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 he might at least in a degree renew a portion of its blessings married a portion of the treasure he had lost if he entered into a new engagement with a woman of sense & of an amiable disposition. Instead of as heretofore guarding himself from the feelings of love, he appears rather to have laid himself open to them. The two orphan girls left in his charge of course weighed much in the balance - he felt his deficiency as the guardian sole parent of two children of the other sex - The Since my mother’s death a lady had resided in his house & kindly undertaken their care- but this could not continue for an indefinite time.

The first

In March 1798 he made a tour such projected leaving town London as he was in the habit of doing for a short interval every year. His destination was He visited Bath & spent ten days in that city. There he met the fair authoresses of The Canterbury Tales, Harriet & Sophia & Harriet Lee. The latter soon attracted his regard & partiality - to the end of his life he always spoke of her with esteem & regard 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

The feeling of love was awakened on their first acquaintance, & his immediate desire was to study her mind - I find a note made of some of her opinions & remarks which shew the interest he took on the subject

Has always been afraid of cultivating emotions - is not sanguine

Professes self-complacence to be a principal source of happiness, & self-displeasure the greatest of all pains.

Immorality of Heloise &c
Believes persons of strong emotions to be most unhappy.

A sh scribbler from childhood. S. (ophia) vi not

Views present circumstances with a favourable eye.

I will have her opinion of poets & poetry - of [illeg.]
Likes Richardson vii - dislikes Emily Jervis viii - fond of etiquettes - pleased with my preference. ix

On his return to town he ventured to write to her. turn over

[ ]
His feelings were so much engaged that he made a second visit to Bath

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WG-HL [n.d.]

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When I had last the pleasure of seeing you, you said, You supposed you should hear of me. What was your meaning in this I do not think proper to set myself to guess, lest I should find that you meant nothing, or what in my estimate might amount to nothing. When you said In saying therefore, that you supposed you should hear of me, I am determined to understand you, that you expected to hear from me. It is indeed a very displeasing thought to reflect, when one’s ideas of a person have first been raised by their writings, & afterwards confirmed by a direct communication of sentiments & feelings, that possibly years may elapse before that communication is renewed, & that possibly it may even never be renewed.

There are so few persons in this world that have excited that degree of interest in my mind which you have excited, that I am loth to have the catalogue of such persons diminished, or that distance should place a barrier between them & me, scarcely less complete than that of death. Indulge me with the knowledge that I have some place in your recollection. Suffer me to suppose, in any future production that you may give to the world, that, whilst you are writing of it, you will sometimes remember me in the number of your intended

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readers. Allow me to believe, that I have the probability of seeing you, in ^no^ long time hence, in the metropolis. You said, if I recollect right, that this was rather the less likely, as the friend at whose house with whom you used to reside in London, had lately removed to some other place. Why should not I venture to suggest the practicability of your substituting my house instead of the accommodation you have lost? I do not perceive that there could be any impropriety in it. A sister of the Miss Jones’s with whom I resided at Bath, lives at my house on the footing of an acquaintance, & is so obliging as to superintend my family, & take care of the children. I am sure she would be happy to do every thing to accommodate you. I should imagine therefore that you might accept the invitation without sinning against the etiquette that you love. It is true that my
establishment is a humble one, but you could not perhaps be at the house under the roof of one who does more justice to your merits.

You told me at Bath that you found your time too much occupied with business, to allow you to devote much of it to literary engagements. If you had the opinion of your talents which I suspect to be the true one, you would be cautious of admitting this excuse. Surely there is something highly pleasing in the idea of amusing & improving more persons than we ever knew; nor can any writer be entirely indifferent to that kind of distinction with which an author of genuine merit is commonly regarded. We love to be known for what we are: an ingenuous mind would not be altogether easy to be thought better of than he deserves; but no person conscious of talents, can be satisfied to be treated & regarded as something less, & overlooked as an object of inferior value.

If I might venture upon the claim of so short an acquaintance to turn critic, I should endeavour to dissuade you from a style of levity. When you attempt to rouse our curiosity or attack our feelings, you may reasonably augur future success from the experiment you have already made. Your Canterbury Tales, which have much merit, would in my opinion have more, if the stories were told with that artlessness & simplicity, which reminded us of no effort to surprise in the writer, & required no effort of attention in the reader.

Be so good as to express to your sister my sense of the flattering politeness of attention she was so obliging as to bestow upon me.

Farewel.

yours, with much regard & esteem,

[blank]

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xi

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This letter remained unanswered & the lover became tormented by a thousand doubts - Had he offended? He was sometimes impelled to pour out his feelings with fervour & frankness - sometimes to be as guarded as possible I find three letters written at this period only one of which I conjecture to have been sent. The first ^is little more than a concise announcement to his intention to revisit Bath. The second^ is contains an open confession of all his feelings (fearful of an offending, eager to persuade he wrote it three times over, & at last I imagine concluded not to send it) the second a concise announcement of his intention to revisit Bath - The third which certainly lead did reach Miss Lee is a mixture of both; this half measure displeased her, as will be seen. I give all thee^three^xiii of these letters.

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WG-HL [n.d.]

xiv

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How wonderfully you contrive to torment me! How numerous are the conjectures I have formed respecting your silence! How many times have I considered the abstract I made of the letter I wrote to you, to discover, if possible, by what circumstance I have been so unfortunate as to offend you! Sometimes I have considered your silence as reproof, as contempt! Sometimes I have hoped that, if it were torture to me, it was not entirely gratification & ease to yourself. Whenever I have said to myself, this cannot be merely rebuke; indifference would dictate a conduct so less harsh; if she did not feel some kindness, she could not feel herself entitled to adopt so irregular a method of expressing her displeasure. I know that, to some women, silence would be the result of an uncertainty how to express themselves; but this I cannot impute to one who has shown so singular a mastery of every department of the epistolary style in the Errors of Innocence. Whenever I have been sober, collected & deliberate, I have determined on this plan, to wait till the period of the Midsummer vacation; to hope yet to hear from you; if not, to find if that on that occasion you came to town; or, both these anticipations failing, then once more to seek you at your own habitation. I am aware that a thousand favourable circumstances offer themselves in conversation; that, when persons are present with each other, one subject imperceptibly slides in after another, & the effect of each is remarked by the speakers; while, on paper, every thing is abrupt, unprepared & alarming. But to me prudence in this case is useless. You haunt me; I see no thing else; I think of nothing else; I can bear any thing rather than the uncertainty in which you plunge me. I recollect our conversations: there every thing was soothing; every thing spoke pleasure to my heart. I found, or thought I found, a responsive chord, the vibrations of which suggested to me emotions, too pure, too full of meaning, for mere words to explain. This perhaps was all folly & delusion. But I must seek a resolution to my doubts. If, to a letter so unambiguous as this, you return no answer, I shall conclude that you are not utterly resolved determined against the renewal of my visit. Yet I would that you would answer me by something more pleasing encouraging than silence, that you would relieve my anxiety, that you would give a determination to my reveries, which now, between hope & apprehension, deprive me of all my customary firmness & peace. Do not conclude from the incoherence of what I write, that I am not influenced by the maturest determination deliberation. The judgment upon which I act, is one that no subsequent incidents are likely to alter. I am not a boy, & my proceeding, though the result of sentiment, is authorised in my mind by the conclusions of reason, & the inferences of experience. I am satiated with vague intercourse with the world, & the frigid barrenness of empty praise. I require a friend of my bosom, whose approbation & sympathy shall stand me in stead of all the world. In this friend I require that cultivated mind that can give as well as receive, & that can improve my mind, while she ravishes my soul. All other love is transitory & deceitful, & can last no longer than the novelty of the object. In this friend I require unbounded, undivided intimacy, together with every advantage that nature bestows for giving to the intimacy permanence & effect. I require sentiment, delicacy, a liberal mind, a candid temper, a warm & ingenuous heart. Where can I find these properties realised but in you? In return I claim to be allowed by you possession to possess some faint portion of them myself. If you do not grant me this, you ought not to waste a thought on the subject of this letter. If you do, let me hope that you will not lightly put
a negative upon it. I will not believe that, with a man to whom you should grant this credit, you will not be happier than in any other situation. If I am not pleading your cause at the same time that I plead my own you ought not to grant me a moment’s attention.

Yours, with the sincerest admiration

(I have no idea of coming to Bath sooner than July next, unless some communication from you afforded me an inducement I do not at present possess.)

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If, in what I have above written, I may seem to require too much of you, suffer me to explain it in the following manner. Silence, if you please, shall merely pass for the symbol indication of a mind not absolutely determined against me. I know that we have seen little of each other; too little perhaps to enable me to decide my choice, if I were not also acquainted with you in your writings; I have reopened the E. of I. since I saw you. I abhor the idea of surprising you into a determination for which you are not perfectly unprepared. I abhor the idea of entangling you in an alternative, against which you have no adequate remedy. Let me only obtain in return that, as I would not precipitate you, you will not precipitate yourself against me. I will not strictly adhere to the interpreting of your silence, if silence it is to be, into the mere supposition, that you have nothing to say that which a considerate benevolence requires should not be deferred; nor will I infer from it an atom of positive encouragement.

The aim of my former letter, in which I could have been well pleased to have been indulged, was, to have obtained from you a neutral correspondence, where we should have become familiar with each other’s mind, without precipitating any thing. Is it still practicable to return to the situation in which we then stood, imagine this letter unwritten, and correspond as if nothing particular had proceeded from either side?

[upside down top margin]

Once more, let me intreat you to recollect, that silence shall merely be interpreted to signify a mind suspended, a mind requiring more materials for judgment, more opportunity for deliberation, not a mind engaging itself for any thing. Surely you may be prevailed on to deliberate, to doubt, not to regard my proposal as wholly un-

worthy your consideration!

Above all things I request you to judge for yourself, not to suppose yourself incapable of forming a judgment from the result of your own reflections, not to be governed in a point of this sort by the advice of others, which is perhaps always worse than inferior to the unbiased dictates of a well instructed mind.

[sideways in left margin]

Further I have to intreat you, if you come to an unfavourable decision, not originating in a spontaneous alienation of mind, but in the representations of others, or in inferences of reasoning, that you will be explicit with me, & suffer me to endeavour to correct misapprehension and remove prejudice.
I linger yet. I will not deny what you must have perceived in the early part of my letter, that I have some
dependence upon the reciprocity of our minds, & that, from what I saw of you at Bath, I anticipate not an entire
indifference. But I may be deceived; & in that case, the disappointment I am to encounter may will be so much
the bitterer. I may be shutting myself out from future opportunities, & penning at this moment the last words I
shall ever be allowed to address to you.

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I know that to some women silence would be the result of an uncertainty how to express themselves; but this
I cannot impute to one who has shown such a singular mastery of every department of the epistolary style in the
E. of I.

I believe perceive that the established, perhaps the reasonable, maxims of worldly prudence, would lead you
to defer any actual direct answer to this letter, if the state of your mind were as auspicious as my most
sanguine thoughts could represent it. Wealth, I have none that first object of enquiry to the worldly wise, I have
none to offer: I neither seek, nor can bestow it. I have hitherto lived creditably on the fruits of my industry, & I
should hope that an over anxious retrospect on this subject is not one of the characteristics of your mind.

.... ...

[late May 1798]

I have just heard that you have been to town. How unfortunate I am! How fortunate I might have been!
All the awkwardness, all the crisis, that attends on a journey purposely taken, would have been removed; the
sentiments of the mind would have taken their genuine, their unforced & most gratifying course. Cruel, cruel
etiquette! I had a kind of presentiment on the subject, & sent to Robinson’s six or seven weeks ago to enquire if
Miss Lee or yourself were in town. But then you were not. Last Sunday I heard that you had been; I hasten-
ed to Mrs Linley’s, with whom, or near to whom I understood you had resided; but you were gone.

