

MANDEVILLE, MOURNING  
AND NATIONAL MYTHS  
William Godwin's Civil War Novel  
and the Use of History

*Richard Gough Thomas*



*MANDEVILLE, a Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England* (1817) is William Godwin's most conspicuously gothic novel. Morbid and stormy at almost every turn, the narrator's downward spiral is the very picture of narrative excess. John Gibson Lockhart reflected that all of Godwin's protagonists were in some way maniacs but that Mandeville was, 'more essentially and entirely a madman than either of his brethren.'<sup>1</sup> The novel's general atmosphere of gloom is punctuated with moments of the wild and grotesque, sometimes bordering on camp, yet this should not obscure a densely allusive and historically specific text that attempts to harness the gothic mode to depict the aftereffects of societal trauma. Charles Mandeville's journey from war orphan to scarred, bitter misanthrope is the author's window into the lasting effects of religious conflict on English culture.

Central to Godwin's novel is an indictment of English sectarianism, turning the anti-Catholic logic of the early gothic on its head by depicting a Protestant education as the seed of irrationality that ultimately leads to the narrator's downfall. The author had engaged with the issue of sectarianism before, albeit obliquely, in the drama *Abbas, King of Persia* (1801). By contrast, *Mandeville* is steeped in English (and Irish) history—most specifically the cultural memory of the English Dissenters, the religious sphere in which Godwin himself was raised. The Dissenters—a catch-all term used in the author's lifetime to describe all English Protestants who refused to accept the authority of the Church of England—were a community held together (despite their theological differences) by their grievances with both the Catholic and Anglican churches.

*Mandeville* is set during the Interregnum, the years between the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the restoration of Charles II in 1660, a key period in the history of English Dissent. We see Godwin's fascination with the civil war period throughout his work, from incidental hints in the names of fictional characters (Falkland, Fleetwood) to his later *History of the Commonwealth* and biography of Cromwell (1824–28). When he proposed *Mandeville* to the publisher Archibald Constable, the author had only recently completed *The Lives of Edward and John Philips* (1815), a biography of the nephews and pupils of Milton who were themselves radical religious writers in the mid-seventeenth century. Godwin was, of course, educated as a Dissenter and recalled reading an

illustrated edition of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (a central text in the history of British Protestant martyrdom) alongside children's works by John Newbery.<sup>2</sup> Godwin's later education and experience as a political writer, philosopher, and historian allowed him to acknowledge the formative influence of his education on his understanding of the world while also responding to it critically. Godwin's works of historical research reflect the author's interest in the cultural life of the period in question, and regularly consider the question of how individuals were shaped by ideas and events (a pioneering approach in history in Godwin's time).

*Mandeville* depicts post-civil war England as a society that wallows in its history of trauma, holding up both religious and secular martyrs as role models for the next generation. Godwin argued passionately (in the *Essay on Sepulchres*, 1809) that we should honour the *lives* of great men and women; *Mandeville* seems to argue that celebrating their *deaths* ultimately poisons the cultural life of the community. Martyrdom is not, obviously, an idea unique to English Dissent: Godwin's later religious writing condemns Christianity as a whole for its glorification of suffering but, in *Mandeville*, the author destabilises the English Protestant narrative of history. In Godwin's lifetime it was still common to claim England as a Protestant Israel, a chosen people united in their resistance to popery (eliding many of the nation's religious and cultural fault lines).<sup>3</sup> Both Anglicans and Dissenters (though perhaps Dissenters most strongly) venerated Protestant martyrs as symbols of that resistance, linking English history with Biblical and early Christian persecution, as a way of reinforcing the narrative of English Protestant exceptionalism in the popular imagination. Godwin's novel depicts this narrative as divisive rather than unifying, highlighting the complicated relationship between religious and political loyalties in the Interregnum period, and challenging both its anti-Catholic and anti-Dissenter implications. In undermining a national myth, the novel also implicitly questions how history itself is read. Like most of Godwin's novels, *Mandeville* uses a first-person narrative to explore the protagonist's psyche—but this has additional resonance in the context of the civil wars, the understanding of which was heavily shaped (in Godwin's time) by partisan memoir rather than any 'settled' historical consensus. *Mandeville* is an unreliable narrative that draws attention to unreliable historical narrative, foregrounding its most irrational and sectarian elements to prompt a reappraisal of the texts that inspired it.

The novel's tone is as dark and savage as its protagonist. Many of Godwin's other fictional works, either for adults or children, contain some note of playfulness or the absurd (the 'found document' conceit of *Imogen*, Withers' ridiculous poetry in *Fleetwood*). *Mandeville*, by contrast, is the author at his most saturnine. Godwin seems to have found it a difficult book to write: he initially proposed a novel to Archibald Constable in December 1815, did not receive a contract until April the following year, and would not finish the work until the end of October 1817. Godwin's diary records bouts of giddiness and sickness during the writing period which, though not as serious as those of later years, usually indicate that the author was under significant stress.<sup>4</sup> The writing was punctu-

ated by the deaths of four significant figures in the author's life. The first was Godwin's one-time patron, the playwright and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan, in July 1816. Sheridan's death seems to have affected Godwin greatly, and the author's diary notes a series of visits to the playwright's grave. October that year saw the disappearance and suicide of Godwin's adopted daughter, Fanny. Godwin's letters to Percy Shelley reflect the great sadness he must have felt, though all parties conspired to hush up Fanny's death (as was often the norm in such cases). Harriet Shelley's suicide came only a few weeks later. Godwin's great friend, the Irish MP John Philpott Curran, died as Godwin was finishing the novel in October 1817. The novel is dedicated to Curran as 'the sincerest friend I ever had'.<sup>5</sup> It does not, of course, follow that these bereavements gave *Mandeville* its gothic tone—we give Godwin too little credit as an imaginative writer if we assume a direct relationship between his life and work—but there is an obvious symmetry between a grieving author and the novel's use of both personal and national grief.

