Chapter note 2: politics

Chapter 1: literature was composed largely from Dep. c.606/1, MWS holograph script on 1835 laid paper. Godwin’s authorship of literature was in focus throughout MWS script, and a chronology of early works was painstakingly annotated by her. By contrast, the miscellany of documents and interrupted chronologies in this chapter 2: politics, many on undated ‘flimsy wove paper’ in Dep. c.606/2, and ‘wove paper of bluish tint’ in c.606/3, largely reflect Mary Shelley’s aversion from radical politics, and pass negative judgment upon the conflicts that beset Godwin’s own excursions into a realm that she insists was not part of his ‘literary character’. The political luminaries introduced in MWS script, such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Charles James Fox, Emund Burke, and Tom Paine, besides lesser lights like Thomas Holcroft, Samuel Parr, Alexander Jardine and James Mackintosh, are contained within a schema of intellectual predilections beyond ‘party interest’ and ‘partial politics’. These are terms of a critique received from Godwin’s text and returned to it with interest added.

A major portion of chapter 2: politics consists of MWS holograph script in all five folders of Dep. c.606, consisting of her third-person narrative commentary and her transcriptions of Godwin’s letters, journals, and autobiographical notes and fragments. Several sequences of numbered pages of relevant MWS script taken from c.532/8 are on paper similar to c.606/3, and the endnotes (E101, E111) point this out. MWS transcriptions of other writers than Godwin come from Duke microfilm reel 13 (MWS transcription of Holcroft’s note to Godwin in 1791 expressing enthusiasm about Paine’s Rights of Man); and from c.607/6 (MWS transcription from Johnstone’s Life of Parr). There is one transcription from Robert Mackintosh’s biography of his father, Sir James, probably in Mary Jane Godwin’s hand, presented here from Duke reel 13. A transcription from John Johnstone’s biography of Samuel Parr, in an unidentified hand, is presented in this chapter from c.607/6.
A small group of drafts of letters and memoranda, in Godwin’s hand, are presented from Bodleian folders labelled ‘Godwin’s correspondence’: circa February-March 1791 to ‘some friend’ in praise of Tom Paine in b.227/6(b); April 1791 to Richard Brinsley Sheridan MP in b.227/2(a); circa September 1793 to Major Jardine and to Charles James Fox, and circa early 1793 to Thomas Erskine, the last three in b.227/2(b). These are holograph drafts and/or fair copies, not letterpress copies, as Godwin did not own a copier until 1795. MWS script introduces these MS letters, and numbers them in sequence with her commentary, as she does also with Godwin’s letter to Revd. Samuel Newton, presented here from Duke reel 5. Godwin’s holograph memorandum of 1796 ‘I ought to be in Parliament’ is cross-referenced in the endnotes to MWS transcription in c.606/5: 119).

The *documents appended to this chapter are taken from a number of Bodleian folders and Duke microfilm reels. Source texts represented among these attached *documents, but not in the body of chapter 2: politics, are: c.607/2; Duke reel 8. These *documents may be added to in future.

.............

Godwin’s politics are thematically and generically contaminated with his literature from the outset of Mary Shelley’s work on the Life of William Godwin. In chapter 1: literature, the chronicle of literary production dates from 1773, whereas the earliest date on Godwin’s political activity noted in MWS script (c.606/2: 48), is 1784. And that delayed debut is duly overtaken by the ‘main crisis’ the ‘revolution of opinion’ of 1791 that returned him to his literary métier, from political journalist on a Whig paper to author of a major work of philosophy. As we have seen, MWS script had opened (c.606/1: 1) with Godwin’s announcement of this reversion to magnetic north. Pamela Clemit (Clemit 1999, xix) remarks on these outcrops of ‘conversion-experience’ in Godwin’s autobiographies. The pattern of Miltonic ‘revolution’ which converts a primary choice of worldly career to an antithetical and higher
'choice of life' is implicit in MWS reading of Godwin’s text, and of Godwin’s life-as-text. This is a High Romantic paradigm, the pattern of the crisis lyric. It establishes a point of biographical and critical entry into the ill-assorted and unrefreshed documents of the Godwin archive and underpins Mary Shelley’s daughterly service to Godwin’s literary stature. The epoch of Godwin’s political activism emerges from MWS script into the light of a unique distraction, excursus, or false move; rather than as that antitype of error on which numerous reversions to true type are dramatically predicated.

