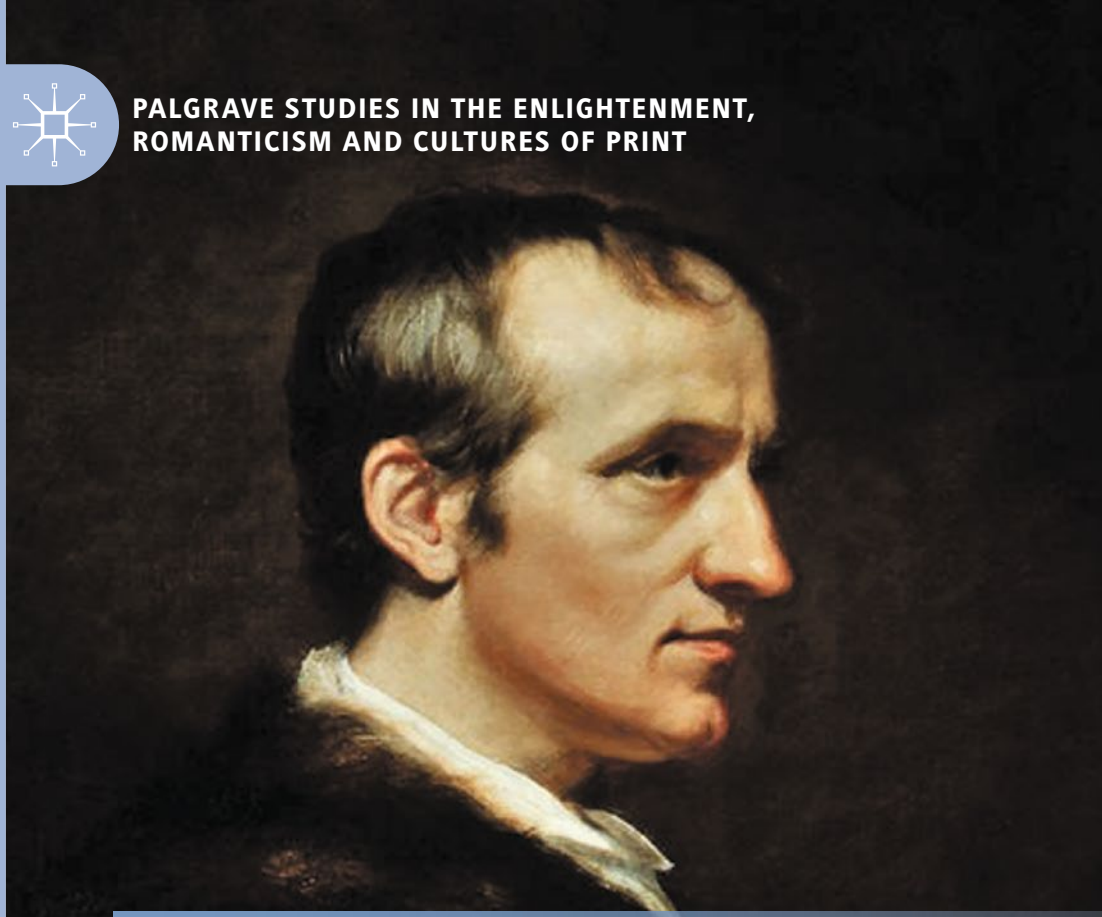

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT, ROMANTICISM AND CULTURES OF PRINT

New Approaches to William Godwin

Forms, Fears, Futures

Edited by
Eliza O'Brien · Helen Stark · Beatrice Turner

palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print

Series Editors
Anne K. Mellor
Department of English
University of California Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA, USA

Clifford Siskin
Department of English
New York University
New York, NY, USA

Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print features work that does not fit comfortably within established boundaries – whether between periods or between disciplines. Uniquely, it combines efforts to engage the power and materiality of print with explorations of gender, race, and class. Mobilizing analytical, archival, and digital resources to explore the varied intersections of literature with the visual arts, medicine, law, and science, the series enables a large-scale rethinking of the origins of modernity.

More information about this series at
http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14588

Eliza O'Brien • Helen Stark
Beatrice Turner
Editors

New Approaches to William Godwin

Forms, Fears, Futures

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Eliza O'Brien
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

Beatrice Turner
University of Roehampton
London, UK

Helen Stark
University College London
London, UK

ISSN 2634-6516 ISSN 2634-6524 (electronic)
Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print
ISBN 978-3-030-62911-3 ISBN 978-3-030-62912-0 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62912-0

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

This book collection developed from a conference in 2017 at Newcastle University. We would like to thank the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics for funding and conference support. Special thanks to Melanie Birch for her invaluable advice and for helping to plan and run the event. We also gratefully acknowledge the funding support from the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, which enabled us to offer travel bursaries to our postgraduate delegates. At Palgrave we thank Camille Davies and Rebecca Hinsley for their assistance with the publication process and their forbearance and special thanks go to Divya Anish and the production team for their support and expertise in the final stages. We thank the editor of *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, Barry Tharaud, and guest editor Rowland Weston, for their permission to reprint the article 'Godwin's Citations, 1783–2005: Highest Renown at the Pinnacle of Disfavour' by Pamela Clemit and Avner Offer, and the Paul Mellon Centre Photographic Archive for permission to reproduce two digital images.

