The Politics of Fear: Gothic Histories, the English Civil War and Walter Scott’s *Woodstock*

Fiona Price, University of Chichester

In his 1824 essay on ‘Sir Walter Scott’ in the *New Monthly Magazine* William Hazlitt apostrophizes ‘Wickliff, Luther, Hampden, Somers’, those who ‘are the cause we no longer burn witches and heretics … who have abated the cruelty of priests, the pride of nobles, the divinity of kings in former times’.[[1]](#footnote-1) Evoking four centuries of religious and political reform, Hazlitt enters into the post-French Revolution struggle about the meaning of history, a struggle that is also a contest for ownership of the gothic. Like Mary Wollstonecraft in her *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), Charlotte Smith in *Desmond* (1792), or William Godwin in his historical novel *St Leon* (1799), Hazlitt seeks to demystify feudalism and to present reform as a rational removal of superstitious tyranny. Yet while Hazlitt asserts that Scott’s historical fictions normalize gothic oppression, Jane West and other conservative writers claimed that it was the radicals and dissenters who gothicized history in order to drive irrational reform. In this battle to deploy gothic and to claim the rational political high ground, the historical novel of the Civil War and the Commonwealth became an important site. Its pages restaged, in generic as well as political terms, the conflict between, on the one hand, radicalism and the dissent, and, on the other, Church and King.[[2]](#footnote-2) Reading Scott’s *Woodstock* (1826) against these earlier historical fictions, it becomes evident that the novel is a bitter exposé of this battle as anything but rational.

Although parallels between 1789 and the Glorious Revolution were common, associations between radicalism and dissent (current in both the 1790s and 1810s) led Cassandra Cooke and Jane West to compare the period of the French Revolution with the mid-seventeenth century.[[3]](#footnote-3) For West, radicals and dissenters had used historical gothic to generate a past filled with sinister clergy and nobility. Instead of these unhistorical ‘ogres of Mother Goose’ (as West referred to them), Cooke’s and West’s fictions of the mid-seventeenth century would position radicals as themselves the terrorized source of terror, reclaiming medicinal and scientific authority for the royalists.[[4]](#footnote-4) While Godwin’s *Mandeville* problematizes such associations, Scott’s *Woodstock* replies to both sides in a metafictional *tour de force*. This late Waverley novel has been read as Scott’s response to the bankruptcy crisis of 1826.[[5]](#footnote-5) Nonetheless, just as *The Antiquary* (1816) had, with a certain amount of cheerful misdirection, restaged the post-French Revolution quarrel over the nature of history, *Woodstock* encapsulates, in more rancorous terms, the era’s generic contest over the historical gothic.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The difficulties that the low-status, feminized, even ‘sickly’ gothic form represented for Scott have been explored, notably by Fiona Robertson and Michael Gamer.[[7]](#footnote-7) In this context, *Woodstock*’s use of the explained supernatural is significant. In revealing how gothic is deployed politically, the novel also suggests what is at stake in the genre’s denigration. Gothic terror emerges as a frequently deployed form of political violence – and one Scott himself is willing to invoke. Suggesting that the problem of violence is central to the Romantic period novel, Anthony Jarrells and Timothy Campbell oppose Godwin’s open-ended depiction of violence to Scott’s aestheticized alternative, which (particularly by concentrating on the ‘Glorious’ Revolution) ‘opens up the space of representation just enough to close off the violence of the recent past’.[[8]](#footnote-8) Yet *Woodstock*’s exposure of the political re-appropriation of gothic tropes, its cruel practical jokes and its barely veiled attack on Godwin all suggest that violence has not been foreclosed. On the contrary, for Scott, the vitriol and fear generated by an extended post-French Revolution debate has irrevocably harmed the British political future.

When Edmund Burke describes the ‘spirit of liberty’ in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) his metaphor is scientific rather than supernatural. Although he asserts the importance of ‘illusion’, or the ‘drapery’ of a ‘moral imagination’, to cover monarchical power, his scientific tropes allow him also to claim a kind of political empiricism. Alluding to experiments with air carried out by the dissenting preacher Joseph Priestley, Burke hints at the inferior rationality of those motivated by the ‘wild *gas*’ of freedom. [[9]](#footnote-9) In this account, the Revolution is an experiment that requires historical perspective; that is, time for the gases to settle and the results to be assessed. In reply, Wollstonecraft’s *Historical and Moral View* claims ‘science’ (broadly conceived) for a progressive radical agenda; implicitly, the radical, scientific reading of history, directing attention to empirical experience, exposes the illusions of court life.[[10]](#footnote-10) Issuing a counter-challenge, in *Letters Addressed to a Young Man*, West echoes Burke’s use of Priestley: history is like ‘experiments made by an air-pump’ but it is also superior to its scientific counterpart, since, she implies, it reveals the falsity of radical dissent’s terrifying reading of the past.[[11]](#footnote-11) *Letters* condemns (radical) historical fiction, but the alternative was to reclaim the genre. In Clara Reeve’s *Memoirs of Sir Roger de Clarendon* (1793), contra popular history, Richard II shows great mercy after the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381, while heroines are warned to disregard gothic nightmares. Rationality belongs to the monarchy rather than to the Lollards; conservative historiography finds supporting evidence in the feudal past.

