erotically charged even when they are not the direct result of sexual desire. Sedgwick in fact taught us that, and if I retire the notion of homosociality here, I do so only with great respect for what her study achieved thirty years ago. The erotic friendships I describe here range from the outright and outrageously eroticized male relationships in Smollett's first novel, *Roderick Random*, to the gloomy and obsessively haunted relationship between Frankenstein and his creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The notion of the homosocial is not really useful in these circumstances, for reasons that I hope will become obvious, any more than it is useful in either Fielding's *Amelia* or Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. In each of these works male relationships are eroticized, for reasons of obsession, or competition or rivalry, in ways that animate the text and give it emotional power. Just as elegiac relations can take the form of a process of mourning, so here erotic relations take the shape of an obsessive process that is as destructive as it is exhilarating.

Male friendship figures centrally in the drama and fiction of the eighteenth century, from the heroic friendships of Restoration drama to the friendship bonds that are celebrated in novels throughout the century. Various accounts of male–male devotion challenge the status quo and invoke classical models as a means of bringing men of different ranks into

<sup>1</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 25.

meaningful relation with each other. This tradition continues into the nineteenth century and beyond, but for important reasons, with this topic as with so many, the eighteenth century witnesses key developments in the meaning of friendship in an increasingly modernized culture.

### **Smollett's World of Masculine Desire in *The Adventures of Roderick Random***

In his landmark essay, "Forgetting Foucault," David M. Halperin has argued that "before the nineteenth century ... sexual acts could be interpreted as representative components of an individual's sexual morphology ... Sexual acts could [also] be interpreted as representative expressions of an individual's sexual subjectivity." In that same essay, he goes on to explain that "neither ... sexual morphology ... nor sexual subjectivity ... should be understood as a sexual identity, or a sexual orientation in the modern sense – much less as equivalent to the modern formation known as homosexuality."<sup>2</sup> Halperin's comments are useful for those working in the field of the literary history of sexuality, to be sure. He is talking here about the Greek figure of the *kinaidos* (morphology) and the sodomitical central character of Boccaccio's story of Pietro di Vinciolo of Perugia, the Tenth Story of the Fifth Day of the *Decameron* (subjectivity). Halperin says further that he hopes "to encourage us to inquire into the construction of sexual identities before the emergence of sexual orientation and to do this *without* recurring necessarily to modern notions of 'sexuality' or sexual orientation."<sup>3</sup> I am heartened by Halperin's reassessment of the misuse of Foucault in the study of the history of sexuality, and I am also ready to accept his challenge to look at the construction of sexual identities in literary works that are key in their own way to this history.

For scholars writing about the history of sexuality, or of male–male relations especially, in the eighteenth century, the famous chapters in Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), in which the characters Captain Whiffle and his surgeon Simper are described, can serve as a touchstone. Take, for instance, this lengthy passage in which we are introduced to the first of these characters:

[O]ur new commander came on board, in a ten-oar'd barge, overshadowed with a vast umbrella, and appeared in everything quite the reverse

<sup>2</sup> David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 41–2.

<sup>3</sup> Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, 43.

of Oakhum, being a tall, thin, young man, dressed in this manner; a white hat garnished with a red feather, adorned his head, from whence his hair flowed down upon his shoulders, in ringlets tied behind with a ribbon. – His coat, consisting of pink-coloured silk, lined with white, by the elegance of the cut retired backward, as it were, to discover a white satten waistcoat embroidered with gold, unbuttoned at the upper part, to display a brooch set with garnets, that glittered in the breast of his shirt, which was of the finest cambrick, edged with right mechlin.<sup>4</sup>

As this passage continues with its description of breeches and stockings and a “steel-hilted sword, inlaid with figure of gold,” Captain Whiffle takes his place as a descendent of Restoration fops like Sir Fopling Flutter from Sir George Etherege’s *The Man of Mode* (1676) or Colley Cibber’s Sir Novelty Fashion from *Love’s Last Shift* (1696). But all those simple examples of gender confusion that expose earlier fops are here more pointed, more significant. As the description continues, it begins to outline a type of behavior and to mark an entire group of men in similar terms:

But the most remarkable parts of his furniture were, a mask on his face, and white gloves on his hands, which did not seem to be put on with an intention to be pulled off occasionally, but were fixed with a ring set with a ruby on the little finger of one hand, and by one set with a topaz on that of the other. – In this garb, captain Whiffle, for that was his name, took possession of the ship, surrounded with a crowd of attendants, all of whom, in their different degrees, seemed to be of their patron’s disposition; and the air was so impregnated with perfumes, that one may venture to affirm the clime of Arabia Fœlix was not half so sweet-scented. (195)

Smollett spares no pains in this description, as if he relishes the opportunity to spin out this portrait at greater than usual length. Of course there is nothing yet to insist on a specific reading of the fop. As many have argued, to describe an excess in dress is not tantamount to making any claims about sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Cameron McFarlane, for instance, says that “Whiffle’s clothes function seemingly as unequivocal signifiers,” but I would insist that their signification itself is overdetermined in this scene. This dress becomes unequivocal precisely because of the exact context that Smollett

<sup>4</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1749]), 194–5 [Chapter xxxiv]; further page references are included in the text.

<sup>5</sup> George E. Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 44–80; see also Cameron McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire, 1660–1750* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 134–5; Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 174–5; and Susan Staves, “Kind Words for the Fop,” *Studies in English Literature* 22 (1982): 413–28.

describes: he gives the captain a partner. Even before that, however, in this first description, Smollett cannot resist mentioning “a crowd of attendants, all of whom, in their different degrees, seemed to be of their patron’s disposition.” Further mention of perfumes and hints of Arabia start to give a certain valence to this “disposition,” a defining function, as it were, which emerges more specifically as the scene continues.

When Roderick enters Whiffle’s cabin in order to bleed him, this is what he encounters:

While I prepared for this important evacuation, there came into the cabin, a young man, gayly dressed, of a very delicate complexion, with a kind of languid smile on his face, which seemed to have been rendered habitual, by a long course of affectation. – The captain no sooner perceived him, than rising hastily, he flew into his arms, crying, “O! my dear Simper! I am excessively disordered!” – Simper, who by this time, I found, was obliged to art for the clearness of his complexion, assumed an air of softness and sympathy, and lamented with many tender expressions of sorrow, the sad accident that had thrown him into that condition; then feeling his patient’s pulse on the outside of his glove, gave it as his opinion, that his disorder was entirely nervous, and that some drops of tincture of castor and liquid laudanum, would be of more service to him than bleeding. (197–8)

Simper is clearly the sympathetic surgeon that Captain Whiffle requires, and in diagnosing the captain’s complaint, in addition to soothing him and lamenting with him over the brutality of those around him, feeling his pulse (if he can feel it through the glove Whiffle wears) Simper offers us an implicitly phobic eighteenth-century diagnosis of Whiffle’s condition. First he says that the “disorder was entirely nervous.” Of course readers, at Smollett’s urging, might think the condition in question is some version of eighteenth-century hypochondria.<sup>6</sup> Historians of sexuality have been loath to talk about this clear representation of same-sex desire as a nervous condition in the eighteenth century. Smollett might indeed be the first to make this specific connection, because as Simper grasps his hand – even through the glove – and shows his deep concern, Smollett is suggesting an intimacy “not fit to be named,” as he says below. If this language calls to mind the legal understanding of sodomy, then it seems that Smollett is taking it upon himself to diagnose this case of excess and misdirected masculinity. Further, he says that castor and laudanum will work “by bridling the inordinate sallies of his spirits”; again, this is a diagnosis that

<sup>6</sup> See George Cheyne, *The English Malady*, ed. Eric Carlson (Delmar: Scholar’s Facsimiles and Reprints, 1976 [1733]), 10–17.

reveals an understanding of Whiffle's desires as pathological in specifically neurological ways. Smollett almost seems to be conducting a sexological experiment.

As Smollett continues this description, these terms are more nearly explicit:

While the captain enjoyed his repose, the doctor watched over him and indeed became so necessary, that a cabin was made for him contiguous to the state-room, where Whiffle slept; that he might be at hand in case of accidents in the night. – Next day, our commander being happily recovered, gave orders, that none of the lieutenants should appear upon deck, without a wig, sword, and ruffles; nor any midshipman, or other petty officer, be seen with a check shirt or dirty linen. – He also prohibited any person whatever, except Simper and his own servants, from coming into the great cabin, without first sending in to obtain leave. – These singular regulations did not prepossess the ship's company in his favour; but on the contrary, gave scandal an opportunity to be very busy with his character, and accuse him of maintaining a correspondence with his surgeon, not fit to be named. (198–9)

This paragraph has been justly celebrated as “an enduring male homosexual stereotype in modern culture,” or “the modern gay man,” the “first gay couple,” and so on.<sup>7</sup> More important than making such continuist claims, however, we might try to figure out what Smollett is describing here. In the first place, he makes the connection between affected effeminacy and sexual desire. In this he echoes Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi, who said about Horace Mann, Horace Walpole's friend and correspondent, who was envoy in Florence, “I call these Fellows ‘Finger-twirlers,’ meaning a decent word for Sodomites; old Sir Horace Mann and Mr. James the Painter had such an odd way of twirling their fingers in Discourse – I see Seutonius tells us the same thing of one of the Roman emperors.”<sup>8</sup> Whether or not Piozzi is basing her observation on anything more than hearsay or superficial mannerisms, we can hardly avoid the connection between “morphology” and sexual “propensity,” as Piozzi calls Beckford's pederasty.<sup>9</sup> The same is true here. Morphology and sexual propensity come together here as well.

<sup>7</sup> McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*, 134–5; see also G. S. Rousseau, “The Pursuit of Homosexuality in the Eighteenth-Century: ‘Utterly Confused Category’ and/or Rich Repository?” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 9 (1985): 132–68. An interesting perspective on Smollett and scatology is offered by Robert Adams Day, “Sex, Scatology, Smollett,” in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 225–43.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Fothergill, *The Strawberry Hill Set: Horace Walpole and his Circle* (London: Faber, 1983), 50; see also Timothy Mowl, *Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider* (London: John Murray, 1996), 58.

<sup>9</sup> On the implications of “sexual morphology,” see Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, 32–8 and 104–37.

Moreover, the members of the crew all notice what's going on. The captain and his surgeon together form a type that can be recognized, and Random calls this a "correspondence ... not fit to be named." Notice, though, that it is the correspondence and not the person that is "not fit to be named." Smollett, or Roderick, does not label an identity; he labels a behavior.

What does it mean, though, to have two chapters on the question of male–male eroticism right in the middle of this quasi-picaresque tale? Cameron McFarlane, who has written the best account of Smollett and sodomy, suggests that Whiffle is marked "as the sodomitical 'other,'" and that the entire episode displays a "comfortable certainty and stability."<sup>10</sup> But Smollett places these characters here in this central position – these scenes occur in chapters 34 and 35 of a sixty-nine-chapter novel – as if he sees them as somehow at the heart of male–male relations. What happens here – so grotesquely and so obviously – is not so clearly "other" as it is an extension of what occurs between men in all the chapters before and all those after this scene. McFarlane says as much, I think, in his extensive analysis, but he does not explain so specifically what that means. For me, it is a precise explanation of the mode of Smollett's phobia, or panic, around the issue of male–male relations. If a captain and his surgeon can cause the ship's crew to imagine a "correspondence ... not fit to be named"; if, that is, two men at the heart of the masculine culture that Smollett has been celebrating in the novel can behave this way, then what defense is there for men who love each other in other contexts and situations, as the men in this novel clearly do?

Various friends and intimates of Roderick – Strap, his servant, Morgan, his shipmate, Bolton, his uncle – are described in intimate terms, and all express their love for Random physically and emotionally. How are these relations to be distinguished from the Whiffle–Simple relation, or can they be distinguished at all? McFarlane reminds us that shortly after this scene, Roderick is dolling himself up in fancy aristocratic clothes in order to cut the right figure in his fortune-hunting expedition. "Roderick has become aware," McFarlane says, "of 'his own attractions,' – indeed, he plans to use them to get ahead in the world. What Roderick is not yet aware of, though, are the 'troublesome consequences to himself' that will ensue."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*, 135–6. On the question of "vignettes" in Smollett, see Pamela Cantrell, "Writing the Picture: Fielding, Smollett, and Hogarthian Pictorialism," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 24 (1995): 68–89.

<sup>11</sup> McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*, 138.

The consequences that Smollett (and McFarlane) have in mind have to do with Roderick's encounter with Lord Strutwell. Roderick meets Strutwell through some new-found aristocratic friends, and he is immediately taken with Strutwell's looks, his behavior, and his seeming interest in helping him, a much younger man, get on in the world. As McFarlane says, "this episode completely undermines the certainty about the self and the 'other' which structured the Whiffle scene."<sup>12</sup> I agree that Strutwell is not the grotesque and excessive figure that Whiffle is. In fact, he is an attractive aristocrat for whom Roderick feels admiration and a kind of kinship. This episode makes explicit what previous chapters have only suggested: male relations are always liable to harbor secrets that render them more complex than the mere concept of "friendship" allows. Roderick's attraction to Strutwell, his hope of a fruitful relation, is almost a parody of the other friendships he has formed:

his lordship ... took me by the hand, assured me he would do me all the service he could, and desired to see me often. – I was charmed with my reception, and although I had heard that a courtier's promise is not to be depended upon, I thought I discovered so much sweetness of temper and candour in this Earl's countenance, that I did not doubt of profiting by his protection. – I resolved therefore, to avail myself of his permission, and waited on him next audience day, when I was favoured with a particular smile, squeeze of the hand, and a whisper, signifying that he wanted half an hour's conversation with me *tête a tête*, when he should be disengaged, and for that purpose desired me to come and drink a dish of chocolate with him to-morrow morning. (307)

The joke, of course, is on Roderick here, and an astute reader may already have picked up the clues of Strutwell's behavior that the hero misses as he flatters himself that this aristocratic attention will be useful to him. Smollett seems to be saying that Roderick has set himself up for this in some way, and of course he does so by making himself available to aristocratic desires. As Sedgwick said in her discussion of William Beckford, in *Between Men*, "An important, recurrent, wishful gesture of this ideological construction [of the aristocracy] was the feminization of the aristocracy as a whole, by which not only aristocratic women ... but the abstract image of the entire class, came to be seen as ethereal, decorative, and otiose in relation to the vigorous and productive values of the middle class."<sup>13</sup> Even more telling, though, are the ways in which Roderick's politic scheming

<sup>12</sup> McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*, 139.

