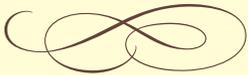




STUDIES IN
Burke
AND HIS TIME


REGINA JANES

Edmund Burke: The Man with Too Many Countries

DAVID E. WHITE

Burke, Barry, and Bishop Butler

DAVID CLARE

*Brian Friel's Invocation of Edmund Burke
in 'Philadelphia, Here I Come!'*

JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

Is Burke Conservatism's Intellectual Father?

REVIEWS OF

RICHARD BOURKE, *Empire and Revolution:*

The Political Life of Edmund Burke

P. J. MARSHALL & DONALD BRYANT, eds.,

The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume IV:

Party, Parliament, and the Dividing of the Whigs

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CONTENTS

- 2 *Editor's Introduction*
5 *Notes on Contributors*
- 6 Edmund Burke: The Man with Too Many Countries
REGINA JANES
- 28 Burke, Barry, and Bishop Butler
DAVID E. WHITE
- 42 Brian Friel's Invocation of Edmund Burke
in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*
DAVID CLARE
- 55 Is Burke Conservatism's Intellectual Father?
JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

BOOK REVIEWS

- 65 Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke*.
STEVEN P. MILLIES
- 71 *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume IV: Party, Parliament, and the Dividing of the Whigs, 1780–1794*,
edited by P. J. Marshall and Donald Bryant.
JOHN FAULKNER

Editor's Introduction



THE BRITISH JURIST Sir Frederick Pollock wrote that “Burke [is] full of ideas more instructive than other men’s systems.” Whether it has been nationalism, Marxism, or more insidious forms of political determinism, it does appear that interest in Burke’s writings has risen particularly at times when confidence in the victory and benefit of systems has reached a peak. The immediate postwar years were one such period, and the 1990s, too, when the future appeared to be the “Third Way,” and intellectuals contemplated the end of history. What do we make of Burke, though, now that the familiar features of such political systems—nation states and patriotism, political parties, the moral bases of an explicitly Christian society—appear themselves to be disintegrating? Since these features were also the very things by which we could connect ourselves—just—to his world, we might ask now, “Which Burkean ideas and writings will impress themselves most forcefully on the figure we summon up over the next few years to counsel us?”

In this process of reconfiguration, it is likely that highly recognizable aspects of Burke’s thought will strike us in a new and surprising light. Each of the articles in this issue provides an absorbing example of this, considering as they do familiar themes in Burke studies through connections and contexts that transform their import and so draw fresh insights from the store of those instructive ideas. In “Edmund Burke: The Man with Too Many Countries,” Regina Janes explores Burke’s association with the concept of patriotism (a “mutually repellent” combination) in a way that explains how the former, as “an Irish emigrant living an un-English but Anglophilic dream of property and place,” attempted

a distinctive play on the latter as a sentiment consistent with the “fervid internationalism” of his pre-revolutionary writings and one quite at odds with the inward-looking nationalism still often associated with the rhetoric of *Reflections*, and of Britain’s war against Revolutionary France.

David White’s study of the intellectual and artistic connections between the Irish painter James Barry, the theologian and philosopher Bishop Joseph Butler, and Burke himself sheds intriguing light on Burke’s (now largely accepted) latitudinarian religion. Burke was an early patron and mentor to his compatriot Barry, and recommended to him Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* at a time when the artist was in spiritual crisis. It was a recommendation that, along with Joseph Addison’s essays, Burke proposed for religious doubt on more than one occasion; but White’s argument unfolds in ways that also disclose important new paths to the depth and complexity of Burke’s thought, well beyond the parameters of his own religious convictions.

David Clare provides similarly unexpected avenues of investigation in his examination of the function Burke’s famous *Reflections on the Revolution in France* serves in Brian Friel’s play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Starting from the playwright’s unexpected deployment of one of Burke’s most familiar passages, the paean to Marie Antoinette, Clare unfolds an extended intertextual presence of the *Reflections* throughout the play, showing how key arguments of loss and gain embedded in Burke’s antirevolutionary polemic are employed as commentary upon the persistent migration of the Irish to the New World.

In “Is Burke Conservatism’s Intellectual Father?” James Matthew Wilson revisits a perennial question with a succinct perception. Situating his thought in the context of traditions of analysis, such as Whig contractual theory, with which it is often considered starkly antagonistic, Wilson teases out vital (but often blurred) distinctions of terminology that indicate the presence of a robust tradition of Christian Platonist thinking, woven in the polemic of the *Reflections* and informing a different, more nuanced and vibrant form of “conservatism” than the nostalgic form of retrenchment with which Burke’s name is still associated today.

In whatever clothing Burke might yet appear, there is no doubt that it will be all the more illuminating owing to the monumental editorial efforts that have produced scholarly editions of his correspondence

and much of his writings. Most recently, Oxford University Press's nine-volume edition of Burke's *Writings and Speeches* has been brought to completion by the appearance of Volume IV, on "Party, Parliament, and the Dividing of the Whigs," and we are delighted to carry a review of that volume in this issue. Reflective of these abundant sources is Richard Bourke's recent study *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke*, which stands as a signal achievement in its incorporation of a vast amount of primary source material, and which is also reviewed extensively in these pages.

As part of its own ongoing contribution to the promotion of research and conversation on Burke studies, and following the success of its meeting at Villanova in February 2015, the Edmund Burke Society will center its next international conference on the topic of "Edmund Burke and *The Conservative Mind*: Russell Kirk on the Burke Revival, Then and Now." The conference is being planned in association with St. John Fisher College, Rochester, New York, and will combine an examination of Russell Kirk's contribution to the postwar Burke revival with assessments of how Burke's inexhaustible imagination may guide reflection and analysis in the early twenty-first century. Anyone interested in attending the conference or presenting a paper should look out for forthcoming details on the Burke Society webpage or contact this journal's executive editor at iancrowe@bac.edu.

IAN CROWE

Notes on Contributors



DAVID CLARE is an Irish Research Council-funded postdoctoral fellow, based in the Moore Institute at the National University of Ireland, Galway. His first monograph, *Bernard Shaw's Irish Outlook*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in November 2015, and his work has appeared in the *Irish Studies Review*, the *New Hibernia Review*, the *Irish University Review*, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, the *James Joyce Literary Supplement*, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, and *Emerging Perspectives*.

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*Edmund Burke:
The Man with Too Many Countries*



REGINA JANES
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Abstract

This essay addresses the rifts between Burke and various patriotisms: simple love of country, the critical (opposition) patriotism that turns into nineteenth-century liberalism, and the bigotry that becomes modern nationalism. In the 1770s Burke develops his theory of party as an alternative to and evasion of popular patriot politics. Out-of-doors patriotism he makes parliament specific. In the 1790s, theorizing untaught feelings and prejudices against rationalist leveling, Burke might be expected to urge untaught, spontaneous, emotive proto-nationalism, but he does not. His patriotism remains critical, entwined with liberty, and turns international.

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WHEN THE TOPIC “Burke and patriotism” was proposed to this distracted eighteenth-century literary scholar, I tried to put the words together and immediately saw—or set—spinning apart what Ian Crowe has so meticulously stitched together: Burke, patriotism, and public spirit. For Burke’s period, of course, there are many patriotisms. So let me begin by parsing “patriotism” for the eighteenth century, where it has far

too many meanings without having the right one—that is, the one we immediately assume as non-specialist inhabitants of our own time, the twenty-first century: the patriotism that is equivalent to nationalism.

Burke and patriotism do not glide easily into each other. On the one hand, they are mutually repellent rather than attractive, and this is true not of one but of most definitions of patriotism in his period and ours. On the other hand, Burke and patriotism are inextricable, a language he never abandons, a terminology he clings to, the ground for everything he values except religion. Complicating matters further is “nationalism,” a term that does not yet exist, but slides up and down patriotism like a bright green Cuban dancing snake or a ghost about to materialize, feinting here and there. It, too, has multiple referents, some of which Burke ought to have invented, but did not. Patriotism (and the order of things) got in the way.

In its simplest, still current sense, “patriotism” is defined in the first edition of Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755) as “love for one’s country, zeal for one’s country.” This simple patriotism is the “unproblematic” variant in Hugh Cunningham’s account.¹ With patriotism taken as allegiance to the *patria*, the native land, more precisely the fatherland, then Burke seems to have been what he once called himself, “a runaway son.”² He lived abroad, he died abroad, and he was buried abroad. To complicate things a little further, after the death of his elder brother, Burke became not only an émigré but an absentee, one of those Irishmen who spent his rents abroad. Yet, as an Irish emigrant living an un-English but Anglophilic dream of property and place, Burke never tried to lose his accent, to erase his brogue. Minor enough, that choice signals that, becoming English, he did not cease to be Irish. He did not leave behind one identity when he took up a new one.³ At intervals, he alludes to his divided allegiances, the place of his birth contrasted with the sphere

1 Hugh Cunningham, “The Language of Patriotism, 1750–1914,” *History Workshop* 12 (1981): 9, 13.

2 “Sir, my name is Edmund Burke, at your service; I am a runaway son from a father, as you are.” The words were said to Joseph Emin and appear in Emin’s autobiography *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, an Armenian* (London, 1792), 90.

3 Conor Cruise O’Brien, eloquent on this issue, quotes Horace Walpole’s acid ridicule of the “patriot remonstrance by an Irishman, from a papist family.” *The Great Melody* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 90. O’Brien makes the important point that “passionate patriots” in the eighteenth century tended to vehement anti-

of his duties.⁴ He will glide from speaking of the English as “they” to rejoicing in “our” glory, “our” achievements. To be both, however, is not to be one or the other, but to slide back and forth. To have two countries is to be a man without *a* country, a single exclusive, unquestioned allegiance.⁵

This is a quandary Adam Smith does not imagine in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). For Smith, one’s country is the state or sovereignty that is the place of one’s birth and education, and where one continues to live surrounded by others interested in one’s welfare. We take its prosperity and glory as honor to ourselves; “we are proud of its superiority, and mortified” when it appears to sink beneath other states in any way.⁶ Smith did not imagine a situation like Burke’s, taking England’s prosperity and glory to himself, and mortified again and again by Ireland’s situation.

David Bromwich has observed that patriotism, love of country, the ruling passion Pope attributes to Lord Cobham, never ranked high among the political virtues Burke admired.⁷ Instead, Burke occasionally singles out double identities: Admiral Keppel’s two countries, one of birth, one of descent, or Fitzwilliam, pulled out of Ireland, “a true Patriot, a true friend of both Countries.”⁸ With his own double identities

Catholicism. That put them fundamentally at odds with Burke, whose sympathies lay with Catholics, whatever his beliefs were.

4 Notably over the Irish commercial propositions in 1785, when Pitt made an allusion to Burke’s “native country.” Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford *et al.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–2015), 9:590, cf. 586.

5 So Sir Roger L’Estrange translating Cicero’s *Offices*: “Our Parents, Children, Kindred, Acquaintance are all dear to us; but *our single Country* is more than *all the Rest*.” 6th ed. (London, 1720). Book I, p. 34. Yuval Levin describes Burke as an “Irish-born English politician” and Paine as “an English-born immigrant to America,” so in some quarters Burke attains his aspirational identity, but is still split down the middle. See *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), xiv.

6 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford University Press, 1976; Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1982), 227.

7 David Bromwich, *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 28.

8 Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:182; letter to the Rev. Thomas Hussey, *post* 9 December 1796 in Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. T. W. Copeland *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958–70), 9:167; Regina Janes, *Edmund Burke on Irish Affairs* (Dublin: Maunsel, 2002), 384.

twisted in the imperial/colonial knot, Burke could not embrace a single geographic allegiance without strangling in a contradiction. Multiplying Burke's accidental duplicity, posterity—that's us—defines Burke as a man with too many countries altogether. We bizarrely identify him by geographies he did not inhabit—America, Bristol, India, France, Ireland, St. Eustatius, forsooth, even Scotland as university rector. The only geographical identity one does not associate with his name is the aspirational one he claimed, England.⁹

That national identity escapes him, though narrower acres find him at home. Elizabeth Lambert, not Burke, has written the book of Beaconsfield, and Disraeli, a Jew, took the title.¹⁰ This centripetal effect, Burke spinning out from an absent or displaced center, held in place by the tap root Beaconsfield, is not accidental. It is a feature of what made him what he was and enabled the thought he spun for us. From a root that was not his, that is other to him but aspirational and principled, an idea rather than a reality, yet an idea being made into a reality, a concept rather than a tradition, yet a concept being transformed into a tradition: from this imaginary claim, Burke develops his fundamental argument for a social order that precedes him and does not altogether include him, but within which he modeled himself, made a life, and negotiated the varieties of eighteenth-century patriotism—a hydra if ever there was one.

Burke's career was a triumph of the imagination and perhaps in retrospect also only an imaginary triumph. To arrive in London in his twenties to study law, to make a mark in literature, to acquire a gradually increasing sense of his own importance and value signaled in the virulent break with Johnson's friend William Gerard Hamilton, to become a member of parliament linked with great owners of ancient estates, to advise such men on policy and procedure and perhaps—if Shelburne is to be believed—to control their thinking, to acquire an estate himself equipped with all the statuary and all the debts of an eighteenth-century aristocrat, to become one of the most prominent politicians in that

9 A strong statement of that aspirational identity appears in the *Morning Post's* account of the Irish commercial propositions debate. See *Writings and Speeches*, 9:590n, and on empire and protection to Ireland, *ibid.*, 591.

10 Elizabeth R. Lambert, *Edmund Burke of Beaconsfield* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware P, 2003). Bromwich has recently highlighted Burke's defense of the Jews of St. Eustatius. See *Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke*, 428–29.

adopted country, to receive a pension from the crown he had opposed the length of his career, to see his own Fitzwilliam Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, poised to initiate reforms Burke at last dared to desire, and then to find it all dust and ashes as the world in which he had triumphed seemed to be taking the path he had not followed and had attempted to ward others from, to see Fitzwilliam recalled in disgrace from Ireland and Warren Hastings pensioned by the East India Company—and turning out the last light, to see his son die: such was Burke’s trajectory. His life describes the ungrateful arc of the vanity of human wishes, but the heights he reached from where he began remain stunning, and the intellectual energy that possessed him until his death most stunning of all. Burke had reason to attach himself, to be grateful to the system that had enabled such a trajectory and such exertions. In our country, we would call this a triumph of the American dream. The English have no cliché for it; the closest approximation is rich American heiresses marrying into threatened aristocratic or gentry country estates, and even for that there is no name but “Jamesian.” *Downton Abbey* isn’t an adjective, yet. Burke’s accomplishment is both unique and a sign of the imminence of changes he deplored. It also lies athwart the connotations of eighteenth-century patriotisms.

Let me illustrate this multiplicity with an anecdote of a town in Pennsylvania with the initials W-B, named for two eighteenth-century politicians (Wilkes-Barre). Approaching the city on Interstate 81, I saw a plant for a newspaper, *The Patriot News*. At the hotel where I stopped for the night, one of the local papers offered guests was *The Citizens’ Voice*. When I checked in, I asked the desk clerk about the pronunciation and origin of the city’s name. I was told some people said Wilkes-Bar, and others Wilkes-Berry, and others Wilkes-Baruh, and others Wilkes-Baree, and she thought it was Wilkes-Baree. As to what Wilkes and Baree were, she thought they were the town’s founders, Mr. Wilkes and Mr. Baree. I deeply regret not having pursued this line of questioning with the morning desk clerk and especially with the clerk at the “wine and spirits” shop the night before.¹¹ The point is simple enough: *The Patriot News*, *The Citizens’ Voice*: is it possible for any titles

11 Somehow I am certain that the “wine and spirits” shop could have given me something I could use, but I am not now going to invent a lively discussion among the

to be less Burke-like? Yet Mr. Wilkes and Colonel Barré were Burke's allies from time to time, and in Burke's time it is difficult to find a reference to patriotism that does not have this patriot whiff.

So let us review our patriotisms and nationalisms. "Simple patriotism," the simple love of country, the only sense recognized by Johnson in 1755 (when Burke was new to London), remains a modern sense of the word. "Country" Johnson defines as, "The place which any man inhabits," without illustration, and, "The place of one's birth; the native soil," which he illustrates with a strange citation from Sprat.¹² Burke of course has countries in both those senses, and they are not the same.

Nationalism, the dominant current sense of patriotism, has two principal referents: Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, and xenophobia with a positive spin. Both are—predictably—almost altogether absent in Burke.¹³ Certainly the "-ism" is missing. Johnson's *Dictionary* does not know "nationalism" but does know "national" as "[b]igotted to one's own country," a definition without an illustrative quotation. When the word "nationalism" appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in a translation from the French in 1798, it carries Johnson's sense of "bigotry." "Nationalism" designates a preference for national over wider interests, for one's own country over mankind. In Johnson's "national," attitudes later emergent as "jingoism," "my country right or wrong" ("love it or leave it," when transportation improved), doubt-

patrons about the origins of the name of their city. Should I ever find that road again, however ...