If feudal times were a popular subject for historical novelists claiming political rationality, the Civil War was more contentious. In *British Historical Fiction before Scott* Anne H. Stevens identifies seven pre-1814 historical novels with a seventeenth-century setting.[[12]](#footnote-12) Of these, besides West’s *The Loyalists* (1812), only one other, Cooke’s *Battleridge* (1799), deals with the Commonwealth. Sharing West’s anti-Jacobin credentials, Cassandra Cooke, cousin to Jane Austen’s mother, had royalist connections on the Leigh side of the family. Moreover, the generic distinctions drawn by Cooke in the preface to *Battleridge* leave her politics in no doubt. She remarks that ‘Mrs Radcliffe’ is the only author of the ‘tremendous’ capable of managing the ‘*belle passion*’, rejecting those ‘late brilliant novelists’ whose ‘young female Novices are taught to abjure parental duty, eloping with their admirers upon *principle*’.[[13]](#footnote-13) For Cooke, as later for West, a radical new philosophy shapes dubious fictions which associate authority with (Catholic) past oppressions. As the word ‘principle’ hints, from Cooke’s perspective such fictions have insufficient empirical grounding.

Set in the period of the Commonwealth, *Battleridge* attempts to police the gothic and its accompanying irrationalities. Sir Ralph Vesey is the legal heir to Battleridge Castle since his vicious Puritan elder brother, Lord Aumerl, has been disinherited. When Sir Ralph finds his deeds to the property missing, the pious and clear-headed Dr Scot locates them. In the work’s final scenes, Dr Scot reveals he was led to their location (in a secret chamber behind an ancestor’s portrait) by a spectral messenger. Only he, the most well-balanced of the novel’s characters, has been able to deal with this ghostly manifestation. Like in Clara Reeve’s *Old English Baron* (1778), Providence supports the legitimate heir. Nonetheless, the narrative of correct succession has been moderated. As in the Act of Settlement that eventually followed the ‘Glorious’ Revolution, ‘continuity’ is observed but religious and political rectitude is more important than following the strict line of descent.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Meanwhile, in contrast to the true Providential support granted the Royalists, gothic irrationality is associated with Cromwell, who appears before Scot in an empty picture gallery like a guilt-stricken ‘ghost, pale, emaciated and stiff’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Cooke implies that there is no truth in the superstitions of radical dissent, and, it can be extrapolated from an interpolated tale in the second volume, the radical rewritings of history are equally false. The at first sight irrelevant narrative ostensibly in praise of Dalzell’s deeds for the Scottish King Kenneth, dwells on the evil and lascivious behaviour of the Ethling, Agitha, supposed heir to Earl Renne. Yet Agitha, a lascivious experimenter, poisoner and false doctor, also proves to be an upstart imposter. Even in the feudal past, terror has been generated by presumptuous ambition rather than by the monarch or nobility. Only the ruler’s true descendants and pious divines like Dr Scot possess the ability to heal.

In *The Loyalists* West expands such medicinal claims by suggesting the scientific credentials of conservatism. In doing so, she makes the attack on late eighteenth-century radical dissent much more explicit. In particular, as I have discussed elsewhere, she rewrites the Birmingham Riots of July 1791 when the house of radical dissenter and scientist Joseph Priestley was attacked by a Church and King mob.[[16]](#footnote-16) In West’s novel, it is the study of the Anglican clergyman Dr Beaumont that is destroyed by rioting dissenters. Scientific and rational enquiry belongs to the Church of England. In contrast, nonconformity is associated with irrationality and superstition. Both the dissenting Farmer Humphreys and the Cromwellian Lady Bellingham believe they have seen accusatory spirits. Reprising Hume’s account in his *History of England* (1754-61) of the religious rather than medical advice received by Cromwell on his deathbed, West has both die terrified, surrounded by ‘godly ministers’, ‘ghostly assistants’ in ‘fierce dispute’.[[17]](#footnote-17) Yet, unlike in *Battleridge*, these supernatural torments are not real. No Providential ghost supports the King. Instead, the medically adroit royalists, Mrs Mellicent and Isabel, are able to use the rebels’ gothic fears to hide an injured royalist. Loyalism is not dead but supported by the empirical knowledge of its adherents.

