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NEW AGENDA

Nineteenth-Century London in William Godwin's Diary

James Grande

In *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, William Godwin identifies 'romantic notions of pastoral life and the golden age' as one of the vices of his age.¹ A bias towards the pastoral has also been among the most ingrained habits of Romantic criticism and a literary history traditionally written from a Lake School perspective. However, the metropolitan contexts of Romanticism are beginning to attract greater critical attention and the Leverhulme-funded publication of Godwin's diary presents an opportunity for further study of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London.² Godwin's writings never celebrate London in the manner of William Hazlitt's and Charles Lamb's essays, yet his diary confirms the centrality of the city to his writings and those of the circle of writers around him. Godwin lived in London from the age of 25 until his death in 1836, a few months after his eightieth birthday, and – with the exception of a six-week stay in Ireland in 1800 – never travelled abroad, leaving the city at most for two or three weeks a year to visit Bath, Norwich or other parts of Britain. The diary gives a meticulous account of five decades of metropolitan experience, recording daily calls, meals and conversation with London's most prominent writers, scientists, politicians and artists, as well as criminal trials, parliamentary debates, research in the British Museum reading room and half a century's devoted attendance at London's playhouses. Its exhaustive record of Godwin's life presents a unique and tantalizing opportunity to map the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writer's circulation through the city.

The Romantic city has increasingly been read by scholars such as Mark Philp, Jon Mee and Gillian Russell through the practices of urban sociability, producing a

I would like to thank the Bodleian Library, British Library and library of Nuffield College, Oxford for permission to quote from manuscripts in their possession.

1. Mark Philp, ed., *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, 7 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), III, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1st ed., 1793), 43.
2. 'William Godwin's Diary: Reconstructing a Social and Political Culture 1788–1836', funded by the Leverhulme Trust and led by Dr Mark Philp, Dr David O'Shaughnessy and Professor Victoria Myers, with the digital guidance of Dr James Cummings and the research assistance of Kathryn Barush and James Grande. This electronic edition of the diary will be published in October 2010. See 'William Godwin's Diary' at <<http://godwindiary.politics.ox.ac.uk>> for more information on the project [accessed online 10 April 2010].

sophisticated understanding of the way that intellectual networks operated in the metropolis.³ However, John Barrell has recently warned against identifying London too closely with the radical public sphere and challenged the way that we now view the networks associated with Godwin and the publisher Joseph Johnson:

we have come to regard the Godwin and Johnson circles as constituting a radical critical public sphere; but loyalists would have seen them as precisely the kind of unpropertied, disaffiliated, extra-institutional intellectuals whom Burke held in large part responsible for initiating the revolution in France.

Drawing attention to Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's frequent changes of address, he places them in opposition to the broader nineteenth-century experience of the city, arguing that,

the effect of this constant mobility may have been that, though they lived *in* London they were not *of* it, except in so far as London meant to them the circles, with their very specific character, in which they socialized.

Barrell portrays a restless, rootless class of writers, 'inhabiting a city of ideas superimposed upon and occluding the city of brick and stone and its strange inhabitants' and detached from the mainstream of metropolitan experience:

London in the 1790s seems to produce, and be produced by, a new kind of metropolitan intellectual, marginalized by its economic and political divisions, alienated from its commercial values, wandering its chartered streets with an appalled sense of estrangement.⁴

There is much that is indisputable about this picture and in *The Enquirer* essays Godwin betrays his allegiance to a class of earnest, unworldly intellectuals, arguing that, 'the genuine wealth of man is leisure, when it meets with a disposition to improve it. All other riches are of petty and inconsiderable value'. He goes on to conduct a lofty survey of trades and professions, all of which he finds to have a negative impact on moral character.⁵ His close friend William Hazlitt also suggests the exclusivity of Godwin's circle, writing in *The Spirit of the Age* that Godwin's

best moments are with an intimate acquaintance or two, when he gossips in a fine vein about old authors In common company, Mr. Godwin either goes to sleep himself, or sets others to sleep.⁶

3. See Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986); Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite, eds, *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, eds, *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1789–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Gillian Russell, *Women Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

4. John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 72–74.

5. Philp, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, V (*The Enquirer*), 'Of Riches and Poverty', pp. 150–53 (p. 153), and 'Of Tradesmen and Professions', pp. 171–83.