- ¹² Defining "country" Johnson commits a little patriotic factious disturbance. Illustrating "country" as "place of one's birth," he cites Sprat, viz. "The king set on foot a reformation in the ornaments and advantages of our *country*." He also cites the definitively "patriotic" lines from Pope on Cobham's ruling passion issuing in his dying breath, "O, save my *country*, heav'n, shall be your last." (Johnson uses the phrase "ruling passion" to define "patriot": "One whose ruling passion is the love of his country.") What is odd in these quotations is that they have nothing to do with the place of one's birth. Nothing suggests that Sprat or Cobham speaks specifically of the place he was born. What Johnson's definitions do, however, is balance the king and the patriot politician as native and serviceable to country. In 1755, however, England's king, George II, whom Johnson found peculiarly detestable, had not been born in England.
- ¹³ As, indeed, Burke is missing from Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006). It might be observed that Burke taught Portland and others to refer to "Aristocracy" as identity and interest, and that for Britain Burke performed the class analysis Anderson finds unimaginable before the revolution. See *ibid.*, 6–7.

less existed, cached under Johnson's "zeal" and "bigoted."¹⁴ An ancient English characteristic, it is perhaps best summed up in the immortal line, "so far as I can see, all foreigners are fools."

"Nation" occurs frequently in Burke designating "the state," and "national" usually carries Johnson's first meaning—"public," "general," rather than "private, particular." When the new French, revolutionary meaning of "the nation" appears, designating an imaginary whole in which the people constitute the state and the old orders are leveled, Burke marks and parodies the usage. So, the Duke of Bedford will be told by the French that his property belongs to "the nation."¹⁵ The democratic thrust of nationalism is the property of the French, and that model Burke did not favor. Later, in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he will divide "the people," the 400,000 who represent "the British public," into Jacobins and "the more passive part of the nation." So, too, he discounts the murmur that the Foxite minority speaks as "the general sense of the nation."¹⁶

At first, Burke seems to have been skeptical that the French project was possible. Theorizing the progress of affections to the national level, he doubts such nationalism can exist. Provincial identities are stepping stones to national identity. If they are removed, the way to national identity itself vanishes also. Provincial identities form part of the progress beyond family and neighborhood, little images of "the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill."¹⁷ Erasing Bretons and Normans, Paris expects to create "Frenchmen with one country, one heart, and one assembly. But instead of being all Frenchmen, the greater likelihood is, that the inhabitants of that region will

14 Cunningham places its emergence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as jingoism. "The Language of Patriotism, 1750–1914," 23–24.

15 *Letter to a Noble Lord*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:179. Burke cites the French usage in a note in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, quoting a French communiqué that claims "the English nation supports impatiently the continuation of the war," *ibid.*, 216n.

16 *Ibid.*, 223–24, 222. Characteristically for Burke, the nation is divided, rather than the seamless unity postulated by the French usage (a unity that paradoxically and invisibly excludes former proprietors). To read the *Reflections* in search of patriotism of any kind is to find fissures and divisions, social analysis and not social solidarity. In Burke, "the nation" refers to a divided public and public opinion, within a conflicted participatory politics, rather than a reified ideal, from which difference and division have been excised, that generates a new identity.

17 *Reflections*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:244.

shortly have no country.”¹⁸ Later, however, Jacobinism seems to achieve such a leveling. The rights of man displace all earlier identities, from every source. Jacobinism “tak[es] the people as equal individuals, without any corporate name or description, without attention to property, without division of powers, ... [it] brib[es] the publick creditors, or the poor, with the spoils, now of one part of the community, now of another, without regard to prescription or possession.... [It is a] scheme of things, which sets aside all the antient corporate capacities and distinctions of the kingdom, and subverts the whole fabric of its antient laws and usages, political, civil and religious, to introduce a system founded on the supposed *Rights of the [sic] Man, and the absolute equality of the human race.*”¹⁹ Old patriotic terms, constituting the “order of things,” face off against an as yet unnamed, un-conceptualized modern nationalism, with, paradoxically, an international reach. The equality of the “race,” not the “French,” is at issue.

The Hastings trial also produces the nation as an imaginary community. Burke has been observed to be more attentive to national character as argument during the trial than in the criticism that led to it.²⁰ Hastings’ counsel undertook to vindicate the national character from Burke’s aspersions and produced a laudatory account of their client, who improves on God in making every person under *his* supervision prosperous and happy.²¹ The crucial shift, however, is in the trial’s auditors, who are produced as a proud community by the fact of the trial itself, as it opened (and whose feelings Burke himself shared). The *Gazeteer* in 1788 supplies Anderson’s terminology: “The *humblest subject* who was present felt *aggrandized in being a member of a community* whose laws thus subjected the highest magistrate to their inquisition ... and extend the protection of English justice even over the tribes of India.”²² The

18 *Writings and Speeches*, 2:244. Flagg Taylor observes that Montesquieu thought provincial identities were already dissolving into Paris, so this may be another place where Burke differs from a writer he much admired.

19 *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies* (1793) in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:458–9.

20 Humberto García, *Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 95, 119–25. P. J. Marshall, “Introduction,” *Writings and Speeches*, 7:12, 15–16.

21 *Ibid.*, 4–5, 7–8.

22 16 February, 1788, quoted *ibid.*, 1.

humble aggrandized as member of a community: if Burke has not created modern nationalism, he has been the occasion of its birth in others.

The closest Burke himself comes to something like the French usage appears very early, in the *Short Account of a late Short Administration* (1769), where he describes the Rockingham party as opposed by placemen and pensioners but “supported by the Confidence of the Nation.”²³ Burke’s usage is specifically “patriotic”: it marks a distinction between placemen or pensioners and the nation, between ministers and people, rather than a French erasure of aristocrats and their property in favor of the people who constitute the nation.

That sense of “patriotism” is the special migratory eighteenth-century sense that wanders from Bolingbroke through Cobham and the elder Pitt to Wilkes and Colonel Barré to the Rockingham connection and even George III himself, the would-be Patriot King. As Hugh Cunningham states, “patriotism was the legitimation of opposition.”²⁴ It provided the terms (laws, freedom, rights, constitution) in which one could propose a politics not identified with the court and dissociated from religious controversy. Patriot politics displace religious politics (or, in Ireland, reconfirm them). Whether the opposition were to Walpole or to Bute or to North, it preferred the interests of the *patria*, however defined, to the prince, and it left the church[es] largely to their own petitions and devices, refocusing the terms of political debate on other issues of governance, including laws, rights, liberties, constitution, tyranny, corruption, parliament. So Burke could oppose his party over a religious issue—their support for a relaxed subscription for Anglican clergy—without breaking with his party.²⁵ This was what Samuel Johnson had in mind when, a Tory in a world of Whigs, he called such patriotism “the last refuge of a scoundrel.” Revising his dictionary in 1773 he made room for a new definition of “patriot”: “It is sometimes used for a factious disturber of the government.”

Johnson’s meaning long precedes him. It is to be found in Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and a more dangerous variant in Dryden’s *Absalom and Achitophel* where patriot’s “modern sense / Is one that would by law

23 *Writings and Speeches*, 2:56.

24 Cunningham, “The Language of Patriotism, 1750–1914,” 9.

25 *Writings and Speeches*, 2:359hn, 368hn.

supplant his prince” (emphasis added).²⁶ The patriots of Burke’s time were less interested in supplanting (a James II) than in governing their prince (a George I–III). In the case of George III himself, the patriot king reasserted the king’s role in the constitution, to save it from the pure democracy into which a young Burke believed the constitution had already fallen. The court party itself, Burke affirmed, did not want the king choosing his own ministers.²⁷

This peculiarly eighteenth-century form of patriotism I will try to remember to call “critical patriotism” in recognition of its oppositional stance. Johnson defines “patriot” as “[o]ne whose ruling passion is the love of his country,” and his quotations make transparent the word’s critical and oppositional affinities. Tickell links patriotism and freedom, echoing Shaftesbury’s view that without freedom or liberty there can be no country.²⁸ Thus Tickell: “*Patriots* who for sacred Freedom stood.” Pope is more explicit—patriots are those powerless against executive power: “Here tears shall flow from a more gen’rous cause, / Such tears as *patriots* shed for dying laws.”²⁹ Pope and Tickell figure the patriot as opposed to some adversary, perhaps external but more likely internal to the polity. Someone is attacking freedom, for which the patriot must stand; someone is murdering the laws, for which the patriot weeps.

Addison provides the wider sense of patriotism as attentive to the general good, irrespective of party and, indeed, of country.³⁰ Addison’s concept, formulated in an imperial Roman context, will be erased by

26 Swift observed in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) that “*furious Zeal* in publick Assemblies against the Corruptions of the Court” is the surest and best way to rise to chief minister, auguring one will be “most obsequious and subservient to the Will and Passions of their Master” (Book IV, Ch. vi). In a more dangerous time forty-five years earlier, John Dryden’s David in *Absalom and Achitophel* has no use for “a patriot’s all-atoning name” (l.179). The passage quoted continues, “The people’s brave, the politician’s tool, / Never was patriot yet but was a fool” (ll. 965–68.)

27 Bourke, “Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts,” *The Historical Journal* 55.3 (2012): 646–47.

28 For Shaftesbury, see Joep Leerssen, “Anglo-Irish Patriotism and its European Context: Notes towards a Reassessment,” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an dá chultúr* 3 (1988): 14. Richard Price reiterates this position in his *Discourse on the Love of Country* (1789).

29 Johnson cites here from Pope’s “Prologue” to Addison’s *Cato*. When he cites Addison’s *Cato* itself, below, he slightly recasts the passage, so that Johnson’s last line is transposed from the previous line, which refers to Cato’s son.

30 Leerssen, “Anglo-Irish Patriotism,” 14.

modern “nationalism” with its preference for the nation over mankind. That is not the position of Addison’s *Cato*: “The firm *patriot* there, / Who made the welfare of mankind his care, / Shall know he conquer’d.”³¹ This sense of “patriotism” prefers the general good, the welfare of mankind, to that of the particular nation. It comes into conflict with simple or “unproblematic patriotism” when the nation’s interests lean one way and those of other peoples tilt against the nation’s narrower interests. Never does the patriot or patriotism blindly endorse the way his nation does things. In fact, his position is precisely opposite—the patriot sees flaws and amends them, intent on the welfare of his own free and lawful place or of mankind in general. So “critical patriotism” seems precisely the right term.

This country that one loves or has zeal for is loved for its freedom, laws, and liberty.³² Even when modern mindless nationalism seems to have triumphantly arrived, texts veer away at the last minute. “Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves,” seems pure imperial celebration, but the rhyme word evokes patriot politics: “Britons never shall be slaves.”

Where is Burke in all this, apart from lodged among the foolish foreigners (with the Irish bulls)? He is at the heart of critical patriotism always, always engaged and always in opposition to it, or more precisely in contention with it.

When “very young,” Burke reports, he had been taught to admire the patriot writings against Walpole, the dying notes of Pope, the energetic strain of Johnson, but he had learned with more maturity to despise them.³³ Certainly by 1770, he claimed to be a passionate admirer of George II and his reign (in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*). Ian Crowe places Burke in the midst of a nest of transforming patriots when he arrives in London and makes a connection with Robert Dodsley’s workshop, where he turns decisively against Pope’s

31 “Barruel,” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1798), contrasts this sense of patriot with the new, narrower “nationalism” that prefers the good of a single nation to the good of the whole, mankind. Barruel’s “nationalism” clearly descends from Johnson’s “national” as bigotry. Addison’s *Cato* reveres Rome, but has Numidian allies. Rome is imperial, with a world elsewhere to be sought by those who follow *Cato*.

32 In the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, Burke sees this link between love of liberty and love of country coming loose and laments it; see below.

33 *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:227.

and Swift's siren Bolingbroke in the *Vindication of Natural Society*. After the fall of Walpole and more particularly with the accession of George III, patriotism convulsed and took another form. The period that saw Burke's deepest engagement with politics, then and now explicitly designated "patriotic," is the late 1760s and early 1770s, motivating Johnson's new, ironic definition for "patriot" in 1773 and dominated by such issues as Wilkes's Middlesex election, the massacre at St George's Fields, the publication of parliamentary debates, the role of juries in libel trials. With such patriots as Wilkes, Burke and his party were often near aligned, with Burke himself making the contact.³⁴

Burke's response to such an alliance was not merely ambivalent, but actively subversive. He responded with his major theoretical contribution without a geographical designation—party. When Burke is most deeply entwined with patriot opposition in the 1770s, he discovers a new way to legitimate opposition. He theorizes party connections, and so invents an alternative to "patriotism" that not only justifies opposition but also provides it with a continuing form, a flexible but durable embodiment, independent of popular agitation. Situated in parliament, that connection depends only on "the people," who understand the importance of the House of Commons, "its powers and . . . its privileges."³⁵ Like economical reform later, the defense of party has an anti-"patriotic" sleight of purpose. If "patriotism" legitimates opposition, party legitimates opposition while sidestepping "patriotism." Throughout *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, Burke insists on "the two only securities for the importance of the people; power arising from popularity; and power arising from connexion."³⁶ The privileging of party connections, "power arising from connexion," creates a third way between "slavery [the power of the crown] and civil confusion [the power of the Wilkes mob, of popularity]."³⁷ The distaste for popular critical patriotism surfaces when he urges his readers "so to be patriots, as not to forget we are gentlemen."³⁸ "Gentleman" precedes "patriot," an identity already in place before the new "patriot" name is acquired that

34 F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, Vol. I, 1730–1784* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 222. Burke was his party's point man for persuading Wilkes to return to France in the 1760s.

35 *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 2:321.

36 *Ibid.*, 2:264.

37 *Ibid.*, 2:321.

38 Bromwich, 180: *Writings and Speeches*, 2:320.

endangers what was there before. Distancing himself and his gentlemanly connection from patriot rhetoric, Burke retains the critical edge characteristic of eighteenth-century patriotism, but situates it in a different key and in the Commons, much as his double-cabinet fiction seems to derive from Louis XV's so-called double diplomacy. Burke tells us that "double cabinet" may be pronounced either as French or as English.³⁹

Responding to still more urgent political currents, economical reform took up a key patriotic theme, corruption, to distract a political public from parliamentary reform. The project aimed at the king's power and influence without enlarging popular influence, without making Burke's people or public more numerous. Such were at the time, Burke's objectives. After the fact, in the *Letter to a Noble Lord*, he congratulates himself on having prevented the death dance of Europe now being led by the French Revolution, threatening property.⁴⁰ In this case, Burke's prescience surprised even him. At least he congratulated himself on it, as he rarely did.

Yet even with Burke's faintly expressed distaste for the designation "patriot," whether that of Bolingbroke and his "patriot king" or Wilkes and his mob, to many Burke looked very patriotic indeed, a conspicuously factious disturber of government through the 1770s and 1780s. Defending the factious Rockingham party, bullying the king, and preferring men over measures, he also pandered to Americans, curtailed the king's gift list, and slunk alongside Wilkes (without fully embracing him).⁴¹ As an opposition politician, he also frequently articulates positions that seem "un-patriotic" in the simple sense of not being in the immediate interests of one's country. Over America, Burke proposes giving up the practice of American taxation, clearly a position against Britain's national interests. Over India he laments the difficulty of bringing home to our sympathies the far away and culturally alien, especially

39 Paul Langford observes that there is "no evidence that this term [Double Cabinet] was anything but Burke's invention," *ibid.*, 2:274n. Given that Burke offers his readers the choice of giving the term "in French or English, as you choose to pronounce it," he may have derived the concept from the more familiar double diplomacy of Louis XV, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*. *Ibid.*, 9:281-82.

40 *Ibid.*, 9:152, 157; threatening property, 159.

41 Many of Burke's most famed positions raised Johnson's skepticism, contempt, and disapproval. Within the Johnson circle, Oliver Goldsmith's "Retaliation," in which Burke gives up to party what was meant for mankind, was written in 1774, at the heart of this period. Where Goldsmith puts "party," Barruel will put "nation."

when we benefit from the exploitation of the distant. Overrating the country or pillaging individuals he charges as crimes, even when an English company and British individuals profit.⁴² Systematic preference for the native land (Johnson's "national") is something Burke often seems to lack. Indeed, he seems frequently to prefer the interests of the other, the distant Americans, the alien Indians, the Jews of St. Eustatius, Catholics over protestants in Ireland, Africans over slave traders. Granted, there are also to be found much easy anti-Semitism (in the *Reflections* and *Regicide Peace*), and easy racism (in the later writings on a *Regicide Peace*), which demand consideration, but not just now.⁴³ Burke's is an imperial critical patriotism that takes mankind as its project.

Surely, then, if eighteenth-century "patriotism" meant opposition and claimed "public spirit" for those outside the ministry and even outside parliament itself; if patriotism reclaimed public virtue from the corruptions of the court, its threats to liberty, its standing army, and is finally appropriated by the radical opposition outside parliament,⁴⁴ when such patriotism moves to parliamentary reform and constitutional challenges, then Burke, with his appeal to prejudice and untaught feeling, ought to be the progenitor of patriotism in a more modern sense, patriotism without a critical sense, bigotry to one's country, mindless nationalism. There, casual racism and anti-Semitism fit, boundaries invoked to make those inside them sit closer together, united against those outside. Such well-learned "untaught feelings" and exclusions are "prejudices" in our sense rather than Burke's, but he exploits them.