I will be in Bath in four or five days from the date of this, unless you say that my appearance there
would be disagreeable to you. Depend on my prudence not to give it an air to excite remark; I will have
business at Bristol.

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June 1798

Dear Madam

I took the liberty of addressing a letter to you soon after my late excursion to Bath, to which you have
not been so obliging as to return favour me with an answer. The esteem & admiration I entertain for you, are
such, as to have made this a subject of considerable much uneasiness to me. I have only lately heard that you have been in London, unfortunately not till after you had some time quitted the metropolis: otherwise I should have hoped to have learned from you personally, whether I had been so unhappy as to have incurred your displeasure. The sentiment of friendship is inexpressibly dear to me, & I had ventured to believe that, though our intercourse was short, it was not altogether alien to that sentiment. I am obliged to be at Bath Bristol next week; I shall with your permission take the liberty of renewing my visit at Belvidere[^xxxiv] house; & I rejoice in the occasion, that may thus, I hope, prove the means of removing a painful feeling from my mind.

Present my best remembrance to your sisters & believe me, With the highest regard,

Yours

June 2, 1798.   [blank]

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WG-HL 2 June 1798

[^xxxv] I have ^been^ extremely mortified at receiving no answer from you, to the letter I wrote soon after my late excursion to Bath. I am not sure indeed whether in perfect strictness I was entitled to an answer. But silence is so ambiguous a thing, & admits of so many interpretations, that, with the admiration I had conceived for you, I could not sit down tranquilly under its discipline. It might mean simply that I had not been long enough your knight, to entitle me to such a distinction. But it might mean disapprobation, displeasure or offence, when ^my heart prompted me to demand cordiality & friendship^ I ardently wished every thing cordial & friendly to exist. My mortification has since been increased, by finding that you have been in town lately, & had left town before I knew of your presence: though, having a kind of suspicion that the Two Emilys[^xxxvi] would bring either Miss Lee or yourself to London, I had made some enquiries on the subject.

I am obliged to be at Bristol next week. I remember, as my greatest good-fortune & pleasure in my last excursion, the repeated & long conversations I enjoyed at Belvidere House. May I hope that now, having a right to call myself an acquaintance, I have not, without intention or consciousness on my part, forfeited the kindness I then experienced as a stranger! Whether next week shall be a week of pride or humiliation to my feelings, will depend on the solution it will afford to this question.

Present my best remembrances to your sis-

[^v] ters, & believe me

With the highest regard & esteem

Yours

June 2, 1798,   W Godwin

Saturday.

[^written in margins]xxxvii
The tone of this letter appears to me [sic] betray vanity disappointed by the scantiness of the homage it has received, rather than mortified by any apprehension of discouragement. If any offense was given by the former letter this is calculated to renew & encrease it: for it is equally presuming without being more explicit except in two sentences so alien to the temper or distant from the express reach of the rest that they should be made under all circumstances to leave the letter. An alternative forced imposed on her by the style second clause, presents itself to me thus “This journey to Bristol has no reference to me: as far as that is concerned the visits are simply as an acquaintance: but his title to be received as such is lost by his forwardness to employ the privileges & claim the rights of a more endeared relation: The purpose of his journey is addressed to me & it may be dictated either by humility or assurance” I doubt that the former interpretation would be given to a letter in which the same air & accent reign as in this

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(1)xlii

Miss Lee was as she acknowledges a lover of etiquette and a provincial life had narrowed her system of the ideas with regard to the proper conduct of a man towards the lady of his love. We shall be The reader will probably be induced to approve of Mr Godwin’s attempt to be assured of the lady’s regard before he exposed himself to the humiliation of a refusal. Miss Lee had more oldfashioned notions, & appended the following remarks to this letter

“The tone of this letter appears to me betray vanity disappointed by the scantiness of the homage it had received, rather than mortified by any apprehension of discouragement. If any offense was given by the former letter this is calculated to renew & encrease it: for it is equally presuming without being more explicit, except in two sentences, so alien from to the temper & or distant from the express reach of the rest, that they should be made under all the circumstances to leave the letter. An alternative imposed on her by the second clause, presents itself to me thus - This journey to Bristol has no reference to me; as far as that is concerned the visits are simply as an acquaintance. But his title to be received as such is lost by his forwardness to employ the priviledges & claim the rights of a more endeared relation. The purpose of his journey is addressed to me, & it may be dictated either by humility or assurance. I doubt whether the former interpretation would be given to a letter in which the same air & accent reign as in this.”

Such are the remarks I find written on the letter itself - returned it would seem to the writer after their intercourse ceased. She replied to it however, in civil terms, saying that she had never received his first letter, & expressing pleasure in the name of her sisters & herself at the prospect of seeing him again.
HL-WG 4 June 1798

Mr Godwin/Polygon/Somers Town/London/No. 5./North Parade/Bath

Sir,

Both my Sisters & myself will be extremely glad to have the pleasure of seeing you as you pass thro’ Bath: in the interim I beg you will acquit me of the rudeness of not answering your first Letter, as I assure you I never received it.

With the Compliments of my Family I remain, Sir,
Your obliged & obedient Servant,
Harriet Lee

Bath June 4th 1798

On the fifth of June Mr Godwin set out for Bath, and did not hesitate at once to press his suit. It was not successful, as the following letter records...

In the situation in which our conversation last night left the subject to which it relates, I feel it incumbent upon me to trouble you once more upon paper with some ideas that arose in the course of it, for your more full consideration.

In every deliberation that relates to our choice of life, the true & rational mode of deciding is by raising to our minds a large & comprehensive picture of that future which our choice is to decide on, that by seeing all that it presents of good or evil, we may make such a determination as the mixed scene of human sublunary affairs renders necessary. In this world there is nothing final, & it would therefore be the extreme of folly to make no choice of anything, till we ceased to see any possible objection to it. But, in the mixed & many-coloured objects we see in this moving scene, there will perhaps always be a superiority of good over ill, or of ill over good. The difference between judgment & caprice lies in this, that judgment is determined by the real overbalance of recommendation or the contrary existing in the object; while caprice, fixing on some one quality
that happens to strike, in the object, never arrives at that just & dignified estimate of the whole which is alone entitled to govern our conduct.

We got thus far, I think, in our last conversation, that the decision you shall be pleased to make will be of the greatest importance, since, though it may be easy for either of us to marry, supposing the present question to be decided in the negative, yet it is not probable that either of us will discover a fit & suitable partner, capable of being the real companion of our minds & improver of our powers. We must remain in that separate & widowed state of the heart, which is no part of the system of nature, or must, as St Paul says, be unequally yoked.

Let me, I intreat you, excite your mind to enter into that picture of the future, which, just now, is the only thing interesting. If you consent to my suit, we shall not join in devotions together, but that neither should we, if my opinions were the exact counterpart of yours. Sober & unsuperstitious religion is an affair of solitude & meditation, nor does any human creature come between the man impressed with rational sentiments in this respect & his God. In every thing that belongs to the intercourse of life, the difference of our sentiments enters for nothing. You are not of that weak & bigoted herd, that who believe that we ought to hold ourselves detached from the scene of things of which we make a part, to purify ourselves from passions & affections to all that is most nearly attached to us, to fix our regards exclusively on things invisible, & to consider the events around us with the cold & unmanly indifference of pilgrims & strangers. You are willing, like me, to enter with ardour & with the heart into all that is interesting to our happiness & all by which we can influence the happiness & improvement of ourselves others. You are sensible, like me, that the true way of recommending ourselves to the approbation of a just & benevolent creator, is to discharge our duty here, & engage with the full bent of our souls in the scene in which he has placed us. True religion, I think you will admit, requires that our attention & the fulness of our exertions should be engaged here. Pass over in your mind every thing which, if we were united, would employ us from day to day & from week to week. Things in which we perfectly sympathised, in which we acted in concert, in which our feelings would vibrate to each other. In the exercise of the benevolent & social affections, in the improvement of our understandings, in taste, in the admiration of natural beauty or the beauties of human productions, in the expressions, the refined, the delicious, but always evanescent expressions of mutual attachment, those expressions in which the true consciousness of life consists, that attachment which converts this terrestrial scene into a paradise, we should, I hope, fully coincide, nor should one discord intrude into the comprehensive harmony.

I have earnestly remonstrated against the precipitation of your judgment, because I wished you to accept or reject me upon an accurate knowledge & a full feeling of what I was. This may at first sight appear unfair, a sort of corrupting the judge to give a partial decision. But it is the reverse. I do not wish to present a garbled representation of myself, or that you should form any notion respecting me, but exactly that which you would find realised in the most intimate union. That you should have a full apprehension of this is barely just. Your decision cannot be right,
except so far as you have the whole future before you, &, by dint of a warm & ardent imagination, see what would be, in the same vivid colours as if it actually was, with all its recommendations & all its disadvantages.

I do not see how between persons of liberality & intellectual refinement, in the most intimate union, any serious misapprehension & contention can possibly arise. The vulgar idea is that, between man & wife, there must be a struggle for power, & that there are concessions scruples will often arise respecting concessions to be made, lest an undue advantage should be taken by the opposite party. In such a contention a liberal mind could have no part; scarcely any thing could induce me to live with a person from whom I should apprehend such a taking of advantage. Between ingenuous minds the fear from concession could never arise; they would each be ready at all times to study the gratification of the other, nor would either be capable of ungenerous usurpation. I am sure a generous spirit will never be restrained from concession by such a fear, nor would scarcely any thing induce such a one to live with a person from whom he feared apprehended an usurpation of that sort. A generous spirit would be ready at all times to study the gratification of the partner of his life. By such mutual sacrifices only is the harmony of the union maintained; & none, but a groveling & ignoble mind soul could conceive the project of converting kindne
tenderness & affection into an instrument of slavery.

Give me leave now to express, because I feel, astonishment, that your mind should be capable of treating the point in discussion between us, as calculated to turn the balance of your the whole deliberation.

This, I am persuaded, is a part of that prejudice which every nation of the world entails upon its inhabitants, that even your vigilance & sagacity has not yet led you to detect. As a question of speculation, every unbeliever in revelation must ad-

mit that it is attended with much obscurity; as a matter of taste & sentiment, in which light you are principally disposed to regard it, I grant that it is considerably eminently interesting; but would you reject a man for every defect of this sort, because he did not relish landscapes, or music, or "plays" painting? You probably recollect the saying of Plutarch to prove that an atheist (which I ought not to be called) is better than a bigot. “I had rather”, said he, “it should be affirmed hereafter that there never was such a man as Plutarch, than that Plutarch was ill-natured, morose, sanguinary vindictive or tyrannical.” Do you tolerate no difference of opinion in an intimate union? Must the man of your choice be absolutely perfect? Is one blemish to swallow all the multifarious branches & circumstances of which character is constituted?

You admit in some degree the force of this when you say, What will my sisters, what will the world think? I would on no account induce you to do any thing that should make your intimate connections unhappy, but I do not believe that any such consequences would arise in this case. My our approbation of a man by no means implies approbation of his errors or his faults. It does imply a general approbation, an opinion that his merits, in our apprehension, clearly & decisively outweigh his defects.