6. William Hazlitt, 'William Godwin', in *The Spirit of the Age* (Grasmere: The Wordsworth Trust, 2004), pp. 105–18 (p. 117).

'Common' is a key term for Hazlitt, always deliberately placed, and John Forster's later record of a visit to Godwin in 1832 suggests how uncommon Godwin appeared to be:

He sits in his little library in Gower Place surrounded by musty folios Quartos & octavos . . . His face is singularly fine – with a mixture of earnest intellectual expression and dignity to a degree I never saw before . . . He is all intellect.⁷

Dickens's future biographer was struck by how extraordinary and anachronistic a figure Godwin cut in 1830s London, an 'old philosopher', 'not less venerable' than his books.

However, Godwin's diary offers evidence to refute some parts of Barrell's argument and, in particular, the claim that members of the Godwin and Johnson circles 'seem to have associated almost exclusively with other members of those circles'.⁸ Work towards an edition of the diary has already catalogued over 60,000 instances of names and identified over 1000 different individuals who appear in the pages of the diary, representing an enormous variety of classes and professions. One of the stated aims of the project is to 'decipher a remarkably detailed map of radical intellectual and political life in the 1790s', yet the rest of this article will move beyond the 1790s to look at some of the more unexpected ways that metropolitan radicalism and reform emerge in the diary post-1800.⁹ Apparently opaque, single-word entries can work to complicate our map of Godwinian London, extending it beyond the conversations of a detached intellectual elite to include a broader range of urban experience. The few examples discussed below suggest that there is much work still to be done to uncover Godwin's London.

Godwin has often been presented as, from around 1800, 'a man in retreat, socially and psychologically'.¹⁰ The altered political climate conferred on him a notoriety which greatly diminished the potential audience for his writings and, as a result, destroyed his income. To provide for a family that now included five children, Godwin and his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont, established the Juvenile Library bookshop, registered first under the name of their manager, Thomas Hodgkins, and then under 'M.J. Godwin & Co.' because of Godwin's own Jacobin infamy. Publishing children's books by themselves and their friends – Godwin's appearing under several different pseudonyms – forced Godwin to become a businessman as well as an intellectual. The diary records countless exchanges with friends who became embroiled in his finances, including the London radical Francis Place. Place's Charing Cross tailor's shop was always more profitable than Godwin's bookshop and their correspondence shows Place advising Godwin that the 'present state of society compels one to have a considerable share of worldlymindedness, very destructive of virtue, yet very necessary' – advice Godwin was struggling late to learn.¹¹ In reply,

7. John Forster to James Whiteside, 31 December 1832, quoted in Kenneth Neill Cameron and Donald H. Reiman, eds, *Shelley and His Circle, 1773–1822*, 10 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961–2002), II, 13.

8. Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism*, pp. 72–73.

9. 'William Godwin's Diary' at <<http://godwindiary.politics.ox.ac.uk/about/>> [accessed online 4 March 2010] (see note 2).

10. Cameron and Reiman, *Shelley and His Circle*, II, 14.

11. Francis Place to William Godwin, Charing Cross, 28 November 1812, British Library Place Papers Add. 35145.

Godwin applied the principles of *Political Justice* to his current position, reasoning on the necessity of his case and then telling Place in increasingly hysterical terms that a small loan

would make all the difference, whether I shall get to the month of August next in a state of comfort & intellectual power, or in a state of mere vegetable existence, with all sorts of anxieties and mental distractions to boot.¹²

As the pained exchange continued, Place cited *Political Justice* back at Godwin and Godwin's letters became even more anguished.

