

### Chapter note 6: *writing*

Chapter 6: *writing* consists of all the manuscripts in Abinger Dep. b.228/4. One item in the chapter comes from Dep. c.507/6, and together with the four \*documents presents the entire gathering in Dep. c.507/6, consisting of five letters to Godwin in 1798 and 1799 from sisters Sophia Lee (1750-1824), and Harriet Lee (1757-1851). The first \*document is a formal note to Godwin from Harriet Lee at Belvidere House, Bath, the girls' school at which Sophia, Miss Lee, was headmistress, and Harriet her deputy. The note was probably hand-delivered to Godwin in Bath either in March or June 1798. The next documents are a letter from Sophia Lee to Godwin dated from Bath 2 June 1799, and this carries a brief postscript from Harriet. The letters from Sophia Lee to Godwin dated from Bath 7 December 1799, and Harriet Lee to Godwin dated from Bath 8 December 1799, were apparently posted as one packet.

Dep. b.228/4 contains MWS script on 1839 watermark paper, and an attached bundle of Godwin's and Harriet Lee's original holograph letters in 1798. One letter from Harriet Lee to Godwin in the course of this correspondence has become detached from the rest and is given in this chapter from Dep. c.507/6. All MWS script b.228/4 is on wove paper with a *papier satine* Joynson 1839 watermark, the same paper as appears in MWS scripts of Dep. c.532/8 and Dep. c. 606/4 in our chapter 5: *women*.

Both the MWS script and the Godwin-Lee letters, in abbreviated and at times silently censored versions, were published in 1876 by Charles Kegan Paul in the first volume of *William Godwin and his Contemporaries* (CKP i 297-310). From external evidence, the correspondence may be dated between March and August/September of 1798. Most of Lee's letters are informally dated with the day of the week. Godwin dated only the final drafts of those of his letters he had readied for posting. Paul published a selection of passages from Godwin's letters headed with conjectural dates. I have indicated Paul's placings and datings in endnotes, but have not relied on them. With posterity in mind, Godwin habitually kept rough drafts, fair copies, and wet-press copies of his numerous letters. In the affair with Harriet Lee, St Clair endorses Godwin's rationale for this librarianship: 'He showered [Harriet Lee] with letters, all prepared with great care and a few constituting substantial ethical essays in their own right' (C204).

All the sheets in the folder b.228/4 have a matching pinhole where they have been formerly pinned together. It remains open as to whether it was Mary Shelley herself or Paul who pinned the sheets of variously sized paper together. Elsewhere in the archive Paul had found Mary Shelley's bundles of sheets already pinned, but whether in this case, is not certain. There is no MWS page numbering on these materials, of the sort that

proved such a useful guide to consecutive order in our chapters 1 to 5. As well, there are no transcriptions or editorial marks from Mary Jane Godwin's hand, and I have concluded that this material was collated by Mary Shelley circa 1840, when Mary Jane's health was deteriorating. There may also have been a reluctance on Mary Shelley's part to collaborate with Mary Jane in reading and arranging the evidence of Godwin's eager pursuit of Harriet Lee.

Likewise, Dep. c.507/6 bears no annotations or other signs of editing by either Mary Shelley or Mary Jane Godwin. Of five letters contained in this folder, one only is included within the chapter 6: *writing*: This is Harriet Lee's letter of 4 June 1798, postmarked 5 June, addressed to Godwin at his London residence, the Polygon, Somers Town, and readdressed from there to his temporary lodgings at Bath.

The documentation of this chapter 6 is cross-referenced to the Abinger MS microfilm (Duke reel 2), which contains Godwin's Journal for 1798. Mark Philp has described Godwin's methods of composing the journals, suggesting that the on-page appearance of a daily jotting is not quite true to form, and that Godwin on occasion filled in blanks from memory, and altered or added to entries. Our transcriptions from Dep. b.228/4 have been checked against the microfilm copy of these materials in Duke reel 5, and transcriptions from Dep. c.507/6 have been checked against Duke reel 12.