Charles Mandeville's life is marked over and over again by tragedy. His parents are murdered in the Irish rebellion of 1641, the protagonist himself rescued by a (Catholic) servant and taken to England by the man who will become his boyhood tutor—the fire-and-brimstone chaplain, Hilkiah Bradford. Charles is raised in the home of his uncle Audley, a recluse who nurses his own tragic story, but it is Hilkiah who provides the boy with a father figure. As Hilkiah's sole pupil, Charles is fully immersed in his tutor's own school of apocalyptic (and virulently anti-Catholic) Christianity. The one moment of brightness in Charles's dark and lonely early childhood is the brief visit of his younger sister, Henrietta, who has been raised in a happier home by their mother's friends. Hilkiah dies not long after, and Charles is sent away to school. At Winchester College, Charles's seriousness and reserve are viewed with suspicion. Charles is ostracised, bullied, and politically othered by his peers—dragging him into the constantly shifting political and religious factionalism of the age. Predominantly from Cavalier (Episcopalian and Royalist) families, the boys brand Charles a Presbyterian (the faction they accuse of starting the civil wars, now allied with the Cavaliers against Cromwell). He is further shamed when a book of anti-Royalist satire is found in his chamber—in reality the property of his Presbyterian roommate, Waller. He is spared further ignominy by the judgment of the school prefect, Clifford, for whom Charles develops a lifelong enmity. Throughout the rest of his life, Charles remains an outsider. Though his deep-seated anger attracts the likeminded Lisle and the manipulative Holloway, Charles's only real emotional bond is with Henrietta. Clifford, always a shining mirror to Charles's darkness, continually reappears to (unwittingly) thwart the protagonist's desires. Charles's disappointments are often accompanied by episodes of madness, explosions of misanthropic frustration that only Henrietta is able to calm. Charles is finally broken by the twin blows of Clifford's conversion to Catholicism (for which he receives only honours) and engagement to Henrietta. Attempting to prevent

the marriage by abducting his sister, Charles is wounded by Clifford and left with a gruesome scar to remind him of his failure.

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In his preface, Godwin credits Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) with 'the impression, that first led me to look with an eye of favour upon the subject here treated' (*Mandeville*, 62).<sup>6</sup> Though Godwin does not explain this reference, we might read it on two levels: the most obvious common theme of both novels is an implicit link between extreme religious conviction and madness, but we might also observe that in both cases these traits are passed from father to 'son'. Brown has Theodore Wieland inherit his father's strangeness; Godwin, always more concerned with the effects of environment on character, has Charles recognise Hilckiah as the true author of his spiritual self, with all the fanaticism that this entails (p. 141). We see the chaplain through Charles's eyes. Our narrator tells us of his respect for this severe but righteous man of god, but the details of his description imply something more sinister: an 'emaciated' man with no hint of healthy colour in his skin, Hilckiah's eyes sparkle with 'primitive and apostolic fury' at the mention of Catholicism (pp. 110 and 115). The chaplain's obsessions are rooted in prophecy and mysticism, searching for numerological meaning in the number 666, to the extent that even the protagonist is concerned for his tutor's mental health. The preoccupations that Charles develops are more mundane. With Hilckiah's encouragement, the protagonist studies a gruesomely illustrated edition of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*:

The representation of all imaginable cruelties, racks, pincers and red-hot irons, cruel mockings and scourgings, flaying alive, with every other tormenting method of destruction, combined with my deep conviction that the beings thus treated, were God's peculiar favourites [...] produced a strange confusion and horror in my modes of thinking. (p. 121)

Charles absorbs much of his tutor's anti-Catholic language, but it is the idea of martyrdom that truly takes root in his brain. Our narrator develops an obsessive interest in his own demise, imagining progressively more horrific deaths for himself as time goes on. More than simply a young man's morbid imagination, Hilckiah's tutelage has impressed upon Charles the idea that such an end is a glorious demonstration of piety and devotion. We might infer that this is the sentiment that encourages him to commit to Colonel Penruddock's rebellion:

[Penruddock's] countenance bespoke the purity of his heart, and expressed in striking lineaments the steadiness of a martyr. I afterwards understood, that he had had two brothers, older than himself, who had fallen in the civil wars, fighting for the late king; and he therefore regarded himself as a person consecrated and set apart, to avenge their fate, or to follow their illustrious example. (p. 199)

Narratorial hindsight seems to recognise that the Colonel's mission is doomed, Charles asserting Penruddock's nobility alongside a reference to the humiliating

nature of his death. On reflection, the narrator sees Penruddock's naivety—expecting to seize the county without bloodshed, not understanding the factionalism amongst his own allies—but it is not clear whether the younger Charles was able to intuit this. The protagonist makes an immediate personal connection with Penruddock ('now for the first time I had found a friend') and more than once calls him a martyr (p. 200). We might speculate that Charles's sudden and passionate commitment to the Colonel and his cause is born out of a need to find a cause to die for. This would at least help to characterise Charles's extreme reaction to being supplanted by Clifford in the role of Penruddock's secretary. The narrator's (at this point unstated) anti-Catholicism might also play a role: Penruddock opines that Sir Joseph Wagstaff's veto of the (Presbyterian) Charles's appointment might herald proscriptions against non-Catholics in the future.

Yet there is a hint that the narrator understands that Clifford denied the younger Charles the chance to die alongside his friend, describing it as the frustration of having the door of opportunity slammed in his face. As Clifford comes to Charles to seek forgiveness for having taken the younger man's place, Charles rages and flies from him. Unable to articulate how his honour has been wounded, the protagonist retreats again into misanthropy, but looking back on the incident as narrator realises that:

He came to me, spurred forward by all the purest sentiments that can inform a human heart. He pitied me; he loved me. Clifford was a being of no mean discernment; and he had had ample opportunity of observing my character at Winchester. He had generously resolved, that I should not perish by any mistake that it was in his power to set right. (p. 212)

Whether or not Clifford consciously takes Charles's place in a doomed expedition is not clear, but implicit in the narrator's account is the sense that his rival is the better martyr. Charles has only fury to offer—Clifford shares Penruddock's compassion, and is thus a more fitting companion for the ill-fated commander.