Oh, Place! Why am I not a young man! & why have my habits been literary! Nothing can be more certain than that man in the prime of his life, & with habits of business, would get through, quickly & clearly, such a difficulty as mine, which, after all, is merely, how money may be raised on the most valid security, & in what way the small period which may necessarily intervene is to be provided for. Shall I be torn to pieces & destroyed, merely because I am not a young man, & because I employed my youth in endeavouring with my pen to promote the welfare of my species? May I not reasonably say, come to my aid, all ye that love literature, & honest endeavours, & do not suffer me to perish, merely because I endeavoured well, & in part succeeded?¹³

Place eventually gave up, convinced that Godwin was not being honest in his accounting. His position was soon supplied by Percy Shelley's similar combination of political sympathy, financial assistance and eventual exasperation.

After 1800 Godwin was unable to afford the life of a free-floating intellectual and the diary shows how much time was spent instead on making calls and writing letters to try and raise the money needed to keep the bookshop afloat. Equally significant to the changed pattern of his life was the location of the Juvenile Library, which, after its first two years in Hanway Street, moved in 1807 to 41 Skinner Street. It remained here for the next 15 years, tying Godwin to the centre of the City. He was conveniently placed at the heart of literary London, close to Fleet Street and the booksellers of Paternoster Row. However, Skinner Street was also caught between Smithfield livestock market to the north and three major prisons to the south: Newgate, the Fleet and the Old Bailey. If he had ever been oblivious to the more everyday realities of the city, he was unable to remain so any longer, a fact which emerges obliquely throughout the later years of the diary. The terse nature of the diary, largely consisting of lists of people, places and texts, forces us to work to decipher Godwin's record of London. However, decoding the diary provides a much more detailed account of Godwin's life after 1800 – decades which have been largely neglected in Godwin scholarship. Enigmatic, even single-word entries suggest a greater absorption in the everyday life of the city than Hazlitt and Forster's portraits suggest, while the lists of names show Godwin's contact with a new generation of more popular radicals. Spanning the philosophic conversations of 1790s radicals and

12. Godwin to Place, Skinner Street, 29 November 1812, British Library Place Papers Add. 35145.

13. Godwin to Place, South End, Essex, 5 September 1813, British Library Place Papers Add. 35145.

the popular radicalism that emerged in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the diary provides a new perspective on Godwin's life and the metropolitan critical public sphere in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The examples of Godwin's engagement with nineteenth-century London given here are all drawn from around 1810 – a critical juncture in metropolitan radicalism – and are presented in the belief that similar examples can be found throughout the diary.

Godwin's unpublished manuscript fragment on the history of London includes, with a slightly wistful tone, 'Smithfield paved 1614, a large pleasant place ... when men might look without interruption towards Shoreditch, Highgate, St Giles's, & the Strand.'¹⁴ When the livestock market was first held in the early seventeenth century the site was outside the city, yet as the city expanded it slowly engulfed Smithfield – with the result that thousands of cattle and sheep now had to be driven through narrow streets into the centre of London. Often the animals collapsed with exhaustion before reaching Smithfield and were slaughtered in the streets around the Juvenile Library. Those that did make it were forced with four thousand other beasts into what had once been, but was certainly no longer, 'a large pleasant place'. Godwin's diary for March and April 1810 contains several references to the market: 'Write on Smithfield, 4pp', 'Smithfield, 10pp', 'Smithfield, for M P, 4pp'.¹⁵ The initials in the last of these entries give the clue for the *Morning Post* newspaper and two days after the entry an anonymous letter appears in that newspaper, part of which reads:

SIR—You perhaps will not refuse me the favour of a small place in your extensively circulated Paper, for a few plain observations upon a subject at present under discussion, and which is deeply interesting to the quiet and beauty of the metropolis, I mean the *removal of Smithfield-market* It is the province of Parliament to consider whether the existence of a great and growing cattle-market in the heart of the metropolis is an evil that calls for their interference If there is any thing in a great metropolis which renders the air pestilential, which tends to destroy the bodies or corrupt the morals of its inhabitants, a genuine legislature will not inquire how this came, but will apply itself to correct the mischief There is further a fallacy in the phrase, that we, the neighbours of the *nuisance* remonstrated against, '*came to the nuisance*.' The people of London did not *come* to the narrow passages and pestilential air of the metropolis . . . they were *born on the spot*, and they *found it*.

