

The Trials of Sincerity: William Godwin's *Political Justice* v. His *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*

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Godwin's changing opinions regarding issues covered in *Political Justice* have been amply documented.¹ My specific concern in this article is the contrast between the rational philosophy put forward in his treatise, *Political Justice* (1793, 1795 and 1797),² and the more subjective arguments expressed in the biography, *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (January and August 1798; henceforward *Memoirs*).³ For an assessment of this contrast, three aspects of Godwin's philosophy will be considered. One is the relevance of necessity and sincerity, as defined by Rational Dissent, for Godwin's account of Wollstonecraft's life and acts; the second is the progression in his views on marriage between the different *Political Justice* editions; and the third, the disparity between the views Godwin adopted on suicide in the treatise and in the *Memoirs* respectively. In particular, in the final section of this article, a joint overview of both works will show to what extent Wollstonecraft's influence (or the influence of Godwin's life with and marriage to Wollstonecraft) is visible in the later editions of the treatise as well as in the biography.

For a better appreciation of the arguments put forward in this article, it is necessary to bear in mind the chronology of events, in particular as the two editions of the *Memoirs* and the third edition of *Political Justice* appeared within a half year, with Wollstonecraft's death (September 1797) coming between Godwin's revisions of the treatise towards its third edition (published December 1797) and publication of the biography (January and August 1798).

Wollstonecraft's relationship with Godwin started shortly after the publication of the 1795 edition of *Political Justice*. This second edition is

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generally assumed to favour the sentiments and to endorse a less strict rationalism than the original 1793 edition.⁴ It is then obvious that this change came about for reasons other than the relationship between the philosopher and the feminist. In contrast, the revisions towards the third edition of *Political Justice* were completed on 30 July 1797, exactly a month before the birth of the couple's daughter, the future Mary Shelley, and were therefore carried out during Godwin and Wollstonecraft's relationship and marriage,⁵ with publication taking place towards the end of 1797. However, changes are not abundant in this third edition, and only those concerning suicide and marriage, issues related to the biography of Wollstonecraft, are considered in this article.⁶

Godwinian critics have failed to agree on the import of the changes in ethics between the first three editions of *Political Justice*. While some assert that the core of the treatise's philosophy remains unchanged, others maintain that the third edition bears little resemblance to the first, to the extent of considering both editions different political statements.⁷ It is not the aim of this article to review those changes, but it would be safe to affirm that, while Godwin's belief in the individual's right to the free use of private judgement remains, a more empirical outlook tempers his rationalism and Platonism.⁸ What remained in Godwin of his faith in utopianism has its origin in Rational Dissent: men have an obligation to truth that motivates moral acts. Such subordination to truth and sincerity, according to Godwin, implies that our conduct, whether private or public, must be regulated by morality and utility. This is relevant to Godwin's fiction, where the protagonists are continually brought before inquisitorial father figures, whether social, religious, moral or familial. It is also pertinent to the writing of biography, one of Godwin's favourite literary exercises, and very especially to the *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

Sincerity and Necessity: *Political Justice* v. the *Memoirs*

Rational Dissenters maintained that “candour” and “plain speaking” were necessary for better communication between individuals in society.⁹ As a consequence of such plain speaking, Godwin believed that truth would be accessible to all individuals who, once enlightened, would be self-sufficient without government. This “euthanasia of government,” as it was called in *Political Justice*, was achieved through truth’s very nature: “single and uniform” (*PJ* 104).¹⁰ The relevance of Godwinian ‘sincerity’ in the context of biography is evident. After the convulsed 1790s, Godwin adopted a more limited educational program, favouring the individual above the general and the private above the public: “the more fully we are presented with the picture and story” of a person of merit, the better readers will experience “a sympathy in their excellencies” (*M* 87).¹¹ At the same time, he maintained in his “Autobiographical Notes” that throughout his life, he “was indefatigable in my search after truth—I was perpetually prompting myself with the principle, *Sequar veritatem*” (*M* 42).¹²