Charles's understanding of martyrdom is not purely religious. Penruddock commits himself to a tragic end because of a (perceived) duty to his fallen brothers. He is not alone in this. Godwin portrays Interregnum England as a place haunted by the sacrifices of previous generations: Charles's home, Mandeville House, is essentially a monument to his uncle Audley's lost love. Henrietta describes the silent and gloomy manse as 'one of the Pyramids of Egypt; and its master is like a deceased prince I have somewhere read of, whose body rose at a certain hour every night out of its coffin' (p. 136). Audley lives in perpetual mourning for his cousin, Amelia Montfort, the childhood sweetheart who was forced to marry another. After Amelia's death in childbirth, Audley arranged for her to be entombed at Mandeville House but his overwhelming grief prevents him from visiting her memorial. Sadness, the narrator tells us, has become Audley Mandeville's entire identity. The mother of Charles's Oxford contemporary, Lisle, is similarly defined by her grief. The historical Sir George Lisle was summarily executed for his part in the 1648 siege of Colchester, becoming

a (secular) royalist martyr in the popular discourse of the time.<sup>7</sup> Sir George's widow goes to great lengths to impress his memory upon her son.

It was her daily purpose, to fill his bosom with her own sentiments, and those of his deceased father. [...] All this had a strange effect upon his youthful mind. His mother spoke to him every day of the parent he had lost, and never without tears. A thousand times, while a child, he had mingled his tears with hers, from the mere uncontrollable force of sympathy. (p. 214)

We also learn that, while her son is allowed out to school, Lady Lisle herself has chosen never again to see the sun and speaks to no one but her son and a fellow widow with a story similar to her own. The family's veneration of Sir George and the late king is explicitly religious in tone ('Charles the First was his God') painting Cromwell in the most monstrous colours. The effect on young Lisle is corrosive.

Sometimes we would sit silent together for hours, like what I have heard of a Quaker's meeting; and then, suddenly seized with that passion for change which is never utterly extinguished in the human mind, would cry out as by mutual impulse, Come, now let us curse a little! In the art of cursing we were certainly no ordinary proficient; and if an indifferent person could have heard us, he would probably have been considerably struck, with the solemnity, the fervour, the eloquence, the richness of style and imagination, with which we discharged the function. (p. 217)

The narrator compares the quality of their hatred. Lisle, raised by a mother who cherished him, hates out of love for those whom his enemies have wronged. Charles imagines himself 'withered [...] dried, and stiffened', a misanthrope because he has never had the chance to feel love for another (p. 218). Their morbidity (Lisle can recite the details of his father's death) and capacity for hatred are the only things the duo actually share. They differ even over the proper object of their hatred (Charles' bitter anti-Catholicism might be problematic for Lisle's particular form of royalism were he to actually engage with it). For all their differences, however, they have had the same education: they have been taught to revere the dead for having died, and have come to regard death as an honour in itself. Lisle is quite literal in this, referring to the execution of Penruddock and his fellow conspirators as an 'honourable sentence [...] which every man who draws his sword in the cause of virtue should be prepared to meet' (p. 226). Charles seems to accept his logic. It might seem that such an upbringing is an inevitable consequence of the trauma around them. The psychic and cultural wounds of the civil wars are still bleeding, as episodes such as Penruddock's rebellion remind us. Not every character is so negatively affected, however. Those characters that escape the cycle of mourning and martyrdom have been taught reverence for life, rather than death.

Clifford's father fell at Edge Hill, the first pitched battle of the civil wars. Clifford's mother, like Lisle's, declines to take a new husband despite the (gen-



teel) poverty that this consigns them to. Bright and charismatic, at school Clifford dismisses the importance of wealth and status in favour of independence. Even as a boy, Charles saw this as naive but could only look on in horror as his schoolfellows adopted Clifford's sentiments uncritically. As an adult, Clifford is more pragmatic (Charles sees it as hypocritical) but his bravery, honesty, and generosity of spirit mean that he is welcomed in places where Charles is only tolerated. The narrator tells us nothing about Clifford's life before school. The boy's social grace suggests he did not have Charles's cloistered childhood, but (in contrast to the novel's other major male characters) we have no sense of what the young Clifford was taught about his father's death. Perhaps the point is simply that there is nothing remarkable to tell. Clifford has no legend to live up to and no grisly end to dwell on.

Henrietta has less control over her own destiny but, like Clifford, has avoided the scars of emotional trauma that mark so many others. Charles describes Beaulieu as Edenic, but the New Forest idyll where Henrietta is raised is not a place untouched by the wars. As Henrietta's guardians (the Willises and the Montagus) are introduced, the narrator explains that the late Lord Montagu died a political prisoner and that his grandson would one day die fighting the Dutch (in 1665). Nor is Beaulieu obviously a retreat from the world in a general sense, as Mandeville House so clearly is. Henrietta and the younger Montagus have not been conspicuously sheltered from the reality of the civil war world but, as Charles writes of his sister's home, 'Every thing I saw was frank, and easy, and communicative, and sensitive, and sympathetic' (p. 150). Under (implicitly) the tutelage of Mrs Willis, Henrietta has imbibed a dramatically different philosophy to her brother:

We know not what destiny is reserved for us. But we shall meet it with quick imaginations and a beating bosom; and the disappointment of all that have gone before us, will not prevent us from anticipating joy, with as sanguine a spirit, as inspired the first man, before history had yet written one solitary page of warning and example. (p. 136)