St Clair (C204, n17) cites a correspondence 'or conversation' between Godwin and Harriet Lee, in January 1799, in Dep. c.512. I have seen no evidence in MWS script that Mary Shelley knew that Godwin and Lee were still corresponding privately at that date, and no papers from c.512 are included in this chapter 6: *writing*.

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The c.507/6 letters of June and December 1799 shown here as \*documents were received under the rubric of literary 'conversation' by the 'fair authoresses of The Canterbury Tales', as MWS script refers to them (b.228/4). The Bodleian folder rubric endorses this convention:

*c.507/6: Five letters from Harriet Lee and Sophia Lee (Authoresses of the Canterbury Tales) to Godwin. 5 items in ten leaves, with typed abstract.*

This polite understanding held even when, as in Godwin's letter of 1 June, 1799, and Sophia Lee's reply on 2 June, they touch on controversial matters of reputation and *amour propre*. It appears that Godwin had taken offense at a character, 'a philosopher of

the new school', in one of Sophia's stories in the 3rd volume of *Canterbury Tales* (1798), jointly-authored by herself and Harriet. St Clair identifies *The Clergyman's Tale* and calls Sophia's apology 'disingenuous' (C207, n25). Godwin had read the first volume of *Canterbury Tales* (1797) with great enthusiasm, travelling by coach in 'summer of 1797 when he had visited Parr and Wedgwood', leaving newly-wed and heavily pregnant Mary Wollstonecraft in London (C201). The sisters' joint letter to Godwin in December 1799 (\*documents c.507/6), mingles a little irony into their praise of Godwin's new novel, *St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1799). Yet Mary Shelley herself would endorse Harriet's impression: 'I see thro' the whole an energy of thinking & feeling peculiar to you' (c.507/6)

As Godwin's literary executor, Mary Shelley might have come upon evidence of the Harriet Lee affair at any date from April 1836 when Godwin died, through July 1836 when she accepted Colburn's commission for the 2-volume *Memoirs and Correspondence*, to the latest date of composition of the biography, some time after May 1840. It would be interesting to know whether Shelley was surprised to discover the affair late in the piece, as St Clair hints. But all that is certain is that she did not proceed to write about it until 1839, on the same watermark paper as her script of the 1797 marriage of her parents. In any case, Shelley begins writing about Godwin's relationship with Harriet Lee on 1839 Joynson watermark paper in Dep. b.228/4, with a glance over her shoulder at what she had already written about Godwin in love and Godwin's mourning for Mary Wollstonecraft:

The other alteration that had taken place in Mr Godwin, to which I alluded, was an entire change of sentiment on the subject of marriage. The happiness he had enjoyed with his wife made him eager to instilled the opinion that a m he might at least in a degree renew regain a portion of its blessings married a portion of the treasure he had lost.

The phrase 'to which I alluded' looks back to MWS scripts c.606/4, and c.532/8, which our edition places in chapter 5: *women*, and thus affords confirmation of the sequence of composition that we have adopted in our chapter plan. In that chapter 5, MWS script described Godwin's sceptical attitude toward marriage, before his own marriage with Mary Wollstonecraft in March 1797 brought about a heartfelt change. The sensitive topic of her own parentage had elicited from Mary Shelley a flurry of comments protecting Godwin from suspicions of libertinism on the one hand, and of cold intellectualism on the other.

To complicate the question of the chapter sequence, MWS script in 5: *women* writes the episode of Godwin's proposal of marriage to the freshly widowed Maria Reveley in July 1799 as a continuous outpouring of his widowed affection and need. This enhances Wollstonecraft's posthumous presence to Godwin's mind but leapfrogs the narrative over the 1798 Harriet Lee affair. And our chapter plan has of course had to abide by this *volte face*.