In *A Tale of the Times* (1799), West had denounced Godwin’s ideas of ‘visionary perfectability’.[[18]](#footnote-18) There, Fitzosborne, amongst other things a philosopher, is suspected of a deism that will perhaps lead to atheism and revolution. Although Godwin (the atheist son of a Calvinist minister) insists that he is unwilling to ‘dwell’ ‘on the rabble of scurrilities’ that writers like West had published about him, his historical novel *Mandeville* replies to such fictions as much as to *Waverley* (1814).[[19]](#footnote-19) Challenging the association of dissent with rebellion and superstition, in *Mandeville* a Protestant royalist is wracked by the gothic torture of religious hatred. West had imagined benign conversations between her Anglican clergyman and misled dissenter; in contrast, having escaped the 1641 Irish Rebellion, Mandeville is exposed to the poisonous anti-Catholicism of his Presbyterian tutor, Hilkiah Bradford, until he ‘wander[s] like a meagre, unlaid ghost’.[[20]](#footnote-20) In addition, in *Mandeville* not only are political beliefs more shifting than West accepts but the narrator’s royalism is consistently misunderstood. In an episode that recalls the Treason Trials of 1794 and the radical William Hone’s trials of 1817, Mandeville is accused by his schoolmates of possessing satirical images of the monarch. Pleading guilty to protect a friend, Mandeville can never escape the suspicion of treachery. Conversely, his contemporary, Clifford, is praised, provoking Mandeville until he determines with a sensation of ‘preternatural horror’ that Clifford is his ‘fate’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Maddened, Mandeville, like the Irish before the Rebellion, finds even the principle of inheritance undermined: his lawyer tries to gain control of his estate. No healing results. For Godwin, the inescapable cause and effect of history generates terror.

Timothy Campbell suggests that Holloway, the corrupt lawyer who tries to gain control of Mandeville’s inheritance, and whose descriptions of history prove so plausible, can be understood ‘as a figure for Scott’ and ‘thus Mandeville, a frustrated practitioner of history, as a figure for Godwin himself’. In this account, Godwin/Mandeville struggles against *Waverley*’s portrayal as ‘enmity’ as ‘pleasure’ that can be ‘controlled’.[[22]](#footnote-22) Yet in *Woodstock* Scott replies in a way that suggests the literary-historic battle is not over and that enmity is far from enjoyable. In 1824 (the year of publication of the first volume of Godwin’s *History of the Commonwealth of England* [1824-8]) Scott asked Robert Southey if he had ‘ever observe[d] how easy it would be for a good historian to run a parallel betwixt the great Rebellion and the French Revolution, just substituting the spirit of fanaticism for that of soi-distant philosophy’.[[23]](#footnote-23) Yet he had been aware of the possibility for some time. As Peter Garside and Angela Wright note, both *Waverley* and *The Antiquary* contain echoes of *The Loyalists*.[[24]](#footnote-24) *Woodstock*, though, does more than construct a ‘parallel’ between the two periods. Rather, it interrogates the post-French Revolution strategies of earlier historical novelists, including West and Godwin.

In ‘Scott, Story-Telling and Subversion’, Christopher Worth traces *Woodstock*’s ‘representation of intensely competitive mixing of disparate language paths’ to the bible and Shakespeare.[[25]](#footnote-25) However, the novel’s early pages connect this interest in a ‘dialogization’ that moves towards ‘hybridization’ with the political debates of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[[26]](#footnote-26) The first chapter contains references to two of the most recycled phrases in Edmund Burke’s *Reflections*, itself one of the most regularly re-appropriated texts of the post-French Revolution debate. Although Lockhart associates the novel’s heroine with Scott’s daughter, the apostrophe to ‘Alice Lee’ supposedly written by a ‘contemporary annalist’ also recalls Burke’s description of Marie Antoinette. As the French Queen symbolizes a system ‘under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness’, the narrator suggests of the ‘faults’ of Alice Lee: ‘so well did they show amid thy good qualities, that I think they made me love thee better’.[[27]](#footnote-27) An improved domestic alternative to the French queen, aristocratic rather than monarchical, she will teach Prince Charles the difference between licentiousness and chivalry. Charles needs the lesson because for ‘the lower orders’ in the congregation in King John’s chapel at Woodstock: ‘the church was … but a steeple-house, the clergyman, an ordinary person; her ordinances, dry bran and sapless pottage.’[[28]](#footnote-28) The sectarians’ refusal of illusion recalls Burke’s sketch of the revolutionary logic that suggests ‘a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order’.[[29]](#footnote-29) Failure of belief in the spiritual power of monarchy spreads until morality is undermined. To prevent this, Scott hints that some imaginative ‘drapery’ is still necessary, protecting power. Scott’s narrator may contend that Alice is ‘no creature […] of an idle romancer’s imagination,’ but his gallantry fulfils the same visionary function.[[30]](#footnote-30)

