Chapter note 4: pedagogy

Chapter 4: pedagogy forms the longest chapter of Mary Shelley, Life of William Godwin. It is arranged in three sections under the names Tom Abthorpe Cooper, Thomas Wedgwood, and Amelia Alderson.

The section on Thomas Abthorpe Cooper is composed from Deps. b.227/2(b); c.606/2; c.607/3; Duke reel 5.

The section on Thomas Wedgwood is composed from Deps. b.227/8(a); c.507/11; c.606/4; Duke reel 3; Duke reel 5; Duke reel 12.

The section on Amelia Alderson is composed from Dep. b.210/6, labelled in the Bodleian folder: ‘Letters of Amelia Alderson (later (wife of the painter John) Opie) to Wm Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (alias Imlay) 1795-6’. One letter, annotated by Mary Jane Godwin, is given from Dep. c.607/2. As well, Duke reels 10 and 12 supply documents complementary to materials in b.210/6.

A selection of documents from the Abinger folders is appended to each section by name: eg document Thomas Abthorpe Cooper.

The correspondence between Godwin and each of these three young people, between 1788 when a thirty-two year old Godwin was making his way as a writer in London, and 1798, by which date he was the widower and memorialist of Mary Wollstonecraft, illustrates a range of his pedagogical attitudes and activities, and was brought together and annotated by Mary Shelley, with Mary Jane Godwin assisting her, expressly to show that side of Godwin. Mentoring and discipleship are in question in others of our chapters: for example, the drafts and accompanying MWS script of Godwin’s fervent expostulations with Harriet Lee in chapter 6: writing. Throughout her commentary, and not only in this chapter, Mary Shelley herself writes within the ambit of Godwin’s mentorial influence. And of course Percy Bysshe Shelley was casually referred to as Godwin’s ‘disciple’ in the journalism of their day, as well as in standard histories of English literature ever since, ‘the most famous of these [young men]—although the one who subsequently caused him the most distress—’, as Mark Philp calls him (MP 19).

The proportions in this chapter of MWS script to pinned-in original letters varies, the first section on Cooper containing an extended script from c.607/3 in MWS hand, the second section on Wedgwood consisting of MWS commentary and an exchange of letters between Godwin and Wedgwood, and the third section consisting entirely of Amelia Alderson’s letters, numbered and annotated by Mary Jane Godwin. Other brief
notices in MWS script about Amelia Alderson, on 1839 watermark paper, are in our chapter 5: women.

MWS script in this chapter 4: pedagogy introduces the names of another Godwin disciple, George Dyson, and others of Godwin’s friends, like Thomas Holcroft and James Marshall, who engaged in pedagogical relations with the boy Cooper. Occasionally in Godwin’s correspondence the names crop up of others of Godwin’s male ‘pupils’ ‘disciples’ and ‘admirers’, such as Willis Webb, John Arnott (‘Arnot’ in Godwin’s reformed spelling), the American playwright William Dunlap, the London barrister Basil Montagu, the Cambridge student John Stoddart, an unnamed student at Oxford who sought Godwin’s advice, and the young poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Mary Shelley wrote to Thomas Abthorpe Cooper in his retirement in 1837 when she was starting to prepare Godwin’s papers for publication. The letter is provisionally dated by Betty T. Bennett in her edition of Mary Shelley’s letters:

[?Feb. Mar. 1837]

   My work has been suspended by my illness - & it is only just now that I am getting to it again. I do not think that it will be published till next winter - The profits will belong to Mrs Godwin - Could I encrease these - & could you facilitate my so doing by any arrangement made beforehand with an American bookseller, you would confer an obligation on us. ...

   My father’s Memoirs - consisting of a portion of autobiography regarding his early years - a great many letters from & to him - with notes by myself to connect & explain - will be in two Octavo Volumes.

   (Bennett ii, 283-4, letter from Mary Shelley to Thomas Abthorpe Cooper.)

