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Edmund Burke & the Heritage of Oral Culture

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Introduction - "To love the little Platoon"

To be attached to the subdivision,
to love the little platoon we belong to in society,
is the first principle (the germ as it were)
of public affections.
It is the first link in the series by which we proceed
towards a love to our country,
and to mankind.
Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France

It is one of the ironies of eighteenth-century studies that the marginal political figure of Edmund Burke holds such a central position. Most of Burke's political career was spent in opposition and even when the Whigs enjoyed a brief period of power, Burke never held a cabinet position. Moreover, he seemed to consistently support the least successful causes: at the beginning of his political career he advised the British Government to conciliate with the American Revolutionaries and he argued for fair trade between Britain and Ireland. For some fourteen years Burke investigated the colonial crimes of the East India Tea Company and he was the foremost prosecutor in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the Governor General of India. Burke insisted that he knew what he was doing "whether the white people like it or not", but prosecuting the man who had won India for the British doomed him to public odium.[1] Then, when "Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive" Burke led the charge in denouncing that French Revolution which proclaimed Equality, Freedom and Brotherhood for the world. However, Burke remains the focus of academic attention and one of the primary reasons why so many monographs and biographies have been written on Burke is that the potency of his speeches still continues to arrest the emotions and attract the intellect.[2]

Burke's speeches are wonderfully composed but they are also deemed to be strange and curious, not only without precedent in British literature but also having a prophetic, prescient quality in describing events and realities which only later came to pass. Burke's treatise on The Sublime and Beautiful describes the effects of terror and beauty on the viewer and listener. The oscilation between terror and beauty was a staple of the Gothic aesthetic but The Sublime and Beautiful was written some years before the first recognisably Gothic literary works in English. Burke depicts British rule in India in terms which generations

later become the rhetoric of anti-colonialists, and he prophesies the French Dictatorship in the first flush of the Revolution. While Burke's speeches are curious anomalies in the tradition of British literature, his political career is also understood to be 'inconsistent', in that at the end of his career he changed from being one of the Whigs' great spokesmen to voice a conservative protest against revolutionary republicanism.

In the Cold War era, Burke, defender of the American Revolution and opponent of the 'socialist' French Revolution, was particularly popular with American conservatives,[3] many of whom sought with varying degrees of failure to resolve the 'contradictions' in Burke and read him as a 'coherent' figure working to a particular (modern conservative) theoretical programme.[4] Other academics present Burke as a figure who is conflicted in his choice of philosophies: hence we get Burke "in revolt against the eighteenth century", Burke, an "ambivalent conservative", and "the seeming incoherence between Burke the traditionalist and Burke the bourgeois liberal."[5]

Even in Burke's lifetime he was regarded as embodying a number of contradictions. He was caricatured as a Jesuit, which was a shorthand way of alluding to his Irish Catholic antecedents and sympathies and his rumoured predilection for sodomy, but he was a strange Jesuit in that he was not given to the Jesuitical characteristics of intellectual duplicity and Machiavellian subterfuge, but was presented as a myopic dreamer, lean and idealistic, a Cervantic knight, in contrast with the astute, corpulent, unshaven, democratic Charles Fox. Contemporary opinions on Burke's speeches also register a recognition of the strangeness of his compositions. He is credited with being one of the foremost orators in the history of the British Parliament, and yet, according to Burke's first

biographer, Bisset, "the uncommon genius and eloquence of Burke" was often treated most disrespectfully by the members of the House of Commons who expressed loud disdain for what Bisset admits were Burke's "most violent expressions" in his crusading speeches against the East India Company. Matthew Arnold complains of Burke's "Asiatic style....barbarously rich and overloaded" and Sir Philip Magnus explains that Burke's Irishness allowed for an added impetus to the hooting and jeering which accompanied many of his speeches towards the end of his career: "Burke spoke always with a pronounced brogue, which helped to emphasise his strangeness, and his gestures when he was on his feet were ungainly."[6]

In his annotated bibliography of works on Burke, Conor Cruise O'Brien gives an example of one of the more gratuitously offensive depictions of the Irish Burke which were common currency until the publication of Burke's correspondence, and echoes of which still survive today: "If we regard his social origins, we can only classify as an Irish adventurer the great Edmund Burke, the theorist and the high priest of snobbery."[7] There are many examples, even in Burke's own lifetime, where he is depicted as the eighteenth-century theatrical stereotype: the Irishman-on-the-make. The successful tagging of Burke as an 'Irish Adventurer' by those who wished to belittle or dismiss his achievements has perhaps led to the situation where many academics who found much to value in Burke chose to ignore his Irish nationality.

This troublesome Irish dimension of Burke which Magnus says accentuated his 'strangeness' has only recently been used to provide a perspective on the apparent contradictions of his life and work. Conor Cruise O'Brien reads Burke's speeches on America, India and France to show how Burke's private

preoccupation with Ireland ghosts those great public crusades, particularly his impeachment of Hastings. Seamus Deane argues that Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France is a "foundational text" in the canon of Anglo-Irish literature and can be read as "generating the possiblity" for a narrative of that great body of work which is Irish writing in English.[8] The result of reading Burke's politics as those of a 'crypto-catholic' Irishman and reading his Reflections within the context of the Irish literary tradition is that he no longer is an 'ungainly', strange, confusing or confused British statesman, nor an Irish adventurer replete with violent oratory, but he is clearly a brilliant and unique eighteenth-century Irish orator, a product of his Gaelic Jacobite upbringing and his Patriotic Irish education at Trinity College Dublin. By investigating Burke's 'social origins', we are provided with the backdrop that brings Edmund Burke's political performance into sharp relief.

It is very clear that a great many Irish authors have drawn deeply from the rich reserves of the Irish oral tradition and storytelling conventions. Many of the novels of Maria Edgeworth, child of the British Whig Enlightenment, were preoccupied with the issues, misuses and abuses of 'English as spoken by the Irish'. This influence of the spoken word on the Irish text is most evident in those authors who were bilingual or lived in largely Gaelic speaking or bilingual areas but it is also evident in even our most urbane and European authors. Though James Joyce is recognised as one of Europe's leading modernists it is inconceivable that any discussion of Joyce's language could continue without any reference to the glories of the dialect of Hiberno-English or Dublin's vibrant oral culture. Discussions of Burke which have ignored or been ignorant of the traditions in which he was steeped and from which he draws so much of his

language and politics have resulted in a Burke who appears an oddity within a narrowly defined eighteenth-century English literary and political canon.

This dissertation proposes that one of the more fruitful ways of interpreting Burke's work is to evaluate him as an oral performer rather than a literary practitioner and it argues that in his voice one can hear the modulations of the genres and conventions of oral composition as practised in eighteenth-century Gaelic Ireland. The first chapter situates Burke in the milieu of the Gaelic landed class of eighteenth-century Ireland. Burke's mother was a Nagle from North Cork, and the Nagles were a proud Gaelic Catholic Jacobite clan, one of the most influential Gaelic gentry families among the few who survived the defeat of the Stuarts in Ireland. Burke's formative childhood years were spent with the Nagles in the Blackwater Valley, North Cork, where he was educated in a traditional manner at a local hedge-school. In a letter to his cousin, Garret Nagle, written in the late 1760s, Burke refers to "the old burthen of [his] song" which is that the Gaelic Catholics and converts consider themselves "as one family" in the face of the oppressive regime of Protestant Ireland. This chapter not only places Burke in the Jacobite political and cultural milieu of the North Cork Nagles but also shows that he was possessed of a long and well-documented genealogy of prominent Catholic, Royalist gentry, an inheritance which explains both his political positioning and the style of his political interventions throughout his career.

The study of how the rich oral culture of the Munster Gaelic gentry was to provide a lasting influence on the form and content of Burke's work begins with a text called Párliament na mBan and the passages in Burke's speeches which realise (or idealise) the British constitution and which have been considered among

Burke's most original, innovative and influential contribution to British culture. Seamus Deane and J.G.A. Pocock have both commented on how these passages of Burke's have a distinctly Jacobite interpretation of British law and history.[9] The second chapter follows the lead of Deane and Pocock in its reading of Párliament na mBan, arguing that the young Burke might well have studied this widely distributed text during his years in North Cork. The Párliament is a Jacobite *speculum principis*, a guide for young rulers, and was composed for the ill-fated James Cotter whose state-sanctioned hanging in 1720 was easily the most traumatic political event in Munster, if not Ireland, in the first half of the eighteenth century. The reverberations were felt decades afterwards. Burke's father, at that time still a Catholic himself, was Cotter's attorney. Breandán Ó Buachalla glosses key concepts in the Párliament such as *ceart* and *maitheas poiblí*, the deployment of which bears a remarkable affinity with passages in Burke's framing of the body politic in "the image of a relation in blood".[10] The Párliament can be read as both a glossary on and an inspiration for Burke's 'unique' depiction. The Párliament is a product of a sophisticated oral culture and Burke's Reflections can also be read in the light of his often-stated unease with the cold abstractions of 'Theory' and his expressed unease at what he saw as a new, "marked distinction between the English that is written and the English that is spoken".

The third chapter continues the loosely chronological order, using Burke's life as a guide, to examine the effect that education at that bastion of Protestant Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, had on the young Burke. It might be expected that moving to Trinity from the Gaelic groves of North Cork via the Shackleton Quaker school in rural Co. Kildare must have proved quite a culture shock but in fact Burke found a most congenial atmosphere at Trinity, many of whose members at that

time were quite critical of the colonial regime of Dublin Castle and were strong in their expressions of Irish Patriotism. While at Trinity, Burke instigated, edited and wrote for The Reformer, a Patriotic publication whose aim was to bring about reform in Ireland's intellectual and creative subservience to the taste and prejudice of "a Country which despises us". The experience of Dublin's mid-century Irish Patriotism was important in affirming and consolidating Burke's experience of being raised among the Gaelic gentry but even more germane to his future development was that Trinity College at that time was home to a vibrant tradition of Anglo-Irish theories of linguistics which had distinctly different positions on fundamental issues of language and truth to those of the theorists of the Scottish and English Enlightenment. The Anglo-Irish school of linguistics explored language as a series of speech processes rather than as a textual event and in their critique of Locke and the materialist theories of the Enlightenment they conjure subjectivities that at times can appear curiously post-structuralist. Burke was indebted to this school, in particular to his teachers, John Lawson and Thomas Leland. This second chapter of the dissertation makes a survey of some of the salient features of eighteenth-century Trinity linguistics and gives a detailed reading of Burke's treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful, which he claimed was conceived and largely composed at Trinity. The Sublime and Beautiful is Burke's only explicit statement on the aesthetic use of words, and it demonstrates how Burke's thought and practice, his 'idioms', might be understood as being formed by and through the criterion of orality rather than literature.

It was also while he was at Trinity that Burke formed 'The Club', a discussion and debating society which still exists today as Trinity's Literary and Historical Society. Burke's 'club' is the earliest example we have of a student debating society in Ireland or Britain. When he settled in London he was a founder

member of The Literary Club which met weekly for over thirty years in Soho to debate and discuss the leading artistic and cultural issues of the day. Its membership expanded to include the artistic and learned male luminaries of eighteenth-century British society, men such as Johnson, Goldsmith, Garrick, Reynolds, Adam Smith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Apart from the ad hoc debates in various coffee houses there was no model in English culture for this regular gathering of talent and wit in the Turk's Head tavern.[11] This chapter draws analogies between the Clubs founded by Burke and the Munster *Cúirteanna* that Burke would have known in his childhood. These poetic courts provide a remarkable context for discussing Burke's poetical-political performance. Burke had most unusual principles concerning the public role of popularly elected members of Parliament. His speech At the Conclusion of the Poll at Bristol declares that "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." This chapter proposes that the clearest precedent for Burke's principles is the example of the gentleman-poet of the Munster *Cúirteanna* and their vividly eloquent, poetical-political compositions.

Burke wanted to be remembered above all for his speeches on behalf of India against the corrupt regime of the East India Company, and he began the task of collecting his own notes and printed accounts of these speeches to prepare for their publication. French Lawrence, Burke's literary executor, did not comply with Burke's request that the Indian speeches be published first; in fact, they were the last set of speeches to be published, almost thirty years after Burke's death. It is easy to understand why Burke's executors were so tardy in publishing these speeches, because in Burke's own lifetime and even to the present day, his Indian speeches are regarded as too violent, too vitriolic, too emotional, too

personal. The speeches are a strange phenomenon in the landscape of eighteenth-century British oratory, but they can be shown to bear a strong relationship to the grief-stricken beauty of the laments for the fallen nobility, *Marbhna na daoine uaisle*, made so popular in Burke's youth by the verse of Munster's premier poet, Aodhagán Ó Rathaille. The *Marbhna*, like Burke's speeches on India, are a scorching mixture of political lament and recrimination.

These Munster laments went hand in hand with a series of vituperative satires on 'the upstart gentry', the *Clan Thomas*, and these satires provide a useful context for discussing Burke's A Letter to a Noble Lord, which has puzzled critics who wonder how a man who is famous for his defence of inherited nobility can have launched such a scathing attack on the Duke of Bedford. The *Clan Thomas* satires provide a ready arsenal for the deconstruction of pretended nobility and a comparison between A Letter to a Noble Lord and the *Clan Thomas* satires supports L. M. Cullen's statement that the proof of the Gaelic influence on Burke is most clearly to be seen in this letter.[12]

The final chapter follows the lead that Declan Kiberd provides in his remark that Burke's conjuring of Marie Antoinette in his Reflections is in fact an *Aisling*.[13] The political vision-allegories of Munster, *Aislingí na Mumhan*, were to prove the most potent of all eighteenth century Irish writing, haunting Irish literature and politics well into the twentieth century. The *Aisling* form still inspires and shadows Irish poetry, (particularly in the English language), in Ireland today. The final chapter uses Burke's *Aisling* of Marie Antoinette and his letters on Irish affairs in the 1790s to offer an interpretation of Burke's sense of politics and history which revises the limited view of Burke as a strange character of Enlightenment England and concludes the argument that it is in hearing Burke's

voice through the body of Gaelic culture that our understanding of Burke's position in the wider world of the eighteenth century is profoundly affected.

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[1] January 19 1786 to Mary Palmer, niece and favourite of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Thomas W. Copeland, et al., eds. The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78) 252.

[2] Burke was the sixth most caricatured person in the Hanoverian era. Nicholas Robinson, Burke: a Life in Caricature (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996).

[3] P. J. Stanlis, ed. The Relevance of Edmund Burke (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1964).

[4] Arthur Baumann, Burke the Founder of Conservatism (London: 1929); Francis Canavan, The Political Economy of Edmund Burke: The Role of Property In His Thought (New York: Fordham UP, 1995); Gerald W. Chapman, Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1969); P. J. Stanlis, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law (Ann Arbour, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1965). See also the following bibliographies for a comprehensive overview of the many studies of Burke: Clara I. Gandy and P.J. Stanlis, Edmund Burke: A Bibliography of Secondary Sources to 1982 (New York: Gale, 1983) and Leonard W. Cowie, Edmund Burke, 1729-1797: A Bibliography (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994).

[5] Alfred Cobban, Edmund Burke and the Revolt Against the Eighteenth-Century (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980), Isaac Kramnick, The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative (New York: Basic Books, 1977) and Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, The Problem of Burke's Political Philosophy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). C.B. Macpherson refers to "the seeming incoherence between Burke the traditionalist and Burke the bourgeois liberal" see Burke (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) 4.

[6] Sir Philip Magnus, Edmund Burke: A Prophet of the Eighteenth Century (London: John Murray, 1939) 77.

[7] Quoted by Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Great Melody (London: Minerva, 1993) xlix.

[8] Seamus Deane, Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 1.

[9] Deane describes this speech of Burke's as "the last brilliant flare of the Irish Jacobite dream", "Edmund Burke," Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing vol. 1 (Derry: Field Day, 1991) 808. See also J.G.A. Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution - A Problem in the History of Ideas," Historical Journal 3. 2 (1960).

[10] Breandán Ó Buachalla, Aisling Gheár: Na Stíobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn 1603-1788 (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar,1996).

[11] The Scriblerus Club of Swift, Pope, Gay and others, met for a few months in 1714 ' to ridicule all the false tastes in learning' and the Dilettanti Society was a gathering of gentlemen who had travelled in Italy and Asia Minor and were keen to promote the study of the region by British artists and antiquarians, but neither group bears much affinity with the Literary Club.

[12] L.M. Cullen, "Review of Conor Cruise O'Brien's *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*," Eighteenth Century Ireland 8 (1993): 154.

[13] Declan Kiberd, Inventing Ireland (London: Cape, 1995).

Burke in Nagle Country

One of the very best men, I believe, that ever lived,
of the clearest integrity,
the most genuine principles of religion and virtue,
the most cordial good-nature and benevolence
that I ever knew or, I think, ever shall know.
....for all the men I have seen in any situation
I really think he is the person I should wish myself,
or anyone I dearly loved, the most to resemble.[1]
Edmund Burke's description of his uncle, Patrick Nagle

Her cause [Ireland] was nearest to his heart,
and nothing gave him so much satisfaction
when he was first honoured with a seat in that house,
as it might be in his power to be of service
to the country that gave him birth.
Burke, reported in Parliamentary History[2]

Now as a law directed against the mass of the nation
has not the nature of a reasonable institution,
so neither has it the authority:
for in all forms of government
the people is the true legislator;
and whether the immediate and instrumental cause of the law
be a single person or many,
the remote and efficient cause is the consent of the people,
either actual or implied;
and such consent is absolutely essential to its validity.
Burke, Tract Relative to the Popery Laws in Ireland.