Eliza O'Brien would like to thank David Stewart for his sincere friendship, and all her dear family: O'Briens, Galvins, Ryans, Stewarts. She offers particular thanks to Professor Graham Allen of University College Cork for introducing her to the work of William Godwin.

Helen Stark would like to thank University College London for their support of this project, Michael Rossington for introducing her to *Essay on Sepulchres*, and Chris Sparks for his unwavering encouragement.

Beatrice Turner would like to thank her fellow editors for their heroic patience, the participants of the original conference for a stimulating and collegial day of discussion, and Philippe for everything else.

Lastly, but by no means least, we collectively thank our contributors for their time and intellectual effort in making the collection a reality, particularly in the final stages of editing, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic in a period that has been very difficult for very many people.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Pamela Clemit is Professor of English at Queen Mary University of London and a Supernumerary Fellow at Wolfson College, University of Oxford. She is the author of *The Godwinian Novel* (Oxford, 1993) and has written many essays on William Godwin and his intellectual circle. She has written a dozen or so scholarly editions of Godwin's and Mary Shelley's writings, including *Caleb Williams* (Oxford, 2009). She is the General Editor of the Oxford University Press edition of *The Letters of William Godwin*, 6 vols., in progress. *Volume I: 1778–1797* (2011) and *Volume II: 1798–1805* (2014) were both edited by her.

David Fallon is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Roehampton. He is the author of *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment: The Politics of Apotheosis* (2017) and co-editor of *Romanticism and Revolution: A Reader* (2011). He is working on a monograph entitled *Bookshops, Authors, and Literary Sociability: 1740–1840*.

Shawn Fraistat is an independent scholar who received his PhD from the Department of Political Science at Yale University and most recently served as a visiting scholar at Brown University. His work has appeared in journals such as the *American Political Science Review* and *Political Theory*, and his forthcoming book, *The Liberalism of Care*, addresses the concept of care in the history of political thought.

M. O. Grenby is Professor of Eighteenth-Century Studies in the School of English at Newcastle University. He has authored books on eighteenth-century political novels, the history of children's literature, and child

readers from 1700 to 1840. He is the editor of Volume III of *The Letters of William Godwin*, covering the years 1806–1815 (forthcoming).

John-Erik Hansson teaches British history at CY Cergy Paris Université and received his PhD from the European University Institute (Florence, Italy). In his dissertation, he analysed William Godwin's works for children and showed how they furthered the programme for radical reform he had developed in the 1790s. More generally, John-Erik is interested in radicalism and radical thought in the nineteenth century, at the intersection of history and literature. His work has appeared in journals such as *History of European Ideas* and *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*.

Grace Harvey was recently awarded her PhD in English Literature from the University of Lincoln, and her doctoral research focused on the depictions and languages of family and friendship in 1790s radical fiction. Her literary research interests include late-eighteenth century fiction, the social and familial networks of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary communities, and the scholarly efforts to recover the works of Robert Bage. Grace works at Nottingham Trent University as a Widening Access and Outreach Officer in the Centre for Student and Community Engagement.

Eliza O'Brien is an independent scholar who received her PhD from the University of Glasgow, and whose main research interests are the Godwin-Wollstonecraft circle and political fiction of the 1790s. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* and *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, and she is a contributor to *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context* (Cambridge 2020) edited by Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen, and *The Cambridge Guide to the Eighteenth-Century Novel, 1660–1820*, edited by April London (forthcoming).

Avner Offer is Chichele Professor Emeritus of Economic History at the University of Oxford, a Fellow of All Souls College and of the British Academy. He was raised in Israel and educated in Jerusalem and Oxford. He has written many books and articles about land tenure, the political economy of war, well-being and the quality of life, and the history of economic thought. His joint work (with Gabriel Söderberg), *The Nobel Factor: The Prize in Economics, Social Democracy, and the Market Turn* (Princeton, 2016), developed a new method of citation counting which is applied in this article as well.