If the veil of romance is attractive, Scott knows that power requires other, less pleasing generic devices. *Woodstock*’s central incident, in which Cromwell’s commissioners are disrupted in their acquisition of the estate by a supposed haunting, operates as a reminder of historical fiction’s manipulation of ‘ghostly machinery’ to political ends.[[31]](#footnote-31) Introducing the Magnum Opus edition of *Woodstock* Scott remarks:

It was the object of neither of the great political parties of that day to discredit this narrative, which gave great satisfaction both to the Cavaliers and the Roundheads; the former conceiving that the license given to the demons was in consequence of that impious desecration of the king’s furniture […] while the friends of the Parliament, on the other hand, imputed to the malice of the fiend the obstruction of the pious work.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Although Scott is aware of two versions of the story, George Sinclair’s *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered* (1685) and Henry More’s continuation of Joseph Glanvill’s *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681), that give credence to the supernatural, he chooses to privilege the more sceptical version given in Dr Plot’s *Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677)*.*[[33]](#footnote-33) This sceptical approach means that the description of political cynicism also functions when applied to the use of gothic in the post-French Revolution debate – a genre exploited to evoke fears of feudalism by more radical writers and to generate fears of radical enthusiasm by their opponents. As such, the preface unveils the re-appropriations that take place in the search for power, while indulging in some political veiling of its own. Scott’s reference in the 1832 introduction to *The Every-Day Book* (1825-26), ‘published by Mr Hone’ underlines that the process of re-appropriation and resignification is still at work.[[34]](#footnote-34) After Hone’s three trials in December 1817, Godwin facilitated Hone’s access to the British Museum’s Library, where Hone gathered materials for *The Every-Day Book.* Given this background, it is unsurprising Hone begins his article on *Woodstock* by referencing a correspondent’s complaints about the novel’s anachronisms. In response, Scott passes over the accusation that the scene should have been set in 1649, instead re-appropriating at length the details of the haunting included by Hone. The gothic tale remains politically pliable long after its Civil War genesis.

With its recycled language and emphasis on political and literary plots, *Woodstock* signals its metafictional content. Like Dr Rochecliffe’s ‘plots’ (‘almost constantly detected’), Scott’s deliberate metafictional exposure of loyalist tactics produces unsettling results.[[35]](#footnote-35) In the battle to preserve what, according to Burke, was the ‘hereditary principle’ of the British constitution, the supernatural had steadily become a less effective weapon.[[36]](#footnote-36) Cooke, like Reeve, imagined monarchical rule supported by Providence (if not by divine right) and its supernatural manifestations but West’s spectres, like those of Scott’s narrative poem of the English Civil War, *Rokeby* (1813), are merely psychological. The ghosts in *Woodstock* draw attention to this decline in the monarchy’s spiritual status. While psychological terrors persist, Scott is more explicit about the ways in which they can be deliberately manipulated than West had been. Mrs Mellicent only connived at the belief that Waverly Park was haunted. In *Woodstock*, in contrast, Joseph Tomkins, the Independent, accompanied by royalist conspirators, ensures that Cromwell’s relative, Desborough, is ‘set upon [his] head the whole night, and soused with ditch-water the next’.[[37]](#footnote-37) Symbolizing the political world reversed and defiled, such unspiritual mischief reveals the ignoble way gothic terror protects the king’s property.