In this fantasy, to Burke's many credits as originator we ought also to be able to add the transformation of patriotism from oppositional to the right-wing, government-supporting, war-mongering jingo patriotism of modernity. Burke would have modeled that late-nineteenth-century turn by walking across the aisle to seat himself with the younger Pitt's supporters and by writing against the French in the name of British oaks and the Windsor keep.⁴⁵ Breathing fire against the traditional

⁴² *Writings and Speeches*, 7:334.

⁴³ For anti-semitism, see the "Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace," *ibid.*, 9:94; for racism, "First Letter on a Regicide Peace," *ibid.*, 9:255, and in the "Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace," where a negro is posited, unflatteringly, as a French ambassador.

⁴⁴ Cunningham, *Language of Patriotism*, 12.

⁴⁵ There is no evidence any actual walk occurred, but it makes a pleasant metaphor.

French enemy, he would have called out, as indeed he does, for enthusiasm for war, for zeal for a great war.⁴⁶ Riveted would be “our first, our dearest, most comprehensive relation, our country.”⁴⁷ Patriotism moves from opposition to government support, with a national, bigoted inflection. Wilkes himself made the change, presenting the freedom of the city of London to William Pitt the Younger, so why should Burke not theorize it?⁴⁸

The only problem with this hypothesis is that it is wrong. Not entirely wrong, of course, there is some truth to it, but its real interest lies in the way it is false. If we look at Burke’s invocations of what appears to be simple, uncritical, mindless patriotism, we find them twisted and twined with critical terminology. If we locate a theorization of modern imaginary nationalism, in which the nation displaces regional or tribal identities, Burke turns out, we have seen already, not to believe such a phenomenon possible or at least to be skeptical of its attainment.⁴⁹ Instead, we find a theorization of ideology trumping simple patriotism. “[Men] may become more attached to the country of their principles, than to the country of their birth.”⁵⁰ The formulation privileges critical patriotism, which comes equipped with principles, over nationalism, which abandons principles for the nation.

So let’s look at what appear to be trumpet calls for simple, uncritical patriotism. At the end of the *Reflections*, Burke invokes a full blown “my countrymen” who will exercise “a truly patriotic, free, and independent spirit, in guarding what they possess, from violation.”⁵¹ “[T]ruly patriotic” and “countrymen” make it appear that Burke has produced

46 *Writings and Speeches*, 9:223.

47 Quoted in Bromwich, *Intellectual Life*, 382. As will be noted of other such formulations, Burke couches this one as a negative: “People may give up false systems or opinions, he concludes, but it cannot be so with ‘the frame and constitution of the state: if that is disgraced, patriotism is destroyed in its very source. No man has ever willingly obeyed, much less was desirous of defending with his blood, a mischievous and absurd scheme of government. Our first, our dearest, most comprehensive relation, our country, is gone.’”

48 John Sainsbury, “John Wilkes, Debt, and Patriotism,” *Journal of British Studies* 34.2 (1995): 195.

49 Burke’s insight that an attack on tribal or regional identities does not necessarily promote national identity is worth bearing in mind in other contexts.

50 *Writings and Speeches*, 9:310.

51 Burke, *Reflections*, ed. J. C. D. Clark, 413–14.

Cunningham's "unproblematic patriotism." Yet, as in critical patriotic discourse, "patriotic" retains oppositional force, entwined with "free" and "independent," attached to the "constitution," that national "treasure." It has turned into a project that conserves; it guards what it possesses "from violation," but traditional critical patriotism also saves the laws from violation, the constitution from destruction (by ministers or monarchy). Earlier in the *Reflections*, a "good patriot" and the true politician work from existing materials, improvisatory bricolage, much like the process of Darwinian evolution.⁵² The *Reflections* ends with a distinction of patriotisms: that of young Depont, who must follow his country, and Burke's, which sees itself as shifting from its usual side, but still affined with "endeavors . . . to discredit opulent oppression." Burke identifies with liberty against tyranny, opulence, and oppression, in a critical act of distinction making.

In his *Letter to a Noble Lord* and the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, Burke also touches down now and then on what looks like "unproblematic patriotism": The king himself is "a patriot" and "improver of his native soil."⁵³ Britons must find means to resist France in "their own patriotism and their own courage," and "*local* patriotism" persuades the wise and worthy to combat France. Three hundred years of military competition with France have led to "national honor" and "national glory."⁵⁴ Nothing could look simpler; but there is a problem. Except for the tribute to the king, each is couched in the negative.

Burke is not urging or praising these patriotisms, but lamenting their absence: Britons are in danger of not finding power to resist France in "their own patriotism and their own courage." That persuasive "*local* patriotism" is no more—it is dead, it has reached its "fatal term . . . lost in the waste expanse, and boundless, barren ocean of the homicidal philanthropy of France."⁵⁵ The most striking example is his lament for the severing of English liberty and English love of country. In the old patriotic discourse, love of country and love of liberty are the same: "our liberty . . . has been English Liberty, and English Liberty only. Our love

⁵² *Ibid.*, 328.

⁵³ *Writings and Speeches*, 9:167.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 223, 303.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 303, 110.

of Liberty, and our love of our Country, were not distinct things. Liberty is now, it seems, put upon a larger and more liberal bottom.” The revolution threatens to “debauch [our liberty] from its domestick relations.” So an old Whig complains against new ideologues. What might have been “unproblematic patriot” discourse is suffused with the old critical patriotic discourse at every point.

Thinking of Burke as valuing untaught feelings and ancient prejudices, I thought him a candidate for theorizing unproblematic patriotism, at least as a rhetorical argument in this fraught context. Yet when I went to look, I encountered a writer who persistently gives a negative valence to what we take to be the most ostensibly positive “patriotic” images in his texts. Surely we should find “unproblematic patriotism” in Burke’s imagery, the keep of Windsor presiding over the letter to a noble lord, the great cattle under the British oak indifferent to the frenzy of the withered grasshoppers in the field around them, the British government “clogged with its peers and its beef; its parsons and its pudding; its Commons and its beer; and its dull slavish liberty of going about just as one pleases....” Or England is the old inn in Swift’s birthday poem to Stella, bound by “all the ties, which, whether of reason or prejudice, attach mankind to their old, habitual, domestic Governments.”⁵⁶ All this sounds stolid and solid and rooted enough, but, as the reader may have observed, the trajectory of this imagery has a problem—the keep of Windsor is medieval not modern.⁵⁷ The cattle are brute animals that chew the cud, thoughtful only in appearance; and peers and parsons bemused with beef and beer scarcely rise above those masticating cattle. If this is patriotism, it is curiously contemptuous of the objects it admires. In spite of Burke’s expressed hostility to satirists, it participates in the genial satire of Hogarth’s *Beer Street*, a softened version of Fielding’s fox-hunting squires and parsons. Even the desire to preserve “pure and untainted, the ancient, inbred integrity, piety, good nature, and good humour of the people of

56 “Letter to William Elliot,” in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:32. *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:83.

57 Burke mocks his “enlightened” age throughout the *Reflections* and defines enlightenment principally as hostility to religion. He is, however, perfectly up to date in his imagery of science and revenue, and he persistently likens the revolutionaries to quacks and medieval alchemists. His is the true science, he implies; theirs is fake.

England” produces an alienating effect.⁵⁸ Whomever this description comprehends, it does not include its own author.

Of these images, the most positive is the keep of Windsor, a metaphor referring not to the people or nation, but to the monarchy.⁵⁹ The passage affirms, unproblematically, “our country and our race” and the “proud Keep of Windsor, rising in the majesty of proportion, and girt with the double belt of it’s kindred and coeval towers ... this awful structure shall oversee and guard the subjected land” from the levelers of France. Nothing could be more stable, more solid than that—nothing more suitable for renaming in time of war a royal family saddled with such alien German names as Hanover and Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.⁶⁰

That secure and comforting image, however, has been preceded by something Burke had already written but not published that unsettles the stability of just such an “ancient fortification.” In the *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, the first written but the last published, the “ancient fortification” that strikes the imagination and looks “awful and imposing,” is actually on the verge of collapse. About to totter and fall of its own, a breach in every part, such an edifice is certainly no match for modern French artillery. “Nothing looks more awful and imposing than an ancient fortification. Its lofty embattled walls, its bold, projecting, rounded towers that pierce the sky, strike the imagination and promise inexpugnable strength. But they are the very things that make its weakness.... Besides the debility and false principle of their construction to resist the present modes of attack, the Fortress itself is in ruinous repair, and there is a practicable breach in every part of it.”⁶¹ So the strong imagery is of weakness.

Rather than celebrating local patriotism, Burke’s later letters promote a fervid internationalism. When Burke avows his own simple patriotic affections, he acknowledges a division in his identity, but leaves behind his “municipal country” for devotion to “my adopted, my dearer and more comprehensive country.” He then leaps from that “more com-

58 *Reflections*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 8:162, 218; *Letter to a Noble Lord*, in *Writings and Speeches*, 9:168.

59 *Writings and Speeches*, 9:172.

60 Renamed by George V, in time of war, as we are reminded in the Helen Mirren vehicle, *The Audience*.

61 *Writings and Speeches*, 9:III.

prehensive” but still local identification to “every nation, ... every land ... every climate, language and religion, in the vast domain that still is under the protection, and the larger that was once under the protection, of the British Crown.” In those larger domains he supports “every right, every privilege, every franchise” and “liberty,” the terms of patriot discourse, but not just at home and not just as English liberty.⁶² Even when starting from the family, and moving to the neighborhood, he does not stop at country, but moves on to mankind. Burke is either going beyond patriotism, or still embedded in the Addisonian patriotism that took all mankind as its responsibility.

Contemplating the threat of a regicide peace, Burke looks beyond what might be called English interests, designated “improvident and stupid selfishness,” to “the community of mankind ... the interest of mankind”: “If we imagine that this country can maintain its blood and its food, as disjoined from the community of mankind, such an opinion does not deserve refutation as absurd, but pity as insane.”⁶³ There is a moment when he exclaims, in the *Fourth Letter*, would “that the English tongue were not employed to utter what our Ancestors never dreamed could enter into an English heart!” and “I begin to feel proud of my Country.” (Michelle Obama caught flak for that.) “But, alas, the short date of human elevation!” What makes him proud is a ministerial statement that England will not give up “the independence of Europe.” That is, this quasi-nationalist formulation extends to all of Europe, not just Britain. It is England’s responsibility to watch over “the balance of power throughout the Christian World.” The “ancient spirit” still alive in “the British nation,” responsive to “publick honour,” will make war not for the nation, but for “property” and that “order of things from which every thing valuable that they possess is derived, and in which order alone it can possibly be maintained.”⁶⁴ It is the order of things that matters, a transnational order, not the nation or any geographical entity or identity.

Not only does Burke not couch his crusade in terms of local English interests, but he is also willing to let the country go for the sake of prin-

62 Ibid., 167; but cf. 110.

63 Ibid., 9:195.

64 Ibid., 94, 93, 346.

principles. Let it sink if it abandons his moral notions: “Better this Island should be sunk to the bottom of the sea, than that (so far as human infirmity admits) it should not be a country of Religion and Morals.” If ministry prefer to treat with the regicides rather than to wage war against them, “truly we deserve to lose, what it is impossible we should long retain, the name of a nation.”⁶⁵ And he won’t change his mind in the face of simple patriotic appeals: “Never shall I part from these maxims out of compliment to anybody because they happen to be my own Countrymen.”⁶⁶

As to the ordinary commercial interests of a nation at war, they count for as little as they did to the patriotic representative of Bristol. Those profitable English conquests must be given up for a higher cause. In the war against France the monarchs have been acting as Tom Paine says they always do, turning a war of principle into a war of pillaging acquisition. “The Princes were easily taught to slide back into their old habitual course of politicks. They were easily led to consider the flames that were consuming France, not as a warning to protect their own buildings ... but as an happy occasion for pillaging the goods, and for carrying off the materials of their neighbour’s house.” England must renounce its conquests in the West Indies, in India, at the Cape of Good Hope, as an earlier ministry ought to have renounced taxation.⁶⁷

If we want to see how low simple patriotism can fall, set against ideological demands, we need only look to the opening of the *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1797). Where Burke should be banging the jingo drum as loudly as he can, we find not a keep of Windsor, but two jokes representing Burke’s two homelands, two fellow countrymen, an Irish joke and an English joke. The Irishman on a long journey proposes going over a pretty piece of road once again just because it is such a pretty bit of road. The Englishman objects to being kicked at Constantinople, no matter what the local customs happen to be. The two jokes catch the tone of the national stereotypes of which Burke is so lavish. Burke himself is visible in both. He is unmistakably an Irishman going over a pretty piece of road once again, and again and again. He did it in

65 Ibid., II5, 223

66 Ibid., 7:444.

67 Ibid., 9:268, 271.

the Hastings trial, he does it over France. He is also an obstinate, truculent Englishman who objects to being kicked, and goes his way, his way.

What this letter discovers is ideology, a word invented a little more than a decade later, in 1812. As Burke observes, opinions guide affections, and men may become more attached to the country of their principles than of their birth. By their social nature they are driven to propagate their principles as much as by physical nature to propagate their kind. If this observation is true of the revolutionaries Burke abhors, it is equally true of Burke himself. Curiously, it belongs more to the Irishman, going over the same ground, than to the truculent Englishman. It also applies to the “suffering Patriot Nobility” of France, France “out of her bounds”; France is her classes, religion, and confiscated property, not her geography.⁶⁸

So let me sum up this dance of patriotisms and nationalisms. As an opposition Whig politician from the 1760s forward, Burke was almost by definition a critical patriot. His response to popular agitation and to ministerial exclusion was to posit another order in the state, between the crown and the people, to insert a new mediating institution, party, above the *Citizens' Voice* and the *Patriot News*. Thickening rather than simplifying the order of things, Burke did not keep company when critical patriotism among the Prices and Paines turned on the constitution and liberties that had earlier justified critical patriotism itself. The Prices and Paines made the tradition of English constitutional liberty an argument for constitutional change in England, intensifying the (unpatriotic) patriotic opposition that becomes nineteenth-century liberalism.

Burke continued to deploy the language of critical patriotism that he might, as he put it, “preserve the order of things into which I was born.”⁶⁹ Intent on reestablishing the link between a particularly English love of country and love of liberty, he was not at this period notable for preserving the present order of things in Ireland, where he was actually born, rather the opposite. There, the state needed change for the sake of conservation, and Burke thought it time that “Protestant Parliaments” be replaced by “Patriot Parliaments.”⁷⁰ His two countries elicited different recommendations from him relative to participation in

68 *Ibid.*, 9:310, 278, 246, 253.

69 12 January, 1794, *Correspondence*, 7:518–19.

70 “Letter to Richard Burke, Jr.,” in Janes, *Burke on Irish Affairs*, 322.

governance. Paradoxically, the “state that is partnership in all virtues,” is not any particular state, though it is for Burke a particular order in the state in which he chose to live. For Burke, patriotism is not confined to national interest or national identity, but looks beyond it, seeing that interest as part of a larger whole, where stability is of value in itself and the excitement of revolution is better displaced by excitement over law and justice, where even demands for political participation ask to be weighed against “the real rights of men” to life, property, and security, observations that are surely salient in our present moment.

Burke, Barry, and Bishop Butler



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As a young man, Joseph Butler wrote to his mentor, Samuel Clarke, that as he had made the pursuit of truth the business of his life, he would not be ashamed to learn from anyone.¹ Edmund Burke, for one, took up the study of Bishop Butler's works, and urged others to consult Butler on matters of ethics and religion. When James Barry felt his confidence in revealed religion diminishing, Burke prescribed a reading of Butler's *Analogy of Religion* (1736), which apparently effected the cure. Barry, who invariably aimed "to give the fine arts elevation by directing them to ethical and national purposes," featured a portrait of Butler at the principal focal point in his mural, *The Progress of Human Culture*, painted for the great room at the Royal Society of Arts between 1777 and 1784.²

1 "For as I design the search after truth as the business of my life, I shall not be ashamed to learn from any person; though, at the same time, I cannot but be sensible, that instruction from some men is like the gift of a prince, it reflects an honour on the person on whom it lays an obligation." Joseph Butler in "The Fourth Letter," [1713/14] ¶ 3 reprinted in David E. White, ed., *The Works of Bishop Butler* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 24. Some attention should be given to the rough but nevertheless informative analogy between Butler's relationship to Clarke and Barry's to Burke. For example, the private and anonymous letter quoted here became Butler's first publication when Clarke had it included in the fourth edition of Clarke's works, published by Knapton in London, in 1716.