At this time, Mary Shelley wrote also to Josiah Wedgwood, whose younger brother Thomas had died in 1805, and she acknowledges assistance and cooperation from Josiah in the comments she appended (in the second section of this chapter) to the Godwin-Wedgwood correspondence (Shelley spells the name Wedgewood). As to the longlived Amelia Alderson, who as the widowed Mrs Opie was a successful novelist and a close acquaintance in the 1830s of Henry Crabb Robinson whom Mary Shelley
also knew, Mary Shelley made no approach to her and no direct comment on the bundle of letters annotated, numbered and pinned together by Mary Jane Godwin (now in Dep. b.210/6). Mary Jane Godwin’s tart comments were added in the margins of Alderson’s letters at some time after Godwin’s death in 1836. The selection of letters in a numbered sequence 1 to 7 may have been made by Mary Shelley herself before she delegated the rest of the task to her stepmother. These letters make up the third section of this chapter.

In the first section of 4: pedagogy, Mary Shelley confronts the magisterial thrust of Godwin’s teaching style in her comments (c.607/3) framing the boy Tom Cooper. Here Godwin’s enlightened views on discipline and punishment were tested in a domestic setting. The flashpoint of domestic disharmony was at those times where a third party, be it James Marshall, Thomas Holcroft or George Dyson, either clumsily intervened, or served as a pretext, for displays of temper on both sides of the divide of authority. In much of his correspondence, Godwin’s trenchant severities coincide with pedagogical professions of disinterest, scouting considerations of sex, gender and class. The sequel to MWS account of Cooper’s boyhood is to be read in the chapters concerning Cooper in volume ii of Hazlitt’s Memoirs of Holcroft, in the second volume of Charles Kegan Paul’s biography of Godwin, and in William Dunlap’s pioneering work on the history of the American theatre stage.

The second section of 4: pedagogy shows the relationship between Godwin and the younger Wedgwood that began at their meeting in the Wedgwood family’s London mansion in 1793. At one point the two men briefly considered setting up a joint household, and MWS script (c.606/4) dwells on this intriguing possibility, cancelling one formulation and trying out another, finally leaving the question unsettled as to how the two could have contemplated such cohabitation. In reality also the suggestion was soon dropped, its passing marked by Tom Wedgwood’s gift of a wetpress copier—surely the perfect gift! Godwin’s solicitations of gifts and loans of money from Wedgwood is evident in the letters that Mary Shelley transcribed and/or pinned in, labelling them ‘2 letters on presents’ ‘3d letter on presents’. Shelley may possibly have familiarised herself with Edmund Burke’s speeches ‘On Presents’ at the trial of Warren Hastings, but in any case prestation was a constant topic of Godwin’s ruminations. Mary Shelley does not speculate on any conflict of interest in Godwin’s mentoring letters to his benefactor. In particular, she either had not read Amelia Alderson’s letters of 18 and 22 December 1796 (in Duke reel 10 and b.210/6) or did not take the hint from
them that Godwin was out to borrow money to finance Wollstonecraft’s debts from that December to March the following year, when Tom Wedgwood did relieve him and the marriage took place accordingly.1

We present (from Duke reel 5) a four page letter to an Oxford student, or at least a young man met at Oxford, which is almost certainly not to Tom Wedgwood but has been annotated by MWS with a question mark ‘T. Wedgewood?’, and paginated serially with three following pages of the same letter, headed (somewhat perversely) by the comment ‘I do not know to whom the ^three^ following letters were [illeg.].’ This letter offers a full statement of Godwin’s pedagogical aims and style, amplified to a therapeutic model of intellectual conversation. It bristles with the clues that led Mary Shelley to identify its addressee as Tom Wedgwood. (‘The melancholy tenour of your mind was somewhat distressing to me, but I was not without the anticipation of benefit to yourself, and instruction to me from our further intercourse’.) Tom Wedgwood’s illness, despite Godwin’s cursory observations on hypochondria and self-pity, proved fatal in 1805.