What will the world say? In the first place, I am not sure that you do not labour under some mistake in this case. I must be permitted to say upon this occasion, that, among those who personally know "me", the respect & love I "have" obtained, is, I believe, fully equal to any reputation I may be supposed to have gained for talents. I believe no person who has so far run counter to the prejudices & sentiments of the world, has been less a subject of obloquy: I know that many whose opinions in politics & government are directly the reverse of
mine, yet honour me with their esteem. I cannot therefore be of opinion that your forming a connection with me would be regarded as by any means discreditable to you.

But indeed it is unworthy of the strength of your mind, to suffer the world to come in for any thing in a question of this importance. Two persons forming the most intimate of all unions, should suffice to each other, & bid the world stand aloof from the sacredness of their engagements. Do you think it is possible, if they feel strongly & ardent towards each other, that, if you put their mutual sentiments in one scale, & the whole world in the other, the world would be anything more than the mere dust of the balance?

I have said to you once before, Do not go out of life without having ever known what life is. Celibacy contracts & palsies the mind, & shuts us out from the most valuable topics of experience. He who wastes his existence in this state, may have been a spectator of the scene of things, but has never been an actor, & is just such a spectator as a man would be who did not understand a word of the language in which the concerns of men are transacted. The sentiments of mutual & equal affection & of parental love, & these only, are competent to unlock the heart & expand its sentiments. They are the Promethean fire, with which if we have never been touched, we have scarcely attained the semblance of what we are capable to be. When I look at you, when I converse with you, it is more, much more, the image of what you might be & are fitted to be, that charms me, than the contemplation of what you are. I regard you as possessing the materials to make that most illustrious & happiest of all characters, when its duties are faithfully discharged, a wife, a mother. But, if you are eminently qualified for its offices, it is the more to be regretted, & shall I not add, the more to censured in you, if you peremptorily & ultimately decline them.

Dear Madam

You have humbled my pride; you have given a severe blow to the self-complacency of my heart: but I cannot prevail on myself to regard what passed at our last interview of as unalterably destructive to a wish, a vision of felicity, that I have fondly cherished & obstinately pressed to my bosom. You have however, at least convinced me of my mistake in presumptuously imagining that, from the commencement of our acquaintance, our hearts understood each other, & were animated by a common sentiment. I have that entire conviction of & deference for your sincerity as to compel me, though without dismissing the vision & the hope so dear to me, to confess with shame my presumption in believing that you entertained for me the preference I desired.

You hinted, in the course of our interview that you supposed me too delicate & too proud to desire to form the most intimate connection with a woman who did not feel for me the distinguishing preference which on my part I avowed. My delicacy however does not dictate to me this sentiment. While you disavowed that degree of distinguishing preference, you confessed you must suffer me to repeat your words of admiration & esteem. Why should not these feelings ( in the first instance) content me? Is it necessary that the absence of

WG-HL [n. d.]
any further sentiment at so early a period of our intercourse, should carry death to my hopes? You do not feel
the distinguishing preference I was eager to anticipate; but, if you feel partiality, if the feelings you professed
may be interpreted into this sentiment unmixed with any thing of an opposite nature, may not this suffice?
Convinced as I am of the unwearied assiduity with which I should study your happiness, & how entirely you
would feel that I made

"...

your peace & pleasure the source of mine, I should not fear that your partiality, might I but flatter myself with
that, would ripen into distinguishing preference & every thing of the tenderest nature. Love at first sight,
romantic & unbounded resistless passion, is the ignis fatuus of youth; but, however delicious a premeditation it
may afford, the event that attends it, is not always happy permanent or enviable. The regard, which,
commencing in unmingled, unalloyed esteem, is every day increasing with increasing knowledge & intimacy,
affords a much more rational basis of hope. I remember to have heard a similar sentiment from your own lips.
^Give me this then, & I will welcome it as the auspicious harbinger of every thing endearing & affectionate.^

Allow me to press one idea on your mind, which it would be my duty to state, even though it were
impossible that I should ever be interested in your election. It seems to me unworthy of your talents & your
wisdom to go out of the world without making experiment of the satisfaction that attends upon the intimacy of
two persons of opposite sexes. Is human life so fraught with enjoyments, as to justify us in abjuring the greatest
it can afford? You say that you have formed to yourself a plan of contentment, the basis of which consists in
suppressing the strong passions. In ^adopting^ this plan you would be wise, were you without an alternative.
But do not, I intreat you, voluntarily determine to be unacquainted with the most eligible condition of which our
nature is susceptible. Do not die, without ever having lived: for that only deserves the name of life, when we
feel existence as if it were at every pore, when we glow with a generosity & disinterestedness with which a life of celibacy must be for ever unacquainted. All else in sublunary existence, is comparative death. If it were possible for me in the present case to forget all
retrospect to myself, I should say, "yet marry". tho'

"...

you should reject me, yet marry. I should ^be^ ultimately & irreversibly excluded from your choice.

Indeed I have sometimes indulged the notion It ^has indeed often occurred to me^ that persons of great
intellectual refinement are the only persons perfectly formed for the marriage state. In marriage, however
intimate the union, the persons will still be two, will in many cases have different inclinations & a different
choice. Without intellectual refinement it is impossible for either party to be fully aware of the propriety of
concession, to concede with grace, & to derive from these sacrifices, the highest & fullest purest gratification,
the full & delicious consciousness how dear to him is every wish of the partner of his ^our^ heart.

How discouraging, in comparison with this, is the life of him who ^that is^ dis unengaged & alone, who ^that^
knows no person of whose sensations & pleasures he is the ever wakeful guard, & who fully repays him
responds to the abundance of his affection! I am fully conscious how liable a man is to be deceived in his
estimate of himself; but, if there is any thing which from self examination a man can certainly know, I know
that I could be this to you.
It is, I think scarcely unnecessary to guard you against that false shame, which would induce a vulgar character to feel difficulty, if induced to see an object in a different point of view, in adopting the language suitable to the alteration of mind that difference. I trust I do not place in you a confidence that shall be vain, when I believe that you will have the generosity & dignity, in reading this letter & reflecting on it, to reexamine the subject entire. If I know any thing of you, I know that you have the skill & the fortitude to retract gracefully, & not the miserable unworthy cowardice that should preclude withhold you from judging better afresh anew, because you had once delivered a judgment.

It remains for me to state that it is my purpose to visit Bath once more in the ensuing autumn. You cannot, I think, reasonably object to this; you cannot refuse to admit my visits upon the same footing as previously to the explanation that occurred in our last interview. I will not importune you on the subject of that explanation; I will introduce it, but with discretion. Believe me, I know myself well enough to know that my mind will be more tranquil after that visit, be its issue what it may, than without it. I should be ashamed, both for your sake & mine, to be officiously & hopelessly pertinacious. But do you think I can give up a cause of this sort without having done it entire justice endeavoured to compensate the disadvantages of abruptness & distance? I might reasonably be charged reproached that my heart was not in my proposal, if I did not practise a certain degree of persistence. The voice of nature within me constituent principles of my nature bid me aspire to receive & communicate happiness. Through the whole universe, I firmly believe, I cannot find another individual to whom I can rationally look up for the happiness I aim at except yourself. The fortunes of the event of my life are in your hand. I dread that solitary existence, that incommunication of silence & torpor of the heart, to which, I fear, it depends on you to condemn me. I am satiated with vague intercourse with the world, & the frigid barrenness of empty praise. I require a friend of my bosom, whose approbation & sympathy shall stand me in stead of all the world. In this friend I require that cultivated mind, that can give as well as receive, & that can improve my mind, while she ravishes my soul. All other love is transitory & deceitful, & can last no longer than the novelty of its object. In this friend I require unbounded, undivided intimacy, together with every advantage that nature bestows for giving to the intimacy permanence & effect. I require sentiment, delicacy, a liberal temper mind, a candid temper, a warm & ingenuous heart. Where can I find these properties realised but in you? My address, though invincible circumstances made it somewhat abrupt, was is not of that ordinary kind, which is incident to unstable & vulgar minds are accustomed to practise. Believe me, Madam, I have never yet encountered a refusal from your sex; & as my mind has not in this respect has not been made become cheap & degraded, I shall on that account have neither the insensibility of habit nor indifference to your merits to console me & will from my conception of

[sideways in left margin]
if all my efforts to obtain engage your kindness & affection ultimately fail of success. Wealth, as you reasonably conceived, it is not in my power to offer. I neither seek, nor can bestow it. I have however hitherto lived creditably on the fruits of my industry and my pre
sent establishment is nearly that which would probably content us both. I am satisfied I do not presume too far, when I suppose, that an over anxious retrospect to this point is not among the characteristics of your mind. I request an acknowledgment of the receipt of this

In what I have written I hope I have removed the idea of those difficulties & scruples which you were kind enough to suggest as liable to arise on my part to the engagement proposed. I dare not say, I dare not enquire, whether I have offered any thing, that may induce you to think me not entirely unworthy of your choice. I patiently, yet anxiously, wait the award of time. - I request an acknowledgment of the receipt of this letter & am

[blank]

........

HL-WG 16 June 1798

[addressed]

Mr Godwin/Polygon/ Somers Town/London

[postmark]

Bath 18 Ju 98

Bath, June 17th 16th, 1798

Saturday.

Sir,

I should suspect myself to be deficient either in understanding or right feeling were I to persist in wholly rejecting the appeal you have so forcibly made to both. You must, however, permit me to repeat that throughout the whole of our last Conversation I was perfectly sincere; impelled more particularly to be so by a contempt for that art of trifling with which so many women have been reproached: an art, frivolous at the best, & in some instances ungenerous. I am persuaded you think too justly not to be well aware that during so short an interval as has since past, no other alteration can have taken place in my mind but that which results from reason, & a more deliberate consideration of the respect your merit entitles you to - for any other sentiment I can only refer you - as you have referr’d yourself - to time & circumstances.

The business that obliged me to be in town in May will require me to be again there some day next week. My sister Anne accompanies me & our stay will depend upon my Brothers plans: but on Monday sennight, or any day succeeding, we shall most probably be at home from [?Twelve hrs] -Mrs [?Milton’s] 17 Lower Brook Street, Grosvenor Square. My elder sister is returned from Wales & regrets she had not the pleasure of seeing you here - both join in Compliments with, Sir,

Your obliged & obedient servant

Harriet Lee

........
The letter I have just received from you charms me. It perfectly accords with that noble sincerity & ingenuousness which I have ever considered as a part of your character. It confirms & fixes me in the respect I wished to entertain for my own. I am indeed the creature of other people in this respect. Though I have a strong propensity to credit myself for something valuable, I have not that proud & immoveable assurance which is proof against all opposition. When I meet with the respect of persons whose respect is worthy to be sought, I then esteem myself; when I am slighted by them, I regard myself with impatience & contempt, proportional to my former elevation. In the luxuriance of boyish scepticism, I was not always a convert to the views of life insisted on in my former letter, but, with the predilections of ardour with which I am now impressed, your persisting in your first determination would, to say the least, have been a severe trial to me.

You go far enough; you distinguish rightly: if, upon closer acquaintance, you do not find further cause for approbation, you ought undoubtedly to return to your first judgment. I am the farthest in the world from imputing any impropriety to you in our last interview. Indeed it was because I could scarcely see how it was possible in that instance to act otherwise than you did, that I ultimately refused, upon revision, to consider what then passed as a rejection. Now however I hope you will suffer me to believe that I was not altogether mistaken, when I conceived in March that our feelings understood one another, & that you betrayed some share of that partial favour, kindness, esteem towards me, with which on my part my whole soul was engrossed. Nothing indeed could have divested me of this sentiment, but the persuasion, which you half succeeded to create in me in the course of our conversation, that you had some partiality, either from character or manner, against me.