2 Edward Fryer in the *Works of James Barry* (London, 1809), vol. I, p. vi.

The common thread in this examination is an attempt to explicate what might be called *logical*, as opposed to *empirical*, conservatism. The drift of the argument, or family of arguments, is that while the received revelation, the mother tongue, and the established institutions may appear open to serious objections, and perhaps actually are defective, any consequent inference to the advisability of drastic change is necessarily self-defeating. To some, this will look like the usual slippery slope appeal: once begin the steps toward radical reform, and you will end in the destruction of society. But the argument of logical conservatism is much stronger. Bishop Butler's version of the appeal to analogy does not at all depend on speculation regarding the future. Rather, Butler argues that if, working from a general background of vast ignorance and self-deception, one is willing to abandon that which has worked in spite of admitted defects, then no good *logical* reason will exist not to abandon all the common sense institutions or presumptions of civilized life. In the preface to the second edition of the *Vindication of Natural Society* (1757), Burke states the argument of the book in terms that could just as well be applied to Butler's *Analogy*, sketching the form of argument that Butler himself attributes to Origen:

The Design was, to shew that, without the Exertion of any considerable Forces, the same Engines which were employed for the Destruction of Religion, might be employed with equal Success for the Subversion of Government; and that specious Arguments might be used against those Things which they, who doubt of every thing else, will never permit to be questioned.³

Butler's own summary, in the "Introduction" to his *Analogy*, uses different words to describe the same logical structure:

The design then of the following treatise will be to shew, that the several parts principally objected against in this moral and Christian dispensation, including its scheme, its publication, and the proof which God has afforded us of its truth; that the particular parts principally objected against in this whole dispensation, are analogous to what is experienced in the con-

3 Edmund Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society*, in *Writings and Speeches*, I:134.

stitution and course of nature, or providence; that the chief objections themselves which are alleged against the former, are no other, than what may be alleged with like justness against the latter, where they are found in fact to be inconclusive ...⁴

Critics and expositors often point out with an air of triumph that the analogy of objections to natural and to revealed religion is no defense at all since the opponent could simply give up belief in God altogether. The last six words in each quotation indicate that both Burke and Butler have covered themselves in this regard. The analogy is a vindication of revelation when it is deployed against those who cannot or will not surrender government or God respectively. According to a famous anecdote, Bishop Butler told his chaplain, Josiah Tucker, that it was possible for whole nations to go insane and that there was no known remedy for that insanity.⁵

The problem that has dogged this line of political thought is that critics have attacked what Butler called “presumptions” and Burke called “prejudices,” as if they were unsupported by sufficient evidence or were better considered as some sort of mystical appeal. The main design of this paper is to show that, whether we call them presumptions or prejudices, the principles that serve as social cement are absolutely necessary for social well-being. Burke argues the point in one of his most famous passages:

This policy appears to me to be the result of profound reflection, or rather the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it. A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors. Besides, the people of England well know that the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation and a sure principle of transmission, without at all excluding a principle of improvement. It leaves acquisition free, but it secures what it acquires. Whatever advantages are obtained by a state proceeding on these maxims are locked fast as in a sort of family settlement, grasped as in a kind of mortmain

4 Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion* [1736], in *Works of Bishop Butler*, 13.

5 Josiah Tucker, *An Humble Address and Earnest Appeal* (Gloucester, 1775), 20–21.

forever. By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives. The institutions of policy, the goods of fortune, the gifts of providence are handed down to us, and from us, in the same course and order. Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts, wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, molding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old or middle-aged or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. Thus, by preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete. By adhering in this manner and on those principles to our forefathers, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians, but by the spirit of philosophic analogy. In this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood, binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties, adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections, keeping inseparable and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars.⁶

Logical conservatism rejects all schemes of radical reconstruction on the one hand, but just as vigorously resists all absolutisms, totalitarianisms, and Orwellianism.⁷ The logic employed here is not the logic of proving or of disproving anything. It is rather a logic of probability, a logic of determining who has the burden of proof and what they must do to discharge that burden, such as when conviction requires evidence of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. There are cases where all that is required is the prepon-

6 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark, 184–85.

7 Orwellianism is the use of the media by the state to shape public opinion and manufacture consent without regard to traditional appeals to experience, reason, or evidence.

derance of evidence, and, as Bishop Butler stresses, many cases in which even a lower degree of evidence, well below an even chance, is still actionable. For example, if police are clearing an area because of a bomb threat, most of us would leave immediately even if we were engaged in important business and even if we were confident there was no danger.

Impressive work has been done already on Butler as a source for Burke and on the significance of Barry's portrayal of Burke and of Butler in several of his paintings, but none of this has made clear the full integration of the role of the political painter, the political commentator and participant in politics, as seen in the careers of these three figures.⁸ For example, so far as I know no one has yet pointed to the textual significance of the Butler-Pascal grouping in Barry's mural, where we find not just Butler and Pascal, in discourse with an angel, but also Origen and Bossuet (added in 1801). Butler nowhere mentions or refers to Pascal, but commentators have long recognized Pascal as one of Butler's sources. Origen, however, is not only mentioned by Butler but is cited and quoted in the "Introduction" to the *Analogy* as an early proponent of the analogical method. Although Butler does not mention Bossuet, he does refer to him in the "Preface" added to *Fifteen Sermons*, second edition (1729). In fact, a detailed and concentrated study of the murals Barry painted for the Great Room at the Royal Society of Arts shows they are plainly a graphic representation of the world's condition in line with the late-eighteenth-century perspective articulated by Burke.

Burke's political philosophy contains many threads picked up from his reading of British philosophy and theology, and Mario Einaudi assigns a place of particular prominence to Butler among Burke's sources.⁹ Most of these studies are flawed, however, by an overly simplistic

8 E. C. Mossner's classic account of *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason* (1936) claims that "Burke's knowledge of Butler was deep and his admiration sincere," and provides the basic details of the Butler-Burke-Barry relationship. John Barrell's *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (Yale University Press, 1986) includes a chapter on Barry, his painting, and his theory of painting, but does not mention Butler. In his *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* (Carolina Academic Press, 1987), Francis Canavan provides details on Butler in relation to Burke, his reading of theology, and his own religious beliefs, but does not discuss Barry.

9 Arthur L. Woehl, "Burke's Reading" (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1928). Mario Einaudi, "The British Background of Burke's Political Philosophy," *Political Science Quarterly* (December, 1934): 576.

distinction between emotion and reason, stressing the opposition and disregarding the correlation between the two. The line that runs from Pascal's wager to William James's "Will to Believe"—and through Butler's theory of probability as the guide to life—is distorted by failure to see that the actionable probability can be low, even far less than an even chance, as long as the payoff is sufficiently high (for Pascal, infinite). Thus, in regard to actions approved by the Pascal-Butler-James tradition, reason is never overpowered by emotions. It is more accurate to say that under certain circumstances, reason licenses the whole-hearted, that is, with passions fully engaged, pursuit of an object even if the probability is less than an even chance, and the probability of success low.

According to the Pascal-Butler-James tradition, this is so because there are cases where there is little chance of success no matter what we do—so the best option, unattractive as it is, may still be rationally more attractive than the alternatives. Also explicit in this line of thought is the notion that, by taking a particular course of action aimed at a certain objective, it is possible to increase the probability of success, and even to intensify the cognitive assent to the truth of the option, which in turn only increases the level of emotional investment. In 1741, Butler preached in the House of Lords:

But it is the strongest objection against attempting to put in practice the most perfect theory, that it is impracticable, or too dangerous to be attempted. And whoever will thoroughly consider, in what degree mankind are really influenced by reason, and in what degree by custom, may, I think, be convinced, that the state of human affairs does not even admit of an equivalent for the mischief of setting things afloat; and the danger of parting with those securities of liberty, which arise from regulations of long prescription and ancient usage: especially at a time when the directors are so very numerous, and the obedient so few. Reasonable men therefore will look upon the general plan of our constitution, transmitted down to us by our ancestors, as sacred; and content themselves with calmly doing what their station requires, towards rectifying the particular things which they think amiss, and supplying

the particular things which they think deficient in it, so far as is practicable without endangering the whole.¹⁰

In fewer than two hundred words, Butler has convincingly connected the ultimate cosmic order (“as sacred”) and the established social order (“their station requires”) with prudence (“the danger”) and “long prescription and ancient usage” as the course of life that reasonable people will not only follow but cling to. We may be reminded here that Burke assigned to the church the highest and most important place in politics, and, given the great political value of people pursuing the path of virtue and piety, the position of the church is of grave concern to those whose primary interests are political. Butler had also written, in the “Advertisement” to the *Analogy of Religion*:

It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it, as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point, among all people of discernment; and nothing remained, but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world. On the contrary, thus much, at least, will be here found, not taken for granted, but proved, that any reasonable man, who will thoroughly consider the matter, may be as much assured, as he is of his own being, that it is not, however, so clear a case, that there is nothing in it. There is, I think, strong evidence of its truth; but it is certain no one can, upon principles of reason, be satisfied of the contrary. And the practical consequence to be drawn from this, is not attended to, by every one who is concerned in it.¹¹

Burke, who was six when Butler penned those words, not only drew out their practical consequence but acted on it over the whole of his career. There is perhaps no particular doctrine or argument that is new in, or unique to, Butler. What Butler offers, and what Burke surely

¹⁰ Butler, *Works*, 338, ¶ 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

appreciated, was exceptional skill in forensic rhetoric, the building of a compelling cumulative case, all tightly integrated and, most importantly, not only having practical consequences but having the consequence of participation mystique. This is the vision we see, also, in the great room murals at the Royal Society of Arts.

Butler's specific strategy was to consider the various objections to Christianity. In the *Sermons*, he considered the fact that some aspects of human nature do not seem designed for virtue as a way of life. In the *Analogy* he took up the moral order of the world and the objection that the life of virtue does not seem necessarily to lead to a state of happiness. That we were designed by nature to act in accord with virtue and that the world is designed so that virtuous action will produce the greatest happiness cannot be known with certainty. But neither can the contrary.

It is undeniable that we would prefer that the constitution of the world be along the lines of the moral order expounded and defended by Christianity and other religions. We have an extreme prejudice in favor of the moral dispensation which Bishop Butler and others in the tradition have argued is the actual dispensation of our world. There is, says Butler, a very considerable presumption in favor of Christianity. This is not to say, there is necessarily a preponderance of evidence in favor of Christianity. Some think the evidence is that strong, but others, especially since the seventeenth century, have taken the skeptical turn. Butler's reply to the skeptic does not at all assert that emotions are in control or are to be taken into account over reason. On the contrary, Butler's reply to the skeptic is that even if the evidence is well below an even chance, it is still sufficient because, given the political importance of Christianity (or whatever religion prevails in a particular society), we ought to adopt the system of virtue and piety prescribed to us because of the presumption or prejudice in its favor and the fact that our opponents, the skeptics, have not sufficiently discharged the burden of proof rightfully assigned to them.

We know that Burke recommended Butler not only to James Barry in particular but to anyone interested in Anglican theology. The account given here seems a more persuasive explanation of Butler's appeal to Burke than his supposed role as a champion of Christianity over against the deists. The whole English deist controversy had died down by Burke's time: Butler never uses the word "deist" or "deism," never

refers to any deist by name, and, so far as Paine was a deist and Burke disputed with Paine, there is hardly any mention of Butler. The primary bond between Butler and Burke, and the best explanation of why Burke recommended Butler so highly, is that they had revived the ancient strategy of defending practices, private and public, of all kinds (personal, social, political, religious), whose logical structure is analogical but whose practical bearing is sufficient to motivate a course of action as if based on certainty. In this, they may be said to have anticipated Wittgenstein's logical conservatism.

Some such account is sufficient to explain why Burke favored Butler, and why he considered Butler a good choice of reading for someone like James Barry who was entertaining doubts about scriptural revelation while retaining an uncompromised faith in God. God is understood as the Supreme Being, a being who is expected to reveal himself, but there is no reason to expect the revelation to be easy or obvious, since we are in a state of trial, a state of moral and intellectual probation, which itself is a necessary condition of God's bringing about the end of Creation. As a theodicy, this view of the world is most associated with Leibniz among the moderns and Origen among the ancients, but it has had very broad appeal to Christians of all types, and, during the time when the British Empire was a major force in Asia, this view was associated with Hinduism and with Chinese religion.

So far we have information, useful from an historical point of view, to support a link between the work of Bishop Butler, Edmund Burke, and James Barry as various expositions of an early "logical conservatism," meaning by that designation that radical, disruptive restructurings of any cultural, political or religious structure are bound to be unsuccessful. We cannot live apart from history; we cannot live without a satisfactory narrative of where we have come from; we can act in ways that are disruptive, but even the most drastic disruptions can only be understood in terms of our prior conceptions; revisions in our language can only be proposed in terms of the received vocabulary. How, then, does this help us to clarify points of sharper detail, specifically, the reason why Barry placed Butler at the focal point of his painting and the correlative question of how we, with our particular and personal involvement, such as it is, are to respond to the series?

The Progress of Human Culture consists of six large murals for the Society of Arts in London. The painting fills the Great Room, with Butler appearing in the final mural, *Elysium and Tartarus or the State of Final Retribution*. Even with Barry's published explanation, there are very real impediments to reading the painting. History painting is no longer taught or practiced or even taken seriously the way it once was; the precise nature of Burke's and of Barry's religion is still disputed, and Butler, at least the Butler of the *Analogy of Religion* as opposed to his *Sermons*, is generally ignored by all but a few theologians and philosophers.¹² Yet it is not by accident, even an accident of history, that Barry places Butler right next to Origen (who supplied the "text" on which the *Analogy* is the "sermon") and Pascal (who initiated the mathematics of Butler's argument), or that they are in the front, the very front, of the line between heaven and hell, or that in this massive graphic display we are able to see fine examples of the beautiful and the sublime.

The meeting of Butler, Burke, and Barry is most clearly told by William Hazlitt:

Having a retentive memory, [Barry] profited by his own reading, and by the conversation of others, who directed him also in the choice of books. As his finances were too low to make many purchases, he borrowed books from his friends, and was in the practice of making large extracts from such as he particularly liked, and sometimes even of copying out the whole book, of which several specimens were found among his papers, written in a stiff school-boy's hand. As his industry was excessive, his advances in the acquisition of knowledge were rapid, and he was regarded as a prodigy by his school-fellows. His mother being a zealous Catholic, the son could not avoid mixing at times in the company of priests resident at Cork, who pointed out to him books of polemical divinity, of which he became a great reader, and for which he retained a strong bias during his lifetime. He was said at one time to

¹² On Burke's religion, see Francis Canavan, *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1987), Chapter 3. For a discussion of history painting and its theory in terms of the discourse of civic humanism, see Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*.

have been destined for the priesthood, but for this report there is no authority. He, however, always continued a Catholic, and in the decline of life manifested rather a bigoted attachment to the religion of his early choice. For a short interval he had a little wavering in his belief of revealed religion in general; but a conversation with Mr. Edmund Burke put an end to this levity. A book which Mr. Burke lent him, and which settled his mind on this subject, was Bishop Butler's *Analogy*; and, as a suitable reward, he has placed this Prelate in the group of divines, in his picture of Elysium.¹³

If this were the whole story, then Bishop Butler would be only a face in the crowd at Elysium, Burke would be a patron who made a helpful suggestion, and Barry a painter as irrelevant to today's art as Butler's *Analogy* is to today's theology. At the other extreme is the perspective which claims that Burke, Barry, and Butler still have the ability



Detail from James Barry, *Elysium and Tartarus*, The Royal Society of Arts, London. By permission.

¹³ William Hazlitt, "James Barry" in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 7th edition (1842). Hazlitt is obviously drawing on Fryer (see footnote 2 above).

to induce conversion, and as much potential of actually doing so. Even after the painting has finally been explicated, there is still some difficulty surrounding the twin questions of what Burke found so attractive about Butler, and what impression Butler's work made on Barry. We have to assume that Butler supplied more than some debater's points to use against deists or atheists, and that Butler must have addressed



Detail from James Barry, *Elysium and Tartarus or the State of Final Retribution*, a later engraving based on the painting.

them in a way that was both passionate and rational. We should also note that an association with Catholicism is a distinctive aspect in the family resemblance of not only Butler, Burke, Barry, and Wittgenstein, but also John Henry Newman, whose own conversion from Anglican to Catholic was the result of reading Butler's *Analogy*. Butler and Barry agreed that a deity exists, that the social utility of religion and especially of Christianity is beyond question, that there can be sufficient grounds for belief in and practice of what has not been proved, that the dogmas, polity, and liturgy of the institutional church are less important than the practice of virtue, and that the moral life of a society is underwritten by a general acceptance of freewill in this life and rewards and punishments for virtue and vice in a future life.¹⁴

In the preface to his recent book on the RSA murals, William Pressly supplies many biographical details that help to explain his own extraordinary interest, but Pressly also affirms the following generalization: "Barry saw Christianity and classical culture as being inextricably intertwined. In addition, the artist even saw the medium of history painting itself, the closest simulation in this fallen world of our heavenly natures, as partaking of divinity."¹⁵ The first sentence here helps us to understand Butler's analogy between the effect of his cumulative case argument and the effect experienced when entering a well-designed building, and the second is suggestive of Burke's notion of the sublime and its significance.