Irish historians have recently placed Burke firmly in the milieu of eighteenth-century Ireland's Gaelic Catholic gentry.[3] Conor Cruise O'Brien argues that Burke's life and work, his 'Great Melody', was decisively formed through his experience as a victim of the oppression engendered by the ruling Protestant elite in the broken Treaty of Limerick and the Penal Laws.[4] L.M. Cullen details Burke's crucial work on behalf of his relatives and other Munster Gaelic Catholics who were being prosecuted as Whiteboys in the 1760s.[5] Burke's political manoeuvring and legal intervention was too late to save his distant relatives, Fr Nicholas Sheehy and Edmund Sheehy, from being hanged but he managed to save many other lives. Kevin Whelan says that Burke's "scathing critique of the Irish Protestant gentry" was inspired by this experience and that he "never lost his scalding sense of partisan indignation derived from his close encounter with 'red-hot' Munster Protestantism".[6]

Thomas Mahoney's Edmund Burke and Ireland recounts Burke's opposition to increasing the strength of the King's army in Ireland in 1767-8, his courageous defence of Irish trade, his passionate and politically suicidal denunciation of the Penal Laws in a speech to his constituents in Bristol in 1780 and his work in the foundation of the Catholic college at Maynooth. However, most of Burke's concerned interventions on behalf of Irish Catholics were not overtly public but were covert and conducted through private correspondence. Conor Cruise O' Brien describes Burke's public statements about Ireland as "few, guarded, cryptic, sometimes evasive"; Ireland in Burke's speeches is "a brooding presence, expressed in haunted silences and transferred passions."[7] Burke tended to work on Ireland's behalf through strategic surrogates such as Fitzwilliam, the short lived Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to whom he gave comprehensive advice on how to deal with the new 'Ascendancy' party. Burke's

beloved son, Richard, followed his father's direction in working in Ireland on behalf of the Catholic Committee; Arthur Young's influential comments on the Penal Laws in his Tour of Ireland were (in)formed by Burke's manuscript "Tracts Against the Popery Laws".[8] In his private letters and in "Tracts Against the Popery Laws", which remained unpublished during his lifetime, we get the full flavour of Burke's feelings for that "Junto of Jobbers ....this new Idea of *Protestant* ascendancy".[9] Burke systematically destroyed much of this private and family correspondence. T.W. Copeland, the general editor of Burke's correspondence, describes him as being "almost morbidly sensitive" about his family affairs, but it is easy to understand Burke's sensitivity, considering his perilous personal and political position as a member of the Gaelic convert class in the virulently repressive regimes of eighteenth century Ireland and England.[10]

Reading Burke in the light of his Gaelic heritage is still a novel concept, many Irish people would be surprised to learn that the eighteenth-century orator and statesman, Edmund Burke, spent his early formative years in the Gaelic culture of North Cork's Catholic gentry. Burke is still best remembered in Ireland as a critic of the French Revolution and the statue of Burke outside Trinity College seems to epitomise the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Burke's statue is one of a pair. His partner on the green beside him is Oliver Goldsmith, that most English of Irish writers. Astride the plinth entitled 'BURKE', in front of Trinity College, is a larger-than-life-size bronze figure, standing haughtily with his arm on his hip, looking towards the neo-classical edifice that once housed the Protestant Irish Parliament which voted for the Act of Union with Britain. The statue of the Irish Parliamentary orator, Henry Grattan, stands outside the gates of Trinity facing 'BURKE'. Grattan's right arm is raised and we can imagine that his declaration of Irish Parliamentary independence of 1782 is directed at Burke: "Ireland is now a

nation! in that new character I hail her! and bowing to her august presence, I say *esto perpetua*! She is no longer a wretched colony." It is difficult to imagine that the model for the 'BURKE' statue grew up in Shanballyduff in the parish of Monanimy, near the village of Killavullen in the townland of Ballymacmoy, in the only region of Co. Cork in which a group of comfortable propertied Catholics survived in the eighteenth century.

Burke's maternal family, the Nagles, was one of the greatest surviving Catholic families in eighteenth-century Ireland, having managed to escape the confiscation of property after the fall of the Stuarts at the Battle of the Boyne. Four branches of Nagles were settled in the Blackwater Valley of North Cork, an area still known as 'Nagle Country', and the leadership of the region's Gaelic Catholic interest remained in their hands for the first half of the eighteenth century. The survival and prosperity of minor Catholic families in the area, such as the Hennessys, depended on the security of the Nagles who leased land to them on advantageous terms. Younger sons were provided with estates on low rents and continued to found collateral branches of the family. The security of this Catholic enclave was strengthened by marriages to the Tipperary Catholic gentry. There was no other region in Munster or Leinster that had a comparable network of Catholic and nominally apostate, crypto-Catholic landowners. The affluent Catholic landowners of Galway are the only other group who succeeded in protecting the old Gaelic Catholic landed class under the restrictions of the Penal Laws and the encroachment of the increasingly thriving middle class interests. In the1750s the Nagles married into this affluent Galway society and into the Catholic gentry of the Pale, achieving a position of influence and connection unequalled by any other Catholic family in Ireland.[11]

Ironically, the Nagles were surrounded by the largest Protestant gentry presence in the country. Breandán Ó Buachalla describes the extended Nagle stronghold in the Blackwater as "an island of Catholic hegemony in a sea of Protestant ascendancy."[12] The heart of the Blackwater Valley is about six miles from Mallow which was a large centre of English settlement in the eighteenth century and with sporting attractions and spa waters which drew many more to visit the area. Within five miles of Mallow there were not less than fifty seats, many small but a few great, such as the Brodericks and the Kings. Perhaps inevitably, the Nagles attracted the wrath of the politicised Protestants of the area and the bitter sectarian politics of Cork which flared in the 1730s, 1750s and 1760s were focused on the Nagles and their dependants. Joseph Nagle, who had been a lawyer before the 1704 proscription on Catholics entering the profession, was most astute in defending and maintaining both the local hegemony of the Nagle family and even in making interventions on behalf of the landed Catholic interest on a national scale. Burke's cousin, Nano Nagle, founder of the teaching order of Presentation Nuns, (in flagrant disregard of the Penal Laws), wrote that her uncle Joseph was: "the most disliked by the Protestants of any Catholic in the kingdom."[13]

Conversion to the Protestant religion and subsequent 'discoveries' by these converts of land illegally held by Catholics, became a routine part of conveyancing in eighteenth-century Ireland. It was in this context that Burke's father conformed to the state church in 1722, when he was named executor to the estates of two uncles, and because Burke's father had converted before his sons were born, the young Burkes were considered Protestant. Burke's mother remained a Catholic and as was the custom at the time, his sister, Juliana, followed her mother's religion.[14] These 'conversions' strengthened rather than

weakened the Catholic position: prominent converts such as Anthony Malone, Lucius O'Brien and John Hely-Hutchinson could express their sympathy for Catholics in Parliament and Edmund Burke must be understood in this tradition.[15]

Burke's association with Catholic Ireland went deeper than most of his fellow converts. It seems likely that he was born in his uncle James' house in Shanballymore, in the townland of Ballywalter in the Nagle country. James Nagle was married to a Burke who was a cousin of Burke's father.[16] The young Edmund may have been put to nurse in North Cork and when he was six he went to live with the family of his uncle Patrick Nagle in the house in Shanballyduff where his mother grew up. Burke lived with his uncle until he was eleven, and, in one of those rare personal letters that have survived, remembered him with affection and respect:

> One of the very best men, I believe, that ever lived, of the clearest integrity, the most genuine principles of religion and virtue, the most cordial good-nature and benevolence that I ever knew or, I think, ever shall know.....for all the men I have seen in any situation I really think he is the person I should wish myself, or anyone I dearly loved, the most to resemble.[17]

Burke attended a hedge-school (an unlicensed academy that provided education for Gaelic Catholics in contravention of the Penal Laws) in Monanimy in the ruins of the great Nagle castle, where Edmund Spenser's son, Sylvanus, had married Eileen Nagle, one of the seven daughters of Burke's great-grandfather, David Nagle.[18] The hedge-school master was a Mr O'Halloran and Richard Hennessy, a year older than Burke and later to establish the renowned Cognac house, was a classmate. Further instruction seems to have been supplied by the Jacobite

poet Liam Inglis who was the hedge-school master at nearby Castletownroche and who later became an Augustinian friar.

The Nagle house at Ballyduff is still standing, situated high on a recessed slope of the Nagle Mountains. It is a typical seventeenth-century Gaelic style building: two storeys high, enclosing a cobbled courtyard, or Bawn, on three sides, with large buttresses and just a few narrow windows.[19] Burke, wrote to his uncle Patrick: "Our little boys are very well, but I should think them still better if they (or the one who is on his legs) were running about the Bawn at Ballyduff as his father used to do."[20] From the Bawn, Burke could view the Nagle Country with its ancient Seven Houses, a fertile valley, immortalised in Spenser's Faerie Queene. The woods and heather of the Nagle Mountains form the southern ring, the Ballyhoura Hills run from west to north, and the high Galtees fade into the Knockmealdowns on the east. In that same letter to his uncle Patrick, Burke wrote:

> I have been, I think it is now eleven years, from the county of Cork. Yet my remembrance of my friends there is as fresh as if I had left it yesterday. My gratitude for their favours and my love for their characters is rather heightened, as the oftener I think of them they must be, and I think of them very often. This I can say with great truth...There is nothing here [London] except what the papers contain that can interest you; but nothing can come from the Blackwater which does not interest me very greatly.

It is likely that Burke's own marriage came about through his association with the Blackwater Valley. Burke spent his early twenties based in England. He did not complete his studies at the Middle Temple but spent about five years leading a dissolute life in the disreputable company of William Burke. William Burke was

no blood relation of Edmund's, though they both claimed they were kinsmen and they shared a common purse and home all their lives. Following a severe physical and psychological breakdown, Burke recovered at the home of Dr Nugent, an Irish Catholic physician, and subsequently married his daughter, Jane, in 1757. A few years later, Dr Nugent's son, John, married cousin Garret's daughter, Lucinda. The Nagles and Nugents had been connected through marriage at least since the seventeenth century, when James Nagle of Annakissy married Honora Nugent of Aghanagh.[21]

The Nagles and Burkes had been at the centre of national political movements for generations before Burke was born. Both Burke's maternal and paternal forbears were supporters of the Stuarts. Burke's paternal great-grandfather, John Burke, was Mayor of Limerick in 1646. John Burke tried to garner support for Ormonde's attempt to make an alliance between the Gaelic forces inspired by Owen Roe O'Neill and the Old-English Royalists who supported the Stuarts. He followed Ormonde in believing that such an alliance was the only combination capable of overthrowing Cromwell and his Parliamentary Army. Mayor Burke read a proclamation from the Lord Lieutenant announcing friendship and toleration for Irish Catholics in the hope of rallying them to support King James. The Limerick citizens supported O'Neill and rose in fury at the suggestion an alliance; they tore up the cobble stones and flung them at the city magistrates; the ensuing riot is still remembered in Limerick as 'Stony Thursday'.[22]

The Nagles' Jacobite credentials were equally impeccable, Richard Nagle, head of the family in the 1680s, was advisor to King James in the War of the Two Kings; James had stayed at the Nagle castle while on his way to Dublin. (Burke could see the tops of the towers of this great Nagle house from the hedge-school

at Monanimy.) Richard Nagle became the attorney general for the Jacobite government in Ireland, Speaker of the House in the Jacobite Parliament, and reputed author in 1689 of the famous act which sought to return to the original owners the lands confiscated and settled in the seventeenth century plantations. He followed James to France where he was Chief Secretary for Ireland at the court in St. Germain.[23]

Burke's own father, Richard Burke, lived just over the county line in Bruff, Co. Limerick. He represented James Cotter, the son of the Jacobite commander, Sir James Cotter, at his ill-fated trial.[24] L.M. Cullen describes Cotter's trial and subsequent hanging in 1720 as "easily the most traumatic political event of the first half of the century in Ireland, having no parallel in the rest of Ireland and providing in recollection on both sides the spark which set alight the sectarian tensions in Munster in the early 1760s."[25] It is likely that Richard Burke got the task of providing counsel to Cotter through the connection of his wife's family to Cotter. Besides being a neighbour of the Nagles in the Blackwater Valley, Cotter was married to a sister of Garrett Nagle's wife. Kevin Whelan finds it remarkable that political involvement of the old Gaelic and Anglo-Norman families such as the Nagles and Burkes can be traced, almost as an inheritance, through so many movements: from Jacobite to Catholic Committee to the United Irishmen, to the O'Connell and the Tithe agitations and on to the Young Irelanders.[26] In the words of Roy Foster: "Family alliances from the early eighteenth century often provide the subtext to political associations in later generations."[27] It is not difficult to see Edmund and his own son Richard continuing this family tradition of political involvement. The literary compositions centred around this Gaelic Munster gentry will provide us with a context for discussing Burke's life and work that makes him appear much less anomalous and strange, and enable us to see

him as operating from a rich tradition of verbal performance and political intervention.

Whelan describes how the old Catholic gentry families such as the Nagles "enjoyed immense social prestige, especially in areas distant from Dublin, where the tendency persisted to regard personal and territorial claims as more legitimate than impersonal state ones."[28] In the words of Roy Foster, "deference was as influential as dependence," and "geography, tradition, kinship, gratitude" were instrumental in establishing and maintaining gentry status and power in eighteenth-century Ireland.[29] Burke's own correspondence reveals his deferential attitude to the Catholic nobleman, Lord Kenmare, owner of a vast estate in Kerry, in his efforts to secure the social and political position of the Nagles. Burke is constantly recommending his Nagle cousins to the protection of Lord Kenmare and thanking him for favours shown to the Nagles. The great Gaelic poet, Aodhagán Ó Rathaille had also looked to the Kenmares for patronage and it is remarkable that both he and Burke reject the Lord Kenmares as models and patrons towards the end of their lives.

While Burke lived in North Cork the Nagles performed their role as Gaelic gentry, sponsoring music and poetry, dispensing profuse hospitality, and patronising popular sports such as hunting, horse-racing, hurling and cock-fighting. In the 1760s the last great Gaelic poet of eighteenth century Ireland, Eoghan Rua Ó Suilleabháin, was tutor to the Annakissy Nagles. When Charles Fox visited Burke's cousin Garret at his lodge in Killarney in 1777, Burke teased Garret: "You are now become a man of the Lough; and must be admitted to be the true *Garroit Iarla*, who is come at last." The reference is to Garrett Fitzgerald, 3rd Earl of Desmond who according to legend was sleeping beneath Lough Gur and would

one day rise. Burke was delighted when Fox reported that "the old spirit and character of the country is fully kept up which rejoices me beyond measure."[30] Burke was eager to assure Garret that Fox was one of the first men in England and even if he did not think much of Fox on first meeting him, he was sure he would like him very much on further acquaintance. Burke's assurances to this member of the obscure Gaelic Munster Catholic gentry might appear remarkable but it must be remembered that the Nagles were very conscious of their own aristocratic heritage and were also more used to looking towards France rather than England.

A month previously, in another letter to Garret which had been concerned mainly with farming matters, Burke expressed his grief "that the old stock [of the Gaelic gentry] is wearing out. God send that their successors may be better." He assures Garret "that nothing can do you all so much good, as keeping up your old union and intercourse, and considering yourselves as one family. This is the old burthen of my song. It will answer infallibly, at one time, or in one way or other."[31] As the eighteenth century progressed, the status of the Gaelic gentry was increasingly undermined by middlemen and mercantile interests and they slowly withdrew from their role as patrons of Gaelic culture. Burke was acutely aware of this phenomenon, and in a letter to his son Richard in 1792, he warns him that the Blackwater Nagles who are still alive "and not quite ruined there," must not "show [him] any honours, in the way, which in old times was not unusual with them, but which since are passed away."[32] Burke is fearful that the "mischievous" newspapers would pick up on the traditional Gaelic celebrations which might be occasioned by Richard's visit to the area. Being so clearly associated with such old-style neo-Jacobite Catholics could upset the young man's position as secretary for the Catholic Committee in delicate negotiations

on repeal of the Penal Laws. This letter to Richard is full of Burke's memories of past oppression and Protestant conspiracies. He urges Richard to collect more evidence for discrediting the Protestant version of that "pretended Massacre in 1641" and to inquire (discreetly, of course) into the "shameful rage in Munster" in the 1760s. He asks Richard to give money to two daughters of his beloved uncle, Patrick Nagle, "without any other reference to me, than that you know how much I loved them." Burke tells Richard that:

> I have long been uneasy in my Mind when I consider the early obligations, strong as debts, and stronger than some Debts, to some of my own family - now advanced in Life, and fallen, I believe, into Great Penury. Mrs. Crotty is daughter of Patrick Nagle, to whom (the father) I cannot now tell you all I owe; she has had me a child in her arms.

The cryptic phrase "I cannot now tell you all I owe", points to Burke's secret debt to the once vibrant culture of the Catholic gentry.

