The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

October 1993 New Series No. 84

Contents

Articles

MICHAEL NEWTON: The Fictitious Shepherd 118

ELENA YATZECK: Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*: Making Virtue of Necessity 126

WILLIAM RUDDICK: Walter Scott, Charles Lamb and William Godwin: Some Shared Opinions and Personal Contacts 136

MARK GARNETT: Two Model Begging Letters by William Godwin 143

Reviews

NICHOLAS ROE on *Political Justice* by William Godwin 146

MADELINE HUXSTEP on *Charles Lamb and Elia: Selected Writings* ed. J. E. Morpurgo 148

RACHEL BENNETT on *The Adventures of Ulysses* by Charles Lamb 149

MARK GARNETT on *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* by Pamela Clemit 150

Society News and Notes from Members 152

Editorial

The present issue of the *Charles Lamb Bulletin* marks the bicentenary of *Political Justice*, first published in 1793, by including articles on the Lamb-Godwin relationship, and on William Godwin's own writings. Our thanks to willing contributors on this special occasion: one or two additional Lamb-Godwin articles will hopefully also appear in the near future.

A remarkable act of patronage, rare in these difficult times, has seen the publication of Messrs. Pickering and Chatto Ltd. of *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin* ed. Pamela Clemit and Maurice Hindle (8 volumes, 1991, £360) and, also under the General Editorship of Mark Philp, *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin* (7 volumes, 1993, £395). Clearly a new edition on this scale is only likely to be found in academic libraries, and, until the financial climate improves, by no means in all such: so it seems important that the existence of this fine new edition of William Godwin, which is surely likely to remain the standard one for as far into the future as any of us can imagine, should be made known as widely as possible.

Our congratulations to the publishers, the editors and all concerned in this remarkable and major enterprise.

The Fictitious Shepherd

By MICHAEL NEWTON

IT IS DIFFICULT to think of Godwin's *Imogen*[1] without also thinking of the meanings of literary survival. Godwin's pastoral romance was considered lost for over a century, until a copy was discovered in the library at Aberystwyth.[2] In reclaiming a lost work of art for the present, our first thought is bound to be not of what have we found but of what we might have lost. Having survived as a physical object, does this fragment of the past survive the critical scrutiny of the present? Aside from its interest for literary scholars, does this work continue in the present with the immediate claims of a work of art? Is this a work that was justifiably forgotten, that failed to be preserved for the good reason that it was not needed? *Imogen* is an almost unknown and unread text. It has exerted no influence upon later artists. The readers of its day did not trouble to preserve it. *Imogen* itself explores this question of literary survival and the issues of the relation of immediacy to tradition that such a question necessarily invokes.

Imogen is a novel in the pastoral mode, concerned with Imogen and Edwin, adolescent inhabitants of the valley of Clwyd, a place 'distinguished for primeval innocence and pastoral simplicity.'[3] As is usually the case with pastoral, the rustic simplicity of the subject matter is treated in a highly artificial manner. An elaborate and ornate rhetorical style (derived from *Ossian*) informs the novel, and adds to the luxuriant richness which characterizes the whole. The only action in the book is Roderick's abduction of Imogen. Otherwise the plot breaks apart into ritualized and elaborate set-pieces. There are processions, rhetorical debates, and bardic competitions. Movement continually slows and stagnates into sterile tableaux. The air itself seems immobile and languid. People move with difficulty, if they move at all. Speeches follow patterns inscribed with leisurely inevitability.

This measured and unhurried atmosphere finds its perfect expression in the plot, which turns upon Imogen's passive resistance to Roderick, her would-be seducer. Roderick tempts; Imogen stands firm through the omnipotence of her innate chastity. Her rescuer is her lover, Edwin, but, for no good reason, he proves a dilatory saviour, and disappears from the novel altogether for a good two-thirds of its length. Roderick has nothing to do but to seduce and Imogen has no task but to maintain her integrity. There is no narrative tension to introduce a dynamic element into Godwin's pastoral. At no point do we consider that Imogen will fall. Her native innocence seems to preclude any notion of violent rape in this idealized and languorous world.

All moves before us in an ideal and sensuous clarity. Details are lingered over and become an end in themselves. All is as lush and rich as a baroque allegorical painting. Within this stylized atmosphere the neo-classical and pastoral simplicity of Imogen resists. The novel breaks apart into successive scenes of persuasion and resistance. The only limit to this recurrent and quickly ritualized pattern would be Roderick's lack of invention in thinking up schemes to entrap the innocent Imogen.

The peculiar quality of the book manifests itself most clearly in Godwin's description of the one moment of sudden action. Imogen and Edwin are returning at night from a

[1] William Godwin, *Imogen: A Pastoral Romance* (London, 1784), recently republished in *The Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, Gen. Ed. Mark Philp (8 vols., London, 1992), in Vol. 2.

[2] See William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (London, 1989), p. 24.

[3] *Imogen* i. 2.

celebration and bardic competition plainly modelled on the traditional pastoral singing match. They somehow wander from the right path. Night falls, and they are lost in gloomy darkness. A storm commences; there is thunder and lightning and driving rain. Suddenly, out from the dark, a demon bursts forth in noise and confusion. Edwin tries to protect Imogen, but the demon is only a decoy, an illusion, for in the turmoil Roderick snatches the hapless Imogen and makes off with her, leaving Edwin alone in the darkness of the storm.

The first thing that strikes the reader is that this is not a mimetic description of reality, but an allegorical enactment of deception and trial. Imogen and Edwin are lost not because they have curiously forgotten the route home, but because life is a process of education through the trial of suffering - as the winning song in the bard's competition has just informed us. The storm is not heavy weather, but an allegorical tumult in the heavens, a convenient sign that there are forces of darkness and chaos within the very Nature that guarantees Clwyd's pastoral beauty. We are being reminded that pastoral may be the best aspect of nature, but it is not its only aspect.

As a stylistic expression of this narrative allegory, we find that even in the moment of most furious activity the action slows itself into immobility. The demon lunges and yet is held before the eye in a pose of bestial ferocity, illuminated carefully by the white flash of lightning.[4] Yet Godwin employs this artificial style and form to celebrate a pastoral innocence guaranteed by childhood remembrance. That which is new, innocent and guileless is contained within a form manifestly traditional, mannered, and self-conscious. Godwin makes this apparent disjunction explicit in the rhetorical manoeuvres conducted in his preface to the novel.

In this preface, Godwin plays upon the ideas of literary authority and originality through the elaborate joke of presenting his own work as a translation from the Ancient British. Any such device would naturally call to mind Macpherson's Ossianic 'poems', which were suspected but not yet unmasked as fakes when Godwin was writing. Godwin refers to the Ossian poems as proof that such writings could survive for so many centuries. However this allusion was intended no doubt to be deliberately dark. In measuring the authenticity of his own romance against those of Macpherson, Godwin obscures that authenticity by raising in the mind of the reader the debates about the true status of the Ossian poems.

This duplicity and shiftiness characterizes the Preface as a whole. Continuously, Godwin's rhetorical methods disrupt his own argument. He establishes a pattern of assertion followed by self-contradiction through a turn in the argument, or the gratuitous introduction of a 'new fact' concerning the origins of this romance. At first, Godwin presents the work as a translation from 'the ancient Welch.'[5] Then, introducing sudden doubts concerning its authenticity, the 'translator' notes the remarkable similarity between the romance and Milton's *A Masque Presented At Ludlow Castle, 1634*. However, on reflection, the translator notes that Milton always used traditional models when he came to write his poems, and wonders if *Imogen* might not be the lost source for *Comus*:

> And if we could allow ourselves in that licence of conjecture, which is become almost inseparable from the character of an editor, we should say: That Milton having written it upon the borders of Wales, might have had easy recourse to the manuscript whose

[4] It is possible to detect here the influence of the theatre on Godwin's style. The effect is uncannily reminiscent of a backdrop stage painting, in being at once artificial and aware of its own nature as allegorical display. Godwin had taken an interest in the theatre since arriving in London.

[5] ibid., i. p. ix.

> contents are now first given to the public: And that the singularity of preserving the name of the place where it was performed in the title of his poem, was intended for an ingenuous and well-bred acknowledgement of the source from which he drew his choicest material.[6]

However, next Godwin allows this conjecture to crumble by introducing an ancestor of his, Rice Ap Thomas, a seventeenth century gentleman and the possible forger of the piece. Godwin then introduces doubts as to the validity of this idea, mentioning as evidence the weather-beaten and ancient appearance of the manuscript and the singular beauty of the romance's style, far beyond anything possible in the seventeenth century. However, if the work is Thomas', then it becomes likely that he was using Milton's *Comus* for a model. This indebtedness is heightened when 'the translator' acknowledges his own intimacy with Milton's poem and declares that he might unwittingly have copied Milton in the process of translation. In short, the Preface is a singularly self-conscious and disingenuous piece. The irony deepens when we remember that Godwin's work only survived at all because some innocent Welsh librarian took him at his word and preserved the novel, in the belief that it was what it professed to be - a translation from the ancient Welsh.

The most puzzling aspect of Godwin's preface is its stylistic contrast to the romance that it introduces. As I have shown, *Imogen* is a highly artificial and mannered piece of writing; but it is the artifice of *naïveté*. Its overwrought and clichéd style are the exact counterparts of pastoral innocence. It is the conversational tone of the preface that is the acquired style of a man of the world. Mannered and operatic cliché is the natural style of the un-self-conscious.

In his preface, Godwin is being as disingenuous as it is possible to be, neatly inverting his own indebtedness by making his novel the model for Milton's pastoral drama. Of course, it is unlikely that Godwin thought this apparatus of appearing as editor or translator of his own work would ever fool anybody (that Welsh librarian notwithstanding). The preface might be seen as itself being a 'well-bred' and playful piece of irony intended to give away the literary provenance of this pastoral romance to the circumspect reader.

However, it is equally likely that one aim of this literary self-consciousness is to call into doubt the notion of literary authority as such. Within this disruption of the authority of the author, Godwin undoes his own claims to authority and originality through this perpetual recession of irony after irony. Within the narrative and style of *Imogen* itself, Godwin furthers this undoing through an ethical change in the nature of the 'Comus' story - an ethical change married to a shift in aesthetic procedure. Godwin's text becomes a translation of Milton's pastoral romance that in the act of translation disrupts the aesthetic/ethical centre of Milton's text. Godwin begins this process in the rhetorical methods of his preface, and continues it in the stylistic manner of the romance itself. At stake in *Imogen* is the displacement of the authority of tradition by the authority of the individual.

In his preface, Godwin gives away his position as imitator, though he does so in such a way as to question the idea of imitation as such. Godwin raises the problem of originality within tradition and, in the process of the narrative, shows how this problem is identical to that of the individual's growth and education within a fixed and unchanging society. For Godwin personally these ideas were no doubt enmeshed with his need to forge his own identity as a writer. Godwin had moved to London in 1783 with the intention of making his

[6] ibid., i. pp. xiii-xiv.

name as an author. Although *Imogen* was an anonymous work it bears the marks of the pushiness that characterized the young Godwin - a pushiness that led him to address the eminent Joseph Priestley as an equal. One of the more disingenuous aspects of Godwin's preface is that the pose of being the work's translator allowed opportunities for self praise and self advertisement.[7] By placing his text at the head of a tradition, Godwin hopes to benefit from the conventional veneration accorded to that tradition, and to call into question the idea of tradition as such.

In the preface, this relation of the individual to tradition is made explicit through the introduction of the idea of cultural inheritance. The translator has inherited the romance from his ancestors:

> The romance was certainly at one time in his custody, and was handed as a valuable legacy to his descendants, among whom the present translator has the honour to rank himself.[8]

That is, Godwin places himself as an inheritor, a man given a story by the fact of birth. That this trope has cultural implications becomes apparent when we reconsider *Imogen's* debt to Macpherson. As with the Ossian poems, *Imogen's* fictional status as a translation from the Ancient British places the text at an imaginary origin of British culture and history. It is a fiction from the nation's origin, and hence belongs to the foundation of tradition. Tradition is that element of remembrance which bequeaths the immediacy of the past to the present in the form of authority. Godwin imagines *Imogen* then as both a text which belongs to the process of remembrance and tradition and also a work which pre-dates that tradition. Therefore, through the preface's elaborate play with the notion of inheritance and temporality, Godwin both places the work under what Marx saw as the nightmare weight of succeeding generations and liberates it from this burden of history by placing it in the purity of an origin.

Godwin's intellectual play with the notions of originality and tradition are continued in the fabric of the novel itself. Pastoral belongs to the literature of the idyll. Its world is outside the processes of history, and its inhabitants exist changelessly, timelessly, and hence in a state of pure being and pure emotion. This pastoral world obviously owes much to Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*. It is worth noting that Roderick, who represents emotional changefulness, is also an historical innovator. In his realm he has, among other things, introduced the plough - Rousseau's image of the close of the pastoral world.

On the level of character, this pastoral mode represents itself in emotional fidelity, as witnessed in Imogen's chaste and incorruptible love for Edwin. This fidelity and self-consistency is linked to the childhood self. Imogen keeps her integrity both through remembrance of her childhood with Edwin, and by keeping in mind the education given her by the druids.

Godwin describes a way of growing up which is to exist in the timeless integrity and sufficiency of the childhood self. This childhood self is likewise expressed in the pastoral idyll, with its existence before history. The static and pictorial quality that marks *Imogen* is therefore not the expression of baroque artifice, but a stylistic equivalent to the unchanging nature of the self within the pastoral mode. The tableaux present innocence. Godwin found

[7] For instance, Godwin is enabled to write of his own work: 'Its style is elegant and pure . . . it will be found to contain much originality of conception, much classical taste, and great spirit and beauty in the execution. (ibid., i. pp. ix-x).