Burke does appear in the murals, but nowhere near the group that includes Butler. He is present in the more significant sense of being Barry's patron and principal support during Barry's five and a half years of study in France and Italy.¹⁶ By the time of the painting Burke and Barry were estranged and, according to Pressly, Burke was the principal source for those aspects of the murals that address Irish discontents.¹⁷

¹⁴ On this comparison and the term 'latitudinarian,' see F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, vol. II 1789–1797 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 574. Lock cites Frederick A. Dreyer and J. C. D. Clark.

¹⁵ William L. Pressly, *James Barry's Murals at the Royal Society of Arts* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), xvii.

¹⁶ "[M]y former friend and patron Edmund Burke, Esq.; to the conversation of this truly great man, I am proud to acknowledge that I owe the best part of my education." Barry on Burke as quoted *ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

There is a great divide, remarkably well observed, between serious, scholarly people who feel obliged to consider the whole body of evidential data before drawing a conclusion and the more popular sort of contributors who simply pick and choose from what pleases or displeases them. Unfortunately, the movement of scholars since Burke's and Barry's time has been to exclude whole bodies of evidence just because it is in graphic or performance mode rather than their preferred linguistic forms of expression, and equally to resist arguments that seem to point to a theistic, supernaturalistic, or sectarian conclusion. To the extent we abandon this Butler/Burke/Barry line of integrated thinking we deprive ourselves not only of access to a supernatural revelation, but also of the metanarrative that serves as the cement of society and allows us to live as human beings.

*Brian Friel's Invocation
of Edmund Burke
in Philadelphia, Here I Come!*



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Brian Friel's breakthrough play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), is set in the fictional town of Ballybeg, County Donegal, on the eve of main character Gar O'Donnell's possible emigration to the United States. The twenty-five-year-old Gar leads a relatively lonely existence in Ballybeg: he works in his father's shop and lives in the adjoining accommodation, and his strongest relationship is arguably with Madge, the O'Donnells' sixty-something-year-old housekeeper. Gar has been offered the chance of a new life in Philadelphia, where he has a job waiting for him in a hotel and where he can live rent-free with his Aunt Lizzy. Despite the possibility of a more exciting—and perhaps prosperous—existence away from Ballybeg, Gar poignantly wonders in the play's closing moments if he really needs to leave the town where he was born and raised.

As anyone who watches or reads the play will note, its most remarkable feature is Friel's splitting of the main character into two different parts: Public Gar and Private Gar. One actor plays the Gar that everyone sees and hears; a second actor plays Gar's "*alter ego*," moving around the set unseen by the other characters and articulating the young man's

secret—and often comically outrageous or bitterly cynical—thoughts.¹ While audience members quickly adjust to this theatrical conceit, they may be more confused as to why, in times of psychological distress, the split protagonist begins to recite the famous passage about Marie Antoinette from the Dublin-born Edmund Burke's 1790 treatise, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Critics have long debated what purpose this recitation serves in Friel's play. Some have rightly noted that someone of Gar's age would have been familiar with the passage, because at the time it was a set text for Irish students sitting the Leaving Certificate examinations; however, they have still struggled to explain why Friel—whose work is often characterized as “too Nationalist”²—chose a passage from a writer frequently depicted as “an apologist for Empire” and the “father of modern Conservatism.” (Richard Pine expresses the perplexity shared by many when he calls the play's allusion to Burke “cryptic.”)³ This essay demonstrates that Friel uses the passage to give us a deeper sense of Gar's haunted and psychologically scarred mind; what's more, he specifically chose a passage from Burke's *Reflections* because he believed that many of that book's critiques of dysfunctional societies applied to the two countries that Gar must choose between: Ireland and the United States.

The beautiful passage by Burke, which the Gars Public and Private begin to recite on ten different occasions, runs—in full—as follows:

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she had just begun to move in, glittering like the morning star full of life and splendor and joy.

1 Brian Friel, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in *Plays 1: Philadelphia, Here I Come!/The Freedom of the City/Living Quarters/Aristocrats/Faith Healer/Translations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 27 (emphasis in original). According to the stage directions, “even Public Gar, although he talks to Private Gar occasionally, never sees him and *never looks at him*. One cannot look at one's *alter ego*.” (Friel, *Philadelphia*, 27, [emphasis in original].)

2 Hiram Morgan, “Playing the Early: Brian Friel's *Making History*,” *History Ireland*, vol. 15, no. 4 (July/August 2007): 63.

3 Richard Pine, *The Diviner: The Art of Brian Friel* (Dublin: UCD Press, 1999), 104.

Oh, what a revolution! and what a heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream, when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her, in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour, and of cavaliers! I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards, to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.

But the age of chivalry is gone; that of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded, and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.⁴

This passage gives us deeper insight into Gar's psychological state of mind at this critical juncture in his young life, because, as Eimear Andrews has rightly suggested, he recites the passage "as a kind of talismanic release from his own thoughts or memories when they threaten to overwhelm him."⁵ Andrews neglects to mention, however, that it is actually specific "thoughts or memories" that trigger the recitation: Gar recites the passage whenever he is reminded of his mother, who died three days after his birth, or whenever he desires the comfort and affection of a maternal figure—or, at least, of an idealized, inaccessible female. Anthony Roche, Neil Corcoran, and Christopher Murray have rightly, if briefly, contended that the Burke quotation is somehow connected to Gar's deceased mother, and Tony Corbett has less tentatively suggested that one of the triggers for the recitation is "the memory of [Gar's] mother's unhappiness."⁶ While (*contra* Corbett) Gar's mother's

4 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin, 1986), 169–170.

5 Eimear Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel: Neither Dream nor Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 89.

6 Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), 93, 97; Neil Corcoran, "The Penalties of Retrospect: Continuities in Brian Friel," in *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, ed. Alan Peacock (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), 18–19; Christopher Murray, *The Theatre of Brian Friel* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), 27. Tony Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2002), 37.

unhappiness only directly triggers the recitation on one occasion, Gar's desire for a mother figure is—I would contend—the inspiration for *all* of his recitations of Burke.⁷

When Gar is aching for his Aunt Lizzy to be a surrogate mother for him (just after an assembled party of friends and relations has discussed Gar's mother at length), he recites it.⁸ Likewise, when the housekeeper Madge, Gar's other surrogate mother in the play, strongly hints to Gar's emotionally distant father that he should talk to his son in advance of his departure for Philadelphia, Gar (presumably appreciative but also feeling vulnerable) recites the passage again.⁹ On four other occasions, Gar recites it when discussing, or ineffectively trying to bond with, his father, which suggests that Gar believes that a mother would be much more emotionally available and comforting to him on his last night in Ballybeg.¹⁰

The three remaining occasions when he recites the passage each occur when he is thinking about the fact that he lost his beloved, Katie Doogan, to a wealthier suitor, Dr. Francis King.¹¹ This is significant for two reasons: first, Gar is subconsciously linking one inaccessible female (his deceased mother) to another (his now-married ex-girlfriend), but second—and crucially—his linking of these women suggests that he was hoping that the more mature Katie would be a substitute mother figure in his life.

Any passage about a beautiful and inaccessible woman could arguably have served this same purpose in the play. In choosing a passage from Burke, Friel was certainly defying expectations, because he often was quite negative about the Irishness of people from Irish Protestant backgrounds—a bias which is likely related to Friel's upbringing in a strongly Nationalist household in Northern Ireland. The best example of Friel's Corkery-esque "Irish-Ireland"¹² tendencies is his often expressed view that:

7 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 38.

8 *Ibid.*, 67.

9 *Ibid.*, 50.

10 *Ibid.*, 36, 91, 92, 94.

11 *Ibid.*, 56, 78, 80. Murray has also suggested (if cautiously) that, on occasion, the Burke passage "seems to identify Katie with the 'delightful vision' of Marie Antoinette." (Murray, *The Theatre of Brian Friel*, 27.)

12 Cork writer Daniel Corkery felt that Catholicism was a cornerstone of Irish identity. His sectarian views are arguably best summed up by a passage in his 1931 study, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, in which he states that he hates referring to the great London-based Irish Protestant writers as "expatriates," because they were

It is time we dropped from the calendar of Irish dramatic saints all those playwrights from Farquhar to Shaw—and that includes Steele, Sheridan, Goldsmith, and Wilde—who no more belong to Irish drama than John Field belongs to Irish music or Francis Bacon to Irish painting. Fine dramatists they were, each assured of at least a generous footnote in the history of English drama. But if we take as our definition of Irish drama plays written in Irish or English on Irish subjects and performed by Irishmen, we must scrap all those men who wrote within the English tradition, for the English stage and for the English people, and we can go no further back than 1899, to the ... opening of the Irish Literary Theatre.¹³

Graham Price has compellingly argued that Friel's distancing of himself from Irish Protestant writers like Wilde and Shaw is due to what Harold Bloom has called the "anxiety of influence"—that is, the tendency of authors to disown writers they fear have had too big an influence on their work.¹⁴ This may well be right: over the past two decades critics have firmly established Friel's significant debt to the Anglo-Irish dramatic tradition. For example, Price has found strong Wildean echoes in the Friel plays *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *Faith Healer* (1979), *The Communication Cord* (1982), and *Making History* (1988).¹⁵ In the case of Shaw, Richard Pine has detected the influence of *Arms and the Man* (1894) on Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973), the influence of *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) on Friel's *Translations* (1980), and the probable impact of Shaw on Friel's bending of historical fact to enhance a history play's dramatic appeal.¹⁶ More recently, Anthony Roche has

writers "for whom Ireland was never a *patria* in any sense." (Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* [Cork: Cork University Press, 1931], 3.)

13 Brian Friel, *Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964–1999*, ed. Christopher Murray (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 51. This quote is from the essay "Plays Peasant and Unpeasant," which originally appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 17 March 1972. For other examples of this type of statement from Friel, see *Ibid.*, 51, 81, 93. These quotes are from 1972, 1980 and 1981.

14 Graham Price, "An Accurate Description of What Has Never Occurred: Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and Wildean Intertextuality," *Irish University Review*, vol. 41, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2011): 94–95.

15 *Ibid.*, 93–111.

16 Pine, *The Diviner*, 116, 140–141, 208–209.

discussed the impact of *Pygmalion* (1913) on Friel's *Molly Sweeney* (1994) and of the Shavian discussion play on Friel's *Making History*.¹⁷

While the "anxiety of influence" may have led Friel to conceal the extent of his debt to Anglo-Irish drama, it is noteworthy that those Irish Protestant writers that he did openly acknowledge often possess a Gaelic Catholic component to their backgrounds—arguably another indication of Friel's Nationalist bias. For example, in 1990, Friel, having previously suggested that no Irish drama existed before 1899, decided to adapt Charles Macklin's 1762 play, *The True-Born Irishman*. Although Macklin was an Irish Anglican, based primarily in London during his adult life, he was actually born Cathal MacLochlainn into a Catholic family on the Inishowen peninsula in County Donegal, where Friel lived for over forty years. Likewise—as regards the subject of this essay—both of Edmund Burke's parents were born Catholic, with his father reportedly conforming to the established church seven years before Edmund's birth and his mother remaining Catholic. What's more, Burke was partially educated at a hedge school in the Blackwater Valley of North Cork,¹⁸ and his extensive exposure to Irish Gaelic Catholics during his formative years led him to be a fierce advocate for Catholic Emancipation and the rights of the Irish tenantry throughout his life. When these Gaelic Catholic aspects of Burke's upbringing are taken into consideration, Friel's attraction to Burke's work, as demonstrated by his use of the Marie Antoinette passage, is much less surprising than it at first appears.

Seamus Deane has long been an insightful critic of Brian Friel's plays, and he has done more than most to establish that Edmund Burke's defence of tradition in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is not inherently conservative and that it does not contradict his support for the rights of Irish Catholics and for Indians suffering under rapacious English imperialists like Warren Hastings. In fact, Deane has convincingly shown that a dislike of "upstarts" and ignorant interlopers disrupting an established, organically-grown tradition is central to all of Burke's writings. Given the

17 Anthony Roche, *Brian Friel: Theatre and Politics* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 195; Anthony Roche, *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899–1939* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), 80.

18 This aspect of Burke's background would have been particularly appreciated by Friel, the future writer of *Translations*—a play set in a hedge school in County Donegal.

depth of Deane's knowledge of Burke and Friel, and his defenses of the "Irish" Burke, it is quite surprising to find that his reading of Friel's use of Burke in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is relatively rudimentary. Deane has written that, "Friel uses Burke [in the play], at some risk, to display the fact that the Ballybeg that Gar O'Donnell is trying to leave is ... the remnant of a past civilization and that the new world, however vulgar it may seem, is that of Philadelphia and the Irish Americans."¹⁹

Deane is right to suggest that Friel is using Burke to defend tradition and "ancestral feeling" (as symbolized by Ireland) against "the shallow cosmopolitanism of the modern world" (as symbolized by the United States).²⁰ However, Friel's interactions with Burke's *Reflections* go much deeper than that in the play. Indeed, I would suggest that Burke's *Reflections* are a significant intertextual presence in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, adding depth to Friel's criticisms of America and Ireland, and even contributing to Friel's construction of key characters.

One of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*'s great merits is its fairness in capturing the strengths and weaknesses of both Ireland and the United States. As various critics have noted, Friel gained new perspective regarding both countries when he spent four to five months in Minnesota in the spring and summer of 1963, just prior to writing *Philadelphia*. Friel was acting as an "observer" at the Guthrie Theater, learning all he could about stage craft from the celebrated head of the theater, the Anglo-Irishman Tyrone Guthrie. (It is possible that this rich and rewarding experience softened Friel up regarding Irish Protestants in advance of writing the play, also contributing to his interest in and openness to the work of an Irish Protestant like Burke.) While scholars have written extensively about the fact that being away from Ireland gave Friel a more mature understanding of his home country and that first-hand exposure to the United States gave him a more realistic perspective on the "American Dream," they have failed to recognize that, in *Philadelphia*, the playwright grounds his critiques of both countries in points made by Edmund Burke in the *Reflections*.

19 Seamus Deane, "Preface" in *Plays 1: Philadelphia, Here I Come!/The Freedom of the City/Living Quarters/Aristocrats/Faith Healer/Translations*, by Brian Friel (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 14.

20 *Ibid.*, 14.

In his celebrated treatise, Burke laments the emergence of societies which promote the “true moral equality of mankind”—“that monstrous fiction” which inspires “false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel the obscure walk of laborious life.”²¹ In the play, Friel suggests that America is just such a society. Not everyone will succeed in the United States and gain wealth or positions of distinction, and yet the American Dream encourages people to entertain what Burke calls “vain expectations”—hopes which, in the case of most immigrants (and, indeed, most American-born citizens) will probably be dashed.

Another criticism of America in the play that echoes Burke is the idea that the United States, with its glorification of the “rags to riches” story, might overly prize “low” birth and the subsequent gaining of social status through mere material acquisition. Likewise, America’s stressing of the social equality of all might lead people to be ashamed of learning, since displays of knowledge will likely lead to accusations of snobbery. As Burke writes in the *Reflections*, “Woe to that country ... [that] considers a low education, a mean contracted view of things, a sordid mercenary occupation, as a preferable title to command.”²² In his play, Friel suggests that, by living in America for a number of years, Gar’s Aunt Lizzy has gotten “dumbed down” and crassly materialistic; Private Gar acidly notes “her [poor] grammar” and “her vulgarity.”²³

Friel also expresses support in his play for Burke’s contention that the love of mankind must be grounded in “affection” for the “little platoon” within which we were raised.²⁴ Burke writes: “We begin our public affections in our families.... We pass on to our neighbourhoods, and our habitual provincial connections.”²⁵ “We proceed to a love to our country and to mankind.”²⁶ As Gar prepares to emigrate, he is often rudely dismissive of Ballybeg and of Ireland generally (especially in his last conversation with Katie). Friel makes clear, however, that Gar’s vehement rejection of his hometown and his native country is excessive and forced. Likewise, when Gar and his old schoolmaster Boyle praise America as

21 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 124.

22 Ibid., 139.

23 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 66, 67.