It can be no coincidence that Godwin allows both Clifford and Henrietta (the characters least harmed by the past) the space to articulate some kind of philosophy. Henrietta's monologue in the novel's second volume is remarkable for Godwin's conscious use of anachronism: the quotations peppered throughout the rest of the text are very deliberately chosen to create the impression of the narrator looking back from a specific point in time, but Henrietta's sermon to her brother quotes a passage from Shaftesbury not published until 1711 (the author confesses to this deliberate prolepsis in an endnote). Henrietta (paraphrasing Shaftesbury) argues for a form of universal benevolence, expressed as simple gratitude for the benefits of being in society. She goes on to advocate a form of determinism, then stoicism. Tilottama Rajan has argued that Henrietta's philosophy is incoherent, a bricolage of early Enlightenment platitudes (*Mandeville*, 243–35 [editor's footnotes]). If so—and in this scene, Henrietta does appear to try a range of arguments in the hope of leading Charles away

from his misanthropy—it would seem to complicate a straightforward reading of Henrietta as the novel's moral centre. Godwin uses a similar strategy in *Fleetwood*: the protagonist's advisors are well-intentioned, but their advice is not unproblematic. The same is true in *Mandeville*. Henrietta is the most significant character in the novel to display the moral and emotional resources to live a positive and happy life. Her advice is forgiving, forward-looking, and genuine, yet ultimately ineffective. While Charles submits to his sister's guidance when she is close at hand, he rapidly veers away from it when he is left to his own devices. The protagonist is easily led and quick to accept direction that reinforces his existing worldview, as evidenced by his hostility to but eventual dependence on Holloway and Mallison (who stoke his hatred for Clifford). It does not matter how genuine or how caring Henrietta's advice is, because it comes from a place alien to Charles's experience and she lacks the empathy and wisdom necessary to reach him. Henrietta, perhaps, repeats the lessons that resonated with her but has not yet understood that they do not constitute a consistent philosophy, or that they are unlikely to make a lasting impression on her unforgiving, saturnine, brother. In the end, however, Henrietta's counsel is benign and offers a stark contrast to the bitter and paranoid culture that Charles encounters everywhere else.

In a more general sense, Henrietta's philosophy speaks to a tension that runs throughout Godwin's work: our understanding is shaped by what has gone before (people in the present are shaped by culture and experience in the past) but we must look forward (imagine new things) if we are to do anything more than repeat the mistakes of our ancestors. Charles has been shaped by sectarianism and political vendetta. Rejected or suspected by royalists for being 'the wrong kind of Protestant', Charles is encouraged to turn more and more violently against Catholicism while maintaining his loyalty to the (crypto-Catholic) House of Stuart, a problem which the narrator acknowledges but sees no way to resolve (p. 329). The protagonist is caught between contradictory causes, a crisis made existential by the belief that the proper way to commit to something is to die for it. Clifford, by contrast, lives for the things he believes in: he aids in the escape of the other conspirators rather than dying with Penruddock. Clifford is depicted as taking a pragmatic attitude to sectarianism, converting to Catholicism because it will allow him to do more good (with an inheritance) than he could as a poor Episcopalian. The narrator suggests that Clifford's Protestant upbringing was no more than an accident of history, striking a typically Godwinian note about the importance of deeds over arbitrary loyalties (p. 333). These sentiments had a contemporary resonance when the novel was published. Dissenters and Anglicans still commemorated their historic resistance to Catholicism (Godwin had been a member of the Revolution Society, formed on the centenary of James II's overthrow in 1688) while Anglicans attempted to exclude Dissenters from public life with the same logic that they excluded Catholics (the nation could not expect loyalty from people whose religious and political allegiances were not vested in the same object). Godwin's friend John Philpot



Curran, to whom the novel is dedicated, saw this acutely. An Irish Protestant who, as a barrister, defended Catholics from Protestant abuses and vocally supported Irish home rule, Curran was regularly forced to contend with the most offensive legal inequalities and regarded the government's management of them as a deliberate strategy of 'divide and rule' (pitting Protestant against Catholic to deny rights to both).<sup>8</sup>

The novel greatly simplifies the religious divisions of the Commonwealth era. The controversies over episcopacy and independent worship that had rocked Britain since at least the 1630s were, to a significant degree, battles for the heart and soul of the established church. Godwin does not give names to the many political and theological factions within the English (and Scottish) church at the time, presenting instead the very personal conflict between Mandeville and Clifford under nominal religious 'flags'. Charles, as narrator, does not articulate his own religious position and Hilkieh's creed is characterised largely by its anti-Catholicism alone.<sup>9</sup> The protagonist's own sectarianism lies dormant until it is stoked. As narrator, Charles reports his mentor's teachings (and describes his own internal rebellion against them) but usually describes the Catholics he encounters in neutral terms. Charles's anti-Catholicism only erupts when others provoke it: Lisle encourages him to give voice to his misanthropy; Mal-lison seeks to use Charles's hatred of Clifford to his own advantage. In either case, Hilkieh's lessons give Charles's hatred a language, but the sectarian 'mode' appears more an inflection to his unfocused anger than the source of it. The episode at Oxford seems to illustrate this. Though the narrator describes how he poured down curses on the Catholic church, he could not voice the true object of his hatred—Clifford.

Oh, if I could have pronounced the name of Clifford, if I could have told the griefs that had flowed to me from him, if I could have given vent to the various emotions he had excited within me, I should have become a different man [...] (p. 221)

In 1817, the Protestant Dissenting Deputies (the elected committee of representatives from London Dissenting congregations) resolved to mount a new campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts that excluded non-Anglicans from public life. Godwin had been on the edge of such a campaign in 1790; if he was aware of this one he does not seem to have noted it (he would declare himself retired from 'practical politics' to Lady Caroline Lamb in early 1819).<sup>10</sup> Sectarian violence was, however, on his mind while he wrote *Mandeville*: over 5-6 July that year he read Maria Edgeworth's *Harrington* (1817), which culminates in a recreation of the Gordon Riots of 1780. The Gordon Riots were certainly sparked by a public backlash against the erosion of anti-Catholic legal 'protections' but were just as certainly underwritten by unemployment, inflation, and inequality—forces harder to name (or confront) than the Catholic other.