Opening the book of Harriet Lee in March 1798, MWS script b.228/4 proposes another 'entire change of sentiment regarding marriage', a further turn of the wheel towards a never to be completed circle of heterosexual and familial attachment. Godwin the widower feels acutely his parental responsibility for Wollstonecraft's motherless girls. The burden of 'two orphan girls left in his charge' weights the balance in favour of a courtship that might otherwise seem precipitate. The 'kindly' lady residing in Godwin's household (young Louisa Jones of Bath), also puts his equanimity at risk (or would have done to a less carefully prepared Godwin than the one scripted here). The answer to these cares comes not only in Harriet Lee's person, but in the revived vitality with which Godwin hails her: 'his immediate desire was to study her mind' (MWS script, b.228/4).

Shelley hedges Godwin's attraction to Harriet Lee as 'regard' [cancelled] ^admiration^ [inserted] 'partiality' 'esteem & regard' 'to the end of his life'. 'To the end of his life' is the phrase with which, from time to time, Mary Shelley writes her own confidential relationship with Godwin in his latter days into her script-in-progress. In b.228/4, she indicates the limits of this confidentiality: 'though it was not till his papers were placed in my hands that I learned the nearer tie that he sought to establish between them'. If Mary Shelley was surprised and/or displeased by the discovery that Godwin was courting Harriet Lee within six months of Wollstonecraft's death, within weeks of publishing his testimonial *Memoirs* of her, and within days of meeting Harriet herself for the first time, she covers it in her usual manner.

The correspondence in b.228/4 between Godwin and Harriet Lee was not intended by either of them for publication, and some of Godwin's drafts certainly were withheld from the post. But, as is apparent in several exchanges of reply and riposte by both the parties, the librarian's insertion into the Bodleian rubric b.228/4(b): "'^one perhaps sent^'", errs far on the side of caution. Internal evidence of Lee's reactions to Godwin's claims of a consensus of liking between them, and against his charges of bigotry, show she did receive and read more than one of his communiqués. I believe Godwin made no less than three, and probably four postings: his first 'offer of accommodation' circa

March 1798; a second letter (called 'letter three' by Mary Shelley) dated 2 June 1798; his letter conjecturally dated by Paul [c6 June], the first to use 'bigot' and 'bigotry', and responded to by Harriet Lee on 16 June; and his undated letter, conjecturally dated by Paul '[June 1798]': 'I sit down now as a disinterested friend'. I believe this latter draft, or series of drafts, is of a later date than is assigned to it by Paul.

The question of privacy, for writers and from readers, which exercised Mary Shelley as the date for publishing *Memoirs and Correspondence of the late William Godwin* drew closer in May 1840, devolves on considerations of how to read a draft, and how to edit (give out) a lineage or array of drafts. The clash between formal generic literature and informal writing is sharpened by the desperation, even to tortuousness, of Godwin's efforts to promote his cause and master Harriet's acknowledgment of (his written proclamation of) himself.

At the time of writing her commentary on the Harriet Lee affair, on Joynson 1839 watermark paper, Mary Shelley was perhaps not aware that Harriet Lee, born in 1757, was living as she had for many years, in Clifton, near Bristol, a favoured spot among retired schoolteachers and governesses, and was not to die until 1851, the same year as Mary Shelley herself. There is no sign that Mary Shelley attempted to contact the ancient dame. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Lee was still alive when Mary Shelley was pondering the question of whether to publish *Life of William Godwin*, and if so, whether to omit certain letters (Cf. c.606/4, chapter note 5: *women*). And consideration of Lee's sensitivities, her so-called 'love of etiquettes', may at this point have weighed with Mary Shelley.

When it came to a correspondence between members of the literary fraternity, congratulating each other on the merits of their recent publications, female authors might safely conduct such a correspondence as honorary brothers. Godwin had initiated such an above board correspondence with an unsolicited letter to Sophia Lee in April 1796, after attending a performance at Drury Lane of her tragedy *Almeyda, Queen of Granada* (C201)

He resumed this conventional style of address in early December 1799, by sending a complimentary copy of his new novel, *St Leon*, to Belvidere House (b.228/4). Sophia and Harriet replied with bread and butter thank you letters, Harriet's folded inside Sophia's to economise on postage (\*documents c.507/6). Harriet's letter seeks additional safety in numbers, relaying to Godwin the cordial compliments of her married sister Anne,

who had chaperoned Harriet on the one occasion she had been in Godwin's company outside Bath, her visit to London, 7th to 22nd July 1798.