Indeed, madam, you will find upon reflection, that intellectual qualities & cultivation, & those only, can promise to afford a basis of mutual regard, that familiarity shall constantly increase, & that no lapse of years shall have power to destroy. Your person, your countenance, your voice, engage my approbation, but your mind only, combined with these, could have made me your declared admirer. And, when I consider how rarely talents, right feeling, a just & candid turn of thought, & a reflecting & well furnished understanding are to be found in your sex, I believe I hazard very little, when I affirm that, in qualities calculated to excite my partiality, I have no chance to discover your equal. Though our personal acquaintance has been slight, I cannot therefore admit myself to have been rash & immature in my decision, & I do not fear that I shall ever find reason to alter it.

If you could witness the change your letter has produced in me, your humanity at least would be gratified. Many circumstances have lately contributed to depress me; but I am naturally of a sanguine turn of mind, & easily eagerly recover my happiness & peace, when ideas of an encouraging nature are presented to me. Do not however imagine that I shall abuse your condescension, or interpret your answer
into anything different from its just meaning. But indeed I feel that I cannot stand alone, that I require friendship, & something more than friendship, to support me "take me by the hand". At the same time I hope to be found prepared to give, what I desire to receive; & that I shall not draw upon your beneficence, without some copious ample a full return "if you will trust me so far" of consideration, attention, affection & kindness. The more I feel myself impressed with "your" liberality, the more ardent & sincere will my sentiments of regard inevitably become impossible shall I find it not to be unalterably at your devotion "unalterable will be my attachment & devotion".

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Early in July Miss Lee arrived in town and Mr Godwin instantly called on her. He saw her frequently during the following week - The accompanying her & her sister to the opera & the theatre. Unfortunately fresh objections rose in the lady’s mind. His attentions were doubtless observed, his opinions [sic] discussed, her mind biased against him. Mr Godwin was not of a nature readily to yield to this sort of difficulty - he argued the point as regarded difference of opinion again & again - hopes he had at one time for I find noted down “After my last letter but one, she gave me every encouragement, started engagements, all at once firm rejection, & without saying, well I grant you

turn over

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your reprieve & nothing more.

The fortnight was given me; she now objects only the world; is made serious; must fly me

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WG-HL [n. d.]

lxxii

As to the point respecting which I am desirous of putting down a few thoughts, is purely of a rational & general nature, I will endeavour, whatever may be my feelings on the subject, to confine myself entirely to the reason of the case.

Let me first state the quantity of difference "that exists" between us. I say difference, because it would be unjust to say opposition. You think yourself sufficiently clear in the truth of a proposition, which I am so unfortunate as to find incumbered with doubt, & which relates to a question that I incline to think it beyond the power of human faculties to solve. You hold an affirmative, I hold neither an affirmative nor a negative. I retire with humility from the incomprehensibleness of the subject, & do not venture to rush in, where angels fear to tread. I endeavour to know a little of the constitution & course of nature, & within that circle, that system tells "I find by daily experience" such uniformity apparent as to enable me in many cases to conjecture respecting
[illeg.] I do not see by analogy with what I do see; But, as to the question of how things came thus. But, beyond that circle, & as to the question of what went before this order & system I see of things, my experience seems to me to inform me of nothing, & from this question I retire in submission & ignorance.

Having shortly explained the nature of my opinion, the thing I attempted in our last conversation, & which I am here to attempt upon paper, is to enquire into the connection between this scepticism of mine, & the sacred maxims of morality & virtue. Morality is of two kinds, first an affair of sentiment & next, an affair of principle. As to sentiment, I readily admit that this is to be the parent of virtue. The man that does not feel rightly as to the common relations of life, of the tender charities of father, son & brother, I hold, can never be a virtuous man. He may boast as he will of comprehensive philanthropy, but can never have my confidence. I hope you find nothing in me hostile to these feelings, or suspect that I am incapable of loving the partner of my life, my child or my friend, or

of patriotism, benevolence or humanity. The sentiment I cannot feel in the same strength as you, a sentiment towards that being who, as to my understanding at least, has encircled his throne with darkness; but I hope that circumstance, instead of detracting from my other affections, will rather, if it restrict the current in one channel, rather make it flow the more copiously in those that remain.

So far as morality is an affair of principle, I daresay you will not deny that its foundation is in a desire of the happiness of others the sentiment, & the sacred adherence to that sentiment, that as I am capable of pleasure & pain, so are other living beings, & that, as I desire pleasure, they are equally impressed with that feeling. This principle requires us to deliberate as to the sum of good or evil to result from our actions, always to rejoice in conferring pleasure & advantage, & never to inflict pain or withhold pleasure, unless in cases where we are thoroughly persuaded that a larger & more comprehensive interest requires it. A rational theist holds that the happiness of sensitive creatures is a good thing, & therefore God desires it; a bigot only holds that the choice & plan of the creator makes that to be a good thing (for instance, happiness), which would not have been a good thing, if his choice had been otherwise. The will of God therefore, according to every rational notion, is a sanction of morality, not its foundation, nor the reason why a thing is moral rather than otherwise. Every rational religionist & divine I ever conversed with, admits this to be the true state of the case.

The sanction of morality derived from religion consists principally in rewards & punishments. I believe, & I dare affirm that you believe, that the man who is moral, merely from a conception of rewards & punishments, is not a virtuous man at all. A virtuous man adopts a certain mode of action because he loves his fellow man, because he rejoices in the welfare & prosperity of his species, & not because he expects a reward for doing right, or fears a punishment for doing wrong. Actions performed from that motive, may be called virtue, but are in reality mere selfishness & cowardice.

For myself I have devoted myself for the happiness of my species; I have published various writings in circumstances of great danger, one an attack upon the judge by whom I expected Horne Tooke, Holcroft & other of my friends to be hanged; a publication that appeared but a few days before their trial, & which is
supposed by them to have eminently contributed to save their lives. No man, I believe, charges me with a
neglect of morality. I have chosen my system of conduct; other men may have made efforts more successful for
morality & public happiness; no man has made efforts more sincere; by the genuine principles of morality I am
determined to live, & for them I believe I know myself well enough to say I have the resolution to die.

I feel it, my dear madam, to be a misfortune even to doubt of principles which the world has agreed to
treat as too sacred even for examination. Every day I am exposed to the chance of some sort of persecution,
unkindness & stigma, because I have dared to think for myself in points respecting many of which I am aware
you think as I do. I feel it as an extremely painful addition to my misfortune, that it has the power to create a
degree of uncertainty & contention in your mind as to one of the most serious & important choices of human
life. There are few things that I can feel more poignantly & impress me than that I have occasion to give you
pain, or that by an opinion or rather a doubt, which is perhaps my misfortune, but which in
reality constitutes a mere shade of difference, I should be exposed to incur the risk of losing you.

Recollect, I intreat you, the many points in which we agree. We have each exercised our thinking
powers; we have each cultivated candour, liberality & ingenuousness; we each of us have a strong & lively
sensibility & an active imagination. We can converse & understand each other; we have a thousand topics of
communication which the world intermeddles not with; & we are capable of relieving & giving interest to these
communications, by an interchange of endearments, pure from the gross-ness of vulgar minds, & which, while
they are the sources of undescribable pleasure, are also calculated to render us more liberal, more generous,
more satisfied with ourselves, & more susceptible of the truest & best consciousness of existence. We differ
only in one point, when the wisest & most exalted of men have been able to do no better than wander in D
darkness. Do you imagine that you can be injured in your cast of mind by such a connection? If so, then indeed
am I a despicable impostor. For myself, I feel that such a connection has the strongest possible tendency to
render me like an angel or a God, to fit me for every thing trying or exalted to which I can be called in the
present state or a future. Do you think that we shall want scope for our sympathies? No; if we look to each
other, to the dearest relations of human life, to those within our reach to benefit, or that call for our compassion
or our friendship, we shall find ourselves animated with the same desires & burning with the same wishes. We
are capable, when we look abroad into society, of the same selections & the same approbations. Are we ^Let us
be neither^ romantic enough to expect to
differ in nothing, nor intolerant enough not to indulge each other in the few points in which all human beings, &
particularly such as are of independent understandings, must expect to differ.

I have nothing ^further^ to add except to remind you of our contract, that the subject to which this
letter relates, is not to be decided on unfavourably for the present. In our conversation^xxxvii you seemed to
commit the mistake of supposing that morality could have no solid & immovable foundation without religion
^it appeared that some of the ideas insisted on in this letter were in a great degree new to you; & it is but fair to
suppose that this will require some space of reflection, before they can be absolutely decided on. Many divines
have attested that religion is necessary to secure the morals of the multitude; but, I believe, no liberal divine has
denied, that morality is an independent and eternal principle, to which religion & the will of god himself can
only act in the mode of a foreign support & incidental sanction. Since then your daring & active mind had never been put in the pain of reflecting on this evident & admitted truth, you must allow that it will require some space of reflection, before they can be absolutely decided on^ small lapse of time to enable you to judge of its tendency to diminish your objection.

All I ask is that you will not decide premature, that you will grant time for my character, my good & my bad qualities, to develop themselves. You will then see whether the latter promise more to interfere with, or the former to promote, your true satisfaction & happiness; & I shall have the consolation, even if rejected, of having obtained from you a fair & honourable attention, & of not being knowing that I was not rejected through prejudice, misconception, or caprice.

_A_ [?esssence] lies in a comparison between other human beings & ourselves, the perception that they are alike capable of happiness, & that their pleasures & pains, intrinsically considered, are objects of no less importance than our own. This perception obliges me, to deliberate as to the sum of good or evil to result from my actions, in all instances to seek the improvement & happiness of others, & never to give pain or withhold pleasure, except in cases when I am well assured that a larger & more comprehensive interest demanded it. It obliges me to consider myself as a member of the great family of mankind, when, all being fellow labourers, each is bound to contribute in proportion to his ability to the common good. In acts of utility, which by producing the happiness of individuals, add to the general stock, a wise & just man will place his pleasure & his pride. There is nothing else that can purchase him genuine honour, or solidly secure to him the approbation of his own heart.

If I do not venture to expatiate far into the invisible world, I do not the less sensibly feel what passes, in what is to me the world of realities. Fanaticism may, & often does, harden the heart; but the spirit which leads to the exclusion of what is visionary, that it should be carried to excess, rather tends to increase one’s interest in the pleasures & pains of our brethren.

Bigots have pretended that the will of God is the foundation of morality, that what he commanded is therefore right, & what he forbids is therefore wrong. But rational theism teaches that morality is antecedent to the divine will, & is a rule that God himself delights to conform. Rational morality^ theism^ teaches that god is good; & to prove he is so; comparws his providence & works with the immutable standard of rectitude to which god & good men equally adhere. The will of God therefore is by no means the foundation of morality, but merely its sanction, an additional reason why we should conform it.

_B_ Many divines have asserted that religion is necessary to secure the morals of man the multitude; but, I believe no liberal divine ever denied that morality was an independent & eternal principle. A virtuous man pursues a certain system of action, because his heart demands it, because he rejoices in the happiness & good of his fellow men, & not because -

_C_ For myself, I must be permitted on such an occasion to say, that I have chosen my system of conduct. My
feelings prescribe it; my understanding approves it; unalterable habit makes it a part of myself. Though I do not venture to be confident in the field of conjecture, morality & virtue are the objects of my most rooted attachment. All my speculations have been directed to the clearing their foundations, & illustrating their principles; & all my writings, in [sic] own apprehension at least, have been destined to increase & spread the love of rectitude & of man.