The alignment of rhetorical authority with public political agency in Godwin’s self-writing, is reflected in a recent article by Chris Jones, ‘Radical sensibility in the 1790s’:

The French abolition of aristocracy (or at least titles of nobility) was noted enthusiastically in red ink in [Godwin’s] Diary for 19 June 1790. He went on to write several drafts of a Letter to Sheridan which focused his dissatisfaction with the constitutional wranglings of the 1780s and welcomed the progress of public opinion towards accepting the abolition of hereditary greatness. (Jones, 77)

The splash of red ink in the private journal not intended for publication recalls us to the anonymous and pseudonymous publication of Godwin’s political writings. Criminal penalties for libel and sedition at this period made such discretion a matter of form; after war was declared in February 1793 it became a matter of ‘public safety’, the chilling phrase covering issues of life and death.

The mask of ‘A Lover of Order’ signing the anonymous Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr Pitt’s Bills (published by Joseph Johnson 1795) was pulled aside by John Thelwall in his newsletter The Tribune, and by Amelia Alderson reporting the gossip in Norwich in 1796 (b.210/6, in 4: pedagogy). Godwin answered Thelwall with a public letter of remonstrance, published at his own request in Tribune 1796
(C521). His reaction to Alderson’s teasing was to charge her with sexual provocativeness. In 1801, Godwin’s resoundingly titled pamphlet, *Thoughts occasioned by the Perusal of Dr Parr’s Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800: being a Reply to the Attacks of Dr Parr, Mr Mackintosh, the Author of an Essay on Population, and Others*, is veiled only by a wisp of anonymity, either for its author or his attackers, since in this pamphlet thoughts occasioned by perusal of a sermon issue in a reply, a four-handed editing process that reduces the risk of popular inflammation.

Godwin frequently adopted ‘open’ publication: openly broadcast as a contribution to the public debate, not openly advertising the writer’s home address. This mode of address and publication compounds with his practice of recasting and redrafting his texts to hollow out a space of rumination neither fully public nor private, a rehearsal room or *coulisse* adjacent to the public rostrum. These negotiations with State and Church power are intrinsic to the educational process, with its fixed stages of instruction, initiation, and graduation. As a dissenter, a provincial, a man of portable, not of ‘real’ or even ‘fixed’ property, Godwin was effectively disenfranchised, other than as he could benefit from the hourglass shape of progressive cultural institutions binding and advancing a double-generation of men.

He was to acquire cultural capital through a bookish education and training to lead a congregation from the pulpit. And he was to cultivate literary authority and disseminate it through published writings and mentorial influence. Throughout the *Life of William Godwin*, MWS script traces the progressive pattern of a *Bildungsroman*, imbricating private memoir, confessional tract, commissioned biography (of an eminent man), and the English realist novel.
In chapter 1: literature, MWS script points Godwin’s earliest literary works towards the peak achievement of the novel Things as They Are: or, Caleb Williams (published in May 1794). In this chapter 2: politics, Caleb Williams is again positioned in a moment of transcendence, compensating Godwin’s readers for the rugosities of Political Justice in 1793, perhaps even rewarding them for resisting that work’s ‘taste for political disquisition’ and rejecting its ‘tenets’ (c.532/8: 120).