[8] ibid., i. p. xvi.

in pastoral a way of growing up which is a natural growth within the self, a continuity that stands outside and before the changefulness of human restlessness, as imaged in Roderick, but also before the change manifest in history. The individual lives in Nature, but a Nature unmarked by human development. (That, of course, is the Rousseauist significance of the plough.) This world is by its nature remote from us, and yet connected to us. It is our imagined historical origin, a time before historical change had begun. This pastoral origin therefore represents an idealized foundation of tradition and an idealized fiction of the childhood self.

Into this unchanging growth of the self, Godwin introduces the idea of trial. It is through the endurance of the temptation to change and lose the integrity of the self that Imogen and Edwin prove themselves as self-sufficient individuals. It is this idea of the trial of the integral self that Godwin translated from the Christian terms of Milton's *Comus* into the beginnings of his own radical philosophy. The question arises: was Godwin a good translator?

To answer this question requires a brief consideration of Milton's *Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634.* In *Comus* there is no dramatic tension as would result from the unfolding of character in narrative time. Character is already apparent and self-evident; the knowingness of The Lady's self-revelation shows this. *Comus* enacts the maintaining of the self's integrity through trial. The wood that the children are lost in is a place of testing, and what is being tested is the individual's identity in the process of growing up.

The form of *Comus* places the individual's growth in the context of a hierarchy of authority and tradition. Integrity exists through the self's relation to others. This helps to explain why it should be sensual pleasure that manifests the temptation which would corrupt the individual's integrity. Pleasure draws the self away from its social relations into the sensual experiences of its own body. In becoming an end in themselves, these experiences cut the individual off from everything outside his or her self.

Although most accurately described as a pastoral drama, *Comus'* indebtedness to masque accounts for much which distinguishes it from Godwin's work. In so far as *Comus* is drama, character reveals itself through trial; in so far as *Comus* is masque, humanity is presented through spectacle. Moreover, the static nature of the form and its political motivations make it difficult to claim that masque deals in 'character' at all. The climax of the masque is the presentation of the three children to their aristocratic parents, a presentation enacted in song. Although the plot concerns the testing of individual integrity, this integrity attains greatest reality through its relation to others, particularly through its presentation to the young girl's parents. It does not stand alone, but assumes a place within a hierarchy of succession. Her integrity is her identity, and her identity is within the family and society.

This corresponds to the nature of masque. Masque enacts the ritualization of the social self, and leads through disguise to the display of the person in artifice and ceremony. Rather than acting, the individual was pretending to be his or her self, and, in fact, through artifice, really being that self. Disguise is not only a method of concealment. It is simultaneously a means to the revelation of the self, or more accurately speaking, the celebration and justification of the self as part of a political heirarchy. The action of *Comus* faces outward. The integrity of the individual establishes itself in something outside itself, whether that should be the ideal of chastity, God, or the King. Everything is contingent and in relationship to another. This idea achieves its apotheosis in the presentation of the children at the masque's end. The action acquires its reality by having been played not just to an audience, but to a specific audience of family and retainers. Masque is always specific and receives its meaning from its connection to one time and one place. Through the meaning of that

place and the experience of poetry, these particular children are granted a worldly immortality.

In *Imogen*, the individual's sanction is not faith, which is directed to the ideal outside the self, but virtue. The inner sanction of the individual conscience is educated by others, but finally it is established within the self.

The theme of *Comus* is the transmission of authority and the dependeuce of the iudividual upon that authority. In *Comus*, virtue is strong, but it is also dependent. The Brothers require the help of the Spirit and the magical property of haemony, and The Lady needs both her Brother and Sabrina to be free. Authority does not reside in individuals but occurs through relationship and hierarchy. All action depends upon the aid of another. This stems both from Milton's Christian sensibility and from his concomitant political intelligence. The Earl of Bridgewater himself was a deputy, acting with the sanction of royal authority. The Masque, which was to celebrate the Earl's assumption of office, shows how the representative of authority possesses the soul and guarantee of right power. The children stand in the same relation to their parents as a subject stands to a sovereign. This masque is therefore a public form for a private relationship. The private affirmation of the children's relation to their parents assumes public expression and permanence. It establishes itself both in personal tenderness and political symbolism. It is not accidental that the romantic love at the heart of *Imogen* is purely personal, and does not obviously carry beyond itself into the realm of politics.

William St. Clair has shown that as early as 1785 Godwin had placed highest authority in the judgement of the individual. The evidence of *Imogen* suggests that by 1783-4, he was already thinking in these terms. In *Imogen*, Godwin represents the highest sanction for action as residing in the individual's own conscience and integrity.

One revealing difference between Milton and Godwin might be their contrasting attitudes to the doctrine of original sin. For Milton, childhood chastity is grace, and hence both the property of the individual and a gift from outside.[9] For Godwin, Imogen's virtue is her own purely, though an expression of her belonging to the pastoral environment and her education in that environment. Her task is to preserve this pastoral and childhood simplicity against corruption.

Through not belonging to the pastoral stability which is the nature of Imogen's self, Roderick, Imogen's seducer, has no absolute identity. His ability to change magically his physical appearance (Comus-like) manifests his failure to be continuously and unchangingly himself. Imogen's body remains unchanged, and this itself represents her stable and continuous identity.[10]

[9] See *Comus* 418-19:

I mean that too, but yet a hidden strength
Which if heaven gave it, may be termed her own . . .

[10] This is apparent to Edwin, who sees in Imogen the manifestation of virtue:

Through the memory of Imogen he derived a body, and communicated a visible form to the precepts of rectitude; and virtue wore all those charms that had the most uncontroled empire in his bosom. (ibid., ii. 162).

As I have already suggested, it is Imogen's sense of individual continuity with her childhood self that enables her to resist the sensual and sexual temptations of Roderick.[11] Imogen is sustained through her education in nature, and is also expected to undergo a further education through trial.[12] The end of this trial is not the development of the individual personality, but a return to timelessness and changelessness in the pastoral, though with the experience of adversity to guarantee the perpetuation of that innocence:

> Long did they dwell together in the vale of Clwyd, with that simplicity and attachment which no scenes but those of pastoral life can know. Their happiness was more sensible than those of the swains around them in that they had known a reverse of fortune. And their fortune was the purer and the more benevolent, in that they had passed through the fields of trial; and that only through the ordeal of temptation and an approved fortitude, they had arrived to the unmixed felicity, and the uninterrupted enjoyment they at length possessed.[13]

Imogen and Edwin end in a state of unchangeable bliss. Their moment of trial occurring at the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, they move from pastoral timelessness to pastoral timelessness. Their momentary suffering acts as a guarantee, a rite of passage between these two elements of the same continuity. Moreover it is a passage secured in their own history, or rather in their own growth, for the pastoral is before history and still outside it.

Imogen meets her trial with the resources garnered within herself. She is supposedly sustained by her pastoral background and her education, but these are felt as extraneous by the reader. Imogen resists through the power of her own innocence. She requires no outside sanction of authority, for the strength and sincerity of her own conscience protect her. Even her rescue by Edwin appears not as rescue, but as Edwin's own opportunity for trial, to be tested as Imogen has been tested. These adolescents live before history in the tradition of the druids, a tradition suitable for the pastoral through its vague quality and its apparent unity with the forces of nature. The individual stands free of the past in the fresh, continuously new pastoral realm.

What complicates Godwin's philosophy is his own indebtedness to the pastoral tradition in literature and most obviously to *Comus*. Of course, Godwin was aware of this: Imogen and Edwin do not just emerge from an animal newness, they belong to the tradition of the druids, and the rhetorical slipperiness of Godwin's preface indicates his own dependence upon the authority of tradition. The world of *Imogen* is not after all a new world, but an idyll which only bears the appearance of timelessness. Roderick represents the force of progress, and even within the pastoral world the oldest bard declares the presence of time and mortality: 'Children, I have met your fathers, and your fathers fathers, beneath the hills of

[11] Godwin had made this point a year earlier in *An Account of A Seminary* (1783), where he argues that a child becomes a moral being through the power of remembrance: 'The moment in which the faculty of memory begins to unfold itself, the man begins to exist as a moral being' (p. 46).

[12] Often in moments of trial, Godwin employs language drawn from the process of education: 'Imogen is under the guardianship of simplicity, her favourite pupil' (*Imogen* ii. 17); 'Thou must be taught, fair and unsuspecting virgin' (ibid., ii. 20); 'She is well fortified with the prejudices of education . . .' (ibid., ii. 2); 'But remember this is your hour of trial. If now you forget the principles of your youth, and the instructions of the sacred Druids, you shall fall from happiness, never to regain it more' (ibid., ii. 84-5). There are many similar examples.

[13] ibid., ii. 174-5. These are the closing words of the novel.

Ruthyn. Such as they were, such are ye, and such ever may ye remain . . .'[14] However, this quotation reveals the peculiar nature of the presence of time within the pastoral. Firstly, the audience are 'children', and hence of the origin. Secondly, they are bound into a cyclical pattern of life, which has not yet entered into the progress of history; 'such ever may ye remain'. The valley seals the pastoral world into a repetitive newness, a state of being, never of becoming.

Godwin himself is in a literary tradition. His position, despite his playing with the nature of temporal succession, is as the inheritor of Milton. In rewriting *Comus* as *Imogen*, Godwin is translating the past into the present. Similarly, as is the case with any dialogue, our reading is an act of translation, in this case of the immediacy of the past into the immediacy of our present. In thinking of these texts, one of which is firmly embedded in tradition and one of which is all but forgotten, it is inevitable that we should wonder if the judgement of tradition has been a fair one. We can assume that *Comus* deserves to be remembered. Has *Imogen* deserved to be forgotten?

In *An Account of A Seminary*, Godwin writes: 'The best thoughts and expressions of an author, those that distinguish one writer from another, are precisely those that are least capable of being translated.'[15] In translating Milton's drama into his own terms, Godwin lost much of what has ensured that *Comus* will be remembered. *Imogen's* interest is primarily a period one, and it will be read now for what it reveals of Godwin, or the history of the pastoral or the novel. If anyone should engage in the gratuitous act of reading it for itself, they will enter a work marred by cliché, flat and uninteresting characters, and a slack plot. However, they will also find a work unlike any other, imbued with an atmosphere possessing all the strange clarity of a vivid dream.

Moreover, while not yet approaching the intensity of *Caleb Williams* or *Fleetwood*, Godwin's anxious indebtedness to Milton brings an ethical depth to this novel. Though Godwin is obviously 'playful' here, it is with an apparent philosophical intent. His relation to his own creativity, and his status as an original writer within a literary tradition, had allowed him to represent as serious play the position of the beleaguered individual in the process of finding his or her own integral identity.

University College, London

[14] ibid., i. 56-7.

[15] *Account of A Seminary* 10.

Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*: Making Virtue of Necessity

By ELENA YATZECK

IN 1825, WILLIAM HAZLITT was the first to describe Godwin's spectacular rise and fall in popularity, and to point out that although the world had changed, Godwin's position had not. 'The Spirit of the Age', he writes, 'was never more fully shown than in its treatment of this writer':

> No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.* Tom Paine was considered for the time as a Tom Fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode; and these were the oracles of thought. 'Throw aside your books of chemistry', said Wordsworth to a young man, a student in the Temple, 'and read Godwin on Necessity.' Sad necessity! Fatal reverse! Is truth then so variable? Is it one thing at twenty and another at forty? Is it at a burning heat in 1793 and below *zero* in 1814?[1]

Godwin has been received as the champion of 'necessity', and, as Hazlitt suggests, as its victim. According to most accounts, Godwin burst onto the political scene in 1793 with the first edition of his anarchist *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, and remained prominent until 1798, when the British government shut down the presses of radical dissent. Godwin made himself completely unpalatable, even to the radical community, when he included unapologetic accounts of Mary Wollstonecraft's extra-marital affairs with Gilbert Imlay and himself in his 1798 *Memoir of the author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women'*. Later writers have taken their cue from Hazlitt when they suggest that after 1800, Godwin's circumstances forced him to redirect his political energies into the literary sphere, where he could still make money, sometimes under a pseudonym.[2] Critics of his political works have drawn the implication that he was so discouraged by the hostile climate which developed that he withdrew entirely from his earlier political engagement, except for his brief re-emergence in 1820 with 'Of Population'.

To argue that Godwin withdrew from political discourse, however, is to ignore the way he reshaped this discourse even while he was still writing within a recognizably political idiom. The doctrine of necessity which forms the philosophical backbone of *Political Justice* also lays the groundwork for the career Godwin took up once that text was completed. Godwin's later works, including novels, essays, children's books, and literary biographies, pursue political ends through literary means, and they do not have to be explained away by *post facto* conclusions that Godwin was beaten down and depressed, or by his contemporaries' belief that he'd stopped writing. Indeed, these works provide evidence which allows one to reconstruct him as an author with a unique perspective on the ways in which literary history can reshape the course of political progress.

Godwin's *Life of Chaucer* (1802) provides an excellent case in point. Until recently, this work has been held up as the epitome of the kind of hack work to which Godwin is supposed

[1] William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt* ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London, 1902), p. 201.

[2] C. Kegan Paul, for example, says that Godwin's interest in politics 'waned' after 1800 (*William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, [London, 1870], p. 204).

to have turned his attention after 1800.[3] Yet the final revision of *Political Justice* (1797) and other texts Godwin wrote around the same time suggest that the biography and its peculiar form should instead be regarded as having been virtually mandated by his doctrine of necessity. In this essay, I would like to analyse the way in which Godwin's 1797 advocacy of a particular kind of literary biography saves his theory of necessary from some logical difficulties, and then briefly examine the ways in which the doctrine of necessity can, in turn, help to explain aspects of the *Life of Chaucer* which have bothered even advocates of the work since it was published.