Whereas in Scott’s earlier fiction he had been willing to provide justification for such tactics, by 1826the excuses appear thinner. Thus, in *The Antiquary* it is only when Dousterswivel (a supposed alchemist like the hero of Godwin’s *St Leon*), attempts supernatural trickery that Edie Ochiltree and Mr Lovel stage a pseudo-supernatural counterplot against him. Gothic deceit on one side generates trickery on the other. Conversely, in *Woodstock*, although the royalists are provoked by the estate’s attempted sequestration, it is they alone (with Tomkins’s help) who indulge in such ignoble jests. Between the paltry tricks played on Desborough and the supposedly spectral appearance of the slaughtered player Dick Robison to Harrison and of Joseph Albany (Rochecliffe) to Holdenough, such spectral antics mix bathos with cruelty. The ‘drapery’ covering royal authority is decidedly tatty.

As well as rewriting West, in *Woodstock* Scott also replies to Godwin, indulging in some political cruelty of his own. Defending himself against James Ballantyne’s charge that he had imitated Mrs Radcliffe, Scott wrote in his journal:

My object is not to excite the fear of supernatural things in my reader, but to show the effect of such fear upon the agents of the story – one a man in sense and firmness, one a man unhingd by remorse, one a stupid, unenquiring clown, one a learned and worthy but superstitious divine’.[[38]](#footnote-38)

With this emphasis on psychological enquiry, Scott claims the same territory as *Mandeville*. Yet in his list of haunted characters, Scott alludes to only one of the Commissioners, Desborough (the ‘stupid, unenquiring clown’); his portraits of the others, Harrison and Bletson, go unremarked. Scott’s mild tone is deceptive. In fact, Scott’s text justifies the ignobility of the loyalist tricks by displaying the unpleasantness of the Commissioners. In *Regency Radical: The Selected Writings of William Hone*, Daniel Kent and D. R. Ewen comment on ‘the heterogeneity of the term “radical”, embracing as it did aristocratic Whigs (Sir Francis Burdett), infidel intellectuals (William Godwin and Jeremy Bentham)’ and ‘religious zealots (Robert Wedderburn)’.[[39]](#footnote-39) As well as suggesting the political differences between Cromwell’s divided supporters, a subject Scott was familiar with from his editorship of the *Somers’ Tracts*, Scott’s portraits of the commissioners evoke, at times viciously, these distinct contemporary radical identities.[[40]](#footnote-40) As ‘a bloody-minded, ranting enthusiast, who read the Bible to such purpose, that he never lacked a text to justify a murder’, Harrison shares William Hone’s own ability to appropriate scripture.[[41]](#footnote-41) With Hone’s suggestion at his 1817 trials that the cabinet minister, George Canning, had, amongst others, parodied the bible, he had drawn attention to the kind of re-appropriation of the spiritually terrifying that *Woodstock*’s artificial ghosts also reference.Equally, alternating between a ‘spirit of enthusiasm’ and a ruthlessness ‘indifference to pain or bloodshed’, Harrison recalls Robert Wedderburn, who, according to Iain McCalman in *Radical Underworld*, was ‘both a licensed dissenting minister of enthusiastic disposition and a ferocious infidel’, a combination, McCalman suggests, that was not uncommon.[[42]](#footnote-42)

If Harrison’s qualities hover between the representative and the particular, with Bletson Scott is at his most directly referential. Like Godwin in the second volume of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793),Bletson believes his own ‘doctrines of the perfectibility of mankind’.[[43]](#footnote-43) Arguing that cause and effect in the external world is analogous to what happens in the mind, Godwin had emphasized necessity: ‘mind as well as matter, exhibits a constant conjunction of events’.[[44]](#footnote-44) Occupying similar materialist ground, Bletson is similarly ‘unwilling to refer any of the phenomena of nature to a final cause’.[[45]](#footnote-45) As the only character to mention Chaucer, Bletson also shares Godwin’s literary tastes. Trying to calm himself after the haunting, Bletson insists that Chaucer ‘lays the whole blame of our nocturnal disturbance on superfluity of humours’.[[46]](#footnote-46) The gap between Bletson’s language and Chaucer’s recalls Scott’s accusation, in his anonymous review of Godwin’s *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1803),that the biographer had made his characters speak almost in the language of ‘*soi-distant* philosophy’.[[47]](#footnote-47) Certainly, Desborough finds Bletson’s ‘description of the old poet’ ‘unintelligible’.[[48]](#footnote-48) Although in 1822 Scott anonymously donated £10 to Godwin’s relief fund, saying he disapproved of his politics but acknowledged his ‘genius’, in *Woodstock*, suffering his own financial difficulties,he is less kind.[[49]](#footnote-49)