Although it became in his lifetime a catch phrase for Godwin’s political philosophy, MWS script never adverts to the novel’s title phrase ‘things as they are’ by which Godwin marks the limen of privilege and powerlessness in the his contemporary England. Mary Shelley’s reading bypasses the novel’s ambivalent attraction to aristocratic manners and revulsion from metropolitan morals, to concentrate in the eponymous protagonist the protestant provincial moral character, the drama of conscience, reformation and redemption. The novel was published with ‘two endings’, the plot and the protagonists culminating, now in heroic psychosis, now in paternalistic accommodation. This split conclusion divides the novel’s agonistic irresolution pretty much as Hercules divided the Hydra’s head. MWS script projects irresolution outwards to the unaccommodating theory of politics articulated in Political Justice.

Chapter 1: literature began with MWS transcription (c.606/1: 1-2), of Godwin’s move in 1791 from political journalism to literary authorship. In the second section of this chapter 2: politics, MWS script (c.606/2: 3) takes up the topic in her own words:

I have before me a copy in my father’s Mr Godwin’s handwriting of the ^abovementioned^ letter he sent in April 1791 to Mr Sheridan, as from “a well known literary character”. It begins by saying: “There are few men capable of the glorious task of eradicating the vices of political government, & rendering liberty & justice as extensive & complete as they ought to be.
The afterthought ‘^abovementioned^’ harks back to page c.606/1: 1: ‘“(1791) On the 29th of April of this year Mr Holcroft and I wrote two anonymous letters, he to Mr Fox and I to Mr Sheridan.’ The sequence then continues in folder c.606/2 up to page 12, albeit pages 8) and 9), a draft in Godwin’s hand February-March 1791 to an unidentified correspondent, are taken from folder b.227/6(b), and page 10), missing from the folders, is given here from Duke reel 13. The sequence then reverts from c.606/2 to c.606/1, where it continues to pages 13), 14), and 15). We present the sequence 1) to 15) by interleaving pages from the three folders and the microfilm reel.

The first section of 2: politics, ‘London journal 1784-1792’ consists mainly of MWS transcriptions of Godwin’s journal entries for those years, and, where Mary Shelley could find them, the autobiographical fragments, or summaries, written in 1796-1797. As Godwin had not drawn up a “Summary of 1789” (c.606/1: [112v]), the momentous year of the Fall of the Bastille is covered from the journal entries alone (c.606/1: 133) [133v]), though Shelley pronounces these less than informative: ‘brief ... memoranda’ ‘a few notes’ ‘a few public events are mentioned’. Godwin’s ‘laconic’ journal entries (c.606/1: 123) yield little to Mary Shelley’s efforts to schematise historical events as a matrix for Godwin’s personal development. The very word ‘public’ becomes a blank or neutral covering term for a lack of auto/biographical resonance.

With this unpromising preamble, MWS script condenses eight months of Godwin’s entries, May to December 1789, into a list of items recording ‘public events’ that ‘mark the course of time’. The script gives this selection for the period 5th to 27th June 1789 (c.606/1: 133):
5th Fr. Grenville secretary of State. Duke of Clarence’s Establishment.

17W. National Assembly.

24 W. Necker is restored.

27 Sa. Revolution in France

This noncommittal list graphically reduces Godwin’s contemporary witness, to increase distance and disengagement from events that had once turned Godwin’s world upside down.

Only one incident catches and holds Mary Shelley attention, that recorded for November 8th to 16th: ‘One of the records of this year is the unfortunate death of Holcroft’s son’ (c.606/2: 134). Holcroft’s name prompts (or licenses) Mary Shelley to amplify the bare record of a tragedy-- ‘16 M. Mort de son fils’ Godwin had written in French against Monday 16 November 1789. Shelley sketches in Godwin’s and Holcroft’s personalities, to contrast the former’s supportiveness with the latter’s harshness, claiming that this was later the cause of a lasting estrangement between the two men. The anecdote is set to justify Godwin’s moderation, a quality that protects him from the barrenness of ‘public’ values.