One other central doctrine for Dissenters was that of necessity.¹³ The necessitarian doctrine regarded humans as caught in a web of causal relations, built on a series of external stimuli to which the individual responds in a given manner. According to Godwin’s philosophy in *Political Justice*, the “character of any man is the result of a long series of impressions communicated to his mind, and modifying it in a certain manner, so as to enable us [...] to predict his conduct” (*PJ* 161). The theory maintains that every act of the individual is necessary and could not have been different: “if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not in any moment of his existence have acted otherwise than he has acted” (*PJ* 158). The second edition of *Political Justice* adds the emendation that the principle of necessity merely *influences* man to adopt one given course of action. But that is the only major alteration in an otherwise largely untouched chapter.

Therefore, it might occur that both doctrines, necessity and absolute ‘truth-telling,’ clashed; for example Godwin as a biographer met with some difficulties when assessing Wollstonecraft’s unconventional—as it was perceived to have been—social behaviour. For if one could not possibly have acted differently than they did, and the biographer has an obligation to truth, how can Wollstonecraft’s suicide attempts, and liberal relationships and pregnancies be accounted for? There seems to be no answer to the conundrum of necessity *versus* morality. As Jon Klancher has affirmed, Godwin’s case is just one more of the “shift from rationalism to empiricism or scepticism, radicalism to liberalism, or Enlightenment assuredness to Romantic ironism,” although for this critic the transition in Godwin is better seen through his choice of genres, “ranging from the scientific and the historiographic [in *Political Justice*] to the poetic and the critical [in *The Enquirer* (1797)].”¹⁴ At the late end of that shift, together with *The Enquirer*, I would include the *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft.

Godwin’s adherence to truth in Wollstonecraft’s biography was misinterpreted in his day, as his readers did not understand the motives of Godwin’s candour. Even in Rational Dissent terms, there was a limit to such candid sincerity: charity, discretion and generosity were invoked to temper the devastating effects that the impartial disclosure of truth could cause. Some Rational Dissenters found Godwin’s obstinate candour distasteful; William Roscoe, for example, wrote Wollstonecraft’s famous epitaph: “mourn’d by thy Godwin with a heart of stone.”¹⁵

However, Godwin’s fearless attitude was to himself entirely justifiable: “If there ever were any motives of prudence or delicacy, that could impose a qualification upon the story, they are now over” (*M* 127). It mattered little that Godwin could call Wollstonecraft “my wife,” for as he had maintained in the famous “fire case,” “What magic is there in the pronoun ‘my,’ that should justify us in overturning the decisions of everlasting truth?” (*PJ* 50).¹⁶ The reason for his liberal vindication of Wollstonecraft’s unusual life was that the *Memoirs* were to form part in Godwin’s lifelong educational project.

This project also involved philosophy, history, fiction, children's literature, and literary criticism. What biography (and autobiography) alone offered was a form of "individual history," a depiction of the subject's mind, that could morally and socially improve readers: "It has always appeared to me, that to give to the public some account of the life of a person of eminent merit deceased, is a duty incumbent on survivors" (M 87). As opposed to the traditional 'life and letters' approach to biography, Godwin advocated total sincerity in an account of an individual's life that considered private and public concerns inseparable. By choosing Wollstonecraft as his subject, Godwin defends her courageous life as representative of the new social order, against institutional imposition and hypocrisy, following the model set by the biographies of many French revolutionary leaders, some of whom had been personally known to her.¹⁷ Godwin's principle is that, by appealing to the reader's conscience, political education is achieved. This turned the *Memoirs* into a defence act just like the publication of *Caleb Williams* had been, with its incendiary Preface, or the production of *Cursory Strictures* to help Holcroft in his trial for treason in 1794.¹⁸