The second work that Godwin refers to in his preface is Joanna Baillie's tragedy *De Monfort* (1798). Representing 'hatred' in Baillie's series on the passions, Godwin saw the play twice during its initial run in 1800 and studied the printed text during the writing of *Mandeville*.<sup>11</sup> Many of the elements that drive the novel towards its conclusion (Charles's possessive love for Henrietta and one-sided rivalry with Clifford) are drawn directly from Baillie's play. *De Monfort* is a more consciously schematic text than Godwin's novel, however, at least in its published version. Baillie's preface to the volume is a philosophically-inclined discourse on human nature, roughly as long as one of the plays it precedes. *De Monfort* itself is structured in such a way as to present a discussion of its own themes: the play's major confrontation takes place in act three, and the murder happens off-stage in act four. The fifth and final act explores the crime's emotional fallout; the final scene allows each of the surviving characters to offer comment on how hatred had affected the title character emotionally, socially, and physically. What few ambiguities remain are settled by *De Monfort*'s sister, Jane, who provides the play's closing statement. By contrast, *Mandeville* is much more dependent on the reader. We are dragged along with the story and are offered little space within the text to reflect on what is happening, Godwin's use of the first person forces the reader to take their own critical stance (outside the text) on Charles' narrative. Going beyond a merely unreliable narrator, Charles' wild irrationality actively discourages the reader from taking his story at face value. If Godwin's musings on the 'moral' and 'tendency' of literary works in *The Enquirer* (1797) offer us some insight into his theory of fiction then it is possible to read *Mandeville*, not as an homage to *De Monfort*, but as a challenge to it. In *The Enquirer*, Godwin argues that a text may purport to say something (it may offer a moral) but the act of reading is inescapably one of interpretation. The reader draws inference from the overall tendency of the work, and thus draws their own conclusions about its meaning. If this is the case, then a work such as *De Monfort* appears to pre-emptively police its own interpretation: it is clear what conclusions we are supposed to draw from the play. *Mandeville* provides comparatively little scaffolding of this kind. Though it is arguably difficult to dismiss certain intended readings within the novel (it is abundantly clear that the adult Charles is mentally ill, for example), we are relatively free to interpret the novel's themes.

It is worth noting that, although Godwin refers to 'hints' that he received from *Wieland* and *De Monfort*, the author is vague about what he has taken from each. Where Baillie's preface is relatively clear about the conceptual aims of the collected plays, Godwin's offers only anecdotal comments on how the novel came to be written. For Godwin, this is atypical: *Imogen* uses its preface as a framing device that playfully foreshadows some of the author's literary indulgences; the original (cancelled) preface to *Caleb Williams* stresses the novel's contemporary political relevance; *St Leon*'s preface is an addendum to *Political Justice* with obvious relevance to the novel itself; *Fleetwood*'s insists that the novel be read as social commentary rather than a pathology, and Godwin

would return to the 'preface as argument' in *Cloudesley*. None of this is to claim that the preface to any of Godwin's novels is an outright statement of the work's meaning (such a thing would be completely at odds with the author's view of literature) but rather that they often indicate the spirit in which the book has been written. Perhaps Godwin's nods to Brown and Baillie are intended to do this in the most gentle way, but it is interesting to observe that *Deloraine* (1833) follows the same model as *Mandeville*, and notably *Deloraine* also centres on an almost wholly unsympathetic, unreliable, narrator. It seems possible that Godwin (in *Mandeville*) consciously eschews comment on the novel's themes so as not to signpost a 'correct' reading. The author's reasons for doing so may not have been entirely literary—his introductions to both *Fleetwood* and *St Leon* were used against him by hostile critics and the family was still the subject of scandalous (Shelley-based) rumours—but if so, this necessity coincides with Godwin's literary theory.

According to Godwin's theory, an author's attempts to dictate the meaning of their work are futile. Even the most explicit statement can be read quixotically, and many texts are remarkable for things they do not say, rather than for things they do. What an author can do is attempt to convey emotional truth, to depict the life of a fictional character's mind in a way that is relatable to the reader. As Godwin argues throughout his critical writing, fiction can offer greater insight into character than any historical record while providing better moral instruction than any didactic text. An invented psychology, if believable to the reader, can portray the twists and turns of the human mind more 'accurately' than an author speculating about a real person's thoughts. The author's essay 'Of History and Romance' (1797) expounds upon this:

Romance, then, strictly considered, may be pronounced to be one of the species of history. The difference between romance and what ordinarily bears the denomination history, is this. The historian is confined to individual incident and individual man, and must hang upon that his invention or conjecture as he can. The writer collects his materials from all sources, experience, report, and the records of human affairs; then generalises them; and finally selects, from their elements and the various combinations they afford, those instances which he is best qualified to portray, and which he judges most calculated to impress the heart and improve the faculties of his reader.<sup>12</sup>

The moral value of literature (be it fictional or historical) in part stems from the reader's opportunity to vicariously and empathetically share the experience of others. Learning about other people's lives provides us with the material to reappraise our own. Earlier in the same essay, Godwin writes:

It is only by comparison that we come to know any thing of mind or ourselves. We go forth into the world; we see what man is; we enquire what he was; and when we return home to engage in the solemn act of self-investigation, our most useful employment is to produce the materials we have collected abroad, and, by a sort of magnetism, cause

those particulars to start our to view in ourselves [*sic*], which might otherwise have laid for ever undetected.<sup>13</sup>

Literature allows us to venture far further abroad than we might otherwise, even into situations we could not possibly experience for ourselves. In his preface to *Bible Stories* (1802) Godwin is clear that we can learn as much from the fantastic as we can from the realistic, and that the imaginative exercise that the fantastic affords is crucial in developing our ability to see beyond our existing experience. The psychological ‘delve’ of the first-person narrative is an example of this: it is impossible for us to know what goes on inside someone else’s head, but fiction allows us to explore the idea of it. From this, however, there is a tension that Godwin does not openly acknowledge: an autobiographical account has the potential to be a psychologically faithful record of real events, and thus offer a better insight than either a fictional creation or a historian’s reconstruction. We would obviously be wise to read such a text sceptically, even if we could establish its honesty, with an eye to sifting through the self-deceptions and rationalisations that a subjective narrative would struggle to escape. Yet even a dishonest text could be revealing and instructive, if read critically.