In these supernumary letters Godwin's failed courtship of Harriet turns back to the collegiality of authorship, with its opportunity to play a mentor's role. This contextualises Mary Shelley's defense throughout the *Life of William Godwin*, of Godwin's literary idealism. It marks a preamble and a coda, the before and the after of an epistolary romance, as Godwin draws back from the brink of intimate embarrassment to reclaim the station of literary character and sponsor of writing.

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As our final chapter, *6: writing* culminates a series of "open" maskings and incompletd abandonments with which MWS script articulates the half-turns or metamorphoses of Godwin's career in London up till the age of forty-two. Chapter *1: writing* opened with a MWS transcription of a Godwin fragment, Dep. c.606/1, a document on 1835 paper, its pages numbered 1) and 2), and signalling a 'crisis' and turning point in the year 1791, when Godwin gave up employment on a Whig journal, *New Annual Register*, and embarked on a financially risky career as an independent author. The final \*document in this chapter, and our edition, marks the publication of Godwin's novel *St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, in December 1799. and signals yet another half-turn, another "opening" into the unwritten and out-of-time.

In successive gatherings of MWS script, an image of the clean break, a bidding for authorial independence and a new leaf, appears by turns as "open" letters, anonymous and pseudonymous political pamphlets, fictionalised autobiography, and in the vicarious investments of moral pedagogy, inculcating virtue in the rising generation of the ruling class. A romance tendency shapes the stages of Godwin's initiation, earnest scholar, trainee clergyman, apprentice to literary fame, political activist, legal advocate, pedagogue and mentor, husband and lover, father, sage, and elegist. MWS script shadows Godwin's steps with a melancholic accompaniment. A daughter-biographer 'left with nothing but conjecture' about Godwin's early manhood (in chapter *1: literature*), by the end of her composition on 1839 watermark paper (in chapters *5: women* and *6: writing*) has drawn her biographical subject into a family circle of loss and widowed renunciation, that marks her own birth as an absence.

Godwin's rejected proposals of marriage to Harriet Lee in 1798, and to Maria Reveley in 1799, retrospectively confirm the death of Mary Wollstonecraft in 1797 as the crucial instance of loss and gain, to which all others defer. The Godwin-Lee correspondence,

material documentation of a six-month-long outpouring of Godwin's words on paper, forms our final chapter 6: *writing*, titled to bookend chapter 1: *literature*, where MWS script lays the ground of Godwin's vocation as author of canonical English literature, the ground from which his master work *Caleb Williams* will rise.

In the fevered drafts of self-justification that Godwin addressed nominally to Harriet Lee in March-August 1798 (b.288/4, 6: *writing*), the crucible of literature is broken in an outpouring of writing against the inevitable. Godwin's retreat into unpublishable, unedited lecturing is sublated by the nervous energy of oral performance, as in the prepublication performance dictating *Cursory Strictures* to an audience of one, James Marshall, in 1794 (c.606/3, 3: *law*). The privileged orality of the advocate, parliamentarian, university professor, devolves on the labour of the disciple-secretary-scriptor.

Did Mary Shelley write her framing commentary to Godwin's proposal of marriage to Harriet Lee during the months March to August 1798, *after* or *before* she had written the section 'Mrs Reveley' about Godwin's proposal of marriage to Maria Reveley in the months following Willey Reveley's death in June 1799? How does the tone and tenor of MWS script on Mary Wollstonecraft engage with Godwin's duplicate and triplicate drafts in b.228/4?