Despite the *Memoirs'* educational purpose, there still remained the so called "ethical question": the biographer's degree of intrusion upon his subject's privacy. The conservative critical position regarding the biography of great persons, observed among others by Addison, was to keep a respectful wait until long after their death.¹⁹ The avant-garde position, by contrast, was "Indifference, with respect to persons, and Impartiality, with respect to truth."²⁰ This attitude seems to have been closely followed by Godwin in his different *Histories* and biographies, including the *Memoirs*. In *History of the Commonwealth*, for example, he assures readers he has passed judgement on events and persons only after "a fair and severe examination of evidence, and the not suffering any respect of persons, or approbation of a cause, to lead the writer to misapprehend or misrepresent the nature of facts."²¹

However, in his old age Godwin would admit to having been suspicious of the intrusiveness of biography: "I have always entertained the

strongest antipathy to this violation of the confidence between man and man, that every idle word, every thoughtless jest I make at another's expense, shall be carried home by the hearer, put in writing, and afterwards printed."²² Godwin's secret misgivings about the intrusiveness of biography and its tendency towards subjectivity, incompatible with impartial philosophy, explains many instances of disagreement between Godwin and other Wollstonecraft biographers. They have also exposed him, the alleged champion of truth and sincerity, to accusations of falsehood or limited sincerity. For example, the happiness Wollstonecraft experienced, according to Godwin, as a chaperone in Bath (*M* 101-03) bears little or no resemblance with her own confessions of disgust at a life of show and dissipation.²³ Likewise, Godwin presents her teaching at the Kingsboroughs' as a fortunate period in her life, in which she was loved by the family. Yet Claire Tomalin paints a totally different picture, affirming that Mary fell out with the Kingsboroughs within less than a year of taking her position. The couple separated shortly after, and the series of scandals that pursued the family were attributed to Wollstonecraft's influence.²⁴

Another Wollstonecraft biographer, Margaret Tims, reveals doubts about Godwin's truthfulness in the case of the Eliza Bishop incident.²⁵ After the rash elopement, Eliza's daughter was left to die, and Tims suggests that, although there is no evidence, maybe Mary Wollstonecraft's sisters refused to take care of Fanny Imlay in Ireland many years later by way of revenge. In Janet Todd's view, "the lack of any anxiety on Mary's part in separating mother and infant was extraordinary."²⁶ It was indeed a neglectful measure, to which Godwin alludes with suspicious brevity: "Mary continued with her sister without intermission, to her perfect recovery" (*M* 94).

It is assumed by modern Wollstonecraft biographers that Eliza Bishop's disorder was what is now termed post-natal depression, and that there was a streak of mental fragility in most members of the family.²⁷ That would account for Eliza's abandonment of her familial

duties, Fanny Imlay's melancholy character and eventual suicide, and Mary Wollstonecraft's own attraction to suicide, too.

Godwin followed Rousseau in the thought that, once an error has been confessed, no-one has the right to criticise the sinner.²⁸ However, the strength of the public reaction to his original account of Wollstonecraft's attraction to suicide forced him to revise both the sections of *Political Justice* regarding the issue and the *Memoirs* themselves. One other issue which suffered revision was marriage.

Marriage and Suicide in *Political Justice* and the *Memoirs*

The final section of this article will focus on these two topics and how Godwin's views on them changed, from the first edition of *Political Justice* to the later two, and the *Memoirs*.

When Godwin and Wollstonecraft married, both the radical and conservative circles of their society were shocked, amused, or both.²⁹ Wollstonecraft had maintained in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* the need for current matrimonial rules to change, if not disappear altogether.³⁰ Godwin for his part had advocated in *Political Justice* the disappearance of all marriage ties. His stance of 1793 was influenced both by his life as a bachelor and his over-rational philosophy, which rested on absolute impartiality and universal virtue. Godwin's original comments on matrimony as a legal institution and social practice can be found in the section significantly entitled "On Property," in the first edition of *Political Justice*. In it, Godwin protests against the tradition and formality of marriage. Marriage, as the chapter heading reads, is "a branch of the prevailing system of property" (*PJ* 448) which deserves Godwin's criticism on the grounds that it presupposes mutual understanding between husband and wife for life, and is entered following a romantic, usually deceptive, decision based on inexperience.