The second section of 2: politics, ‘public letters’, presents Godwin’s unsolicited letters to public men on matters of urgent public import. Godwin’s stance of ‘open’ address constructs a virtual agora, standing in for the pulpit that he had trained for and the elected parliament that he aspired at this period to enter. Precisely because as a propertyless dissenter he had no voice in constitutional governance, Godwin invested the bystander and overlooker function of the writing ‘I’. The decorum of polite address differs in respect to whether the writer has-- or has not-- been formally introduced to the recipient. In Godwin’s case a lack of formal introduction becomes an active element of self-introduction. Withholding his legal signature under an unsigned or pseudonymous cover protects the writer, but weakens
somewhat the professions of his own commitment, and the solemn exhortations to his reader, which characterise Godwin’s epistolary style.

MWS script c.606/2 devotes three pages to Godwin’s April 1791 letter to Sheridan, and attaches a copy in Godwin’s hand (b.227/2(a)) to her script. Sheridan the politician is addressed by “a well known literary character” urging him on for a ‘glorious task’ that of ‘eradicating the vices of political government’ and ‘rendering liberty & justice ... complete’. This is a version of the political process as apolitical, a dialogue of equals conducted in utopian space. MWS script presents Godwin’s letter in April 1791 to Sheridan (b.227/2(b)) without any adverse comment or precautionary framing, whereas Godwin’s letter to an unidentified correspondent, probably Holcroft, on his first looking into Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man*, and his letter to Paine after they had been introduced by Brand Hollis (c.606/2: 11-12), are fenced with caveats.

Another of the letters introduced by MWS script (c.606/3: 86-87) is addressed to a man well known to Godwin, and under no doubt at all of the writer’s identity. This is Godwin’s letter (b.227/2(b): 88-89) to Major Alexander Jardine, described by MWS as a ‘specimen’ of polemics, and moreover a ‘mitigated’ specimen. There were evidently worse examples, like Holcroft’s ‘unmitigated severity’ (c.606/2: 134). With its colloquial opening gambit: ‘You are one of the men, my dear major ...’, the letter propels an ongoing controversy between acquaintances and fellow-members of a debating society. The second paragraph, ‘Are you the friend of liberty or the enemy?’ rises to a general disquisition on political patronage and factional politics.

Godwin’s letter of February-March 1791 (b.227/2(b): 8-9), to an unidentified correspondent, probably Holcroft, on his first looking into Tom Paine’s *The Rights of Man*, and his letter to Paine after they had been introduced by Brand Hollis
(c.606/2: 11-12), evidently challenge the ingenuity of the MWS script to present them uncensored while covering Godwin’s tracks on the dangerous path of political radicalism. Introducing the letter to the unidentified friend, Mary Shelley writes:

\[
\text{In the enthusiasm of the moment he [Godwin] praised him [Paine] more than he would subsequently have done & wrote hastily to some friend in eager encomium on his work. (c.606/2: 7) }
\]

Haste precipitates, and enthusiasm warms, Godwin’s praise of Paine in a letter which in hindsight not only perhaps should not, but, according to MWS script, would not, have been written. She attaches this letter, not transcribes it. MWS script c.606/2 continues with a transcription of Godwin’s letter to Paine after the two had been introduced at Brand Hollis’s in November 1791, and adds:

\[
\text{Notwithstanding this letter no familiar intercourse ensued between Mr Godwin & Paine. They met at dinner at various houses but the intimacy proceeded no further.}
\]

This is followed by MWS transcription of a note (Duke reel 13) to Godwin from Thomas Holcroft, displaying, so Mary Shelley writes: ‘As was natural .... much greater enthusiasm’. Holcroft’s note exults in the uncensored publication of Paine’s Rights of Man Part i. Its exuberant confidentiality may be ‘natural’ to him, but it exceeds even Godwin’s ‘enthusiasm of the moment’, let alone his maturer judgment.

Letters to Major Jardine and to Charles James Fox are introduced by MWS script c.606/3. Shelley professes concern that sensitivity to others’ feelings, and ‘the charities of social intercourse’, were too often overlooked in the correspondence among Godwin and his circle, and sets this down to ‘their peculiar system’ and a ‘strict principle adherence to truth’. This extenuates a disturbing feature of
Godwin’s writing by steeping it in the temper of times past. This cover extends to Godwin’s private and better self, beginning soon, ‘how soon’, to revaluate his ‘theories of the philosopher’ in the light of ‘the violences of the French Revolution and above all of mob commotions’. A willingness to strike and wound in private, incited by a public climate of violent radicalism, is the very antithesis of a paternal pedagogue, ‘contributing to the amendment & virtue of another excellence of the person they loved’ (c.606/3: 87).