David O'Shaughnessy is Associate Professor for Eighteenth-Century Studies at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. He is the author of *William Godwin and the Theatre* (Pickering & Chatto, 2010), editor of *The Plays of William Godwin* (Pickering & Chatto, 2010), and co-editor of *The Diary of William Godwin, 1788–1836* (Oxford Digital Library, 2010). Most recently, he is the editor of *Ireland, Enlightenment and the English Stage, 1740–1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and co-editor of *The Letters of Oliver Goldsmith* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Mark Philp is Professor of History at the University of Warwick and an Emeritus Fellow of Oriel College. He has written widely on the history of ideas, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European history, and political realism and ethics in public life. Recent books include *Reforming Ideas in Britain,* (CUP, 2013) and *Radical Conduct: Politics, Sociability and Equality in London 1789–1815* (CUP, 2020).

Helen Stark gained her doctorate from Newcastle University; she now works at University College London. She has written on Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Lord Byron. Her research interests include men of feeling, national identity, memorialisation, and commemoration.

Ruby Tuke has recently completed her PhD in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary University of London. Her thesis is entitled 'From "Right" to "Gift": Representations of Indebtedness between 1790 and 1834' and examines the writings of William Godwin, Thomas Robert Malthus, William Wordsworth, and Thomas De Quincey.

Beatrice Turner gained her PhD at Newcastle University. Her first monograph is *Romantic Childhood, Romantic Heirs: Reproduction and Retrospection 1820–1850* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). She has also written on William Godwin Jr's novel *Transfusion* (1835) and most recently on David Bowie and the Romantic child archetype. She is broadly interested in Romantic inheritances and afterlives.

List of Figures

List of Tables

Godwin's Citations, 1783–2005: Highest Renown at the Pinnacle of Disfavour

Introduction to *New Approaches to William Godwin: Forms, Fears, Futures*

Eliza O'Brien, Helen Stark, and Beatrice Turner

Scholars of Romanticism are intimately familiar with the set pieces—the over-cited quotes, the endlessly-rehearsed biographical incidents—that come to stand, in one way or another, for the authors whose texts they study, and which overdetermine their critical afterlives. The English philosopher and writer William Godwin (1756–1836) has been particularly susceptible to this fate. A prolific and wide-ranging thinker and author, Godwin's works run the gamut from career-defining political treatise to anonymously authored children's stories via the novel, biography, educational guide, history, drama, and almost every other literary form besides

E. O'Brien (✉)
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

H. Stark
University College London, London, UK
e-mail: h.stark@ucl.ac.uk

B. Turner
University of Roehampton, London, UK
e-mail: beatrice.turner@roehampton.ac.uk

E. O'Brien et al. (eds.), *New Approaches to William Godwin*, Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62912-0_1

verse. Yet discussion of Godwin and his works frequently (and the present volume has not escaped this tendency) seem to defer to one of three such 'set pieces': his supporting role in the Godwin-Shelley family psychodrama, the Archbishop Fénelon thought-experiment of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), familiar to all undergraduate philosophy students, and William Hazlitt's memorializing description in 1825 of the still-living Godwin's slide from a 'sultry and unwholesome popularity' to 'doubtful immortality'.[1] Hazlitt's assessment of Godwin is so often repeated because it is an irresistible ironic foil for Godwin's own desire for and anxiety about posthumous fame, and because it resonates more broadly with Romantic-era anxieties about individual posterity and the afterlife of texts. But it also uncannily reflects contemporary scholarly uncertainty about whether William Godwin's time has finally come, and how we ought to approach a writer whose reputation must still be understood through that inaugurating pair of blockbusters, *Political Justice* and *Things as They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794).

This collection originated in a one-day conference in Newcastle in 2017, which was convened by the editors out of a desire to see what critical responses to Godwin's work might look like when he is considered as the central focus of those contexts in which we most frequently encounter him: to primarily consider, in other words, 'Godwin', rather than 'Godwin *and*'. We had a sense that there was sufficient scholarly interest in Godwin as central rather than supporting actor to justify the event; we also had the sense that interest in Godwin was on the rise. Godwin scholars will also, perhaps, recognize these instincts, for interest in Godwin has for at least the last decade seemed to be on the rise, without ever quite managing to escape the event horizons of those works and events that have come to stand in for him. One of the underpinning questions that informs this collection is whether we should move wholly away from Godwin's definitive works, to focus our attention on those texts of his that have to date received less critical attention. This is the approach taken in the recent special edition of the *European Romantic Review*, 'New Directions in Godwin Studies' (2019), which explicitly aims, 'Rather than focusing on Godwin's best-known works, […] [to] examine his letters, *Fleetwood*, *Life of Chaucer*, and *Mandeville*'.[2] As the edition editor observes, Godwin's complete body of work is both formally wide-ranging and groundbreaking, and the collection draws our attention in particular to the sheer spread of genres across which he worked, whilst reminding us of the central importance to Godwin of individual biography and public history in

