



WILLIAM GODWIN AND FRANKENSTEIN:  
THE SECULARIZATION OF CALVINISM IN GODWIN'S  
PHILOSOPHY AND THE SUB-GODWINIAN GOTHIC NOVEL; WITH  
SOME REMARKS ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE GOTHIC TO  
ROMANTICISM.

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## SUMMARY

The subject matter of this thesis is William Godwin's Political Justice and Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.

My central argument is that there is a secularization of Calvinism in both Godwin's philosophy and the sub-Godwinian Gothic novel. The relationship of the Gothic to Romanticism is also a primary consideration here.

I thus aim to demonstrate how a particular theological model becomes secularized, both as an intellectual system and as a literary form. Part One involves an examination, through an analysis of Political Justice, of how Godwin's early Sandemanian Calvinism becomes secularized in the idealistic anarchism of his political philosophy; Calvinist predestination is translated into progress, as reason and the human will assume the role of deity. Part Two then argues that Victor Frankenstein's distinctive qualities can be attributed to a Calvinist world view, an outlook which also defines the Gothic. The Gothic, however, is an extreme psychological and emotional response to Calvinist rationalism and absolutism. In Frankenstein's Romantic Gothic text, a yearning for the completion and wholeness which is a characteristic of Romantic

organicism is combined with the despair and damnation of a fatalistic Gothic universe.

I interpret Frankenstein as an allegorical representation of the development and possible consequences of Godwinism, with Victor and his creature as embodiments of this process. Victor's history mirrors the possible psychological, emotional, and intellectual conflicts which might ensue in someone who effectively fails to make the transition from a fatalistic world view into that of beneficent Romanticism, with its utopian ideas of progress and millennial felicity.

Frankenstein reveals an ambivalence about the powers of human rationality which conflicts with the overt message of Political Justice; it can be read both as a subversion of Godwinism and as a questioning of Romantic organicism, as a reaction against rationalist systems of progress and utilitarian relativism. As an assertion of essentialist and absolutist values and truths it represents Mary's rebellion against her origins.

This is to certify that the following thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if applicable if accepted for the award of the degree.

VIVIENNE ANN BELL

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