<sup>13</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 93.

has led him directly into the hands of this predatory Earl. What follows when the Earl begins his celebration of male–male love is not so much a crisis of identification, as McFarlane argues, but an attempt at seduction that causes a phobic response. When after a couple of meetings the Earl promises Roderick a position, he launches into a discussion of Petronius Arbiter in these terms:

I own ... that his taste in love is generally decried, and indeed condemned by our laws; but perhaps that may be more owing to prejudice and misapprehension, than to true reason and deliberation. – The best man among the ancients is said to have entertained that passion; one of the wisest of their legislators has permitted the indulgence of it in his commonwealth; the most celebrated poets have not scrupled to avow it at this day; it prevails not only over all the east, but in most parts of Europe; in our own country it gains ground apace; and in all probability will become in a short time a more fashionable vice than simple fornication. – Indeed there is something to be said in vindication of it, for notwithstanding the severity of the law against offenders in this way, it must be confessed that the practice of this passion is unattended with that curse and burthen upon society, which proceeds from a race of miserable deserted bastards, who are either murdered by their parents, deserted to the utmost want and wretchedness, or bred up to prey upon the commonwealth ... Nay, I have been told, that there is another motive perhaps more powerful than all these, that induces people to cultivate this inclination; namely, the exquisite pleasure attending its success. (310)

It is truly fascinating that this unique defense of same-sex desire occurs here toward the climax of Smollett's first novel. However violently Roderick reacts to this argument, it is articulated here with such force and clarity that it is hard to resist. Roderick does resist it, of course, but what are readers to make of this lucid account? Once the question is stated in these terms, it has an ontological presence that the Whiffle scene barely suggested. The terms are changed, and every male–male relationship now must come under the scrutiny of a phobic gaze. If Sedgwick says, "there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures of maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power," she seems to imply that there is something almost threatening about the ways in which the structures of patriarchal power can also serve a sodomitical purpose.<sup>14</sup> Even if we want to resist the anachronistic "homosocial" and "homosexual," we might still note that a "sodomitical purpose" among male relations of various kinds is exactly what Smollett finds so threatening in *Roderick Random*. Strutwell makes it clear that the line of demarcation is

<sup>14</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 25.



moveable and the consequences serious for someone like Roderick who is on the make and ready to put himself into anyone's protection.

Roderick's reaction is automatic and unequivocal:

From this discourse, I began to be apprehensive that his lordship finding I had travelled, was afraid I might have been infected with this spurious and sordid desire abroad, and took this method of sounding my sentiments on the subject. – Fired at this supposed suspicion, I argued against it with great warmth, as an appetite unnatural, absurd, and of pernicious consequence; and declared my utter detestation and abhorrence of it. (310)

Roderick's response is significant in that he talks about being "infected with this spurious and sordid desire abroad." If male–male desire can be caught like a disease, then it is not a feature of identity any more than smallpox or consumption would be. The desire, moreover, "spurious and sordid," is what is discussed. It is not a condition or an identity, or anything more than a behavior that one might fall into, especially when traveling. In what sense is this at all like what was in the later twentieth century called "gay" identity? Gay men did not see themselves in these terms. Indeed, they spoke of gay identity as something innate. The way Roderick talks about this infection suggests, to me at least, a completely different understanding of sodomy, one closer to various phobic responses that have been articulated in hate speech of the twenty-first century. It is something that can be caught, and spread, like a disease.

If we return here to the Halperin essay, we can note that Captain Whiffle, in all his effeminate extravagance, is like the *kinaedos* of ancient Greece, and that Earl Strutwell, in his easily disguised but unmistakable desire for other men, is like the figure of Pietro di Vinciolo of Perugia in Boccaccio. The former is too obvious to miss and easy to mock; the second, easily disguised in aristocratic masculinity and bonhomie, is more dangerous because less discernible and even, it would seem, almost reasonable in his claims. As Cameron McFarlane argues, "Roderick obviously cannot 'read' Strutwell in the same way that he 'read' Whiffle."<sup>15</sup> With Strutwell, in a sense, Roderick has met someone to admire and emulate until he finds himself appalled. How is it possible, the novel seems to ask, that sodomy could be disguised in the figure of a gentleman?

Roderick's response bespeaks an understanding, however, that would more than explain Smollett's use of sodomy in this novel (and indeed in

<sup>15</sup> McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*, 139.

at least one of his later ones). Sodomy circulates in the world of masculine desire, almost precisely as Sedgwick suggests – eliciting fear that at once yields phobic responses and implies the ever-present danger of male–male seductive power. Earlier Smollett scholars have implied as much in their analyses, McFarlane especially; but consider more closely what a free-floating notion of a threat of sodomy does to other male–male relations in the novel.

Take the relationship between Roderick and his friend/servant Strap. The young and entertaining sidekick to Roderick, so amusingly named, is a given in the novel, as if male relations must be clearly established before any courting of female characters can even be considered. Indeed, it is a commonplace in Smollett criticism to say that whatever courting does take place, whatever articulation of male–female desire, is secondary in this rollicking picaresque world of male–male interaction of various kinds. Smollett, that is, takes a world of masculine desire and plays out its drama in a world almost exclusively male.

When Roderick first sets out on his journey, he meets up with his “old school-fellow” (31) Strap in a barber’s shop on the road, and from this moment Strap becomes a devoted companion for Roderick. When they meet, Strap has just started shaving Roderick, and as he asks where Random is from, he becomes more and more agitated, spreading suds all over his face, and finally asks him his name:

But when I declared my name was Random he exclaimed in a rapture, “How! Rory Random?” The same, I replied, looking at him with astonishment; “What,” cried he, “don’t you know your old school-fellow, Hugh Strap?” At that instant recollecting his face, I flew into his arms, and in the transport of my joy, gave him back one half of the suds he had so lavishly bestowed on my countenance; so that we made a very ludicrous appearance, and furnished a great deal of mirth to his master and shop-mates, who were witnesses of this scene. – When our mutual caresses were over, I sat down again to be shaved, but the poor fellow’s nerves were so discomposed by this unexpected meeting, that his hand could scarcely hold the razor, with which (nevertheless) he found means to cut me in three places, in as many strokes. (32)

Smollett makes sure that we can feel a kind of emotional intensity within the comedy of the scene; but the comedy itself – with the caressing, the mutual effusion of suds, the excitement, the blood – has all the makings of intense physicality. Strap indeed functions throughout *Roderick Random* as an avatar of erotic physicality that can sometimes be taken for the object of desire himself.

Roderick and Strap are separated for some time while Roderick works as a surgeon's mate in the Navy and then as a soldier in Flanders, but when he finds himself in Rheims, there he meets his friend again, described to him as Monsieur D'Estrapes, who works as valet-de-chambre for an English gentleman there. When Roderick reveals himself to Strap, we have a scene of similar intensity to the one quoted above. Roderick speaks in his Scottish-inflected English, and Strap recognizes him:

When he heard me pronounce these words in our own language, he leaped upon me in a transport of joy, hung about my neck, kissed me from ear to ear, and blubbered like a great school-boy who has been whipt. – Then observing my dress, he set up his throat, crying “O L – d! O L – d! that ever I should live to see my dearest friend reduced to the condition of a foot soldier in the French service!” (252)

Strap is upset that they had parted in some disagreement, and he makes up for it here with this outpouring of emotion and clear articulation of a personal attachment. Roderick makes certain the encounter has a physical component as well. After they make up their differences and Strap invites Roderick home for a meal, Roderick begs his friend for some clothing as well:

I thanked him for his invitation, which, I observed, could not be unwelcome to a person who had not eaten a comfortable meal these seven months; but I had another request to make, which I begged he would grant before dinner, and that was the loan of a shirt . . . He stared in my face, with a woe-ful countenance, at this declaration, which he would scarce believe, until I explained it, by unbuttoning my coat, and disclosing my naked body; a circumstance that shocked the tender-hearted Strap, who, with tears in his eyes, ran to a chest of drawers, and taking out some linen, presented to me a very fine ruffled holland shirt, and cambrick neckcloth, assuring me, he had three dozen of the same kind at my service. – I was ravished at this piece of good news, and having accommodated myself in a moment, hugged my benefactor for his generous offer, saying, I was overjoyed to find him undebauched by prosperity, which seldom fails of corrupting the heart. (252–3)

Roderick seems all too ready to expose his naked flesh to Strap in this scene, and he is “ravished” when Strap offers him clean linen. Then he talks not of Strap's generosity directly, but of his being “undebauched by prosperity.” All this language is more than suggestive, I would claim, of the degree of erotic play at work in the union between these two men. The blubbering and ejaculating of the first scene (O L – d! O L – d!) gives way to a play of physicality in a continuum, of sorts, with the earlier scenes I have discussed. Further scenes with Strap can serve to deepen

this perception, and I will look at one such scene before moving on to talk about other robust male–male relationships in this novel.

The last important scene with Strap is one in which Roderick takes out his jealousy over a nobleman’s attentions to the elusive Narcissa by abusing his faithful valet. Smollett describes the scene this way:

I went home in the condition of a frantic Bedlamite; and finding the fire in my apartment almost extinguished, vented my fury upon poor Strap, whose ear I pinched with such violence, that he roared hideously with pain, and when I quitted my hold looked so foolishly aghast, that no unconcerned spectator could have seen him, without being seized with an immoderate fit of laughter ... [H]e could not help shedding some tears at my unkindness. I felt unspeakable remorse for what I had done, cursed my own ingratitude, and considered his tears as a reproach that my soul, in her present disturbance, could not bear. – It set all my passions into a new ferment, I swore horrible oaths without meaning or application, I foamed at the mouth, kicked the chairs about the room, and play’d abundance of mad pranks that frightened my friend almost out of his senses. – At length my transport subsided, I become melancholy, and wept insensibly. (356–7)

Roderick Random is already upset, but after he abuses Strap and then sees the anguish he has caused, he then feels “unspeakable remorse” and lapses into even more intensely passionate ravings and destruction. It is fitting that Strap is the immediate occasion of this transport of emotion; and it is Strap who gives rise to this “unspeakable remorse.” Roderick’s debilitating melancholy, that is, does not concern only Narcissa and the jealousy she engenders, but it also concerns Strap and the ways in which he has abused his friend.

Other characters who fall into this male–male economy include Morgan, Roderick’s shipmate and fellow victim of the autocratic Captain Oakhum. Morgan, the foul-mouthed and outspoken Welsh surgeon, becomes a friend in difficult circumstances – they are both held for treason on Oakhum’s ship, the *Thunder* – and they fight together (and deal with the wounded) in the ill-considered battle of Cartagena. When Random is himself struck low with a fever, Morgan nurses him. After his fever breaks and he is sleeping comfortably, Morgan laments over his enfeebled body:

“Ay, ... he sleeps so sound, (look you) that he will never waken till the great trump plows. – Got be merciful to his soul. He has paid his debt, like an honest man. – Ay, and moreover, he is at rest from all persecutions, and troubles, and afflictions, of which, Got knows, and I know, he had his own share. – Ochree! Ochree! he was a promising youth indeed!” So saying, he groaned grievously, and began to whine in such a manner, as persuaded me he had a real friendship for me. (193)

It might be considered at least odd that Roderick needs this bedside confirmation of his mate's affection. Odder still is his decision to counterfeit death so that he can have an even more extensive display of Morgan's overweening emotion:

The serjeant, alarmed at his words, came into the birth, and while he looked upon me, I smiled, and tipt him the wink; he immediately guessed my meaning, and remained silent, which confirmed Morgan in his opinion of my being dead; whereupon he approached with tears in his eyes, in order to indulge his grief with a sight of the object: And I counterfeited death so well, by fixing my eyes, and dropping my under-jaw, that he said, "There he lies, no petter than a lump of clay, Got help me." And observed by the distortion of my face, that I must have had a strong struggle. I should not have been able to contain myself much longer, when he began to perform the last duty of a friend, in closing my eyes and my mouth; upon which, I suddenly snapped at his fingers, and discomposed him so much, that he started back, turned pale as ashes, and stared like the picture of horror! (193)

This amusing scene, which emerges as a tantalizing reminder of elegiac moments of loss, challenges the reader in various ways. What kind of joke is it to pretend to be dead in order to shake up the emotions of a friend? Because he has been so convincing as a corpse, Morgan must reach out to touch him in a deeply felt and intensely intimate way. Roderick uses that moment to snap at Morgan's fingers, a gesture which turns the kindness of deep friendship into a kind of proto-Gothic horror. What better way to represent the workings of homophobia in the text. Intimate gestures become sites of horror, and male–male intimacy, however deeply felt, is also the source of blood-curdling distress.

As if to italicize these observations and mark them out in bold, Roderick's infamous reunion with his father, near the end of the novel, becomes an orgy of male–male affection that seems more intense than any other relationship presented in the novel. In discussing this scene, or series of scenes, McFarlane says that "this conclusion – meant, I would maintain, to be read in opposition to the Strutwell episode – represents the achievement of the homosocial ideal, a pure bond between men, cleansed of the 'sordid and vicious disposition' that characterized other relationships in the novel." But McFarlane cannot help but add that "the comparison between the scenes can move in both directions, and this ecstasy of homosocial bonding contains within it the suggestion of an evasive fulfillment of the more libidinal bonding denounced earlier in the novel."<sup>16</sup> I agree,

<sup>16</sup> McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*, 143.

but would go even further to say that the scenes with Don Rodriguez that later dissolve in the tears of familial recognition are meant even more vividly to resolve the novel's earlier tensions around sodomy and to offer a transformed quasi-sodomitical model of male love and affection.

Roderick meets Don Rodriguez when he has, because of involvement with the slave trade, landed in Rio de la Plata, to unload a cargo of African slaves and prepare to return across the Atlantic. He enjoys Don Rodriguez, the English gentleman he meets there, and finds himself deeply attracted to his commanding presence:

He was a tall man, remarkably well-shaped, of a fine mien and appearance commanding respect, and seemed to be turned of forty; the features of his face were saddened with a reserve and gravity ... Understanding from Don Antonio, that we were his countrymen, he saluted us all round very complaisantly, and fixing his eyes attentively on me, uttered a deep sigh. – I had been struck with a profound veneration for him at his first coming into the room; and no sooner observed this expression of his sorrow, directed, as it were, in a particular manner to me, than my heart took part in his grief, I sympathized involuntarily, and sighed in my turn. (411)

This initial encounter is suggestive of an attraction between the two men, and given the context of this moment of male–male intimacy, any reader might connect it to the encounter with Strutwell from some fifteen chapters before. Here, however, the male–male attraction is safely placed in the configuration of father–son love. But like other domestic love that is represented in novels by women in the later part of the eighteenth century – love between sisters, and between mothers and daughters – this love is vividly eroticized, both to fill out the domestic space with the erotic, with which it can at times be rife, and to explain the ways in which erotic relationships are ideally modeled on these family relationships themselves.<sup>17</sup> Here is an example of father–son love performing the same function. After frustrating and unfulfilling male encounters, Roderick falls into the arms of his father as if he were the lover he has been looking for all along.

The moment of recognition is intense: “O bounteous heaven! (exclaimed Don Rodriguez, springing across the table, and clasping me in his arms) my son! my son! have I found thee again? do I hold thee in my embrace, after having lost and despaired of seeing thee, so long?”