understanding socio-political structures. The remarkable special double issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* (2014) on William Godwin showcases this generic spread. Essays on law, oratory, religion, mass politics, the London Corresponding Society and the Spanish Enlightenment round off a substantial collection which also includes *Political Justice*, novels and history writing. A similar approach informs the only other book collection to date dedicated solely to Godwin, *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism* (2011), which, with the exception of Robert Maniquis' essay on the Calvinist ghosts haunting *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice*, focuses on his Godwin's (then) less-well known children's literature and educational writing, drama, and life-writing. The 'moments' uncovered in that collection likewise illustrate Godwin's interest in 'both long durations of history and the punctuating moments of dire event'; or, to put it another way, both the objective, organizing survey and the personal, subjective view from within the crowd.[3]

This collection takes a slightly different approach. An instructive insight gained in bringing it together is that the set pieces, the notorious quotes, and the core texts remain stubbornly resistant to displacement, regardless of the critic's intent to mine new material. Criticism cannot be undone, and in Godwin's case, there is good reason to keep the origins of his early fame firmly in view. Rethinking and revising attitudes to the familiar is a vital part of scholarship. It is a practice which Godwin held to: his two best-known works, *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, each went through a number of substantial revisions for later editions. The *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) was revised in the face of intense public criticism, but Godwin mainly revised for himself, not for his critics. As Pamela Clemit has recently discussed, Godwin's politics 'were reformist and gradualist' and this commitment depends upon constant enquiry, evident not only in his writings but in his approach to his own thoughts and ideas.[4] Critics have observed that Godwin revises his ideas across as well as within texts: *The Enquirer: Reflections On Education, Manners, And Literature* (1797), for example, was intended as a practical corrective to what he saw, four years after the publication of *Political Justice*, as a 'danger, if we are too exclusively anxious about consistency of system, that we may forget the perpetual attention we owe to experience, the pole-star of truth'.[5]

Several of the contributors to this collection engage with Godwin's revisions; David Fallon's chapter hinges upon the significance of his decision to alter the name of Falkland's enforcer from Jones to Gines for the

second edition of *Caleb Williams*, while Grace Harvey and Shawn Fraistat both consider revisions Godwin made to the second edition of *Political Justice*, and the ways in which his ultra-rationalist perspectives on family affections were softened and amended by 1796. Revision is an important practice in critical studies too: we need to periodically return to old ideas and old approaches, to gain a new perspective on familiar texts and to turn over new ground. David O'Shaughnessy's chapter in this collection exemplifies this practice. In 'Godwin, Ireland, and Historical Tragedy' O'Shaughnessy returns to his earlier ideas on Godwin's dramatic writing, and finds that the texts open up productively when a shift in critical focus—in this case, a greater awareness of Godwin's interest in Irish politics—newly illuminates Godwin's work for the stage, in his historical tragedy *Abbas, King of Persia* (1801). This approach feels right for a thinker who is never content to consider a subject closed.

Thus the collection puts Godwin's established works into dialogue with those which have received less attention, and into new critical frameworks whilst retaining an awareness that Godwin has always been defined, as Hazlitt saw, by a renown based on his major work of philosophy. They are situated within a broad range of Godwin's works and thought, including his novels, children's literature, plays, memoirs, and essays, but they also benefit from an intense awareness of the highly charged political atmosphere of their time of composition, as shown in the chapters authored by Fallon and Mark Philp. Reflecting the polymath nature of Godwin's thought the collection is interdisciplinary, featuring contributions from political science, philosophy, book history, and reception studies, as well as literary criticism. New methodologies have enabled new findings, too: M. O. Grenby's chapter applies stylometrics, a method of using computational stylometry to quantitively assess literary style, to demonstrate that Godwin is likely the author of at least three previously unattributed publications. Helen Stark's chapter, which investigates the illustrator of a copy of *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), combines a visual analysis interpretive approach with an investigation into the item's acquisition history that both illuminates Godwin's potential links with early nineteenth-century artists' circles and offers a case study of the ways in which items enter circulation, and can be lost, found, attributed, and misattributed.