D We agree in all the spontaneous sentiments of the heart & all the real relations of life; we differ only in what is scarcely an object of human apprehension.

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WG-HL [n. d.] 1xxii

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There is one consideration which, upon recollection, I feel myself extremely surprised at having omitted in my letter regarding our difference of opinion.

The most obvious way of detecting any prejudice which education may have planted in my mind is to enquire whether it is not local. This enquiry I remember to have first started doubts in my own mind respecting Calvinism & Christianity, the system in which I was bred, & I have little doubt that the same has happened to you. I am a Calvinist, said I, and am taught that whoever does not believe the doctrines of Calvin will be damned. Yet how small a handful in our modern age of the world are the followers of Calvin? What an accident that I happen to be here among them? If I had been born in any other age or quarter of the world, I should never have heard of them. The same may be observed, with a little enlargement of meaning, respecting

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You incline to imagine that to believe in the belief of the existence of a God, is indispensible to the character of a worthy, accomplished & amiable man; &, in thus simplifying the articles of his creed, you think that you do enough. The time has been when you & I considered Christianity, & probably some particular system of Christian faith, as indispensible in the character we should admire & love. But, when we looked abroad in the world, we found that the adherents of this system were comparatively but a handful of men in a very recent period of history, & we became sensible that the sources of approbation love & admiration might exist out of the pale of our sect & country.

Now this observation is precisely applicable to the question between us. Theism is a doctrine of about two thousand years old & previously to that period had scarcely been heard of in any civilized nation of this world. This fact is very far from a disparagingment to the doctrine; many of the sublimest discoveries of the human mind have been made within that period, & undoubtedly pure theism is a very sublime principle. It only proves that this principle however admirable, is not indispensible.
For the first ages of history, & in all savage nations, no man ever thought of enquiring into the origin of the universe. They took things as they found them, & the only invisible beings they thought of were such as disturbed, not generated, the order of the universe. A monster, a tempest, a famine, an earthquake, any calamity that terrified them, they ascribed to an invisible being, & became religious, or rather superstitious. They supposed the same beings who disturbed the general economy, could rectify the disorders they committed; & therefore they prayed & sacrificed, to propitiate the favour of the Gods or appease their anger. The religion of the ancient Greeks & Romans taught, that Gods & men rose together out of the primeval chaos, & that the Gods were but a little superior in power to men, & were subject to human follies & vices. At length speculative men enquired into the origin of all things: Hesiod said they rose from night; Thales from water; another philosopher from fire. Anaxagoras, the master of Socrates, about 250 years before Christ, is the first philosopher upon record, who ascribed the order of the universe to the interference of a designing mind. But his philosophy was by no means more popular than that of many of his competitors.

The result is then, that we live in an age of theists. But is this a reason why we should not love the great heroes or philosophers of ancient Greece or Rome, or why we should ascribe to them an intolerable defect? The majority of them lived before theism, as we understand it, was known. Of those who lived at a later period Cicero was a sceptic, Horace was an Epicurean, & so on of the greater part of the rest. Give me leave to say that I should prefer these men with as friends, associates or models, though with the defects we ascribe to them, to infinitely prefer them, to almost any of my contemporaries. They were men, with the affections, the spirit & the energies of men, while we are sunk in a cold & levelling apathy & uniformity.

I sit down now as a disinterested friend to give you an opinion, the result of what has lately passed between us. It is little likely that anything of consequence to me should result arise either way from what I am going to state. I give up the point I have hitherto sought to enforce. You have erected an insurmountable wall of separation between us. Henceforth we shall be no more to each other than persons that had heard of each other's names, that remember there was a period when for a short time they had the habit of seeing each other, & who may now & then have the occasion to say, Dear me! no, I believe he is not dead, is he? It might have been otherwise. It ought to have otherwise. But you have made your election. I have neglected nothing that became me; I laboriously brought the whole subject before you; but you have remained pertinacious & immoveable. Certainly my opinion of you is not altered; my partiality is not diminished; if it were yet possible that you should view the question between us with justice & liberality, it would afford me a gratification much, much beyond the power of words to express. It would change me into a new creature; & open to me afresh the most pleasing prospects of life. I know that your heart, the bias & leaning of your heart, is on my side. But you have found the secret of suppressing the feelings of your heart, & subjecting them to the mystery & dogmas of your creed. Suppose then that you are reading the reflections of an impartial friend who has the courage to communicate to you the truth; suppose that the person whose visits you have lately had the
occasion to receive is dead. Such a supposition may easily be made; & will cause make little difference in anything to which you look forward. The friend who addresses you, as he has the courage to treat you ingenuously, so, I hope, he will not forget what is due to your sex & your merits, or utter a word which it would misbecome you to hear.A

What I have to say relates almost entirely to that creed which has been the instrument of putting an insuperable bar between us. I have not a word to say against a liberal & elevated deism; I yield it every respect, as an opinion gratifying, soothing & sublime. I have friends of all opinions, & I entertain no disrespect for any; the allowance I demand, I freely & unreservedly give. But to your creed as connected with what has lately passed between us I have much objection, & that objection I feel myself prompted to state; you will perhaps meet with no other friend who will urge what I am going to urge, & which probably merits your attention. The unworthy alloy you have mixed with your theism you owe to the retirement & peculiarity of your situation; &, if your own understanding goes on to exert itself, you will purge off this alloy, though probably too late for me to reap the benefit of the change. The exceptions I take consist of three particulars.

First, that your opinion, taken with the construction you annex to it, is the mortal foe of all moral virtues. You say, [illeg.] that, if it were not for your religion, & your ideas of a future state, you believe you should adopt a system of conduct selfish & licentious. I do not credit you when you say this; if I did, it would[^sic] impossible for me to have the smallest respect for you. I am not so unfair as to suppose that your opinion has the effect of rooting out all liberal & ingenuous sentiments from your mind, but I cannot doubt that it has that tendency think it a serious misfortune that you should confess it has. Every parent & preceptor perfectly knows that a conduct adopted from the hope of reward or the fear of punishment is not has not the smallest moral virtue If I make myself useful to my fellow men merely because I expect to be rewarded for it, it is as clear as the day, that I have no love of utility or virtue, & that, if the reward were placed on the other side, I should be the most mischievous as mischievous a creature as lives. Virtue is not a form of external conduct; it is a sentiment of the heart. I am a base & low-minded creature, whatever be my external conduct, if I do not seek to confer happiness, from a genuine principle of sympathy, & because I have a direct & heart-felt pleasure in the pleasure, the improvement & advantage of others. If Omnipotence itself were to annex eternal torments to the practice of benignity & humanity, I know not how poor a slave I might be terrified into, but I know that I should curse the tyrant, while I obeyed the command. I congratulate myself upon a creed which has no tendency to lead me by selfish & mercenary motives to a conduct, which is worthless except as it is pursued from generous motives. In reality the virtue of every good man is built upon the stable basis of what he sees & daily experiences & not upon the precarious foundation of that retribution, which he rather endeavours to credit, than certainly believes.

My second exception The second error I have noticed is that your creed, as you understand it, inculcates the worst part of bigotry. You look, as in effect you tell me, with suspicion & incredulity upon the virtue of almost all that was most illustrious in ancient times, & upon of half the most unprejudiced & exemplary men of our own day. This is the very quintessence of bigotry, to overturn the boundaries of virtue & vice, & to deny the existence of all goodness out of our pale try men not by what we see of their conduct &
know of their feelings, but by their adherence to or rejection of a speculative opinion. You have a certain Shibboleth, a God & a future state, which, if any man deny, you assert he can have no firm & stable virtue integrity. And, which is most curious, you say to him, If you have only the sentiment of virtue, if you only do good from 

a love of rectitude & benevolence, & do not feel yourself principally led to it by a foreign, an arbitrary & a mercenary motive, I can have no opinion of you. I am happy to know that these notions of yours errors have no necessary connection with either deism or Cty.\textsuperscript{xlv}

I am happy to say that I have known many deists & many Christians. [illeg.] They perhaps think, in the language of the bible, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but they know that it can only be a beginning, that it may wean a man from vicious habits, but that neither fear nor hope can ever be virtue. [illeg.] I know that it has been the jargon of priests\textsuperscript{xxxvii} to say that no man discards religion but because he wishes to be profligate with impunity; but liberal-minded men believers despise this

B

jargon shameless assertion & confess that among their opponents unbelievers are to be found many of the greatest ornaments of our nation. This liberality of construction is inconsistent neither with theism nor christianity; it is cherished by the best Christians, it reflects honour upon the name by which they are called.

The last exception I have to state, comes to the point itself, that your way of thinking in this matter has induced you to reject me. This could never have happened, if it had not been for the illiberality & bigotry into which you have unsuspiciously fallen. If you had habitually remembered, what is as clear as the sun, that religion is at best but the ally of virtue, that selfish & mercenary views are not goodness, & that multitudes of the best of men have been strangers

\textsuperscript{,}\textsuperscript{,},
to or dissenters from your creed, you would have assigned to your creed its relative importance, & never suffered it to thrust out every other consideration from your mind, or to suppress all the feelings & inclinations of your heart. If it could be told to a being of a superior nature to man, the distant spectator of our transactions, that a person of a cultivated mind & who has risen superior to many prejudices, having formed a notion of an infinite creator, a notion almost beyond the cognisance of our understanding, & which by its most enlightened adherents has been pronounced not to be an object of reason, but merely of taste, & having formed this notion, had suffered it, in a most important question, to supersede & annihilate every consideration the most substantial & unquestionable, doubtless it would appear to him incredible. Surely, if there be such a thing as reason we ought to assign to\textsuperscript{xxxviii}

[blank]

But I have done.\textsuperscript{xxxi} I entertain no hope of a good effect from what I now write, & merely give vent to the sentiments your determination was calculated to excite. I have made no progress with you; when you have dropped "an objection" it has been only afterwards to revive it; when I have begun to entertain fairer prospects,
you have convinced me I was deluding myself. My personal qualities, good or bad, are of no account in your
eyes; you are concerned only with the articles of my creed. I am compelled to regard the affair as concluded, &
the rational prospect of happiness to you & myself as superseded, by something you conceive better than
happiness. I have now discharged my sentiments, & here ends my censure of your mistake. If ever you be
prevailed on to listen to the addresses of any other man, may his success be decided on more equitable
principles than mine has been.

HL-WG 31 July 1798

""

You distress me, Sir, extremely by again agitating a question which ought to be considered as decided.
I had full opportunity while in Town to hear, and attentively to weigh your opinions concerning the position
["sic"] which we most differ: for perhaps I do not agree with you in supposing our minds in unison on many
others: but that is immaterial. The matter before us is decisive. All the powers of my understanding of the better
feelings of my heart concur’d in the resolution I declared before [illeg.] we parted. Every subsequent reflection
has but confirm’d it. With me our difference of opinion is not a mere theoretical question. I never did, never can
feel it as such, & it is only astonishing that you should do so. It announces to me a certain difference, I had
almost said a want in the Heart, of a thousand times more consequence than all the various shades of intellect or
opinion. My resolution then remains exactly, & firmly, what it was: it gives me great pain to have disturb’d the
quiet of your mind, but I cannot remedy

""

the evil without losing the rectitude of my own’s.

I have taken from my Sister the unpleasant task of telling you what you are unwilling to credit. She
does justice to your understanding, she wishes you every good that you can reasonably demand; but recollect
how improbable it is that I should cherish opinions she has not entertain’d long before;[xc] and even if I did, self-
dependent as I am both in mind & years, how little likely is it that I should look to another for a rule either of
duty or Happiness.