In the case at hand (that is, the history of the civil wars and the Interregnum) the two major texts available to readers in Godwin’s lifetime were the Earl of Clarendon’s *History of the Rebellion* (published 1702–04), and the *Memoirs* of the parliamentarian Edward Ludlow (published 1698–99). Neither work was the first to document the period, the best-known earlier work being Bulstrode Whitelocke’s *Memorials of the English Affairs from the Beginning of the Reign of Charles I* (1682), a notoriously dry text, but one which reprints a wealth of period documents. Clarendon and Ludlow’s works have parallel claims to authority: Clarendon was party to many of the major events of the period as an advisor to both the executed Charles I and his son. Ludlow, by contrast, served as one of the judges at Charles I’s trial (though later broke with Cromwell after the Protector dismissed parliament in 1653). Clarendon’s book mixes personal memoir with an authoritative but clearly partisan historical narrative. He began to write a history of the conflict in the mid-to-late 1640s but left it unfinished, returning to it after his banishment in 1668 and incorporating material from his separately-written autobiography. It is clearly coloured by contemporary concerns. Clarendon foregrounds his loyalty to the crown despite his exile, while criticising the late king’s (pragmatic) compromise on religious issues as a warning to his successors. Ludlow’s *Memoirs* offer a much more personal narrative of the period than Clarendon’s *History*. A bestseller at the turn of the eighteenth century, the book remained a key parliamentarian account of the civil wars for some 250 years. Ludlow’s work seemed ahead of its time, offering a thoughtful commentary on political (though not so much religious) issues at the turn of the eighteenth century, despite the author having died in 1692. What was suspected at the time, but not proven until the late twentieth century, was that Ludlow’s work had been re-shaped by an anonymous editor to fit the concerns of period Whigs. When a Ludlow manuscript was uncovered

at Warwick Castle in 1970 (a substantial autobiographical fragment detailing events later than those found in the *Memoirs*, but overlapping with them) it became clear that the 1698–99 volumes had been both ruthlessly abridged and heavily rewritten. The *Memoirs* present their author as a measured and mostly secular observer who placed patriotism and liberty ahead of religious conviction: in short, a model Whig whose resistance to the rule of both the Stuarts and Cromwell offered lessons during the reign of William III. The manuscript, entitled *A Voyce from the Watch Tower*, reveals a passionately spiritual Ludlow who justifies his actions and beliefs with Biblical citations. In a typical passage, he explains Charles I's crimes:

That he was an enemy to the Commonwealth, appears in that he was a supporter of all corrupt interests who united themselves to extirpate what was most deare to the good people of the nation, either as men or Christians; and not only so, but in appropriating to himselfe those powers and attribuits which are only due to the Lord, thereby doing what in him lay to make God their enemy; the people being oftentimes punished for the sins of the magistrate, 2 Kng. 23, 26, 1 King 18. 18, 15 Jer. 4.<sup>14</sup>

The historian Blair Worden's detailed study of Ludlow's manuscript and the *Memoirs* attributes the revisions to the freethinker John Toland (biographer of Milton, James Harrington, and Algernon Sidney), an author whom Godwin had no doubt been reading since his student days in the 1770s.<sup>15</sup> We know that Godwin read both Clarendon and Ludlow's *Memoirs*, with references in Godwin's diary dating back as far as the 1790s (he refers to Clarendon and Whitlocke in 'Of History and Romance').<sup>16</sup> The author took an acute interest in the historiography of the civil wars, reading extensively in this area since at least 1804. John Oldmixon's *Clarendon and Whitlock Compared* (1727) appears in the catalogue of books Godwin owned, and his diary contains references to Oldmixon (though not explicitly this text) in the period he is writing and researching his biography of the Philippses.<sup>17</sup> Godwin may have suspected that Ludlow's *Memoirs* had been rewritten. Even from its initial publication, critics had alleged that the work had been doctored or fabricated. Some pointed to the translator Isaac Littlebury as the editor, among them later the Whig philanthropist Thomas Hollis (1720–74).<sup>18</sup> Hollis's close friend and eventual heir, Thomas Brand, was in turn a friend to Godwin. Toland was suggested by others, and the first edition of Ludlow's *Memoirs* held at the Bodleian library contains an annotation to that effect (attributed to the antiquary Charles Godwyn, who bequeathed the volumes).<sup>19</sup> Godwin visited Oxford and the Bodleian while writing *The Lives of Edward and John Philips* (1815) but, since he owned his own copy of Ludlow, it seems unlikely that the author consulted the specific tome in question.<sup>20</sup> A similar note has been added to Toland's entry in a Bodleian-owned translation of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionary* though (frustratingly) Godwin's diary suggests that Godwin read Bayle at the British Museum rather than the Bodleian.<sup>21</sup> Godwin may have some knowledge of the history of



Whig publishing and pamphleteering, having been part of the trade himself in the 1780s: one of the author's Juvenile Library pseudonyms (Edward Baldwin) seems to nod towards Richard and Abigail Baldwin, Whig publishers active in the 1690s, associated with 'Calves-Head Club' republicans such as the Philips brothers, Littlebury, and Toland. While composing *Mandeville* Godwin was also reading into another publishing controversy of the 1690s, on the authorship of Charles I's 'spiritual autobiography' *Eikon Basilike*.<sup>22</sup> None of the evidence here rises above the level of speculation and possible coincidence but, given the density of *Mandeville*'s historical and literary allusions, no possible reference should be discounted.