In addition, marriage in 1793 is for Godwin not only an affair of property, it is also against justice for the community, for “[s]o long as I seek to engross one woman to myself, and to prohibit my neighbour from proving his superior desert and reaping the fruits of it, I am guilty of the most odious of all monopolies” (*PJ* 453). These views would be echoed in the *Memoirs*, five years later. When he reflects on his and Wollstonecraft’s wedding day, his tone is more legalistic than romantic: “after the experiment of seven months of as intimate an intercourse as our respective modes of living would admit, there was certainly less hazard to either, in the subjecting ourselves to those consequences which the laws of England annex to the relations of husband and wife” (*M* 130).

However, following the speculative manner in which he wrote the last section of *Political Justice*, Godwin provides only suggestions for the abolition of matrimony: man should look for the most virtuous of his community, form relationships and only engage in “sensual intercourse” as “a very trivial object” (*PJ* 454). Reason and duty dictate how the species should be propagated, and paternity loses its relevance, for one’s sense of moral virtue demands total impartiality. Godwin points to a future society in which there is no conflict between public duty and private affection.³¹ This rationalistic attitude even extends to Godwin’s conception of sexuality: Friendship, Godwin says, “may be expected to come in aid of the sexual intercourse to refine its grossness and increase its delight.” Godwin admits that even when two people are satisfied with their relationship, infidelities may occur. That, he says, is all right, as long as that “inconstancy” is not carried out “in a clandestine manner” (*PJ* Variants [2] 338-39).³²

Godwin’s progression in his views on marriage is evident in the definition he gives the institution in the third edition of *Political Justice*, i.e. after his marriage to Wollstonecraft: “a salutary and respectable institution, but not of that species of marriage, in which there is no room for repentance, and to which liberty and hope are equally strangers” (*PJ* Variants [3] 339). The stress is again on the spouses’

obligation to honesty. Respectable though the institution now seemed to Godwin, he still has objections, particularly due to its legal implications. However, he acknowledges that since the social majority accepts the institution, the bad consequences of rejecting it in practice would outweigh the good. He would no doubt understand the strain of opposing society, since he had felt the need to publicly defend Wollstonecraft's adherence to the name "Mrs Imlay":

Mary indeed had, till now, retained the name of Imlay which had first been assumed from necessity in France; but its being retained thus long, was purely from the awkwardness that attends the introduction of a change, and not from an apprehension of consequences of this sort. Her scrupulous explicitness as to the nature of her situation, surely sufficed to make the name she bore perfectly immaterial. (*M* 131)

It is hard to believe, however, that a punctilious philosopher such as Godwin would declare "immaterial" the choice of the name "Imlay," in particular if it was inexact.

A greater challenge is posed to the philosophy of *Political Justice* by the question of suicide, which Wollstonecraft attempted at least twice. As Janet Todd argues, she had not considered suicide in her *Wrongs of Woman* because it was supposed to be the result of emotion, not rationality. Later, however, she came to accept it as the opposite of female resignation, and it thus became "the revolutionary right of rational death." For this critic, however, Godwin's record for posterity of Wollstonecraft's suicide attempts in the *Memoirs* implied the lasting connection of suicide and female rights in the public reactionary mind. In addition, suicide would in future be interpreted as sentimental and romantic, an interpretation against which Wollstonecraft had always battled.³³