Necessity in Political Justice

Given the way the radical community embraced *Political Justice* in the 1790s, one might expect Godwin, like Paine, argued that universal human qualities such as reason are what make political institutions unnecessary. It would not be surprising to find him arguing that no matter what one's historical context, he or she can use reason to discern what should be done, and that historical precedents are therefore irrelevant. 'Self-evident' truths were advocated as political guidelines by philosophers in America and France, as well as by republican sympathizers in England. Godwin, however, does not argue that reason can operate outside of history. Instead, he maintains that every human action is the necessary result of individual and social history. Although he was received as an ally of Thomas Paine, his position might be described more accurately as one which takes Edmund Burke's theories of historical continuity to their logical extreme. Godwin's version of the doctrine of necessity, which he based on arguments he found in Hume, Hartley, and Priestley, holds that all human actions spring from precedent and habit, which are historically conditioned. Even reason operates within historical constraints:[4]

> In the life of every human being there is a chain of events, generated in the lapse of ages which preceded his birth, and going on in regular procession through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it was impossible for him to act in any instance otherwise than he has acted. (p. 351)[5]

Although the 1793 edition of *Political Justice* bases its hopes for human perfectibility on people's ability to transcend their context using reason, Godwin abandons this solution in 1797 and asserts that everything must happen within the system of necessity.

Godwin's reliance on this deterministic belief in necessity puts a great deal of pressure on his equally strong insistence that 'man is perfectible'. On the one hand, he argues that organized government provides a precedent in which a social institution imposes laws on people rather than allowing them to use their own consciences. Governments then lead people into war abroad and torture at home. He concludes that the history of political institutions is 'little else than a record of crimes' (p. 83). On the other hand, he concludes

[3] Pamela Clemit and others have eloquently rebutted this argument, particularly with regard to the novels, but also to Godwin's 'philosophical biographies'; see *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 81-4.

[4] Mark Philp explores the arguments by Priestley, Hartley, and Hume which most seem to have influenced Godwin, in his book *Godwin's Political Justice* (London, 1986). In Chapter 9, 'Re-vising *Political Justice* 1796-1797', he supports the interpretation that Godwin had stopped believing that man can always use reason to act correctly, and instead argued for a system in which man acts based on feeling and habit (pp. 193-213).

[5] Page numbers refer to *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth, 1985), based on the 1797 version.

that people are becoming more moral as history progresses. He asserts that despite years of rule by political institutions, people will gradually begin to rule themselves and make government obsolete. Political institution creates a negative precedent, but Godwin foresees a positive result.

The missing term in the equation turns out to be a second history which Godwin says coexists with, and tries to reshape, the political one. In the final chapter of book I he asserts that 'man is perfectible' not just because everyone is born rational, but because all people have an excellent historical precedent which has already had an impact on them, and whose record is there for them to consult: the history of language, letters, and the arts. In this chapter, Godwin challenges precisely the scepticism which his earlier analysis will have produced in the reader, and he describes his opponents as those who think that mankind has not been able to change over the centuries. He exposes the 'erroneousness' of this belief by presenting as counter-evidence 'a summary recollection of the *actual* history of our species' (pp. 156-7, my italics), in which improvements in people's language have allowed them to make moral strides forward as well. Godwin outlines the chapter as one which will catalogue 'the great changes which man has undergone as an intellectual being, entitling us to infer the probability of improvements not less essential, to be realized in the future' (p. 157). Under the broad heading of 'great changes', the ensuing pages provide three positive models: the acquisition of language, the development of abstraction, and the invention of writing. Godwin concludes:

> Such was man in his original state, and such is man as we at present behold him. Is it possible for us to contemplate what he has already done without being impressed with a strong presentiment of the improvements he has yet to accomplish? There is no science that is not capable of additions; there is no art that may be carried to a still higher perfection. If this be true of all other sciences, why not of morals? If this be true of all other arts, why not of social institutions? (p. 163)

Godwin identifies a chain of necessity which occupies the same time-frame as the history of political institution - from man's 'original state' to the present - but which provides a positive, rather than a negative, impact on the public morals.

This passage also, however, highlights the connection Godwin sees between the chain of events which had led up to a person's birth and the chain of events within the person's lifetime in which he or she actually feels their impact. Godwin uses the collective 'man' in this chapter to blur the distinction between the development of an individual and the historical progress of a whole nation.[6] Although he looks for physical, moral, and economic benefits to the 'species of mankind', his picture of history is one which each human being experiences in narrative form. He plays down the train of actual events in his sketch of history, and outlines something that looks more like a comparison between the ways history can actually be *learned* by an individual in different historical contexts:

> Let us carry back our minds to man in his original state, a being capable of impressions and knowledge to an unbounded extent, but not having as yet received the one or cultivated the other; let us contrast this being with all that science and genius have effected . . . . It is to be remembered that this being did not, as now, derive assistance from the communications of his fellows, nor had his feeble and crude conceptions

[6] Burton Pollin analyses this issue in some depth in *Education and Enlightenment in the works of William Godwin* (New York, 1962), pp. 90-104.

amended by the experience of successive centuries; but that in the state we are figuring all men were equally ignorant . . . (p. 157)

Godwin's most complete argument for the perfectibility of man de-emphasizes reason as a common bond between generations. Although he preserves the idea that historical events themselves function as part of a 'chain of necessity', he is more interested in history as it is reconstituted in moral texts for the benefit of present-day readers. Once Godwin argues that history takes place within the individual consciousness of the reader, he can go on to compare the acquisition of language with the acquisition of facts about events which took place centuries ago. The history of political institution, he argues, can be rewritten once it is incorporated into the history of literature.

In 'Of history and romance', an essay which was published in the same year as the revised edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin explicitly advocates literary biography as the genre most likely to affect moral and ultimately political reform. In this essay, Godwin rules out both the 'history of mass movements' and 'romance' for his purposes and promotes an odd hybrid text which takes an historically existing literary figure for a hero and shows this figure as both the product of society and a force which reshapes it. He argues, first, that only a text which focuses on an individual can have the impact he desires on the reader: 'He that would prove the liberal and spirited benefactor of his species, must connect the two branches of history together, and regard the knowledge of the individual, as that which can alone give energy and utility to the records of our social existence' (p. 363). Godwin argues that the history of mass movements in the abstract has been overrated: 'it is to be feared that one of the causes that have dictated the panegyric which has so often been pronounced upon this species of history, is its dry and repulsive nature' (p. 361). Those who study a history of abstractions are doomed to 'dull repetition' of old mistakes, while those who study individual lives will gain insights which can be applied to future decisions: 'It will be necessary for us to scrutinize the nature of man, before we can pronounce what it is of which social man is capable. . . . It is thus, and thus only, that we shall be able to add, to the knowledge of the past, a sagacity that can penetrate into the depths of futurity' (p. 363).

When Godwin insists that only an interesting story about an individual will have the desired impact on the reader, one might think that a novel, rather than a biography, would best suit his purposes. He concedes, in fact, that a novel should theoretically be the best vehicle for the kind of cultural education he hopes to give his readers, since the novelist ought to be able to fine-tune the social variables in the text for maximum social results in the world: 'we should be apt to pronounce that romance was a bolder species of composition than history' (p. 370). He regretfully concludes, however, that the biographer 'recover[s] his advantage' because he or she has available all the myriad specific details of real life: 'To write romance is a task too great for the powers of man, and under which he might be expected to totter. . . . Naturalists tell us that a single grain of sand more or less on the surface of the earth, would have altered its motion, and in process of ages, have diversified its events. We have no reason to suppose in this respect, that what is true in matter, is false in morals' (p. 372). Only historical research can provide enough details of real life to make an argument which can stand the test of the reader's own subsequent experiences.

Because Godwin comes to advocate biography for philosophical reasons rather than aesthetic ones, he differs sharply from his contemporaries on the way the genre should be

constructed.[7] This can be seen both in his approach to his subject and in his approach to his readers. First, for Godwin, the rhetorical power of the biography springs from its ability to show the biographical subject in a social context, not a transcendent, supernatural one. The values and beliefs which biographies help to disseminate draw their authority not from an unseen, ideal world, but from lessons which one's ancestors painstakingly accumulated and recorded.[8] He objects to biographies which celebrate genius over effort; he insists that even great heroes are made of mortal material. He concludes that the only picture which will inspire the reader, rather than causing him or her to feel depressed and intimidated, is one which will show the social forces which worked upon these heroes, and emphasize, reciprocally, that they helped to have an impact on their own societies:

> The excellence indeed of sages, of patriots and poets, as we find it exhibited at the end of their maturity, is too apt to overwhelm and discourage us with its lustre. But history takes away the cause of our depression. It enables us to view minutely and in detail what to the uninstructed eye was too powerful to be gazed at; and, by tracing the progress of the virtuous and wise from its first dawn to its meridian lustre, shows us that they were composed of materials merely human. (p. 362)[9]

One of Godwin's motivations for writing biography, then, is to replace a dialectic of natural and supernatural with one which shows the interaction of socially constructed individuals with their host societies.

Godwin argues, secondly, that the only writing technique which will succeed in linking an individual to his or her social context is one in which the reader participates with the author in constructing the text from these details. Arguing at several points that biography operates through a kind of 'magnetism', he argues that the reader can only make history his or her own property by piecing together all the raw materials him or herself. 'Profound scholars', he says:

> proceed at once to the naked and scattered materials, out of which the historian constructed his work. This they do, that they may investigate the story for themselves; or, more accurately speaking, that each man, instead of resting in the inventions of another, may invent his history for himself, and possess his creed as he possesses his property, single and incommunicable. (pp. 370-1)

Godwin concludes that biography alone has the power to move the reader's emotions, will, and faith, and that this makes it the most practical moral tool available in an imperfect world:

[7] Godwin's work itself demonstrates that norms for biographical writing were very much in turmoil in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but as Annette Cafarelli and Joseph Reed persuasively argue, one may safely assert that many biographers of this period were influenced by Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (1776), which expresses as much about Johnson as about its subjects, or by James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791), with its strict concentration. Both works promote an idea of biography as a non-philosophical genre which focuses tightly on one subject at a time. See Cafarelli's *Prose in the Age of Poets Romanticism and Biographical Narrative from Johnson to De Quincey* (Philadelphia, 1990) and Reed's *English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century: 1801-1838* (New Haven, 1966).

[8] Godwin's last biographical work, the *Lives of the Necromancers* (1834), specifically addresses this pathology of what he terms 'superstition'. It is, as its subtitle suggests, 'An Account of the Most Eminent Persons in Successive Ages, who have claimed for themselves, or to whom has been imputed by Others, the Exercise of Magical Power'.

[9] All references to this essay come from the Penguin edition of *Caleb Williams* ed. Maurice Hindle (Harmondsworth, 1988), to which it forms an appendix.

> He that will not examine the collections and the efforts of man, till absurdity and folly are extirpated from among them, must be contented to remain in ignorance, and wait for the state, where he expects that faith will give place to sight, and conjecture be swallowed up in knowledge. (p. 373)

Godwin argues, finally, that literary figures, not political ones, are the best subjects for biography. Although this point might be extrapolated from *Political Justice*, he makes it again in his 1809 'Essay on Sepulchres', where he suggests that monuments should be raised on the burial sites of all the illustrious dead, not just those of monarchs and war heroes. He proposes to honour more literary figures posthumously because they have been workers for the social good. These social actions are what he hopes to prolong:

> I trust that none of my readers will be erroneous enough to consider the vivid recollection of things past, as hostile to that tone of spirit which should aspire to the boldest improvements in the future. The genuine heroes of the times that have been, were the reformers, the instructors, the improvers of their contemporaries, and he is the sincerest admirer of these men, who most earnestly aspires to become 'like unto them'.[10]

Godwin's biographies serve the same purpose which he proposes here for physical monuments: they draw attention to the figures in the past who have already affected social changes, and whose spirit of reform he hopes to see emulated in analogous actions by his readers. *Political Justice* provides a blueprint for the best manner in which to cause government to fall away of its own accord, and it is this blueprint which Godwin follows, writing not only the monumental *Life of Chaucer*, but also the memoir of Mary Wollstonecraft and a life of Milton's nephews in 1815.[11] *Political Justice* proposes that literary history needs a publicist in order to have its maximum effect, and Godwin throws himself into this role after 1800. Where literary history provides *Political Justice* with an explanation for how virtue can be the product of necessity, moreover, the doctrine of necessity may help to provide us with some sense of the virtues of the *Life of Chaucer*.

Necessity and the Life of Chaucer

In a letter of 1811, Coleridge called Godwin 'the critic who in the life of Chaucer has given us, if not the principles of aesthetic, or taste, yet more and better data for principles than had hitherto existed in our language.'[12] Coleridge stood virtually alone in his positive evaluation of this work,[13] and even so, his praise is couched very oddly (does a 'principle' really need the support of 'data'?). The context for this compliment is praise along similarly curious lines for *Political Justice*, which he says 'gave us the first system in England that ever dared reveal at full that the most important of all important truths, that morality might be built up on its own foundation like a castle built from the rock, with religion for the ornaments and

[10] *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), p. xii.

[11] *Political Justice* sheds light on these two works as well. Godwin's choice of Milton's nephews as biographical subjects, for example, can be seen as a rebuke to Samuel Johnson for dismissing Milton's educational efforts.

[12] *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. E. L. Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956-71), iii. 314.