The chapters in this collection have been enhanced by significant recent developments in publishing and in digital scholarship, such as the ongoing publication of *The Letters of William Godwin* (OUP, 2011-, two volumes to date of a planned six volumes), the launch of Godwin's digitized *Diary*

(2010) and the Shelley-Godwin digital archive (2013), which have transformed scholarly interest in and understanding of Godwin's thought. Recent criticism on Godwin embodies the significance of these developments: a new biography of Godwin by Richard Gough Thomas offers an accessible and up-to-date account of his life, work, and influence; two chapters, by Pamela Clemit and Mark Philp respectively, in recent collections on Mary Wollstonecraft manage the difficult task of presenting a fresh perspective on Godwin to the seasoned scholar, while offering an excellent introduction to those new to his work.[6] Tilottama Rajan's editorial work on *Mandeville* builds upon her important scholarship on Godwin and narrative, and productively explores the interplay between history, politics, and trauma, stimulating further critical work on this fascinating novel (as demonstrated in this collection).[7] Other developments have had a similarly beneficial effect upon our understanding of Godwin's work, such as the recent critical turn towards the function of material culture. To take but two examples of this: Emma Peacocke's essay 'Puppets, Waxworks, and a Wooden Dramatis Personae: Eighteenth-Century Material Culture and Philosophical History in William Godwin's *Fleetwood*' examines how Godwin's anchoring of *Fleetwood* in eighteenth-century culture via the use of puppetry and waxworks is a counterpoint to his 'new man of feeling' who decisively breaks with the conventions of this type. Tom Mole reads *Essay on Sepulchres* and its attempt to construct a national pantheon, ostensibly through the use of white wooden crosses as grave markers, alongside the commemorative culture of Britain in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism*.[8] A future publication of interest is Volume III of *The Letters of William Godwin*, covering the years 1806–1815 and edited by M. O. Grenby (forthcoming). This and the subsequent volumes of the *Letters* will help to direct attention towards Godwin's underdiscussed works from later in his career, such as his final two novels and the substantial four-volume *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1824–28), and will surely stimulate a further wave of Godwin scholarship and reappraisal.

The structure of this collection closely informs the individual chapters themselves. 'Forms', 'Fears', and 'Futures' were the panel topics which delegates were invited to address at our conference in June 2017; each chapter therefore responds to one of the three themes. Within the collection as a whole, the chapters engage productively with one another and with those themes. 'Forms' was chosen in order to consider Godwin's extraordinary formal range, whether through his use of the historical

tragedy genre to comment on contemporary Irish politics, or his developments in the field of children's literature. 'Fears' is a theme that enables consideration of Godwin's work in his own contemporary context—the political fears of the 1790s saturate his earlier publications—as well as his personal fears and anxieties. 'Futures' interrogates both Godwin's own sense of the future in his writings, and the afterlife of his thought in the nineteenth century and beyond. Imagining the future is vital to the progressivism at the heart of Godwin's political thought, and we hope the chapters in the collection as a whole will stimulate new scholarly work on this most absorbing of writers.

Part one, Forms, highlights Godwin's formal range, and the ways in which he uses genre to develop and iterate concepts, with chapters considering drama, the novel, and children's literature. It begins with David O'Shaughnessy's chapter 'Godwin, Ireland, and Historical Tragedy'. O'Shaughnessy places Godwin's historical tragedy *Abbas* in the context of the Act of Union (1801) of Britain and Ireland and connects *Abbas* with Godwin's earlier political journalism of the 1780s, his civil-war novel *Mandeville* (1817), and his *History of the Commonwealth* (1824–28) to draw more robust lines of critical discussion through Godwin's career as a whole. Grace Harvey's chapter focuses on the forms of familial relationships in *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1799). In '"My son, once my friend": Sanguinity, Sincerity, and Friendship in St. Leon's Confessional Narrative', Harvey traces the ways in which the titular protagonist's attempts to conflate disinterested friendship with the partiality of blood relations ultimately destroy any possibility of a relationship with his son founded in sincerity. The chapter thus contributes to the body of scholarship on Godwin's complex and changing conceptions of the family. Forms concludes with John-Erik Hansson's investigation of how Godwin combined historical and novelistic approaches to challenge the conventions of children's life-writing and produce biographies for children that reflect his political and educational commitments. 'Through the Looking-Glasses: Godwin's Biographies for Children', places *The Looking-Glass: A true history of the early years of an artist* (1805) and the *Life of Lady Jane Grey* (1806), both published under the pseudonym of Theophilus Marcliffe, in the context of the *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) and the *Life of Chaucer* (1803).

Part two, Fears, brings political philosophy into dialogue with literary criticism, exploring a broad range of Godwin's personal and philosophical concerns, from a resistance to gift-giving to a fear of violence. In 'Candour,