The old-style Catholic gentry class was gradually submerged during the long eighteenth century by the interests of middlemen farmers and the developing mercantile sector. In tandem with the demise of this class, Gaelic also declined as the language spoken by the vast majority in Ireland and Scotland. However, in 1726, just three years before Burke was born, we know that there were at least twenty-six Gaelic scholars and composers working in Dublin, the most Anglicised part of Ireland.[33] In the Munster province of Burke's boyhood and the western province of Connaught where his sister settled, Gaelic remained the dominant language throughout the eighteenth century. In 1731 two-thirds of the entire population used Gaelic as their first language and two years after Burke died, in 1799, about half spoke Gaelic for everyday use and conversation.[34] It seems improbable that Burke did not speak Gaelic; he may not have often spoken Irish

in Dublin but it is most likely that he spoke it in North Cork. Over ninety percent of the population still spoke Gaelic in North Cork as late as 1781.[35] Even by the end of the century, Gaelic was still the predominant language in that region; the North Cork militia, instrumental in defeating the United Irish rising in Wexford, were Gaelic speakers. In his book, Travels in Ireland, Edward Wakefield says that in 1812 "The Irish was so much spoken by the common people of Cork city and its neighbourhood, that an Englishman was apt to forget where he was; and to consider himself in a foreign city." In his memoir, Mo Scéal Féin, Fr O'Leary says that when he was curate in Bweeng, in the Ballyhouras, in 1868, Gaelic was still the spoken language of most of his parishioners and of the majority of the people in the townlands along the Blackwater. Even as late as 1906, when Ó Hannracháin, a Gaelic League organiser, visited the Mallow area, he found that Irish had lingered on with a few of the older generation in remote places.[36]

According to Burke's first biographer, Dr Bisset, Burke was still fluent in Gaelic after many years of living in England. He describes Burke's visit to the Scottish Highlands in 1785 and says that near Inverary Burke and his companion, William Windham, met with a local celebrity, Dr McIntyre: "Burke who understood the Gaelic, spoke to Dr McIntyre in that tongue. He was answered in Erse; and they understood each other in many instances, from the similarity of these two dialects of the ancient Celtic."[37] Burke's library provides us with the most direct evidence of his preoccupation with Gaelic: he had a copy of The Catechism in Irish and English published in Paris in1742, Tracts relative to the Celtic Language by Cleland, and the Irish-English, English-Irish Dictionary published in Paris in1768 (which was the work of Conor Begley and Hugh Mac Curtin). This dictionary is one of the very few books in which Burke made annotations. Burke collected Gaelic manuscripts and did much to encourage the use of Gaelic sources in the

writing of Irish history. He arranged that Charles O'Conor of Belangare (the model for Lady Morgan's 'Prince of Coolavin' in The Wild Irish Girl) was granted access to Trinity College's library, he encouraged Vallency to publish Gaelic annals in the original and with translations, and he persuaded Sebright to donate the Gaelic manuscripts which he had bought from Lhuyd to the library at Trinity College. These invaluable texts became the basis of Trinity College's Gaelic manuscript collection.[38]

While at Trinity, Burke admitted to Dick Shackleton that he was gripped by a "*furor historicus*" and for the rest of his life he maintained a keen interest in Irish history and historiography. His library contained all the Irish histories written by those who supported the Gaelic cause, including O'Halloran, Vallency, Curry, and O'Flaherty. He had Campbell's Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland, a copy of Lhuyd's Archaelogia Britannica, and Histoire Monastigue d'Irelande published in Paris in 1690, as well as many other publications and manuscripts which were of direct Irish historical and topographical interest, including Beaufort's 1792 Memoir of a Map of Ireland with handwritten annotatations by Burke, an unusual practice for him.[39] The rebellion of the Irish Jacobites in 1641 was the prime focus of Burke's historical interest. Burke was adamant that the insurrection of 1641 was not a rebellion against government but was a display of loyalty to the Royal House of Stuart who were the rightful Kings of England but who had been temporarily deposed by the disloyal Puritans. Bisset gives a long and entertaining account of Burke's quarrel with Hume on this matter. Bisset is unsympathetic to Burke's position: "The genius, wisdom and learning of Burke did not prevent him from entertaining some opinions totally unfounded...He most strenuously denied the Irish massacre." In arguing with Hume, Burke affirmed that on the banks of the Shannon, thousands of Irish people had witnessed the

ghosts of numbers of Catholics who had been killed and thrown into the river. Bisset reports that Burke could not speak on "the Irish massacre" without being "transported into a rage." Bisset also reports that Burke never forgave Hume for making it known that it was to Burke that he was alluding in his History of England when he wrote about the "Irish Catholic, who denies the massacre in 1641." According to Hume, this Irish Catholic, was like the English Whig who believes in the Popish plot, and the Scots Jacobite who believes in the innocence of Queen Mary: they are all "party men" and should be considered as "men beyond the reach of argument, and must be left to their own prejudices."[40]

Many histories of eighteenth century Ireland, such as Froude and Lecky, start in the year 1641. According to those who drafted and enforced the Penal Laws, the Catholic 'massacre of Protestants' in 1641 was an example of the pernicious nature of Irish Catholics, a nature that must be curbed with the aid of repressive legal measures. Burke persuaded Leland, his former teacher and friend at Trinity, to write a history which would disprove this version. In a letter to William Markham, Burke writes: "I really thought our History of Ireland so terribly defective that I did, and with success, urge a very learned and Ingenious friend of yours and mine in the University of Dublin to undertake it." Burke declares "I dare say he will do it ably and faithfully," but his confidence in Leland is not unequivocal: "if he thinks that any thing unfavourable to his principles will be deduced, from telling the truth or cares for Vulgar Malignity on that occasion he is much more below the task than I can yet prevail on myself to think him."[41]

Leland wrote the first historical novel in English, Longsword, in 1762 but his history, perhaps inevitably, follows the colonial party line of Moryson, Ware, Cox, Harris and Carte. Norman Moore describes it as "a dry narrative, [which] exhibits

little knowledge of topography or of literature", and wryly suggests that Leland's best contribution to historiography in Ireland was his donation of Gaelic manuscripts to Trinity's library.[42] Burke, of course, was most disappointed with Leland's history; he had loaned four folio volumes of his own Gaelic manuscripts to Leland, and he wrote to his son Richard that he had discussed sources for the history with Leland: "We agreed about them; but when he began to write history he thought only of himself and his bookseller; - for his history was written at my earnest desire, but the mode of doing it varied from his first conceptions."[43]

The Catholic, Gaelic, Royalist gentry world of Burke's youth in North Cork was a vibrant culture of oral performance and scribal activity. Later chapters will examine this Gaelic cultural substratum to Burke's political positions and the style of his political interventions, and will show how some of his famous speeches share in the political assumptions and stylistic traditions of eighteenth-century Cork and Kerry Gaelic compositions. Burke's political career has been characterised as a long defence of traditional societies. He argued for conciliation with the Americans because Britain had broken the long established contract with the colonists. India, according to Burke, had a culture more ancient and venerable than anything in Britain and should be honoured as such, and he deplored the French revolutionists who were destroying their inheritance for the sake of ideals. In seeing Edmund Burke among the faded remnants of Catholic, Gaelic, Royalist gentry stock, we can understand how his entire political career was fuelled by a desire to protect the riches of traditional culture and societies from the arrogance of greed and from persecution based on a hatred fuelled by myths, savage caricatures and colonial stereotypes.

[1] Thomas W. Copeland, et al., eds. The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78) 346.

[2] T.C. Hansard, Parliamentary History vol. 13 (London: Longman, 1814) 33.

[3] Roy Foster being a notable exception. He writes in the tradition of J.C. Beckett in seeing Burke as "almost English or reformed by his stay in England." The comment is made by L.M. Cullen "Review of Conor Cruise O'Brien's *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*," Eighteenth Century Ireland 8 (1993): 152.

[4] Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Great Melody (London: Minerva, 1993) 13-14.

[5] L. M. Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics and County Cork Society and politics in the Eighteenth Century," Cork History and Society eds. Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1993) 535-583.

[6] Kevin Whelan, The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760-1830 (Cork: Cork UP in association with Field Day, 1996) 37.

[7] Cruise O'Brien xxvi.

[8] L.M. Cullen, "Burke, Ireland and Revolution," Eighteenth-Century Life 26. 1 (Feb. 1992) 35-6.

[9] Correspondence vol. 7, 290 -294.

[10] Correspondence vol. 2, vii-viii.

[11] Burke's sister Juliana (also Julia) married Pat French of Loughrea in 1766. L.M. Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics" 541.

[12] Breandán Ó Buachalla, "A Cork Jacobite," Cork History and Society 472.

[13] Quoted by L.M. Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics," 559.

[14] Basil O'Connell, Edmund Burke (1729-1797): A Basis for a Pedigree. reprinted from Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society 61 (1956): 72-73.

[15] Whelan 6.

[16] O'Connell 119.

[17] Correspondence vol. 1, 346. It is tempting to speculate that perhaps it was Patrick Nagle who inspired Burke's observation that: "The authority of a father..... hinders us from having that entire love for him that we have for our mothers, where the parental authority is almost melted down into the mother's fondness and indulgence. But we generally have a great love for our grandfathers, in whom this authority is removed a degree from us, and where the weakness of age mellows it into something of a feminine partiality." A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime And Beautiful III.x

[18] William O'Brien says he was better known as 'Sylvy', Edmund Burke as an Irishman (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1924) 17ff.

[19] Half of the house was still inhabited by a family named Barry until 1991. This information was provided by the farmer, Mrs. Barry, who lives in Ballyduff Lodge . Conversation, July 1997.

[20] Correspondence vol. 1, 136.

[21] Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics," 553 and Basil O'Connell, The Nagles of Annakissy Reprinted from The Irish Genealogist 2:11 1.

[22] O'Brien 3.

[23] O'Brien 20.

[24] W. Hogan and Seán Ó Buachalla, "James Cotter's Papers," Cork Historical and Archaeological Society Journal 68 (1963): 71 -95. Among James Cotter's Papers we have a letter from him to a Nugent cousin which might prove to be a further intriguing connection between Cotter and Burke if this Nugent should prove to be a forebear of Jane who married Burke. There are also a number of Nugents who were members of the Jacobite parliament: See J.G. Simms, The Jacobite parliament of 1689 Irish History Series, 6 (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1974).

[25] L.M. Cullen, Emergence of Modern Ireland 199-200 and also F.J. Froude, The English in Ireland (London: 1881) 432-3.

[26] Whelan 18.

[27] Roy Foster, Modern Ireland: 1600-1972 (London: Penguin, 1988) 232. See also Breandán Ó Buachalla "Irish Jacobite Poetry," The Irish Review 12, (Spring\Summer 1992) : 40-49 for a

discussion of how Gaelic Jacobite poetry employed the traditional literary mode of describing the king as spouse of Ireland to impart innovatory political messages.

[28] Whelan 15.

[29] Foster 236.

[30] Correspondence vol. 3, 391-392.

[31] Correspondence vol. 3, 371-2.

[32] Correspondence vol. 7, 102-106.

[33] Breandán Ó Buachalla, "Seacaibíteachas Thaidhg Uí Neachtain," Studia Hibernica 26 (1991-92).

[34] That is 1,340,808 Gaelic speakers in 1731 from a population of 2,011,219 and 2,400,000 speakers in 1799 from a population of 4.75 million. See Brian Ó Cuív, "Irish Language and Literature: 1691-1845," A New History of Ireland eds. T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, vol. 4, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 383 and Irish Dialects and Irish-Speaking Districts (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951) 19.

[35] Garret Fitzgerald, "The Decline of the Irish Language 1771-1871," Origins of Popular Literacy in Ireland eds. Daly and Dickson (Dublin: 1990) 70.

[36] Quoted by John J. Kavanagh, "Kilshannig - The Changing Times," Mallow Field Club Journal (1990) : 89-90.

[37] Robert Bisset, The Life of Edmund Burke. Comprehending an Impartial Account of his Literary and political Efforts and a Sketch of the Conduct and Character of his Associates, Coadjutors and Opponents (London: George Cawthorn, 1798) 447 -8.

[38] Todd, Bibliography of Burke 273 and William O'Sullivan, "The Irish Manuscripts in Case H in TCD," Celtica 11 (1976) 229-250.

[39] Burke also had a two volume manuscript entitled A List of Payments to be made for Civil Affairs, to begin from the first day of April, 1684 tracts in reply to the treasury Pamphlet on Irish Trade; a Letter from an Irishman on the proposed System of Commerce 2 vol. in 1, with a few (rare for Burke) MS corrections; Proceedings upon the Claims to the titles of Viscount Valentia bound in red morocco, Dublin, 1773; the Collection of Protests from 1737, which are protests by the Protestant interest in Ireland against various measures proposed by the English administration, including the Drapier's letters and an intriguingly titled Munsteri Cosmographia Universalis with woodcuts published in Basil in 1559. Burke was also well versed in the work of Keating, see Correspondence vol. 5, 208-209.

[40] Bisset 195-7.

[41] Correspondence vol. 2, 285.

[42] Entry on Thomas Leland, Dictionary of National Biography.

[43] Correspondence vol. 7, 147.

"The image of a relation in blood"
Párliament na mBan & Burke's Jacobite Politics

...an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers,
and to be transmitted by us to our posterity;
as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom ....ocked fast in a
sort of family settlement;
grasped as in a kind of mortmain 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.
Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France

*...it is Justice/*Ceart *that keeps people together*
and binds them peaceably in communion
and love with one another,
*Justice/*Ceart *is the peace of the Commonwealth,*
the defence of the country, the bond of society, the calm and stillness of the sea
and the fruitfulness of the ground.
*...Also the Kingdom that is governed with Justice/*Ceart
possesses every good both publick and private.
Fr Dónall Ó Colmáin, Párliament na mBan

Burke's description of the British constitution is often given as evidence of his great contribution to political science and it is one of the aspects of his thought that has attracted the most scholarly attention. His dramatic reading of the constitution is apparent as early as 1775 in his speech On Conciliation with America. The peroration of the Speech Opening the Impeachment of Hastings (1788), the conclusion of An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs (1791) and, most famously, passages from the Reflections on the Revolution in France, (1790) are also frequently quoted as the most stirring and perceptive accounts of the unwritten British constitution. J.G.A. Pocock argues that although Burke's description of the British constitution in his Reflections is brilliant, it cannot be described as unique. Burke's accomplishment is that he "achieved a genuine historical insight into the character of English political thinking", his vision of political society is a vibrant re-enactment of "the cult of the 'ancient constitution' ...one of the cardinal political ideas of Stuart England."[1] Seamus Deane also characterises Burke's Reflections as Jacobite: "It may be said that his defence of the old monarchical system in Europe was the last brilliant flare of the Irish Jacobite dream of a restored monarchy, in which catholic Ireland would play its full part and regain its lost privileges."[2]

Jacobitism, that is support for King James and the House of Stuart, remained a powerful cultural force in Ireland and Scotland throughout the eighteenth century, though the political cause of the Jacobites was dealt an effective death blow in the Battle of Culloden in 1745, during Burke's first year at university. Supporters of the Stuarts hoped that a restoration of the Stuart dynasty would bring a King who would be at least sympathetic towards Catholicism, and would certainly be supportive of Gaelic culture. It is difficult now to imagine a Britain that is not dominated by England, especially as the history of Britain has generally been

written from the perspective of the commercial south-east of England. British history is a tale of manifest destiny: differences and anomalies are neutralised in the discourse of assimilation to and legitimation of this Parliamentarian and commercial centre. In the eighteenth century Ireland's population was not far behind that of England, the population of the Scottish Highlands was five times greater than it is today, and the legacy of the Jacobites in Gaelophone and British culture was a force (and a threat) more potent than is generally realised now.[3] Jacobitism infused Gaelic poetry with memories of greatness and promise of restoration and renewal. Jacobitism also provided an alternative lexicon of political concepts and ideas of social order to the English parliament and commercial metropolis.

This alternative lexicon might be described as a 'genealogical politics.' Jacobite poetry and songs presented national, political matters in terms of the bonds of personal affiliation to family and locale, to the *tuath*, the "territorial and genealogical" Gaelic word that signifies both landscape and tribe.[4] Bishop Markham, godfather to young Richard Burke, became concerned about Burke's Jacobite sympathies while listening to him converse with his family. Markham was Irish and would have been sensitive to any evidence of a Jacobite taint. Burke dismissed the accusation of "so amazing, and *supernatural* a fidelity" to the lost political cause of King James but Burke's strong affinity with the political worldview of the Jacobites can be demonstrated by making a comparison between Burke's depiction of the British constitution in his Reflections and the deployment of key political concepts, such as *'Ceart'* and *'Maitheas Poiblí'* in Jacobite texts.[5] The use of these concepts in Párliament na mBan provides a gloss on the famous Burkean analysis of the Constitution and gives a clearer picture of the ramifications and implications of Burke's political performance.