The letter is simply signed 'A LOVER OF TRANQUIL IMPROVEMENTS', however, the references to writing the letter in the diary allow us to infer Godwin's authorship.¹⁶ This previously unattributed letter, published anonymously in a trenchantly conservative newspaper, identifies Godwin with a campaign which would continue until the livestock market was finally moved by the City of London Corporation to Copenhagen Fields, Islington, in 1855. Anticipating the criticisms of Smithfield made much later by Dickens, Godwin's letter draws attention to the 'narrow passages and pestilential air' of this part of the city to make the connection

14. Abinger Papers, Dep. b. 229/7, Bodleian Library.

15. Godwin's diary, Abinger Papers, Bodleian Library, 23 March 1810, 31 March 1810 and 4 April 1810. Subsequent references will be given within the text.

16. *Morning Post* (London), 6 April 1810, p. 4.

between moral and physical contagion. The market will ‘destroy the bodies’ and ‘corrupt the morals of its inhabitants’ – and would also have damaged business at the Juvenile Library. The letter shows Godwin’s response to a place that dominated the area around Skinner Street and sees him intervening on a subject of practical reform. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the material problems of nineteenth-century London cut across our periodization of Romantic and Victorian culture, and how a focus on urban space can open up the lived context of radical culture.

Godwin’s neat lists of texts and exhaustive cataloguing of people and conversations promises the tantalizing possibility of comprehensively mapping the intellectual life of Godwinian London – a fantasy of reason, to borrow the title of one biography – yet his letter to the *Morning Post* places him in the more disordered world of early nineteenth-century London and, in particular, the area around Smithfield.¹⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft’s well-known links with Stoke Newington and Godwin’s 1790s residence in Somers Town – then a new development on the northern fringe of London – ensure that we often place Godwin’s circle a couple of miles north of the City. However, in the years after 1800, Godwin’s London was increasingly based in the City and centred on the area surrounding Skinner Street, including Smithfield market and Newgate prison. This part of London resisted attempts to map it, as Franco Moretti observes:

In early nineteenth-century maps, detail is rapidly lost as the map moves away from the West End; the London maps published by Bowles (1823), Wyld (1825), and Fraser (1830), for instance, all agree on the number of streets that intersect Bond Street, or lead into Grosvenor Square – but they are in total disagreement on those that lead into Smithfield (13, 9, 10), or on the alleys around Saffron Hill (in Bowles, one third fewer than in the others), or on the number of lanes that run into the river between Blackfriars and Southwark Bridge (9, 12, 16).¹⁸

Moretti’s comparison of silver-fork and Newgate novels leads him to conclude that ‘if a novel focuses on one half of London, it simply cannot *see* the other half, nor represent the crossing of the border between them’, a gulf that he does not find bridged in the nineteenth-century novel until *Our Mutual Friend*.¹⁹

However, outside the world of the novel, Godwin’s diary records his movements between the City and the West End. On both Saturday 7 April and Sunday 8 April 1810 the diary records a ‘walk to Piccadilly’, the first with his student Thomas Turner, when he records meeting the family of John Frank Newton, ‘vegetarian, naturist and Zoroastrian’ (and later a friend of Shelley), and the second with Mary Jane.²⁰ He does not mention the political significance of these seemingly innocuous walks, although his record of public events provides some clues: ‘Committal of Burdet [*sic*] voted, 189 to 152’ (5 April), ‘Burdet [*sic*] to the Tower’ (9 April),

17. Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

18. Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 83, n. 5.

19. Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, p. 86.

20. Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), p. 174.

referring to the radical MP Sir Francis Burdett, who Godwin had met occasionally at Horne Tooke's Wimbledon dinners between 1797 and 1807. Burdett had used a letter published in Cobbett's *Political Register* to attack the ban on reporters during the debate on the disastrous handling of the Walcheren expedition, in which 4000 soldiers had died, mostly from malaria, typhus, typhoid and dysentery. His fellow MPs deemed that he had violated parliamentary privilege and voted for his committal to the Tower of London for the rest of the parliamentary session. Burdett then resisted the speaker's warrant and barricaded himself in his Piccadilly house, while a large crowd gathered outside in his support. As J. Ann Hone relates, his committal 'produced a national outcry and the most widespread demand for parliamentary reform that had been heard for many years', with protests over the weekend of 7–8 April threatening to develop into riots on the scale of 1780.²¹ Burdett was eventually carried to the Tower after troops broke into his house on 9 April and found him – in a brilliant piece of political theatre and propaganda – listening to his son read Magna Carta. The references to Piccadilly in the diary show that Godwin took to the streets in support of Burdett – walking from the City to the West End on both days of this tense weekend to join the crowds protesting outside Burdett's house. Cobbett, taking his cue from 'the people in the streets', described the protests as 'the Piccadilly expedition', parodying the Walcheren expedition and suggesting the distance between the centres of popular radicalism in the City and the Piccadilly home of Sir Francis Burdett, a paternalistic champion of parliamentary reform.²²

Later in 1810 William Cobbett was himself sent to prison, having been found guilty of seditious libel and sentenced to two years in Newgate. The charge related to an angry article he had written criticizing the flogging of soldiers by German militiamen, yet this was widely seen as a pretext for prosecuting a radical journalist who had formed a dangerous alliance with Burdett. Godwin's philosophic radicalism is usually viewed as far removed from the more populist platform of Cobbett and Burdett and Godwin himself is often presented as politically quiescent in the years after 1800. However, Godwin's diary shows that he visited Cobbett in Newgate on four separate occasions in 1811:

[24 October 1811] Eik^s, p. 30. Call on Curran, at Chantry's; adv. A C: call, w. Curran, on Cobbet; adv. Cochrane: theatre, w. d^o: sup at Bedford (conference): T T sups.²³

21. J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796–1821* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 180 and 187.

22. *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 28 April 1810.

23. Many parts of these entries are obscure, but a partial gloss of Godwin's meetings is possible. On 24 October, after his customary morning reading, Godwin meets the lawyer and radical John Philpot Curran (1750–1817), along with his daughter, the painter Amelia Curran (1775–1847) and then with Curran visits Cobbett in Newgate. There they unexpectedly find ('adv') one of Cobbett's political allies, the radical naval officer Thomas Cochrane (1775–1860), who in 1809 had won one of his most spectacular victories with the use of fireships and explosion-vessels against the French fleet at the Battle of Basque Roads. Godwin sees a play with Curran, 'sup at Bedford (conference)' seems to refer to a meeting at a public house and then Godwin's protégé Thomas Turner sups at Skinner Street.

[29 October 1811] Averroes, çala. Red Cross Library: call ~~w.~~ on Cobbett, w. Curran: dine, w. Curran, at Hatchet's; adv. Jennings. Coleridge, J J Morgan, & Burr call ^{na}24.