The section ‘public letters’ concludes with Godwin’s anonymous letter to barrister Thomas Erskine after the latter’s unsuccessful defense of Tom Paine, tried in absentia for criminal libel in December 1792. The draft numbered by MWS (b.227/2(b): 36-40) seems to have been intended for newspaper publication: ‘I address you through the medium of the press’, but there is no sign that it was published. If any draft were sent to Erskine it may not have been in these exact words. This highlights the point that until Tom Wedgwood’s gift of a wetpress copier in 1795, Godwin had no means of keeping copies of his own letters, other than to compose several drafts, and then choose which to send, if any. In a recent study of the 1794 London Treason Trials, Judith Pascoe quotes this letter in part, adding a footnote:

William Godwin to Thomas Erskine, [Abinger deposit] Dep. b. 227/2 (b), Bodleian Library, Oxford. This letter exists as an undated file copy in Godwin’s hand and does not carry any subsidiary evidence of postmarking. (Pascoe 1997, 47-8, n24)

The footnote is factually accurate but somewhat misleading, since we could only expect to find such material evidence of postage and delivery if Mary Shelley had successfully solicited return of the original letter from its recipient, as she did in the case of Godwin’s letters to Tom and Josiah Wedgwood. We shall again meet the problem of whether Godwin followed through and posted his letters, whether to
personal correspondents or to men in the public eye, in chapter 6: writing, where Godwin’s correspondence with Harriet Lee in 1798 offers only scattered clues as to which of Godwin’s numerous manuscript drafts (in b.228/4) were eventually delivered to Lee.

The third section, subheaded ‘Political Justice’ includes (from Duke reel 5) Godwin’s letter to his former schoolmaster Rev. Samuel Newton who was reportedly critical of Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and Newton’s reply dated 4 December 1793. This critical exchange is introduced by Mary Shelley in c.606/3: 64- [64v], following her annotations on Godwin’s journal entries at the date of Political Justice’s publication, 14 February 1793. Godwin’s correspondence with Newton is numbered 65) to 69), tallying with MWS script.

The section Political Justice presents c.532/8: pages 43) to 50), and 120) to 122), written on undated paper similar to the sheets of MWS script in c.606/3, where they are labelled ‘Fragments of draft on wove paper of bluish tint’. Accidental displacement from the folder c.606/3 of these sequences would account for the fact that both are bundled together haphazardly in the folder c.532/8, where the majority of sheets are written on Joynson 1839 watermark paper. This is confirmed by noting that the *Bodleian rubric for c.606/3 shows gaps corresponding to all these page numbers.

In c.606/1: [unnumbered], MWS script had announced that in 1790, while Godwin was ‘on the eve of his great work, but the idea yet unborn’, he ‘revolved a multitude of plans of literary labor’. After February 1793, he revolved again, this time in a revisionary purging of his freshly published text:

.... As he proceeded also in Political Justice he was anxious to consider all the topics introduced into that book in every possible light, & eagerly advanced arguments &
heard those on the other side - being desirous of attaining the truth with a sincerity &
directness of purpose seldom met with. Yet this did not prevent mistakes which he
afterwards detected & acknowledged .... (c.606/1: 14)

The warrant for this labour of Sisyphus is the text itself, circling in defense of its
borders. This onerous self-inspection emerges in Godwin’s preface to the revised
3rd edition of Political Justice, worked over during his brief marriage in 1797, but
not published till 1798:

The French Revolution ... that inexhaustible source of meditation to the reflecting
and inquisitive. While the principles of Gallic republicanism were yet in their
infancy, the friends of innovation were somewhat imperious in their tone. Their
minds were in a state of exaltation and ferment. They were too impatient and
impetuous. There was something in their sternness that savoured of barbarism. ...
The author confesses that he did not escape the contagion. With as ardent a passion
as ever, he finds himself more patient and tranquil. He is desirous of assisting
others, if possible, in perfecting the melioration of their temper. London: February
4, 1797
(Preface, ix-x) ]

MWS script in c.606/3 attempts to distance Godwin from the radical
pronouncements of the first edition of his Political Justice and reinforces this theme
in c.532/8 pages 43) to 50).