[13] Sir Walter Scott, to name one famous example, complained that 'the style is depraved, being both mean and bombastic' although he conceded that the book would be valuable 'if pruned to one quarter the size' (*Edinburgh Review* 3 [1804] 437-52).

completion of its roof and upper storeys.'[14] It is perhaps only the early Coleridge who could cheerfully allow not only 'principles' but even 'religion' to be phenomena whose utility could be tested with experience. Paine was imprisoned shortly thereafter for publishing similar beliefs. Coleridge's lonesome and odd praise for Godwin is valuable, however, for pointing to the assumptions which underlie the unusual biographical design of this text. In it, Godwin puts into practice his theory that he could best influence posterity by providing readers with all of the data which would allow them to piece together Chaucer's development as a social creature and to apply the narrative of his development to their own lives. The efficacy of this work depends upon its interactive stance; Godwin encourages the reader to collaborate with him and past historians in trying to construct Chaucer as a product of the middle ages and the author of future English culture. Godwin's goal is not to satisfy the reader's curiosity about the poet, but rather to engage him or her in permanently reactivating the past as a moral force in his or her own life.

The *Life of Chaucer* principally has been criticized for two things. As a life story, first of all, it spends surprisingly little time describing Chaucer himself, delving instead (and at length) into particulars of medieval architecture, religious festivals, politics, and food; Chaucer disappears for chapters at a time. A second charge, which may seem more serious to modern readers, was that Godwin 'invented' a lot of his facts, speculating on the thoughts and motivations of John of Gaunt, for example, and creating out of whole cloth the details of Chaucer's reputed meeting with Petrarch.[15] One may at first doubt that Godwin could be guilty both of excessive historicism and of abandoning historical method altogether, but the introduction to the work makes it clear that Godwin was not only guilty as charged, but intended to write the biography that way.

Godwin portrays his biography most clearly as an extension of his own previous philosophical ideas when he explains in the introduction that he considers it as an answer to Thomas Tyrwhitt's terse eight-page account of the poet's life in the preface to his 1798 edition of *The Canterbury Tales*.[16] Tyrwhitt's analyses of Chaucer's versification, and his defence of him as an English poet in a French-speaking court, had raised Chaucer to the status of the first national poet. From Godwin's perspective, however, Tyrwhitt fails to capitalize properly on his own achievement. Godwin argues that Tyrwhitt does not do enough historical homework, on the one hand, and that he presents his factual information in an excessively unimaginative manner, on the other. The key words in his critique come straight from his 1797 theory of necessity: Tyrwhitt is dry, terse, and caught up entirely in the negative narrative of political institutional history: 'he has endeavoured to reduce the life of the poet to a dry extract of the records of those of our English sovereigns whom Chaucer served'.[17] Godwin ranks Tyrwhitt with other 'men of cold tempers and sterile imaginations' who, 'by their phlegmatic and desultory industry, have brought discredit on a science [antiquaries], which is perhaps beyond all others fraught with wisdom, moral instruction, and intellectual improvement' (p. xiv). Godwin's own technique is portrayed as functioning in opposition to Tyrwhitt - where Tyrwhitt is brief, Godwin is expansive, and where Tyrwhitt

[14] *Collected Letters* iii. 314.

[15] Pollin quotes the *Critical Review* as saying that for Godwin, biography was a matter not of fact, but of 'fancy and philosophy' (Pollin, p. 343).

[16] Peter Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven, 1984), p. 255.

[17] William Godwin, *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, The Early English Poet; including Memoirs of his near Friend and Kinsman John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; with Sketches of the Manners, Opinions, Arts and Literature of England in the Fourteenth Century* (London, 1802), p. 352.

is dry, Godwin foregrounds his own storytelling to capture the reader's imagination and to encourage the reader to perform his own acts of narration.

Godwin turns the rescue work which has been done by Tyrwhitt into the foundation for a positive programme which he hopes will galvanize the English reading public into historical enquiries of their own, enquiries with moral and surprisingly nationalistic overtones. 'There are abundant reasons why Englishmen should regard Chaucer with particular veneration', he says, 'The first and direct object of this work is to erect a monument to his name, and, as far as the writer was capable of doing it, to produce an interesting and amusing book in modern English, enabling the reader . . . to do justice to his illustrious countrymen' (p. vii). Godwin offers two related benefits to his readers. First, the book provides him the perfect vehicle for demonstrating his theory of the social formation of character, an idea which he says 'was continuously present to the mind of the author while writing' and 'obviously contributed to give animation to his labours and importance to his understanding':

> We must observe what Chaucer felt and saw, how he was educated, what species of learning he pursued, and what were the objects, the events and the persons, successively presented to his view, before we can strictly and philosophically understand his biography. (p. viii)

Chaucer provides a central structure upon which the reader can build a coherent narrative from the otherwise seemingly disjointed facts. The reader will therefore be better able to apply the lessons learned by his or her ancestors:

> The person of Chaucer may in this view be considered as the central figure in a miscellaneous painting, giving unity and individual application to the otherwise disjointed particulars with which the canvas is diversified. No man of moral sentiment or of taste will affirm, that a more becoming central figure to the delineation of England in the fourteenth century can be found, than the Englishman who gives name to these volumes. (p. ix)

When Godwin juxtaposes a pictorial metaphor with an assertion that Chaucer 'delineates' a history, he sets the tone for a work which purposefully makes the reader largely responsible for its ultimate coherence. If the reader can be brought to rise to this challenge, however, he or she will reactivate all the material which helped to make Chaucer the great figure he was, and make the same material newly available for his or her own life. Godwin's goal is not to depict unchanging truths about the past, but to make the available material morally useful.

This reader participation, if it can be successfully elicited, itself constitutes Godwin's second methodological benefit. The readers who co-operate will not merely accumulate facts about the past - they will also become aware of the way the past has already acted upon them, and the manner in which their own contributions can likewise be important for posterity. Godwin depicts Chaucer as the single-handed creator of English civilisation, and maintains he did it through just such acts of narration:

> What had been achieved in English, was little better than a jejune table of events with the addition of rhyme. Chaucer fixed and naturalized the genuine art of poetry in our island. But what is most memorable in his eulogy, is that he is the father of our language, the idiom of which was by the Norman conquest banished from courts and civilized life, and which Chaucer was the first to restore to literature, and the muses. No one man in the history of human intellect ever did more, than was effected by the single mind of Chaucer. (p. vii)

Godwin constructs Chaucer, most of all, as the man who could put diverse experiential matter into an appealing form. He presents Chaucer's use of language, and his story telling, as examples to emulate.

Godwin's appreciation for the importance of Chaucer's narrations to subsequent events in history, and his hope that the reader will use narrative in a similarly powerful way, causes him to foreground his own narrative acts throughout the biography. Far from passing off fictions as fact, Godwin highlights the fictional and constructed aspect of the tales he tells, and encourages the readers to do the same. At every point where he departs from directly narrating events in Chaucer's life, he explicitly connects the apparent digression to his main narrative. Introducing a chapter on the plague of 1349, for example, he clearly identifies his words as speculative, but justifies them in terms of the overall impact the events must have had on the poet's growth: 'It would be unpardonable in a work the principle object of which is to point the mind of the poet, and by this means enable the reader, as far as possible, to transport himself into the times when Chaucer lived, if we omitted to notice the great plague . . .' (p. 252). Later, he identifies a point where he has borrowed from the story of a different poet to fill a gap in this one: 'We have no information as to where Chaucer resided, or how he was employed, during this extraordinary occurrence. In this deficiency, I am inclined to fill the vacuity to my own imagination, by recollecting the situation of a great poet of a subsequent age, in a time of similar calamity, though of a much inferior magnitude . . .' (p. 257). Godwin connects the information which he presents into Chaucer's life story, and then explains how he thinks the background information helps to explain Chaucer's development.

Godwin also frequently cites and comments on his sources, drawing the reader into a dialogue with previous authors. Here, for example, he rebuts Speght for unquestioningly accepting the word of a 'Mr. Buckley' that Chaucer was a lawyer:

> [According to Speght] 'Not many yeeres since, Master Buckley did see a record in the same house [the Inner Temple], where Geoffrey Chaucer was fined two shillings for beating a Franciscane fryar in Fleet Streete.' This certainly would be excellent evidence, were it not for the dark and ambiguous manner in which it is produced. I should have been glad that Mr. Speght had himself seen the record, instead of Mr. Buckley, of whom I suppose no one knows who he is; why did he not? I should have been better satisfied if the authority had not been introduced with so hesitating and questioning a phrase as 'not many yeeres since': and I also think that it would have been better if Master Buckley had given us the date annexed to the record; as we should then at least have the satisfaction of knowing whether it did not belong to some period before our author was born or after he had been committed to the grave. (p. 358)

Godwin projects the reader as a co-author of his work, not a passive receptacle for it, and presents the arrangement of facts itself as a natural activity worth doing well. He continually makes clear that the point of reading the book is to practice using historical material as comfortably as the reader uses the materials of his or her own experience. By engaging the audience in the process of reconstructing Chaucer, he hopes to both demonstrate and reactivate his theories of the social formation of character.

Conclusion

As Mark Philp suggests in *Godwin's Political Justice*, Godwin's belief in the perfectibility of man must be seen in the context of the small self-disciplined community within which he lived. Certainly the *Life of Chaucer* is an unlikely vehicle at best, for implementing social reform. Yet the clear continuity between the two texts suggests that Godwin himself

continued to develop and pursue his twin doctrines of necessity and perfectibility in the years after *Political Justice*. The pressure he applies to theories of biography, moreover, is as valid today as it was in his own time. Godwin's refusal to fully appropriate his biographical subjects into fleshed-out narratives allows him great scope for philosophical theorizing without causing him to lose respect for them as figures whose loss he mourns. Godwin does not use quite the same narrative techniques for his lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and of Milton's nephews as he does for the *Life of Chaucer*, yet this distance from his subjects remains constant in all three texts. As he says in his 'Essay on Sepulchres', 'It is impossible to calculate how much of good perishes, when a great and excellent man dies. It is owing to this calamity of death, that the world forever is, and in some degree for ever must be, in its infancy' (p. 10). The *Life of Chaucer* suggests that one development which springs from Godwin's use of the biographical form for his purposes is that he begins to temper his continued hopes for the power of texts to push people towards perfection with a respect for those things which the written word can never describe.

University of Chicago

Walter Scott, Charles Lamb and William Godwin: Some Shared Opinions and Personal Contacts

By BILL RUDDICK

THAT SIR WALTER SCOTT, a lifelong Tory, should have been interested in the personality or writings of William Godwin, author of *Political Justice*, is, on the face of it, unlikely. And when a glance at the catalogue of Scott's great library at Abbotsford shows that only Godwin's *Life of Chaucer* (1803) and *Mandeville* (1807) were on its shelves,[1] and one recollects that Scott had reviewed the earlier and more expensive of the two works in an early number of the *Edinburgh Review*,[2] thereby receiving it free, the impression of indifference remains. But in actual fact the story is not so simple, and it links together Walter Scott, Charles Lamb and William Godwin in some surprising and unexpected ways.

In the summer of 1822, Godwin was suffering another of his recurrent financial crises and had lost his home. Charles Lamb sent £50 of his own in May, and he then busied himself seeking further donations from sympathetic friends. He had met Sir Walter Scott at one of Benjamin Robert Haydon's breakfasts in the previous year, and they had evidently got on well; but rather than presume on the acquaintance, Lamb asked Haydon to approach the prolific and highly-successful novelist on Godwin's behalf.

Scott wrote to Haydon some time in October, enclosing a cheque for ten pounds. He asked that his name should be kept back if a list of subscribers were to be published: what he then said by way of explanation is half predictable, half rather surprising:

> I dissent from Mr Godwin's theory of politics and morality as sincerely as I admire his genius, and it would be indelicate to attempt to draw such a distinction in the mode of subscribing.[3]

Scott's generosity produced a letter from Lamb himself (the only one known), written from the East India House on 29 October 1822. He was touched by the way Scott had recollected part of their breakfast conversation from the previous year in his letter to Haydon, and the ease with which the two writers had got on echoes clearly through his own prose:

> My disparagement of heaths and highlands - if I said any such thing in half earnest - you must put down as a piece of the old vulpine policy. I must make the most of the spot I am chained to, and console myself for my flat destinies as well as I am able.[4]

If we go back to the start of this particular story, it may well appear that though the evidence may be rather slight, an unexpected degree of harmony seems to have existed between the opinions of the poet-novelist of the 'land of the mountain and the flood' and the prose eulogist of the joys of Inner London where the character and the works of William Godwin were concerned.

Walter Scott knew about Godwin years before he ever heard the name of Charles Lamb. Whether he read *Political Justice* in 1793, or skimmed the reviews and shuddered, is

[1] J. G. Cochrane, *Catalogue of the Library at Abbotsford* (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 392.

[2] *Edinburgh Review* 3 (1804) 437-52.

[3] *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott* ed. H. J. C. Grierson *et al.* (12 vols., Edinburgh, 1932-7), vii. 252. (hereafter *Scott Letters*).