Let us have a look first at Godwin's words on suicide in *Political Justice*. In the original version, he rejects suicide as an act of cowardice, as he maintains that "pain" and "disgrace," the two reasons which he considers may drive a person to voluntary death, are "a small inconvenience," and "an imaginary evil" respectively (*PJ* 55). In addition, suicide is a breach of one's duty to the rest of society: "The difficulty is

to decide in any instance whether the recourse to a voluntary death may overbalance the usefulness I may exert in twenty or thirty years of additional life" (*PJ* 56). Although he cites figures of the classical world whose suicides taught self-restraint and love for the Roman republic, his opening stance is that human beings have no right to kill themselves. Similar arguments appear in the second edition of *Political Justice*. The appeal to usefulness remains, but now on the grounds that "to escape from pain is a motive exclusively selfish, and he who postpones the possible benefit of many to his personal ease, seems to be the fit object of censure, and not of approbation" (*PJ* Variants [2] 68).³⁴

Bearing these views in mind, it would be safe to assume that Godwin should have chastised Wollstonecraft in the *Memoirs* for her determination to take her own life, but no reproof is found. In contrast, readers encounter one of Godwin's bouts of extreme impartiality. He enthusiastically approves of Wollstonecraft's dangerous journey to Scandinavia on behalf of Imlay, the man who had put her in that suicidal frame of mind. He also thinks it was "gratifying to her feelings, to be employed in promoting the interest of [Imlay]," in a mission which "seemed the most desirable thing to recruit her health, and, if possible, her spirits, in the present crisis" (*M* 122).³⁵ For a man whose longest trip was to Ireland, it seemed odd to express such enthusiasm for such a risky adventure.

There is a more relevant variation between the two editions of the *Memoirs* concerning suicide. After a meticulous description of Wollstonecraft's method for sinking in the Thames, Godwin in the first edition of the *Memoirs* philosophises about the suicide's state of mind. A man about to kill himself, Godwin says, is blind to "the prospect of future tranquillity and pleasure," but "moral reasoning" should produce different results: men should "impress their minds, in their sober moments, with a conception, which [...] seems to promise to act as a successful antidote in a paroxysm of desperation" (*M* 124). In the revised *Memoirs*, however, Godwin's philosophy becomes both more profound and specific: whereas in the first edition he had made no

reference to Wollstonecraft's specific contribution to society at large, he now does:

By insensible degrees she proceeded to stake her life upon the consequences of her error: and, for the disappointment of his [Imlay's] choice, for a consideration so foreign to the true end of her powers and cultivation, she was willing to consign those powers and that cultivation, pregnant as they were with pleasure to herself and gratification to others, formed to adorn society [...], as well as, through the medium of the press, to delight, instruct, and reform mankind—she was willing, I say, to consign all these to premature destruction! (*M Variants* 154)

The change is explained as Godwin's attempt to prove to his and Wollstonecraft's detractors that the educational campaign he had in mind with the *Memoirs* was intimately linked to her example. Abstraction and generalisation were therefore replaced with specific references to her. In his haste and earnestness, Godwin overlooked his grammatical correctness, for the sentence above, which for the sake of simplicity has been edited, would have merited inclusion in his own *Enquirer* as an example of long-winded syntax.³⁶ Godwin's readership therefore had an effect on the *Memoirs*, but would Wollstonecraft have an effect on the third edition of *Political Justice* as regards suicide?

The chapter on suicide in the 1797 edition in *Political Justice* reads mostly along the same lines as the first two. Godwin chastises suicides on the grounds of social nonchalance in their neglect of the Dissenting duty to foster general improvement, and still adheres to the immorality of terminating our own lives, one of our endowments which fall under moral discipline. And "in common with every branch of morality, it is a topic of calculation, as to the balance of good and evil to result, from its employment in any individual instance" (*PJ Variants* (3) 68). But there is an important change: where Godwin had wondered in 1793 and 1795 whether the suicide had a right to destroy himself "to escape from pain or disgrace" (*PJ* 55), in 1797 he speculates about "pain and *distress*" (*PJ Variants* [3] 68; my emphasis).