24 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 135.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

a place where people can be totally free of personal ties and the past, discerning audience members will note that the two people doing the praising are two of the most immature characters in the play. Despite Gar's rude remarks about Ballybeg and Ireland and despite his praise for American "rootlessness," he knows deep down that his hometown and his native country mean more to him than he admits and that he does not actually want to erase his Irish past: at the end of the play, when he admits that he will replay the scenes of his last night in Ballybeg over and over again, he shows that he recognizes how important one's "little platoon" actually is and how ultimately hollow a lonely, American "rugged individualism" must be. In a passage which echoes some of Friel's key points in *Philadelphia*, Burke warns that a country without due respect for shared, "settled principle[s]" and "steady education" will inevitably "crumble away ... into the dust and powder of *individuality*."²⁷

While these Burke-based criticisms of America might sound harsh, Friel is also highly critical of the Republic of Ireland, and, once again, his criticisms centre on Burke's critiques of dysfunctional societies in the *Reflections*. As much as Friel would presumably like to see Gar embrace his native Ireland and to acknowledge how important it is to him (and always will be), he certainly understands why Gar—and other emigrants—find Ireland wanting. In the *Reflections*, Burke writes that "There ought to be a system of manners in every nation which a well-formed mind would be disposed to relish. To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely."²⁸ The country of Ireland, as symbolized by the fictional "everytown" Ballybeg (the town's name is an Anglicization of the Irish Gaelic for "small town," *Baile Beag*), is anything but "lovely," and it is certainly lacking in "manners." For example, none of the male characters appropriately acknowledge Gar's last night in Ireland. Even the two males that do confront Gar's departure most directly (Boyle and Gar's young friend, Joe) still do an appalling job of showing him love and respect as he undertakes such a big life change: Boyle insults Gar's intelligence and borrows money from him, and Joe needs little prompting to run off with their mutual friends, Ned and Tom.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 194 (emphasis added).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

In the *Reflections*, Burke criticizes what the French revolutionaries and their English sympathizers regard as the “rights of man” and provides us with his own list of “the *real* rights of men.”²⁹ Chief among these is “a right to the fruits of [one’s] industry; and to the means of making [one’s] industry fruitful.”³⁰ Gar’s father pays him less than he pays the housekeeper, and this, combined with his disrespect for the great work that Gar does in the shop, certainly contributes to Gar’s inability to marry Katie and, later, to his emigration. Even if Gar were to leave his father’s shop, the lack of opportunities in the country generally hangs like a specter over the play. Young people of Gar’s generation were emigrating in such numbers (and are, sadly, once again), because of mismanagement of the country’s affairs by successive governments.

In the early 1960s, the lack of Irish economic opportunities would have attracted Friel’s ire, but so would censorship. A year after *Philadelphia* premiered in a Gate Theatre production as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, John McGahern’s excellent second novel, *The Dark*, was banned—joining a long list of books of high literary merit banned by the Irish censors in the four and a half decades following independence.³¹ In writing a play that critiqued the financially shaky and aesthetically conservative Republic, Friel was inspired by the *Reflections*—a work in which Burke writes “if commerce and the arts should be lost in an experiment to try how well a state may stand without these old fundamental principles ... [it will lead to] a nation of gross, stupid, ferocious, and at the same time, poor and sordid barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride, possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter.”³² At the time of the play’s writing, a chink of light was entering the nation’s financial outlook thanks to some of Seán Lemass’s economic reforms, but, in the short term, Gar O’Donnell “possess[ed] nothing” and also had little to hope for—at least until his father retired, and the implication at the play’s end is that his father’s business is contracting year by year. Little wonder that America beckoned for the young man.

29 Ibid., 149 (original emphasis).

30 Ibid., 149.

31 For more on this, see Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990).

32 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 174.

While it is clear that Friel was thinking about the concepts in Burke's *Reflections* as he wrote *Philadelphia*, many might take issue with my suggestion that the *Reflections* are an intertextual presence in the play. There are clear examples, however, of the *Reflections* influencing choices made by Friel, as he created the characters and the dialogue. The most obvious examples relate to Katie's father, Senator Doogan, who Friel chose to make a lawyer by profession. Burke criticizes lawyers at great length in the *Reflections*.³³ He does so in various other works, as well. Although Burke briefly studied law at the behest of his lawyer father, Seán Patrick Donlan has demonstrated that attempts by contemporary lawyers to claim Burke as one of their own are undermined by the fact that "the Irishman's opinion of English jurisprudence [was] ... complex and not wholly complimentary." Injustices in Ireland, India, and America had taught Burke how "insular" and "perverse" English law could be, and he was often "critical of ... the more Draconian aspects of contemporary criminal law" (he was particularly worried about the injustices that might arise from basing judgements solely on "legal precedent" and inflexible "'precepts' and 'rules'"). What's more, contrary to what is often suggested, Burke repeatedly "insisted that Parliament rather than courts should be at the centre of legal change."³⁴ Finally, as Donlan also wisely observes, Burke's experiences at Middle Temple—far from making him a proud lawyer for life—directly contributed to his "deep reservations about the narrowness of the legal training of the day and the quality of the public men it produced."³⁵

Burke's conviction that studying the law often made men *less* valuable as public servants inspired some of his angriest denunciations of lawyers in the *Reflections*. He is particularly scornful of lawyers who wield great power over the lives of others despite coming from obscure origins. Burke was, of course, not completely against self-made men—

33 Ibid., 129–131.

34 Seán Patrick Donlan, "The law touches us but here and there, and now and then': Edmund Burke, Law, and Legal Theory," *Sartoniana*, vol. 25 (2012): 44, 44; 49, 52, 55, 55, 60. Donlan also notes that Burke's "use—or misuse—of the language of law" was not a sign of his devotion to the profession but "a rhetorical strategy that served as a critique of the thin legalism of revolutionary sloganeering" and which must be contextualised within his "wider understanding of morals, manners, and history." Ibid., 60, 60, 45.

35 Ibid., 46.

he was one himself—but he thought that they should acquit themselves with humility and dignity, since their lack of knowledge regarding aspects of life to which they had never had any exposure might lead them into errors and vulgarities. Having noted “that upstart insolence almost inevitably adhering to and disgracing those who are the first acquirers of distinction,” Burke goes on to particularly lament the way that self-made lawyers, “snatched from the humblest rank of subordination,” become “intoxicated with their unprepared greatness.”³⁶ In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, Senator Doogan recalls the lawyers denounced by Burke in that he has risen from humble origins. When he is first mentioned to Aunt Lizzy, she replies: “Never heard of him. Some Johnny-hop-up,”³⁷ which alerts us to the fact that Doogan is a self-made man, a “first acquirer . . . of distinction.” This self-made lawyer also recalls those targeted by Burke in that he wields power over the lives of others. By subtly pressuring Katie to marry the more financially secure Dr. King, Doogan foils Gar’s best chance of married happiness in Ballybeg. In retaliation, Public and Private Gar repeatedly (and comically) mock the lawyer when—alone in Gar’s bedroom—they act out their extravagant fantasies of a bright, prosperous, and glamorous American future.

As Tony Corbett has noted, these bedroom fantasies (including the childish “retaliations” against Doogan) and Gar’s occasional “posturing” as a “pseudo-sophisticate” betray the young man’s “stunted . . . emotional development.”³⁸ Additional indications of Gar’s emotional immaturity—clearly related to the early loss of his mother and to his father being emotionally “cold”—are the impracticality of his plans for marriage with Katie and his unrealistic expectations of American success.³⁹ A final indicator relates directly to the work of Edmund Burke. In the *Reflections*, Burke claims that the desire for radical, vivid change on the part of the revolutionaries (complete with “magnificent stage effect” and “grand spectacle”) shows a “juvenile” cast of mind.⁴⁰ Burke believed that a mature person would be reconciled to the considered and carefully managed reform that, however slow in coming, is longer-lasting and

36 Burke, *Reflections*, 121, 130.

37 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 62.

38 Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe*, 37.

39 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 65.

40 Burke, *Reflections*, 156.

less prone to rash errors in judgement or reinvention of the wheel. Similarly, Friel, in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, suggests that part of Gar's immaturity is the fact that he believes he needs the radical change that a move to America will bring, when, in fact, he may simply need to remain in Ballybeg, learning to make better emotional connections and being more courageous in his professional life.

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* profoundly influenced the writing of Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, just as George Steiner's *After Babel* (1975) and J. H. Andrew's *A Paper Landscape* (1975) heavily informed the creation of Friel's *Translations* years later. Gar's psychological obsession with the *aisling* figure in the Marie Antoinette apostrophe—often the sole focus of critical attention—is only one, relatively small, facet of Burke's influence on this classic play. As we have seen, Friel drew upon Burke's *Reflections* when conceiving the play's critiques of Ireland and America and when creating the characters of Gar and Senator Doogan. Today, as young Irish people emigrate in significant numbers once again—mainly to the “New Worlds” of Australia and North America—*Philadelphia, Here I Come!* feels surprisingly contemporary and relevant. This renewed relevance extends to Friel's engagement with Burke in the play, because contemplating Friel's handling of Burke's ideas can help us to understand what today's new migrants might be gaining—and losing—by trading life among their “little platoon” for life in a more prosperous, “rootless” society.

Is Burke Conservatism's Intellectual Father?



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Abstract

The argument made in the following essay offers a reading of Burke that brings into focus his capacity to speak as a Whig but with greater resources of wisdom than could belong to any one political party. In particular, the essay shows that Burke understood the “artificial” “contrivance” of constitutional society as ordered by and to God, our Father. Although the essay mentions St. Augustine only to indicate Burke’s departure from his thought, the Burke I depict here is one whose thought fits comfortably

¹ In his forthcoming book, *The Vision of the Soul: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the Western Tradition* (CUA Press, 2017), James Matthew Wilson offers an account of Burke, and his late disciple Russell Kirk, that envisions conservatism as an effort to preserve against the reductive thought and armed ideology of modern liberalism the great insights of Christian Platonism. In the volume as a whole, he contends that the central claim of the Christian Platonist tradition is that man and all things else are ordered by and to beauty, that the capacity for what Burke called “philosophic analogy” is in fact the intellectual capacity “to see the form” of reality as a whole, to perceive being in its relations, proportions, and depths, and that such a capacity is foundational to the intellectual life in general and to social and political life in particular. This essay was first published as part of a debate regarding the nature of Burkean conservatism and its position relative to the prevailing liberalism of our day.

in the same tradition as that of the great saint of late antiquity. They both belong to what I have since described as the Christian Platonist tradition, by which I intend the broad tradition of the West as a whole whose beginnings lie in ancient Athens and Jerusalem.

I.

BURKE WAS PERHAPS the most complex of British thinkers during a period of great, brilliant, but single-minded and simplifying, men. One senses in the writings of David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, and others, a desire to reduce all questions to a single abstract principle. The power of their writing derived from its rationalism—that is, from its driving ambition to force the opposition to surrender its claims, its beliefs, even its heart-felt certitudes, by bludgeoning them with sententious abstractions. Our age can learn little from looking back on these other writers, because our age perpetuates their practice: slapping the hesitant, shifting visages of those who dare maintain an old idea with the clean geometries of “rights” language or indignation on behalf of “fairness.”

We can, conversely, still learn much from Burke; it was his objection that the spirit of his age was a reductive one. His ever-recurring attack on “the clumsy subtilty” of his opponents’ “political metaphysics” makes him sound consummately anti-intellectual, and indeed the modern conservative heirs of Burke seem often to risk a “common sense” Philistinism at odds with Burke’s intentions. One could understandably, though inaccurately, take Russell Kirk’s identification of Burkean conservatism as the antithesis of ideology to be a renunciation of ideas altogether.

The real cause of Burke’s ire, however, was the supposedly intellectual disdain with which his contemporaries greeted the conditions of actual human life—of what we may redundantly call lived experience. Rejecting the claims of natural rights variously articulated in the months after the French Revolution, Burke contended that, as rights, liberties, and restrictions “vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, they cannot be settled upon any abstract rule; and nothing

is so foolish as to discuss them upon that principle."² Human experience is not only the source of human wisdom, but its permanent condition and also its end. Those who would either transcend the concrete conditions of history or ignore the legitimate concerns for the preservation of human happiness in order to take flight into utopian realms of abstraction succumb to a double weakness; they blithely reduce reality to theory and, in pursuing a theory, may brutally cause real suffering. Hence, the old conservative maxim that it is easier to destroy than to create expresses well one fundamental premise of Burke's thought.

How far, though, does a suspicion of intellectual abstraction and a strong desire to conserve the known rather than to essay the hitherto only imagined explain Burke? One encounters moments in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* when the author seems totally averse to any statement of principle, abstraction, or right. He says, after all:

Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it; and exist in much greater clearness, and in a much greater degree of abstract perfection: but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to every thing they want every thing. Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*.... If civil society be the offspring of convention, that convention must be its law. That convention must limit and modify all the descriptions of constitution which are formed under it. Every sort of legislative, judicial, or executory power are its creatures. They can have no being in any other state of things; and how can any man claim, under the conventions of civil society, rights which do not so much as suppose its existence?³

Here, the author grants that natural rights exist—but follows with the assertion that they are irrelevant to civil society. Society and government are “contrivances,” they are artifices created through a primeval social contract, and their forms are “conventional” rather than natural. It

² Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1968), 151.

³ *Ibid.*, 150–51.

will not do to introduce arguments of abstract principle from outside of the closed conventional system of a particular government, as if these outside abstractions could be relevant to what is interior to the man-made, artificial province of the state.

One might think this the most illiberal claim possible. In fact, it is exactly here, I would argue, that Burke comes into closest contact with his fellow Whigs and the French revolutionaries he vilified. Like them, Burke believes that society is, again, a man-made and merely conventional artifice, brought into being by that great historiographic Gordian-knot cutter, the social contract. The revolutionaries claimed that, because society is the product of such human artifice, its human members may withhold consent and remake it however they wish. Burke cannot argue against them categorically because, as a Whig, he is committed to accepting the theory of society as artifice. And so, his most direct response will be to claim that the contract, once undertaken, is permanently binding; our ancestors bound all subsequent generations to it. We could not reason otherwise, because the end of society is not a finite task; its end is ongoing and perennial, to wit, its end is its own perpetuation, growth, maturation, and improvement. The contracted, constitutional government

is to be looked on with ... reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.⁴

To repeat, Burke grants that society and government are conventional, they are the work of human hands; but they were not created for some "subservient" and ephemeral purpose, as might be a civic association for the suppression of "vice" or a contract between the owner of some land and an architect to construct a house. Indeed, they are not subservient to *us*, if we understand "us" as merely the aggregate of

4 Ibid., 194–95.

persons living at any one time. Burke shows himself here as granting a major historical premise of his political party, the Whigs, but he draws from it conclusions that many of his contemporaries could not share.

II.

The question I would like to address is whether this Whig identity can meaningfully be said to disqualify Burke as a conservative. To propose such disqualification one must presume that being a Whig puts one in a political tradition we now identify with liberalism, and which also assumes that conservatism is antithetical to liberalism. As a historical thesis, this confuses rather than crystallizes. In Burke's day, there were two identifiable political positions—that of a Tory and that of a Whig. But the Tories had been thoroughly routed and banished from power in the tumultuous 1750s. The only game in town was Whiggery, and so the Whigs comprised all of the possible positions one could occupy while in political power. Under such circumstances, even if one were sympathetic with the Tory cause (which may generally be expressed as the “divine right of kings” but was specifically expressed in a desire to see the Stuarts restored to the throne), if one wanted actually to *participate* in politics, one had to become a Whig.

Burke was not, as it were, a Tory in a Whig wig. He not only accepted the Whig theory of society as an artifice founded by contract, but also *many* of the notions deducible from it. As quoted above, he affirmed that “Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants.” Provision for human wants is the *raison d'être* of government, rather than, say, the provision for the desires of the monarch. Indeed, by “human” Burke primarily intended what almost every other Whig in his day intended: the aristocratic and mercantile classes whose relatively wide oligopoly had come into being through the overthrow of a monarch.

Does being a Whig make Burke less a conservative? I would provide two answers, a strident “no” and a qualified “no.” The strident “no” addresses this question as an historical one. As T. S. Eliot said, addressing the London Conservative Union in 1955, most persons understand Conservatism as the product of “a fusion of Tory and Whig elements,

due largely to the effect of the French Revolution upon the mind of Burke.”⁵ Burke is not simply a conservative; he is the cornerstone of a tradition. And that tradition has generally freely acknowledged that, in opposing liberalism, it is *not* opposing all the elements historically found in Whiggery (or, if you will, Classical Liberalism). Most conservatives who regard themselves as Burkean are also good Whigs who see government and society as matters of contrivance and convenience; they believe the free market the crown jewel set in this artifice (like Burke, they admire Adam Smith greatly). They are suspicious of all innovation that does not seem to derive logically from the currently existent and operable system of government. Like Burke, they suspect abstract thinking not only because it floats freely in the ether, but because they are themselves men of the world, men of affairs, and think it not the least offense of abstract speculation that it gets in the way of real work and real action. Burke is most certainly the fountainhead of the mainstream of conservatism, even American conservatism, in his combining an aboriginal individualism with an artifice of social order fused in the primeval social contract.