[4] *Scott Letters* vii. 252(N). This corrects earlier printed texts of Lamb's letter.

unknown. But in November 1796 he received a tremendous earful from his former schoolfellow and future printer and literary advisor, James Ballantyne, who he met by chance on the Edinburgh coach at Kelso. Ballantyne had been to London to engage correspondents for a new local paper, and while there he had spent much of the time in radical circles, particularly relishing the company of Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin. Scott was full of antiquarian stories, but Ballantyne was well able to hold his own:

> By way of entering upon reprisals, I opened to him my London budget, collected from Messrs Holcroft and Godwin. I do not think that Boswell ever shewed himself a more dexterous redacteur than I did on this occasion. Hour after hour passed away, and found my borrowed eloquence still flowing, and my companion listening with an unwearied interest.[5]

By the time the *Edinburgh Review* commenced operations in 1803, with Scott as a regular contributor, he seems to have known Godwin's published works tolerably well and to have developed a lasting enthusiasm (despite doubts concerning its political stance and moral tone) for *Caleb Williams*. It was almost certainly because of his own work as a ballad editor and medievalist that he was invited (or perhaps chose) to review Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*, but the review shows that he had a fair grasp of Godwin's political message, a more than fair grasp of his characteristics as a novelist, and, like the bulk of his contemporaries, a hearty dislike of Godwin's widely-misunderstood *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Women*. It also shows Scott, who was not by nature a savage reviewer, pitching into Godwin for having rubbished earlier biographers and then made use of their discoveries in a book of his own which, Scott claims, is so undisciplined and out of focus that Godwin runs out of space before he has even reached *The Canterbury Tales*, without managing to add more than a single new fact to the few already established about Chaucer's life story.

Above all, though, Scott objected to Godwin's having used his imagination to pad out the narrative with lengthy accounts of what Chaucer must have done and must have felt, in all manner of situations for which he had no documentary evidence whatsoever. And it is here that a closeness between Scott's and Charles Lamb's opinions first begins to suggest itself.

Godwin had asked Lamb to review his *Life of Chaucer* already, hoping for a favourable critique. Lamb soon found himself in difficulties and begged to be excused, pleading ill health. When Godwin took umbrage at this and demanded to know the real reason, Lamb was driven to speak out. In particular, he declared,

> I think there is one considerable error runs through it, which is a conjecturing spirit, a fondness for filling out the picture by supposing what Chaucer did and how he felt, where the materials are scanty.[6]

Scott points out several such instances in his review, and he comments on one of them that

[5] Text from James Ballantyne's manuscript, National Library of Scotland MS. 921, f. 163. The version printed by J. G. Lockhart in *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (7 vols., Edinburgh, 1837), i. 249, has been subjected to Lockhart's customary smartening up of style, in the course of which it loses something of the original sense of Ballantyne's enthusiasm and excitement.

[6] *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marrs Jr. (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8), ii. 127.

> It is not given as a day-dream, in which the writer gives reins to the vivacity of his imagination; but the supposed cases which Mr. Godwin puts, without the least authority from the record, are gravely intended as illustrations of the Life of Chaucer.[7]

The point is the same in each objection: Godwin had allowed his novelist's imagination to run away with him and had overlooked the distinction which should be drawn between fiction and true history.

Godwin can scarcely have been pleased by Charles Lamb's enforced criticism. He was clearly furious after reading Scott's review. William St. Clair believes that when Scott visited London in 1806 Godwin sought him out to demand whether he was the author of the offending article. If so, Godwin's precise purpose is unclear to me, and unfortunately St Clair gives no source for the story.[8] If the two men did meet, one would very much like to know whether personal acquaintance did anything to modify the continuingly low opinion of Godwin's current publications which was shown with devastating plainness in Scott's second (and final) Godwin review, a merciless demolition of the plot and characters of *Fleetwood: or the New Man of Feeling*, which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for April 1805.

The review opens with a catalogue of the objectionable features of *Caleb Williams* (extravagantly gothic plotting, doubtful moral positions and an assumption of authorial omniscience appropriate only to the Deity), but soon goes on to acknowledge the novel's capacity to excite 'a more powerful interest' through its command of the 'savage force of Salvator Rosa' way beyond that of other books. In *St. Leon* Scott detects a falling off towards excessively-unrelieved gothicism, but he still acknowledges the remains of unusual power. *Fleetwood*, however, is treated as a nonsensical rehash of stock situations and characters within a plot marked by wild extravagance from one end to the other; and above all the character of Fleetwood himself is pilloried as a monstrous tissue of egocentricities. The ultimate appearance of a sensible character, seemingly capable of applying a straight waistcoat to the hero of the novel (and, by implication its author), is woundingly lauded in Scott's final paragraph.

While Scott was pitching into the author of *Political Justice* with uncharacteristic ruthlessness, Charles Lamb's friendship with Godwin was still at its closest, despite his dislike of the philosopher's choice of a second wife. Being interested in the drama himself, he helped Godwin in his attempts at play writing and he provided a prologue for one of Godwin's plays and an epilogue for another.[9] And of course both Charles and Mary Lamb were assiduous in writing books for children to swell the list of those published by the

[7] *Edinburgh Review* 3 (1804) 441. A hilarious confession of how 'flesh and blood succumbed under the temptation' to 'use the critical scalping knife' and a suggestion that Godwin's *Chaucer* could usefully be dumped at sea 'for blocking up the mouths of our enemy's harbours' can be found in Scott's letter to Charles Erskine of 19 March 1804 (*Scott Letters* i. 216-7).

[8] Usually the purpose of such a visit would have been to extract either denial or an acknowledgement of authorship. In the latter case the challenge to a duel was by no means unknown. The imagination boggles when called upon to envisage such a possibility in the present instance: it would have been a scene worthy of Scott's own mature gifts as a novelist. However the almost-contemporary case of Thomas Moore's challenge to Byron which ended up in a close and lifelong friendship should not be forgotten.

[9] On Lamb's interest in Godwin as a playwright see in particular his letters to Godwin of 16 and 18 September 1801 (Marrs ii. 17-19 and 23-4).

Juvenile Library, which Mrs Godwin organized.[10] But his letters, at any rate, do suggest that after his brush with Godwin's sensitivities over the *Life of Chaucer*, Lamb was cautious about expressing his opinion of subsequent books. His letters, whether to Godwin or others, say very little about them. However in later years, at least, he certainly does seem to have shared another of Scott's objections to Godwin's work as a historical writer. Scott had censured the lack of structure and authorial control in the *Chaucer*: much later, on 9 April 1827, Lamb commented dryly to Sir John Stoddart that

> I have just received Godwin's third volume of the *Republic*, which only reaches to the commencement of the Protectorate. I think he means to spin it out to his life's thread.[11]

The paucity of Lamb's comments generally does seem to suggest that though his personal liking for 'the Professor' remained strong, he was a good deal less than enthusiastic about his friend's numerous works.

However it came about, Scott and Godwin were on friendly enough terms by 1816 for the latter to be asked to visit Abbotsford for an overnight stay during the course of his Scottish tour that April. The visit was (perhaps, to us, unexpectedly) a great success. In 1822 Scott told Haydon that

> I was much amused with Mr Godwin's conversation upon his return from Edinburgh, some years ago, when he passed a day at this place.[12]

Indeed even before the visit the two novelists seem to have been developing a greater interest in each other's work. Godwin had read *Guy Mannering* in September 1815 and *The Antiquary* in the following May, at about the time when he began work on *Mandeville*, for which he hoped a fresh perusal of *Guy Mannering* might 'serve me, if God so pleases, in the nature of a muse.'[13] Pamela Clemit, in turn, makes a very good case for finding a Godwinian influence already present in *Guy Mannering* itself, where 'political struggle is domesticated and finds expression through the attitudes and prejudices of individual characters'.[14] It is also noticeable that when Scott came to review *Frankenstein* in 1818, he recognized its Godwinian affiliations straight away.

Proof of Scott's enduring admiration for *Caleb Williams* comes in a letter to James Ballantyne, dated 9 July 1824, when they were planning further additions to the ill-fated series of fiction reprints which Scott kept going for the benefit of John Ballantyne's widow:

[10] An interesting, if slight, link between the Godwins, the Lambs and Walter Scott may be noted in the fact that from 1809 onwards Scott's main publisher, Archibald Constable, was the Scottish distributor of the children's books published under the imprint of M. J. Godwin and Co. See William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London, 1989) (hereafter St. Clair), p. 395.

[11] Lamb is referring to Godwin's *History of the Commonwealth of England*, begun in 1824 and eventually completed by a fourth volume in 1828.

[12] *Scott Letters* vii. 253. Godwin's account of the visit can be found in a letter to his wife of 24 April 1816. See C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries* (2 vols., London, 1876) (hereafter Kegan Paul), ii. 236.

[13] Kegan Paul ii. 237.

[14] Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: the Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown and Mary Shelley* (Oxford, 1993), p. 97.

> I got the Caleb Williams. I am taking a formal opinion from the Ld. Ch. Baron which he has promised to give me in detail upon the law in Caleb's case.[15]

Presumably some difficulty over copyright caused the novel not to be published in the series after all: the unfortunate consequence being that if it was ever written, Scott's mature opinion of Godwin's most celebrated novel was never to appear in print.

The end of the story of William Godwin's dealings with Sir Walter Scott is rather a sad one. Scott had already remarked to Haydon in 1822 that 'I sincerely commiserate' Godwin's money troubles. So when Godwin appealed to him for information concerning Cromwell's rule in Scotland to include in his *History of the Commonwealth*, Scott sent back a lengthy reply on 22 November 1824, listing printed authorities, giving brief historical summaries of his own, and offering to lend Godwin pamphlets and manuscripts from his own collection.[16] This last was a rare and generous gesture on Scott's part, since he took the greatest care of his books and other collected materials. It marks a striking change of attitude (clearly the result of personal contact and a genuine liking) from his jibe in the *Chaucer* review, long before, that

> When he complains that private collectors declined 'to part with their treasures for a short time out of their own hands', did it never occur to Mr Godwin that the maxims concerning property, contained in his *Political Justice*, were not altogether calculated to inspire confidence in the author?[17]

Scott's own financial crisis in 1826 and the years of dogged overwork during which he strove to pay off his own and his publishers' debts with honour could only increase his sympathy for disaster-prone fellow writers, among whom Godwin was no exception. He may have known that Godwin had at long last been declared bankrupt in 1825, in an early phase of the commercial slump and attendant collapse of the book trade which he himself fell victim to in due course. His *Journal* also records 'a sight' of Godwin at a London breakfast on 16 May 1828, when Scott noticed with concern how 'the philosopher', unseen for over a decade, had 'grown old and thin'.[18]

So when, in February 1831, Godwin sent a letter pleading for help, Scott paused from his own work, despite the pressure under which he was living and writing, to respond at some length by return of post.

Godwin had written on 17 February, using words which he might equally have applied to Charles Lamb, that 'I have never experienced anything from you but the greatest kindness'. He therefore asked Scott to believe that the book which he was now writing, his *Lives of the Necromancers*, had been planned before he knew anything at all of Scott's *Letters on demonology and witchcraft*, even though Scott's book had then already appeared. He still believed there would be room for a second such publication and he asked Scott to take pity on his advanced age and lack of status in the eyes of London publishers and to induce Robert Cadell, Scott's own Edinburgh publisher, to bring out the book. He ended by suggesting, somewhat broadly, that a purchase price of £300 would be right for it.[19]

[15] *Scott Letters* viii. 325.
[16] *Scott Letters* viii. 433-5.
[17] *Edinburgh Review* 3 (1804) 452.
[18] *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* ed. W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford, 1972), pp. 475-6.
[19] Kegan Paul ii. 310-12.

Scott was sympathetic to Godwin's predicament as a writer driven to produce book after book in order to try to make ends meet. He may well have remembered his own sense of weariness as he toiled to complete his *Letters on demonology and witchcraft* in the previous year. On 26 May 1830 he had confided to his *Journal* that the book was proving 'a cursed thing to do neatly. I must finish it though', he reflected, 'for I need money.'[20]

So Scott's reply to the elderly writer's *cri du coeur* was sympathetic. But it also had to be realistic. Wary of Godwin, no doubt, in view of Godwin's well-known difficult character as an author in his dealings with booksellers, and well aware of the decline in the selling power of his later works which Godwin himself had acknowledged, Scott nevertheless did his best to be helpful in a way that might realistically hope to succeed, while pointing out his own delicate financial and authorial situation:

> My Dear Sir - I received your letter, which is a melancholy one, and I heartily wish it were in my power to answer it as I might formerly have done. But you know that were I to apply to any bookseller unconnected with myself to take a work in which he did not see his immediate profit - and, if he did, my intervention would be useless - he would naturally expect me in some way or other to become bound to make up the risk.

Scott goes on to explain that his own remaining debts make it impossible to use any part of his earnings to support a fellow writer, even in the limited role of a guarantor. He then proceeds

> Now, I have no dealings with any except Cadell, nor can I have, as he has engaged great part of his fortune in my publication. . . . Now, you will see that I can neither involve Cadell by making requests to him in another gentleman's behalf, nor interfere in literary speculations where I have nothing to engage me but my sincere good-will to the author. It is therefore out of my power to serve you in the way you propose. As the sapient Nestor Partridge says, *Non sum qualis eram.*

However Scott has a practical suggestion to offer. Were Godwin to publish his new book by subscription at a guinea a time, Scott would feel able to subscribe for ten copies with a clear conscience, and he felt sure that there would be enough additional subscribers to enable the plan to succeed. To make his own situation clearer he adds that

> I cannot be further useful, for till a month or two ago I had not a silver spoon which I could call my own, or a book of my own to read out of a pretty good library, which is now my own once more by the voluntary relinquishment of the parties concerned. I have been thus particular in this matter, though not the most pleasant to write about, because I wish you to understand distinctly the circumstances which leave me not at liberty to engage in this matter to the extent you wish.[21]

Alas, like Charles Lamb, Scott was to experience Godwin's touchiness in this, their last contact before ill health and overwork caused Scott's early death in September 1832. But at least it took a form which was unlikely to cause more than a brief moment of regret and understandable exasperation to a well-meaning, hard-pressed fellow author in the midst of his own rapidly-accumulating personal difficulties. William St. Clair records how, 'as he passed

[20] *Journal* ed. Anderson, p. 591.