(H)e kneeled upon the floor, lifted up his eyes and hands to heaven, and remained some minutes in a silent extasy of devotion: I put myself in the

<sup>17</sup> See George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998), for countless examples of this kind of relationship.

same posture, adored the all-good Disposer in a prayer of mental thanksgiving; and when his ejaculation was ended, did homage to my father, and craved his parental blessing. He hugged me again with unutterable fondness, and having implored the protection of heaven upon my head, raised me from the ground, and presented me as his son to the company, who wept in concert over this affecting scene ... "Dear son, I am transported with unspeakable joy! – This day is a jubilee – my friends and servants shall share my satisfaction." (413)

Critics are right to say that there is no more intense personal encounter in the novel, but then how could there be? As McFarlane points out, "Unutterable. Unspeakable. Unnamable? Manly passion in this scene finds its (non)articulation in the same terms regularly applied to the sodomite; the ideal and the transgressive collapse into similar representational structures."<sup>18</sup> What this collapse means – what the representational similarity insists upon – is the recognition of the erotics of the father–son relationship. Why should not this male–male intensity remind the reader of the potentially sodomitical encounters? Smollett has offered those scenes in order to make this encounter even more affecting. Love between men is possible, Smollett seems to say, as long as it is contained in these familiar structures. Roderick has been looking for a father all along – he has been trying to seduce various older men who might be able to support and sustain him – and in Don Rodriguez he finds the perfect father at last. Here is the generous older gentleman who will turn his life around, make him wealthy, and give him the chance he has always seemed, at least to himself, to deserve.

*The Adventures of Roderick Random* is an astonishing novel from this perspective. A "robust adventure story," as it is sometimes called, it puts male–male relations at the center of the world it describes.<sup>19</sup> Some relationships are predatory and therefore off-putting, but the closest relationships between men can only be expressed in erotic terms. This means that the friendships between Roderick and Strap or Morgan constantly slip into intense physicality, and his relation with his father is almost indistinguishable from a bond like that which Strutwell is proposing. Early in the century and in the later seventeenth century, loving relations between men were often represented in these terms.<sup>20</sup> Smollett has revived this tradition even as he tries to cordon

<sup>18</sup> See McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire*, 143.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Jerry Phillips, "Narrative, Adventure, and Schizophrenia: From Smollett's *Roderick Random* to Melville's *Omoo*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 25.2 (1995): 177–201.

<sup>20</sup> Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 23–43.

off actual sodomitical desire. But that cannot work. Love is love, and the love he represents in the scenes I have outlined cannot be distinguished from any other kind of male–male love. They invest each other with significance, as Smollett’s novel suggests, with the result that male relations are given an intensity that they rarely have in other fiction of the period. Smollett’s fear of giving in to male desire – his almost startling homophobia – means that he only gives in to it more intensely than ever. That is what makes *Roderick Random*’s world of masculine desire so truly robust.

We might return to Halperin at this stage and ask what kind of inquiry “into the construction of sexual identities before the emergence of sexual orientations” this has been;<sup>21</sup> then we could say that we have two different examples that offer very different angles on what would some 150 years later be called homosexuality. In the first place, we have the extravagantly effeminate Captain Whiffle, with his clothes, his neuroses, and his private surgeon. Even Roderick mocks him and labels him, suggesting that he is “maintaining a correspondence with his surgeon, not fit to be named” (199). In accordance with Halperin’s notion of sexual morphology, that is, this effeminate type is demarcated and classed as clearly as Smollett dare in a fiction such as this. Second, there is Strutwell, with his apology for same-sex love: later he would have been recognized by sexologists and defined in ways that Smollett’s phobic presentation only begins to hint at. Beyond these two clear markers of sexual identity, there are countless other male–male relations that Smollett cannot help but color with the language of emotion, physicality, and same-sex passion. In other words, the Whiffle and Strutwell passages create a context in which all male relations can seem dangerously intimate. It almost seems that it is in that danger that their intensity lies. But that is the fascinating story about masculinity that Smollett has to tell.

### Adultery and Friendship in *Amelia*

Henry Fielding’s last novel, *Amelia* (1751) is a deeply personal and reflective, if not to say valedictory, novel. Written when Fielding was wracked with ill-health and pressured by the demands of his position as local magistrate, it has neither the delight of discovery that is to be found in *Joseph Andrews* nor the comic majesty of *Tom Jones*. For some, it is badly written and overly sentimental.<sup>22</sup> What it offers in place of Fielding’s earlier

<sup>21</sup> Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Sabor, “*Amelia*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding*, ed. Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 94–108.



achievement, however, is a deeply felt account of the complexities of contemporary life and the burdens to be borne by a young married couple of limited means. While in his earlier novels, topics like friendship or marriage might have been discussed or even represented, in *Amelia*, the terms of representation are more serious and the concepts themselves are subjected to the exigencies of the lived experience of the author. *Amelia* offers a new way of understanding Fielding and a useful perspective from which to view his earlier work.<sup>23</sup>

Friendship in *Amelia* is often celebrated, but it is also shown to be less than ideal. For one thing, it is almost always measured in mercenary terms: a friend is considered more or less stalwart according to how much money he can lend. This happens so often in the novel as to seem like a solid tenet. For another, male friendship almost always founders because of rivalry over a woman. In her description of “homosocial” relationships in English literature, Sedgwick talks about such rivalries: male bonds are charged with emotion, even if that emotion emerges from such negative forces as jealousy or hatred.<sup>24</sup> *Amelia* gives us several examples of friendship that founders on erotic rivalry. But then it almost seems that the erotic rivalry becomes an end in itself: its own kind of emotional bond. Even when Booth and James recognize the bitter rivalry between them, they still, almost inexplicably, remain friends.

Marriage too, although central to Fielding’s plan here, never shows itself to be the flawless and consoling structure he sometimes describes. Marriage offers a spectacle of debility for Fielding’s hero: Captain Booth rarely has enough money to support his wife and growing family; he squanders what little money he has through silly investments or loses it in gambling; he has sex outside of marriage and puts his wife Amelia in one untenable situation after another; and he is jealous to a fault. There are innumerable pressures and tensions associated with keeping food on the table for a growing family – Amelia herself is seen preparing meals more than once – and at times it seems that no family so constituted can ever survive in a world that undermines marriage in all its basic assumptions about masculinity and power. Despite all these gargantuan pressures and overwhelming tensions, however, marriage emerges intact in *Amelia*. Often labeled a weak character or even a caricature of Fielding’s first wife, Amelia emerges as the one character who understands what it means to hold a marriage together in the middle years of the eighteenth century. In *Amelia*, then,

<sup>23</sup> For an account of the reception and publication history of *Amelia*, see Sabor, “*Amelia*.”

<sup>24</sup> Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 20–1.

Fielding is trying to show that friendship and marriage are flawed and self-defeating in variously frustrating ways. But Fielding also finds a way of taking strength from the very structures he deconstructs in this way.

Marriage as an ideal is undermined in the novel's earliest scenes. While incarcerated in Newgate, Booth meets the charming Miss Mathews, another prisoner, who tells him the long saga of her family life and unhappy love affair. This account culminates in her stabbing her unfaithful lover with a penknife. Booth is sympathetic and soothing to the teller of this sad tale, and before long it seems that they are becoming almost too intimate. After telling his own long story of his life with Amelia, Booth tries to articulate an ideal of married life, which Miss Mathews can only mock with worldly disdain as "the dullest of all Ideas":

"I know," said he, "it must appear dull in Description; for who can describe the Pleasures which the Morning Air gives to one in perfect Health; the Flow of Spirits which springs up from Exercise; the Delights which Parents feel from the Prattle, and innocent Follies of their Children; the Joy with which the tender Smile of a Wife inspires a husband; or lastly, the cheerful, solid Comfort which a fond Couple enjoy in each other's Conversation. – All these Pleasures, and every other of which our situation was capable, we tasted in the highest Degree." (147)<sup>25</sup>

This is a beautiful description of a happy marriage; indeed it expresses the ideal of married life rather than any specific lived experience. No sooner has Booth articulated this ideal than he is undermining it: exchanging expressive and increasingly sexually charged looks with his interlocutor; and as Fielding's narrator draws the curtain, he does so with something close to embarrassment, making it clear that if the prison governor has left these two to their own devices, "we will lock up likewise a Scene which we do not think proper to expose to the Eyes of the Public" (153).

The "criminal Conversation" (154), which this scene introduces, gives way to repentance and melancholy for Booth, and jealousy for Miss Mathews, who is exonerated when it turns out her paramour has not died. She receives her discharge and decides to take Booth along with her. But just at this moment Amelia arrives in the prison: "a faint Voice was heard to cry out hastily, 'where is he?' – and presently a female Spectre, all pale and breathless, rushed into the Room, and fell into Mr. *Booth's* Arms, where she immediately fainted away" (159). Fielding puts his hero in the awkward position of holding his loving wife in his arms as his mistress stares at them

<sup>25</sup> Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983 [1753]); all parenthetical references are to this edition.

with anger in her eyes. The women react to each other with coolness, and the narrator wonders why Miss Mathews would be cool to Amelia when she has designs on her husband, but “there is,” he says, “something so outrageously suspicious in the Nature of all Vice, especially when joined with any great Degree of Pride, that the Eyes of those whom we imagine privy to our Failings, are intolerable to us, and we are apt to aggravate their Opinion to our Disadvantage far beyond the Reality” (161). Whatever else is true, however, is this fact of adultery that Fielding has forced on us before giving us the tender scene of Booth and Amelia together. He almost insists, that is, that we see this threat to their marriage first, and only understand the bond with the proviso of this lack of faith.

The topic of adultery is thus established before the wheels of the plot have even started to turn. Indeed, the very basis of action and reaction in the early phases of the novel can be traced to Booth’s early transgression. Not only does he seem nervous and distracted around Amelia and his children when they are again together in their London lodging, but he also finds himself monitoring the mail, worrying about visitors, lying, and in many ways undermining his so-called happy marriage. Fielding makes it clear that adultery, or rather the guilt over adultery that the hero feels, comes close to poisoning his marriage. Booth finds himself having to lie to Amelia when a letter from Miss Mathews arrives, and even in the ease with which he deceives his wife, Booth feels the sting of deception:

*Booth* was overjoyed at this Escape which poor *Amelia’s* total Want of Jealousy and Suspicion, made it very easy for him to accomplish: but his Pleasure was considerably abated, when upon opening the Letter, he found it to contain, mixed with several strong Expressions of Love, some pretty warm ones of the upbraiding Kind ... She had already sent Chairman to his Lodgings, with a positive Command not to return without an Answer to her Letter. This might itself have possibly occasioned a Discovery; and he thought he had great Reason to fear, if she did not carry Matters so far as purposely and avowedly to reveal the Secret to *Amelia*, her indiscretion would at least effect the Discovery of that which he would at any Price have concealed. Under these Terrours he might, I believe, be considered the most wretched of human Beings. (171)

It is almost as if the ease of deception makes the fear of exposure even worse. This careful delineation of Booth’s response in situations like these gives the novel a compelling sense of the consequences of deception in marriage. Fielding is not content to leave this to the reader’s imagination, for he proceeds immediately to say:

O Innocence, how glorious and happy a Portion art thou to the Breast that possesses thee! Thou fearest neither the Eyes nor the Tongues of

Men. Truth, the most powerful of all things, is thy strongest Friend; and the brighter, the Light in which thou are displayed, the more it discovers thy transcendent Beauties. Guilt, on the contrary, like a base Thief, suspects every eye that beholds him to be privy to his Transgression, and every Tongue that mentions his Name, to be proclaiming them. Fraud and Falsehood are his weak and treacherous Allies, and he lurks trembling in the Dark, dreading every Ray of Light, lest it should discover him, and give him up to Shame and Punishment. (171–2)

What a remarkable apostrophe this is. Fielding almost seems to be speaking through his narrator here in order to make a point about guilt and deception that he has experienced first-hand. This signals the special quality of this novel as personal or valedictory: Fielding is working out complex feelings about the experience of marriage and the complexities of deception and self-contempt within that ultimately sustaining bond. If the narrative voice seems strained at this moment, that may be because the narrator gives way to the author here, as he reflects on the reality of lived experience and the pain of remembrance.

Later, in hopes of disburdening himself to his friend Colonel James, Booth meets this friend and tells him the trouble he has had with Miss Mathews:

After some little Conversation, *Booth* said, “my dear Colonel, I am sure I must be the most insensible of Men, if I did not look on you as the best and truest Friend: I will therefore without Scruple repose a Confidence in you of the highest Kind. I have often made you privy to my Necessities, I will now acquaint you with my Shame.” (172)

Booth then acquaints this friend with his embarrassment with Miss Mathews and asks his assistance in dealing with that woman. James responds agreeably enough – “Well ... and whatever Light I may appear to you in, if you are really tired of the Lady, and if she be really what you have represented her, I’ll endeavour to take her off your Hands” (173) – but no sooner does James go off to accommodate his friend than Booth hears from Miss Mathews that James was the very rival she had told Booth about in prison. That, along with other things like his “forgetting” to return Booth thirty pounds he has borrowed and his making Amelia immediately uncomfortable, makes it clear that this friendship is anything but “the best and truest” as Booth has described it.

Again then Fielding has articulated an ideal only to undermine it. It is almost as if he is insisting that all ideals – marriage, friendship, honor – need

to be exposed as false, even as he shows that all attempts at honesty are doomed to failure. Fielding puts it this way:

To say the Truth, there are Jilts in Friendship as well as in Love; and by the Behaviour of some Men in Both, one might imagine that they industriously sought to gain the Affections of others, with a View to making the Parties miserable.

This was the Consequence of the Colonel's Behaviour to *Booth*. Former calamities had afflicted him; but this almost distracted him; and the more so, as he was not able well to account for such Conduct, nor to conceive the Reason for it. (174)

Booth's very sense of values is challenged here. He treasures friendship, but he finds that his friend is fickle and hard to understand. The reader knows that this situation results from Colonel James' own attraction to Amelia, but it takes a long time before Booth understands this fully.

If it seems as if no one is the person he seems to be and everyone wears a mask of some kind or other, then that might be why the most iconic scene in this novel is the scene at the masquerade. The masquerade, indeed, hangs over the entire novel as a threat of deception and duplicity. So few characters are exactly what they seem – so many disguise behaviors in order to mislead, misinform, or even seduce – that the masquerade takes on added complexity.

Critics have often noted that it is the figure of the masquerade that represents metonymically everything that Fielding thinks is wrong about contemporary culture, and this includes friendship and marriage as well. Linda Bree writes, for instance:

The centerpiece of *Tom Jones* had been at the inn at Upton, a location embodying temporariness and transition, arrivals and departures, where most of the main characters came together, misunderstood each other, and separated again. It is hugely significant that the equivalent scene in *Amelia* takes place at the much less neutral, much more duplicitous, location of a masquerade.<sup>26</sup>

The masquerade, revealing what Bree calls the heart of “deception” in the novel, offers an opportunity, she says, for “genteel men and women to throw off the ceremonies and formalities of their society and act in transgressive ways.”<sup>27</sup> For the novelist, moreover, it offers the chance to show how friendship and marriage function under extraordinary duress. The masquerade is at first threatened when Amelia's (false) friend Mrs.