Godwin had paid a house visit to Etruria, the Wedgwood estate and pottery in Staffordshire, in June 1797 (C174). After Godwin’s return to London, he received a fascinating letter from Tom Wedgwood, written on 31 July 1797 from the Wedgwood holiday home in north Wales, and proposing to set Godwin up as director of a school for boys, a school of a wholly new and enlightened sort, a ‘nursery of genius’. The letter portrays the culmination of his and Godwin’s mutual interest in pedagogy, and is given as a *document in this chapter from Duke reel 12. The June 1797 visit was recalled sixteen months later as less than happy in Godwin’s letter of 5 October 1798 to Wedgwood (Duke reel 5, *document Thomas Wedgwood), and does not appear to have been repeated.

Mary Shelley omits to mention the June 1797 visit to Etruria, let alone record Wollstonecraft’s reproaches to Godwin for leaving her alone in London, pregnant and ill at ease. When Shelley comes, late in the piece, to write of her mother’s death, she refers obliquely to this event, that ‘set a dark seal upon this year [1797]’ (c.606/4, chapter 5: women). She then announces her decision to separate Wedgwood’s letters in

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1 Cf. (above) Duke reel 3, WG-TW 4 March 1797, endnote 77 to Chapter 4: pedagogy.
the later part of 1797, and place them in a separate chapter dealing with 1798. I have not located a chapter in the Bodleian folders that fits this description.

The third section of *4: pedagogy*, consists mainly of the numbered series of letters in Dep. b.210/6, Miss Amelia Alderson, signing ‘AA’, writing from her father’s home in Norwich to the bachelor philosopher William Godwin in Somers Town, north London, from 28 August 1795 to 22 December 1796. Godwin and Alderson had first met in Norwich in summer 1794 (C147, 152). On her subsequent visits to London, in September 1794 and June 1795, Godwin urged her to develop her literary talents but his urgings, no doubt kindly meant, appear to have made insufficient allowance for the constraints placed on young unmarried women. On 28 August 1795, ‘AA’ has just arrived back home from her spring-into-summer social season in London. In letter No. 4, dated 12 February 1796, she tells Godwin it will only be five weeks before she sees him again in London. The 1 April 1796 letter No. 5 has no address but was evidently written while Alderson was visiting London, and sighing, so she says, ‘for the leisure of my own study in Norwich’.

I have not sighted any of Godwin’s letters in reply to Alderson annotated or numbered by Mary Shelley or Mary Jane Godwin for inclusion in the work-in-progress for *Life of Godwin*. In any case, it seems that Alderson wrote to Godwin more often and more effusively than he was inclined to respond to her. Godwin’s occasional replies to her persistent demands for his attention are quoted by William St Clair. These are noted in the endnotes to this chapter, and we refer the reader to his *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (1989).

From Dep. c.607/2, outside the numbered series, we have presented a single page of a letter dated 11 April 1796, on undated wove paper, lacking signature or addressee, following a clue on the letter itself supplied by Mary Jane Godwin, who has pencilled across the top of the page: ‘Are not these though signed Almeyda Amelia Opie’. It seems probable that this letter also was to Godwin from Alderson, in London for the first performances of Sophia Lee’s verse tragedy *Almeyda: Queen of Granada*. Godwin himself attended the theatre season and wrote an unsolicited letter of praise to Sophia Lee (C201). By 28 August 1796 Amelia is once more back in Norwich, and now writes to Wollstonecraft (‘Mrs Imlay’), whom she has recently met for the first time in London. This letter in b.210/6 has not been included by Mary Jane Godwin in her numbered list. Its final letter, No. 7, is dated from Norwich, 1 November 1796. In April 1797, Alderson
paid her annual social visit to London, and here we have ended our story of her in a document attached to this chapter.

Amelia Alderson is mentioned elsewhere in MWS script (c.532/8: 121) as ‘a correspondant’, unnamed, who had written to Godwin to let him know that his mother Ann Godwin and his father’s cousin Mrs Sothren, elderly widows sharing a house in rural Norfolk, did not think as highly of his new novel (Caleb Williams) as of the insipid Italian Letters he had hastily published ten years earlier.