The principles of no book were ever canvassed with so much pertinacity and eagerness as those of
Political Justice. ... The book became popular & unpopular ^praised & censured^ ... . (c.606/3: 64)

In after times ^Mr^ Godwin shrunk from some of his conclusions & there are several papers written
not long after the publication which shewed that when the mere ardour of composition had
evaporated, he could perceive some flaws in his system. As to disseminate truth was his object, he
did not hesitate at once to acknowledge his errors. (c.532/8: 47)
In the folder c.532/8 the sequence of pages 43) to 50) on *Political Justice* is followed by two pages 120)-121), where Mary Shelley invokes *Caleb Williams* (published May 1794), to counterbalance the abstract ‘theory’ of Godwin’s philosophy in *Political Justice*, describing the novel as ‘a new era in the art of novel writing and an appeal to the noblest sentiments of [the reader’s] heart’.

Caleb Williams was published in May - it raised the reputation of the author to the highest pitch - those who had no taste for “political disquisition”, or who did not agree in the tenets of Political Justice, were carried away by the engrossing interest, the elevated feeling and dignified yet purely English style of the novel. Its reputation became European.

The c.532/8 script ends on page 121) with an encomium on Godwin’s friendship with Mr and Mrs John Taylor of Norwich, and follows it (page 122, from Duke reel 13; page 124) from c.532/8) with an extract from Sir James Mackintosh’s biography by his son, which lauds Mrs Taylor as a paragon of feminine domesticity in the privacy of the middle-class home.

The MWS script and accompanying documents in the last section of 2: politics, subheaded ‘political reaction’, illustrate both the AntiJacobin reaction that damaged Godwin’s reputation and imperilled his livelihood, and Godwin’s own disappointment and disillusion with such political opportunities as he had at one time hoped to profit by.

The penultimate document of this chapter 2: politics is a two-page MWS transcript of Godwin’s memorandum in 1796 “I ought to be in Parliament”. The original memorandum is in b.229/8, on a small folded sheet, undated, unsigned. And the date of writing, 1796, is signalled by Godwin’s remark ‘I am now forty years of age’, and confirmed by St Clair’s examination of the papers (C140, n19). As such, it is a
comparatively rare example of an autobiographical writing by Godwin that records immediately contemporaneous thinking. Even so, its affective germ lies in the past.

An earlier anecdote in MWS script (c.606/2: 48) had voiced indignation over Sheridan’s casual treatment of Godwin, but insisted that Godwin was not in any way a suitor to Sheridan for favours or patronage. Godwin’s autobiographical fragment for 1787 (MP: 46-47), claims that Sheridan ‘proposed that I should receive a regular stipend … but this I declined’. This theme is resumed in MWS script c.606/5: 119)-120):

Sheridan had once said to him “You ought to be in Parliament”---the observation made a deep impression---probably it roused for a time his ambition and some years afterwards, he still seemed to reflect upon them, as I find the following note among his papers.

Sheridan’s casual remark had made a deep impression on Godwin, never the casual politician himself, and he was still brooding about it at age forty, though no powerful sponsors came forward at that time. March 1796, when Godwin’s 40th birthday initiates his autobiographical writings and reassesses his ambitions public and private (MP 58) coincides with Godwin’s relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft, and heralds the publication in 1797 of his miscellaneous essays of various date collected as *The Enquirer*, an eponymous individual pursuing enquiry for its own sake.