The Párliament may very well have been one of the first Gaelic texts that Burke studied. It was composed in 1697 by Fr Dónall Ó Colmáin for the education of his pupil, the ill-fated Séamus Óg Mac Coitir/James Cotter. James Cotter, was the son of Sir James Cotter, commander of the Jacobite forces in Cork, well rewarded by Charles II for his part in the killing of the regicide John Lisle. Under the articles of the Treaty of Limerick, Sir James was allowed to remain in possession of his seat at Carrigtowhill, just outside Cork city, and the large Cotter holding in the Blackwater Valley. When he inherited his father's estates, the younger James Cotter continued his family legacy of support for the Stuart cause and was perceived to be a prominent leader of the Cork Jacobites. Besides being neighbours in the Blackwater Valley, the Cotters and the Nagles were connected through marriage and the Cotters and the Nagles, specifically attorney Joseph Nagle, shared a leadership role in terms of the Irish landed Catholic interest.[6]

It was most likely through this affinity with the Nagles that Edmund Burke's father, Richard, acquired the eminent position of defence attorney for Cotter in his dramatic trial. Cotter was ostensibly charged with the rape of a Quaker woman, Elizabeth Squibb, who seems to have been his mistress.[7] Scholars largely agree with the popular consensus at the time which regarded the trial and subsequent hanging of James Cotter as nothing short of political assassination of a prominent Gaelic Jacobite noble by the Protestant interest.[8] Widespread riots on a national scale followed the execution, countless poems were composed lamenting Cotter's death, and the bitter memory of Cotter's hanging seeped through successive generations.[9]

Perhaps it was because Cotter's hanging was such an important event that the text Párliament na mBan, composed for him by Fr Dónall Ó Colmáin, was so widely available in Cork during during Burke's youth.[10] It was a common practice on the European continent and in Ireland to have the local priest act as tutor to the son of the local lord and it was in this role as tutor that Ó Colmáin composed Párliament na mBan as a *speculum principis* , a guide for the young ruler, Séamus Óg Mac Coitir. Given the close connections between Cotter and the Nagles, and the particularly close link between Burke's father and the martyred James Cotter, Burke might well have been introduced to the text by his own clerical tutor. Considering the status of the Nagle family in which he was raised, it was quite probable that the young Burke received private instruction from a priest, in addition to his schooling by Master O'Halloran at the hedge-school in the ruins of Monanimy Castle. Local tradition maintains that Burke's clerical tutor was An tAthair Liam Inglis, Fr Liam English, an Augustinian who was based in Castletownroche. In a letter to his uncle, Patrick, Burke writes: "give Garret the enclosed memorandum,...we are much obliged to him for the Letters he has written us, and to our friend English - assure him that when we have any good news, he will be the first to hear it."[11] No letters survive either to or from this English; presumably they were part of the family correspondence that was destroyed by Burke at his son's death. Fr Liam was well informed on European politics. As was usual with eighteenth century Gaelic poets, his poetry was largely political in content. He wrote Jacobite poems in which he commented on various European political affairs of which he would have been aware through newspapers, through letters from clerics and Irish exiles living on the continent, and also possibly through correspondence with Burke.[12]

According to Breandán Ó Buachalla: "The self-assurance of that Catholic gentry is well reflected in Párliament na mBan as are its rich polyglot culture and its cultivated life-style, albeit one being lived out in the shadow and fear of persecution and dispossession."[13] The Párliament is largely an adaptation from Latin sources such as sermons, common-place books and manuals; the first two sections are a translation of Erasmus' Colloquia Familiaria which he wrote as a textbook for sons of the wealthy whom he was tutoring. However, the Jacobite politics of the Párliament are clearly signalled from the introduction where Ó Colmáin makes a direct address to "the noble youth, my loving pupil, Séamus Óg Mac Coitir" and recounts in detail his father's glorious service to the Stuarts and the rewards accrued by Sir James. Ó Colmáin presents Sir James as an exemplum for Séamus Óg not only in terms of his loyalty to the Stuarts but also for his successful resistance to King William and his followers, for his conspicuous services to the Catholic faith in the face of severe persecution and for the "great service he did to the Gaelic in bestowing gold and silver to the learned, to performers on stringed and other musical instruments and to eminent poets." Ó Colmáin says that Sir James "was inclined to hand down to posterity the manners and customs of the truly hospitable Irish gentry."[14] Ó Colmáin reminds his pupil that the example of his father "is for you, son of my heart, a pattern and sample, by which you may draw the lines of your conduct."

The Párliament proper opens with a gathering of thirty-two women of Ireland, thirty-two being the number of counties in Ireland. These women congregate whenever they have something to discuss, especially on matters of national significance, "appertaining to religion, conscience or anything which would promote the common good;" '*Maitheas poiblí*'. Having met in Cork, they decide to call a Parliament and on June 10, 1697, five hundred women from all over

Ireland, gather in Glanmire. Glanmire is where the Cotters have their seat and the auspicious date is James III's birthday. The thirty-three sermons which comprise the main body of the text are moralistic sermons, castigating sensual lusts and avarice of all kinds and promoting piety and religious virtues. However the twenty-ninth address, which is given by Monica Chórach (Monica the Just) on the topic of *Ceart*, is of particular interest in its display of the manifold implications of the Gaelic word *Ceart* which is invariably translated into English as 'Justice'. Monica (or Maria in some manuscripts) describes *Ceart* as the second cardinal virtue after wisdom. *Ceart* is, as it were, the Gaelic expression of 'the Spirit of the Laws': it "keeps people together and binds them peaceably in communion and love with one another". In a lyrical passage she describes *Ceart* as all that is good in a society, it is the "peace of the Commonwealth, the defence of the country, the bond of society, the calm and stillness of the sea and the fruitfulness of the ground." *Ceart* is an eternal, essential force of nature, "it can be compared to the river Euphrates because this river when it overflows its banks, it fertilises the country round and causes a plentiful harvest."[15]

The twenty-ninth sermon of the Párliament ends with a quatrain, in *Amhrán* (song) metre, used throughout the text by Ó Colmáin to sum up the moral of the preceding tale:

> Congaibh an ceartus[16] 'na sheasamh a nághail go brách
> Coimirc na haitheannta theagaisgid cliar is fáidh,
> Cuin'g a mheabhuir ghloin eagla Dia's a ghrádh,
> 'S ní thuit(f)ir a bpeaca na ccleag, a chriadhchurpáin.[17]
>
> Let justice be thy chief and constant care

Nor ever think against it to declare
But in your hearts let godly fear abide
And you'll not sin, while you on earth reside.[18]

Ceart is akin to the English word Right not only in its meaning but in the way that it functions as both a noun and an adjective. One of the more intriguing uses of *Ceart* in the Párliament occurs when it is combined with *'cleacht'* which is the Gaelic intransitive and transitive verb for 'perform habitually', to give 'right-habits' or 'customs'.[19] This combination is found in line 136 when Ó Colmáin is describing Sir James' wish to preserve as much as possible of the noble customs of the Irish until God's help should overtake them': "cheirtchleachta gnáthuasal na nÉirionnach bhfírfhial do congmháil ar cuimhne go mbeireadh fortacht Dé ortha."[20] This sense of 'right-habits' or customs being under the protective ordinances of the chieftains, who are acting under the imprimatur of God in Heaven, is a distinctive characteristic of '*Ceart*' as it was used by the Gaelic Jacobites. They used '*Ceart*' to signify the Stuart concept of the Divine Right of Kings, the belief that the hereditary succession of Stuart Kings was ordained by the authority of God. One of the most succinct treatments of '*Ceart*' can be found in a poem contemporary with Ó Colmáin's, by fellow Corkman, Donnchadh Caoch Ó Mathúna, in praise of the Earl of Mar when the Pretender came to Scotland in 1715:

An Tán Tháinig an Prionnsa Séarlus Stíobhart go h-Albain
(When Prince Charles Stuart Came to Scotland)

Ós ceart a cheart 'na cheart go d-tagaidh go luath.

(Since his right (claim) is right (lawful), to his right (entitlement, patrimony) may he come soon.)[21]

This one line demonstrates how *Ceart* contains within its one syllable, the concept that the appeal (claim) for (lawful) justice is enshrined as a hereditary principle (entitlement, patrimony). Ó Buachalla says that *Ceart* was " a pivotal lexical item and concept in Irish Jacobite rhetoric and was invoked constantly by the literati." While *Ceart* is generally translated into English as "Justice" or "Correctness" it "had a much wider semantic range" as it also signified "'rightful (rule)', 'righteous (kingship)' and had numerous connotations of 'legal title', 'just claim'."[22]

The concept of hereditary kingship was first adopted by the Gaelic elite as an expression of their support for James I at the beginning of the seventeenth century. James had inherited the throne from his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, and they assumed he would be understanding towards their shared Gaelic and Catholic heritage. Genealogy had always been an important component in Gaelic culture in making a claim for kingship and in the conferring of 'rightful' royalty. The recitation of genealogy was presented as the fulfilment of destiny; the more illustrious the genealogy the more fitting the king. So genealogy functioned as a prophetic legitimation not only of the present but of the multiple events and personages of the past while ensuring the promise of a prosperous future. Anthropologists who study 'oral societies' give many examples of how the recitation of genealogies is used in oral cultures to ratify existing and current political situations. An expression of the support that the Gaelic elite gave to James can be seen in the impeccable genealogy which showed that he was descended from Kings of each of the four provinces of Ireland.[23] The person of

the king, constituted under this order of *Ceart* and confirmed by such use of prophecy and genealogy, is a fusion, not just of one time period but of all times; he is not just one individual body but the embodiment of all regal bodies, the population and the very landscape itself.[24] This King becomes (in both senses of that word) Nature. Hence the paradoxical metonym on the death of a British monarch: "The King/Queen is dead, long live the King/Queen."

According to Monica Chórach, "the Kingdom that is governed with Ceart possesses every good kind of common good." This last line in the Gaelic text reads "*Sealbhann sí gach aontsórd maithios puiblíghe.*"[25] It was to discuss this '*Maitheas poiblí*' (often translated as the commonweal) that the thirty-two women had congregated in Cork. The Gaelic-English dictionary which Burke used provides evidence of the remarkable potency of this term: '*Maith*' not only signifies 'good' but it also means 'the chieftain'. '*Maithe*' are the chieftains: '*Do Maithibh Múmhaín*' means both to/for the chieftains of Munster and to/for the good(ness) of Munster. Thus the chieftains are synonymous with 'the good' of the region. In Tadhg Ó Neachtain's manuscript dictionary, dated 1736, '*Maith*' is also glossed as a *file* or poet, which displays the self-perception of the eighteenth-century Gaelic poets and scribes as being the effective leaders and conscience of the Gaels.[26] One of the cruces of the traditional Gaelic order is the dependency of the king on the poet's praise and approval. If anything, this dependency of the nobility on the inheritors of the Bardic role, the literary intelligentsia, increased in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Certified genealogies were requisite for the thousands of young Gaelic Catholic noblemen who left Penal Law-Ireland for Austria, France and Spain where the royal courts, on perusing their genealogies, recognised their noble pedigrees and

granted them positions which were appropriate to their birth, generally as officers in their standing armies.[27]

'*Maitheas poiblí* becomes an even richer and more complex slogan in examining the word '*Pobal*' or '*Pobul*' which means a people, a tribe, a congregation; when it is prefixed to the names of particular territories, it means not only the land but the people that inhabit that territory. The good of the public; (in the dual sense of a space and a people) is intimately associated with the governance of the public. Understanding place, people, prosperity, and prince as an interdependent relationship, an organic communion, was not particular to Ireland but was a European phenomenon. The history plays of Shakespeare provide many rich meditations on this union. The character of King Lear, much quoted by Burke during his speech attacking Fox's panegyric on the French revolution, provides an archetype of the argument that the rightful king is a necessary function in the maintenance of 'natural order'.[28] According to Ó Buachalla: "'*Maitheas poiblí*' was one of the new politico-religious concepts introduced into Irish discourse in the seventeenth century by the agents of the counter-Reformation", but, like the most potent of ideologies, it was grafted onto a more ancient model.[29]

As the rightful king brings peace and prosperity, the converse must also be true: rule by a 'Pretender' brings civil unrest and impoverishment to the land and people. The 'Pretender' was what the Hanoverian regime dubbed the Stuart James III who laid claim to British crown. Obviously Jacobite sympathisers had other ideas on the identity of the 'Pretender'. The Jacobite poet Richard Savage wrote:

> Two kings we have, the one is true
> The other a pretender;

To him, so called, is that name due
or him we call defender?....

No longer let us then mistake
The king for a pretender,
Nor the pretender a king make
But right to right surrender.[30]

Ó Buachalla pays particular attention to this distinctive element of the Gaelic concern with the 'Pretender' in Párliament na mBan. The closing line of Ó Colmáin's introduction describes Sir James Cotter with the words:"*dá rígh nár chlaon*" which may be translated both as 'he who was never disloyal to his king' and 'he who never yielded to his king.'[31]

Jacobitism's obsession with the rightfulness of rulers had a double valence; kings might also be the personification of all that is rotten in the state. William's usurpation of the rightful King James was meditated in Gaelic Jacobite poetry through images of famine, decay and despoliation in Ireland.[32] Burke was most alive to the obverse implications of the concept of 'rightful rule.' His exploitation of the language of 'rightfulness' is seen to best effect in his speeches on the madness of King George III. The King's madness gave rise to a constitutional crisis where Pitt's Tory government asserted the principle of Parliamentary authority and the Whigs found themselves in the ironic position of upholding hereditary right in support of the Prince Regent from whom they expected to receive the control of government once he was instated as ruler. Burke seemed very comfortable with this argument and he rose to the occasion with fervent, impassioned speeches. Many times he was called out of order and he himself

began to be depicted as a madman by the caricaturists of the day.[33] When the House of Commons voted not to sit on January 30, he sarcastically reminded the government that it was the anniversary of the execution of the Stuart, Charles I and so it was "of all days the most fitting for taking that step which was to annihilate the constitution". It was his speech on February 5 which was to bring him the most trouble, invoking Milton's description of Lucifer being banished from Heaven in Paradise Lost, Burke described George III as having been "hurled by Providence from the throne."[34] When he was arguing in his Reflections that the British Constitution was the best governmental system that could be achieved in human terms, he had to work hard to distance himself from this description of George as the devil incarnate.

The idea of Justice as a sacred tradition, at once a principle of nature and a human virtue, implicated in personal inheritance and a claim to govern, is evident in those of Burke's speeches which reflect on the British Constitution. Also evident is the sense of *Tuath* and *Pobal*, whereby people are inextricably bound with land and the assumption encapsulated in *Maith* that the goodness of the land reflects the fitness of the ruler. Pocock remarks that in his description of the Constitution in the Reflections Burke made "a chain of association formed by the words 'entail', 'family settlement,' 'mortmain,' 'incorporation'".[35] The Reflections is a passionate argument against the establishment of Government "according to a *Theory*". In arguing against theory Burke presents the practices, the "stationary policy of the kingdom", the "spirit of our constitution" as being rooted in an ideology which is literally prescriptive, prior-to-writing. In Burke's argument the Magna Carta is not the first example of British law but it is "Our oldest reformation... nothing more than a re-affirmance of the still more antient standing law of the kingdom." Burke presents the Glorious Revolution of 1688, as another

'reformation': "The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as *an inheritance from our forefathers.*"

The practice of genealogical politics encapsulated in *Ceart* is echoed in Burke's description of the immemorial practice of claiming liberties. Burke claims that the British constitution which safeguards British liberty is "an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted by us to our posterity." The constitution which protects liberty is a common weal, "an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right." The British Constitution operates "in a sort of family settlement": its "maxims" are "grasped as in a kind of mortmain 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."

In his Reflections Burke mirrors the chronotope of the Gaelic *Ceart* and *Maitheas Poiblí* where time is not linear but is experienced as a 'natural' cycle of propagation, decay and regeneration, and meaning, authority and significance are established and validated by a process of inheritance. Burke describes the British constitution as "working after the pattern of nature" whereby 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." According to Burke, the British political system "is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world." The principles which govern the British body politic are evident in the constitution of the human race: "with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts", in the same manner

as "the great mysterious incorporation of the human race.....is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy", the British body politic "moves up through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression. In this choice of inheritance, we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood."