Courage and the Calculation of Consequences in Godwin's 1790s' Mark Philp offers a nuanced consideration of the ways in which Godwin modified his views on candour, exploring the political and personal reasons for these changes in relation to an important element of Godwin's philosophy. In a chapter which similarly attends closely to *Political Justice*, Shawn Fraistat explores 'Godwin's Fear of the Private Affections' and considers first, Godwin's opposition to the conventionalities of domestic life and marriage, before moving to an examination of Godwin's re-envisioning of personal relationships, reaching a more positive and sympathetic theorization of them. Ruby Tuke's chapter, too, meditates on Godwin's treatment of personal relationships, examining his critique of the structural inequalities underpinning charitable giving in *Political Justice*. In 'Gifts, Giving, Gratitude: The Development of William Godwin's Radical Critique of Charity in the 1790s', Tuke develops a theory of Godwin's intersubjective 'gift theory' which prefigures Pierre Bourdieu's critical ambivalence towards the gift in the twentieth century. As Tuke shows, Godwin rejected the concept of gratitude, which some contemporaries then misinterpreted as support for private vice. David Fallon's chapter, 'Gines, Violence, and Fear in *Things as They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*', closes this section with a detailed examination of the resonances of aristocratic violence within the novel. Focusing upon Falkland's hired hand, the thief-taker Gines, and tracking the development of this character across Godwin's many revisions of the text, Fallon shows how the novel registers Godwin's fears in relation to the increasing populism and polarization of the public sphere.

In part three, Futures, chapters engage with and reconceive Godwin's legacy. In 'Godwin's Popular Stories for the Nursery', M. O. Grenby uses stylometrics to demonstrate that Godwin was likely the author of several children's titles, published in 1804/05 and previously unattributed. Grenby shows that Godwin wrote at least three titles in the groundbreaking series *Popular Stories for the Nursery* published by Benjamin Tabart—*The Story of Griselda*; *History of Robin Hood*; and *Richard Coeur de Lion*—entitling him to a previously unacknowledged place in the development of children's historical fiction. Eliza O'Brien's chapter, 'Godwin and the Love of Fame', explores Godwin's fascination with ideas of reputation and renown. Taking as a starting point his positive use of fame in *Political Justice* to promote virtue, she examines how Godwin considers his personal desire for fame in his autobiographical writings, and the ways in which his novels investigate the more destructive side of the love of

fame. As Tuke and O'Brien remind us, Godwin's contemporaries both vilified and forgot him at the turn of the nineteenth century although his reputation improved again from 1812, as Clemit and Offer show. Helen Stark's chapter, 'An Illustrated Afterlife: William Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres*', addresses the legacy of one text in Godwin's lifetime. Stark investigates the afterlife of the 1809 *Essay on Sepulchres* through the lens of drawings made post-publication by an anonymous artist on one copy of *Sepulchres*. Stark's close reading of the drawings and *Sepulchres* illuminates the latter by demonstrating how a Romantic-era artist responded to and inscribed *Sepulchres*. This reading is contextualized by her drawing out of Godwin's place in a network of artists which includes both those he worked with and those who haunt the illustrated copy of *Sepulchres* through the artist's allusions.

Finally, in 'Godwin's Citations, 1783–2005: Highest Renown at the Pinnacle of Disfavour' Pamela Clemit and Avner Offer present substantial analysis of Godwin's citations. Clemit and Offer examine Godwin's citations using two sources, one from the outset of his career to 1966, the other starting in 1900. Godwin's peak of citation renown occurs later than might have been expected, in 1801, and is mostly negative at that point. Clemit and Offer show that Godwin's reputation fell into several different periods, not just one. As they say, his flame never went out entirely, and in the past few decades it has begun to blaze once more. It is our hope that this collection will stoke that resurgence by providing new approaches to inspire the next generation of Godwin scholars.

Notes

1. *William Hazlitt, The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering, 1998), VII: *Liber Amoris*; *The Spirit of the Age*, p. 87.
2. William D. Brewer, 'New Directions in Godwin Studies', *European Romantic Review*, 30:4 (2019), 347–351 (p. 337).
3. Victoria Myers, 'Introduction', *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, eds. Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 3–22 (p. 4).
4. Pamela Clemit, 'William Godwin' in *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context*, eds. Nancy E. Jackson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 173–81 (p. 175).
5. William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), V:

Educational and Literary Writings, ed. Pamela Clemit, p. 77. The transformations in Godwin's thought, particularly following the death of Mary Wollstonecraft, are remarked upon by many Godwin scholars. See 'Mary Shelley's Beloved Lessons' in Beatrice Turner, *Romantic Childhood, Romantic Heirs: Reproduction and Retrospection, 1820–1850* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 135–30; 'Making Public Love' in Julie A. Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 23–65, and David Collings, 'The Romance of the Impossible: William Godwin in the Empty Place of Reason', *ELH*, 70 (2003), 847–874.