<sup>26</sup> Linda Bree, “Introduction,” in *Amelia* (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview Press, 2010), 9–30 (15).

<sup>27</sup> Bree, “Introduction,” 15.

Ellison offers tickets to the Masquerade at Ranelagh, which are “a present from My Lord to us” (247). Booth suspects the intentions of the so-called Noble Lord, and he insists that Amelia not accept these tickets. When Mrs. Bennet hears of this offer, she tells Amelia a long and horrifying tale of her own entrapment by the same Mrs. Ellison and the Noble Lord. The masquerade can therefore be seen to function as a snare for unaware young women, married or unmarried, and it becomes almost immediately clear that Amelia is the intended victim of just such a scheme. She has been made aware of the ways in which the traps inherent in the masquerade can destroy a woman and ruin her marriage.<sup>28</sup>

Amelia’s integrity is continuously under attack. If the Noble Lord befriends her and offers trinkets to her children, warming her heart but placing her in more danger than she realizes, then Amelia has to learn that even kindness can be barbed. Later, though, when Colonel James, her husband’s dear friend, has been over-friendly and attempts everything in his power to bring Amelia under his control, Booth remains ignorant of his designs. He even tries to get Booth a posting abroad so that he can offer to bring Amelia and her children to reside with him and his increasingly dishonest wife. Finally he presses two tickets to the masquerade onto Booth. When he does so, Amelia recognizes that she is in real danger. She dare not let on about James’ assiduities to her husband because she fears a duel will bring him harm. As Amelia gets an ever-clearer sense of Colonel James’ designs, she turns to their good friend Dr. Harrison to seek advice:

*Amelia* now informed her Friend of all she knew, all she had seen and heard, and all that she suspected of the Colonel. The good Man seemed greatly shocked at the Relation, and remained in a silent Astonishment. – Upon which, *Amelia* said, “Is Villiany so rare a Thing, Sir, that it should so much surprize you?” “No, Child,” cries he, “but I am shocked at seeing it so artfully disguised under the Appearance of so much Virtue ... O Nature, Nature, why are thou so dishonest, as ever to send Men with these false Recommendations into the *World*.”

“Indeed, my dear Sir, I begin to grow entirely sick of it,” cries *Amelia*. “For sure all Mankind almost are Villains in their Hearts.” (374)

Amelia’s exclamation puts succinctly what the novel seems to be arguing at this point. Dr. Harrison offers a powerful corrective – “The Nature of Man is far from being in itself Evil” – but that does not really offer her consolation. He goes on to rail against adultery and argue: “the Community in

<sup>28</sup> Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), see esp. 219–22.

general treat this monstrous Crime as Matter of Jest” (374–5). What here seems an expostulation to help Amelia in her distress, very soon becomes a formal sermon on the topic, which is read at the masquerade.

Because Amelia has already caught on to James’ ploys, and because she fears to tell her husband about his attempts at seduction, when James offers Booth and Amelia masquerade tickets, she realizes the trap and asks Dr. Harrison what to do. He offers his own objections: “I do not like the Diversion itself, as I have heard it described to me: Not that I am such a Prude to suspect every Woman who goes there of any evil Intentions; but it is a Pleasure of too loose and disorderly a Kind for the Recreation of a sober Mind” (406).

Mrs. Atkinson (the former Mrs. Bennet) offers to help Amelia make a plan, and as they take matters into their own hands, the doctor wishes them well. Then, unknown to the reader, Amelia switches places with Mrs. Atkinson, who attends the masquerade in her place. Afterward Amelia reassures her husband who thinks he has seen her in her mask conversing with the noble lord, and Mrs. Atkinson admits that in her disguise as Amelia, she has even procured some advancement for her husband. In this way, both women have defeated the power that the masquerade has held over them.

What is even more remarkable about the masquerade, however, is the public reading of a pointed sermon on adultery that entertains a gang of young bucks at the masquerade itself. The sermon, meant it seems for the ears of Colonel James, has been penned by none other than Booth’s and Amelia’s dear friend Dr. Harrison, who hovers as a force of beneficence over most of the novel. The adultery sermon stands out as an anomaly in eighteenth-century fiction, and for that reason, it is worth considering more closely.

The adultery sermon addresses topics of friendship and marriage from another perspective: it points out the deficiencies of friendship and the ways in which it undermines the very meaning of marriage. Dr. Harrison begins by reminding his listeners of the punishments promised in scripture, but then he goes on to detail the outline of the sin itself:

And for what will you submit yourself to this Punishment? Or for what Reward will you inflict all this Misery on another? I will add on your Friend? For the Possession of a Woman, for the Pleasure of a Moment? But if neither Virtue nor Religion can restrain your inordinate Appetites, are there not many Women as handsome as your Friend’s Wife, whom, though not with Innocence, you may possess with much less Degree of Guilt? What Motive can thus hurry you on to the Destruction of yourself and your Friend? (415)

By posing the question in this way, Dr. Harrison articulates one of the main concerns of the novel: friendship fails whenever sexual desire for a woman intervenes. Adultery seems to be more concerned with friendship than it does with a woman and her reputation. The rivalry of friends is central to this notion of adultery, as if it were something one friend does to another.<sup>29</sup> This makes the transgression central to all the most deeply held values of the novel: friendship and marriage, to be sure, and their place in the nets of social relation that offer a struggling couple like Booth and Amelia something like hope.

This tension between friends happens twice in the novel, first when it turns out that Miss Mathews, the woman with whom Booth had a brief affair while in prison, much to his later chagrin, is also the object of Colonel James' long-standing desire. This means that when Booth tries, by confiding in James, to shirk off the responsibility he feels toward Miss Mathews, the senior officer is only too happy to take this woman off his hands. Whatever generosity James shows to Booth – and as I mentioned above, this novel most often evaluates friendship by the willingness with which funds are exchanged – is therefore always already tempered by sexual jealousy and a sense of libertine rivalry.

While Booth might seem above such rivalry in certain ways, Amelia knows that he would fight a duel with James if he were ever to discover the truth. And when, later in the novel, James actually sends Booth a challenge, Amelia intercepts it. What ensues is one of her darkest moments:

It is not easy to describe the Agitation of *Amelia's* Mind when she read this Letter. She threw herself into her Chair, turned pale as Death, began to tremble all over, and had just Power enough to tap the Bottle of Wine, which she hitherto preserved entire for her Husband, and to drink off a large Bumper. (490)

Her panic here is all for the danger Booth is in. James' letter was challenging him because he spent an evening with Miss Mathews, but Amelia ignores this transgression because it pales next to the mortal threat of a duel. Later she reads Booth's letter to her, in which he confesses his marital transgression and laments that he is in the bailiff's house once more. This calms her slightly, and she passes a "miserable and sleepless Night" (493).

<sup>29</sup> Adam Potkay makes an important distinction between religious feeling in the novel and the power of "necessity" that Fielding struggles with in the novel. See "Liberty and Necessity in Fielding's *Amelia*," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 6–7 (2009): 335–58. See also Amy Wolf, "Bernard Mandeville, Henry Fielding's *Amelia*, and the Necessities of Plot," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 6–7 (2009): 73–102.



Amelia understands the power of this masculine rivalry, and she also understands that it can destroy her marriage if she does not take care.

Booth thinks of James as a friend who can sustain him in any adversity. The language of celebration of this kind of friendship is almost overbearing. When James visits him in the sponging house, for instance, we are given this poetic account:

The unexpected Visit of a beloved Friend to a Man in Affliction, especially in Mr. *Booth's* Situation, is a Comfort which can scarce be equaled; not barely from the Hopes of Relief, or Redress, by his Assistance; but, as it is an Evidence of sincere Friendship, which scarce admits of any Doubt or Suspicion. Such an Instance doth, indeed, make a Man amends for all ordinary Troubles and Distresses; and we ought to think ourselves Gainers, by having had such an Opportunity of discovering, that we are possessed of one of the most valuable of all human Possessions. (330)

All the excessive language here, when the reader is already suspecting James' hypocrisy, points to how far short of any ideal actual friendship usually falls. Even as he articulates these values, moreover, the narrator does not seem able to resist exposing James, to the reader if not to Booth:

In Truth, the Colonel, tho' a very generous Man, had not the least Grain of Tenderness in his Disposition. His Mind was formed of those firm Materials, of which Nature formerly hammered out the Stoic, and upon which the Sorrows of no Man living could make an Impression. A Man of this Temper, who doth not much value Danger, will fight for the Person he calls his Friend; and the man that hath but little Value for his Money will give it him; but such Friendship is never to be absolutely depended on: For whenever the favourite Passion interposes with it, it is sure to subside and vanish into Air. (331)

If what the narrator calls "the favourite Passion," in this case sexual intrigue, can cause all the value of friendship "to subside and vanish into Air," then a mind like James' is not really suitable to the nourishment of the kind of friendship that Fielding has articulated. The closest thing in the novel to a friend, as classically defined, James turns out to be a perverse and double-dealing enemy rather than anyone we would want to label "friend." In her wonderful book about Fielding, Jill Campbell notes the tension between two sets of values in the novel. For Campbell, Booth is often "paralyzed or isolated by a conflict between Christian ideals and the Cavalier or military code" and more modern and forward-looking versions of masculinity.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Jill Campbell, *Natural Masques: Gender and Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 215.

This seems right to me, and by devoting himself to the friend who turns out to be false, Booth is trying to uphold values that are utterly outmoded.

We can see how outmoded they are by attending briefly to another friend: Colonel Bath. Bath is rendered ridiculous by the degree to which he is ready to rush into a duel for the sake of his "Honour." No friend is safe from the occasional ire of this fire-breather, who is at other times as sweet and charming as any friend could be. "The Man of Honour wears the Law by his Side" (354), Bath tells Dr. Harrison when the older man is trying to argue the speciousness of arguments in favor of dueling. Bath is not persuaded, and he leaves the novel bristling with irritation that shortly brings about his demise: "killed in a Duel" as the narrator announces (531). The older Cavalier values that Campbell mentions are mocked in the figure of Bath, and with James, equivalent libertine codes of sexual license are also questioned.

Male friendship is hampered by a conflict of codes and libidos in this way. Booth's friends are victims of these competing allegiances, but then so is Booth. He is as given to sexual jealousy as any other character in the novel, and he finds himself hounded by a sense of honor and what it demands of him in one situation after another. If friendship is only rivalry, as it often seems here, and male relations can only lead to conflict, however emotionally intense, then what hope is there for a culture that is structured around the flexibility of male relations?

Fielding considers a similar interplay between friendship and marriage in his play *The Modern Husband*, which was produced in 1730. As Martin Battestin notes in his biography of Fielding, "In *The Modern Husband*, Fielding risked a new kind of drama that ... dares even to be 'serious,' taking as its subject something intrinsically detestable, '*Modern Vice*,' and representing the Town 'vicious as it is.'" Battestin goes on to say, "Fielding was something of a rake in his youth: but he always regarded the institution of marriage as inviolable ... and adultery was so far from being with him the comical game of intrigue Restoration wits and modern gallants had made it, that in the period of his magistracy he openly deplored the lack of laws for punishing adulterers."<sup>31</sup> Adultery is the only lethal challenge to a married couple: other adversities can be overcome, but adultery gnaws at a marriage from within. This is what Fielding seems to argue in *The Modern Husband*, and he revisits the topic here with even more emotional delicacy.

<sup>31</sup> Martin C. Battestin, with Ruthe E. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 129.

Fielding offers two clear models of true friendship. Dr. Harrison stands out as a friend: the honorable older man supports Booth and Amelia and does his best to make their path easy. He challenges Booth when it seems he is going astray and he helps them discover the deceit that leads to the happy ending.

Sergeant Atkinson can also function as a friend, devoted as he is and as ready with his purse: when he can least afford to spare any cash he hands considerable amounts over to Booth. But Booth also treats him as little more than a servant, as Campbell reminds us. For her, “Assumptions about class and assumptions about the relative importance of homosocial and heterosexual bonds both influence Booth’s understanding of Atkinson, whose actions and motivations he consistently either overlooks or mistakes” (221). Although Atkinson functions in this way, he remains a minor character whatever he does to distinguish himself as a stalwart friend and brother to the heroine.

For me, however, there is another friendship that stands out as the best and the most forward-looking relationship in the novel, and that friendship is the one between Booth himself and Amelia. Far from offering an idealized version of his first marriage, as is often suggested, Fielding uses this novel to examine the state of marriage itself; and far from sugarcoating it, he shows the stress it is under and the various ways in which it could easily fail. Unlike the relationship with James, however, that seems rooted in an idealized past, Booth’s relationship with Amelia is not only rooted in the present, but it is constantly being redefined as the novel proceeds. Campbell reminds us that with “no more means than Booth to sustain her little family economically, but from quite early in their story, [Amelia] is given a sphere of honorable activity and self-definition in the labor of caring for their home and children” and that her “function as housekeeper and mother ... provides the present economic as well as moral anchor of the Booth household” (206–7).

If Linda Bree feels that Amelia “never converts [her] rhetoric [of devotion] into any practical action to improve the family’s position,” she nevertheless asserts, rightly, I think, “the scenes between Booth and Amelia offer a convincing representation of a husband and wife, who know each other well and are still in love with each other despite the pressures of a hostile world, whether they are exchanging informal intimacies, gossipy jokes, delicate half-truths, or uncomfortable lies.”<sup>32</sup> Even more importantly, Amelia’s “practical action” works to keep the family afloat when many things that Booth does could actually destroy it. Rather than merely passive, that is, Amelia works hard to see that her marriage and her family survive.

<sup>32</sup> Bree, “Introduction,” 20, 17–18.

This “convincing representation” is in many ways the whole point of the novel.<sup>33</sup> The possibility of a mutual relationship based on respect that nourishes both members of the relationship and enables them to function together in a way that neither could function apart: this is the definition of marriage that Fielding offers, and it would be hard to find a better or more forward-looking definition of friendship. The degree that marriage is modeled on friendship in the later eighteenth century has only begun to be told.<sup>34</sup> Betty Rizzo reminds us that even so-called “companionate marriage” makes it clear that relations were askew to the point that wives felt subservient.<sup>35</sup> But what Fielding is offering is something else: something based on a model of friendship that celebrates mutual love and trust. Just to witness Booth and Amelia together is to see something that rarely appears in eighteenth-century fiction.

Some critics point out that deception creeps even into this relationship, but deception to protect is far different from the other kinds of deceptions that circulate in the novel.<sup>36</sup> When Amelia tricks Booth into thinking she has gone to the masquerade, she avoids having to admit her fears about James and involve Booth in them directly; moreover, she shows her faith in Booth in her knowledge that he will forgive and even celebrate her absence from the masquerade as he does. Booth transgresses with Miss Mathews while in prison, and Amelia both understands and forgives that behavior. She sustains the marriage, in turn, when Booth is unable to do so; and it is her inheritance that provides for them at the novel’s conclusion. Booth’s love might seem debilitating at times – as feckless as he often appears – but Amelia’s faith in him is just that: faith that he can be the husband and friend who can sustain her in the world of multiplied dangers.