With these unsettling portraits, Scott rewrites both *Mandeville* and Godwin’s *History of the Commonwealth* in a distinctly personal way. In his essay ‘Of History and Romance’ Godwin had suggested that histories of individuals not only promote self-knowledge in the reader but also ‘mark the operation of human passions’ in a way that cannot be achieved through the study of mankind in the mass.[[50]](#footnote-50) Reassessing the idea that social forces shape an individual’s passions (as Mandeville’s irrational hatred is caused by the interaction of religious intolerance, chivalry and the doctrine of spiritual equality), Scott supplies his commissioners with unworthy motivations based on political position and self-interest. The contrast between Bletson’s supposed principles and his self-interested conduct is particularly marked. In suggesting the ‘caution dictated by the timidity of the philosopher’s disposition’ (‘conscious his doctrines were suspected, and his proceedings watched’), for example, Scott alludes both to Godwin’s sense of paranoia and his supposed retreat from direct political engagement in the early decades of the nineteenth century.[[51]](#footnote-51) Instead of Bletson facing the dangers he has generated, he, like Godwin, continues an educational project (‘if he had an opportunity of talking in private with an ingenuous and intelligent youth’) that Scott portrays as highly insidious.[[52]](#footnote-52) Worse still, like the eponymous hero of *St Leon* (and Dousterswivel), Bletson is an experimenter. Unprepared to sacrifice himself, he is at the same time hypocritically indifferent to practical obstacles to change, ‘for the miscarriage of his experiment no more converts the political speculator, than the explosion of a retort undeceives an alchemist’.[[53]](#footnote-53) With this portrait, Scott’s fiction reverses Godwin’s psychologically complex historical fiction to produce, not a developmental portrait but a performance of enmity. The historian’s desire to mete out ‘impartial reward’ that Godwin had expressed in his *History of the Commonwealth* is lacking.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Yet having roundly abused the radicals in the first volume and given the royalists a rather mean-spirited victory, Scott comes to suggest that the state is, after all, terrifyingly haunted, distorted by the monarchy and tarnished by the circulation of political tropes. The one moment of psychological torture comparable to *Mandeville* occurs when Cromwell confronts Anthony van Dyck’s portrait of Charles I on horseback, putting himself and implicitly the executed monarch to the trial of history. Oliver wishes to read Charles merely as a ‘man’ with ‘breath in his nostrils’, rather than as a king, and the painting as a mere ‘painted canvass’ rather than a representation of divine truth.[[55]](#footnote-55) Yet Charles’s eye, ‘cold’ but still ‘complaining’, suggests whichever of the king’s two bodies Cromwell confronts, the republican will continue to be haunted.[[56]](#footnote-56) Worse still, kingly iconography continues to shape Cromwell’s behaviour.[[57]](#footnote-57) In this scene, although Cromwell talks of his disinterested desire to protect ‘injured liberties’, he struggles to imagine government outside the familiar terms of direct personal rule. Fit only to dominate ‘crouching Frenchmen, or supple Italians’, Charles issues a challenge to Oliver to reign more completely.[[58]](#footnote-58) Although Cromwell suggests that Royalist tricks only work on ‘simple fools’, the shows of monarchy terrorize and control this representative of the modernizing state.[[59]](#footnote-59)

In *Battleridge* Dr Scot experiences a moment of sentimental reflection when he considers Charles I’s absence from an empty picture gallery where the monarch had so often walked; in *Woodstock* the dead monarch remains all too present. Equally, in Cooke’s novel the portrait of Sir Ralph Vesey’s ancestor leads to the deeds that confirm legitimate ownership, whereas in Scott’s work the portrait of Sir Victor Lee, Sir Henry’s ancestor, suggests a more dubious narrative of acquisition. Confronted by the portrait in the style of Holbein of Victor Lee participating in the dissolution of the monasteries, Tomkins smiles, perhaps to see the ‘grim old cavalier employed in desecrating a religious house’, perhaps for ‘some other ideas’.[[60]](#footnote-60) The Reformation establishes a precedent for the Civil War. Further, in *An Historical and Moral View* Wollstonecraft had made the demystifying suggestion that rulers were ‘individuals wishing to fence round their own wealth or power’ and that their ‘descendants’ were at work to solder ‘the chains they forged’.[[61]](#footnote-61) Echoing this cynicism, Tomkins’s smile hints the royalists were, like the Commissioners, despoilers, and freebooters. In line with this idea of royalist ruthlessness, the labyrinth behind the picture facilitates Charles’s escape, as in the Reformation it had aided the Catholic priests. Scott hints that images of terror (whatever their source) support the counter-revolutionary impulse. Even the labyrinth behind the portrait can be read as a nightmarish version of Burke’s organic constitution. Behind the portrait of destructive royalism/ banditry lies a confusion that defies healthy change.