[21] *Scott Letters* xi. 476-8.

through his seventies, Godwin was more prickly and truculent than ever.'[22] He appears to have greeted Scott's attempt to be helpful with what Wilfred Partington acidly but not altogether unjustly describes as 'a half-whining, half-truculent retort.' His letter back acknowledges how Scott had 'written in the language of kindness' but adds, somewhat huffily, that 'the author of *Caleb Williams* (I was still eager to suppose) was somebody'.[23]

But the sad truth is that, like the author of *Waverley*, the author of that early radical novel so steadfastly admired by Scott was, in 1831, only a shadow of himself. Sir Walter had done the best he could, but Godwin was hurt and dissatisfied. And so, in a heavy silence, all correspondence between the two writers ended.

So the tale of the slight but surprisingly extended mutual awareness of William Godwin and Sir Walter Scott and the degree of mutual appreciation which marked the best years of it comes to a close in silence; and in silence it has mostly remained ever since, little remarked upon by biographers or literary commentators. But there were links, and the search for them raises the intriguing possibility that though their personal contacts were sadly very limited indeed, Scott and Charles Lamb may not have been so very far apart in their feelings about the works and even the personality of the once-celebrated author of *Political Justice* as they knew him in the later years of his life.

Crawcrook

[22] St Clair 476.

[23] *The Private Letter-books of Sir Walter Scott* ed. Wilfred Partington (London, 1932), p. 236.

Two Model Begging Letters by William Godwin

By MARK GARNETT

IN THE GREY COLLECTION at Durham University, amongst heaps of scrawl from Henry Brougham to the Second Earl Grey, are two letters which shed interesting light on the personality of William Godwin. It is well known that Godwin was keen to help Shelley sustain the terrible burden of inherited wealth, but his later attempt to gain recognition from the government for his services to mankind has received less attention. The letters, unquoted by Godwin's numerous biographers (so far as I can find), are worth transcribing for the benefit of those who wish to put forward similar claims on the public finances.

No.44 Gower Place,
April 4, 1833.

My Lord,

I write in a sort of despair as to the subject on which I have several times taken up the pen to you. Two or three years have elapsed since your Lordship had the goodness to assure me that you had every disposition to promote my interests, and invited me to point out any offices for which I should judge myself competent. In the interval between that time and the present I have produced different literary works. But the taste of the times is not favourable to such undertakings, and the public is indisposed to receive old faces with welcome. Tbey have not therefore sufficed to support even the simple way in which I live. Meanwhile I am daily less enabled to point out vacancies as they arise. My old friends one by one are continually removed from the scene: and the sudden death of my only son in the thirtieth year of bis age bas contributed still further to narrow my prospects, and cut me off from the world. I have heard that persons, like your Lordship, possessing patronage, are sometimes in the habit of causing the names to be put down of those whom they are willing to favour, against the time when, in the uncertainties of human life, vacancies will infallibly arise. This I fear is the only hope that remains to me; and if my name were so fortunate as thus to be recorded by you, I should be led to a persuasion that your friendly disposition would in no long time produce the fruit of which I am in so pressing need. Your Lordship's integrity and single heartedness teach me a confidence which I should not feel in any other minister.

I am, my Lord,
With the truest respect,
Your most obedient servant.
William Godwin.

No.13, New Palace Yard.
June 15, 1833.

My Lord,

Though it was not precisely the thing I could have wished, I instantly accepted with a deep sense of obligation the appointment you with so much goodness offered me of Yeoman Usher of the Exchequer. I regarded it as affording me an essential prospect of tranquility and competence for the remainder of my days.

Judge then of my surprise, when the following notice was given me, as contained in a letter from the Hon. James Stewart, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, of the date

of the 11th instant, not two months after my appointment, to the Auditor of the Exchequer. 'At the same time inform Mr. Godwin that, as the establishment of the Exchequer has been for some time under the consideration of Government, he must not expect any compensation in the case of any arrangement being made that may affect his appointment'.

Is it too much to expect your Lordship to cause an explanation to be given me of my situation? This, on the supposition of the immediate extinction of my office, will be much more forlorn and worthy of pity, then it has ever been. These infirmities, at my time of life, in a manner annihilate me. The more nearly I approach to the grave, the more necessary it is for me to know what I have to depend upon for the short time I have to live.. And I am confident that your Lordship will not think it unreasonable in me to request, that you would take me out of the state of extreme anxiety and uncertainty in which this letter has placed me.

I am, my Lord,
With the deepest feelings of thankfulness
for what you so unexpectedly did for me,
your obliged servant
William Godwin.[1]

Few disciples of Godwin will be delighted with this correspondence, which seems out of keeping with his philosophic character. Godwin's sponging off Shelley led some to imagine that he required a form of payment in return for his daughter Mary, but it is possible to argue that a fellow-believer possessing a fortune through no merit of his own could be asked for a contribution without impropriety. Pleading for help from the government - that 'brute engine' as Godwin had called it in happier times - leaves very little room for further excuses. The champion of private judgement and plain speaking refers to Grey's 'integrity and single heartedness' - qualities which only sycophancy could identify in his Lordship. As Godwin had once written, 'the man who possesses and disburses money in profusion, can scarcely fail to procure the attendance of the obsequious man and the flatterer.'[2] Godwin might reply that he should not be blamed for having to request the kind of assistance that ought to have been his by right. He might add that he only needed to beg in his old age because he refused to grovel in his prime. Nevertheless, it is difficult to applaud when a severe critic of a system subsequently offers an outstretched hand to receive its fraudulent benefits.

Readers of Lamb and Hazlitt may take a more relaxed view of Godwin's frailties. 'The Professor' emerges from their letters and essays as a rather comical personage: who that has read Lamb's tender account of Godwin's theatrical failures will censure him for craving assistance in his final years? Despite Lamb's tumultuous relationship with the second Mrs Godwin, he was quick to relieve his friend with £50 during an earlier bout of insolvency. Hazlitt was not impressed by Godwin as a man: 'in common company, Mr. Godwin either goes to sleep himself, or sets others to sleep'.[3] We can well believe Stanley Jones's contention that remarks like these caused a lasting breach between the two.[4] Godwin had not always dealt fairly with Hazlitt, so a little personal bitterness might lurk in such

[1] I would like to express my thanks to Dr J. M. Fewster of Durham University Library for his kind assistance.

[2] *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* ed. W. Codell Carter (Oxford, 1971), p. 280.

[3] Hazlitt, *Spirit of the Age* (London, 1910), p. 194.

[4] Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford, 1989), p. 377.

criticisms. But elsewhere Hazlitt neatly illustrates the schism in Godwin between the author and the man:

> Yes [he told James Northcote], he writes against himself. He has written against matrimony, and has been twice married. He has scouted all the common-place duties, and yet is a good husband and a kind father. He is a strange composition of contrary qualities. . . . naturally dull, and brilliant by dint of study; pedantic and playful; a dry logician and a writer of romances.[5]

Unfortunately, Hazlitt did not live to see the final detour in Godwin's long odyssey, but he would not have been very surprised by it.

Few of us can appear at our best when we ask a favour. At first sight Godwin's entreaty may well seem to be a sad end to a notable career. Yet the letters can also be read as a bold attempt to salvage something of a dignity wrecked by years of impoverishment. 'Two or three years' had elapsed since he received a promise of assistance, and although his former self might have interjected that 'promises are, absolutely considered, an evil', he was hardly pestering Grey out of turn.[6] Even more impressive is the peremptory tone. The poor old man, his private life loaded with multiplied cares, lifts his eyes to the great minister without flinching. He is incapable of doubting his own merit; his only regret is that the public has proved unworthy of his labours on their behalf. In the second letter, the ceremonial thanks to Grey are mixed with a note of dissatisfaction: 'it was not precisely the thing I could have wished'. Two sentences of gratitude are deemed a sufficient preamble to the complaints which make up the bulk of the letter. Had Godwin not been threatened with the loss of his sinecure, would his thanks ever have been expressed? 'Gratitude . . . is no part either of justice or virtue', as the author of the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* would have said.[7]

When so many literary men of doubtful virtue and talent were rewarded by the state, we can hardly begrudge Godwin his mite. If we agree with Hazlitt that Godwin was essentially a plodder, we must still recognize that he plodded further than most of his contemporaries. It is a splendid irony that the man who was once regarded in government circles as the devil's research assistant should end up under a Prime Minister's patronage. The story ended satisfactorily; both Grey and his successor Melbourne (who had privately contributed to Lamb's subscription a decade earlier) helped to sustain the philosopher until his death in April 1836. Even the Tory Robert Peel continued the arrangement. If we can exercise equal charity in our judgements we ought not to jeer at Godwin's predicament. If there is a lesson, it is that 'Things as they are' needed reform if they could force such a letter out of such a man, but they were not utterly irreparable when the most corrupt practices of government could be turned to the service of benevolence. Despite his mistrust of government, Godwin might have guessed that his approach would work. According to his *Political Justice*, 'we can scarcely fail to recollect, at every interval, the gratitude we shall excite, or the approbation we shall secure, the pleasure that will result to ourselves from our neighbour's

[5] *Works* ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols., London, 1930-4), xi. 235.

[6] Godwin, op. cit. p. 103.

[7] ibid. p. 71.

well-being, the joys of self-applause, or the uneasiness that attends upon ungratified desires.'[8] Government ministers might not be gods, but at least in those days they were recognizably human.

University of Exeter

[8] ibid. p. 182.

Reviews

WILLIAM GODWIN, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (facsimile of the first edition of 1793). Introduced by JONATHAN WORDSWORTH. Woodstock Books: Spelsbury, Oxford, 1992. 2 volumes. Pp. ix + 895. £125.

THE BICENTENARY OF THE PUBLICATION of *Political Justice* (14 February 1793) has been accompanied by a marked revival in Godwin studies. New editions of his novels, autobiographical writings, political and philosophical works have appeared, along with biographies and literary / critical monographs. The Woodstock facsimile of the first edition of *Political Justice* contributes to this reassessment of Godwin's achievement by making available the original text of the controversial treatise which established Godwin's fame in the turbulent 1790s. The introduction by Jonathan Wordsworth usefully places the book in its contemporary political and philosophical context and presents an account of its influence. The Woodstock facsimile is produced to a very high standard and it retains the massive two-volume format in which *Political Justice* was first available to readers: a substantial physical reminder of why the book was regarded by contemporaries as 'the oracles of thought'.

Godwin's rational, necessarian philosophy asserted the perfectibility of human beings through education and intellectual argument, offering a progressive and optimistic view of the future at a period when political events in France and England had decidedly turned for the worse. This was the time when Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, and contemporaries in the Universities and in reformist circles were attracted to *Political Justice* as an unassailable argument that revolutionary optimism might be vindicated against day-to-day news of killings in France and the intensifying repression in Britain.

The story of how Godwin's disciples were disappointed in their hopes has often been recounted. Put briefly, the abstraction of Godwin's principles ultimately proved incompatible with the emotional and intuitive aspects of human relationships, motives, and behaviour. During the French Reign of Terror of 1793-4, it became apparent that there were unsettling similarities between Godwin's theories of human perfectibility and Robespierre's principled justification of violence to preserve the ideals of 1789. 'Terror is only justice that is prompt, severe, and inflexible', Robespierre had proclaimed in February 1794: 'it is therefore an emanation of virtue'. Godwin's theoretical argument for an immaculate revolution of mind might be used (by English Jacobins, or Pitt's unscrupulous government) to justify an English Terror as the cause of the 'general good' for which Godwin had looked in *Political Justice*.

'Expostulation and Reply' and 'The Tables Turned', first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), articulate Wordsworth's disenchantment with 'books of modern philosophy':

Up! up! my friend, and clear your looks,
Why all this toil and trouble?
Up! up! my friend, and quit your books,
Or surely you'll grow double.

In advocating the 'wise passiveness' of a heart that 'watches and receives', Wordsworth's poems substituted a receptivity to experience and feeling that was at odds with the thoroughgoing intellectuality of *Political Justice*. By describing his poems as *lyrical* ballads (as distinguished from the popular broadsheet ballads sold on street corners) Wordsworth was directing his poems towards an educated, literate readership that had formerly been among the admirers of Godwin's philosophy. Recent criticism of Wordsworth's poetry written in the years 1797-8 has argued that in foregrounding his philosophy of memory, imagination, and nature the poet 'evaded' or 'suppressed' political and social issues that were current at the time. At the level of word, image, and emblem, however, one can trace - as with the response to *Political Justice* noted above - the subtlety with which these texts negotiate with and mediate those lived historical issues of the day. One might in fact claim that Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poems in *Lyrical Ballads* effect a return to the goings-on of the world precisely as a response to Godwin's success in abstracting thought from more immediate areas of human experience. The point is not a new one, perhaps, although in the light of some recent readings of Romantic poetry, and particularly of *Tintern Abbey*, it deserves to be reiterated.

Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* (1825) did much to establish the myth that, following his celebrity in the 1790s, Godwin's reputation suffered a decline such that to subsequent generations he was 'to all intents and purposes dead and buried'. It was Shelley who in 1811 had been surprised to discover that the author of *Political Justice* was in fact still alive, and who wrote in January 1812 expressing his 'feelings of reverence and admiration' for Godwin and requesting a meeting. The ensuing course of Shelley's relation with the Godwins has been brilliantly documented in William St. Clair's book *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (1989). Less well known, perhaps, is Keats's knowledge of Godwin from an early date in his schooldays at the dissenting and republican Enfield academy. There he read about the Ancient Greeks in the *Pantheon* written by 'Edward Baldwin' (i.e. William Godwin). He was also familiar with *Political Justice* and with Godwin's novel of guilt and obsession, *Caleb Williams* (1794). It was however Keats's friend Charles Dilke - a convinced Godwinian and admirer of *Political Justice* - whose advocacy of strict necessarianism seems to have contributed (with Shakespeare) to Keats's speculation about a quality of mind precisely contrary to Godwin's; that is, a mind which is 'negatively capable', content to exist in doubts and uncertainties, and open to the full diversity of possible experiences.