You tell me that you are individually beloved[xc] by those who know you, & I can easily believe it, but,
I will tell you that even among the number of your Friends, or at least well-wishers there are to my knowledge
those who much lament and even blame the lengths to which your systems of thinking have carried you and
who recede insensibly from your opinions while they preserve a respect for your intentions.

If in our conversations I have appear’d in

""

any moments undecided it was only at those when it seem’d to me that truth & genuine feeling were so strongly
on my side that while you were collecting arguments to enlighten my mind, I felt persuaded of the possibility of
a change in your own. And why should I not? - a doctrine so necessary to the heart, so [?consonant] to the
reason, as that of a just & all powerful Deity will (I hope) one day find its way to both. My own good wishes ,
& those of my Siste[r], attend you. Nothing further can or ought ["sic"] said by either of us. Farewell - but let it
be a friendly Farewell!
A What you have done is in the genuine style of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. You have put out of sight the man, & asked only what he believes. In the midst of the vast world of conjecture, you have before the beginning of all things, that appropriate field of wild assertion, in which proud man, ignorant of the essence & character of what immediately passes under his eyes, delights to expatiate, you have chosen a creed. You have done well; it amuses the fancy; it is the parent of a thousand interesting pictures; it soothes the heart with pleasing ideas. This is the deism of those persons whom I have known, who, having shaken off the empire of infant prejudices, yet differ from me in the point in which you differ. They “frankly” acknowledge that it is a matter of taste, & not a matter of reason. What can you know of the origin of the universe? Wert thou present when the formations of the earth were laid? Didst thou see whereupon the formations of the earth are fastened, or who laid the cornerstone thereof? Knowest thou it because thou wert then born, or because the number of thy days is great? Still more “unsupported” groundless in reason is the notion of a future state.

Still more groundless unsupported in reason is the notion of a future state. We see a man die; we can lock up his body in a vault; we can visit it from day to day, & observe its gradual waste; & we say that an invisible part of him is flown off, & inhabits somewhere with a consciousness that that & that only is the man. The evidence that we had of his existence was speech & motion & pulsation & breath. All this is changed into a motionless & putrid mass, & we still say, the man exists. We pretend to infer the character of infinite benevolence from what we see in a world, when despotism & slavery & misery of war continually prevail; & then, reasonably growing discontented with the scene, we piece out another world most miserably with hallelujahs & everlasting rest according to our own fancy, & we call this evidence. We first infer the goodness of God from what we see, & then infer that this world is not worthy of the goodness of that being whose existence we deduced formerlly from it. I have no disrespect for these opinions; far from it. I regard them as the food of a sublime imagination & an amiable temper. But I expect the unprejudiced man that cherishes them, to know them for what they are, the creatures of taste & not of reason. I expect him to be moderate & forbearing in assertion [sic]. I know that such a man will never regard this invisible world, with which he has no acquaintance, & which is the mere creature of his conjecture, as a balance for the realities around him; will never, instead of enquiring what is a man’s understanding, what is his genius, what are his morals, what is his temper, what the improvement, the pleasure, the mode of happiness he proposes to me, - will never, I say, instead of this, enquire, what is his creed, & judge him by that. This mode of proceeding can suit those only, who walk in a vain show, who regard themselves as pilgrims & strangers here, &, concerning what is with frigid & monastic ungenerous indifference all that is fix their attention only upon all that what is not.
You could not have come to the conclusion to which you do have come never have classed with those fanciful dogmatists, had it not been for two errors that I have noted in you, the alloy & not the essence of theism, & which you could never have imbibed but for the retirement & peculiarity of your situation. If your understanding goes on to exert itself, you will shake off these errors, though perhaps probably too late for me to reap the benefit of the change.

The first of these errors lies in supposing that morality has its foundation in religion. Religion, when restrained within proper bounds, I grant to be respectable. But, when it usurps a province it ought not to invade, when its professors representing morality as incapable of existing without its aid, I then suspect it to be the grand foe of truth & of man cannot then bestow on it my respect. Morality is founded in palpable & unchangeable principles, it appeals to the heart of every man capable of affections & feeling, whatever be his creed. It relates to the great realities of human life, to the improvement of the human mind, to the diffusion of human happiness, & depends upon no conjecture, however pleasing, of an invisible world & a reward hereafter. The man who, fixing his imagination upon all that is not, contemplates with frigid indifference all that is, who regards himself as a stranger & pilgrim here, & instead of opening his heart to the best affections of his nature, abstracts himself from all around him, is to be regarded as a man who has poisoned his understanding & feelings with a delusive enthusiasm.

B Religion, as you understand it, is certainly the adversary of all improvement. The operation of the errors I have been endeavouring to detect, is in a high degree injurious to you. You embrace certain tenets upon high elevated incomprehensible subjects, which may be pleasing, which may even be true; & so far you [?] & I agree] But, when you come to regard these sublime conjectures as every thing, & regard all human worth & all human happiness as unfit to be put in competition with them, you then become a visionary, & part with every thing all that is most wholsom & sound in human understandings. As to the genuine & most honourable feelings of our nature, it the case is still worse. I should be glad to know in what way you admire Voltaire’s tragedy of Zayre, while you imitate the conduct error of Zayre, to suffer yourself, by out of consideration for a certain dogmatical creed, to be led contrary to the genuine dictates of your heart & your understanding. I am worthy of you, or I am not. Happiness, the cultivation of the best emotions of the mind, the opening of the soul by new relations, the affording a new field for the most refin valuable experience, & a new document for the understanding of human nature & society, the communication of the most refined sentiments, the awakening your soul heart from the fatal calm into which it threatens to subside, would or would not be promoted by our union. The question whether or not I entertain a theoretical opinion, really makes so

[sideways in left margin]

miserable a figure by the side of these, that I am astonished it should have engaged our serious discussion for a moment.

....
I suppressed in the letter I wrote to you last week the principal point that it was upon my mind to state, & which had first led me to address you at that time, & I suppressed it because, writing at the same time to your sister,1 I felt that I should be unjust to myself & my own feelings if I in any degree had anticipated your her answer. I should otherwise have observed that, dismissing from my mind the the subject that agitated me while you were in town, I now felt the full value of your esteem, & that few things could be more pleasing to me than that [sic] the consciousness of your favourable & friendly remembrance.

I should be unjust to that frankness, which is bound to my heart by the consideration of something more important to me than the consideration of even your esteem, I mean, by the necessity imposed on me of preserving my own, if I did not tell you that I am not pleased with the tone of your last letter.

You are very unnecessarily piqued by my appeal to your sister. It was only a further proof, if further proof had been requisite, of my regard for you. I merely supposed that you were not exempt from the universal lot of our nature, when I thought your opinions & views might be more or less affected by the representations of a person greatly esteemed & apparently necessarily impartial. I never would have owed you to any thing but your own free, individual choice. I wrote to your sister, because I had reason to know she would see my letters to yourself, because she must inevitably give an opinion of some sort upon the perusal of them, because I felt that it was difficult for the most impartial umpire to hold the balance even between a person present & absent, & because I felt it due to the importance of the I chose upon such an occasion, to preserve to myself the unalterable consciousness that I had omitted nothing that it was in my power to do. You say, under the influence of this pique that perhaps I have only to add that I have been disappointed in your sister: not certainly in her not agreeing with me in her decision upon the subject, for in that I never was sanguine.

You say, under the influence of this pique, that perhaps you do not fully agree with me in supposing our minds in unison upon many other points, beside the one that has been agitated. Perhaps not; Be it so; for myself, I supposed you did, because I could not was unable in any other way to account to my own satisfaction for your conduct towards me.

As to your repeated charge of a want in the heart necessarily attendant on my opinions, I cheerfully submit to the an accusation which I must share with very many, living & dead, who have been the greatest ornaments of my species. I should willingly yield to your superiority in this point as in many others, were it not built on the most mischievous & vicious of all distinctions, the inferences we make to the destruction degradation of a man’s moral character, because we happen not to agree with him in his creed. My opinions are built upon a basis, against which, as I firmly believe, all the gates of hell will never prevail, &, I am willing to confess, the more injustice I suffer for them, the more they cling to my heart.

You say, Let our farewel be a friendly one. I am afraid this epithet, friendly, sits too light upon you. I do not understand that friendship, that which proposes that nothing further shall be said by either party to each the other, & probably that they shall never see each other again. I put down the feelings your letter excites; but, if ever I come to Bath, the first suggestion of my heart mind will be, as a friend, to see you, because I consider you as an estimable & extraordinary human being.
I sought you first for your merits. You were gratified by my good opinion. Perhaps by this time you hold that good opinion light cheap, because, as you seem to think, I have respected you too much, & sought you too perseveringly. That thought will be transient; I shall then have only the exclusiveness of your creed to oppose me as an acquaintance & a friend. How far that may alienate your esteem from me I am unable to say. My good wishes & sympathy will accompany you in all the events & successes of your life. You will have in me a friend, perhaps useless, perhaps undesired, certainly one whose heart is too fervent ever to utter a friendly farewell; without anxiously desiring that it may be the forerunner of a friendly intercourse.

....

HL-WG 7 Aug. 1798

[addressed]

Mr Godwin/Polygon/Somers Town/near London

[postmark]

8 AU 98

The Justice due both to you and myself induces me, Sir, to reply to some parts of your last letter. That the style of mine did not please you is not surprising, since it did not satisfy me: it is, therefore, my turn to apologise for errors of expression, if there are any, & to request that you will consider only the tendency of what I wrote.

On the subject of my Sister’s silence you appear to me to have form’d an erroneous judgment. The simple fact was that she found it difficult to reconcile delicacy with sincerity, therefore, greatly by my advice, forbore to write. You are equally mistaken, I assure you, in believing that I myself wrote under the influence of pique on the contrary I felt that I had reason to be flatter’d by your appeal: but I also felt its inutility; and it was that only I meant to explain.

Thus much for words. On the article of conduct I am much more decided. Ingenuousness was the unvariable rule of mine. I believe it to have been so of yours: & thus far each of us has cause to be satisfied with the other.

Of the opinions you “cling to” I had no right to speak, except as circumstances sometimes gave it me. My privilege, therefore, now ends compleatly with the occasion.

Suffer me, however, to add that I cannot perceive on what you ground your idea that feeling myself gratified by good opinion in the first instance, I should hold it cheap when it arose to particular distinction. Assure yourself you are wrong; & that the friendly remembrance you desire will subsist, uncheck’d by those minuter misunderstandings to which we both have been subject.

It is an ungracious, tho’ a proper conclusion, to request that you will not answer my Letter: but as I do not feel quite sure that this explanation is necessary, tho’ I believe it to be desirable, I consider the Letter itself as almost
superfluous. Adieu!

H. L.

August 7th 1798

...
Characteristics of a being calculated to bestow Happiness. I must be allow’d to say of myself that I am too proud, too delicate, too weakly conscientious as you may deem it, to be that Creature to any one existing whose opinions differ as much as yours do from my own.

The feelings you ascribe to me, however, are not mine - I shall not consider as wholly dead to me those whose good qualities entitle them to my esteem, whose talents excite my respect, whose kindness demanded my gratitude. I shall not suffer one error, whatever its magnitude, to obliterate the recollection of moral virtue; while I separate myself decidedly, & forever, from what is wrong in any Character, I shall still preserve my esteem for what is right.