[3 December 1811] Write to Taylor, Norwich. Call on Lambert & Place: R T calls: call on Cobbett; adv. Walker & Wood.²⁵

[18 December 1811] Legend, 2 pp. Cid, p. 194: H. de Qualité, p 172. Call on Morgan (R C L), Faulder ⁿ & Cobbett; adv. Margrove & Walker.²⁶

Neither set of biographers has commented on these meetings, there is no reference to Newgate in the diary entries and only the dates of Cobbett's imprisonment allow these meetings to be traced to Newgate. The entries show that Godwin was first taken to visit Cobbett by the Irish lawyer and radical John Philpot Curran and then made later visits without Curran. Among the people he met visiting Cobbett was Alderman Matthew Wood, a figure of great significance in London radicalism, and the breadth of Godwin's London is suggested by the entry for 29 October, which shows Godwin visiting Cobbett in Newgate with Curran and then, after he had returned home to Skinner Street, receiving a call from Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The diary gives no clue as to the subjects Godwin and Cobbett might have discussed, although it could be significant that when Cobbett was first imprisoned in Newgate his wife took lodgings in Skinner Street and so for a few weeks became Godwin's neighbour. While lodging in Skinner Street, Nancy Cobbett suffered a miscarriage, which Cobbett would always blame on the stress caused by the trial and her move from Hampshire to London.

Cobbett's daughter later recalled the effects of two years imprisonment in Newgate:

Papa's health did not suffer in prison, but his temper did. He left it an altered man in many respects. Miss Mitford says truly that he never talked politics in society, never broached them at least. After Newgate he talked of little else. He was so angry at being so ill-used.²⁷

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24. Godwin visits the dissenting library in Red Cross Street – now Dr Williams's Library – and then visits Cobbett, again with Curran, who he dines with afterwards. Back at Skinner Street, he receives calls from Coleridge, the Bristol lawyer John Morgan (d. 1819) – a friend of Coleridge – and Aaron Burr (1756–1836), who had been Thomas Jefferson's Vice-President from 1801 to 1805.
 25. Godwin calls on the radical and businessman Francis Place (1771–1854) and the financier John Lambert, both of whom were involved in an attempt to re-finance the Juvenile Library. Godwin receives a call from the Norwich printer, naturalist and Unitarian Richard Taylor (1781–1858) and then visits Cobbett, this time without Curran. At Newgate he also meets Matthew Wood (1768–1843), sheriff of London and a prominent figure in liberal city politics, who would later become lord mayor and MP for the City of London.
 26. Godwin calls on the Welsh librarian and dissenting minister Thomas Morgan (1752–1821) at the Red Cross Library before visiting Cobbett in Newgate for the final time.
 27. Quoted in Richard Ingrams, *The Life and Adventures of William Cobbett* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 117.

His letters show how much he suffered from being separated from family and rural life in Hampshire and give detailed instructions for how the farm should be managed in his absence. They refer to ‘the number of people that are crowding in’ to visit him – which included Major Cartwright, Thomas Cochrane, Henry ‘Orator’ Hunt and representatives from 197 clubs and societies around Britain – yet their focus is on effecting an imaginative escape from Newgate.²⁸ During his imprisonment, he exercised each morning on the roof of the prison – in view of the executions – by acting out the motions of agricultural labour and in a typical letter to his son expressed his hope that Nancy ‘rode into the coppices and looked at the roads; for those are the most beautiful things in the world. Those are the things that I think most about.’²⁹ Two years confinement in Newgate contributed to his demonization of London as the ‘great Wen’: literally, a boil on the face of the country, collecting the noxious matter of the country and spreading infection around the body politic. When he came to write *Rural Rides*, London cannot be mapped alongside the southern counties of England in Cobbett’s elaborate descriptive prose and instead appears out of place, erupting into the text in passages of angry polemic. When he returns to London at the end of 1825, his ‘Rides’ are presented as a form of inoculation, which have ‘laid in a stock of health for the winter, sufficient to enable us to withstand the suffocation of this smoking and stinking WEN’.³⁰ Cobbett’s portrayal of London as the ‘great Wen’ is one of the most influential representations of London in the period and helps to balance the celebratory accounts of the city given by members of Godwin’s circle: for Cobbett, radical cultures were more likely to be fostered by the countryside of southern England than the corrupt city. However, Godwin’s diary reveals that Cobbett and Godwin’s very different kinds of radicalism intersected on four separate occasions in Newgate prison.

