



Paroxysms of the Mind: Narration, Consciousness, and the Self in William Godwin's Things as They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams

May 18, 2014 · Volume 18 (2014)

James J. Fiumara

Fiumara JJ. Paroxysms of the Mind: Narration, Consciousness, and the Self in William Godwin's Things as They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams. PsyArt Journal. 2014 May 18 [last modified: 2016 Apr 2]. Edition 1.

Abstract

This article positions William Godwin's 1794 novel *Things as They Are; Or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* as anticipating a modern theory of consciousness (the "self") found in psychoanalysis, philosophy, and cognitive psychology that argues that we do not have reliable access to the workings of our own minds (let alone another's mind) and that our notion of the "self" is largely a fiction mediated and created through narrative (i.e., language). I argue that Godwin's novel explores the peculiar nature of the human "self" as it exists at the unfathomable crossroads of rational contemplation and emotional impulse, or the "paroxysms of the mind." Godwin does this through a complex construction of multiple narratives where acts of narration in both the public and private spheres compete to create a sense of a "self" (our character, our past, our self-consciousness), and is our only access to a self which is ultimately unknowable.

PDF

[Download pdf here](#)

PsyArt-2014-Article-10-J-Fiumara1