Amelia Alderson relates this news to Godwin in her letter of 5 February 1796 (No 3 in the series annotated by Mary Jane Godwin in b.210/6):

What your old friend Mrs Southerne thinks of the matter I know not - but I called on her [...] I also asked her opinion of Caleb Williams: “now pray let not thy noble courage be cast down” when I inform you, that both Mrs S: & her daughter think you speak too favourably of wicked men, & that “Italian Letters” (yr first novel) are vastly prettier than Caleb Williams. Console yourself my good friend by reflecting on ye fable of the old man & his ass -

I conclude that Mary Shelley had read this letter by the time she was composing her commentary on Caleb Williams. That commentary is now scattered among three Bodleian folders (c.606/1, c.606/3, c.532/8), written on papers dated from 1835 to 1839, and we have presented it in our previous chapters 1: literature and 2: politics. The chapter note and endnotes to these chapters give a more detailed picture of the defensive advocacy inspiring Mary Shelley’s biography, and Caleb Williams lies at the core of this advocacy. It would perhaps be too much to claim that Amelia Alderson’s high opinion, and Godwin’s mother’s low opinion, of the novel provoked Mary Shelley to its defense--but not altogether too much, surely?

Amelia Alderson introduces the names of Annabella and Ann Plumtre as aspiring writers living in provincial circumstances like her own, and refers somewhat enviously to the burgeoning reputations of Mary Hays, Fanny Burney, and especially Mary Wollstonecraft, whose success she longs to emulate. In her letter dated Norwich 28th of August [1796], and addressed to ‘Mrs Imlay, Judd Place’, the name by which Mary Wollstonecraft was known to her London acquaintances (see *documents Amelia Alderson), Alderson is candid about her “expectations” of Godwin as an intellectual
patron and cultural mentor, and confesses that these have been disappointed. There is a current of erotic excitement in her letters, reproved by Godwin (and by his 20th-century biographers) as her predilection for flirtatiousness, or coquetry. It might be interpreted rather as an amateurish variation on the literary discipleship that he and his contemporaries approved and solicited in young men. Alderson’s letter (in c.607/2) of ‘Monday Eve. Apr. 11 1796’, that we have placed between Mary Jane Godwin’s ordering (in b.210/6) of Alderson’s letters No. 5 (1 April 1796) and No. 6 (Thursday [13 Oct. 1796]), shows off her rainbow colours. And Mary Jane’s detective work (‘Are not these though signed Almeyda Amelia Opie?’), indicates that she has recognised the mixture of facetiousness and longing that colours Alderson’s efforts to network through Godwin. In April 1776 the Lee sisters were already attracting notice, as fashionable schoolmarms and published authors, and the London production of Sophia’s verse tragedy crowned this success. Soon Godwin too was to notice them; he wrote an unsolicited letter to Sophia congratulating her on Almeyda ‘as a compliment from a famous author to a promising newcomer’, writes William St Clair (C201). No wonder then that Amelia picked up the stage name ‘Almeyda’: she signed off her letters to Godwin with a flourishing ‘A A.’, and patterned the names of female characters in her play in the making, ‘A’ for the heroines, and ‘M’ for the older women (a nomenclature retained in her later novel Adeline Mowbray (1804)).

The influence of Rousseau’s Emile; ou, de l’Education on Godwin’s thinking has been recognised (especially in Political Justice, Bk v, xiv). But perhaps not enough attention has been paid to the defining role of the ‘Governor’, Rousseau’s first-person narrator, who differs from 18th-century English models of the pedagogue, in that he does not simply mind an upperclass youth until he takes up the social place he was born into, but trains and equips the orphan Emile to be a leader of a reformed social order. This presupposes that the teacher himself is an initiate of elite power and, as a corollary, that he has undertaken the duties of teaching as a disinterested exercise. Godwin’s situation, as a dissenter without real property or powerful connections in London of the late 18th-century, is measurably distant from these preconditions, but all the more insistent in its claims to an enhanced status for educators of youth.