I rest persuaded that the subject on which I have written is in all respects so delicate that my letter will never meet any eye but your own. Adieu -

Saturday morning

H. L.

I can not bear, after what has passed between us, to part thus. You profess friendly sentiments, but this will always remain in my memory an image of inveterate animosity. Surely it is not too much to ask to see you, when it may possibly be for the last time in our lives. If there is any thing too warmly expressed in the letter I gave you, surely the state of my mind may afford some palliation. Whatever you may find in it of that sort, so far from being really disrespectful, in meaning, ought to be considered as a proof of the high value I entertain for you, which will not suffer me to give you up in the style of entire calmness & ceremony. I however sincerely ask your pardon for any thing in which I may have unintentionally offended you. You greatly mistake the form of my temper; you may depend upon it that one word of reproach shall ever escape from my lips.

You are surprised I should say that my personal qualities have been of no account with you. In strictness probably you are right; but, in my sense of the word, they obtain no consideration, when a mere theoretical opinion is suffered to outweigh them.

I made use of the term bigotry merely as a dictionary word. I think it is a practice by which we injure ourselves, when we say, such or such a term may be a proper name for a defect in my neighbour, but it is an ugly word, & I will never think of applying it to myself. By a bigot I understand, one who lessens the character of others, or denies them to be good men, merely on account of an omission in their creed. If however there be the slightest indecorum in the word, that was a sufficient reason why I ought not to have used it.

I am surprised you should think it necessary to caution me respecting the confidential nature of your letter. It shall certainly never be violated by me.

You say, in objection to my sentiments, that virtue will not always make me happy. In answering, vice will make me less happy; & this is enough to decide my choice.

........
end 6: writing
*documents*

c.507/6
HL-WG [n.d.]

Miss Harriet Lee presents her compliments to Mr Godwin. She is extremely sorry she cannot have the pleasure of seeing him this evening, as she finds Mrs Symons’ engagements do not admit of her leaving home.

Belvidere Friday

SL-WG 2 June 1799

Sir

I feel so unconscious of a mean personality in the phrase you have marked as applied to yourself, that your letter would have made me smile, had not the air of serious pique it discovers required another conduct - in a scene like that I have attempted ludicrously to depict there must be some opposition of character, & certainly I never supposed when terming an opinionated Valet “a philosopher of the new school”, I should be suspected of an impertinence to a Man of Genius & merit, from whose conversation I had derived pleasure, & from whose lips I never heard a syllable that I had either right or reason to question. I live so entirely out of the literary world even when in London, that I was not apprized of the designation your Friends give you, or I should from delicacy have chosen some other way to contrast my characters - among my faults neither friends nor enemies will reckon insincerity, therefore I rely on your believing my explanation, and ranking me with those entitled to your esteem - however I might shun taking any part in the nice question you once addressed me upon, I cannot suppose my silences would lead you to misjudge her who is with regard and admiration,

Your humble servant

Bath June 2d 1799

Sophia Lee

[HL-WG]
My Sister has omitted to thank you for your favourable opinion of her Story, or to add my Compts & thanks for your sincere one of mine. I cannot say that I quite agree with you - but Authors Judgments on their own works are almost proverbial. I promise myself much pleasure in reading your Novel, which I am told is in the press - I remain always with much regard & respect - Yrs

H. Lee -

SL-WG 7 Dec. 1799
cxxii

Sir

I unite with my Sister in acknowledgments for your very obliging and acceptable present of St Leon, which it is impossible to peruse without the most animated feeling, or speak of without admiration - so naturally partial am I to the softer scenes of human life as to prefer the Madonna of Raphael to his Cartoons, of course I concur with Harriet in the judgment she gives - if you know how I hate the Supernatural in any but Eastern Tales you would be pleased with thus interesting me in spite of myself.

I could wish you had not to a certain degree forestalled your own masterstroke by giving us Charles in a dream - I would fain come upon him in all his military dignity without a previous idea that I might -

It was not easy for the Author of Caleb Williams to keep up his own reputation, I congratulate you on having added to it, & remain

Sir, Your obliged,
Humble Servant,

Bath Decr 7th 1799

Sophia Lee

HL-WG 8 Dec. 1799
cxxiv

Allow me to thank you for the Books you have been so good as to send us - not as a mere form of thanks but in acknowledgment of the lively Pleasure I have received from the work. I was impress’d in the early part with the boldness of the design & the power of the language, & I see thro’ the whole an energy of thinking & feeling peculiar to you. I believe I can foresee that you have not bestow’d immortality on your Hero with the resolution of limiting our knowledge of his History to so short a span: at least if the Public take the same
interest in it numberless readers doubtless will. The sex in general I think ought to hold themselves indebted to you for the character of Margarite, who appears


a model of everything charming & correct in Woman - perhaps it is the losing her, together with some other particulars, that render the latter part of the 3rd Vol to me the least pleasing one of the whole. cxxv I am however a very bad Critic on works of great interest & ought therefore only to dwell on the general impression I received from yours. - Of the social ties & affections it seems to me hardly possible to speak with more eloquence & feeling than you have done - you seem indeed to assure the Mind that it is an eloquence of feeling, not simply of language.

My Sister Anne begs to add her thanks & good wishes to mine - & with those very sincerely offered I remain

Bath Dec 8th
1799

Yours &c

Harriet Lee

........
For full citations see Bibliography

i*Bodleian folder rubric Dep. b.228/4.

iiMWS hand, first of four uniform single quarto sheets, wove paper, same ink throughout, written recto only except for three lines on verso of third sheet, Joyson 1839 watermark.

iii*a lady’, Louisa Jones, Godwin’s housekeeper in 1798.

ivMWS script corrects the order of precedence, naming eldest sister and headmistress of Belvidere House school, Sophia, Miss Lee, first. St Clair suggests that Godwin had already met Sophia Lee, perhaps as early as 1786, when she was an established playwright and novelist, and Harriet Lee’s first novel, The Errors of Innocence, had just been published. However, he adds, ‘he does not seem actually to have met Harriet until he arrived in Bath in March 1798’ (C201).

vHarriet Lee outlived Godwin, and died in 1851, aged 94 (CKP i 298).

vi(o phia) has been added in brackets above upper case ‘S’.

viiProbably the novelist Samuel Richardson (1689-1761).

viii*I have been unable to identify 'Emily Jervis’. There are six characters named Emily in Sophia Lee’s ‘The Two Emilys’, vol. ii Canterbury Tales (1797), but not an Emily Jervis.

ixCf. Godwin’s undated letter to Harriet Lee (below), ‘Believe me, I have never yet encountered a refusal from your sex’. MWS script (c.532/8) comments: [H]is gentleness mildness & refinement as well as his talents recommended him and his preferences usually met with a return’. See 5: women.

xDep. b.228/4, Godwin hand, quarto fold, laid paper, undated watermark, no heading or signature, pinhole in top left corner. Draft of letter from Godwin to Harriet Lee, offering her accommodation in his London household. Dated by Paul ‘[April 1798]’ (CKP i 298).

xiDep. b.228/4, MWS hand, this is fourth of four uniform single sheets on 1839 watermark paper that commence MWS account.

xiiSt Clair suggests that Harriet Lee only pretended not to have received the April letter because Godwin’s offer of overnight accommodation was unconventional (C202).

xiiiI give all thee three'. Cf. Paul's comment 'Arguments to induce the lady to reconsider her determination are urged with ... pertinacity and elaboration' (CKP i 302).

xivDep. b.228/4, Godwin hand, quarto fold, laid paper, decorative undated watermark, written recto and verso. At 4 pp. this is draft a), the longest of three drafts [a) b) c]) beginning, ‘How wonderfully you contrive to torment me’. Other two drafts not shown here. Cf. (below) Godwin undated letter 'Dear Madam, You have humbled my pride', containing a number of reworked passages from all three versions of 'How wonderfully you contrive to torment me'.

xvThe ‘abstract’ of the ‘offer of accommodation’ letter (above). Where this draft a) gives 'letter I wrote you', draft b) gives 'letter I sent you'.


xviiMidsummer vacation’ in May.

xviiiThe avowal /disavowal ‘I am not a boy’ is in all three drafts a) b) c).

xixGodwin’s double and triple negative constructions lead to confusion; the caret has been inserted after completing the sentence.

xxDraft a), 4th page of quarto fold.
Draft c) gives in parenthesis: ‘(I have reopened the Errors of Innocence since I saw you)’.

Probably ‘this letter’ and ‘my former letter’ contain the same offer of accommodation in his London house.

A sentence follows in draft c): ‘This is its fair & natural construction.’

Draft a), top margin of 4th page in quarto fold.

Draft a), sideways in left margin of 3rd page of quarto fold.

Draft a), sideways in left margin of 2nd page of quarto fold.

Draft a), sideways in left margin of 1st page in quarto fold

Draft a), top margin of 1st page in quarto fold, thinner nib, paler ink than rest of 4pp. draft a). I infer that these marginalia were written in reverse page order at later dates than the rest of the draft.

At the phrase 'characteristics of your mind' in draft b) the writing breaks off.

Probably 'this letter' and 'my former letter' contain the same offer of accommodation in his London house.

A sentence follows in draft c): ‘This is its fair & natural construction.’

Draft a), sideways in left margin of 4th page in quarto fold.

Draft a), sideways in left margin of 3rd page of quarto fold.

Draft a), sideways in left margin of 2nd page of quarto fold.

Draft a), sideways in left margin of 1st page in quarto fold

Draft a), top margin of 1st page in quarto fold, thinner nib, paler ink than rest of 4pp. draft a). I infer that these marginalia were written in reverse page order at later dates than the rest of the draft.

At the phrase 'characteristics of your mind' in draft b) the writing breaks off.
June 1798 (above) adds punctuation marks and contains occasional slips, ‘had’ for ‘has’, ‘whether’ for ‘that’, ‘priviledges’ for ‘privileges’, ‘rights’ for ‘right’.

\footnote{Cancelled (1), is usual MWS way of numbering footnotes.}

\footnote{MWS suggests that the parties returned each others’ letters when the acquaintance was broken off. But the 2 June letter returned to Godwin with comments in the margins, St Clair conjectures, was ‘more probably ... returned at the time’, ‘marked up with snubbing third-person comments’ (C203, n15). If St Clair is correct, I should expect to have found even sharper reactions in Godwin's already highly reactive letters. St Clair quotes from Paul’s edited version of the ‘third-person comments’ (CKP i 301. Cf.my endnote 39 (above)).}

\footnote{\textit{Bodleian folder} rubric Dep. c.507/6, laid paper, no watermark, pinhole in top left corner. Harriet Lee’s letter of 4 June, 1798, posted to Godwin’s Polygon address on the day he left London.}

\footnote{\textit{Dep. b.228/4, MWS hand, single quarto sheet, wove paper, Joynson 1839 watermark, pinhole left top corner.}}

\footnote{\textit{Dep. b.228/4, Godwin hand, single quarto sheet, laid paper, written recto and verso, no watermark, many cancellations, pinhole left top corner. Draft of 5pp. letter from Godwin to Harriet Lee, n.d., lacks signature, 6 June 1798. Cf. St Clair ‘a meeting took place at Bath on 5 June 1798 at which Godwin evidently proposed marriage’ (C203).}}

\footnote{\textit{Dep. b.228/4, Godwin hand, single quarto sheet, laid paper, written recto only, many horizontal and vertical cancellations, pinhole left top corner. Godwin's Plutarch quotation is based on Seneca, \textit{De clementia}, making the distinction between a good king and a tyrant.}}

\footnote{\textit{Dep. b.228/4, Godwin hand, single quarto sheet, laid paper, written recto only, many horizontal and vertical cancellations, pinhole left top corner. This sheet has 1797 watermark.}}