6. Richard Gough Thomas, *William Godwin: A Political Life* (Pluto, 2019). Pamela Clemit, 'William Godwin'; Mark Philp 'William Godwin' in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, eds. S. Berges, E. Hunt Botting, and A. Coffee (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 211–23.
7. Tilottama Rajan, 'Introduction', *Mandeville*, by William Godwin (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2016), pp. 11–45.
8. Emma Peacocke, 'Puppets, Waxworks, and a Wooden Dramatis Personae: Eighteenth-Century Material Culture and Philosophical History in William Godwin's *Fleetwood*' in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 31:1 (2018), 189–212. Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artefacts, Cultural Practices and Reception History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Bibliography

Brewer, William D., 'New Directions in Godwin Studies', *European Romantic Review*, 30:4 (2019), 347–351.

Clemit, Pamela, 'William Godwin', *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context*, eds. Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 173–81.

Godwin, William, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin,* gen. ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), V: *Educational and Literary Writings* (ed. Pamela Clemit).

Hazlitt, William, *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering, 1998), VII: *Liber Amoris; The Spirit of the Age.*

Myers, Victoria, 'Introduction'*, Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, eds. Robert M. Maniquis and Victoria Myers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 3–22.

Mole, Tom, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artefacts, Cultural Practices and Reception History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Peacocke, Emma, 'Puppets, Waxworks, and a Wooden Dramatis Personae: Eighteenth-Century Material Culture and Philosophical History in William Godwin's *Fleetwood*' in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 31:1 (2018), 189–212.
Philp, Mark, 'William Godwin' in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, eds. S. Berges, E. Hunt-Botting, and A. Coffee (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 211–23.
Rajan, Tilottama, 'Introduction', *Mandeville*, by William Godwin (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2016), pp. 11–45.
Thomas, Richard Gough, *William Godwin: A Political Life* (Pluto, 2019).
Weston, Rowland, ed., Special Issue on William Godwin, *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 41:1/2 (2014).

PART I

Forms

Godwin, Ireland, and Historical Tragedy

David O'Shaughnessy

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote to his friend William Godwin on 17 December 1800 after reading about the ill-fated *Antonio*, his friend's debut on the London stage. It was a much-needed fillip. Godwin's domestic tragedy had been some three and a half years in gestation, and he had intended it to be the work that would elevate him to even greater heights of literary glory; however, it had been utterly condemned by the London audience after its first and only performance on Saturday, 13 December.[1] After the appropriate commiserations, Coleridge went on to suggest:

> If your Interest in the Theatre is not ruined by the fate of this, your first piece, take heart, set instantly about a new one, and if you want a glowing Subject, take the death of Myrza, as related in the Holstein Ambassador's Travels into Pe[r]sia […] There is Crowd, Character, Passion, Incident, & Pageantry in it—and the History is so little known, that you may take what Liberties you like without Danger.[2]

D. O'Shaughnessy (✉)
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: doshaug@tcd.ie

E. O'Brien et al. (eds.), *New Approaches to William Godwin*, Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Cultures of Print, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62912-0_2

The advice was taken up by Godwin with enthusiasm. His diary tells us that he conceived his next play *Abbas, King of Persia* on 24 December, only two days after the revised version of *Antonio* was published.[3] Godwin's writing and research was focused and determined. He spent three weeks reading Orientalist literature and consulting previous or similar literary treatments of the story. His chief historical source—based on the number of days he spent reading it—was John Chardin's *Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and Ye East Indies Through the Black-Sea and the Country of Colchis* (1686), and John Denham's *The Sophy* (1642) was his primary literary source, a play he read on 10 January 1801. After this intensive bout of reading he began writing the play on 13 January and, managing on average a couple of pages a day, he completed his first draft on 23 February. The very next day he wrote to John Kemble asking him to read it but the manager of Drury Lane Theatre declined the honour, insisting that he only looked at plays once they had been vetted by Drury Lane's own readers. Normally, of course, Thomas Holcroft would be the person Godwin would turn to for literary advice but he was still in quasi-exile in Germany. In need of some assistance, Godwin wrote to Coleridge on 17 March to ask for his comments. Due primarily to ill health, Coleridge did not get back to Godwin on until July but when he did he offered a detailed if somewhat discouraging response. Charles Lamb, who had spent a lot of time with Godwin in February, also contributed some comments and suggestions.[4] Finally, in late August Godwin sent the manuscript to Thomas Harris, manager of Covent Garden Theatre. This also proved fruitless and Godwin was obliged to submit the tragedy to Kemble as a last gasp effort (although he attempted to maximize his chances by also sending it to Richard Brinsley Sheridan, his old acquaintance and Kemble's boss).[5] All to no avail: *Abbas, King of Persia* was neither performed nor published in Godwin's lifetime.[6]