Strangely, *Mandeville* more closely resembles the unpublished *Voyce from the Watch Tower* than it does any of the memoirs that we are certain Godwin read before composing the novel. *Mandeville*, like Ludlow's *Voyce*, is rich in Biblical references (there are at least twenty-five quotations or paraphrases from the Bible in the novel, very few of them fully attributed). The verisimilitude with which Godwin channels the voice of seventeenth-century England is striking, as Charles weaves scripture (and significant quantities of Milton) into his explanations. Examples abound: Audley's death provides Charles with a revelation he compares with Samson pulling down the temple; the English are endowed with 'the liberty with which Christ has made us free' (Galatians 5. 1); Charles raves of bringing down 'the wrath of the lamb' on Lord Bristol (Revelations 6:16). Notably this use of language intensifies as the novel goes on (quotations are relatively sparse in the first volume but a constant presence by the third), as befits a narrative that becomes increasingly manic towards the novel's climax.

Godwin was not, however, reliant on published sources for his research into the civil wars. Since 1811 the author had been a frequent visitor to the Red Cross Library (now Dr Williams's Library, after its founder), a place originally established to support Dissenting ministers and students but by Godwin's later years also an extensive collection of manuscripts and ephemera for researchers interested in the history of Protestant Dissent.<sup>23</sup> Godwin's reading of (relatively secular) memoirs was probably supplemented by a study of seventeenth century religious pamphlets, and perhaps even diaries and private correspondence, and it feels as if this is what *Mandeville* aims to channel.

The narrator's Biblical rhetoric goes some way in distancing Charles from the reader—contemporary reviews of the novel were frequently uneasy with the narrator's language—reinforcing the idea that Godwin wants us to read Charles critically at every stage.<sup>24</sup> It may also be calculated to give the novel a ring of authenticity. *Mandeville* is, of Godwin's novels, the work most particularly drawn as a memoir. The earlier first-person narratives are framed as confessions, but *Mandeville* is locked into a much more specific temporality that affords the reader clues to a fictitious date of 'composition'. As we should reading Clarendon or Ludlow (with or without the suspicion of tampering), we are encouraged to position the narrator in time and consider the context in which the words are 'written': to interrogate Charles's motivation for telling his story years after the



fact. Perhaps because it imitates the patchiness and inconsistency of memoir, contemporary readers found the novel incomplete. A response to Lockhart's review in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* claimed that, had 'THE END' not been printed at the bottom of the page, they would have turned over expecting more (p. 476). Godwin's story details only the protagonist's childhood and early years of adult life, despite hinting at many more decades after. An unofficial/unauthorised 'fourth volume' of *Mandeville*, published anonymously in 1818 under the title *Last Words of a Maniac*, borrows further from *De Monfort* and concludes with Charles's murder of Clifford. Ironically this continuation ends as abruptly as Godwin's original novel, but it suggests that readers sought a resolution that the author refused to give.<sup>25</sup> In a larger sense, this signposts a tension between historical memoir and historical fiction: readers are more inclined to accept a partial memoir, or a memoir that leaves unanswered questions, than they are a fictional narrative that does the same things. The author of historical fiction is thus incentivised to create a self-contained narrative space. The reader should not have to immerse themselves in the period to understand how the characters think (except where it can be quickly explained for the purposes of novelty), and the plot should resolve itself by the final chapter (with an optional epilogue to place the story in historical context). Such tidiness suggests how easily historical fiction establishes and reinforces national myths. If the author is to satisfactorily close the narrative without tragedy, it helps if the protagonist is on the right side of history. Furthermore, the very conceit of concluding the narrative implies that said historical moment has ended—that this chapter of history is settled. Walter Scott's novels often exemplify this, as Carmel Murphy has identified, presenting British history as a gradually unifying evolution towards an Anglican, capitalist, (constitutional) monarchy.<sup>26</sup> Murphy reads *Mandeville* as an attempt to keep alive the memory (warts and all) of the seventeenth-century republican experiment as an imaginative 'political possibility'. Murphy's interpretation sets *Mandeville* directly against Scott's recently published *Old Mortality* (1816), which presents a less troubling version of seventeenth-century royalism and religion. Godwin perhaps hoped to contest Scott's version of history (the novels address different events but similar themes) but *Mandeville* seems to reach for something more fundamental about historical memory.

In his essay, 'History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination', Gary Handwerk argues that, in Godwin's historical fiction, prejudices persist because history grafts itself onto personal trauma and encodes that trauma as part of a larger historical text (Charles's childhood traps him in the ongoing story of sectarian violence).<sup>27</sup>

Both St Leon and Mandeville are strikingly insightful about the patterns and processes that entrap them, yet are never able to find the place from which they could change the world around them or even their own responses to it; the mood of malaise that characterizes most of Godwin's fiction arises from their realization of this. This incapacity may mark the limits of Godwin's liberal imagination in

its inability to conceive recursiveness except as traumatic repetition and thus to assimilate its own Romantic insight.<sup>28</sup>

Handwerk's reading, however, engages with Godwin's historical novels as 'closed' texts. It is possible for us to read *Mandeville* as a conventional novel—with a beginning, middle, and end—and recognise the cycle of trauma that Handwerk identifies and Godwin no doubt intends to depict. That does not mean, however, that this is the only reading available to us. Godwin understood that no matter how carefully a work is crafted, its readers are free to interpret it how they wish. The novel's 'fourth volume' demonstrates that this freedom is not even constrained by the boundaries of the text itself. It may be that Godwin, as Handwerk sees his characters, was conscious of the limits of his own imagination and unable to see a way to avoid history repeating itself (the author's thoughts on causality, as they appear in *Political Justice*, are strongly deterministic). It is, however, just as likely that Godwin set out to craft a work with the imaginative potential to help a reader break the cycle instead. The author described his essays in *The Enquirer* as not 'dicta' but 'the materials of thinking'.<sup>29</sup> The same could be said for any of Godwin's published works.