\footnote{\textit{Dep. b.228/4, quarto fold, 4pp and marginalia, Godwin hand, pinhole in right top corner would have pinned the fold shut. This quarto fold has been placed at the back of the Bodleian folder and this reflects a difficulty in deciding its place in the correspondence. Godwin's reference to 'what passed at our last interview' indicates that it was written in London, after Godwin's return from the 5 June visit to Bath; and contra-indicates his receiving any letter from Harriet in the interim. No evidence that this was posted.}}

\footnote{\textit{A looping line traced around the phrase 'in the first instance' shows Godwin revising his draft.}}

\footnote{Not for the first time, Godwin's negative constructions lead to confusion. Presumably, 'I should not fear but that your partiality ... would ripen' etc.}}
incidence of the masculine singular pronoun.

ixviii Probably, the interview in Bath on 5 June.

ixix Godwin thematizes Harriet Lee’s ‘silence’, not always consistently. In the drafts of cMay he wrote: ‘How wonderfully you contrive to torment me! How numerous are the conjectures I have formed respecting your silence!’ But elsewhere he proposed that ‘Silence, if you please, shall merely pass for the symbol indication of a mind not absolutely determined against me’; and in another undated draft: ‘If, to a letter so unambiguous as this, you return no answer, I shall conclude that you are not utterly resolved determined against the renewal of my visit. Yet I would that you would answer me by something more pleasing encouraging than silence’.

x Several sentences repeated from drafts of cMay. Other indications place this after 5 June.

xii Godwin’s marginal postscript on the last page of the letter continues in the lefthand margin of the first page, above the opening address ‘Dear Madam’.

xiii The ‘over anxious retrospect to this point’, probably warns Lee against enquiring into Godwin’s financial prospects.

xii Dep. b.228/4, quarto fold, wove paper, Durham & Co 1794 watermark. The cancelled date 17th is the only blot in an elegant script.

xiv Harriet Lee’s letter, dated eleven days after the interview of 5 June, refers to ‘our last Conversation’, but her emphatic, ‘permit me to repeat’ suggests that Godwin has posted at least one letter of ‘appeal’ in the interim, including a promise to ‘await the award of time’ as in the draft version (above).

xv There is a plural apostrophe to ‘Brothers’, but Lee is referring to her brother-in-law, Anne’s husband.

xvi ‘My elder sister’, Sophia Lee.

xiv Godwin hand, single quarto sheet, laid paper, no watermark, written recto and verso.

xvii Godwin’s aspersions on ‘bigots’ and ‘bigotry’ are retorted against by Lee in the ‘Saturday morning’ letter (below).

xviii ‘his choice’ i.e. the creator’s choice.

xix Foregoing paragraph heavily cancelled with vertical penstrokes.

xxvi The ‘attack upon a judge’ is Godwin’s Cursory Strictures, upon the Charge ... of Lord Justice Eyre, published 21 Oct. 1794. See 3: law.

xxvii ‘Our contract’ consists of Lee’s concession in her letter of 16 June that ‘the award of time’ might bring about an understanding. The ‘conversation’ probably took place at one or more of the meetings in London in July.

xxvi The foregoing paragraph cancelled by heavy vertical penstrokes.

xxviii Uppercase initial A is Godwin hand, [1r] of quarto fold. This document has first few letters of some words
in left margin effaced and may be a letterpress copy. The materials set out under the letters A B C D duplicate with variations those on the quarto fold draft beginning 'Let me first state the quantity of difference' (above).

Blurred copy, perhaps 'for fear that'.

'B' is Godwin hand, [2r] of same quarto fold as 'A'.

Godwin hand, [1r] of another quarto fold. This quarto fold bears the relation of a substantial footnote and appendix to 'my letter regarding our difference of opinion', which itself consists of drafts on two quarto folds, beginning 'Let me first state the quantity of difference between us' (shown above).

Godwin's draft, cancelled with vertical slashes, breaks off and resumes on same page after a blank space.

b.228/4, Godwin hand, two unnumbered sheets, written recto and verso, heavily cancelled, contain overlapping versions of Godwin's argument with Harriet's Christian beliefs, and the conditions she places on their correspondence. The paragraph beginning 'But I have done' is a later addition. This material is presented as part of a letter from Godwin to Harriet and conjecturally dated '[June 1798]' by Paul (CKP i 304-7). Cf. (below), Lee's letter of 31 July: 'You distress me, Sir, extremely by again agitating a question...'. which supports Paul's conjecture that she had received at least one of these drafts before the end of July. Another sheet beginning on recto page: 'What you have done is in the genuine style of the eleventh & twelfth centuries' is a revised version of the two shown here, and is shown (below) in the context assigned it by Paul's conjectural dating to '[early August 1798]'. I cannot adjudicate Paul's decision to separate these three alternate versions of the same (or similar) arguments by three months, June to August.

Uppercase initial 'A' in Godwin's hand. Godwin's use of alphabetical points suggests that he is rehearsing arguments, before posting a final version to Lee. The following paragraph cancelled by horizontal and vertical slashes.

Paul amends Godwin's abbreviation, to read: 'with either deism or Christianity' (CKP i 306).

For Godwin's 'the jargon of priests' Paul substitutes: 'I know it has been fashionable among divines' (CKP i 306). This substitution has no warrant in Godwin's script.

The writing breaks off mid-line at 'assign to'; the paragraph is cancelled with a heavy vertical line.

This final paragraph is written without cancellations below a blank space and appears to have been added as a final statement summarising three versions in of Godwin's argument that 'What you have done is in the genuine style of the eleventh and twelfth centuries'. St Clair notes another visit to London by Harriet Lee in Jan. 1799, when she met Godwin and he again wrote to her (C204, and n17). This paragraph may have been added at that date.

Harriet Lee responds to Godwin's complaint that she has been swayed by the 'advice' of 'others'. Harriet retorts that she values Sophia's opinions as she knows them to be Sophia's settled convictions, it being unlikely 'that I should cherish opinions she has not entertain'd long before'. Cf. Harriet Lee letter of 7 Aug. (below) 'on the subject of my Sister's silence'. 'I have taken from my Sister the unpleasant task' suggests that Godwin had written to Sophia Lee and this is confirmed in his letter of no date (below), where Godwin mentions 'writing at the same time to your sister'.

Refers to Godwin's letter c 6 June: 'among those who personally know me, the respect & love I have obtained ...

Godwin hand, single quarto sheet, laid paper, written recto and verso, no watermark. Large initial A at top of recto page; large initial B in middle of verso page. Paul conjecturally dates this document, described as 'the following extracts', to '[early August 1798]' (CKP i 308-10).
Godwin's use of the term 'deism', interchangeably with 'theism', is idiosyncratic; contemporary usage opposed them, equating deism with scepticism and scientific materialism.

During 1798, Godwin was holding discussions with the Rev. Thomas Malthus, who was writing his First Essay on the Principle of Population, published that year.

The slippage in pronouns here indicates that the hypothetical description of the just man has slipped into special pleading in his own behalf with Harriet Lee (or a hypothetical female interlocutor).

Godwin recites JHWH's questions to Job (Job 38: 4-6; 21-2); and adds his own concluding sentence.

Godwin canvasses the topic of 'the retirement & peculiarity of your situation' on two other sheets in the folder. See above, letter dated '[June 1798]' by Paul (CKP i 304-7). I take Godwin to refer to Harriet Lee's being unmarried at the age of forty-one, residing with her sisters, and teaching in a provincial girls' school.

This is Godwin's keynote statement, that a woman's assent to or rejection of a man's proposal of marriage passes judgment on his standing in a male meritocratic order.
Lee protests at Godwin's instructing her to 'suppose that the person whose visits you have lately had the occasion to receive is dead', in his letter 'I sit down now as a disinterested friend'.

Not known which of Godwin's earlier letters he refers to as 'the letter I gave you'. It may be the one to which Harriet's 'Saturday morning' refers in its first sentence 'the frame of mind your letter announces', since she was provoked by that to write: 'I tell you we ought not to meet again'.

The three-way exchange about Godwin's 'personal qualities', like the three-way exchange about 'bigotry' in the following sentence, places this letter of Godwin's last in the series.

Cf. Lee to Godwin 'Saturday' [n. d.] (above) 'while you accuse me of bigotry'.

Cf. Lee 'Saturday morning' (above), requesting 'that my letter will never meet any eye but your own'. Harriet Lee lived until 1851 and this pledge by Godwin may have entered into MWS deliberations about what letters should be published in the Life of William Godwin. No correspondence located between MWS and Harriet Lee. In contrast to this, MWS letter April 1836 to Mary Hays (Bennett, ii, 270), undertakes to return Hays's letters to Godwin to her. See 5: women.

endnotes

cxvii Dep. c.507/6, single sheet, laid paper, folded, seal, ‘Mr Godwin’ on outer, no watermark, pinhole on left top corner. An undated formal note addressed from Belvidere House, Bath, where the Lee sisters ran an exclusive boarding school for girls. Godwin visited Bath between 4 and 14 March 1798, and again between 5 and 10 June 1798 (Duke reel 2, Godwin’s Journal). Harriet must have written this note, perhaps for delivery by hand, on one or other of these two occasions, as, according to St Clair, '[Godwin] was seeing her in London in January 1799 and several letters followed, but there is no indication that he again visited her in Bath' (C204, and n17).

cxviii Dep. c.507/6, quarto fold, laid paper, no watermark, pinhole on left top corner. Letter of 2 June 1799 from Sophia Lee to Godwin, after he had complained in a letter of 1 June that a character in a tale by Sophia Lee in Canterbury Tales iii, 1798, was pointed at himself. St Clair does not cite a shelf number for Godwin's 'letter of complaint' on June 1, and I have not sighted it. He identifies the offending phrase 'a philosopher of the new school' in The Clergyman's Tale 1832 [Standard Novels Edition] (C207, and n25).

cxix The 'nice question' may refer to Sophia's influence with Harriet when Godwin proposed to Harriet in 1798. The Lee sisters had a habit of interchanging grammatical third and first person in their letters.

cxx Written sideways on second sheet of quarto fold, a postscript of compliments & thanks from Harriet Lee for Godwin's 'sincere' opinion of her story (unspecified).


cxxii The only son of the novel’s protagonist Reginald de St Leon prefers to be known by his mother’s name as Charles de Damville. His father’s ‘dream’ of a military career for Charles in Chapter XIV becomes a reality through Charles’s own efforts in the final chapter.

cxxiii Dep. c.507/6, quarto fold, laid paper, no watermark, pinhole on left top corner. This letter from Harriet Lee dated 8 December has no outer, so it may have been posted inside the letter from Sophia Lee dated 7 December.
Harriet Lee praises the character of Marguerite de Damville, the longsuffering wife of the obsessional alchemist St Leon, but finds ‘the least pleasing one of the whole’ to be the account in the third volume of Marguerite’s death ‘the victim of her disconsolate and repentant husband’s unhallowed wealth’ (St Leon 1994: 295). Mary Shelley had inherited the tradition that Godwin modelled the character of Marguerite as a tribute to Mary Wollstonecraft. Accordingly, Pamela Clemit’s introduction to her 1994 edition describes the novel as Godwin’s ‘most overt tribute to Wollstonecraft’s thought’ (Introduction, St Leon: xv). Clemit quotes a letter from Holcroft to Godwin, written from Germany in September 1800: ‘Knowing the model after which you drew, as often I recollected it, my heart ached while I read’ (xvi, citing CKP ii 25).