But a qualified “no” is also required. Burke’s text admits of another reading—one of which he *may* not have approved, of which many of his posterity *certainly* would not, but which, finally, I believe he would recognize as superior to that his posterity has given us. Burke tells us society and government are artifices, and these artificial structures are not founded on some natural property called “rights.” He says they come into being through a binding but nonetheless man-made contract. But government and society are *not* impenetrable monads, admitting nothing at all from outside themselves. To the contrary, Burke insists that we view every living generation as admitting three distinct influences from outside itself. First, and, surprisingly, least of all, Burke tells us (as we have seen) every living generation finds itself indissolubly bound to “those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” We are not our own, and we are not therefore sovereign rulers of ourselves or our society, at least to the extent that we compose a small part of an “eternal society” comprising past, present, and future generations. As such, the

5 T. S. Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic, and other writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), 138.

work of artifice is founded in a constitutional theory; the English constitution, as the exemplary form of government, works “after the pattern of nature,” and so,

is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression.⁶

However artificial the constituted society may be, it is patterned on nature through what Burke calls a “philosophic analogy.” As W. B. Yeats wrote, Burke “proved the State a tree.”⁷ It is organic, growing, and groaning, rather than mechanical, clockwork, and ticking.

Second, Burke finds all human judgment on natural sentiments. Human beings cannot intuit such abstract propositions as rights, but they may well feel by their natures what is good and what is evil, so long as they can accurately perceive the drama of historical events. As such, prejudices and traditions are necessary and legitimate not merely because they preserve the analogically organic continuity of society, but because they are a fragile, uncertain, but definite expression of nature insofar as human beings remain natural rather than “artificial” creations. Society may be circumscribed by convention, but not the human heart. To make claims founded on natural rights may be preposterous, but claims based upon a human nature schooled by the “moral imagination” are those most worthy of our assent.

It was for this strain in Burke’s argument that Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft most vehemently attacked him. They tried to label him an irrationalist, a mere sentimentalist, so repelled were they by the suggestion that such a fragile instrument as human emotion might underlie all the heady and consequential questions of good and evil. Burke left himself open to the charge because of his sneering at abstract

⁶ *Reflections*, 120.

⁷ The phrase appears in Yeats’s poem “Blood and the Moon.”

reason; but it is a false charge nonetheless. Was Paine more an adept at metaphysics than Burke? The latter primarily wished to show that all abstract notions should derive from and resolve into concrete realities. As such, our very earthy intuitions have as much at stake in human events as our most rarified reasonings. If we hear someone deprecating something we love deeply as mere sentiment, we may often fail to provide a convincingly rational riposte, but we may well (depending on the circumstances) be right to punch him in the mouth.

Third—and this subtends and modifies the two principles above—Burke *is not really a Whig* in a particular sense. Unlike so many of his contemporaries and antecedents (one thinks of John Locke), Burke *sincerely* and *consequentially* holds that belief in the Christian God precedes and informs all other human activities: “We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long.”⁸ He defends the Established Church not as one more convenient and beneficial artifice for the service of human wants; it is the portal through which man can look into his nature most clearly and see his true place. Most distinctively modern philosophies think of human society as conventional, contingent, and artificial; they justify thereby man’s sovereignty over everything he knows, because he can know nothing he has not made. Burke tells us something different. Society and government are artificial not primarily in the sense of being the unnatural contrivance of human hands, but in being the instrumental means to human beings’ supernatural end. The English, with their inheritable crown and above all their Established Church, “conceive that He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection—He willed therefore the state—He willed its connexion with the source and original archetype of all perfection.”⁹ Man, as a religious animal, is by his nature destined for a supernatural end; the state, a work of artifice, is one proper and instrumental contrivance that makes it possible for the natural man to work toward that perfection which will someday allow him to see his supernatural God face to face. If temporal government

8 *Reflections*, 187.

9 *Ibid.*, 196.

appears as a “contrivance,” it is thus only because it is ultimately subordinate to the divine, not to man.

Consequently, at a moment in *Reflections* when he seems merely to be affirming the *mortmain* hold of the social contract on all generations, Burke in fact inserts the horizontal succession of those generations through constitutionalism into the vertical relation of each human being to the supernatural end for which he is destined:

Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible worlds, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place.¹⁰

For Saint Augustine, the visible world of the City of Man was in conflict with the invisible world of the City of God. Not for Burke. When he speaks of an “eternal society,” he is speaking first of the Kingdom of Heaven, and he is speaking secondarily of the extended kingdom of man cradled within it. The apparent sovereignty of government in the face of “natural rights” breaks down when confronted with the supernatural sovereignty of the Creator. Or rather, human society is not merely patterned on the natural world, it is informed by its function to bring men to perfection, to aid them in becoming suitable for eternal life. At the heart of Burke’s politics is an eschatology—one that refuses to follow the path of the revolutionaries and become immanent.

The Burke I have just described would seem to be in tension not only with contemporary liberalism but with the Whigs of his own age. He affirms the reality of intergenerational obligations; the upholding of inherited traditions; the informing of human society and morality by traditions, intuitions, and pure reason rather than mere instrumental, abstract, or technocratic rationalism; and, above all, the ordering of human society and government *not* to a series of procedural norms intended to preserve a set of pre-political rights, but to the good life for man whose consummation will come only when he passes from the eternal society of this world to the eternal society of the next.

¹⁰ Ibid., 195.

The Burke of history was a Whig who saw more deeply than any of his contemporaries the true evil of the French Revolution; with a prophet's eye, he scanned the new world that the revolution was bringing into being and predicted its horrors. The Burke of history was a Whig who built his arguments upon the requisite foundations to gain a hearing among his peers in England; but he also spoke with a prophet's voice that could articulate the true foundations not only of English oligarchic constitutionalism, but of human society. The Burke of history gave us much of what has passed as conservatism for a century or more: he also provided us the bedewed, stirring foundations for what has come to be called traditional conservatism. He is its intellectual father.

Book Reviews



Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 1,032 pp.

Among his intellectual contemporaries, the ongoing attention given to the biographical details of Edmund Burke's life is conspicuous. Examinations of Burke's ideas redound inevitably to an examination of his life in a way quite unlike examinations of Kant or Hume, for example, where the focus more typically fixes on their writings in isolation from biography. Perhaps in a way, this is inevitable. Burke, as we know, did not undertake anything like systematic, philosophical writing after 1760. The last four decades of his life that saw his fame and ideas flourish were caught up in the tumult of events, and Burke himself left no treatise to define helpfully his conceptions of politics and history. Burke's body of ideas must be read through his life. Like conservative political ideas themselves, Burke's thought resists "the chains of a definition" with staggering and persistent effectiveness. Burke remains a gauntlet thrown, a puzzle with which each successive generation must struggle.

In the broad corpus of writings about Burke's life since the immediate wave of biographies and hagiographies that followed his death, we can trace several successive phases of understanding Burke since Robert Bisset's two-volume *The Life of Edmund Burke* appeared in 1800. By turns, Burke has been a stout Whig, a cool utilitarian, a devoted exponent of the classical tradition of the natural law, and, since Conor Cruise O'Brien's *The Great Melody* in 1992, Burke's Irishness has come

into sharp focus. Richard Bourke's *Empire and Revolution* both continues and reframes this most recent tendency in Burke scholarship. The effect is somewhat jarring, yet succeeds to be illuminating.

Richard Bourke is professor in the history of political thought in the School of History at Queen Mary University of London. To the American ear, this is an odd-sounding appointment. We are, in the American academy, so much accustomed to the high walls of separation between disciplines like history and politics that it is easy to imagine the jealous guardians of the *American Political Science Review* shaking their heads in shocked disapproval at such intellectual miscegenation. What could history say to the science of politics? How could such broad sympathies satisfy the rigorous demands of narrow specialization? Professor Bourke's approach to Burke and the arc of his own career suggest something like the now-quaintly interdisciplinary work of Peter Gay, whose great contributions to our understanding of the Enlightenment benefitted so much from the breadth of his intellectual perspective. The effect in *Empire and Revolution* is much the same. Bourke possesses a subtle understanding of the political ideas at work in Burke's eighteenth century while, yet, he still brings to his comprehensive study both the sweep of the historian's eye and the depth of a historian's technical training. To that last point, look only to Bourke's extensive use of archival research throughout *Empire and Revolution*, to the greatest degree this reviewer ever has seen in a study of Edmund Burke.

There is a good suggestion of a contrast when we think about Bourke's contribution as a historian and think back upon F. P. Lock's two-volume *Edmund Burke* (Oxford, 1998 and 2002) or David Bromwich's more recent *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke* (Harvard, 2014). Both Lock and Bromwich came to Burke from backgrounds in literature, and their treatments illuminate Burke's ideas in the light of his character and temperament. These are serious treatments of Burke's political ideas, well-sourced and thoughtful, and yet Lock's and Bromwich's eyes seem drawn to Burke's distinctive quirks, foibles, and predilections. We come to know Edmund Burke with the familiarity of a house guest in these treatments, albeit an erudite house guest prone to occasional expressions of deep wisdom or fits of extravagant outrage. In Bourke's study, we come to know Burke at a granular level of detail that sometimes seems

to follow each jot of Burke's pen strokes while, at the same time, Bourke brings us into a deep secondary literature that describes everything in Burke's world from the training of conforming Irish barristers to census estimates of the Atlantic slave trade. Here, in a masterful work of history, no detail is omitted. We can see not only the formation of Burke's ideas, but their meaning in a complex political and intellectual environment.

Perhaps the most interesting comparisons and contrasts with Bourke's work are suggested by the more self-consciously Irish treatments of Burke we have found recently in books by O'Brien (University of Chicago, 1992) and Luke Gibbons (Cambridge, 2009), among others. Professor Bourke certainly has not set out to write an Irish history of Edmund Burke. That much is clear. Yet Ireland lingers throughout *Empire and Revolution* as, perhaps, only could be expected. While generations of Burke scholars satisfied a variety of interests by minimizing Burke's connection to Ireland, the more recent work exposing Burke's Irishness has made it somewhat safer and more inevitable that we should consider how important was the fact that "The first twenty years of Burke's life were spent in Ireland" (27), or that Burke's own "belief that his relatives had been dispossessed as a result of Cromwellian plantation is noteworthy" (38). These are the potent and portentous, youthful ingredients of a worldview that can shape the formation of political ideas. On Ireland, at least, Bourke finds his subject to have exhibited a remarkable constancy of attention and activism throughout his whole life. It stands to reason, since Bourke describes Ireland unapologetically as Burke's "native country" (920).

The significance of British occupation and imperial ambition in Ireland was the theme of Gibbons's *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, for whom the Irish experience of empire suggested the presence of a "colonial sublime" in Burke's ideas that transferred the suffering of Irish Catholics to others under the power of the British Empire, such as the American colonists or Indian Hindus and Muslims. Gibbons's book was not received well by many Burke scholars, and Bourke has not indulged even to mention Gibbons's book. Yet Burke's psychic connection to suffering Ireland persists through Bourke's book with the certainty that "Burke's interest in both the justification of conquest and the practicalities of achieving civil peace was rooted in his awareness of his family's misfortune arising out

of the Cromwellian conquest" (161). Bourke spares as little sympathy for O'Brien and "the Yeatsian hypothesis about the crux of Burke's thought" (35*n.*), entirely rejecting O'Brien's suggestion of "crypto-Catholicism on Burke's part" (33) that was central to *The Great Melody*. Those earlier efforts to steer Burke scholarship toward a greater engagement with what Irishness meant to Burke find no support in *Empire and Revolution*. Still, it is difficult to forget Bourke's lengthy treatment of Burke's twenty youthful years in Ireland while reading a strong analytical chapter about the *Enquiry*, which follows immediately, even if Bourke, himself, never makes the connection. Ireland looms large.

That ongoing interest in what does (and does not) justify conquest and the practical settlements that do (and do not) bring about civil peace were the two themes that dominated Burke's life in the way that Bourke describes them as *Empire and Revolution*. The basic framework of Yeats remains in play ("American colonies, Ireland, France and India/Harried, and Burke's great melody against it") even if it is rendered instead as "America, India, Ireland, France" with the addition of "Britain" (5), and in every case the question returns to the two sides of hegemony—the growth of power and order as empire, the limitation of tyranny and the unsettling of precedents as revolution. Bourke renders evident Burke's ongoing preoccupation with "the writings of philosophical historians" (163) and also explores Burke's deep, youthful interest in the progress of historic empires in the ancient history of the Americas as well as Europe and Asia. Subordination emerges as a theme in these earliest years of Burke's life, bringing about a healthy and prosperous empire if successful and calling forth revolution, healthy or not, if it is unsuccessful. The theme recurs later in places so widespread as the "Speech on Conciliation with America" and the *Reflections*. One thing certainly united Edmund Burke to the more typical cast of Enlightenment era thinkers we recognize from Jefferson to Condorcet: Burke was preoccupied by the problem of political order, and he studied history widely in search of exemplars that could point to a solution.

The familiar relationship of those themes (empire, revolution, political order, history, subordination) to the causes identified by the Yeats hypothesis plays out across the rest of Professor Bourke's book. Bourke identifies something like a turning point in Burke's career as he came

to represent Bristol in 1774 and “was forced to think seriously about his obligations as a representative” (374). Bourke transforms this turn of Burke’s attention into one of the more spectacular episodes in *The Political Life of Edmund Burke*, for here Burke’s attention falls as much on Britain and its constitution as it ever falls on the other great causes Burke addressed abroad. Reflecting on events in Britain, “Burke recognized that while government might have its origin in subjugation, the act of conquest should be aimed at conservation” (375). Conservation becomes a barrier between empire and revolution, a guarantee of liberty against the need for any revolution. At the same time, when empire fails, conservation becomes the boundary against excess in revolution. Representation of Burke’s Bristol constituents, in the light of how *Empire and Revolution* join together thematically, becomes the logic that explains grudging support for American independence alongside condemnation of French revolutionary sympathy, a fear that Ireland has been prepared to breed Jacobin sympathies by a too-ambitious spirit of conquest alongside the determination to prosecute Warren Hastings for fear of how his Indian aggrandizements could endanger respect for constitution and law at home in Britain.

Bourke’s long chapter (74 pages) on “Representation and Reform” addresses all of these issues in considerable depth, and develops from the discussion of representation a coherent narrative of Burke’s career that follows for several hundred more pages. That Burke whom we find in *Empire and Revolution* is one who is familiar in his suspicion of popular government and for his determined defenses of governments that emerge organically from those who are to be governed. None of this breaks surprising ground for readers familiar with Burke’s life and writings, certainly not for those familiar with the range of secondary interpretations which already have put Burke into view from practically every available perspective. Indeed, Bourke’s summary conclusion ends rather limply with the observation that, “Burke’s rhetoric speaks of an epoch suddenly submerged; his analysis allows us to see durability amid change” (927). But the exposure or reinterpretation of the familiar tensions in Burke’s life and ideas really is not Bourke’s purpose. Rather, this meticulous work of history lays bare the surest foundation for reading Edmund Burke, himself—shorn of the generations of interpreters from

Lewis Namier to Russell Kirk to Conor Cruise O'Brien. There have been many quite good biographies of Edmund Burke down the last two centuries. Professor Bourke has given us one that engages Burke's ideas through the cautious lens of historical research. Not writing simply a biography of the man or an engagement with his ideas to suggest an interpretive approach, Bourke succeeds as one hopes a historian of political thought would. He excavates the ideas and the man, Burke, from the layers of accretion in which he has become so well encrusted. And Bourke does this with the methodological precision of a historian. The product is as impressive as it is much needed.

Our political and intellectual preoccupation with Edmund Burke offers an interesting barometer of our civic life. Consider the sheer number of works with which the reviewer is tempted to compare *Empire and Revolution*: Bisset (1800), Prior (1854), Morley (1879), Cone (1957 and 1964), MacPherson (1980), O'Brien (1992), Lock (1998 and 2006), Hampsher-Monk (2009), O'Keefe (2010), Norman (2013), and Bromwich (2014). More than that, consider the way that authors have seemed to turn to Burke in moments of dislocation. After Burke's death, a long silence follows Bisset until the era of Disraeli and Gladstone raised questions about the end of British hegemony and the place of conservative ideas. A long silence follows again until mid-century when the Cold War joined Nazism in an age of ideology that sent thinkers back to Burke. What can we say about the Burke boom since the end of the Cold War? It is not so clear that we face an ideological enemy like the Jacobins or the Nazis in this time. Perhaps more like late nineteenth-century Britain, as we watch the unraveling of American influence around the globe and as American conservatives squabble among themselves to puzzle out what they believe, this return to Burke makes some sense. That is a cheerless comparison between our time and the fading empire of Victoria's Britain. Yet since history has placed us in this circumstance, it is fortunate that we have Burke and Bourke available to us.

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The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume IV: Party, Parliament, and the Dividing of the Whigs, 1780–1794, edited by P. J. Marshall and Donald Bryant. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015. xvi + 674 pp.

The most prominent among several ways this book may be characterized is that with which Professor Marshall begins his preface: it is “the last volume of texts” of the *Writings and Speeches* edition. (No mention is made of a general index.) In the book’s preliminary pages a sense of time’s passage is strong. The list of the edition’s Advisory Committee members has contracted to a single name. Textual editor William B. Todd has died since the publication of the series’ penultimate volume. This volume is dedicated to the project’s General Editor, Paul Langford, who passed away in the interval between the writing of its preface and the volume’s publication. Volume IV, indeed, might have been published a quarter-century ago had not its initial editor, Donald C. Bryant, a leading American authority on rhetoric and a respected Burke scholar, died in 1987, near to but before completing his work. However, although Professor Marshall has benefitted from his predecessor’s skill, the selection of items to be printed is somewhat different, and the introductions, notes, and other editorial matter are almost exclusively Marshall’s. Apart from the bibliographical determination of Burke’s published texts, undertaken decades ago, this volume is a work of twenty-first century scholarship.