Political Justice cast a longer shadow than Hazlitt allowed in *The Spirit of the Age*. Indeed, two hundred years after its first publication the book continues to exert a strong influence on understanding of the revolutionary and romantic period. Back in 1793 Pitt declined to prosecute Godwin for advocating treasonable principles in *Political Justice*, believing that the price of three guineas would prevent any wide circulation of Godwin's philosophy. He was wrong: Godwin's ideas achieved a wide currency in reformist circles, largely through John Thelwall's lecturing during 1793-5. In 1993 the price of these fine facsimile volumes may prohibit all but the dedicated Godwinian scholar from attending at the 'oracles of thought'. University libraries should however be encouraged to purchase the Woodstock *Political Justice*. The most scrupulously edited modern edition of Godwin's great work of political philosophy cannot convey the *materiality of thought* that so impressed the first readers of these two enormous volumes. The Woodstock reprint does, and that is invaluable.

University of St. Andrews NICHOLAS ROE

Charles Lamb and Elia: Selected Writings ed. J. E. Morpurgo. Carcanet: Manchester, 1993. £9.95 paperback.

A BAND OF AGING ELIANS jealously guard on their bookshelves (if spared the depredations of 'the men who borrow') J. E. Morpurgo's *Charles Lamb and Elia* published by Penguin Books in 1948 in the familiar purple and white cover denoting 'Essays and Belles Lettres'. The price was 1*s* 6*d* (7½p to younger readers). So welcome to 'amicus redivivus' in Carcanet Press's handsome new and expanded edition. Alas - the price is now £9.95 (post free to CLS members)[1] but, even so, well worth a place in any Lamb library.

In his Introduction the editor comments: 'Two authors, Samuel Johnson and Charles Lamb, stand pre-eminent among their peers as much (and perhaps more) for what they were as for what they wrote' (Interestingly, this recalls Carolyn Misenheimer's essay, 'Johnson and Charles and Mary Lamb and the art of writing for children', which will appear in a future *Bulletin*). It is tempting to quote extensively from this thought-provoking Introduction which illuminates the selection from Lamb's essays, letters and poems, which follows. Two examples must suffice:

> Lamb was unique and yet - it is a paradox he would have relished - he was also in many respects a patently ordinary, middle-class Englishman, born away from the handicap of poverty and never achieving the disgrace of riches

and

> Bitterness, anger, hate, resentment: all self-destructive passions were foreign to Lamb's character. Even as a critic his purpose was to enhance and not to diminish reputations; . . . . he never exploited his authority nor did he ever flaunt his cleverness (as have so many critics) to shatter the work of incompetents.

Particularly valuable is an extended examination of the life-long friendship between Coleridge and Lamb, and of Lamb's more uneasy relations with Southey. Due weight is given to Lamb's devotion to the theatre - as playwright, theatregoer and critic - and as the compiler of *Dramatic Specimens* (1808) - 'Lamb restored to readers many of the mislaid glories of the English Renaissance' - a good text for the Society's planned exploration of this aspect of Lamb's works in future programmes.

The pattern of the 1948 edition is retained with some welcome additions, some replacements and only one or two omissions. Each section, beginning with '*In the days of my childhood*' and concluding with 'Critical and Anti-Critical', is prefaced by a short introduction which gives the background to the ensuing selections.

In more detail, '*In my joyful schooldays*' includes 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' replacing 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital' - though it would be nice to have had both these complementary pieces! 'That we should lie down with the Lamb' joins 'That we should rise with the Lark' in '*By duty chained*', and a new section, 'Merits and Demerits', gives us Lamb's 1827 mock obituary notice 'An autobiographical sketch'.

Section II ('He serves up his friends') moves from the personal to various aspects of Lamb's circle and interests - an excellent selection (although some may regret the omission of 'Mackery End in Hertfordshire' to illustrate the theme of '*Double Singleness*').

[1] The Secretary has a supply of order forms for the special post-free offer from Carcanet Press. Members can contact her on 081 940 3837.

A new third section, 'The Irate St Charles' gives another side of Lamb's character and includes his blistering letter to Southey (*London Magazine* [1823]), and the poem 'The Triumph of the Whale' (according to the editor 'a sustained exercise in personal abuse which has few equals in all English verse').

Later sections cover the themes of 'More House Lamb than Grass Lamb', 'Juices of Meats, Innocent Vanities and Jests' and 'Critical and Anti-Critical', with generous selections of letters and essays, including 'My First Play' and 'The Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Productions of Modern Art'.

Useful 'Notes on Some Contemporaries' complete the volume, although under 'Fanny Kelly', her suitor George Barnett did not shoot *himself* while she was on stage but shot at *her*; he died in an asylum (p. 284).

This book succeeds in its aim of presenting a rounded portrait of Charles Lamb through well-chosen selections from his essays, letters and poetry. It would be an excellent present to give to someone you wish to introduce to the pleasure of meeting 'Mr Lamb'. A good present must be one you would wish to keep for yourself, and this book must be rated one of these - the fruit of the Editor's 50-year long devotion to Lamb.

London MADELINE HUXSTEP

CHARLES LAMB, *The Adventures of Ulysses* ed. JOHN COOKE. Split Pea Press: Edinburgh, 1992.

THE IMPETUS for the reproduction of this school edition of Lamb's *Adventures of Ulysses* comes from Joycean scholars. Their interest lies not so much in Lamb's 1808 production, based on Chapman's Homer and published by Godwin, as in a later 1892 textbook annotated by James Cooke. The present editors, Alistair McCleery and Ian Gunn, explain in an Afterword that the text they use was obtained from the original publishers Browne and Nolan in 1951 but is essentially the same as that of the virtually extinct edition of 1892. It was this edition that was a set book for the Intermediate Examination in English at Preparatory Grade which James Joyce sat at Conglowes College. Its seminal effect is suggested by the fact that in 1922, the year of the publication of *Ulysses*, Joyce recommended Lamb's version to his Aunt Josephine. The present edition includes Cooke's Preface, in which he distinguishes Lamb's *Ulysses* from other early writings for children on account of its literary quality, his Introduction, Notes, and an Index of Proper Names (with accentuation). Also included is an Apparatus which particularizes Cooke's omissions, made mainly for purposes of bowdlerization, and a Bibliography which details studies of the connections between Joyce's *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*. With all this careful scholarship it is a pity that there are several, albeit minor, misprints in the tale itself.

What is there for the reader primarily interested in Charles Lamb, other than the text which can be found, for instance, in E. V. Lucas's *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* Vol. 3? The answer lies in Cooke's notes, which throw light on both Lamb and Joyce, as well as on the literary process. Cooke provides classical and general information to supplement Lamb's text and shows Lamb's debts to Chapman, but it is his fascination with words, apparent in the derivations he gives of many commonplace as well as unusual words and in his examples of changing usage, that make these notes, as McCleery and Gunn point out, a demonstration of intertextuality. They could also have pointed out that Cooke's frequent examples from the Bible alert us to the Biblical rhythms in Lamb's prose, as for example in such a passage as 'Two days and two nights he spent in struggling with the waves, though sore buffeted and

almost spent . . .' John Payne Collier's conversation with the Duke of Devonshire, quoted by Lucas in the volume already cited, is pertinent here. To the duke's remark on the book's Biblical style Collier replied that it had been written for young people who had learned to read chiefly from the Bible. This mixture of Biblical and classical reference as much as the delight in the behaviour of words links Lamb's *Ulysses* to Joyce's through the agency of John Cooke.

Equally interesting, for this reader, is the protean nature of narrative that a consideration of this textbook indicates. Lamb is seen to stand in a line which stretches back to Chapman and Homer and forward to Joyce; the tale of Odysseus is told in epic form, in seventeenth-century pentameters, simplified for young readers, and as a multi-faceted element in a twentieth-century novel. If we take one episode from Homer, the Cyclops story, the 'terrible' aspects of which Lamb defended from Godwin's bookseller demands for cuts, and whose central character becomes Joyce's Citizen, we can extend its metamorphoses to include Sinbad's third adventure in the *Arabian Nights* and, developing from that, an eighteenth-century chapbook, popular with children. In his own book for children, then, Lamb is seen to work in a narrative tradition which makes connections in unexpected and fruitful ways.

Centre for Continuing Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne RACHEL BENNETT

The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley by PAMELA CLEMIT. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993. Pp. 243.

NO LITERARY FIGURE is more suitable for interdisciplinary study than William Godwin - biographer, historian, critic, dramatist, philosopher and novelist. Pamela Clemit's monograph is a rigorous, persuasive and very readable exposition of the work of Godwin and his closest disciples, his daughter Mary and the American, Charles Brockden Brown. In placing these figures in their intellectual context, Dr. Clemit proves once again that a proper understanding of literature is only gained through skills and knowledge which surmount the artificial boundaries between academic subjects.

Unlike most other novels written by philosophers, Godwin's *Caleb Williams* has a plot which is not suffocated by its didactic purpose. Godwin employed a narrative technique which permits an exploration of psychological states and an examination of society's impact on the individual. The advantages of this approach were so evident that even Godwin's philosophical opponents used it; *Caleb Williams* was designed as a critique of the existing political order, but the social conservative Brockden Brown quickly realized that the Godwinian model could serve to illustrate his own ideas. Mary Shelley, whose work seems to undermine all positive social theories, could also borrow her father's technique to memorable effect. Both directly and through another follower, Bulwer, Godwin influenced much of the best nineteenth-century fiction. Yet even if this legacy is disregarded the achievement of the Godwin 'school' is a notable one.

Dr. Clemit provides a very clear chronological survey of Godwin's career as a novelist. She begins with the early *Imogen* (1784), which dealt with politics in a 'speculative' fashion. The political relevance of *Caleb Williams* (1794) was much more direct; as a counter-thrust to Burke's *Reflections*, it argued that aristocratic power and mistaken notions of chivalry stifle the development of real virtues like sincerity and friendship. Clemit asserts that later novels such as *St. Leon* and *Mandeville* do not suggest Godwin's retreat from political subjects; rather, they illustrate the changes in his philosophy, notably his new 'recognition of the

emotional springs of action' and his re-emphasized commitment to gradual, as opposed to revolutionary, change.

The intrusion of Charles Brockden Brown at this point is slightly unwelcome because the discussion of Godwin is so good. Indeed, the section on Brown seems to deserve a book to itself, since Clemit is forced to truncate her fascinating insights into the reception of Godwin's books across the Atlantic. Brown's *Weiland* is presented as a conservative response to Federalist fears of French principles; Godwin's *Political Justice* had argued that governments corrupt society, but Brown's purpose is to show that in the absence of central power and long-established ties human relationships disintegrate with calamitous results. It is a tribute to Brown's eclecticism that he genuinely appreciated Godwin's work in spite of ideological differences. Clemit's final section on Mary Shelley stresses the complexity of the author's response to her father (and her husband Percy) and is equally thorough and perceptive.

One could quibble about the arrangement of *The Godwinian Novel*, but within its necessary structural confines the task could hardly have been tackled better. There is, however, one remaining point. Although the French Revolutionary period is the subject of fierce ideological debate, Dr. Clemit's historical sources are mainly concentrated in one broad camp - those writers like E. P. Thompson who have little sympathy for the eighteenth-century aristocratic order in either France or Britain. Although Dr. Clemit clearly attempts to do justice to both sides of the quarrel, it is unlikely that an impartial account can arise from biased sources. This problem has led to one or two interpretations that might be questioned. For example, Godwin wrote the anti-aristocratic *Imogen* when he was helping the cause of the Rockingham Whigs - a parliamentary grouping whose new leader Charles James Fox personified all the epicurean traits that the anti-aristocrats chose to call 'vices'. This apparent incongruity in Godwin's position deserves attention from a scholar as painstaking as Dr. Clemit; the rejoinder of liberal historians that Fox was a 'Friend of Liberty' will not do, because at the time his record of support for electoral reform was easily over-shadowed by that of the left's bogey-man, the Younger Pitt.

Dr. Clemit's other surprising argument seems to arise from the same source. Her penetrating discussion of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* includes the verdict that the book 'suggests a retreat from social analysis' on the author's part. Yet the evidence produced by Clemit herself reveals that like other Godwinian novels *The Last Man* has profound social implications if the reader chooses to seek them out. The novel certainly shows a deepening pessimism on Shelley's part, but pessimistic people are just as inclined to theorize as their optimistic opponents. These philosophies are generally dismissed as self-serving nonsense by left-wing historians, but a full contextual treatment demands that principled disagreement should not prevent such theories from being taken seriously. This is not to say that right-wing history is any improvement - recent examples, indeed, have been a good deal worse. Yet the clash of committed historians can yield a more accurate picture for those scholars who are not simply frustrated politicians.

As Dr. Clemit shows, Mary Shelley's pessimism predated her husband's tragic early death. Not the least of *The Godwinian Novel*'s many feats will be to make interdisciplinary students take more notice of Mary Shelley. They might even conclude that she is a more interesting figure than her celebrated father.

University of Exeter MARK GARNETT

Society News and Notes from Members

Congratulatory

Congratulations first of all to our President, Professor John Beer, on retiring from his Chair at Cambridge. One suspects that 'retirement' will really mean several very busy and productive years - and hopefully a great many - for our President. But it is gratifying to record that his retirement was marked by a dinner in July at which he was presented with a volume of essays in his honour by fourteen distinguished hands, entitled *Coleridge's Visionary Language* ed. Tim Fulford and Morton D. Paley. We hope to review the collection in due course.

