

Dissertation Abstract:

*William Godwin and the Anti-Sympathy Novel* focuses on the impact of the fictional writings of political anarchist William Godwin on the genre of the novel. Godwin published in England during the turbulent 1790s. Much of the scholarship examining the writings of William Godwin has focused on the influence of his politics. Scholars explore his novels as conduits for his anarchist views and do the same with his political treatises. However, this study investigates the formal, rather than strictly political, legacy of Godwin's fiction. Specifically, this dissertation will examine Godwin's novels alongside those of his contemporaries in order to trace a particular form that Godwin gives to Romantic fiction, and that continues to surface in unexpected places throughout the Romantic and into the Victorian period; a form the author calls the anti-sympathy novel, or a novel that critiques Enlightenment ideas of sympathy through both content and form. Thus, while this dissertation sees Godwin's generic legacy as steeped in the political, the legacy it will trace is less anchored in Godwin's political treatises and explicit political ideas, such as revolution and government, and that, in its subtleties, has a much longer afterlife. While Godwin's fame as a politician and novelist was short-lived, the narrative effects of his novels have astonishing longevity. Although the formal features of the anti-sympathy novel change and adapt as they reappear in different novels at different times, they always cause anti-sympathy moments when the narrative exposes its own dependence upon sympathetic identification without totally breaking apart. This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first two chapters situate *Caleb Williams* among narratives of sympathy and the rise of the novel, define the anti-sympathy novel, and investigate the workings of the anti-sympathy novel in the novels of recognized compatriots and followers, as well as detractors, of Godwin. The last three chapters will trace the anti-sympathy novel in works of Romantic and Victorian authors, pushing the anti-sympathy novel from the realm of the Jacobin novel to the larger field of the novel in its maturity.