Alongside such authoritarian hauntings, by royalists who may themselves be little better than reformist robbers, the re-circulation of tropes and behaviours, is likely, Scott hints, to harm even the post-Restoration state. In the damaged polis the real cannot be separated from the illusory or opponents distinguished from friends. For Wildrake and Everard, sentimental ties overcome political differences, but Holdenough, on discovering that his companion Rochecliffe, ‘one of the pillars of Hugh Church’, is still alive, quarrels with him. Unlike the dissenter Barton and the Anglican Dr Beaumont (whose discussions lead to common ground) in *The Loyalists*, and more viciously disputative than Oldbuck and Sir Arthur in *The Antiquary*, the combatants fight ‘more like fierce polemics about to rend each other’s eyes out, than Christian divines’.[[62]](#footnote-62) Only their separation preserves harmony. The alternative to such division is even more darkly confusing. Unlike his significantly named ancestor ‘Victor’, Henry Lee cannot distinguish between victory and defeat – after the first fight between Tomkins and Sir Henry, Joseph lets the old royalist appear to win. Later the deceived knight almost kills his own son. Through a process of appropriation, re-appropriation and even collusion, the royalists are linked with their opponents as much as with their allies. And although the marriage of Everard and Alice indicates possible cross-party union, the shared licentiousness of Charles II and Tomkins suggests a more sinister space of agreement. Both meet their objects of sexual desire near Rosamond’s well. Admittedly, Tomkins attempts to rape Phoebe, whereas, as Hewitt argues, Charles is re-educated by Alice. [[63]](#footnote-63) Nonetheless, the sense of sexual threat still remains. When Alice is delayed in escorting the king out of the environs of Woodstock, her father feels ‘deep anxiety’.[[64]](#footnote-64) Even though the monarchy has been modernized, the post-Restoration state will be haunted by the threat of violent domination.

Scott reverses the medicinal symbolism of *The Loyalists* and *Battleridge*. In *St Ronan’s Well* (1823), Scott associated the fountain, metaphor for the healthy polis, with Dr Quackleben’s false healing and the fakery of a contemporary spa; in *Woodstock*, worse still,the well’s isolated environs are associated with violence along with fraud. Even Alice, the figure of reinvented political romance, cannot heal. Although Alice compares her instructional verbal sketch of the ideal king to ‘the wholesomest medicines’ which ‘are often bitter’, Charles answers with ‘asperity’: ‘physicians are reasonable enough to expect their patients to swallow them, as if they were honeycomb’. [[65]](#footnote-65) Whereas West’s Mrs Mellicent offers healing ‘sallads, oat-cake, and metheglin’, Alice’s medicine is not sweet enough and her ideal portrait will, history instructs, never be painted in reality.[[66]](#footnote-66) Even worse, claiming the language of ‘wholesome medicaments’, Cromwell rejects the ‘honey-comb’ Charles II craves. Using the ‘canting drawl’ of radical dissent, the politician suborns the words of spiritual purity needed by the country. [[67]](#footnote-67)

Portraying sickness at the state’s heart, Scott also complicates the ownership of scientific rationality that West claimed for Church and King. Dr Rochecliffe, a ‘constituent member of the Royal Society’ accepts the terms of Charles’s question: ‘Why, if a vessel is filled brimful of water, and a large live fish plunged into the water, nevertheless it shall not overflow the pitcher?’[[68]](#footnote-68) The conservation of volume is overlooked in favour of royal assertion. West’s conservative image of Anglican rationality is undermined. The admittedly humorous incident gains sinister resonance through Tomkins’s use of a similar vessel. Before attempting to rape Phoebe, Tomkins gives her the time needed to fill a pitcher to agree to his advances. An Independent who possesses real scientific powers rather than the fraudulent magic of *The Antiquary*’s Dousterswivel, Tomkins might be read as a Godwinian whose actual political ‘gunpowder’ has ironically helped the monarch.[[69]](#footnote-69) Alternately, with his many pseudonyms and ‘wizard’-like moral qualities, Tomkins can be read as the author of *Waverley*.[[70]](#footnote-70) Yet the Trusty Joe of the novel’s prefatory material vanishes in the text. If Jo’s (only ultimately) pro-royalist plots parallel Scott’s own authorial activities, the character’s viciousness signals self-doubt on the author’s part. The struggle to claim political rationality is dangerous because its outcomes cannot be foreseen; the results of the plots of the *Waverley* novels remain uncertain.