Godwin’s mother, Anne – never fully recovered from her son’s decision to exchange East Anglian dissent for radical atheism in London – expressed another nightmarish vision of the city, fearing ‘London streets will be fill’d with begging Godwins when I am gone’.³¹ Her fears proved fairly accurate until 1830, when Godwin found a government sinecure in the Palace of Westminster, and it is perhaps only due to his chronic shortage of money that Godwin remained tied to the City and that his diary now acts as such a useful source on early nineteenth-century London. Godwin’s *Morning Post* letter on the ‘narrow passages and pestilential air’ around Smithfield, tending to ‘destroy the bodies’ and ‘corrupt the morals’ of Londoners, shows, no less than Cobbett’s image of the ‘great Wen’, how radicals could view London as a nexus of infection and a place of dangerous opacity, as well as a city of theatres, pleasure gardens and vibrant intellectual exchange. Although the diary

28. Cobbett to Frederick Reid, Newgate, 28 June 1812 in the Cobbett papers, Nuffield College, Oxford.

29. Cobbett to William Cobbett, Jr, Newgate, 12 June 1811, Cobbett papers, Nuffield.

30. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ed. by Ian Dyck (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 259.

31. Quoted in Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason*, p. 225.

promises to offer a comprehensive map of literary London in the period, it also shows an awareness of how the city resisted this mapping – an awareness shared by both radicals and conservatives, with Shelley describing in ‘Peter Bell the Third’ how, ‘Hell is a city much like London—/A populous and a smoky city’.³² Unlike Shelley or Cobbett, Godwin never went into exile but remained in London to record the disorder and confusion of city life.

Given his own sense of the city’s opacity, perhaps we should not expect to read in the diary an authoritative map of nineteenth-century London, but instead look for the ground-level, pedestrian perspective theorized by Michel de Certeau and usefully invoked by Lynda Nead in her study of *Victorian Babylon*:

De Certeau opposes two views of urban space: the panoptic, aerial viewpoint of the mapmakers and city-planners and the perception of the walker at ground level. The aerial viewpoint articulates a totalising mastery of space; it renders the city legible and comprehensible. At street level, however, space cannot be controlled in a single gaze, but is apprehended through a rhetoric of walking and its associated symbolic mechanisms of dreams, memories and fables. The poetic space of the pedestrian is, for de Certeau, a space of resistance, which defies the attempts of the planners and improvers to discipline the contingencies of everyday life.³³

Individual days, cryptic entries and lists of names in Godwin’s diary can offer a comparable ‘space of resistance’, giving a ‘street level’ view of the city that challenges received ideas about London in the period. Godwin’s Skinner Street address ensured that he remained mired in the everyday life of early nineteenth-century London, with his diary recording the violent riots and punishments which on occasion took place literally outside his front door: on 2 December 1816, he enters ‘Riot at Becksmith’s’ after the Spa Fields rioters looted a gunsmith’s on Skinner Street on their way to the Tower. On 12 March 1817, he records ‘Execution of Cashman’ – not one of the Spencean Philanthropist leaders of the riots, followers of the agrarian revolutionary Thomas Spence – but a drunk, penniless Irish sailor who had got caught up in the riots and was the only person to be convicted. Cashman was sentenced to be executed outside Beckwith’s on Skinner Street, the last time in England that anyone was condemned to hang at the scene of their crime. Godwin’s detailing of the places and events around Skinner Street and his intervention on Smithfield market suggests his immersion in the everyday life of the city, while his visits to Cobbett in Newgate and support for Burdett in Piccadilly suggest the cross-fertilization between philosophic and popular radicalism. While this article has focused on only a few examples around

32. Shelley, ‘Peter Bell the Third’, in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd edn (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), p. 36.

33. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), chap. 7; Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 7.

1810, the very different experiences of London recorded in the diary force us to re-think the relationship between the conversations at private dinners and the protests in the streets in order to locate and better understand the nineteenth-century metropolitan critical public sphere.

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