In chapter 5: *women*, MWS script c.532/8, on 1839 watermark paper, the section headed 'Mrs Reveley' opens with a specific date: 'An event happened in June during this year which gave a new turn to Mr Godwin's feelings; this was the death of Mr Reveley ... on the 8th of June 1799'. MWS script glosses Maria Reveley's reaction: 'Endowed with the keenest sensibility her heart received a shock from which she could with difficulty recover'. This suggests that Mary Shelley may have planned a section of *Life of William Godwin* dealing with events and correspondence 'during this year', 1799. While it does not unsettle the arrangement of manuscripts in chapter 5: *women*, it does raise a question about MWS script b.228/4, on the same 1839 Joynson paper, and presented in this chapter 6: *writing*.

MWS script b.228/4 has already gone ahead of Wollstonecraft's death and Reveley's widowhood, and throws back a shadow upon Godwin's exhortations and expostulations with Harriet Lee. Shelley will write, or has already written (c.532/8, 5: *women*), a proleptic script of the courtship of Maria Reveley that took place in July 1799, almost a year after he had given up hopes of Harriet Lee. 'There' and 'then' within the frame of MWS script, the widow Reveley is a lay figure of the widow Mary Shelley in July 1822, a

mourner and keeper of vigils who waits for Godwin's writing to catch up with his destiny. In c.606/4, along with Elizabeth Inchbald, Reveley is said (by Godwin) to have 'shed tears' when Godwin announced his marriage, but unlike Inchbald, to have subsequently 'become an intimate friend' of Mary Wollstonecraft. Breaking the time-frame, MWS script c.606/4 inserts a reference to Maria Gisborne, as a *viva voce* source '^in after days^' of the encomium on Wollstonecraft's 'devotion disinterestedness nobleness of nature disposition' that follows in the c.606/4 script of chapter 5: *women*.

According to St Clair's *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, chapter 15, 'The Jacobin Monster', Godwin's first approach to the married Maria Reveley was on 17 November 1797, 'when Godwin decided that justice to the children required him to find a suitable companion who would help with their upbringing' (C199-200), and his second proposal to her followed a month after Willey Reveley's demise in June 1799 (C200, n9, n10, n11. Cf. MWS script c.532/8 'He waited a month ...'). After chronicling Reveley's 'rebuff', St Clair sets the Harriet Lee story in ironic retrospect, to be read across Maria Reveley's story, an anachronising sequence that parallels the ordering of MWS scripts c.532/8 and b.228/4.

St Clair maintains that Maria Reveley in 1797 and 1799, and Harriet Lee in 1798, rejected Godwin in cold blood because he had gone out of fashion politically, and because of their conformity to a rigid sexual code. The conflation of women's sexual choice and antifeminist politics, a major feature of 1790s anti-Jacobin rhetoric, seems made to order for St Clair's argument.

In direct contrast, Mary Shelley filters sex and politics, and ('above all') sexual politics, out of her script, and steers Reveley's and Harriet Lee's stories into different streams of Godwin's lifestory. MWS script b. 228/4 performs a retrospective troping, in order to purloin (stretch) Godwin's relationship with Maria Reveley, a relationship under the aegis of Reveley's friendship with Wollstonecraft and Godwin's urgent cares for the motherless infants Fanny and Mary. This borrows emotional colour and provides preliminary cover for Godwin's advances to Harriet Lee, to which the narrative of MWS script is to revert. Reveley is an insider, Lee an outsider, to the charmed circle of Wollstonecraft's influence. Reveley is held together with Wollstonecraft, often on the same page of MWS script, the only surefire way to prevent separation. As Maria Reveley she was a stopgap carer for the infant Mary, but as Maria Gisborne she lived to feed Mary Shelley's hunger for a mythical maternal figure. Thus Godwin's affair with Harriet Lee is materially separated from these living women, propelled into a space-time posthumous to Wollstonecraft, and dedicated to her memory.