“Domestic Happiness is the End of almost all our Pursuits,” Dr. Harrison says in his sermon on adultery (414), and that does seem to be the one lesson that this novel argues persuasively. Many critics have said that the novel was ahead of its time in dealing with social life as realistically as it does.<sup>37</sup> Even more important is this articulation of marriage as a kind of friendship. Fielding is an unlikely source for such an important advance in

<sup>33</sup> See George E. Haggerty, “Amelia’s Nose; or, Sensibility and Its Symptoms,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 36 (1995): 139–56.

<sup>34</sup> Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 307–23.

<sup>35</sup> Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relations Among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1994), 22–4.

<sup>36</sup> Bree, “Introduction,” 15.

<sup>37</sup> See Martin C. Battestin, “Introduction,” in *Amelia* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), xv–lxi (xxxix); and Battestin and Battestin, *Henry Fielding*, 535.

gender relations, but as one of the greatest novelists in the English literary tradition, it is suitable that he is.

### The Abyss of Friendship in *Caleb Williams*

Works in the last decade of the eighteenth century sometimes seem to challenge the friendship ideal: William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, like other Gothic novels, is teeming with violent emotions and vengeful plots, and would appear to tell a completely different story. However, if we look more closely at Godwin's 1794 novel, I think we will find that it fits crucially within the eighteenth-century tradition of erotic friendship.

*Caleb Williams* makes friendship so central to its harrowing conception of male relations that readers often miss its particular valence. Some critics, it is true, have suggested that a corrupted homosexual bond is what animates the conflict between Caleb and his patron/tormentor Mr. Falkland.<sup>38</sup> As provocative and at times persuasive as these readings are, and as seemingly true to the language of the text, they ignore the language of friendship that Godwin uses to give his account of human interaction a theoretical grounding in the romantic terminology with which he was so familiar. It may be true that homophobia was alive in the 1790s, but that does not mean that it is the first consideration in an analysis of complex emotional relationships between two men. Of course, in their own terms, by way of the friendship tradition, such bonds may be homoerotic, and excessively so. But even such intense friendships do not and cannot always give way to "homosexuality" in this era, nor are the most overtly emotional relationships necessarily more fruitfully described by using that twentieth-century terminology. Godwin makes clear in the manner in which he develops his plot, in its crisis, and in its resolution too, that friendship is what matters here.

What kind of friendship is it, though, when two characters are so long and destructively at odds that they come close to destroying each other? The enmity that Caleb and Mr. Falkland feel for each other does in fact haunt one version of "friendship" that can exist between two men. When two men are so deeply involved with each other that they uncover

<sup>38</sup> Among the most intriguing essays in this regard are: Robert Corber, "Representing the 'Unspeakable': William Godwin and the Politics of Homophobia," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990): 85–101; Alex Gold, Jr., "It's Only Love: The Politics of Passion in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 19 (1977): 135–60; see also Ranita Chatterjee and Patrick M. Horan, "Teaching the Homosocial in Godwin, Hogg, and Wilde," in *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: MLA, 2003), 127–32.

unpleasant truths that set them in opposition, they can become inseparable. These unpleasant truths are part of what determines the nature of friendship itself. As Jacques Derrida notes in *The Politics of Friendship*, “Friendship tells the truth – and this is always better left unknown. The protection of this custody guarantees the truth of friendship, its ambiguous truth, that by which friends protect themselves from the error or the illusion on which friendship is founded – more precisely, the bottomless bottom founding a friendship, which enables it to resist its own abyss.”<sup>39</sup> Godwin wants to look more closely at the “error or illusion on which friendship is founded,” and in doing so he is intent on pursuing friendship into this abyss. If Gothic fiction in general tries, in Victor Frankenstein’s words, to pursue “nature in her hiding places,” then Godwin, who might be called the godfather of *Frankenstein*, does the same with friendship.<sup>40</sup> He does not take it for granted, but he inverts it as a way of exposing its inner workings. Derrida calls this “politics,” and Godwin is certainly writing about the politics of friendship in *Caleb Williams*. Godwin brings politics into the intimacy of friendship because that is where it has always already been from the time of Plato and Aristotle, through Montaigne and onto Derrida himself.<sup>41</sup>

Adam Smith says in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.”<sup>42</sup> Friendship offers the kind of identification that makes this sympathetic response possible. It would be a mistake to think, though, that this identification is always transformative in positive ways. *Caleb Williams* makes it clear how harrowing such identification can be.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 2005), 53.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980 [1819]). Victor Frankenstein is talking about the power of the modern philosophers who inspire him: “They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places” (47); Victor later says of his own research: “I pursued nature to her hiding places” (54).

<sup>41</sup> The classic works in the friendship tradition include Plato, *Symposium*, *Lysis*, and *Phaedrus* (*Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997]); Cicero, “De Amicitia” (Cicero, *De Senectute*, *De Amicitia*, *De Divinatione*, trans. William Armistead Falconer [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923], 103–211); and Montaigne, “On Affectionate Relationships” (Michel de Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. M. A. Screech [London: Penguin, 2003], 205–19).

<sup>42</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966 [1759]), 3. See also John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 114–46.

<sup>43</sup> For Eric Daffron, the connection between the central characters is a form of “sympathy,” and he connects this emotion to a specifically British context on account of the strong anti-Jacobin sentiment

From the first moment when Caleb is taken into the service of Mr. Falkland, he finds the older man fascinating in ways he does not completely understand: “His manner was kind, attentive, and humane. His eye was full of animation; but there was a grave and sad solemnity in his air, which, for want of experience, I imagined was the inheritance of the great, and the instrument by which the distance between them and their inferiors was maintained” (1.i; 61).<sup>44</sup>

Caleb observes “every muscle and petty line of his countenance seemed to be . . . pregnant with meaning” (1.i; 61), and he hopes to bring this meaning forth, whatever the cost to himself or his patron. If he sees a “grave and sad solemnity,” it is already implied that he will look deeply into Falkland’s privacy in order to explain it. This is the nature of the attraction of friendship he feels for his patron, and of course it suggests an intense and clearly directed desire. This desire for knowledge is partly based in class distinction – Caleb might not be so interested if Falkland were not his social superior and his employer – but it is also grounded in an almost physical fascination that Falkland provides for his “inferior.” This is not exactly the same thing as sexual desire, but it is equally powerful for an impressionable young man such as Caleb. He wants to know his master as intimately as possible. He sees discomfort, and he wishes to explain it. His aim is to know this man who has befriended him in every detail of his personal complexity.

Almost immediately after this, Caleb notes the ways in which his patron’s personality seems affected by this deep “unquietness of mind”: “The distemper which afflicted him with incessant gloom had its paroxysms. Sometimes he was hasty, peevish, and tyrannical . . . Sometimes he entirely lost his self-possession, and his behaviour was changed into frenzy: he would strike his forehead, his brows became knit, his features distorted, and his teeth ground one against the other” (1.i; 63). It would almost be fair to say that Caleb is dealing with a madman, but these “paroxysms,” as they are called, are not so frequent that they make intercourse impossible, nor so intense that they keep the men from each other. Caleb says that

to which Godwin and his friends were subjected. Sympathy of course connects more immediately and obviously to eighteenth-century notions of human intercourse through heightened sensibility, which writers like Adam Smith emphasize. For me the language of friendship has almost equal power and indeed is an older tradition; but that does not mean that the language of sympathy, as Daffron describes, is not at work here as well. See Eric Daffron, “‘Magnetical Sympathy’: Strategies of Power and Resistance in Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*,” *Criticism* 37.2 (Spring 1995): 213–32.

<sup>44</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* ed. Gary Handwerk and A. A. Markley (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 2000 [1794]). References to the novel include volume and chapter, as well as page in the Broadview edition.

Mr. Falkland rushed from the room when he was particularly overcome but otherwise could control his responses. Caleb is already on alert: he suspects that the man he admires and hopes to emulate is harboring a deep unhappiness that Caleb can only guess at. But as the intimacy between the two men grows, it takes on a darker cast: Caleb insists on uncovering Falkland's deepest secrets, however private or debilitating. For his part, Falkland almost insists that his secrets are there for Caleb to find, even as he resists the process and castigates Caleb for invading his privacy.

Very early in his tenure at Mr. Falkland's estate, Caleb wanders into Mr. Falkland's chamber and hears "a deep groan, expressive of intolerable anguish." There he finds Mr. Falkland in the process of slamming shut the cover of a trunk. Only Falkland would keep his most carefully kept secrets locked up in a trunk: it is almost too grossly available as a metaphor for his world of private guilt and torment. Be that as it may, Caleb happens upon him when this trunk is open, and he pays the price when he encounters Falkland's rage:

at that moment a voice, that seemed supernaturally tremendous, exclaimed, "Who is there?" The voice was Mr. Falkland's. The sound of it thrilled my very vitals ... Mr. Falkland was just risen from the floor upon which he had been sitting or kneeling. His face betrayed strong symptoms of confusion. With a violent effort, however, these symptoms vanished, and instantaneously gave place to a countenance sparkling with rage. "Villain!" cried he, "what has brought you here?" I hesitated a confused and irresolute answer. "Wretch!" interrupted Mr. Falkland, with uncontrollable impatience, "you want to ruin me. You set yourself as a spy upon my actions; but bitterly shall you repent your insolence. Do you think you shall watch my privacies with impunity?" I attempted to defend myself. "Begone devil!" joined he. "Quit the room, or I will trample you into atoms." (1.i; 64)

Falkland wants to befriend Caleb, but he also sees their intimacy as a threat. This could be the result of Falkland's innate sense of superiority, inculcated by class difference, to be sure,<sup>45</sup> but it is also the product of the intensity of friendship: because of this very intensity, the language of friendship has been perverted into a kind of enmity. Intimacy breeds mutual suspicion, if not contempt.

Friendships between masters and servants are not unheard of – think only of Trim and Uncle Toby in *Tristram Shandy* – and there is no structural reason for Falkland and Caleb to be enemies. Derrida reminds us how deeply threatening friendship can be: he calls this the truth that is

<sup>45</sup> See Gary Handwerk, "Of Caleb's Guilt and Godwin's Truth: Ideology and Ethics in *Caleb Williams*," *ELH* 60 (1993): 939–60.



better left unknown. Mutual knowledge is as dangerous as it is wonderful for two men to share. Without trust, this knowledge can be lethal. Still, while Caleb has admitted curiosity about his patron's affairs, he has not (yet) been playing the spy or trying to catch Mr. Falkland in nefarious acts. He has no reason to imagine any. Instead, it is possible to say that Mr. Falkland has over-invested his relationship with Caleb with levels of suspicion that Caleb can only wonder about. He has projected intentions and motivations that are the products of his own guilt. The resulting threats are harrowing expressions of power – as it happens he uses the very words he repeats near the conclusion of the novel – and they leave Caleb speechless and afraid: speechless, afraid, and utterly engaged. Nothing could be more carefully calculated to draw the young man into Falkland's own power than this peremptory demand that Caleb absent himself. This very moment could be said to mark the beginning of Caleb's obsession with his master.

After this introductory chapter, Mr. Collins, Mr. Falkland's steward and a friend to Caleb, tells the elaborate account of Falkland's time in Italy; his return to the village and conflict with Barnabas Tyrrel; his friendship with Miss Melville and her death; the insults between Tyrrel and Falkland; and finally Tyrrel's death and Falkland's increasing depression: "From this time to the present Mr. Falkland has been nearly such as you at present see him ... These symptoms are uninterrupted, except at certain times when his suffering becomes intolerable, and he displays the marks of a furious insanity ... His domestics in general know nothing of him, but the uncommunicative and haughty, but mild, dejection that accompanies every thing he does" (I.xii; 174–5).<sup>46</sup>

Caleb is embarrassed by this information because he does not know how to respond. He is also embarrassed by the admiration he still feels: "I found thousand fresh reasons to admire and love Mr. Falkland" (II.i; 179). Either because of this love and admiration or in spite of it, Caleb soon begins to imagine that Mr. Falkland might have been the murderer. "It was but a passing thought, but ... I determined to place myself as a watch on my patron": "The instant I had chosen this employment for myself, I found a strange sort of pleasure in it. To do what is forbidden always has its charms ... To be a spy upon Mr. Falkland! ... The more impenetrable Mr. Falkland was determined to be, the more uncontrollable was my curiosity" (II.i; 180–1).

<sup>46</sup> Other critics have talked at length about Falkland and Tyrrel. See for instance, Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 81–97; and Tilottama Rajan, "Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel," *Studies in Romanticism* 27 (1988): 221–51; see also her "Judging Justice: Godwin's Critique of Judgment in *Caleb Williams* and Other Novels," *The Eighteenth Century* 51 (2010): 341–62.

What is this “strange sort of pleasure” but an attempt to forge an intimacy even more intense than the one Mr. Falkland has offered? Caleb courts this forbidden knowledge because he understands that it is the secret Mr. Falkland holds most dear. This attempt to probe into Mr. Falkland’s secrets backfires on Caleb, to say the least. But at the moment, he is motivated by the form of desire he calls “curiosity.” This curiosity is a desire to know Falkland’s secrets and to use them, Caleb hardly admits to himself, as a way of intensifying their bond. If, for Derrida, friends come together to keep silent about what they know they are destined to be – “dissociated, ‘solitarized,’ singularized, constituted into modadic alterities ... where, as the phenomenologist says, what is proper to the *alter ego* will never be accessible *as such*”<sup>47</sup> – then what Caleb is in the process of discovering might be seen as the harrowing difference between self and other that the concept of alter ego may for a moment disguise.<sup>48</sup> He thinks that by forcing himself closer and closer to this man he so admires, he will finally “penetrate” the forbidding exterior. As thrilling as this potential bond might be, Caleb actually finds as he pushes closer to Mr. Falkland, in order to discover his deepest secrets, he is also pushing himself so far away from his admired friend that he will never find his way back to him.<sup>49</sup>

This dynamic is almost painful in the long series of scenes in which Caleb brings up murder as a topic of discussion, and Mr. Falkland engages him in conversation and tries to instruct him in the world which he is about to enter. After Caleb has been railing against Alexander as a murderer, Mr. Falkland responds with these kindly remarks. “Recollect his heroic confidence in Philip the physician, and his entire and unalterable friendship for Ephestion”:

The way of thinking you express, Williams, is natural enough, and I cannot blame you for it. But let me hope that you will become more liberal. The death of a hundred thousand men is at first sight very shocking; but what in

<sup>47</sup> Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 54.

<sup>48</sup> Accounts of the function of Falkland and Caleb as the avatars of each other go back as far as Misao Miyoshi’s wonderful study, *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 1–45. For Miyoshi, Caleb Williams is “a voyeur with a touch of the morbid about him,” and he adds that “The two locked together in their strange drama have little to do with the rest of society, and are isolated within it” (25).