The change seems a revealing one: what appears to have been a casual choice of words in the first two editions, posed after the

Memoirs some discomfort to Godwin, for it now seemed that he was supporting the notion that a suicide—and here his reading public would put “Wollstonecraft”—might wish to escape disgrace. Therefore, it was assumed, she *had* been disgraced. Willing to avoid such a line of thought, Godwin would have felt the need to replace, in the treatise’s third edition, this searing word with a more indistinct one. It is significant that Godwin in the *Memoirs* strives to dissociate the term “disgrace” from Wollstonecraft, in a famous passage where he attempts to vindicate her character—with poor results, one might add. The brackets enclose the *Memoirs*’ second edition amendments:

There are no circumstances of her life, that, in the judgement of honour and reason, could brand her with disgrace. [She had errors; but her errors, which were not those of a sordid mind, were connected and interwoven with the qualities most characteristic of her disposition and genius.] Never did there exist a human being, that needed, with less fear, expose all their actions, and call upon the universe to judge them. An event of the most deplorable sort, has awfully imposed silence upon the gabble of frivolity. (*M* 127; *M* Variants 155)

It is obvious that Godwin felt the need to acknowledge Wollstonecraft’s “errors,” although he connected them to her intellect, in a very unfortunate sample of his preference for the *Political Justice* jargon. In the space of sixty-four words, two references to judgement are made; more strangely, also to honour, a very rare occurrence in Godwinian philosophy.

In this article, I have tried to show the extent to which Godwin’s theoretical adherence to sincerity clashed with areas of Wollstonecraft’s life which he covered in his biography of her. From his adjustments in his conception of the institution of marriage to his indecision regarding the motives that could drive a person to suicide, Godwin experienced the gap which opened between writing philosophy and writing a life. Godwin may have protested his faith in Wollstonecraft’s clean past, and believed that her tragic death would seal her accusers’ lips. But the decades to come proved him wrong in his latter assumption.³⁷ A close reading of his contradictions and constant corrections to

the text of the *Memoirs* shows that not even he believed his own words. Understandably, when Godwin returned to a glorification of Mary Wollstonecraft, he chose fiction, and when he returned to biography, he chose a medieval literary personality. *St Leon* (1799) and the *Life of Chaucer* (1803) proved that Godwin maintained his faith in the formative nature of circumstances and the potential of political and social contingency to affect individual growth. Typically Godwinian though these premises looked, they did not touch on any private lives, and both works became successes. His fictional idealisations of Wollstonecraft after 1799 would all read as more elegant, constrained, and, above all, sensible.

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NOTES

¹The most comprehensive study is Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

²The second edition of *Political Justice* was published in November 1795, and the third in December 1797. For this reason, most Godwin commentators refer to them as the 1796 and 1798 editions respectively. In order to avoid confusion with the chronology of events, the years used in this article are 1795 and 1797. See Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) 360-61, for a detailed chronology of events around the 1790s and 1800s in Godwin's life.

³Originally published in January 1798, the *Memoirs* shocked the majority of the reading public of the time, who did not understand that Godwin, recently widowed, would disclose such personal material about Wollstonecraft voluntarily. See the section "Reactions" in Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker, introduction, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman: William Godwin* (Letchworth: Broadview Literary Press, 2001) 32-36.

⁴Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 142-44.

⁵Godwin's diary entry for the day that revision started, 11 March 1797, also shows "chez elle," his customary key phrase indicating his private encounters with Wollstonecraft (Dep. e. 203). Godwin's Diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Uncatalogued.

⁶For Godwin's revisions of *Political Justice*, see his Diary (Dep. e. 203), for the dates mentioned. Among the relevant readings Godwin recorded are Holcroft's

Hugh Trevor, Diderot's *Religieuse*, Cowper's *Task*, Darwin, Hobbes's *Human Nature* and *Leviathan*, and very specially, Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*. The readings that followed are similarly representative: on the same day he finished the revision, Godwin read *Werther* (30 July 1797), followed by Rousseau's *Confessions*, *Émile* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. He was, in other words, reading for inspiration on sensibility, association and human nature, and for biography and autobiography.