Eighteenth-century Gaelic dictionaries vividly demonstrate the Gaelic enactment of the "frame of polity [in] the image of a relation in blood". Kinship, genealogies, natural cycles of propagation, decay and regeneration, and the performance and transmission of laws and poetry are all semantically linked through the word '*craobh*'/branch. The dictionary that Burke used gives '*craobh coimhneadra ngéul*' as the Gaelic for pedigree, '*craobhaim*' is to sprout or shoot forth, but *craobh* is also associated with publishing and proclaiming. The Gaelic for the "ancient, occult manner of writing of the Irish Druids or Celts" is given as '*Ógham-chraobh*'[36] and '*craobh sgaoilim*' can mean: I disperse, I propagate, I delineate, I explain, I enlarge upon, I preach, I set down a genealogical table of lineal descent. This notion of *craobh* being linked with 'making public' can be most clearly seen in O'Neachtain's manuscript dictionary where '*craobhscoilim*' is described as 'I publish' and '*craobhsgaoileadh*' is a manifestation or proclamation, but is also defined as a breaking up of house and home, or a scattering abroad.[37]

While Burke follows the Jacobite material examples of *Maith*, *Tuath*, *Pobal*, and *Ceart*, in conceiving of the British body politic, he also fights a rearguard action in opposing the abstractions of 'Theory', particularly when applied as a programme for human relations and government. According to Burke, maxims are applicable only in so far as they emerge from a specific concrete argument. He declares in

his first published Parliamentary speech, On American Taxation: "I am not here going into the distinctions of rights, nor attempting to mark their boundaries. I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions; I hate the very sound of them." Referring to his second published speech, On Conciliation with the Colonies, Burke wrote to Charles O'Hara pointing out that it was never his custom to "ask what Government may do in *Theory* except *Theory* be the *object*; When one talks of *Practice* they must act according to circumstances.".[38] From the earliest phase of his political career Burke rejects "the cant of *Not men, but measures*....a sort of charm, by which many people get loose from every honourable engagement".[39] Burke explained that he delayed in prosecuting the East India Company as he had an "insuperable reluctance....to destroy any established system of government upon a theory."[40]

Burke's experience, education and training among the Gaelic gentry and even later at Trinity College emphasised oratory, the live performance of persuasive speech, as the bedrock of all political and literary practice.[41] As the concepts of *Maith*, *Tuath*, *Pobal*, and *Ceart*, were mediated and experienced through a dynamic oral culture, Burke's fundamental assumptions about the generation of truth and knowledge also come from his understanding of language as a spoken event. Burke was not only a consummate orator, but he is best understood as thinking like an oral performer rather than a literary practitioner. He did not write his speeches prior to their delivery but at times worked through many drafts of a particular image which generated the thrust of his argument and, as was usual in the eighteenth century, he did not read from these notes when delivering his speech.[42] Burke published just a small fraction of his speeches, preparing them for publication with the use of his own fragmentary drafts, his memory of the occasion, and the records kept by others, such as the shorthand notes by an MP

called Cavendish. Boswell describes "Cavendish taking down while Burke foamed like Niagara".[43] Christopher Reid compared Cavendish's notes with Burke's published speeches and concluded that the printed text was "a creative interpretation rather than a simple transcription of the performance it purported to record." However, Burke's revisions did not make his speeches more literary; they still were presented as an immediate Parliamentary performance: "the actual character of the performance was retained.. the [printed] speech is not now in some way more 'written' than 'spoken'.[44] After Burke's break with the Whigs, when his Parliamentary and oratorical role went into decline, it was the format of the printed letter that Burke used to make a distinctly personal, rhetorical, extra-Parliamentary address, rather than adopting the usual prose writer's conventions of presenting an impartial argument for a rational or sentimental reader. These literary compositions from the 1790s are among Burke's most famous texts but their style of passionate direct address owes more to the conventions of oratory rather than literary culture.

Sometime after he had composed his Reflections Burke wrote to Arthur Murphy, the translator of Tacitus, and complained of a new style which was becoming increasingly more evident. The tendency of this mode was the establishment of "two very different idioms", that is the introduction of "a marked distinction between the English that is written and the English that is spoken".[45] Burke's disquiet at the new "marked distinction" between English that is spoken and English that is written is indicative of his deepest ethical concerns. He displays a keen awareness of the changes that occur when political and social symbolic processes become more removed from personal interaction between people and the fluctuating dynamics of spoken language. When social and political significance and meaning is generated and mediated primarily through print, then

the foundations of such socio-political knowledge and truth is dependent on circumstances and contexts that do not necessarily relate to actual lives. What is represented becomes more inter-textual, abstract and metaphysical and relates more to the reflexive terms of printed language rather than speakers. Text is detached from the original situation which is described in its discourse and text is predisposed by its materiality to become an object for analysis, comparison, contrast, and reflection. But when people speak they have the opportunity to enact an affective identification with what they re-present and represent.[46] In speech, people's gesture, intonation, bodily stance and facial expression as well as their words, convey their experience. When people assert their personal feelings it is impossible to prove or disprove the quality of what they say they feel. While the activity of silent reading enables people to experience a sense of their own interior consciousness, communicating in signed or spoken language enables people to experience one another as conscious interior beings.

Burke's concern at the differences mediated through the 'two different idioms' can be clearly seen in one of his earliest commentaries on the French Revolution which he addresses in a letter to Adrien-Jean-François Duport. He confesses that he has "no great opinion of that sublime abstract, metaphysic reversionary, contingent humanity". According to Burke, this 'abstract' humanity can "in *cold blood*...subject the *present time*, and those whom we *daily see and converse with*, to *immediate* calamities in favour of the *future and uncertain* benefit of persons who *only exist in idea*." Burke declares that he "cannot think well of that speculative good which is to be produced by a great deal of practical evil." He allows that the Revolutionary ideals "which beggar the present generation for the sake of enriching the future may produce what they seek, but they may also fail, and the evil is certain." He says he will not applaud "those who are engaged at

such a table, where men so freely game away the substance and the blood of others. Our first trust is the happiness of our own time."[47]

When he came to compose the Reflections Burke's critique of this 'gaming' and 'speculation' underpins much of his argument. He is concerned with those who 'speculate' in the dual sense of dealing in theoretical imaginings and gambling with paper ownership, those, "most desperate adventurers in philosophy and finance". Burke conflates belief in the principles of the Revolution with confidence in the market of *assignats*, the French paper currency. He argues that they gave "some sort of credit to their paper [the *assignats*] by taking it themselves." In the speeches of the French Assembly "they made a sort of swaggering declaration... that there is no difference in value between metallic money and their *assignats* . This was a good, stout, proof article of faith, pronounced under an anathema, by the venerable fathers of this philosophic synod. *Credat* who will."

Burke, product of a Penal-era hedge-school, knows intimately that theory legislates a practice; that theory produces the activities over which it rules. He tries to reveal how the impetus of theory is not to describe or codify a practice; it is not empirical, although it may present itself as such; theory is a generative system which requires a practice, produced by the system in order to function. France cannot be described as being governed by *Ceart*, the principles of 'entailed inheritance', a polity whose image is one 'of a relation in blood': "the property of France does not govern it", and the republic of Paris will continue its despotism "by becoming the heart of a boundless paper circulation, to draw everything to itself". Burke invokes the real of the gold and silver standard as the absolute law in order to deconstruct the French *assignats* and reveal them as

merely symbolic. In England paper money is received by choice alone and "has had its origin in cash [gold, silver and copper] actually deposited." English paper currency "is of value in commerce, because in law it is of none. It is powerful on 'Change, because in Westminster Hall it is impotent".

Burke stresses that 'speculation', in terms of ideas and *assignats* , appeals more to the future than to the present; in underlining this aspect of 'speculation', he undermines the system as actual and highlights its provisional contingency. Burke pivots his speaking position so that the aspect, or internal temporal contour, of his Reflections is such that the "liberty" in France has yet to be achieved in the uncertain future and the liberty of England is an actively maintained, treasured, heritage.[48] In criticising the sermon to the Revolutionary Society by Dr Price, ("who seems to have speculated himself into no small degree of fervour upon this subject",) Burke focuses on Dr Price's declaration on "*..the favourableness of the present times to all exertions in the cause of liberty.*" Burke declares that he had been under the illusion that he lived in a free country "and it was an error [he] cherished, because it gave [him] a greater liking to the country [he] lived in." He says that he was "aware, that a jealous, ever-waking vigilance, to guard the treasure of our liberty" was the best wisdom and first duty. He had considered this much vaunted liberty of the free-born Briton to be a "treasure rather as a possession to be secured, than as a prize to be contended for". By situating English liberty as a heritage from the past, realisable now, and by conflating French revolutionary ideals with the unimaginable and terrible sublime of a mounting, excessive public debt, Burke is able to displace the Revolution from the realm of the present real into the incalculable future.

In Burke's Reflections English liberty is brilliantly conveyed as being the un-written given, always present to be re-affirmed. Burke places immense value on this quality of presentness/ presence in the performance of the spoken word. It is this quality of a 'present presence' in the performance of speech that is the hinge for Burke's articulation of ethics. For Burke, truth and meaning come continuously out of the spoken-present, real life situations. An English translation of '*maithios puiblíghe*' in line 2069 of the Párliament, reads "every good both publick and private."[49] For Burke also, it was a logical step that from loving our own private sub-division, "the little platoon" into which we are born, we would automatically "proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind." The next chapter looks at the influence of the Irish Patriot school of oratory on Burke's fusion of politics and aesthetics, and reads his Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful to see how his conceptions of truth, knowledge and identity are mediated through oral forms.

[1] J.G.A. Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution - A Problem in the History of Ideas," Historical Journal 3. 2 (1960) 130.
[2] Seamus Deane, "Edmund Burke," Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing vol. 1, (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991) 808.
[3] Breandán Ó Buachalla, Aisling Gheár (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Tta, 1996), Murray Pittock, Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth Century Britain and Ireland (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), and H. Erskine-Hill, "Literature and the Jacobite cause," Modern Language Studies 9.3 (Fall, 1979) 15-28.
[4]Joep Leersen, defines 'tuath' as being both "clan territory" and an "amorphous mass of persons claiming descent from a common ancestor." Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael (Cork: Cork UP in association with Field Day, 1996) 466, n. 123.
[5] Thomas W. Copeland, et al., eds. The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78) 282-285.
[6] L. M. Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics," Cork History and Society eds. Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1993) 535-583.
[7] William Hogan and Seán Ó Buachalla, "James Cotter's Papers," Cork Historical and Archaeological Society Journal 68 (1963).
[8] Hogan and Ó Buachalla, 66 and L.M. Cullen, "Catholics under the Penal Laws," Eighteenth-Century Ireland 1 (1986): 32.
[9] Breandán Ó Buachalla, "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," Cork History and Society 482-484.
[10] Brian Ó Cuív, ed. Párliament na mBan (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1952) xxvii. Párliament na mBan seems to have been such a popular didactic text, that the other (in)famous eighteenth-century parliament of women, congregated in Brian Merriman's Midnight Court, could be seen to be an even greater scandal if we read it as a licentious counter-narrative to the strict piety of Párliament na mBan.
[11] Correspondence vol. 10, 4.
[12] Cornelius G. Buttimer, "Gaelic Literature and Contemporary Life in Cork, 1700-1840," Cork History and Society and Risteárd O'Foghludha, Cois na Bríde: Liam Inglis (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig Díolta Foillseacháin Rialtais, 1937).
[13] O'Buachalla, "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," 470.
[14] For a discussion of the Cotters' patronage of Gaelic learning see Ó Conchúir, Scríobhaithe Chorcaí: 1700-1850 (Baile ÁthaCliath: An Clóchomhar Tta., 1982) 212-5.
[15] Translation is from T.C.D. MS 1172, 52. lines correspond to 2055 ff. in Párliament na mBan. TCD MS 1172, 1-60, is an incomplete copy of an English translation.
[16]'Ceart' has its etymological roots in the Latin 'Certus'. With the use of 'an ceartus' Ó Colmáin is perhaps underlining this prestigious connection with Classical Rome. Support for the Stuarts was very effectively coded in 'translations' of Classical Latin texts such as Vergil's Aeneid. See Murray Pittock and H. Erskine-Hill.
[17] Ó Cuív 66, (lines 2090-2093).
[18] T.C.D. MS 1172, 52.
[19] Niall Ó Dónaill, Foclóir Gaeilge-Bearla (Baile ÁthaCliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1977).
[20] Ó Cuív 401.
[21] R. Ó Foghludha, Carn Tighearnaigh (1938) 29, see also Rev. P.S. Dinneen, Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille (London: Irish Texts Society, 1900) 139-8.
[22] Ó Buachalla, "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," 477.
[23] See also Ó Buachalla, "James our true king: the ideology of Irish royalism in the seventeenth century," D. George Boyce, et. al., eds. Political Thought in Ireland since the Seventeenth Century (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) : 7-35, for a discussion on how Old-English families were awarded a Gaelic pedigree in the formation of a new national consciousness and consensus in seventeenth-century Ireland. See also Ó Buachalla, "Na Stíobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn: Cing Séamas," Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (83 C, 1983) 81-134.
Competition between accounts of James' genealogy was one of the important disputes in the famous 'Contention of the Bards', Iomarbhágh na bhfileadh', between the Bards of Munster and

Ulster: see Brian Ó Cuív, "The Irish Language in the Early Modern Period," A New History of Ireland vol. 3, T.W. Moody et al., eds, 539.

[24] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of the Chronotope and of the Chronotope in the Novel," The Dialogic Imagination ed. and trans. C. Emerson and M. Holmquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) 84-258.

[25] Ó Buachalla, "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," n.28, p.493. Ó Cuív, Párliament na mBan 64, (lines 2069-70).

[26] Ó Neachtain's MS dictionary is at Trinity College Dublin: TCD MS H.T.16.

[27] Frank O'Connor, The Backward Look (London: Macmillan, 1967) 109. Kevin Whelan, The Tree of Liberty (Cork: Cork UP, in association with Field Day, 1996) 21.

[28] Parliamentary History (6 May 1791) vol. 29, 364. Maddened by Fox's followers constantly interrupting his speech Burke quoted the words of King Lear: "The little dogs and all,/Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see they bark at me!" and "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and soberness."

[29] Ó Buachalla, "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," n.28, p. 493.

[30] Quoted by Ó Buachalla "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," 478.

[31] Ó Buachalla, "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," 477-478.

[32] Ó Buachalla, "Irish Jacobite Poetry," 40.

[33] See Nicholas Robinson, Edmund Burke. A Life in Caricature New Haven: Yale UP, 1996, Chapters Five and Six.

[34] I am indebted to John Barrell for drawing my attention to this speech of Burke's. Barrell delivered a paper at the conference on Burke entitled "Our Present Discontents" held at Goldsmith's College, London, July 1997.

[35] Pocock 131.

[36] " ..so called from the similitude or likeness which the several characters of the same have to branches of trees..." Hugh Mac Curtin, The Elements of the Irish Language, Grammatically Explained in English (Lovain: Martin Van Overbeke, 1728) 88.

[37] TCD MS H.T.16., 234.

[38] Correspondence vol. 5, 147.

[39] This was intended to be a critique of William Pitt, 'The Great Commoner' who was later created 1st Earl of Chatham. "Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents," Works Rivington, vol. 2, 337.

[40] 1 December 1783.

[41] See Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts: The Oral Construction of Oral History Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, vol. 22, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992). See also, Jack Goody, The Interface Between the Written and the Oral (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) and Ruth Finnegan, Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

[42] See Christopher Reid, Edmund Burke and the Practice of Political Writing (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1985) and John Butt, The Age of Johnson Oxford History of English Literature, vol. 10, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 375.

[43] Butt 377.

[44] Reid 126-132.

[45] Correspondence vol. 8, 502.

[46] See Eric A. Havelock, Preface to Plato (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1963).

[47] Correspondence vol. 6, 109.

[48] See Bernard Comrie, Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal as Past and Related Problems (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976).

[49] Quoted by Ó Buachalla, "The Making of a Cork Jacobite," 470.

Burke & the School of Irish Oratory

Our Countrymen are esteemed in a neighbouring Isle
the dullest of Mankind,
and there is scarce a Scribbler among them
who has any other name for this Nation than BAOETIA;
I don't know for what we deserve the Appellation
more than the senseless Encouragement
we give their wretched Productions;
so plentifully do they supply, and so greedily do we swallow
that Tide of fulsome Plays, Novels, *and* Poems
which they pour on us,
that they seem to make Stupidity their Science,
and to have associated for the Destruction of Wit and Sense,
and that we were bound to support them,
while they despised us in return.
Burke, The Reformer I

The high Irish style of parliamentary rhetoric was celebrated:
a language of baroque metaphor and personification,
punctuated by brutal rejoinders.
The most businesslike debates were far less well-attended
than those which permitted lofty attitudinising.
Roy Foster, Modern Ireland: 1600-1972

In the morning of our days....
I despair of ever receiving the same degree of pleasure
from the most excellent performances of genius
which I felt at that age...
The most powerful effects of poetry and music
have been displayed, and perhaps are still displayed,
where these arts are but in a very low and imperfect state....
Burke, Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful

Dublin was one of the great success stories of Europe in the eighteenth century. Its population and trade expanded at an astonishing rate, making it the sixth largest city outside the Russian and Turkish dominions, only slightly smaller than Amsterdam.[1] Burke arrived in this thriving city to attend Trinity College in 1744. The following year was a critical time in Irish politics because it was the year when the Irish Jacobites did not rise in support of Bonny Prince Charlie in Scotland. After this date the leaders of Protestant interest became more confident and secure in their establishment in Ireland and they also became increasingly dissatisfied with their role as the great 'Undertakers' of colonial rule as mediated through Dublin Castle. The Protestant interest became more patriotic in their assertion of Ireland's fiscal, and eventually military and political independence, from Britain. Earlier in the century, Swift's Drapier's Letters, Berkeley's The Querist and Samuel Madden's Reflections and Resolutions proper for the Gentlemen of Ireland, as to their Conduct for the Service of their Country (1738) provide evidence of an engagement with the impediments to Irish political, social, commercial and cultural development due to its colonial status.[2] From the mid-century this Patriot movement became a dominant feature of eighteenth-century Irish politics, culminating in an independent parliament in 1782, until the fears provoked by the rising of the United Irishmen, and much bribery by Dublin Castle, saw the end of Irish legislative independence with the Act of Union in 1800.