In Books V and VI of Political Justice Godwin argues the problematic power-relationship of tutor and ephebe dialectically. Godwin knew that Plato, the first philosopher of the Governor-ephebe relationship, was tutor to Dionysus, tyrant of Syracuse, and had failed
to reform his pupil’s politics. The bedrock objection to monarchical government proclaimed in *Political Justice* is that ‘every king is a despot in his heart’ and surrounds himself with sycophants and flatterers. The role of the intrepid teacher is to seek the means of insertion into power of a countervailing authority. Godwin contrasts two pedagogic exemplars, Archbishop Fenélon, tutor to the Dauphin of Louis XIV, and author of *Telémaque* and of an essay on Aristotle, tutor to Alexander the Great; and Stéphanie de Genlis, governess to the sons of Philippe Egalité, Duc d’Orléans, whose charges benefited from her ‘independence and firmness’, yet were not, Godwin supposes, ‘of the class of princes who seemed destined to a throne’ (*Political Justice*, 418-20). The implication of this last observation seems to be that the cadet branch might profit from an upbringing by liberal pedagogues and found a reformist-minded constitutional monarchy.

But the task of changing princely children to agents of social change and redistributive economic justice is a hard one indeed: ‘The wisest preceptor, thus circumstanced, must labour under insuperable disadvantage’ (*Political Justice*, 417). Godwin turns for support to Fenélon ‘s canonical text *Telémaque*, which Godwin had read aloud with Tom Cooper when the boy was his live-in pupil (c.607/3: 143); recorded in MWS transcript of Godwin’s journal entry 12 Oct. [1790]). The often-quoted passage in *Political Justice*, Book II, ‘Of Justice’, where Godwin counsels the ‘impartial’ reader to prefer to save Fenélon from a house fire before one’s mother/maidservant/ valet, is an injunction to prefer the immortal book to the mortal body.

Mark Philp [MP 19] emphasises the centrality to Godwin’s work of his ideas on education, finding a practical outlet:

first, in the role of formal tutor to Willis Webb and Thomas Cooper, and later with a variety of young men and women who corresponded with him and sought him out in person for advice and philosophical discussion and to whom he acted as mentor. Maria Reveley and Mary Hays both sought his company and counsel; Coleridge, although occasionally exasperated with him, also showed him a degree of respect, sometimes amounting to deference; and the Wedgewoods (sic), George Dyson, and the young Basil Montagu did much the same. John Arnot, a young Scotsman, walked all the way from Edinburgh to see Godwin and developed a similar relationship.

A blend of intellectual patronage and emotional discipline characterises Godwin as an ideal mentor in Philp’s summary. Even Mary Shelley’s painstaking efforts to neutralise Godwin’s sexual relationships with women fall short of Philp’s description of Maria Reveley and Mary Hays as two who ‘sought his company and counsel’. And Philp makes a distinction without teeth, between ‘formal tutor’ to youths, and ‘mentor’ to adults, to foster the impression of a pedagogy unconstrained by the professional marketplace for writers and teachers, and undisturbed by differences in wealth, status, and gender. Godwin’s peripatetic, extramural sallies into pedagogy would seem from Philp’s account to be selfless, rather than competitive.

MWS script casts a net even wider than Philp’s ‘variety of young men and women’. Indeed, Shelley pictures all Godwin’s relationships with women, not excepting even Mary Wollstonecraft, as primarily mentorial, and ‘above all’ (one of her favourite phrases), intellectual. ‘[H]is immediate desire was to study her mind’, she writes (b.288/4) of Godwin’s approach to Harriet Lee in 1798. As to Godwin’s male friends and associates, MWS comments on James Marshall, Thomas Holcroft, or Samuel Parr strive to adjust Godwin’s presumptive intellectual superiority to the self-effacing role of teacher.

Thus, in 1: literature, Holcroft is pictured as an uncut diamond, roughened by his years of professional acting and writing for the theatre:

> the more polished education & great acquirements of Godwin led him to be of most use to his friend - but when he undertook the writing a drama Holcrofts criticisms became valuable & important (c.606/1: 123)

Again, Mary Shelley keeps a watchful eye on the competitive shifts and strains in Godwin’s relationship with Samuel Parr (in chapter 2: politics). Parr had ‘solicited’ Godwin’s acquaintance, but only after Political Justice had conferred stature on Godwin as a philosopher, and Caleb Williams had made him famous as a novelist.