⁷In F. E. L. Priestley's opinion, the 1797 edition offers Godwin's views "in their final form" and is therefore the basis of his own edition. Priestley concludes with Godwin that "through it all, 'the spirit and great outlines of the work' remain untouched." F. E. L. Priestley, ed., *William Godwin: An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, 3 vols. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1946) 3: 99-100. Peter H. Marshall, too, admits that the second edition may have lost in "urgency and daring," but it "therefore offers a more substantial and convincing exposition of Godwin's philosophical anarchism." Peter H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (London: Yale UP, 1984) 163. Mark Philp argues that if we look at the core of Godwin's philosophy in *Political Justice*, we find a set of beliefs that remained constant not only to all the editions, but also all of his works: "a duty-based conception of morality, revolving around benevolence and a conception of utility couched in perfectionist terms, constrained by the right of private judgement." Mark Philp, "Introduction," *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1993) 1: 39. Marilyn Butler on the contrary considers that *Political Justice's* second edition was "so materially changed that [it] represents a new political statement." Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: OUP, 1982) 237. De Quincey in Godwin's days was of the same opinion: "the second edition, as regards principles, is not a recast, but absolutely a travesty of the first" (Priestley 3: 81).

⁸For an account of the changes in this section, see Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 158-59.

⁹Originally, "candour" in Dissenting circles had implied, precisely, open-mindedness, toleration. Truth could only emerge after the collision of mind upon mind, through the free exchange of opinion, whatever that might be. See Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: OUP, 2003) 109-12; Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 24 and 95; and Marshall 41 and 45.

¹⁰The edition used is *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp, 7 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1993), vol. 3, *Political Justice*. All further references are incorporated in the text, with the abbreviation "PJ" and page number. When the word "Variants" appears, the quote refers to other than the 1793 edition; "(2)" and "(3)" refer to the second and third editions respectively, published in vol. 4 of *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*.

¹¹The edition used is *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. Mark Philp and Pamela Clemit, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1992), vol. 1, *Memoirs*. All further references are incorporated in the text, giving page number

and the abbreviation "M." Where the second edition text is quoted, the word "Variants" appears before the page number.

¹²Godwin's "Autobiographical Notes" are published in the same volume of *Collected Novels and Memoirs with the Memoirs of Wollstonecraft*. Godwin wrote these fragments from 1 to 8 October 1809.

¹³See William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 69-73 for an account of the Dissenting notion of the doctrine of necessity.

¹⁴Jon Klancher, "Godwin and the Genre Reformers: on Necessity and Contingency in Romantic Narrative Theory," *Romanticism, History and the Possibilities of Genre: Re-forming Literature 1789-1837*, ed. Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 21-38, 21. My additions.

¹⁵Quoted in Locke 134.

¹⁶According to Godwin, the life of archbishop François Fénelon (1651-1715), liberal author of *Telemachus*, was more conducive to the general good than that of his valet; therefore if a fire broke out in his house, and only one life could be saved, then according to justice, the valet should be left to perish, even if I, or my father, (wife or mother in *Political Justice's* first edition) were the valet (PJ 50).

¹⁷For an overview of these figures and their contribution to revolutionary autobiography, and Godwin's educational concept of "individual history," as he termed biography, see Clemit and Walker 12-22.

¹⁸Hazlitt records how at Godwin's dinner table Horne Tooke expressed his gratitude after the trials: "when [Godwin] went round to his chair, [Tooke] took his hand, and pressed it to his lips, saying—'I can do no less for the hand that saved my life!'" William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, or Contemporary Portraits* [1825], ed. E. D. Mackerness (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1969) 52.

¹⁹Philip Daghljan, ed., *Essays in Eighteenth Century Biography* (London: Indiana UP, 1968) 72-73.