The publication of the *Enquirer* essays ended a drought in Godwin’s creative output since 1795, when *Considerations ... By A Lover of Order* had provoked a quarrel with John Thelwall and the radical wing of politics. The reactionary repression of the wartime Pittite government against all reform movements converges with Godwin’s increasing mistrust of the governing class which held the keys to political influence. MWS script realigns Godwin’s increasing alienation from the political
process with an interior swerve (another ‘conversion experience’) away from politics in 1796, preparatory to his moral and personal transformation as husband and father. Mary Shelley’s preamble about the untrustworthiness of politicians in general and Sheridan in particular, is closed off by her negative judgment of the political sphere itself:

The doubt as to his fitness existing in [Godwin’s] own mind perhaps is a proof of unfitness - a person fitted for active life cannot subside into the contemplative. (c.606/5: 120)

As on other occasions, MWS script reflects Godwin’s penchant for the rhetorical double negative (litotes). ‘Unfitness’ can ‘subside’ where ‘fitness’ can only, as it were, fit; and the contemplative is the higher, the Miltonic sphere of literature.

The document of latest date and closing this chapter 2: politics is Godwin’s letter to Revd. Samuel Parr after the latter’s Spital Sermon, preached at Christ’s Hospital in the city of London at Easter 1800, and published as a pamphlet for those like Godwin who did not attend Anglican church services. Godwin’s letter, dated 24 April 1800, is an expostulation protesting against Parr’s attack on him from the pulpit. MWS script on 1839 paper (c.606/4: [unnumbered]) introduces this letter into her paraphrase of Johnstone’s biography of Parr, which relays information about Parr’s role in the Anti-Jacobin reaction: ‘the correspondence was broken off [in] Dec. 1799. In that month a letter supposed by Mr Godwin to be important remained unanswered’ (c.607/6: [unnumbered]). Godwin’s letter to Parr is given in this chapter from Duke reel 5.

In 1801 in the aftermath of this contretemps, Godwin published his Thoughts occasioned by the Perusal of Dr Parr’s Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800: being a Reply to the Attacks of Dr Dr Parr, Mr Mackintosh, the Author of an Essay
on Population, and Others. This is rated by William St Clair (C220), as one of Godwin’s most spirited performances on a matter of public moment, but it falls just outside the end date of MWS script and its political significance is muted by her nostalgic comment: ‘[Godwin] recollected with singular satisfaction the happiness he enjoyed in Dr Parr’s conversation & company’.

Mary Shelley’s script in this chapter cites Robert Mackintosh’s 1835 biography of his father and two biographies of Dr Samuel Parr, by John Field and John Johnstone, both published in 1828. These texts exemplify the standard life and letters format that she had been commissioned to write for Henry Colburn and to which she occasionally gestured. At the turn of the century Samuel Parr and James Mackintosh reneged on their political allegiances and denounced their former allies. Mackintosh was rewarded with a knighthood and a lucrative sinecure in Bombay, India, in 1803. A typical passage in Field’s biography demonstrates the technique of ‘trimming’, using the advantage of hindsight to alter history in favour of the winners. Mackintosh’s only significant book, Vindiciae Gallicae (1791), had defended the French Revolution in its early days from the unreflective antipathy of English opinion. Field quotes a statement by Parr testifying to his [Parr’s] admiration of its author:

“In Mackintosh, then, I see the sternness of a republican, without his acrimony, and the ardour of a reformer, without his impetuosity. His taste in morals, like that of Mr Burke, is equally pure and delicate with his taste in literature. ... His philosophy is far more just, and far more amiable than the philosophy of Paine ...“. (Field i, 312-13)

While Mary Shelley does not directly contest this stultified canon, nevertheless she opens the manuscript page to the contemporary record of Godwin’s opposition. MWS script on Johnstone’s Life of Parr (c.606/4 and c.607/6,) together with Godwin’s letter to Parr, are the witnesses with which this chapter 2: politics
concludes. In their incompatibility they constitute a palinode or haunted memory of the far from pure, delicate, just, and amiable politics of the 1790s.

..................