History defies the idea of a closed narrative. Events and ideas echo through time, questions go without answers, subjects are reinterpreted in the light of new evidence or changing attitudes. Our understanding of history, however, seeks boundaries: periodisation, a consensus of interpretation, lessons that can be learned from the past. National or cultural myths are perhaps accepted out of a desire to order the past so that it can explain the present, but 'real' history is messy and confusing, and many debates in the present are merely modern attempts to work through the issues that troubled our ancestors. *Mandeville* attempts to imitate both fictional narrative and historical memoir. It clothes itself in the trappings of memoir (in language and style) while combining, with only partial success, the structure of memoir and novel (Godwin privileges the narrator's distinctive voice over dramatic unity). It is a novel that demands to be read critically in order to signpost the need to read history critically. It is a story that counters the idea of British history as a story, foregrounding the awkward, marginalised, and unpalatable reality behind the patriotic legend. In all this, we might consider the novel a failure: it failed to find the audience of Godwin's earlier works and its anti-sectarian themes went unacknowledged for over a century. It remains, however, a challenging and experimental work. ☒

## NOTES

1. John Gibson Lockhart, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2.9 (December 1817), 268–79, quoted in *William Godwin Reviewed: A Reception History 1783–1834*, ed. by Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 2001), p. 340.
2. Godwin uses its colloquial title, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, in his autobiography, but its original one in *Mandeville*. William Godwin, *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin: Volume 1* (London: Pickering, 1992), p. 18.

3. This is discussed at length in Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 30–33 and 368–69.
4. ‘Curran, John Philpot’, in *The Diary of William Godwin*, ed. by Victoria Myers, David O’Shaughnessy and Mark Philip (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010) <<http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/people/CUR01.html#CUR01-notes>> [accessed 9 December 2019]. The entry for 3 July 1816 also notes the cryptic ‘Somnium post 24 horam’ (a day when the author was also clearly working on *Mandeville*) which suggests a long period without sleep.
5. William Godwin, *Mandeville*, ed. by Tilottama Rajan (London, ON: Broadview Press, 2016), p. 59.
6. It should also be noted that Godwin read Brown’s *Edgar Huntly* (1799), *Jane Talbot* (1801), and *Clara Howard* (under its 1807 Minerva Press title, *Philip Stanley; or, the Enthusiasm of Love*) while composing *Mandeville*.
7. One of several royalist commanders at Colchester, only Lisle and Sir Charles Lucas were executed after the surrender. Their deaths came at the order of Sir Thomas Fairfax, who justified the executions with reference to Lucas’s offences earlier in the wars. The historiography of competing claims regarding the incident is discussed in J. H. Round, ‘The Case of Lucas and Lisle’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 8 (1894), 157–80.
8. This is implicit in Curran’s rhetoric on Catholic Emancipation, particularly his speech of 18 February 1792. See *Speeches of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran*, ed. by Thomas Davis (Dublin: Duffy and Co., 1865), pp. 138–43.
9. Rajan notes that Hilksiah’s dress suggests a Puritan separatist, but Charles’s reference to the (singular) Church of England (p. 113) implies that his mentor did not reject the established church entirely. Given the specificity of other historical details within the novel, it seems likely that Godwin leaves this deliberately ambiguous.
10. Godwin to Caroline Lamb, 25 February 1819, MS Abinger c. 12, f. 43.
11. The first volume of Joanna Baillie’s plays was published in 1798 under the title *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*, and it is this volume that Godwin probably consulted. It is available in a modern edition as Joanna Baillie, *Plays on the Passions*, ed. by Peter Duthie (London, ON: Broadview, 2001).
12. William Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin, Volume 5: Educational and Literary Writings*, ed. by Mark Philip (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 296.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
14. *Edmund Ludlow, a Voyce from the Watch Tower, Part Five: 1660–1662*, Camden Society Fourth Series, 21 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978).
15. Blair Worden, *Roundhead Reputations: the English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London: Allen Lane, 2001).
16. There are 105 references to Clarendon in Godwin’s diary (though it is not always clear which refer to his history and which to his collected state papers). Ludlow is referenced thirty times. In 1804, Godwin read Clarendon’s *History* throughout April and Ludlow in July.
17. *Diary of William Godwin*, 22 April 1813 and 15 March 1815.
18. Worden, p. 93.
19. Worden (p. 95) for some reason attributes the bequest to Francis Godwyn, his sixteenth-century ancestor, but his dates are correct for Charles.

20. Ironically, the Godwin scholar H. N. Brailsford would later question the authenticity of the *Memoirs* in his own work on the civil war period. See Brailsford's essay in Christopher Hill's collection *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961).
21. *Diary of William Godwin*, 24 May 1813, 'Museum; Bayle, Plutarch & Boyer: call on Sheldon; adv. Towers. W C Brown calls na.'
22. Specifically, Godwin's diary records that he was reading Thomas Wagstaffe's (1691) defence of the king's authorship on three occasions in 1816.
23. Godwin's diary records his first visit to the library in 1802, but notes seventeen visits from 1811 to 1816, mostly during the research for *Lives of the Philipses*.
24. An anonymous response to Lockhart's review refers to it as 'pervading anachronism in the style', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2.10 (January 1818), 402–08, quoted in *Mandeville*, p. 476.
25. A review of *Last Words* praised the continuation for attempting to give a 'more satisfying conclusion'. See *British Lady's Magazine*, 3rd ser., 2 (1819), 174–45, quoted in *Godwin Reviewed*, p. 344.
26. Carmel Murphy, 'Possibilities of Past and Future: Republican History in William Godwin's *Mandeville*', *Keats–Shelley Review*, 28.2 (September 2014), 104–16 <<https://doi.org/10.1179/0952414214Z.00000000049>>.
27. Gary Handwerk, 'History, Trauma, and the Limits of the Liberal Imagination: William Godwin's Historical Fiction', in *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre*, ed. by Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 80.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
29. Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, p. 78.

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