There is some controversy as to whether or not Burke supported the Patriots by writing anonymous pamphlets on behalf of Charles Lucas who wanted to reform city government. However, Burke's most obvious contribution to the Irish Patriot movement was The Reformer, which he founded, edited and largely wrote while in his final year at Trinity.[3] The Reformer ran to thirteen weekly editions and

sought to generate and focus public criticism of Thomas Sheridan's Theatre Royal in particular, and of Dublin society in general, in order to bring about desired 'reforms' of artistic and social life in Dublin. The young Burke was scathing on what he saw as Ireland's intellectual and creative subservience to British taste and prejudice, to "a Country which despises us".[4] Issue V describes Burke's trips to Dublin coffee-houses to hear what the public thought of the paper and T.O. McLoughlin remarks that all of Burke's early writings and The Reformer in particular, illustrate Burke's "need for and relation with an audience. From his earliest letters he fancies himself writing for the public ...he has no doubt that through writing, or, as in the Club, public speaking, he is training himself to establish a public voice."[5]

The public voice of Burke in his Reformer spoke from the platform that criticism of the taste and writings of a nation is "the first and surest Method of establishing its Morals".[6] Terry Eagleton points out that from the early eighteenth century "moral discourse is being drawn steadily into the orbit of the aesthetic, for aesthetic judgment is that mysteriously self-contradictory act which is at once subjective in quality - a matter of taste- and universal in its conclusions."[7] Burke, however, was concerned not with subjectivity, with personal morals or interpersonal relationships but with the morals of political and public conduct; like the Gaelic poets, he was focused on the political implications of language issues and aesthetic performances. The work of Trinity College scholars throughout the eighteenth century also took the links between political ethics and the aesthetics of language as their subject matter. Burke draws deeply on this vibrant tradition of Anglo-Irish linguistics and its deliberations on issues of knowledge and truth. The writings of Swift, Berkeley and Dr Peter Browne on language are precursors to the mid-eighteenth century Irish rhetoricians who include Dr John Lawson and

Dr Thomas Leland, both of whom taught Burke at Trinity.[8] There is a remarkable consistency in the content of these men's concerns, attitudes and assumptions about the workings of language and Burke's debt to the scholars of Trinity College can be most clearly seen in his only explicit work on aesthetics, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful, which he claimed he composed at Trinity although it was not published until 1757.

The most immediate and striking characteristic of these Trinity scholars is their promotion of the figurative language of eloquence, ("the art of deliberative oratory", as Adam Potkay defines it). The study of eloquence takes the speeches of Demosthenes and Cicero as exemplary, evoking the image of a speaker stirring the passion for justice in a civic assembly and inspiring a sense of community and common cause against tyrannical rule, and this promotion of eloquence continued longer in Ireland than in Scotland and England. Potkay shows how David Hume increasingly expressed his distrust of eloquence, as he revised his essay On Eloquence between its initial publication in 1742 and its final version in 1770. Hume's distrust grew, not because he held that eloquence was deceptive or politically incorrect, but because he was influenced by the literary and social discourse of politeness, first made popular through the pages of Addison and Steele's Spectator. During the mid-eighteenth century politeness eventually displaced the ideal of eloquence in England and Scotland.[9] The ideals of politeness and a particular form of femininity were generated through conversation in drawing rooms and parlours and in the solitary and contemplative perusal of magazines of sensibility and sentimental novels. After the Seven Years War with France ended in 1763, it was argued that the rude dynamism of

eloquence, which urged public community action, could be stabilised, placated and tamed by the feminine application of platitude, passivity and recoil.[10]

Irish politics and literature in the 1760s were far from being influenced by the ideals of politeness. The Seven Years War had been much resented in Ireland as a waste of Irish revenue; robust patriotism rather than refined politeness was the tone of Dublin society. The beautiful Dublin home of James Caulfeild, later Earl of Charlemont and Commander-in-chief of the Irish Volunteers, was the centre of literary Dublin and its Patriot politics. Caulfeild came to prominence in Irish politics in 1754 when he brokered an agreement between the Patriot Speaker of the House, Henry Boyle, and the Castle supporter, Primate Stone, who were opposed on what was to be done with £20,000 of Irish surplus. Burke's teacher, Lawson, dedicated his patriotic Irene: Carmen Historicum to Henry Boyle and Burke's teacher and friend, Leland, was encouraged by Caulfeild to publish his translation of The Orations of Demosthenes against Philip which appeared in parts from 1754 to 1761, in a complete edition in 1770, and was frequently reissued. Leland's Orations of Demosthenes became "the model for the Anglo-Irish tradition of parliamentary speaking as practised by Edmund Burke, Henry Grattan, John Philpot Curran, and others of his students in accordance with the idea of exalted style."[11] Demosthenes' speeches sought to provoke a patriotic fervour among the people of Athens as he rallied them in opposition to the tyranny of Philip. Like Demosthenes, the Irish orators excelled in opposition and in the avowal of the freedom of the people.[12]

Caulfeild also supported the careers of the Irish patriots, Flood and Grattan, and he introduced Burke to his first employer, 'single-speech' Hamilton. The careers of Irish orators in Britain demonstrate how the ideals of eloquence were practised

longer by the Irish than the polite and rational English. After Fox's government fell on the 'East India Bill', the subsequent election of 1783 saw a large influx of younger men entering the House of Commons, and Burke was subsequently dubbed 'the dinner bell' by the young Tories. His eloquence was regarded as unfashionably antique and impassioned. In the same year, Flood took a seat at Westminster, where he too found that "his mode of oratory which had bought him fame at College Green, was unsuited to the British parliament and his career languished."[13] After the Union, Grattan went to Westminster and became an inconsequential voice, campaigning, without success, for Catholic Emancipation. Following the other famous Irish orators, John Philpot Curran ended his career by a move to London where he associated with Thomas Moore, Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Byron who said "I have heard that man speak more poetry than I have ever seen written."[14]

The ideals of eloquence also informed eighteenth-century Gaelic poetry and its performance, so the lectures of Leland and Lawson on oratory and the promotion of eloquence found a receptive audience in the young Burke, who most likely witnessed gatherings of Gaelic poets perform their political verse. Lawson published his Lectures Concerning Oratory in 1758 after his career as Trinity's first Professor of Oratory and in 1765, his successor, Leland, published A Dissertation on the Principles of Human Eloquence, "Being the substance of several lectures read in the Oratory-School of Trinity-College, Dublin." In their lectures both Lawson and Leland highlight the dramatic, poetic and rhetorical arts of the 'great republics' of Greece and Rome to argue that public speaking is the best expression of public liberty and that the study and practice of eloquence is the best security of civil liberty.

It is in this concern with the universal effects of the spoken word on the audience that the Trinity rhetoricians can be characterised as Aristotelian in that it was Aristotle who most famously examined the effects of the dramatic arts on audiences. Lawson quotes from Aristotle, "the great master in his Rhetorick", to remind his students that the study of the effect of eloquence on people can lead to discoveries about the general condition of the human psyche and that in order to be eloquent the student must "Observe, which, of what Kind and Turn are the Passages, that most affect your selves and others; from thence take your Direction." Lawson explains that by nature we are created so that "all strong passions stamp themselves upon the outward Form." These strong passions "are visible in the Air of the Countenance, in every Gesture and Motion" and, as a counterpart to speech, the bodily registers of our passion "form a Kind of natural Eloquence, which, without Help of any other, is most powerful in winning over the Spectator, spreading as if by Contagion."[15]

This sort of argument operates on the assumption that we are all formed in the same mode by 'nature' to react in a similar manner to external stimuli and Burke adopts this Aristotelian position at the outset of his Enquiry. In his introductory chapter "On Taste", Burke proposes an empathetic partnership between author and audience, and proceeds on the assumption that differences between people are "rather apparent than real". He announces that he "observed that the ideas of the sublime and beautiful were frequently confounded "but he argues that a shared humanity enables all people to appreciate works of art in the same manner, and declares that his aim is to observe the human passions in their reaction to mimesis and digesis, that is to the re-presentation and representation of reality, both in the experience of our lives and the real as we experience it in art. This "diligent examination of our passions in our own breasts" and "a careful

survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions" could show how aesthetics (art as mimesis of 'nature' or the real), and human performance in general, operate on "our bodies and passions".[16] Burke makes no distinction between the subjectivity which reacts to the real of the world and the subjectivity which reacts to art because art, in his formula, is "imitative" of the real and so there is just one subject who witnesses, on the same plane, both the real and its mimesis in art.[17]

In promoting the study of eloquence and its effects, the Trinity men were compelled to take issue with John Locke's critique of the study of eloquence which claims that it is an art form which is designed to hoodwink and deceive the rational faculty and is therefore an unsuitable mode in essays addressed to the understanding. Leland confronts Locke from the opening pages of Principles of Human Eloquence: in quoting from Pope's translation of the Iliad, where Hector addresses his army, Leland writes that "this mode of speech is truly forcible and affecting, altho' the words may be used without distinct ideas annexed to each, and heard without exciting such distinct ideas."[18] Leland quotes Berkeley, "the acute and philosophical Bishop of Cloyne", in his defence of eloquence from Locke's critique: "The communication of ideas is not the chief or only end of language, but that there are other ends, as the raising of some passion, the exciting to, or deterring from an action, the putting the mind into some particular disposition, to which the former is in many cases barely subservient, and sometimes entirely omitted."[19]

The Trinity men not only objected to Locke's distrust of eloquence but they also took issue with Locke's main semantic thesis contained in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding which is that words stand for or signify ideas.[20] Most of

the Trinity scholars accuse Locke of a radical reductionism whereby they understand Locke to say that words signify ideas and that ideas are invariably images. This does seem to be the logical conclusion to draw from some of the things that Locke says, although there have been other critics who have rescued Locke from such an interpretation.[21] David Berman argues that all Irish philosophers of the eighteenth century, with the possible exception of Molyneux, interrogated and criticised Locke's empiricist scepticism.[22] Berkeley disputed with Locke on many points and he countered Locke's theory of reference with the argument that words raised far more emotions rather than clear rational images. Berman and Andrew Carpenter claim that "Burke was one of the very few eighteenth-century thinkers to accept Berkeley's emotive theory of language: for Burke, as for Berkeley, words may be used significantly without their necessarily representing ideas."[23] It is true that, in his Enquiry, Burke can be seen to adapt and develop Berkeley's "emotive theory of language" but it is not accurate to state that Burke was one of the very few eighteenth-century thinkers to accept Berkeley's theory. Swift, Dr Peter Browne, Lawson, Leland and Burke followed Berkeley in an implacable opposition to Locke's theory of reference.

Swift makes an hilarious attack on Locke's semantic theory in describing Gulliver's visit to "the grand Academy of Lagado" where "the projectors in speculative learning resided", and whose projects aimed to abolish words and converse solely with the aid of objects, "since words are only the names for *things*". Swift describes the silent communication of these projectors who bring out '*things*' from their multiple packs, carried by many servants in order to converse more conveniently. When their conversation is over, after some hours, they "then put up their implements, help each other to resume their burthens, and take their leave."[24] Swift is, of course, being unfair to Locke as Locke makes the

crucial distinction that words are not the signs of things, but of ideas, although he does not directly address the constitution of these 'ideas'.

Another popular (mis)reading of Locke is to interpret him as a paradigm case of the private language philosopher, one who argues that our mental life consists of a series of privately construed 'ideas' to which we make reference whenever we use words meaningfully. There are a number of oft-quoted passages in his Essay which support this interpretation, though there are also a significant number of other passages in which Locke emphasises the social and public aspects of language to argue that definitions are always publicly ascertainable.[25] The Trinity men seem to be reacting against the argument that our languages are as private as our individual experience, continually stressing the point that when we are born we are already implicated in existing conventions of human behaviour and agreed truths and those established matrices are changed only in the modifications we make in our interaction with each other. Leland quotes the former Provost of Trinity, Peter Browne, who argued that language is the "voluntary application of *arbitrary* signs, according to the consent of different men and nations, ... Hence, *Gracefulness* or *Strength* of Style, Harmony or *Softness, copious* expression, *terse* brevity, or *contrasted* periods, have by turns gained the approbation of particular countries."[26] Throughout his Enquiry Burke follows the Trinity school in demonstrating that truth and knowledge are situated in a dynamic process, that meanings are not singular givens but contestable, that interpretation is a movement of interaction, and that every use of words brings with it the contexts and conditions of previous uses.

Burke begins the Enquiry with the axiom: "It appears indeed to be generally acknowledged, that with regard to truth and falsehood there is something fixed."

In his understanding, truth and falsehood are mapped through a convergence of "general acknowledgements", necessary to "maintain the ordinary correspondence of life"[27]. He remarks that: "We find people in their disputes continually appealing to certain tests and standards which are allowed on all sides, and are supposed to be established in our common nature." This ongoing process of reasoning "is so much strengthened by perpetual contention, that certain maxims of right reason seem to be tacitly settled amongst the most ignorant."[28] We are presented with the idea that what is reasonable continues to be determined through a process of agonistic discourse. Truth and falsehood in the Enquiry cannot be privately ascertained; neither are they fixed certainties which necessarily transcend time and circumstance. Rather "there is something fixed" about them only because people have agreed about their relative position. Truth, according to Burke, is a maintained correspondence, through dialogue, debate and by popular assent. In the first section of the Enquiry he candidly announces: "I have no great opinion of a definition....A definition may be very exact, and yet go but a very little way towards informing us of the nature of the thing defined."[29]

It is in the last section of the Enquiry, which is on 'Words', that we find Burke's most sustained engagement with Locke's theories. One striking characteristic of Burke's dissertation is that he always assumes that 'Words' are spoken rather than written and another noteworthy distinction is that he makes the terms 'eloquence' and 'rhetoric' synonymous with 'poetry'; according to Burke, poetry is always a spoken performance and a prime focus of this section is on poetry's effects on a listening audience. Lawson makes defensive apologies when he quotes Latin poets as examples of eloquence but Burke has no such qualms, perhaps because in the Gaelic culture in which he was raised the most striking

examples of eloquence were to be found in the public performance of political poetry. He disputes with Locke's theory of reference to argue that not only does poetry not "depend for its effect on the power of raising sensible images" but "it would lose a very considerable part of its energy, if this were the necessary result of all description."[30] Burke states that there are a very few words which are "real essences, and hardly cause, I think, any real ideas." These words are "*united by nature* to form some one determinate composition, as man, horse, tree, castle, &c." Most words he describes as "*compounded abstract*" which he claims, (almost two centuries before Sausurre,) to have meaning in "an *arbitrary* union... and various relations" to other words. Burke argues that the reduction of words to the first principles of their composition is a meaningless exercise: "and when you have made such a discovery of the original ideas, the effect of the composition is utterly lost. A train of thinking of this sort, is much too long to be pursued in the ordinary ways of conversation, nor is it at all necessary that it should." (This point is, perhaps, a counter to Locke's position that all complex ideas are made up out of simple ideas.) Burke states that "words are in reality but mere sounds" which we experience "being used on particular occasions ...and being applied in a variety of cases that we know readily by habit to what things they belong, they produce in the mind, whenever they are afterwards mentioned, effects similar to those of their occasions."[31]

Burke understands that words are eventful: they have come into effect through previous events and their affect depends not only on those past events but on all the contingencies of the event or "occasion" of their use. 'Occasion' implies not only a particular time and place but a definite series of actions and a certain relationship between people present. According to Burke, we learn the meanings of words not so much through their 'context', their position in a text, but through

the occasion of their deployment, in the lived interaction between people at a particular time and place, and it is in the context of the actual performance inside and between people that what is true is decided and change occurs under pressure from the variable circumstances of the human performance of these principles.[32] Memory is less an individual possession, a personal *tabula* on which the experience of life is inscribed, than the recall of social relationships and social experiences through which the present is interpreted and the future enacted.