<sup>49</sup> See Miriam L. Wallace, “Duplicitous Subjects and the Tyranny of Ideology: Godwin’s *Things As They Are*; or *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Fenwick’s *Secresy* (1795),” in *Revolutionary Subjects in the English “Jacobin Novel”* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2009), 36–60. In this wonderful chapter, Wallace discusses the ways in which secrecy helps to determine subjectivity in the 1790s. “Both novels explore,” she says, “the ways in which subjects and subjectivities are made ideologically coherent: through the legal-judicial discourse, through the language of gendered sensibility, and through the lure of detection,” 38.

reality are a hundred thousand such men, more than a hundred thousand sheep? It is mind, Williams, the generation of knowledge and virtue, that we ought to love. This was the project of Alexander; he set out in a great undertaking to civilise mankind; he delivered the vast continent of Asia from the stupidity and degradation of the Persian monarchy; and, though he was cut off in the midst of his career, we may easily perceive the vast effects of his project. Grecian literature and cultivation, the Selucidæ, the Antiochuses, and the Ptolemies followed, in nations which before had been sunk to the condition of brutes. Alexander was a builder, as notoriously as the destroyer, of cities. (II.i; 185)

This celebration of Alexander is thoughtful and suggestive. Basing his appreciation, as he does, on the much-recounted friendship between Alexander and Epehestion, Falkland offers Caleb an ideal of male relations that Caleb cannot comprehend. Like Achilles and Patroclus or Antony and Dolabella, these classical friendships are commemorated as bonds that “surpass the love of women,” and as such, they act as models of male–male relations.<sup>50</sup> In other words, Falkland offers heroes of classical friendship who are willing to die for each other; and instead Caleb perverts this ideal by pushing even more aggressively at the issue of murder and responsibility. “Mr. Falkland ... gave me a penetrating look, as if he would see my very soul. His eyes were then in an instant withdrawn. I could perceive him seized with a convulsive shuddering which, though strongly counteracted, and therefore scarcely visible, had I know not what of terrible in it” (II.i; 187).

When Falkland turns this scorching look on Caleb – “as if he would see my very soul” – he mimics Caleb’s own pursuit. This is a terrible portrait of what intimacy can evoke and the terror with which personal knowledge is fraught. This is the dark underside of friendship, but it is exactly where Caleb wants to be. “Is it possible,” said I, “that Mr. Falkland, who is thus overwhelmed with a sense of the unmerited dishonour that has been fastened upon him in the face of the world, will long endure the presence of a raw and unfriended youth, who is perpetually bringing back that dishonour to his recollection, and who seems himself the most forward to entertain the accusation?” (II.ii; 188). Caleb insists on this confrontation, as if exposure were the only route to gaining intimacy with Mr. Falkland; and of course it may well be. This darkness, the dark privacy that is tantamount here to a secret crime, is the crux of the friendship ideal after all: can the

<sup>50</sup> Such friends are discussed at length in David M. Halperin’s study, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 75–87. See also Haggerty, *Men in Love*, 23–43.

friend be supported if he has done something immoral? Caleb assumes the answer to this question is yes, but Falkland knows why it has to be no.<sup>51</sup>

Whatever Caleb thinks he is doing, he certainly provokes Mr. Falkland to extreme expressions:

“How came this conversation?” cried he. “Who gave you a right to be my confidant? Base, artful wretch that you are! learn to be more respectful! Are my passions to be wound and unwound by an insolent domestic? Do you think I will be an instrument to be played on at your pleasure, till you have extorted all the treasures of my soul? Begone, and fear lest you be made to pay for the temerity you have already committed!” (II.ii; 193)

Mr. Falkland seems interested in confiding in Caleb: he seems almost to be ready to trust him with the secrets of his soul. But this intimacy quite understandably scares him, and his immediate and vitriolic put-down of Caleb is a measure of the threat that friendship always, and this friendship especially, poses. Derrida, citing Nietzsche, argues that “friendship had better preserve itself in silence, and keep silent about the truth,” and that truth is what Falkland confronts here. Falkland’s most violent expression is to put Caleb in his place as an “insolent domestic” and to insist on his social superiority.<sup>52</sup> But note that he does this only in such moments of crisis: for the most part, in these earlier sections of the novel, he almost seems ready to treat Caleb as an equal. Equality is of course key to the concept of friendship as it has evolved. Friends may not start out equal, as even Cicero attests, but equality results from their open dealing with each other.<sup>53</sup> This openness is starting to backfire here: Falkland’s rhetorical questions – “Who gave you the right to be my confidant?” “Do you think I will be an instrument to be played on at your pleasure” – remind us how fully Falkland himself has been the author of this bond that now seems to torment him.

Caleb, sensing that he has struck a nerve, cannot give up his pursuit. Almost in spite of the admiration and love he feels for Mr. Falkland, he pushes his advantage; and before too many chapters, he has laid out the story as he heard it from Mr. Collins and implicitly asks Mr. Falkland to respond. Falkland’s response is fascinating:

The scene of that night, instead of perishing, has been a source of every new calamity to me, which must flow for ever! I am then, thus miserable

<sup>51</sup> This question is asked everywhere in the classic theories of friendship; see, for instance, Cicero, “De Amicitia,” 185–9.

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 53.

<sup>53</sup> See Cicero, “De Amicitia,” 181.

and ruined, a proper subject upon which for you to exercise your ingenuity, and improve your power of tormenting? ... Misery itself has nothing worse in store for me, except what you have inflicted: the seeming to doubt of my innocence, which, after the fullest and most solemn examination has been completely established. You have forced me to this explanation. You have extorted from me a confidence which I had no inclination to make. But it is part of the misery of my situation, that I am at the mercy of every creature, however little, who feels himself inclined to sport with my distress. (II.iii; 196)

Friendship has become a scene of misery because Caleb pushes beneath the rugged surface of Falkland's "miserable and ruined" façade. Caleb's doubt is a product of the intimacy between the two men. He only "extorted a confidence" to the degree that Mr. Falkland found himself trusting him. This is the very extortion upon which friendship is based: what would friendship be if it did not extort secrets.<sup>54</sup> Here, however, it has shifted from mutual confidence into something more like forced confession. That shift is one that makes friendship a torment rather than a balm. Of course, Falkland knows the person with whom he is dealing, and he changes his tack to evoke his young protégé's guilt by emphasizing the agony of the procedure for himself: "Misery itself has nothing worse in store for me, except what you have inflicted." In this way, Falkland draws Caleb into the emotional stress of his position, and in a sense, he insists that Caleb share in his misery. This becomes clearer in the string of questions and responses with which Caleb follows this speech.

Caleb first offers to quit Falkland's service: "Let me go and hide myself where I will never see you more." Falkland takes this almost as an insult: "But you cannot bear to live with such a miserable wretch as I am!" The conversation then ventures into a zone that must be recognized as a moment of extreme passion:

"Oh, sir! do not talk to me thus! Do with me anything that you will. Kill me if you please."

"Kill you!" (Volumes could not describe the emotions with which this echo of my words was given and received.)

"Sir, I could die to serve you! I love you more than I can express. I worship you as a being of superior nature. I am foolish, raw, inexperienced, – worse than any of these – but never did a thought of disloyalty to your service enter into my heart." (II.iii; 196–7)

The intensity of the love that is expressed here – Caleb is not merely willing to die but ready to be killed by Falkland – is the love that resides

<sup>54</sup> Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 62.

in the most celebrated male friendships. Caleb's praise of his master and the resulting self-abnegation bind him in a relationship that is more than he could ever have hoped for. Friendship calls for adoration, in this way, and silence about the doubts and fears of "dishonour." Derrida reminds us of the "Lie, mask, dissimulation, [which] the simulacrum [of friendship] bestows ... The sage, for friendship's sake ... takes on the disguise of a fool, and, for friendship's sake, disguises friendship in enmity." And he goes on to explain that if "the sage presents himself as an enemy in order to conceal his enmity. He shows his hostility so as not to hurt with his wickedness."<sup>55</sup> What we see here is a performance similarly positioned in and around enmity. When Caleb says, seemingly in self-contempt, "Oh, sir! do not talk to me thus! Do with me anything that you will, Kill me if you please," he is challenging Mr. Falkland with the suspicion of murder, and Mr. Falkland responds appropriately. But his demands that Caleb not leave his service are also a threat. These men are locked into a dance of respect and mutual admiration, which masks and holds in check their need and desire to destroy each other in the intensity of their love. "Sir, I could die to serve you!" Caleb does not realize how powerfully prophetic these words actually are.

Instead he finds himself recommitting himself to his master in a fit of rapture:

Here our conversation ended; and the impression it made on my youthful mind it is impossible to describe. I thought with astonishment, *even with rapture*, of the attention and kindness towards me I discovered in Mr. Falkland, through all the roughness of his manner. *I could never enough wonder at finding myself, humble as I was by my birth, obscure as I had hitherto been, thus suddenly become of so much importance to the happiness of one of the most enlightened and accomplished men in England.* But this consciousness attached me to my patron more eagerly than ever, and made me swear a thousand times, as I meditated upon my situation, that I would never prove unworthy of so generous a protector. (11.iii; 197; italics mine)

Caleb's raptures are a measure of his own transformation and how important he thinks he has become to the happiness of his patron. He hugs himself with the delusion that Falkland depends upon him. What he does not recognize is how deeply his own interior life is dependent on his master.

At the same time, these protests of devotion mask Caleb's unremitting attempts to expose Mr. Falkland at his most vulnerable, and hardly has the next chapter begun when he says: "It is not unaccountable that, in the

<sup>55</sup> Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 60.

midst of all my increased veneration for my patron, the first tumult of my emotion was scarcely subsided, before the old question that had excited my conjectures recurred to my mind, Was he the murderer? It was a kind of fatal impulse, that seemed destined to hurry me to my destruction" (II. iv; 198). The "fatal impulse" seems to emerge directly from the raptures of devotion. Could they be connected? I would say, yes: Caleb's devotion – "the first tumult of ... emotion" – brings with it this desire to know Falkland to the depths of his soul. This is an instinctual impulse in friendship, the abyss that true friendship can always mask. Caleb and Falkland turn trust inside out, and as a result, friendship becomes a form of torment to them both.

Such torment becomes clear as Falkland starts slipping into a form of insanity. He disappears for long stretches, and as Caleb remarks, "It was by an obstinate fatality that, whenever I saw Mr. Falkland in these deplorable situations, and particularly when I lighted on him after having sought him among the rocks and precipices, pale, emaciated, solitary, and haggard, the suggestion would continually recur to me, in spite of inclination, in spite of persuasion, in spite of evidence, Surely this man is a murderer!" (II.iv; 202).

When shortly after this, there is a fire in Mr. Falkland's home, Caleb finds that by some "mysterious fatality" (II.vi; 210), his steps lead him to Mr. Falkland's room beyond the library, where he had seen Falkland closing a trunk in the first chapter. Now alone in this room, while everyone is running around to deal with the fire, Caleb finds himself confronting the trunk once more: "My mind was already raised to its utmost pitch. In a window-seat of the room lay a number of chisels and other carpenter's tools. I know not what infatuation instantaneously seized me. The idea was too powerful to be resisted. I forgot the business on which I came, the employment of the servants, and the urgency of the general danger" (II.vi; 210). Caleb calls his impulse an infatuation, and in a sense that is exactly what compels him to probe into the secrets of Mr. Falkland. It is not the truth itself but rather the discovery of the truth that motivates Caleb.

Caleb does not even manage to lift the lid and examine the contents before he is interrupted by Mr. Falkland, who has entered the chamber and confronts Caleb now:

I was in the act of lifting up the lid, when Mr. Falkland entered, breathless, distracted in his looks! He had been brought home from a considerable distance by the sight of the flames. At the moment of his appearance the lid dropped down from my hand. He no sooner saw me than his eyes emitted sparks of rage. He ran with eagerness to a brace of loaded pistols

which hung in the room, and, seizing one, presented it to my head. I saw his design, and sprang to avoid it; but, with the same rapidity with which he had formed his resolution, he changed it, and instantly went to the window, and flung the pistol into the court below. He bade me begone with his usual irresistible energy; and overcame as I was already by the horror of the detection, I eagerly complied. (II.vi; 211)

The thrill of confrontation here – the culmination of all the indirection and insinuation of this section of the narrative – is almost a relief after all the subterfuge, and Caleb reacts so quickly that he almost seems to understand that. “My act was in some sort an act of insanity,” he says. “The insatiable vengeance of a Falkland, of a man whose hands were, to my apprehension, red with blood, and his thoughts familiar with cruelty and murder” (II.vi; 211). Caleb understands the man whom he has challenged, and it adds to his thrill that he nearly excited this man to murder him. If the consummation of friendship is love, that of enmity is murder, or the fantasy of murder, as these scenes remind us.

What Caleb cannot perhaps imagine is what actually happens: Falkland confesses the murder of Tyrrel and his allowing the Hawkinses to take the blame for his act. Caleb “started in terror, and was silent” (II.vi; 213); but after the confession, Mr. Falkland makes his most important claim on Caleb so far:

Do you know what it is you have done? To gratify a foolishly inquisitive humour, you have sold yourself. You shall continue in my service, but can never share my affection. I will benefit you in respect of fortune, but I shall always hate you. If ever an unguarded word escape from your lips, if ever you excite my jealousy or suspicion, expect to pay for it by your death or worse. It is a dear bargain you have made. But it is too late to look back. (II.vi; 215)

Falkland has made his confession concern Caleb rather than himself. Falkland has spoken, but Caleb has “sold himself.” Even more to the point, friendship has given way to employment: “you shall continue in my service, but can never share in my affection.” Falkland’s language insists on friendship as loss. “I shall always hate you”: this sustaining enmity is the other side of the love that friendship offers. The bond is every bit as intense, but the terms are more tormenting. Falkland talks as if he has possession of Caleb, and this is the abyss into which the young hero has fallen.

This abyss is the abyss of friendship. For no sooner has Falkland told him that “it is too late to look back,” than Caleb is celebrating his patron and reminding himself of obligation and beneficence:

This will not be wondered at, when it is considered that I had myself just been trampling on the established boundaries of obligation, and therefore



might well have a fellow-feeling for other offenders. Add to which, I had known Mr. Falkland from the first as a beneficent divinity. I had observed at leisure, and with a minuteness which could not deceive me, the excellent qualities of his heart; and I found him possessed of a mind beyond comparison the most fertile and accomplished I had ever known. (11.vi; 217)

It is remarkable that Caleb can talk in these terms of the man who has just threatened to deprive him of his freedom forever, but he does. It is almost as if Falkland's threats fulfill Caleb's earlier desires. After all, they place him in an unremitting relation to his master and they insure that he will never be far from his master's thoughts. As he acknowledges here: "I had made myself a prisoner"; but this prison is one that he has carefully constructed of his own materials.