Within the *Writings and Speeches* edition, Volume IV is the third and final volume in its Party and Parliament sequence. It includes writings extending from the meeting of the new Parliament late in 1780, when Burke was returned to the House of Commons for the pocket-borough

of Malton, onward to his retirement from the House in 1794—a period as long as those of its two predecessors combined. It is able to do so because Burke limited his parliamentary speaking in the 1790s to fewer subjects and especially because his speeches on India and the Hastings Impeachment throughout the entire period it covers had been assigned to Volumes V through VII. Upholding a precedent set by Burke's earliest editors, the overriding of this volume's chronological organization by the thematic grouping of the writings and speeches on India probably does have more advantages than liabilities. Volume VIII consists entirely in published writings on the French Revolution written in these years, but they are addressed to an extra-parliamentary audience; however, the one such writing most closely related to party issues, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, is included in Volume IV. These allocations have left the volume with only three of Burke's published writings, fewer than either of the other Party and Parliament volumes. This matters because it affects what readers may reasonably expect from it.

The second paragraphs in the prefaces of every volume in the edition but that of Volume I begin with a variant of the statement: "This edition makes no claim to be comprehensive." They then draw a distinction between two differing classes of writings included in the edition. The first consists in Burke's published works, including versions of speeches made in the House of Commons that he subsequently prepared for publication, which, after all, thereby became writings. To them are added "a selection of those in which he can be shown to have collaborated and of those which he intended to print without actually doing so." These comprise the writings. The second category includes the large majority of speeches which were not published but are known to have been delivered by Burke from various sources such as newspaper accounts, diaries, compilations of parliamentary debates, and drafts and other papers among his manuscripts. Owing to both limitations of space and various inadequacies of the source material, only a relatively small percentage of these numerous speeches has been printed in the edition—often in the form of a newspaper's third-person journalistic summary. To merit inclusion, these speeches had to be based upon a reliable record and be significant for addressing important issues or revealing Burke in some characteristic way. This is not the only limita-

tion, however, to which this distinction calls attention. Editing as practiced in the writings of the first category is a different task from that in the second. In editing of writings in the first category, the goal has been the common one of producing an accurate text representing the latest intentions of the author; that end is hardly ever possible to achieve with the material in the second category. Textually, at least, the published writings are exemplary. It is the limitations inhering in the unpublished speeches which have occasioned the cautionary paragraphs.

Students of Burke are fortunate that, in a generation of outstanding bibliographers, William B. Todd, “the foremost eighteenth-century bibliographer” of his time, was attracted to the textual complexities of Burke’s writings. The accolade just quoted was pronounced by the man whose books laid out the principles of bibliographic description for his era, Fredson Bowers. In the 1950s Todd’s recruitment had been a high priority for the University of Texas, which, at the time, appeared to have almost infinite funds for the acquisition of rare books and manuscripts and was developing its outstanding Humanities Research Center (now the Harry Ransom Center). There the objects of his inquiry ranged from Gutenberg Bibles to the suspect typescripts Richard Nixon had submitted of the Watergate Tapes. Once Todd’s *Bibliography of Edmund Burke* (1964) had made such an edition possible, it was inevitable that he would be asked to be textual editor of the *Writings and Speeches*. From the HRC he sent out to volume editors pairs of marked-up photocopies—one a working copy—of each selected text, usually copied from the university’s collections or from his own. (Todd’s important private collection of Burke’s writings in multiple editions has since been acquired by the Hesburgh Library at Notre Dame.) For each volume, he would also supply the Appendix B, stating his principles and identifying variants, and would assist the volume editor with additional guidance. For *Reflections on the Revolutions in France*, in Volume VIII, Todd’s discovery of a further correction by Burke resulted in the adoption of a different edition (531) from that he had originally identified in the *Bibliography* (531). The three published writings in Volume IV, however, seem to have presented no new problems. In this long-delayed volume, Todd’s contributions were inherited by P. J. Marshall from Donald Bryant. Proofreading the edition’s texts as well as annotating and introducing them were left to the volume editor.

Those are tasks, of course, that the editor also faced when the work he was editing was an unpublished speech. But first he had to choose which of the available but typically incomplete reports of the speech to print. Since the number of newspapers reporting debates in Parliament increased in the 1790s to at least six, decisions multiplied for an editor having space to print perhaps two which might be supplemented by occasional footnotes referring to details in additional sources. Sometimes a later report or a compilation, such as *The Parliamentary Register*, might carry information absent in earlier accounts. Then the editor, often lacking conclusive evidence, nevertheless had to assess how likely it might be that Burke, himself, had supplied the additional material. Language Burke uses in a surviving draft of a speech may not turn up in newspaper reports of the speech as delivered. Had Burke then included it although the reporter had not, or had he deleted it himself? French Laurence and Walker King, Burke's first editors, sometimes by their own connective prose fused more than one report into a single "speech." Some of their sources, however, have subsequently disappeared. The editor nevertheless had to try to identify what he could and to determine whether to print it without their interpolations. If important material could not readily be detached, his decision then became whether or not to reprint their inferior version. How exasperating the prospect of doing so could be is illustrated by a memorable passage in Todd's *Bibliography* when (on page 227) his language of bibliographical description gives way to an editorial comment on one of Laurence and King's prefaces: "On this arrogant note the executors conclude all public defence of their editorial mismanagement, as first undertaken three years before and yet to extend for another twenty-seven years." Still, against this, the editor might have to set his own awareness that, on certain matters, Laurence and King, close and devoted associates of Burke, may have been better situated to infer Burke's intentions than he. Because in so many cases an editor's investigations cannot arrive at an authoritative decision, perhaps it would be best to call his choices "preferred versions." That, at least, would acknowledge upon what the reader has to depend: an editor's familiarity with the sources, his judgment, and, one hopes, his exacting standards. The volumes thus unavoidably combine textually authoritative editions of the writings with something rather less, which

one might call scholarly resources for the study of Burke's unpublished speeches. The limitations of the unpublished speeches dictate that in some investigations conscientious scholars will have to go beyond the edition to sources passed over. Still, at their best, the sources printed, supplemented by the listings in its Appendix A of all Burke's speeches within a volume's areas of coverage, can give them important assistance.

Because of the limitations imposed by the unpublished speeches, it may not be entirely fair to compare *generally* the *Writings and Speeches* with the *Correspondence* edition, as is commonly done. Still, one of several respects in which the editions can be compared is their consistency. Probably because (in its later volumes, at least) members of the team at Sheffield assembled and supervised by Thomas Copeland participated in the editing of multiple volumes, the *Correspondence* achieved a higher level of consistency than the *Writings and Speeches* has been able to sustain. That inability can be ascribed to the ravages of mortality upon its editors, but only to a degree. There seems to be something near a consensus that the *Writings and Speeches* are at their best in Paul Langford's inaugural and precedent-setting Volume II and in P. J. Marshall's three India volumes. (However, concerning those India volumes, one must recall the disclaimer that the edition "makes no claims to be comprehensive." The four volumes on India originally projected were reduced to three, presumably entailing some hard decisions.) The most criticized volumes have been I and VIII. Disappointment with the former centers upon writings of Burke it failed to include such as the passages in Edmund's hand of the *Account of the European Settlements in America*. Admissions to, and exclusions from, its section of Miscellaneous Verse and Prose also may leave one with a sense of missed opportunity. Many readers of this review will have noticed that, although the *Writings and Speeches* is justly regarded to be the standard edition of Burke, a significant amount of recent scholarly writing, most notably Richard Bourke's *Empire and Revolution*, has cited J. C. D. Clark's Stanford University Press edition of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in preference to Volume VIII. Where Volume VIII uses the text Todd had determined to be the last that Burke corrected, Clark reprints the first edition. It is good to have both. If one's subject is the debate *Reflections* occasioned, one might reasonably want to cite it from the first edition in which

many of Burke's earlier adversaries read him; if one's concern is Burke's thought in its larger dimensions, Todd's text in Volume VIII would appear to be more suitable. Since, however, the reasons these scholars have resorted to the Stanford edition appear not to be textual, their choice likely arises in reservations about the unreliability of Volume VIII's general introduction and possibly about the voice in which it insinuates its characterization of Burke.

What place, then, does Volume IV have within the *Writings and Speeches*? It is not, as might initially appear, a late supper of leftovers completing the edition after Burke's published writings on similar subjects had been served up earlier and elsewhere. It is one of the edition's best volumes. True, it lacks the wealth of major writings that, for example, Volume III offers—both Conciliation speeches, the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, the public statements concerning both Bristol elections, and the *Speech on Economical Reform*. Still, its contents are sufficient to show Burke's mind engaged with significant issues, especially in the sober argument of *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* and the exposition of the moral responsibilities of conquerors in his first speech denouncing the pillage of St. Eustatius. For what it lacks in concentration, the volume compensates in the range and complexity of Burke's opinions it discloses. Since among its speeches are many of Burke's most difficult and extreme moments in the House of Commons, the failed defense of Powell and Bembridge, some of his worst excesses in the regency debates, and the 1791 debates on Quebec that culminated in his break with Fox, no one, alas, can complain that Volume IV lacks drama. Its merit, however, inheres less in its subjects than in its editing.

To Thomas Copeland, in 1973, mulling over in his journal the *Writings and Speeches* edition he had begun to plan, an editor's work would begin by listing in Appendix A all Burke's unpublished speeches in the House of Commons during the time the volume covered. Once he had determined its fullest reliable text for each item within the volume's scope, he was in position to select from his list the speeches and other writings that deserved publication and full annotation and add them to the published writings previously agreed upon. The list, Copeland believed, would be a volume's foundation. Professor Marshall's Appendix A in Volume IV is unrivalled within the edition in its extent and in the range of its sources. In

smaller print than all but one of its predecessors, it extends twenty-seven pages. For each speech he directs the reader to the report of the speech he has found to be most authoritative and inclusive. For those he has printed, he has comparatively full textual introductions supplemented by the volume's informative preliminary discussion of his sources. His policy on the two major compilations of parliamentary debates, Debrett's *Parliamentary Register* and Cobbett's nineteenth-century *Parliamentary History*, which drew heavily upon it, is worth noting, for it reverses that of at least two earlier volumes of the edition. Marshall prefers the former except in cases where the latter contains material "that cannot be accounted for elsewhere." Those other editors seem to have relied on the *Parliamentary History* because of its greater availability. Marshall appears to prefer the *Parliamentary Register* because it came earlier, during Burke's lifetime—early enough for there to be "a reasonable presumption" that material in the compilation containing passages not found in any of the newspaper accounts may have been supplied by Burke himself. The Appendix A of Volume VIII is necessarily a much smaller listing than that of Volume IV because it was confined to writings on the French Revolution, but Marshall's list includes all twenty-five of its speeches. Of the twenty-five, Marshall agrees with only one source. Volume VIII's Appendix A lists the *Parliamentary History* as the preferred source for twenty-one (84 percent) of its speeches, suggesting that it may possibly have been a default source except in special circumstances in which newspaper accounts not used by the compilation were sought out. Four newspapers are cited once each as a source for those remaining. Marshall's list prefers the *Parliamentary Register* for thirteen speeches, and draws from six other sources for the other twelve. His Appendix A supersedes that of Volume VIII, the only volume with which it overlaps enough to make comparison possible, because his command of the reports of Burke's speeches and of his manuscripts is unsurpassed.

In addition to his distinction as an historian of the British Empire, ever since the publication of his first book, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, Professor Marshall has been for Burke scholars an irreplaceable guide to Burke's involvement with India. The range of his expertise, attentive readers have long known, extends considerably further than the areas with which he is most readily associated. An additional way

of viewing Volume IV is as the fullest repository of his knowledge of Burke apart from that concerning India, a perspective encouraged by the diverse subjects of the speeches it collects. Although, like his earlier colleagues on the *Correspondence* edition, Marshall is not an historian of political ideas, this book betrays no falling off from the India volumes in his erudition as a political historian, nor in the skill of his expository prose. That erudition is especially well conveyed in the introductions to the individual writings and speeches. He is admirable in laying out arguments at issue in a parliamentary debate and in distributing emphasis among their salient details. He is particularly careful about admitting speculative interpretation, which he does very occasionally allow himself within closely circumscribed boundaries. While his reference to “the nominally anti-Catholic Gordon Riots” (4:318 n.1) may raise the eyebrows of readers of Nicholas Rogers and Colin Haydon, it is more characteristic in confining its issue to a single adverb. Typically, Marshall appears to write with the restraint of one conscious that his edition will have to last for generations and may never be undertaken again in something like its present form. This he does while concurrently acquainting us in his notes with revealing unfamiliar material from Burke’s papers.

The *Writings and Speeches* has observed a convention of longer general introductions than those of the *Correspondence* which preceded it. The brevity of the latter seems to have been Thomas Copeland’s policy and may have arisen from the difficulty of imposing order on the great diversity of subjects Burke’s letters, over a relatively short period, would accumulate. Since five of the *Writings and Speeches* volumes have been organized thematically, they have given their editors greater opportunities for fuller development. That, however, is not the case with Volume IV, and Marshall’s general introduction must have been a challenge to integrate. His introduction quotes from Burke profusely, as it should, and its notes constitute a kind of index of important Burkean statements. He has divided his thirty-four page essay into seven sections, which, after a single opening paragraph, include a chronological survey of the last half of Burke’s political career, a tracing of the fluctuating reception of his oratory in the 1780s and 1790s, and an important account of the changing emphases in Burke’s continuing defense of the British Constitution.

That takes his readers to the difficult years following Burke's break with Fox and to an explanation of how Burke conceived the threat to Great Britain and to European civilization generally. Marshall also portrays Burke as recognizing that ninety-nine percent of the very poor knew that they had no prospect of acquiring property by their industry. Stability thus depended upon their accepting the station in life in which Providence had placed them and in the enforcement of "stern" laws by a "frowning" police. In the penultimate section of the essay that image of Burke is held in necessary suspension along with his aspiration to "act as the representative of the people who had no power." In the years covered by Volume IV he is seen often in that role. Although documented in other volumes, in his view the people of India were preeminently such a powerless people. Catholics were also, especially in Ireland. So were the Jewish merchants of St. Eustatius, victims of Admiral Rodney's looting, who lacked citizenship in a state which might defend their rights under the law of nations and for whom "Humanity must then become their protector and ally." He spoke against the transportation of convicts to what he presumed would be certain death by tropical disease in an area of West Africa not under British control at a time before Botany Bay was adopted. Marshall here also takes up Burke's opposition to the slave trade. He chooses to conclude the introduction by focusing upon the costs to Burke of the late rigidity into which his anxieties about revolution stiffened and his campaign against France required:

But a campaign pursued in so obsessive a way exacted a heavy price from him. Deeply pessimistic about the future and seeing himself as beleaguered in the midst of turpitude, folly, and cowardice, he adhered rigidly to his own rectitude, sacrificing to it some of the sympathies and the generous vision of politics and human nature that had enriched his life (4:34).

The introduction is an important summation by a truly distinguished historian of aspects of Burke's career he had not previously addressed, and it enables Volume IV to bring the edition to a substantial end.

A final way one may regard this volume is as the conclusion, not only of the *Writings and Speeches* edition, but of the foundational period of contemporary Burke scholarship, begun with the deposit of Burke's

papers at Sheffield in 1949 and Northampton soon afterward. At the end of 1973, Thomas Copeland was growing pessimistic about the prospects for the *Writings and Speeches* since it was apparent that the excellent editorial team he had assembled for the *Correspondence* could not be held together for the new project. But he still saw some reasons for hope. Of P. J. Marshall he wrote in his journal: "Peter, who was very central to the old team, is *the* reliable center of the new." The editing of four of the edition's nine volumes constitutes a very substantial center, and the quality of his work has been yet more important than its mass. Moreover, by the time the series was under way he had, in an emergency situation, devoted work that Copeland and Paul Langford agreed in calling "herculean" to bringing the *Correspondence* edition to a close with its outstanding index volume. No one has done more than Professor Marshall to lay the foundations of contemporary scholarship on Burke.

With his characteristic generosity, Marshall has also been the most prominent link between the foundational period and the new era of remarkable superstructures built upon it, especially the three biographies of F. P. Lock, David Bromwich, and Richard Bourke. All are acknowledged in Volume IV, but from the acknowledgements in their own books it is clear that P. J. Marshall has contributed much to what David Womersley recently described as the current "golden age of Burke scholarship." Volume IV at once concludes the foundational era and takes a deserved place beside these contemporary achievements.

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STUDIES IN

Burke
AND HIS TIME



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