Burke displays more sophistication than most of the other Trinity scholars in his discussion of the semantics of truth. In countering Locke's claim that eloquence, the art of deliberate oratorical persuasion, was inherently deceitful, Lawson and Leland fell back on the circular argument that to be truly eloquent one must be perceived as being true.[33] Burke, however, argues that in the same manner that we all share the same faculty of 'reason', we also have a faculty for aesthetic appreciation which he calls 'Taste':

> On a superficial view, we may seem to differ very widely from each other in our reasonings, and no less in our pleasures: but notwithstanding this difference, which I think to be rather apparent than real, it is probable that the standard both of reason and Taste is the same in all human creatures.[34]

This aesthetic faculty has an ethical dimension in the form of 'Sympathy'.[35] Through our faculty of Taste, Burke argues, we enjoy personal pleasure by the exercise of Sympathy, which is sociable, compassionate action: "...a sort of Substitution, by which we are put in the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected."[36] It is axiomatic for Burke that "we take an extraordinary part in the passions of others and that we are easily affected and

brought into sympathy by any tokens which are shewn of them".[37] Burke believes that nothing has more power than "poetry and rhetoric" in the inspiration of a sympathetic reaction, the 'exact description' of painting or of polite conversation will not do. According to Burke "poetry and rhetoric" are not concerned with "exact description. ...their business is to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves."[38] Burke explains that "it could scarcely have the smallest effect, if the speaker did not call in to his aid those modes of speech that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself. Then by the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire already kindled in another."[39] Burke continues with the point that words can convey realities which might not be in the experience of the listener, "as war, death, famine", but their spoken evocation can have "a great influence over the passions." According to Burke a "strong expression" describes a thing as it is felt by the speaker and this display of feeling is more potent than any preciseness in description: "a moving tone of voice, an impassioned countenance, an agitated gesture," and those passionate words "always used by those who are under the influence of any passion; they touch and move us more than those which far more clearly and distinctly express the subject matter." According to Burke we "yield to sympathy what we refuse to description."[40]

'Sympathy' is a key term in both Burke's aesthetic theory and his political practice. In his political speeches, Burke sought to display the suffering of others by his eloquent performances and so excite 'sympathy' among his listeners for the people he re-presented. This dramatic understanding of the role of "poetry and rhetoric" gives us the best summary of how Burke understood his own parliamentary role. By embodying and enacting a reaction to matters of state, a

parliamentarian might excite sympathy in his listeners which would influence their own reaction. One of his most complete descriptions of this process is to be found in his speech on the fourth day of the trial of Warren Hastings where Burke describes his desire to provoke "sympathetic revenge" among his audience for the crimes committed against the people of India. Burke characterises his desire as "the greatest of all possible virtues, - a virtue which the uncorrupted judgment of mankind has in all ages exalted to the ranks of heroism." He describes how his desire for 'sympathetic revenge' has left himself open "to calumny and all its herd of hissing tongues and poisoned fangs, in order to free the world from fraudulent prevaricators, from cruel oppressors, from robbers and tyrants." Burke vows to continue to "*flow with the most determined and inextinguishable animosity against tyranny, oppression, and peculation in all, but more particularly as practised by this man in India.*" He declares that he and his committee "*never will relent, but will pursue and persecute him and it; till they see corrupt pride prostrate under the feet of justice.*" After this performance of eloquence Burke makes a direct appeal: "We call upon your Lordships to join us; and we have no doubt that you will feel the same sympathy that we feel". If the Lordships do not concur with Burke's eloquent address and join in his desire for 'sympathetic revenge', Burke tells them that: "you will be identified with the criminal whose crimes you excuse, and rolled with him in all the pollution of Indian guilt, from generation to generation. Let those who feel with me upon this occasion join with me in this vow: if they will not, I have it all to myself."[41]

In Burke's assumption that all poetry is a spoken performance on a par with eloquence and rhetoric, and that it is the business of poetry and political rhetoric to excite the sympathy of an audience in a common cause and understanding, it

is not difficult to see the influence of the Gaelic poets on his thinking. On the last page of his Enquiry He remarks that:

> in general the languages of most unpolished people, have a great force and energy of expression; and this is but natural. Uncultivated people...admire more, and are more affected with what they see, and therefore express themselves in a warmer and more passionate manner."[42]

The 'great force and energy of expression' in the 'language of the unpolished people' that Burke was most familiar with was, of course, Gaelic. In an unguarded moment in the Enquiry Burke declares that:

> In the morning of our days, when the senses are unworn and tender, when the whole man is awake in every part, and the gloss of novelty fresh upon all the objects that surround us, how lively at that time are our sensations, but how false and inaccurate the judgments we form of things? ...I despair of ever receiving the same degree of pleasure from the most excellent performances of genius which I felt at that age. ...The most powerful effects of poetry and music have been displayed, and perhaps are still displayed, where these arts are but in a very low and imperfect state.[43]

The morning of Burke's days was spent immersed in the Gaelic world of North Cork where a rich Gaelic poetic tradition survived, albeit in a 'low and imperfect state' without the grand patronage of former ages. In this memory of his childhood Burke twins poetry and music; it is the only instance in his treatise of this pairing and its significance lies in the fact that the transmission of eighteenth-century Gaelic poetry depended on music.[44] Burke's poignant despair of "ever receiving the same degree of pleasure from the most excellent performances of genius" that he experienced in his youth leads us aptly to the next chapter which

considers the influence of the Munster courts of poetry on Burke's own public career.

[1] L. M. Cullen, "The growth of Dublin 1600-1900: Character and heritage," Dublin City and County: From Prehistory to Present F.H.A. Aalen and Kevin Whelan. eds. (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1992) 251.
[2] Burke sent Dick Shackleton a copy of one of Madden's books while he was at Trinity.
[3] See Thomas Mahoney, Edmund Burke and Ireland (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1960) 17 who quotes letters of Burke where he disparages Lucas' anti-Catholicism, for a contrary view see T.O. McLoughlin, "The Context of Edmund Burke's *The Reformer,*" Eighteenth Century Ireland 2 (1987) : 37-56 and A.P.I. Samuels, The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke LL.D. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1923) 279-329.
[4] The Reformer 1, 2.
[5] McLoughlin 44.
[6] The Reformer 2, 1.
[7] Terry Eagleton, Heathcliff and the Great Hunger (London: Verso, 1995) 109.
[8] Richard Brinsley Sheridan's father, Thomas Sheridan, actor, theatre manager and later an elocutionary educator, an activist-philologist and lexicographer, might also be included in this group though most of his writings were in the latter decades of the century. His writings are of great interest to those concerned with subjectivity, gender, nation and citizenship. See Peter de Bolla, The Discourse of the Sublime (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) and John Barrell, An Equal, Wide Survey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).
[9] Adam Potkay, The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994) introduction.
[10] See Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987).
[11] Robert Welch, ed. The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
[12] Another Dublin linguist who forged a career in a fusion of oratory and politics is the Revd Philip Francis. Francis' translation of Horace, published in 1747, quickly became the most popular edition of Horace in the eighteenth-century Anglophone world. His Orations of Demosthenes appeared in two volumes in 1757-8, but his effort was considered inferior to that of Leland which depressed him greatly. Francis' fortune was made, however, when he secured the position of private chaplain to Lady Caroline Fox. He taught Lady Sarah Lennox to declaim and Charles Fox to read and he went with Fox to Eton to assist him in his studies. Charles' father, Lord Holland, also employed this Dublin cleric to write anonymous attacks on Pitt, starting a family tradition that his son was later to continue. The Revd Francis was father of Philip Francis who wrote the Junius letters and who was to be a chief advisor in Burke's impeachment of Hastings.
[13] Welch 199.
[14] One of John F. Kennedy's best known quotes about the price of freedom being eternal vigilance can be found in a speech by Curran on the election of the Lord Mayor of Dublin in 1790.
[15] Lawson 166-170.
[16] Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful ed. James T. Boulton (Notre Dame: U. of N.D.P., 1968) 3.
[17] de Bolla 281-300, discusses differences between Burke's understanding of self-knowledge and his depiction of the imagination as a capacity to combine, compare and make similitudes and the Romantics' conception of the imagination as a 'Negative Capability', a 'suspension of disbelief' which is a temporary hiatus of self-knowledge. This transformative power of the imagination leads to a subsequent distinction between the aesthetic 'heightened' experience from the mundane real, between "the subject of vision" or 'subjective effect' and the "subject of action" or the subjective affect. The features of the aesthetic were less important to the Romantics than the interior power of the imagination. See also Frances Ferguson, Solitude and the Sublime (New York: Routledge, 1992).
[18] Dr Thomas Leland, A Dissertation on the Principles of Human Eloquence (Second Edition, Dublin: Printed for A. Leathley, Bookseller, 1765) 7
[19] Leland 9.
[20] "...*Words*...come to be made use of by Men, as *the Signs* of their *Ideas*" (Essay Concerning Human Understanding III.ii.1:405); "*Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for*

nothing, but the Ideas *in the Mind of him that uses them.* That then which Words are the Marks of, are the *Ideas* of the Speaker."(Essay III.ii.2:405); "....Words, as they are used by Men, can properly or immediately signify nothing but the *Ideas*, that are in the Mind of the Speaker". (Essay III.ii.4:406).

[21] E.J. Ashworth, "Locke on Language," Locke ed. Vere Chappell, (Oxford: OUP, 1998) 175-198. Ashworth argues that Locke's emphasis on the place of ideas in the process of signification can be interpreted as an emphasis on the importance of a speaker's concepts, beliefs, and experiences, in the process of communication and so "he can be credited with a genuine awareness that there is also something public about language use." (198). See also E.J. Lowe, "Language," Locke on Human Understanding (London & NY: Routledge, 1995) 143-170, who claims that: "..(a) that Locke probably does not have (and certainly need not have) an imagistic conception of ideas; and (b) that he is not, in any case, offering a theory of how language can serve to convey the results of our constructive exercises of the imagination." (168).

[22] David Berman, "The Irish Counter-Enlightenment," The Irish Mind. ed. Richard Kearney. (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1985) 119.

[23] David Berman and Andrew Carpenter, "Eighteenth-Century Irish Philosophy," Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing vol. 1, 764. According to Berman and Carpenter: "This view does not seem to reappear until C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards's famous book *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923)."

[24] Swift, Gulliver's Travels, III, Chapter 5.

[25] Locke held that ideas are prior to words (at least historically): "I confess, that in the begining of Languages, it was necessary to have the *Idea* before one gave it the name" (Essay III.v.15:437) For some examples of his claim that we have a mental language consisting of mental propositions which contain ideas, not words, see: (Essay IV.v.3:574; IV.v.5:575; II.xxxii.19:391). For a cogent discussion of Locke's understanding of the public aspects of language see Ashworth, 179-181.

[26] Leland 76.

[27] Boulton ed. Enquiry 7.

[28] Boulton ed. Enquiry 1.

[29] Boulton ed. Enquiry 12

[30] Enquiry V.v Examples that WORDS may affect without raising IMAGES.

[31] Enquiry V.ii The common effect of POETRY, not by raising ideas of things.

[32] Enquiry V.iii General words before IDEAS.

[33] Lawson quotes an axiom of Horace that "an Orator ought to be esteemed a good man" because he argues that "You cannot be much affected by what he says, if you do not look upon him to be a Man of Probity, who is in earnest, and doth himself believe what he endeavoureth to make out as credible to you." (172) The first four chapter headings in Leland's Principles of Human Eloquence illustrates the same argument: Chapter I is entitled "Eloquent modes of speech, the natural effusions of passion and emotion", Chapter II describes how "Modes of Eloquence the most artificial and refined, arise from nature and necessity", Chapter III claims "Animated forms of Elocution [are] the natural signs of sincere emotion" and Chapter IV argues that "Eloquent modes of speech [are] the natural result of sincere and lively conviction, even in those who condemn them as the instruments of deceit."

[34] Boulton ed. Enquiry 11.

[35] Burke's depiction of 'Sympathy' bears a strong affinity to Hutcheson's theory of 'Moral Sense'. The introductory chapter on 'Taste', added to the second edition of the Enquiry, in which Burke discusses his conception of Sympathy, might owe some inspiration to the posthumous publication of Francis Hutcheson's A System of Moral Philosophy by his son, who was at Trinity at the same time as Burke. (The catalogue of Burke's library includes a copy of Hutcheson's essays.) Hutcheson argued that in the same manner that we humans have the capacity to reason we are also endowed with a sixth sense that is the moral impulse of benevolence which leads us to react instinctively with compassion and without initial regard to self-interest. Hutcheson's 'Moral sense' infuses both the public and personal spheres as it is the actions which are most socially benevolent which give us the most private pleasure and the most public praise. Our moral sense

which inspires us to do good also makes us feel good. According to Hutcheson poetry and rhetoric depend on this moral sense, as Eagleton describes it: "Like poetry, virtue turns on the empathetic imagination, on a delightful decentring of ourselves into the being of others." (Eagleton 114).

[36] Enquiry I.xiii SYMPATHY.

[37] Leland's lectures also comment on "our natural fondness for comparison of objects, observing resemblances, and forming similitudes," and he sees "Eloquence" as appealing to that fondness, but Eloquence's greatest powers are founded on "the most noble, most amiable and virtuous qualities in our nature. They are addressed to our pity and our sympathy." The powers of Eloquence operate "on our benevolence, our tenderness of affection, our virtuous indignation, our public spirit, or some other generous principle." (35)

[38] Enquiry V.v Examples that WORDS may affect without raising IMAGES.

[39] Enquiry V.vii How WORDS influence the passions.

[40] Enquiry V.vii How WORDS influence the passions.

[41] The Trial of Warren Hastings: Fourth day Speech in Reply 6 June 1794. See also Robert Bisset, who quotes a long discussion that Burke has with Sir Joshua Reynolds on the effects of parliamentary eloquence. According to Burke: "There are many honest well-meaning country gentlemen, who are in parliament only to keep up the consequence of their families. Upon most of these a good speech will have influence" The Life of Edmund Burke (London: George Cawthorn, 1798) 245-6.

[42] Enquiry V.vii How WORDS influence the passions.

[43] Boulton ed. Enquiry 23-24.

[44] Pádraig Breathnach, "Oral and Written Transmission of Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," Eighteenth-Century Ireland 2 (1987) 59.

Cúirteanna Éigse & Literary Clubs

It may possibly, in the revolution of this Political Platonick year,
come again to our turn.
But I see this Event, (if I see it at all)
at the End of a very long Visto.
The View is dim and remote;
and we do nothing in the world to bring it nearer,
or to make it more certain.
This disposition, which is become the principle of our party,
I confess, from constitution and opinion, I like.[1]
Burke on his decision to join Rockingham in opposition.

He cannot readily comprehend the transaction he condemns.
What I have obtained was the fruit of no bargain;
the production of no intrigue;
the result of no compromise;
the effect of no solicitation.
.....I cannot recognise in his few and idle years,
the competence to judge of my long and laborious life...
Poor rich man!
He can hardly know anything of public industry in its exertions,
or can estimate its compensations when its work is done.
Burke, A Letter to a Noble Lord

At the age of sixteen, while at Trinity College, Burke founded a debating and discussion society known as 'The Club' which exists today as the Literary and Historical Society. Burke's Club is the earliest example we have of a student debating society in Ireland or Britain.[2] In a letter to his close friend from his schooldays in Ballitore, Dick Shackleton, Burke referred to the fact that the idea for the formation of such a group had been with him for a few years before he went to Trinity.[3] The Club was not an open society; it was a small exclusive group of seven members and its activities consisted of reading prepared essays, the reciting and reading aloud of poetry, and debating in "personated characters" on set themes. The rules of conduct and minutes of the meetings of Burke's Club are still extant and ithe preface to the rules states that the Club is to perform the function of a school so that "when years draw us further into the cares and business of life, we would be thereby enabled to go with more ease through the Duties of it; and more largely to contribute to the good of the public and to the increase of our private interest."[4]

When he settled in London, Burke was the founder member of 'The Literary Club', dedicated to the entertainment and instruction of its members through the art of conversation and debate. This club met for over thirty years, every Monday at seven in the evening at the Turk's Head in Soho. At its inception it consisted of nine men, including Dr Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Joshua Reynolds and Burke's father-in-law, Dr Nugent. 'The Club', immortalised in Boswell's Life of Dr Johnson, later admitted more members, among them some of the most famous names in British eighteenth-century cultural life, such as David Garrick, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Charles Fox, David Hume and Adam Smith.

Robert Bisset gives us a vivid account of Burke at The Club; he tells us that Burke excelled at conversation as much as he did at formal public speaking because, like the best of oral performers, he could tailor his discourse to "the capacities, and habits, and knowledge of the person addressed. He could convey information either to the simple or the refined, and instruction either to the clown or the sage." Bisset describes Burke's conversation as "an unaffected effusion of knowledge, imagery, sentiment, reasoning, philosophy."[5] Besides ad hoc debates in various coffee houses, there was no model in English culture for this regular gathering of talent and wit in the Turk's Head tavern. The Scriblerus Club of Swift, Pope, Gay and others met for a few months in 1714 'to ridicule all the false tastes in learning', and the Dilettanti Society was a gathering of gentlemen who had travelled in Italy and Asia Minor and were keen to promote the study of the region by British artists and antiquarians, but neither group bears much affinity with the Literary Club.

The most obvious precedent for Burke's Clubs are the exuberant *Cúirteanna* or 'Courts' of Burke's childhood. Bardic schools were part of Irish history by the eighteenth century, but '*dámhscoileanna*' (schools of poets), '*cúirteanna éigse*' (courts of poetry) and '*cúirteanna na mbúrdún*' (district courts of poetry) still flourished all over Cork. Like Burke's Clubs, these poetic schools and courts were private groups of literary men, dedicated to their own instruction and entertainment through competitive performance. These gatherings of poets and wits centered around a 'sheriff', 'high sheriff', or 'chief poet', and they provided a playful yet sophisticated forum for the performance of new poetic compositions, the recitation of old favorites, and a learned arena for the setting of future literary and political agendas. Since Cromwell's proclamation to 'Hang all the Harpers', Gaelic poetry was engaged with the political situation of colonised Ireland, not

least of all because the very language itself was under threat of erosion from the official language of English.[6] A verse by Aodh Buidhe Mac Cruitín/Hugh Mac Curtin, provides a vivid illustration:

Féach na flatha ba fairsing in Éirinn uair
gur éirigh Galla agus ceannaithe caola an chnuais
le tréimhse eatortha ag teagasc a mbéas don tsluagh;
do réir mar mheallaid a mbailte dob aolta snuadh
tá Béarla i bhfaisean go tairise is Gaeilge fuar.

Consider the rulers who once were generous in Ireland
until foreigners and the cunning avaricious merchants came between them,
teaching their own customs to the people;
according as they seduce our fairest towns
English becomes fashionable and Irish decays.

Daniel Corkery tells us that "verses were nearly always written on current events, as was the Gaelic fashion."[7] In reviewing eighteenth-century Gaelic literature in Cork city, Cornelius Buttimer shows how poets such as Burke's reputed tutor, Liam Inglis, composed poems in reaction to newspaper reports on the progress of what came to be known as the Seven Years War.[8] Many of these poems can be generally described as Jacobite in character but many Gaelic poems from this era also focus on local issues. The North Cork poet Seán Clárach Mac Dónaill was famous for his Jacobite songs but one of his best known compositions is a poem on the death of the hated landlord, Colonel Dawson from Aherlow, which begins:

Taiscidh, a chlocha, fá choigilt i gcoimeád criadh
an feallaire fola 's an stollaire, Dawson liath;
a ghaisce níor cloiseadh i gcogadh ná i gcath lá glia,
ach ag creachadh 's ag crochadh 's ag coscairt na mbochtán riamh.