Of course as the novel proceeds into its darkest sections, it becomes clear how much a prisoner Caleb really is. After a brief respite, when Falkland's brother Forester is visiting and seems to befriend the young man, Caleb becomes the consummate victim. As if to illustrate Caleb's psychological disease, Caleb flees the Falkland household only to find himself wandering in a heath that is neither hospitable nor nurturing. It is a landscape as disorienting as it is dispiriting:

At length I roused myself, and surveyed the horizon around me; but I could observe nothing with which my organ was previously acquainted. On three sides, the heath stretched as far as the eye could reach; on the fourth I discovered at some distance a wood of no ordinary dimensions. Before me, scarcely a single track could be found, to mark that any human being had ever visited the spot. As the best expedient I could devise, I bent my course toward the wood I have mentioned, and then pursued, as well as I was able, the windings of the inclosure ... The sun was hid from me by a grey and cloudy atmosphere ... My thoughts were gloomy and disconsolate; the dreariness of the day, and the solitude which surrounded me, seemed to communicate a sadness to my soul. (11.viii; 227)

Caleb is as lost on the heath as he is in his dealings with Mr. Falkland, and even if he does not recognize the meaning of this scene – grey and cloudy atmosphere; gloomy and disconsolate thoughts – he is dreary, solitary, and sad. Friendship has led him into this labyrinth of depression, but it will also lead him into torments he can barely imagine. Here is the abyss of friendship figured forth in the landscape of mental conflict. This is where Caleb finds himself after his at first hopeful and later desolate dealings with Mr. Falkland. No human being has walked on this heath, just as no one has suffered through friendship as Caleb has. And of course, his unhappiness is barely beginning.

When Caleb emerges from the wood, he finds himself at the home of Mr. Forester, where Mr. Falkland shortly appears. Caleb tries to flee, but soon he is called back to face Falkland: "There was nothing I so ardently desired as the annihilation of all future intercourse between us, that he should not know there was such a person on the earth as myself" (II.ix; 239). Caleb feels his innocence will defend him in the trial that ensues; but once Falkland condemns him as a "monster of depravity," who has stolen money and jewels from his master, Caleb is already guilty, even to himself.

After this so-called trial, Caleb is thrown into prison, and it would seem as if an entirely different story of incarceration and punishment has succeeded that of friendship and enmity. But Caleb no sooner finds himself in this new scene – "To me every thing was new, – the massy doors, the resounding locks, the gloomy passages, the grated windows, and the characteristic look of the keepers, accustomed to reject every petition, and to steel their hearts against feeling and pity" (II.xi; 262) – than he recognizes that his former master is the mastermind of his incarceration here. Even as his case is postponed – and his execution delayed – Caleb feels the hand of his "persecutor": "My thoughts were full of irritation against my persecutor . . . In every view I felt my heart ulcerated with a sense of his injustice; and my very soul spurned these pitiful indulgences, at a time that he was grinding me into dust with the inexorableness of his vengeance" (II.xii; 277). The amorphous fear of victimization, a staple of Gothic fiction, is here given so specific a cause that it becomes closer to a psychological thriller than a Gothic fantasy. The personal struggle between these two men, a struggle of life and death, has brought them into an intimacy as close as anything figured in even the most intensely personal Gothic fiction.

These prison scenes, then, as brutal as they are, function as a fulfillment of the expression of friendship between these two men. Caleb can only be a victim, which is what the intensity of Falkland's feeling for Caleb has rendered him. Falkland wanted Caleb as the young man he could control as he wished. But by defying that control, Caleb has begun to expose its ugliest features. The law becomes nothing more than an excuse for personal persecution, and Caleb is abject until he decides to manipulate the law for his own purposes.<sup>36</sup>

When Caleb does finally escape from the prison – after a failed attempt and solitary confinement – he finds he is never far from being discovered

<sup>36</sup> See John Bender, "Impersonal Violence: The Penetrating Gaze and the Field of Narration in *Caleb Williams*," in *Critical Reconstructions: The Relationship of Fiction and Life*, ed. Robert M. Polhemus and Roger B. Hinkle (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 111–26.

and rarely free from the pursuit of Falkland. James Thompson has written compellingly about “surveillance” in *Caleb Williams*, and these scenes are brilliantly devised to give the feeling that wherever Caleb turns he is being watched.<sup>57</sup> He disguises himself as a beggar – another telling metaphor – and even distorts himself as a way of escaping detection: “I adopted, along with my beggar’s attire a peculiar, slouching and clownish gait, to be used whenever there should appear the least chance of my being observed, together with an Irish brogue which I had an opportunity of studying in my prison” (III.v; 333). Caleb is a parody of himself precisely because he is trying to establish an independent existence, outside the one that Falkland was ready to provide for him.<sup>58</sup>

It is now no surprise that Caleb puts his extreme misery in terms of an absence of friendship – the consolations of friendship – but it is by giving in to his need for a friend that Caleb is finally undone.<sup>59</sup> Whatever he does here, he finds that Falkland is there, watching him and, as it were, pursuing him, turning him against himself: “I was shut up, a deserted, solitary wretch, in the midst of my species. I dared not look for the consolations of friendship; but, instead of seeking to identify myself with the joys and sorrows of others, and exchanging the delicious gifts of confidence and sympathy, was compelled to centre my thoughts and vigilance in myself” (III.viii; 353). That bond between the two men is inescapable, however far Caleb strays from his master. Caleb may feel at times that he is escaping from Falkland, but it is clear that all his actions are still predicated on the bond between them. Reverence and esteem are trampled; he feels himself pursued by this fiend-like being. “One is the other,” Derrida says, “One guards and guards himself in the other. One does violence to oneself, becoming violence.”<sup>60</sup> In some ways, it almost seems as if Caleb is haunted by Falkland; but what could be more intimate than this kind of haunting. Caleb is courting his master even as he resists him. This trope of a kind of queer spectrality, familiar from Gothic fiction, works here

<sup>57</sup> James Thompson, “Surveillance in William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*,” in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 173–98 (182–9).

<sup>58</sup> On the question of multiple selves in the novel, see Jacqueline T. Miller, “The Imperfect Tale: Articulation, Rhetoric, and Self in *Caleb Williams*,” *Criticism* 20 (1978): 366–82.

<sup>59</sup> Shaftesbury, in his *Characteristics*, makes a similar observation: “Now if banishment from one’s country, removal to a foreign place, or anything which looks like solitude or desertion, be so heavy to endure, what must it be to feel this inward banishment, this real estrangement from human commerce, and to be after this manner in a desert, and in the horriddest of solitudes even in the midst of society?” (Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, 1699. See *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 229.

<sup>60</sup> Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 59.

to undermine Caleb's sense of his ability to make any determinations for himself.<sup>61</sup>

When shortly after this, he sees Falkland, he recognizes that Falkland has suffered as much, if not more, than he:

when I last beheld this unhappy man, he had been a victim to the same passions, a prey to the same undying remorse, as now. Misery was at that time inscribed in the legible characters upon his countenance. But now he appeared like nothing that had ever been visible in human shape. His visage was haggard, emaciated, and fleshless. His complexion was a dun and tarnished red, the colour uniform through every region of the face, and suggested the idea of its being burnt and parched by the eternal fire that burned within him. (III.xii; 382)

This fiend-like character accosts Caleb and demands that he sign a retraction of the accusations he has tried to bring against Falkland. When Caleb refuses this final act of self-abnegation, Falkland becomes almost violent: "You defy me! At least I have a power respecting you, and that power I will exercise; a power that shall grind you into atoms" (III.xii; 386). In this repetition of his earlier threat, Falkland is starting to show the limits of his power, but Caleb does not recognize that and instead he finds himself confronting one ultimate attempt to clear his own name. When he realizes he will never escape Gines or feel less intensely the hand of Falkland, he decides to publish his tale. This feels like his last resort, but it is of course at the same time a final insult to his former patron.

"Tremble!" he says as he takes his story to a magistrate. When Falkland is brought before this magistrate at last, Caleb almost regrets what he has done:

He was brought in in a chair, unable to stand, fatigued and almost destroyed by the journey he had just taken. His visage was colourless; his limbs destitute of motion, almost of life. His head reclined upon his bosom, except that now and then he lifted it up and opened his eyes with a languid glance; immediately after which he sunk back into his former apparent insensibility. He seemed not to have three hours to live. (III.xv; 426)

In this figure, the abyss of friendship takes on the quality that does little but threaten. The reality of friendship is this figure of death.

<sup>61</sup> On the topic of "queer spectrality," see Carla Freccero, "Queer Spectrality: Haunting the Past," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 194–213, 195.

Caleb protests at first – “Mr. Falkland! I most solemnly conjure you to recollect yourself! Did I ever prove myself unworthy of your confidence?” (III.xv; 429) – but before long he is regretting his action and wondering how he could undo it:

I have told a plain and unadulterated tale. I came hither to curse, but I remain to bless. I came to accuse, but am compelled to applaud. I proclaim to all the world, that Mr. Falkland is a man worthy of affection and kindness, and that I am myself the basest and most odious of mankind! Never will I forgive myself the iniquity of this day. (III.xv; 431)

This is Caleb’s last word on Falkland. It is as if he recommits himself to the earlier friendship these men shared. And why shouldn’t he? Both men are brought to the extreme here, and it seems that they have plumbed the abyss of friendship to the very bottom. Now Falkland can say only: “Williams, you have conquered! ... You cannot hate me more than I hate myself” (III. xv; 433). Perhaps, but this pursuit has never been about hate, it has been about desire. As Caleb says here, after Falkland has already passed away, “Falkland, I will think only of thee, and from that thought will draw ever-fresh nourishment for my sorrows” (III.xv; 434).

As if this erotic love has always already been the valedictory love of the elegy, Caleb connects that love with sorrow and memory in the best elegiac tradition. As Derrida says, “a memory is engaged in advance, from the moment of what is called life, this strange temporality opened by the anticipated citation of the funeral oration”<sup>62</sup>: *Caleb Williams* has been all along anticipating this moment when Caleb could speak of Falkland with heartfelt funereal devotion. If this love is elegiac, that is because it could never find expression beyond this tale of mutually haunting desire. Erotics and desire are transformed into elegiac feeling when they cannot be adequately expressed before the grave. Friendship, as Derrida reminds us, commemorates loss, and what is *Caleb Williams* but a complex and harrowing saga of loss. Only friendship gives meaning to this loss and transforms the political tale of a master and his servant into a powerfully personal tale as well. The violence of this novel earns it a place in this section on erotic friendship because its elegiac demeanor becomes apparent only at the close. I cannot imagine a more complex dynamic of friendship than the one that Godwin presents us with here.

<sup>62</sup> Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 5. See also George E. Haggerty, “Desire and Mourning: The Ideology of the Elegy,” in *Ideology and Form*, ed. David Richter (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1999), 184–206.

### The Horror of Friendlessness in *Frankenstein*

Early in Mary Shelley's 1831 edition of her masterpiece, we are told that Robert Walton, the lonely explorer in search of the unknown, has a deeply frustrated need that he must share with his sister:

I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel a most severe evil. I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection. I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine. You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother! ... I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind.<sup>65</sup>

This clear statement of need is never specifically answered in the novel – Victor Frankenstein himself, whom Walton meets soon after this, when he is taken into the explorer's vessel as a broken and desperate man, can hardly function in this capacity; nor can the creature, melancholy and suicidal, whom Walton meets at the end of the novel. It is almost as if these lines that characterize Walton so clearly are without any attention to the larger concerns of the novel. I would argue, though, that there is no greater concern in *Frankenstein* than this question of friendship. Walton seems schooled in the friendship tradition, and he places this ideal version of a friend before his sister as a claim on what he misses in human experience. Far more than a tease in Walton's letter to his sister, friendship looms in the novel as a need that can only be ignored at one's peril.

Walton's plea establishes a high mark for any friend to reach. This friend has to be strong in exactly those areas where Walton is weak, and he has to be sensitive to Walton's needs and understanding of his shortcomings. He cannot despise him as a romantic, even as he teaches him to regulate his mind. This friend emerges from the tradition of the perfect friend, as I have articulated it, and Walton's experience demonstrates how rarely that friend is to be found. It is of course the kind of friend familiar in the

<sup>65</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 28–9; further parenthetical references are to this edition.

writing of Montaigne, and Walton seems aware of that ideal, even if he does not refer to Montaigne specifically.<sup>64</sup>

What we discover as we move further into the novel, however, is that Victor Frankenstein has just such a friend. Clerval is described in these terms:

Henry Clerval was the son of a merchant in Geneva, an intimate friend of my father. He was a boy of singular talent and fancy. He loved enterprise, hardship, and even danger, for its own sake. He was deeply read in books of chivalry and romance. He composed heroic songs, and began to write many a tale of enchantment and knightly adventure. He tried to make us act plays, and to enter into masquerades, in which the characters were drawn from Roncesvalles, of the Round Table of King Arthur, and the chivalrous train who shed their blood to redeem the holy sepulcher from the hands of the infidels. (43)

This description marks Clerval as the emotional and intellectual complement to Frankenstein, who is scientifically obsessed and who states clearly: “It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my enquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or, in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world” (43). “Meanwhile,” Frankenstein says immediately after this, “Clerval occupied himself, so to speak, with the moral relations of things. The busy stage of life, the virtues and heroes, and the actions of men, were his theme, and his hope and his dream was to become one among those whose names are recorded in history, as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species” (43). While Victor pushes at the limits of man’s physical being, Clerval occupies himself with the “moral relations of things”: his stories of gallantry and adventure pale beside Victor’s scientific endeavors, but Clerval’s moral compass is surely a safer guide than Victor’s search for the “secrets of heaven and earth.” When Victor begins his studies of the alchemical precursors of science, and when he witnesses the power of nature in the form of a wild lightning storm, he begins to question everything he knows about the world. Once he pursues his studies in Ingolstadt, Victor finds a professor, Waldman, who can nurture his desire to pursue the “mysteries of creation” (51). As his studies become more obsessive, his activities seem akin to those of a madman:

To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must

<sup>64</sup> Montaigne, “On Affectionate Relationships,” 205–19. See pp. 7–8, above.

also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body ... Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; and a churchyard was to me the mere receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm. Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses ... I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. (53–4)

Where is Clerval when Victor is obsessing over human decay? He had wanted to join Victor in his studies, but his own father, a trader, refused to allow it. Instead he sent Victor off with a handshake, and is now nowhere near his friend to offer advice or support. Victor has gone off on his own in solitary pursuit of his own fondest and most lurid dreams. Victor is not thinking of his friend right now, and that is a measure of his doom.

“I pursued nature to her hiding places,” he says, “who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?” (56). The solitary rape of the natural world would not have failed so spectacularly – that is, succeeded in the way it did – if Victor had allowed his friendship to guide him. But instead this solitary obsession sets him apart, and makes it clear that in order to succeed in his quest he is willing to sacrifice everything dear to him.