²⁰Donald A. Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1941) 350. Samuel Johnson had given sanction to this kind of biography in No. 60 of *The Rambler*, where he affirmed that "every man has, in the mighty mass of the world, great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of immediate and apparent use." Samuel Johnson, *A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: OUP, 1984) 205. Other examples of this stance were W. Kenrick's *Robert Lloyd* (1774) or Robert Shiels' *Lives of the Poets* (1753), in which total disclosure is favoured: "in biographical writing, the first and most essential principle is candour, which no reverence for the memory of the dead, nor affection for the virtues of the living should violate." Lord Orrery's life of Swift was praised because he had tried to show the man as he really was, both his virtues and his "many failings" (Daghljan 77).

²¹William Godwin, *History of the Commonwealth of England*, 4 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1824-28) 1: v-viii.

²²*Lives of the Great Romantics III: Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley by their Contemporaries*, vol. 1, William Godwin, ed. Pamela Clemit (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999) xiii.

²³See Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000) 85-91.

²⁴Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) 65. One of the daughters, Margaret King, later Lady Mountcashell, professed lasting admiration for the teachings of Wollstonecraft, and remained a lifelong friend of the Shelleys. Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley* (London: John Murray, 2000) 24.

²⁵Eliza, Mary's sister, married John Bishop, became pregnant and gave birth to a girl. Although there is no evidence to suggest an unhappy or violent marriage, Eliza fell into acute post-natal depression, and at Mary's instigation, ran away with her, leaving both husband and baby behind. Margaret Tims reveals doubts about Godwin's truthfulness in the incident. His account is, she says, "somewhat disingenuous"; the crisis is "strangely glossed over by Godwin." Margaret Tims, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Social Pioneer* (London: Millington, 1976) 28. For a comprehensive account of the episode, see Todd 45-57.

²⁶Timms 49.

²⁷See for example Kate Chisholm, "In the Full Flood of Feeling," *The Telegraph*, 7 September 2003, www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2003/09/07/botod07.xml.

²⁸Peter France, *Landmarks of World Literature: Rousseau's Confessions* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987) 25-26. For the relevance on Godwin of Rousseau's concept of biography as a series of personal "revolutions," see Clemit 19-22.

²⁹See St Clair 170-73, and Todd 444-47.

³⁰Several passages illustrate Wollstonecraft's campaign for a change in the institution of marriage; for example, *Works by Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London, William Pickering, 1989), vol. 5, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 66, 211 and 217.

³¹As would happen in many other points of his philosophy, Godwin later changed his views, and towards the end of his life affirmed that we grant priority to those we have near. In this new light, our benefit to the world at large is questionable, but, "The benefits we can confer upon those with whom we are closely connected, are of great magnitude or continual occurrence" (Dep. b. 228/9[e]).

³²However, when Shelley disclosed his intentions regarding free love with Mary, Godwin replied he should have read the second edition of *Political Justice* rather than the first, for society had turned more conservative and was not yet ready for such experiment. See Janet Todd, *Gender, Art and Death* (London: Polity P, 1993) 126.

³³Todd, *Gender* 102-19.

³⁴Although no religious considerations appear in *Political Justice* on the question of suicide, Godwin would have been familiar with the fact that Protestants would interpret the act as irreligious, since they saw themselves as accountable to God for the gifts received at birth, whether physical, intellectual or material (Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* 22). Godwin would later express the same idea in an undated letter to an editor, including one of those references to the Creator which became so common towards the close of his life: "Soberly and impartially speaking, the power over my life with which nature has endowed me, is a talent committed to my discretion [...] the being that made us has with equal clearness, endowed us with the empire over our own life or death" (Dep. c. 527).

³⁵This passage is virtually unchanged in the second edition of the *Memoirs*. For a detailed account of Wollstonecraft's activities and purpose in Scandinavia, see the authoritative study by Per Nyström, *Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian Journey* (Göteborg: Kungl. Vetenskaps- och Vitterhets-Samhället, 1980).

³⁶Pamela Clemit, "Godwin's Educational Theory: *The Enquirer*," *Enlightenment and Dissent* 12 (1993): 3-11.

³⁷Seymour 31-33.