After seeing Caleb Williams through the press in May 1794, Godwin went to Norfolk for a holiday:

> Not long after his return he received ... [a letter from Dr Parr entreating a visit soliciting him] It is probable that his acquaintance with Parr began on the score
of Gerrald whom they both loved - but it was the doctor, who solicited for an introduction, & was eager to cultivate an intimacy with the Author of Political Justice. (c.532/8: 124)

Mention in MWS script of Joseph Gerrald reminds us that Godwin’s intervention in the case that brought Gerrald to trial in Scotland for sedition, and ended in his transportation for fourteen years, and his death in distant New South Wales, was a potential irritant between Parr, his former headmaster and acknowledged mentor, and Godwin, who had met Gerrald only when the die was already cast in 1792 (see chapter 3: law). When the official break with Parr occurred in April 1800 (see 2: politics), Godwin reproached Parr in terms that we find echoed in MWS script c.532/8 (quoted above). Godwin wrote:

I should be glad if you would answer to your own satisfaction, what crime I am chargeable with, now in 1800, of which I had not been guilty in 1794, when with so much kindness & zeal you sought my acquaintance. (c.607/6, Duke reel 5)

There is no question that Godwin was entitled to demand an explanation, since Parr had publicly denounced his writings from a City of London pulpit. It is the form taken by the demand, marking the interrogative relation of pedagogue to pupil, that characterises Godwin and predicts that his protest will meet with a snub, as it surely was.

In her account of Tom Cooper, MWS script qualifies Philp’s assertion that Godwin was equably inclined to the teaching role, whether or not his interlocutor was a pupil of tender years, or an adult (and professional) contemporary. MWS describes Godwin as temperamentally unsuited to sustain a tutorial relationship and a domestic parental role with the boy. It may be that some of her own childhood memories of Godwin’s ‘temper he put in his lectures’ surface in her picture of Cooper, but it is just as possible that she drew the inference from reading the record of their domestic and schoolroom experiences. With the papers spread out before her or pinned to her script, Shelley describes the boy himself as ‘proud wilful and independent’ (c.607/3), a veritable mini-Godwin in fact, and head-on clashes followed. This explains why the household atmosphere was frequently turbulent.

Godwin’s pedagogy had been laid down by his own schooling in the Latin classics. Mary Shelley’s exclusion from this masculine culture was no doubt a factor in her judgment of Godwin. In chapter 2: politics, we have shown Mary Shelley’s remarks on
'the very disputative air' of Godwin’s letter to Alexander Jardine (c.606/3: 86). In this chapter, we find her scrutinising his tutoring of Tom Cooper:

> These papers deserve to be preserved as they throw light on his views of education - & also as evidence of the conscientious & persevering nature of his endeavours. At the same time they display his faults as a teacher. He was too minute in his censures; too grave & severe in his instructions - at once divided too far from his pupil, & too little through want of sympathy, & too much on a level from the temper he put in his lectures. (c.607/3: 138)]

The usual manoeuvre in MWS script when confronted by Godwin’s conflictual relationships, is to shape a comparison favourable to Godwin, as for example in comparing Godwin’s sensitive kindness with Holcroft’s ‘unmitigated severity’ when Holcroft’s son suicided in 1789 (c.606/2, 2: politics). But this move is ruled out in the present instance, since the boy Tom Cooper occupies the rhetorical site in MWS script reserved elsewhere for Godwin himself -- imaging a stubborn independence of mind and refusal to defer to arbitrary authority. Godwin’s paedia--his concept of the education of boys by men--is steeped in the dissenter traditions of English oppositionist discourse. Its ideological limitations emerge at the cusp of development from dependent youth into independent adult, from rebel against power to wielder of power. And this is the crisis in both boy and man that MWS script puts in evidence from the journals and letters of 1789 and 1790.