Congratulations also to Dr. Kathryn Sutherland on gaining the Chair of English Literature at the University of Nottingham.

NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

'Mr. H', a farce in two acts, by Charles Lamb

Our member, Roy Hidson, FLA of the Islington Reference Library, has sent us a copy of the playbill advertising a performance of Lamb's play by the Islington Antiquarian and Historical Society on 14 January 1927. Are there any readers who were present at this production? How was it received?

More Drama

'Dream Children' by John Watts was performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 1993. The Society was delighted to contribute financially to this venture. Older members may remember John Watts saying Grace at the 1960 Charles Lamb Birthday Dinner (he was then a Grecian at Christ's Hospital) and since then he has had a varied career in the theatre. Another reason for our support - Jacob Murray, the director of 'Dream Children', is a former student of our Associate Editor, Duncan Wu.

New River Action Group

Elians should have a special affinity with the New River flowing through Hertfordshire to New River Head in Finsbury. In 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital' Lamb recalled 'our delightful excursions in the summer holidays to the New River, near Newington, where, like otters, we would live the long day in the water, never caring for dressing ourselves when we had once stripped; our savoury meals afterwards, when we came home almost famished with staying out all day without our dinners'. In 'Amicus Redivivus' he recalls idyllic boyhood explorations of the river's course and writes rather harshly of its later condition when flowing past Colebrook Cottage - 'Mockery of a river - liquid artifice - wretched conduit!'

The New River Action Group exists to protect, conserve and preserve for the benefit of the public the New River and its immediate environs. The Membership Secretary is Betty Franks, 18 Blenheim Road, NW8 0LX.

At its November meeting your Council will be considering how we can assist this Group so that the New River can no longer be termed 'Mockery of a river'.

CLS Meeting at Edmonton

On 9 April 1994 our meeting will be at All Saints' Church Hall, Edmonton, thus giving members the opportunity to see the Lambs' grave in the churchyard as well as to hear Carolyn Misenheimer on 'Southey's Letters to Children' (nearly commemorating the 150th anniversary of Southey's death in 1843). Details of how to get there will be published in the January 1994 Bulletin.

Birthday Celebration Luncheon
Enclosed with this Bulletin (for UK members) is a booking form for the Luncheon on 19 February 1994. Please apply early as accommodation is limited to about 50. We are delighted that Professor John Bayley of St. Catherine's College, Oxford, has agreed to be our Guest of Honour. Professor Jack Morpurgo also hopes to be present.

Study Weekend on Coleridge, the Wordsworths and their friends 1797-8
Advertise your event in the Bulletin! Following the item in Bulletin 82 no fewer than 13 CLS members were among 60 attending this wholly delightful weekend at Kilve Court in Somerset. The lectures and discussions were excellent and walks took us (before breakfast) to the coast and during the afternoons through the Quantocks, led by Peter Larkin. Our thanks to Reggie and Shirley Watters for organizing such a memorable event.

Legal London walk led by Edward Preston
Judging by their prowess in scrambling up hill and down dale in the Quantocks, country walks are more to Elians' taste than town walks. Only 3 members joined members of the Dickens Fellowship for an instructive ramble through Legal London. However 'the little red book' (i.e. Elian Booklet No. 2, 'Lamb's London') was much in evidence as we visited several Lamb sites including St. Andrew's, Holborn (burial place of Lamb's parents and scene of Hazlitt's wedding) and Bartlett's passage (perhaps the site of Lamb's first school). At appropriate points readings from Lamb and from Dickens brought the past to life.

Surplus Books
The books from Edmonton Library formerly housed at Putney United Reformed Church were transferred to Guildhall Library for checking against our collection there. This has now been done and duplicates returned to Putney. We shall be arranging to offer these for sale to members.

First fruits of Australian poetry by Barron Field (1819)
Mr. W. L. Fletcher (formerly Minutes Secretary to the Council of the CLS) has sent us some notes on Professor Lionel Elvin's address at the 1977 Birthday Luncheon, to supplement the account in the July 1977 Bulletin.

Lamb's review of this very slim volume (published in 'unliterary thiefland') can be found in the *Complete Works* ed. R. H. Shepherd (London, 1878), pp. 768-9. Lamb does not devote much space to reviewing the two poems but has some amusing observations on the infant 'theatrical establishment' in Sydney - an interesting link with the play 'Our Country's Good' produced in London a few years ago, in which officers and transportees devise a production of Farquhar's 'The Recruiting Officer'.

Madeline Huxstep

EDITOR'S NOTES

Wordsworth Summer Conference, Grasmere, 31 July-14 August 1993
The weather could have been kinder, but the company could scarcely have been better, and the Wordsworth Summer Conference, with Jonathan Wordsworth as its Director for the first time, maintained its usual high standard of lectures and conference papers, in addition to an especially successful programme of walks and excursions. Every participant must have had his or her own personal 'high spot': the editor's is of reading the *River Duddon* sonnets at the points which they celebrate in that still miraculously-unspoiled and un-touristy valley.

A 'Readers' Theatre' adaptation of *Nightmare Abbey* on the final evening brought the fortnight to its customarily relaxed and hilarious conclusion.

Wordsworth Winter School, Book Collectors' Weekend and Summer Conference, 1994
The Wordsworth Winter School will run 6-11 February 1994, the annual Book Collectors' Weekend 25-7 February, and the Summer Conference 30 July-13 August. Details of each may be obtained from Sylvia Wordsworth, The Wordsworth Trust, Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9SH (UK) and a brochure containing further information on all three events will be available from mid-October onwards.

An addition to the Elian bibliography
Information about publications concerning the Lambs in other languages and other countries is always of interest, and doubly so when the actual book, journal or offprint arrives to be added to our library archive. Mme. Micheline Cadilhac, who attended the 1992 Birthday Luncheon, has provided us with a copy of her article 'Quelques aspects de la conception romantique de l'enfance', dealing with childhood in the writings of Wordsworth, Blake and Charles Lamb, published in *L'Enfance dans la litterature et la civilisation anglaise* ed. Pierre Sahel et Jean Vivies (Provence, 1993), to add to her study of Lamb's style in *Elia*, which she presented to the Society's library a few years ago.

De Quincey Manuscripts
Grevel Lindop, General Editor of the forthcoming edition of the prose works of Thomas De Quincey, is anxious to learn of the whereabouts of any manuscripts by De Quincey in either public or private collections which seem likely to have escaped the notice of his fellow editors or himself. De Quincey manuscripts are numerous and very widely scattered, so it is likely that stray items or small caches may exist almost anywhere. If you think you can help, please contact Grevel Lindop at the Department of English, The University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, UK.

And last of all, ahem! subscriptions
Just an early reminder that subscriptions to the Charles Lamb Society are due each January. Details on the back cover of this and every edition of the *Bulletin*.

Bill Ruddick

'Don't Call Me Gentle Charles!'
The Johnsonians among us will recall the (presumably true) anecdote of the two ladies who congratulated Dr. Johnson on his having omitted all the dirty words from the *Dictionary*. 'Oh, so you looked for them, did you, my dears?' he said.

Skimming Charles Lamb's *Letters* for another purpose, I have been somewhat taken aback to notice a number of, shall we say, slightly racy usages. I was not actually looking for them, you understand, nor are they likely to be a complete collection, but they seemed worth recording, if only to chip away at Elia's milk-and-water image (assuming that anyone still sees him in that light).

We must remember that Charles Lamb was not some alabaster bust (sorry, statue) in a library. He was a Georgian Londoner writing to his friends, in the present cases always male. Queen Victoria is supposed to have been somewhat similar in her youth, clearly the offspring of Georgian roués and not the prim pursed Late Victorian exemplar that she became at last. And as for some of the things that Jane Austen wrote . . . well, for those you have only to go and read her *Letters* - and I mean her published ones.

As long ago as 1866, Percy Fitzgerald wrote in *Charles Lamb*: 'On mere strangers and acquaintances whom he did not care to set right as to his true opinions, social puritans and pedants whom, perhaps, he delighted in "shocking a little", it was natural that unfavourable impressions should be left' (p. 159).

Thus mere strangers and acquaintances, social puritans and pedants, may be a little shocked by what follows. True Elians, scholars, and close friends of Charles Lamb will regard it as a further illustration of his inexhaustible variety and power to instruct and entertain. So as to give the work at least a minimal intellectual gloss, I have cast it in the form of a quiz; answers are at the bottom of page 256.

1) Whose new-born baby was it that caused CL to write 'here I must leave off, my Benedictory Powers failing me. I could *curse* the sheet full; so much stronger is *Corruption* than *Grace* in the *Natural* man!'
2) Who 'skipped about like a *pea* with its arse scorched'?
3) Why did CL complain that 'my *Arse* tickles red'?
4) Who was advised to '*Damn* the Husband, & his "Gentleman like qualities".'?
5) To whom did CL refer as 'that Bitch'?
6) Of which 'cursed . . . Crew' did Charles Lamb say '*Damn them*' and describe them as 'those *Blights & Blasts* of all that is *Human* in man & child'?
7) Which two ladies had '*great b*tt*ms*' - so great that CL thought of 'the two b*tt*ms saluting and doing the honours of a first meeting independently', as housekeepers do when their ladies first meet?
8) In what circumstances did CL say that he did not know a lady 'But damn her at a venture'?
9) In which famous letter did CL use 'Christ' as an ejaculation, not an invocation?
10) Who was 'The son of a bitch in a manger!'?
11) Who was 'The little bastard'?
12) When did CL fear that someone would say 'Damn it, here's Lamb's box come again'?

D. E. Wickham

Christ's Hospital at the Top - for the record

It was reported - for example in *The Daily Telegraph* (24 November 1992) - that Mark Hick, a pupil of Christ's Hospital, had rediscovered an ancient privilege which allows any pupil 'possessed of sufficient assurance' to ascend to the highest part of St Paul's Cathedral. I remember that there used to be public access to the bottom of the cross but presumably this privilege involved the top of the cross. The Venerable George Cassidy, Archdeacon of London, reported that 'It has not happened before in living memory' and he was said to be hoping that it did not lead to hordes of boys presenting themselves.

D. E. Wickham

Strangulation by Neck-Cloth

The Trinity College, Oxford, Annual Report for 1990-91 referred to the Benwell Diary transcripts of 1785-96, now in the College archives. I was particularly intrigued by the 1 December 1790 reference to 'Mr Dussett of Trinity College [who] was found dead in a friend's room at Lincoln [College] where [he] had spent the evening before. This sad accident was occasioned by his going to sleep on the floor, without loosening his neck-cloth, by which means he was strangled' (p. 30).

As I wrote to the Editor of the Report, I had assumed that death in such circumstances today might be attributed to inhalation of vomit. True or not, I then almost immediately

found the following reference in a letter from Charles Lamb to Samuel Taylor Coleridge dated 13 August 1814, showing that strangulation by neck-cloth was still specifically feared:

> I am going to eat Turtle, Venison, marrow pudd[ing], - cold punch, claret, madeira, at our annual feast at ½ past 4 this day. Mary has ordered the bolt to my bedroom door inside to be taken off, & a practicable latch to be put on, that I mayn't bar myself in and be suffocated by my neckcloth, so we have taken all precautions, three watchmen are engaged to carry the body up stairs, Pray for me.

He was referring to one of the last of the annual feasts served to the East India House clerks.

D. E. Wickham

'Don't Call Me Gentle Charles!': Answers

1) (Apparently) Sophia Lloyd's; CL to Manning, 9 August 1800 (Marrs i 221).
2) George Dyer on receipt of 'so much cash' when the first volume of his *Poems* was published; CL to Manning, 15 February 1801 (Marrs i 274).
3) 'From the northern castigation'. Had he been lukewarm about the *Lyrical Ballads*? CL to Manning, 27(?) February 1801 (Marrs i 276).
4) William Godwin, when drafting a play; CL to Godwin, 18 September 1801 (Marrs ii 24).
5) Mrs Godwin. Godwin's 'pitiful artificial wife' had evicted Marshall, 'the man who went to sleep when the Ancient Mariner was reading' *and* this is all in the letter which contains one of the London/Lakes rhapsodies and includes the sentence 'Still Skiddaw is a fine Creature'; CL to Manning, 24 September 1802 (Marrs ii 70).
6) 'The cursed Barbauld Crew', whose books for children had replaced poetry with science, *Goody Two-Shoes* with *Lessons for Children, of Three Years Old*; CL to Coleridge, 23 October 1802 (Marrs ii 82).
7) 'The Baby' (Mrs Godwin) and Mrs Charlotte Smith, 'Novellist & morals-tainter'; CL to Wordsworth, 26 June 1806 (Marrs ii 233).
8) To put an end to a fellow guest's enquiries about his acquaintance with persons of note and did he know Miss ---? The story is told, without further details, in a footnote to Lucas's *Life* (1905) i 320, Chapter 27 (for 1812).
9) The letter about frogs' legs in Paris, the not inconsolable widow, and Mary falling through the 'crazy chair', i.e. CL to P. G. Patmore, 19 July 1827 (Lucas iii 106). 'Christ, how sick I am . . .' and, indeed, 'what you mean by Poste Restante, God knows' occur in the same letter.
10) Taylor of the *London*, who threatened Moxon with an injunction over breach of copyright; CL to Talfourd, 6 March 1833 (Lucas iii 358).
11) Presumably the 'sick child, who sleeping or not sleeping, next me with a pasteboard partition between, killed my sleep' at the Westwoods' house and was just about the last straw before the Lambs' removal to Edmonton a few days later; CL to Moxon, 27 April 1833 (Lucas iii 367).
12) When asking for the loan of some books; CL to C. W. Dilke, summer 1834 (Lucas iii 411).