Nor has the play received much in the way of critical attention. Julie Carlson's analysis of Godwin's plays characterizes Godwin's turn to the theatre after Wollstonecraft's death as a means of broadcasting his rehabilitation as regards the domestic affections while also maintaining his critique of their incompatibility with political justice. Carlson sees *Abbas*, a play 'pitting honour against commitment to family', as being consistent with this general dramatic tendency in the wake of Wollstonecraft's death in 1798.[7] Zaheer Kazmi identifies the play as the only occasion that Godwin writes exclusively on a non-European context and thus important evidence that Godwin's anarchism informed his perspective on

international relations. Liberty, argues Kazmi, is central to the play and it is an idea of liberty that is culturally determined rather than related to race.[8] My own analysis of the play laid emphasis on Godwin's turn to visual spectacle, as per Coleridge's mention of crowds and pageantry above, as a means to ensure commercial viability. *Antonio* had been damned for a variety of reasons but, as recorded by Lamb, it was the unfulfilled promise of a swordfight that finally provoked the audience to hissing when all that was delivered in the end was a philosophical reflection on duelling: 'They could not applaud, for disappointment; they would not condemn, for morality's sake'.[9] *Antonio* was a bid, I argued, to reform the stage in line with Godwin's political principles and his sceptical views on the volatility of crowds; *Abbas* was not an absolute capitulation to the demands of contemporary theatrical fashion but it was certainly a move in that direction as was evident from the opening scene which features 'A procession of trophies and standards: Trumpets: Enter a herald, a crowd of suttlers &c, following'.[10] Certainly, Godwin had moved considerably from the rather spare dramaturgical practice of *Antonio* which had eschewed the scenery, crowd scenes, and other visuals of contemporary theatrical success.

Reading my analysis of the play now, it seems that the interpretation was rather narrowly conceived. The focus on Godwin's intellectual and aesthetic development in the context of the dramatic genre still seems fair enough but more attention should have been placed on the political context of the play's composition and on Godwin's reading and acquaintance at that time. Given the emphasis put on conversation in Godwin's political philosophy with regard to self-improvement—and he conceived of reading as a mode of conversation—the six-week period he spent in Ireland in the summer of 1800 and the implementation of the Act of Union with Ireland seems to me now to have played a bigger part than I then acknowledged. The ready availability of Godwin's diary in online and searchable form now allows this richer context to be more fully developed. This chapter then will seek to flesh out that Irish context in order to develop, to use James Chandler's phrase, an 'elevation of perspective' on *Abbas, King of Persia*.[11] Such a move allows us to connect the tragedy with Godwin's later novel *Mandeville* (1817). Ultimately, I argue that revisiting and thickening out my reading of the play has broader implications for our understanding of Godwin. Firstly, the writing of *Abbas* is proof that, despite *Antonio*'s failure, Godwin remained fully committed to the form of the five-act tragedy as a means to effect political justice. Secondly, the tragedy

is strong evidence that Ireland and its relationship with Britain represents a crucial throughline of Godwin's literary career from the 1780s to at least the 1820s. And an important corollary to this argument is that a proper contextualization of the play helps resist traditional divisions in Godwinian scholarship which still tends towards downplaying his political ambition in the wake of Wollstonecraft's death.

The newspapers of December 1800 had more to write about than William Godwin's *Antonio; or, The Soldier's Return*, his first staged tragedy: the pending Act of Union between Ireland and Britain was dominating public discourse.[12] The passage of this piece of legislation—arguably on Pitt's mind since the early 1780s—had been convoluted but there was still one thorny issue that had to be resolved: the Catholic question.[13] Pitt had committed to Catholic emancipation under pressure from the Dublin administration and was in the process of galvanizing cabinet support for the measure in January 1801 when George III discovered his machinations. Angered by Pitt's proposal and the manner in which he had gone about the business, relations between the pair deteriorated. The strength of George III's feelings was sincere and he declared at an emotional and agitated 28 January levee to Henry Dundas, War Secretary, that he should consider any man his 'personal enemy' if he should propose the Catholic question to him.[14] Tension ran high among cabinet members and Pitt failed to gain consensus for the measure, scuppered in particular by Lord Loughborough, the Lord Chancellor. On 31 January Pitt wrote to the king directly. In a powerful missive—which Camden called 'a most masterly exposition'—Pitt laid out his arguments in an impassioned and careful manner. In sum, he explained to the king that emancipation was 'highly advisable with a point to the tranquillity and improvement of Ireland, and to the general interest of the united kingdom'.[15] For Pitt, the chief danger lay not in religious differences but matters of political ideology. He expostulated:

> A distinct political test point against the doctrines of modern Jacobinism would be a much more just and a more effectual security than that which now exists, which may operate to the exclusion of conscientious persons well affected to the state.[16]

The letter concluded with Pitt hinting at resignation but, if this was a bluff, George III called it. The king's reply on 1 February was equally resolute and Pitt tendered his resignation on 3 February 1801. He had