Godwin had stood in loco parentis with his fatherless young kinsman, Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, from 1784 when the boy was eight years old, taking him into his household as a full time resident pupil from 1788 till 1791. Before 1788 Godwin’s ideas about tutoring boys had been hypothetical (his 1783 prospectus for a boy’s school at Epsom)3; or fictitious (the adventures of the well-named Mr Godfrey as tutor to the well-born sons of the rich in Damon and Delia (1784)). He brought to the task of educating Tom Cooper his own recollections of schooldays in Norfolk, vivid and mostly painful recollections that he was yet to write up in his autobiography (see 1: literature). As with any first-time parent and tyro schoolmaster, most of Godwin’s energy went into trying not to treat Cooper in their schoolroom as he had been treated by his teachers, and not to deal with him in the home they shared as he had been dealt with by his father, the Rev. John Godwin.

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3 [Anon.] An Account of the Seminary that will be opened on Monday the fourth Day of August at Epsom in Surrey (London: T. Cadell, 1783) (MP 51)
For Tom Cooper, Godwin set out a conscientious program of study and discipline, reminding himself of his own miseries with flogging schoolmasters, and refraining on principle from corporal punishment. Nevertheless, the daily task of dinning classical learning into unreceptive ears wore him down. Fretting under the the tight rein he kept on his emotions with his pupil, he quarrelled fiercely with the other men who interested themselves in the boy, George Dyson, Thomas Holcroft, and James Marshall. After three stormy years domesticating together, Cooper left Godwin’s house to try his luck on the theatre stage. As soon as he left, Godwin broke up his household, moved to bachelor lodgings and embarked on full-time research and writing for *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793).

MWS script on Godwin as domestic pedagogue is careful to place Godwin’s heart safely out of reach of his theories. By 1837 she was not prepared to defend the theories.

Godwin from the very nature of his opinions which led him to analyze '^mind'^ & draw conclusions as to character, '^& to have a sanguine faith in the practicability of improvement^ entertained rigid opinions on the subject of education. Tom Cooper was a spirited boy, exceedingly independant resolute '^& true^ and probably proud willful & indolent. Godwin conscientious to the last degree in his treatment of every one, extended his utmost care to the task of education—but many things rendered him rather unfit—his severity was confined to words —but these were pointed & humiliating—his strictness was indurating—and this was more particularly the case in early life when he considered the power of education to be unlimited in the formation of the understanding & temper. (c.607/3)

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The stirring times of November-December 1790, when Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution* was answered by Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, find Godwin straining to jump into political controversy and Cooper pining to escape the schoolroom.

November 3. Penance him for being out of humour with me without reason—because my not choosing to read before him Burke’s pamphlet after he had pronounced it "stupid stuff" a priori

December 1. Tears for the supposed imputation of a lie. C. I will not bear it, you would not treat any body else thus. G. Every body says that I treat you too well.
Do not threaten me. Go to the Devil as soon as you please; from instruction to ignorance, from virtue to vice. (c.607/3)

According to St Clair, Godwin completed his separation from Tom Cooper in 1791 with a self-approving flourish:

The periods when he had shared lodgings with Cooper, Marshall and Holcroft had revealed the strain caused by having too many opportunities for mutual sincerity, and he also believed, with a touch of priestly dedication, that no man could be a great writer or great benefactor if distracted by domesticity. He moved to Chalton Street as soon as Cooper left. (C144).

In 1795 Godwin received the first of what was to be a longterm correspondence from a young painter and playwright in America. This was a letter dated ‘New York Octo. 1, 1795’ from William Dunlap, who declared himself an admirer of Political Justice (‘Political Justice, if I may judge by my small circle of acquaintance, has been read by many in America’), and solicited Godwin’s interest for his own work: ‘I have written several Dramatic pieces, principally Tragedies ... if these could be published in London or any of them brought on the London stage, I trust, the cause of humanity would be served’. (b.227/2 (d))