Both West and Cooke claim a kind of medicinal empiricism for the followers of Church and King, while deploying gothic against their opponents. Eschewing the narrative of healing, Godwin reverses these associations. In his account, the terror caused by religious and political sectarianism has real mental force and to analyse such enmity is, implicitly, to possess (radical) rationality. In some sense, what West performs, Godwin analyzes. However, these Civil War fictions do not just struggle over ownership of the gothic but over two ways of understanding historical process. Cooke’s and West’s approach allows for a first cause, for some divine influence on human affairs. Between *Battleridge* in 1799 and *The Loyalists* in 1812, this Protestant moderation of the divine right of kings becomes increasingly secularized, but Godwin’s *Mandeville* even more firmly strips away the idea of supernatural intervention in the historical process. In its place, the sectarianism which relies on religious fantasy becomes part of the terrifyingly determined, inescapable process of history. Despite Scott’s mockery of Godwin, *Woodstock* comes closer to this second position. However, it adds an unpleasant littleness to the picture of historical causality. As *Woodstock* considers the standpoints taken by earlier historical novelists, Scott suggests it is not so much sectarianism but the petty rhetoric of debate that drives historical process.

Scott’s novel reveals the role of the gothic as a driver in such debate. Unlike Radcliffe, whose explained form of supernatural removes the cause of terror, Scott suggests gothic’s continuing manipulation across the political spectrum to generate power. Scott wryly demonstrates that, by enabling particular accounts of historical causality, the gothic can be used to produce either a radical or a more conservative understanding of political change in the present. In *Woodstock*, however, while Church, King and radicals all use the gothic to generate fear, the radicals are most sincere, genuinely feeling the terrors of the past. At the same time, all sides denigrate its use by opponents. Nonetheless, genuine terror is not lacking amidst the metafictional humour of Scott’s own account. While Godwin in his *History of the Commonwealth* had been concerned with tracing patterns of causation, Scott traces supernatural effects to the most banal of causes; play-acting and mimicry largely replaces psychological solemnity. Yet in tracing historical causality in the operation of a series of practical jokes, Scott has exposed the weakness of the ‘drapery of the moral imagination’ and has shown authority’s reliance on fear rather than romance. The gesture of litotes, the reduction of political and generic debate to farce, does not remove enmity or sooth political doubt. On the contrary, *Woodstock*’s meta-analysis reveals that the traces of former language and policies, of earlier processes of recuperation and compromise, linger to constrain the present. When past royalists can be mistaken for freebooters, a process of hybridization has taken place that renders both modernity and monarchy suspect. In the years before Catholic Emancipation (1829) and the Great Reform Act (1832), Scott finds it more difficult to distinguish between false devils and real phantasms than he had once supposed.

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3. Anthony Jarrells, *Britain’s Bloodless Revolutions: 1688 and the Romantic Reform of Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), *passim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jane West, *Letters Addressed to a Young Man*, 3 vols (London: Strahan, 1802), III, p. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Kenneth M. Sroka, ‘Fairy Castles and Character in *Woodstock*’, *Essays in Literature*, 14 (1987), 189-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Fiona Price, *Reinventing Liberty: Nation, Commerce and the Historical Novel from Walpole to Scott* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 170-206. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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11. West, *Letters*, III, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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15. Cooke, *Battleridge*, II, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Fiona Price, ‘“Experiments Made by the Airpump”: Jane West’s *The Loyalists* (1812) and the Science of History’, *Women’s Writing*, 19 (August 2012), 315–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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18. Jane West, *A Tale of the Times*, 3 vols(London: Longman and Rees, 1799), III, p. 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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20. William Godwin, *Mandeville: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England*, ed. by Pamela Clemit, in *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, 8 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992), VI (1992), p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
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22. Timothy Campbell, “‘The Business of War’”, p. 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Walter Scott to Robert Southey, 1824, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Herbert John Clifford Grierson, Davidson Cook and W. M. Parker, 12 vols(London: Constable, 1932-7),VIII, 374-7 (VIII, 376). For other sources, see Walter Scott, *Woodstock*, ed. by Tony Inglis, with J. H. Alexander, David Hewitt and Alison Lumsden, *Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels*, 30 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993-2012), IXX (2009), pp. 419-26; subsequently *Woodstock*, Edinburgh edition. Although political differences stemming from the Civil War linger in Scott’s *Peveril of the Peak* (1822), as it is primarily set at the time of the Popish Plot of 1678 it falls outside the scope of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
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29. Burke, p. 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
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61. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, VI, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
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65. Scott, *Woodstock*, III, pp. 51-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
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