October-November 1797 is the juncture at which Maria Reveley, who had undoubtedly saved the baby Mary's life in its first few days, sent her back to her father's household, accompanied by a wet-nurse (Duke reel 2, Journal entry 30 April 1798: 'Wet-nurse dismissed'). Godwin then apparently asked Reveley to move in permanently and run the household and care for the children (C199-200). But MWS script does not mention this episode. If she had any knowledge of it (and that cannot be said for certain), perhaps Shelley could not come to terms with Reveley's refusal (to care for herself as infant).

Shelley implies that Godwin approached Harriet Lee in 1798 because he urgently needed a carer for 'two infants of the opposite sex'. What we have here in MWS script b.228/4 is a displacement of the offer to Reveley in 1797 (in the name of the mourning father of the motherless daughters), on to the offer to Harriet Lee in 1798, an offer which, once we have b.228/4 open before us, is nowhere to be read, certainly not to be read as part of the marriage proposal so pertinaciously urged on Lee. Godwin's only reference to the children is to gesture towards the respectability of his London household, in his first and fateful letter offering accommodation.

The technique of reversed chronology of MWS scripts c.532/8 (1799 Maria Reveley's rejection of Godwin); and b.228/4 (1798 Harriet Lee's rejection of him), stems from Mary Shelley's devoted readings in Godwin's novels, with their complex shifting temporal perspectives. Godwin's narrational strategies culminate in his novel *St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Robinson, 1799) an extended palinode or 'incompleted abandonment' of the male protagonist's ego defenses, and his romantic idealisation of knowledge (literature).

Chapter xxviii *St Leon* comes towards the end of the third volume (of four) in the 1799 first edition that was sent to Sophia and Harriet Lee. This chapter narrates the death of St Leon's wife Marguerite de Damville of childbirth fever, one of the incidents 'that render the latter part of the 3rd Vol to me the least pleasing one of the whole', as Harriet Lee wrote to Godwin on 8 December 1799 (\*document c.507/6).

The novel portrays a widower whose care of his daughters impels him to seek a surrogate mother for them. Godwin had freely expressed such sentiments in the immediate wake of Mary Wollstonecraft's death, writing to a woman friend: 'I have her two children about me. They have no mother, & I am afraid I am scarcely worth having as a father. I feel as if I were the most unfit person in the world for the business of

education. She was the best qualified of any person [that] ever was. What a reverse! Poor infants, poor little wretches!' (Duke reel 7, to an unidentified correspondent, circa October 1797, microfilm of letterpress copy).

Godwin sent the just published *St Leon* to the Lee sisters in December 1799 (\*document c.507/6), a strategic *finis* to the unsatisfactory courtship. In the introduction to her recent edition of *St Leon* (Oxford, 1994) Pamela Clemit states that Godwin began reading for and planning the novel as early as 1795, and began writing 'at the start of 1798' (Clemit 1994, xiii, xviii, citing Abinger MS. e. 202). A gestation interrupted by three momentous years produced a patchwork tessellation of autobiographical elements backlit against a Faustian allegory. The moment in which *St Leon* renounces egoistic and sexual interests, out of devotion to his late wife's memory, and to secure the protection of her daughters, culminates a rewriting of recent history in order to generate a more desired and self-favouring completion, a classical trope of anxiety and spur to (further) writing.

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Bodleian folder rubric Dep. b.228/4

*Dep. b.228/4 Papers concerning William Godwin's unsuccessful wooing of Harriet Lee, 1798, comprising (a) (8 leaves) fragment of Mary Shelley's memoir of William Godwin; (b) (29 leaves\*) drafts of letters from Godwin to Harriet, in disorder, some in several stages, ^one perhaps sent^; (c) (8 leaves\*) 4 letters from Harriet to Godwin. /45 leaves.*

Bodleian folder rubric Dep. c.507/6

*Dep. c.507 [Abinger file 4]: Letters to Godwin from various correspondents. A Total of sixty-three letters. A review of Mandeville. 63 MS items in 111 leaves and 1 printed item in 6 leaves.*

*c.507/6: Five letters from Harriet Lee and Sophia Lee (Authoresses of the Canterbury Tales) to Godwin. 5 items in ten leaves, with typed abstract.*