Dunlap was to become Cooper’s manager and producer in his successful career on the American stage. Their initial contact was through this overture to Godwin and accordingly the image of Godwin as mentor remained a theme in their correspondence throughout. Dunlap’s diaries, unpublished until 1969, add to our view of Godwin through the double filter of Cooper’s and Dunlap’s separate reminiscences:

New York City, 1798. [Feb.] 12th Cooper ... son of a Surgeon ... [who] went to the East Indies and dying there left a large family of Orphans. Mr Godwin, some way connected with the family, took & educated Cooper & under the instruction of Holcroft he was destin’d for the stage. (Dunlap 1969: 220)

The *document Notes on Cooper, in this chapter 4: pedagogy, is from Dep. c.607/3, an unidentified hand on watermark 1796 paper. This memorandum reveals that when Tom Cooper sailed on the Sansom for New York and an engagement to the Wignell theatre company of Philadelphia in September 1796, he left behind a widowed mother and her

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younger children still looking for support from the East India Company. The late Mr Thomas Cooper, it says, had ‘entered the service of the East India Company in the beginning of the year 1770 as Ship Surgeon’ until the ‘time of his decease Oct 4th 1787’. Godwin is described in the note as: ‘A relation of Mrs Cooper’s [who] had the goodness to take upon himself the education of her eldest son: ‘The unfortunate unhappy Widow is induced to solicit the benevolent aid of any Gentleman in the service’. Godwin’s goodness looks more concrete when we read how little their father’s seventeen years of foreign service had secured to his children and widow.

Tom Cooper and Amelia Alderson did not meet under Godwin’s auspices, as Cooper had left Godwin’s London household in 1791, well before Alderson was introduced to it in the summer of 1794. But Alderson herself recognised Cooper as her precursor in Godwin’s academy without walls, and in particular, she wanted to glean from Godwin the vital clues that would turn her manuscript comedy-in-progress throughout 1796, into a successful stage production. Alderson’s letter of 12 February, 1796 (No. 4 in b.210/6) urges the play’s merits on Godwin’s attention: ‘I flattered myself that all its varieties would be forcibly & admirably given by your pupil Mr Cooper’. But she has been disappointed to discover, as she believes, that ‘Mr Cooper played no more’. This was a reculer pour mieux sauter for Tom Cooper, who at this date was receiving intensive tuition in stagecraft from Thomas Holcroft.5 For Alderson it was not so, she had no such springboard out of genteel provincial maidenhood. Holcroft’s formidable skills in theatre arts were, as she said herself ‘inaccessible’. ‘But I soon found that Mr Cooper played no more & that Mr H: was all but inaccessible’ (b.210/6).

Alderson’s letter of 1 April 1796 (No. 5 in b.210/6) asks Godwin for news of Robert Merry and his actress wife, and gives him what news she has gathered in Norwich. The Merrys sailed as shipboard companions on the Sansom with Tom Cooper, and in the USA Thomas Abthorpe Cooper and Anne Brunton Merry had an illustrious career as ‘stars’ of Shakespearean tragedy. The second of the *documents Notes on Cooper comes from William Dunlap’s biography of the actor Fred Cooke, commemorates the role of Godwin as Tom Cooper’s teacher, and casts an oblique reflection on Amelia Alderson’s ups and downs in the vicissitudes of youthful ambition.

5 Charles Kegan Paul, William Godwin and His Contemporaries (London, 1876) covers this period of Tom Cooper’s life in some detail in vol. ii.
This chapter closes with Alderson, and the *documents attached include her informal note to Mary Wollstonecraft in April 1797, after the news of her marriage to Godwin had surfaced. It is, I think, within the spirit of MWS commentary on Alderson and, *a fortiori*, on Wollstonecraft, that we attach this document. It clearly contradicts the view that Alderson was among the first of Wollstonecraft’s acquaintance to turn on and shun her for her marriage to Godwin. Whatever priority is due to Godwin’s claims in his 1798 *Memoirs of the Author*, Alderson must at least be allowed to offer her friendly greeting, to which Wollstonecraft, signing herself ‘femme Godwin’ wrote in reply, ‘My Dear Girl’.

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