Chapter v of *Frankenstein* spells out the terms of his impending doom. In language that is famous in the annals of Gothic literature and science fiction, Victor says:

It was on a dreary night in November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning, the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. (57–8)

Victor achieves this act of creation entirely on his own, and when he first looks at the being he has created, he finds it hideous: “His yellow skin scarcely covered the works of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes ... his shriveled complexion and his straight black lips” (58). Victor flees from



this horrifying image and tries to compose himself in his room; there, he finally sleeps and dreams:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features began to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the graveworms crawling in the folds of the flannel. (58)

Victor's act of creation involves him in these nightmare images of death and decay: death and decay of his fiancée and his mother, who are combined in this one grotesque transformation.

Often this dream is taken to mean that Victor has usurped his mother's right of giving birth and/or that he is sacrificing Elizabeth by devoting himself to this lurid creature.<sup>65</sup> Rather than usurping birth, however, I see this as a sacrifice of the female notions of love and domesticity and a turn instead to a more rugged world of masculine intimacy that the creature's appearance both mocks and invokes. Upon waking from this dream, Victor sees the creature at his bedside: "He held up the curtain of the bed, and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks" (58). Victor flees, but not without this vivid image of the horror he has created. The creature's smile of invitation, though, might have forestalled the implicit horror in a bond of complicity. But that option does not seem open to the terrified and disgusted scientist.

Victor passes a miserable night: "mingled with this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment; dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!" (59). In this mood of bitterness, frustration, and defeat, Victor meets Clerval: "the Swiss diligence . . . stopped just where I was standing; and on the door being opened, I perceived Henry Clerval, who, on seeing me, instantly sprung out. 'My dear Frankenstein,' exclaimed he, 'how glad am I to see you! How fortunate that you should be here at the very moment of my alighting!'" (60). Clerval's walking into

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 213–47; and Devon Hodges, "Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 2.2 (Fall 1983): 155–64; Barbara Johnson, "My Monster/ My Self," in *The Barbara Johnson Reader: The Surprise of Otherness*, ed. Melissa Fruerstein, Bill Johnson González, Lili Porten, and Keja Valens (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 179–90 (186–7); and see also Anne K. Mellor, "Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*," in the Norton Critical Edition of *Frankenstein*, ed. Paul Hunter (New York: Norton, 2012), 355–68, esp. 355–8.

Victor's life at this crucial moment is more than coincidental. It reminds the reader, and it reminds Victor himself, of the values of friendship that Victor has sacrificed to his maniacal creativity: "I grasped his hand, and in a moment forgot my horror and misfortune; I felt suddenly, and for the first time during many months, calm and serene joy. I welcomed my friend, therefore, in the most cordial manner" (60).

This transformation in mood and sudden sense of calm seems inspired by the touch between these two men. This touch has been what Victor has been missing. They talk and chat, and Victor feels taken out of himself and brought into social relation for the first time in months. At first Victor is agitated and concerned, and his friend notes, "I did not before remark how very ill you appear; so thin and pale; you look as if you had been watching several nights" (60). When they return to Victor's room, they find no one there, and now Victor is manic: "It was not joy only that possessed me; I felt my flesh tingle with excess of sensitiveness, and my pulse beat rapidly. I was unable to remain for a single instant in the same place; I jumped over the chairs, clapped my hands, and alighted aloud" (61). Clerval reacts to this extreme behavior with concern, even as Victor collapses in a fit. As he recalls this scene, Victor laments:

Poor Clerval! what must have been his feelings? A meeting, which he anticipated with such joy, so strangely turned to bitterness. But I was not the witness of his grief; for I was lifeless, and did not recover my senses for a long, long time.

This was the commencement of a nervous fever, which confined me for several months. During all that time, Henry was my only nurse. (61)

This role of nurse, so broadly ignored in most discussions of the novel, marks Clerval as a very special friend indeed. This kind of intimacy, as Holly Furneaux mentions in her discussion of Dickens, helps to fill out friendship with a mode of physical reality that it otherwise lacks. This is a wonderful example of what Furneaux describes. "If we recognize, however, that homoerotics are not necessarily antithetical to or discontinuous with Victorian sexual mores," she says, "more tender, but no less prevalent, expressions of same-sex desire can be recognized."<sup>66</sup> I am not claiming that these relations are specifically homoerotic, but nevertheless they mark a friendship that is more intense than has otherwise been allowed. Clerval is a caring and nurturing friend, and as such, he stands in almost direct contrast to Victor's callous rejection of the creature.

<sup>66</sup> Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 207–8; see below pp. 125–35.

As Victor recovers he plans to return home, and Henry helps him deal with family concerns. “The month of May had already commenced,” he tells us, “and I expected the letter daily which was to fix the date of my departure, when Henry proposed a pedestrian tour in the environs of Ingolstadt ... I was fond of exercise, and Clerval had always been my favourite companion in the rambles of this nature that I had taken among the scenes of my native country” (67). He then adds, “We passed a fortnight in these perambulations: my health and spirits had long been restored, and they gained additional strength from the salubrious air I breathed, the natural incidents of our progress, and the conversation of my friend” (67–8). This is another rarely remarked passage, but it is a measure of the intimacy of the relation between these two men. It represents an engaging and restorative moment of calm before increasingly desperate mental agony. The two friends spend their time walking and exploring in what could almost be called a celebration of mutual masculine endeavor.<sup>67</sup>

Immediately after this sojourn, Victor receives word that his young brother William has died. He and Clerval return home, and there Victor is confronted with the creature and the enormity of what he has done. Before that confrontation, however, Clerval expresses a brief eulogy for the murdered boy:

“Poor William!” said he, “dear lovely child, he now sleeps with his angel mother! Who that had seen him bright and joyous in his young beauty, but must weep over his untimely loss! To die so miserably; to feel the murderer’s grasp! How much more a murderer, that could destroy such radiant innocence! Poor little fellow! one only consolation have we; his friends mourn and weep, but he is at rest. The pang is over, his sufferings are at an end for ever. A sod covers his gentle form, and he knows no pain. He can no longer be a subject for pity; we must reserve that for his miserable survivors.” (70)

This is an unremarkable eulogy, touching in its simplicity, but it verges on the appalling when we consider it a measure of Victor’s own guilt. Even before he confronts the creature, Victor knows that this boy’s death is his own responsibility.<sup>68</sup> Henry talks about death as final and an escape from pain, but Victor knows that there is no escape for him from the monstrous world he has created.

<sup>67</sup> For an engaging discussion of masculinity in the novel, see Bette London, “Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Spectacle of Masculinity,” *PMLA* 108.2 (March 1993): 253–65; reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of *Frankenstein*, ed. Paul Hunter (New York: Norton, 2012), 391–403.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, William Veeder, *Mary Shelley & Frankenstein: The Fate of Androgyny* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Victor's confrontation with the creature on the Sea of Glass near Mont Blanc undoes almost every consolation Henry has articulated. The creature confronts Victor with his own actions and pleads with him for understanding:

I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample on me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection is most due. Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather thy fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. (90)

This passage is the prologue to the creature's long account of his first experiences; his time in the hovel peering in on the De Laceys; and his more recent rampage, murdering William and implicating Justine. At the end of this long tale, he asks Frankenstein to create for him a mate. "I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create" (124).

What the creature is protesting in these two speeches is surely the failure of friendship. Victor may be the creator, but he has rejected the thing he created. What the creature really needs is a friend. His isolation and loneliness, recollecting as it does that dissatisfaction that Walton expresses in his letters to his sister, remind us of the abjection that friendlessness instills. The creature asks for a mate, and often there is talk of procreation and the threat of a race of monsters; Victor himself imagines that at the moment he destroys the second creature. But really all the creature needs or wants is a friend. That is what he has sought again and again, and that is what he has been denied. In this, as in so many things, he is a parody of his creator himself. For Victor chose solitary pursuits over his intimate relations, and the measure of his obsession is also the measure of his undoing.

This becomes clear at the moment I was just describing. After the creature has met Victor in the Alps and pleaded with him to make him a mate – a female creature like himself whom he can love and nurture as a companion – Victor almost relents. Before marrying Elizabeth, who now feels that marriage would be best for his health as well as their joint happiness, he says he has to travel so that he might "be restored to my family in peace and happiness" (131). He travels north with his friend Clerval – "the presence of my friend could in no way be an impediment, and truly

I rejoiced that thus I should be saved many hours of lonely, maddening reflection” (131) – and Clerval seems to embrace the journey, praising the landscape and celebrating the mountain landscapes. Frankenstein looks back on this moment with clear devotion:

Clerval! beloved friend! even now it delights me to record your words, and to dwell on the praise which you are so eminently deserving. He was a being formed in the “very poetry of nature.” His wild and enthusiastic imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart. His soul overflowed with ardent affections, and his friendship was of that devoted and wondrous nature that the worldly-minded teach us to look for only in the imagination. (133)

Victor is lamenting Henry Clerval here, but he is also making a statement about friendship. This beautifully articulate version of friendship stands out in stark contrast to the relation between Victor and the creature. Rather than overflowing with ardent affections, Victor’s soul has closed down as it has rejected the creature. This rejection is completed as he fails at his task of creating a mate. “But in Clerval,” he says, “I saw the image of my former self; he was inquisitive, and anxious to gain experience and instruction ... He was also pursuing an object he had long had in view ... He was forever busy; and the only check to his enjoyments was my sorrowful and dejected mind” (135). Victor seems already to have built regret into his discussions of Clerval. It almost feels as if he could have saved himself if he had recognized what this friendship truly offered him. Instead, he cuts himself away and destroys them both.

Eventually he finds his way to the Orkney Islands of Scotland, where he will finally honor his pledge and create a second creature. As he sets to work here, he finds that he cannot complete this task:

I grew restless and nervous. Every moment I feared to meet my persecutor. Sometimes I sat with my eyes fixed on the ground, fearing to raise them, lest they could encounter the object which I so much dreaded to behold. I feared to wander from the sight of my fellow-creatures, lest when alone he should come to claim his companion. (140)

Victor continues this act of creation while looking over his shoulder and fearing to see the creature he calls his “persecutor,” and in a sense almost expecting him to appear “to claim his companion.” When he does appear, Frankenstein cannot contemplate continuing work on this second being, and he destroys the new creature even before he manages to endow it with life:

I sat one evening in my laboratory; the sun had set, and the moon was just rising from the sea; I had not sufficient light for my employment, and

I remained idle, in pause of consideration of whether I should leave my labour for the night, or hasten to its conclusion by an unremitting attention to it. As I sat, a train of reflection occurred to me, which led me to consider the effects of what I was now doing ... I had before been moved by the sophisms of the being I had created; I had been struck senseless by his fiendish threats: but now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race. (140–1)

In this change of heart, Victor rejects any claim of relation, friendship or otherwise, to talk himself out of the creation he had promised, and before he can even think beyond these first reactions, the creature torments him with his presence:

I trembled, and my heart failed within me; when, on looking up, I saw, by the light of the moon, the dæmon at the casement. A ghastly grin wrinkled his lips as he gazed on me, where I sat fulfilling the task which he had allotted to me ... As I looked on him, his countenance expressed the utmost extent of malice and treachery. I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and, trembling with passion tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, he withdrew. (141)

Frankenstein deprives his creature of a future and in a single act also destroys his own. Victor was formerly a creator, but in this scene he does nothing but destroy. If he can destroy “the creature on whose future existence he [the creature] depended for happiness,” then he rejects any future in favor of a present that is both unthreatening and resistant to the demands of procreation. If that earns the despair and revenge of the creature, Victor is willing to face that as long as he can avoid giving a future to the creature he detests. That creature threatens him with a resounding, “I go; but remember I will be with you on your wedding night” (142). Victor worries about his own future, never even imagining that the creature will destroy both Elizabeth and Clerval. But the creature understands how best to force his creator to confront him directly and answer for the failure of his promise.

When Victor realizes that the creature has murdered Henry Clerval, which happens almost immediately after the scene quoted above, he lapses into a heartfelt lament that spells out the terms of his transgression:

I entered the room where the corpse lay, and was led up to the coffin. How can I describe my sensations on beholding it? I felt parched with horror, nor can I reflect on that terrible moment without shuddering and agony.

The examination, the presence of the magistrate and witnesses, passed like a dream from my memory, when I saw the lifeless form of Henry Clerval stretched before me. I gasped for breath; and throwing myself on the body, I explained, "Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life? Two I have already destroyed; other victims await their destiny: but you, Clerval, my friend, my benefactor." (149)

Victor's sensations here – the sense of loss coupled with responsibility – unmans him (he is "carried out of the room in strong convulsions" [149]) and it also reminds him what his act of creation has really meant. This friendship with Clerval, this abiding and intimate relation, is now blasted. The very answer that Victor had to the creature's demands is now used against him. Victor laments this loss so bitterly because he knows that his refusal to create a second *dæmon* has broken the bond of friendship that has allowed him to flourish as he has. Friendlessness now looms as the deeply disturbing result of all his solitary longing.

Victor's masculine other understands him and knows that destroying this friendship will hit Victor at his core. It is significant that most film versions of the novel leave Clerval alive or neglect to tell the final story. His loss in the novel is almost more devastating to Victor than the loss of Elizabeth. Friendship is the key to what Victor loses, just as it is the key to what the creature lacked. That is why this loss and the devastating confrontation of the wedding night, when he finds Elizabeth strangled, can only lead him in a mad pursuit: the very pursuit, that is, that leads him into the frozen north and onto the very ship that Walton is piloting into the unknown.

As Victor laments to Walton:

My imagination was vivid, yet my powers of analysis and application were intense; by the union of these qualities I conceived the idea, and executed the creation of a man. Even now I cannot recollect, without passion, my reveries while the work was incomplete. I trod heaven in my thoughts, now exulting in my powers, now burning with the idea of their effects. From my infancy I was imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition: but how am I sunk! (176)

Victor knows his defeat and he also knows that he must depart without a resolution of any kind. Victor is not allowed to claim his creation or to position himself as the creative genius that the story has celebrated. Instead, he is broken and frustrated. "Now I am sunk!" Victor felt he could challenge the creator with his own creative power, but miserable and alone, finally friendless, he knows that he has really created nothing but the misery that

surrounds him. He has challenged the very notion of God, and in doing so, he has deprived himself of all satisfaction, love, or friendship.

The surprising feature of the novel's closing pages is the creature's own sense of loss and the sudden and urgent meaninglessness of his own position.

After the murder of Clerval, I returned to Switzerland, heartbroken and overcome. I pitied Frankenstein; my pity amounted to horror. I abhorred myself ... Evil thenceforth became my good. Urged thus far, I had no choice but to adapt my nature to an element which I had willingly chosen. The completion of demoniacal design became an insatiable passion. And now it is ended: there [pointing at Frankenstein's body] is my last victim. (182–3)

The creature is driven to destroy because he is not allowed the solace of any real companionship. He mimics Milton's Satan because he is shut out from the pleasures of sociability. The creature is "lost in the darkness and distance" at the end of the novel; we are forced to acknowledge that there is absolutely nothing else he could have done. This is the horror of the creature's friendlessness. He is truly lost.