Keep fast under cover, o stones, in closet of clay
this grey-haired Dawson, a bloody and treacherous butcher.
Not in struggle or strife in the fight are his exploits known
but ravaging and hanging and mangling the poor forever.[9]

As Seán Ó Tuama explains:

> A great deal of [Irish poetry] is political poetry or a response to social - and linguistic - injustice. The purely personal lyric voice is rarely heard, ...but there is no mistaking the strong personal feeling that attaches itself to public issues. And it is a kind of poetry that demands a listening rather than a reading audience.[10]

Burke's Clubs were similarly engaged in a passionate fusion of literary and political debate. His Trinity Club favored the recitation of Milton's poetry and debate ranged over a number of contentious topics such as "Lenity for the [Jacobite] Rebels of the Forty-Five". Bisset recounts that in the Literary Club, Dr Johnson, "who considered conversation as a competition of intellectual powers, declared he was never stimulated to such exertion as when contending with Burke."[11]

Burke's childhood home at Ballyduff was ringed by a number of such schools: poets gathered around Seán Clárach Mac Domhnaill in Charleville, Seán Ó Tuama in Croom and Ballynonty, and Piaras Mac Gearailt held a court in East

Cork which continued to flourish, under various successors, into the nineteenth century.[12] Pádraig Breathnach details the close networks of personal contacts and friendships between Munster poets and it seems that every poet could be linked to another poet at least through mutual acquaintances.[13] According to Brian Ó Cuív, no part of Gaelic speaking Ireland was without poets in the eighteenth century, but it is in Munster, specifically Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Clare, that poets were more numerous than anywhere else in the country. While Burke was living at Ballyduff, in the barony of Fermoy, around fifty poets were active in the neighboring Muskerry barony, and Ó Cuív believes this figure to be representative of the number of poets composing in the other Cork baronies. (Many of these poets belonged to formerly ruling families.) O'Cuív asserts that "even the mediocre among them had a considerable technical skill and a good command of language, and the combination of scribal activity and poetic composition ensured that a great deal of verse was preserved accurately."[14]

A striking feature of the poetic gatherings of Munster, the *cúirteanna éigse* , is the atmosphere of familiar jocular banter and the playful, ostentatious display of learning and wit among the Gaelic literati of gentlemen, priests and scribes.[15] This atmosphere is preserved for us in the accounts we have of the summons which called for an assembly of the *cúirt* and in their jovial elaboration on rules of conduct and the issuing of authorisations or certificates of competence (*pas filíochta*).[16] The summons was composed by the chief poet and then learned by rote by a *canntuire*, a messenger who walked the county and beyond, publicising fresh compositions and reciting the call to the *éigse* to the designated poets.[17] Burke's Clubs were organised in a similar fashion to these poetic Courts in a number of important respects: there was a presiding figure, (the chair rotated at the Trinity Club but it was largely Dr Johnson who was Master of Ceremonies at

the London Club); membership was by invitation only and was offered to those who had distinguished themselves in literary and intellectual endeavor; and while the evidence is that Burke's student Club took itself rather seriously in its rules of conduct and awarding of contests, it is clear that the Club at the Turk's Head shared the same spirit of banter, wit and skilled debate that were the hallmark of the Munster Courts.

Like the Club at the Turk's Head, copious amounts of alcohol fueled the proceedings of the *cúirteanna* which were held regularly in an inn, or else in the homes of the lavishly hospitable Gaelic gentry.[18] Burke's uncle, Patrick Nagle, hosted poetry recitations at Ballyduff. In a letter to his son Richard, Burke refers to the 'honours shown in the old times' by the Nagles of his boyhood.[19] It was the style of the Gaelic gentry to provide visitors, and particularly those who might provide entertainment, such as poets, with an extremely generous hospitality. According to Ó Tuama, "In the socially important matter of hospitality....poets were more readily provided for than others."[20]

While the *cúirteanna éigse* were eagerly anticipated social events, they were also important cultural meetings where skills and learning were displayed; information was relayed, discussed and analysed; poets transcribed from each other's manuscript book or *duanaire*; and generally celebrated themselves as the guardians of the culture and learning of their race. In the same manner, the Club at the Turk's Head came to see itself as an important cultural establishment: membership of the Club was awarded to those who had distinguished themselves as men of letters and so participation conferred a certain social and cultural standing. This was obviously an important, if not crucial, fellowship for Burke who proudly insisted on his literary and political reputation as an

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independent voice in the adjudication of the public good. This persistence in maintaining such a reputation cost him dearly in material terms.

Burke's first clash on this issue came when, after a number of years of working for the parliamentarian William Hamilton, he insisted on being left with "a discreet liberty" to continue his own literary endeavours. In a letter to Hamilton, he says that whatever advantages he had acquired had been due to a literary reputation and he could only hope for a continuance of such advantages on condition of doing something to keep the same reputation alive. Hamilton took extreme offence and Burke was in turn so outraged that he gave up the pension that Hamilton had secured for him.[21]

Burke's guardianship of his "discreet liberty" was again to the fore on the occasion of his fortuitous election as M.P. for Bristol in 1774, when he took the opportunity to insist that an M.P.'s "unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not sacrifice....to any man, or to any set of men living...They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable." Burke repudiated for himself the customary undertaking to be bound in Parliament by the instructions of his constituents. He made a distinction between a representative and a delegate, declaring that authoritative instructions which a member was bound blindly to obey were things utterly unknown to the law of the land, and alien to the spirit of the Constitution. He claimed that he was not required to represent the electors of Bristol; he offered himself for election on the understanding that Bristol would wish to support a man of his virtue and accomplishments to deliberate on how the common good might best be protected and promoted. "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your

opinion." Burke's speech, which he also claimed he made during the election as well as at its conclusion, is a remarkable and singular assertion, not only without any precedent in British politics, but quite contrary to the popular understanding at that time (and today) of how a popularly elected politician should act.

The poets, wits and scholars of the *cúirteanna* also proudly asserted their position as the independent political voice of the Gaelic nation; according to Corkery's influential argument, eighteenth-century Munster poetry is the elegiac voice of a people dispossessed and oppressed by political colonisation. It is certainly true that the most common theme in the poetry laments the fall of the Gaelic nobility and rails at the injustice of the new order, but the *cúirteanna* were also home to a theatrical, baroque poem known as the *Barántas* (Warrant poem), whose raucous irony is described by Corkery as "intimately freakish".[22] The *Barántas* conventionally begins with the English word 'Whereas' and continues with a judicious sprinkling of English legal jargon, producing a new Gaelic genre, a pompous dull discourse that is formed under the heavy influence of English legal procedure in a suitably simplistic jingle of metre and rhyme. The *Barántas* is at once both an hilarious parody of the leaden, rational language of the English legal courts and also a wry commentary on the impotence of the Gaelic poet, and indeed his learned audience, to influence the course of justice. That the *Barántas* is an ironic contrast to the classical age of Gaelic culture when the Bard was the legislator of the Gaelic world, both *file* and *breithemh*, poet and judge, was well understood by the audiences of the *cúirteanna*.

The poetry of the *cúirteanna*, be it elegy or satire, was profoundly political in content but it is the attitude of the poets to their social and political position that has a certain resonance with Burke's stance as he articulated it to Hamilton and

at the conclusion of the Poll in Bristol. The Gaelic poets inherited a sense of themselves as arbiters and defenders of the public good, answerable not the masses but to their tradition. A *burdún* or epigram from an eighteenth century manuscript provides a succinct encapsulation of the Gaelic poets' attitude:

Uireasa oidis bheir dorchadas tlás is ceas
ar thuilleadh agus ormsa i bhfogas don táin nár cheart,
mar do ritheadar bodaigh i mbrogaibh na dáimhe isteach
is do bhaineadar solas na scoile de chách ar fad.

Loss of our learning brought darkness, weakness and woe
on me and mine, amid these unrighteous hordes.
Oafs have entered the places of the poets
and taken the light of the schools from everyone.[23]

Burke's declaration at Bristol that his "mature judgment" was, like a talent, a "trust from Providence", and that he chose to be answerable to a higher power than the opinion of the electorate, fits easily with the Gaelic tradition.

It was due to his advocacy on behalf of Irish trade and toleration for Catholics that Burke eventually fell foul of the Bristol constituents and it is in that controversy that he elaborates more fully on his understanding of his role as a political representative. In a letter to Samuel Span, of the Society of Merchant Adventurers, he argues that:

> Beggary and bankruptcy are not the circumstances which invite to an intercourse with [Ireland] or any other country; and I believe it will be found invariably true, that the superfluities of a rich nation furnish a better

> object of trade than the necessities of a poor one. It is in the interest of the commercial world that wealth should be found everywhere.

He says that if he had been capable of acting as an advocate on behalf of his constituents in opposition to "a plan so perfectly consonant to my known principles, and to the opinions I had publicly declared on a hundred occasions", he would "have lost the only thing which can make abilities as mine of any use to the world now or hereafter". Burke defines this commodity as: "the authority which is derived from an opinion, that a member speaks the language of truth and sincerity...that he is in Parliament to support his opinion of the public good, and does not form his opinion in order to get into Parliament, or to continue in it."[24]

According to Burke, the public perception that he is personally devoted to 'truth and sincerity in the public good' is his precious capital. Like all verbal performers Burke needs the public audience in order to realise his performance. Burke understands that his speaking position is authorised by public opinion that he is 'true and sincere' in his efforts on behalf of the 'public good'. It is this, rather unique, understanding of his performance as a man of letters and politics that makes Burke such a complex and interesting figure. In the words of Thomas Copeland: "He was an orator, a pamphleteer, a political philosopher, an aesthetician, a historian, and a journalist - if we go no further."[25] Burke was well acquainted with what he terms in the Reflections of the Revolution in France, the "politick well-wrought veil"; he was most adroit in all the careful machinations needed in moving people and institutions towards change; but it is in his affirmation of the combined roles and duties in being a man of letters and politics that the precedent of the gentlemen-poets of the Munster *cúirteanna* can be seen.

[1] Thomas W. Copeland, et al., eds. The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78) 263.
[2] See A.P.I. Samuels, The Early Life and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke (Cambridge: CUP, 1923) 223-295, for a record of the minutes of the Club.
[3] Correspondence vol. 1, 47.
[4] Samuels 223.
[5] Robert Bisset, The Life of Edmund Burke (London: George Cawthorn, 1798) 134-5.
[6] Written while serving in Lord Clare's regiment in Flanders, quoted by B. O'Cuív, "Irish Language and Literature: 1691-1845" 397. Aodh Buidhe Mac Cruitín collaborated on the English-Irish dictionary, published in Pairs in 1732, a copy of which was owned and annotated by Burke.
[7] Corkery 102.
[8] Cornelius G. Buttimer, "Gaelic Literature and Contemporary Life in Cork, 1700-1840," Cork History and Society Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer.eds. Dublin: Geography Publications, 1993).
[9] Ó Tuama agus Kinsella 172-173.
[10] Ó Tuama agus Kinsella xxv.
[11] Robert Bisset, The Life of Edmund Burke (London: George Cawthorn, 1798) 134-5.
[12] See B. Ó Conchúir, Scríobhaithe Chorcaí : 1700-1850 (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Tta., 1982).
[13] Pádraig Breathnach, "Oral and Written Transmission in the Eighteenth Century," Eighteenth-Century Ireland 2 (1987) 60.
[14] Brian Ó Cuív, "Irish Language and Literature: 1691-1845," T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan, eds. A New History of Ireland vol. 4, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 403.
[15] Breandán Ó Buachalla, "James our true king: the ideology of Irish royalism in the seventeenth century." D. George Boyce et. al., eds. Political Thought in Ireland since the Seventeenth Century (New York: Routledge, 1993) 8.
[16] B. Ó Cuív, "Rialacha do Chúirt Éigse igContae an Chláir," Éigse 11 (1965-66).
[17] One of the most famous *canntuire* in Cork was the cross-dressing Anna Príor, also called *Seón*. Burke's reputed tutor, Liam Inglis, used her services. R. Ó Foghluda, ed. Cois na Bríde No. 7.
[18] Sometimes the *cúirteanna* were held at a '*lios*,' the name given to an historic and revered meeting place in the local countryside. *Lios* signifies the place of a ring fort, fairy mound, and also the night time halo of light around the moon. (Niall Ó Dónaill, Foclóir Gaeilge-Bearla, (Baile ÁthaCliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1977)). The custom of gathering at a *lios* meant that *lios* in the eighteenth century also denoted a dispute, debate or strife, as well as a fort, palace and house. (Edward O'Reilly, Irish-English Dictionary, (Dublin: O'Neil, 1821)). Public gatherings of concerned citizens at the local *lios* seem to have been a long standing tradition. Spenser, whose castle at Kilcolman is a neighbourly few miles from Ballyduff, tells us that it was customary among the Irish, or rather, "all the scumme of the people", to make "great assemblies together upon a rath or a hill, there to parlie (as they say) about matters and wrongs between township and township, or one private person and another." (View of the State of Ireland).
[19] Correspondence vol. 7, 102-106.
[20] Ó Tuama agus Kinsella 23.
[21] Correspondence vol. 1, 190.
[22] Daniel Corkery, The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century, (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1996, first published 1924) 106. For a wonderful example of a Warrant poem see Ó Rathaille's *Ar Choileach a Goideadh ó Shagart Maith/On a Cock Stolen from a Good Priest*, Ó Tuama agus Kinsella 146-149.
[23] Ó Tuama agus Kinsella 194-195.
[24] Correspondence vol. 3, 436.
[25] Thomas W. Copeland, Our Eminent Friend, Edmund Burke, (New Haven, Yale UP, 1949) introduction.

"I must return to my Indian vomit" - Caoineadh's Cáinte - Lament and Recrimination

His speeches against Hastings display all
his unrivalled power of marshalling facts,
his gift - stimulated here
by romantic visions of the gorgeous East -
for conjuring up elaborate imagery,
and his Irish birthright
of sustained invective.

...The long labour, the long uncertainty, the strain of
keeping the affair from collapsing altogether,
were bound to tell on a man of the nervous temper
so clearly visible in Reynolds's portrait of him,
whose personal activity was his only claim on society.
...For Burke was never very secure,
either in his involved finances
or his very dubious family
or his position in the Whig party.[1]
W.L. Renwick, The Oxford History of English Literature, Vol. 9.

On 6 Feb., 1778, Burke made a motion
against employment of Native Americans
by British in war with America,
supporting it with a speech of three and a half hours
which excited such applause that the ministers,
who as usual on these occasions
had cleared the house of strangers,
were congratulated on their prudence,
for it was said that had the public heard Burke's speech
their lives would have been in danger.
William Hunt, entry on Burke, Dictionary of National Biography

'Remember Nuncomar!'
The Lament for the victim of political assassination[2]

Burke's father, Richard Burke, was barrister to the Jacobite James Cotter when he was tried on charges of molesting his mistress, Elizabeth Squibb. The trials were engineered by the ruling Cork Protestants and Cotter's subsequent hanging in 1720 led to mass demonstrations across Munster and Leinster by a horrified populace. The response of the poets was also decisive. Froude describes how the walls of Cork city were pasted with placards of prose and verse, cries of lamentation and outrage.[3] There is a legacy of laments composed by principal Munster poets of the day: Seán Clárach Mac Dónaill, Liam Rua Mac Coitir, Éamonn de Bhál, Piaras Mac Gearailt, Uilliam Mac Cairteáin. The Cotter hanging was the first in a vindictive series of politically orchestrated assassinations of Catholic gentry in Cork throughout the eighteenth century, and the conventions of the Cotter lament were to be repeated in the laments for Morty Óg O'Sullivan (killed in 1754),[4] Fr Nicholas Sheehy, (hanged in 1765) and Arthur O'Leary (killed in 1773). One of the best known Gaelic poems, *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* (The lament for Art O'Leary) attributed to his widow, Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, bears some striking resemblances with the keen composed for Sir James Cotter by his nurse more than seventy years before. The Munster genre of the lament for the victim of political assassination became a national and nationalist genre after 1798 and remains a constant presence in Irish literature. From the evidence of his library, Burke was particularly interested himself in trials of Jacobites: besides owning two editions of the Tryal of Dr Sacheverell, he also had a 1725 copy of the Tryal of the Earl of Macclesfield, who was tagged by Swift as a Jacobite, and who was impeached on charges of abusing his magisteracy of the court of chancery. The most poignant example of Burke's interest in Jacobite trials is his copy of volume three of State Trials; published in1742, the volume

gives a verbatim account of the trials brought after the accesssion of Charles II to the throne. The brief Restoration of the Stuart dynasty inspired a reactionary fervour among the Parliamentrians who tried prominent Catholics for sedition. Burke's volume of State Trials tells how the Protestant Lord Castelreagh was freed from charges of sedition but the Catholic primate of Armagh, Oliver Plunkett was hanged, drawn and quartered.[5]

Ten years after the Cotter assassination, when Burke was an infant, the Catholics of the Blackwater valley were again the target of national attention. The ruling Cork Protestants were disturbed by the mandate given in 1730 to Colonel Richard Hennessy to recruit for the Irish Brigade in France and so they instigated systematic harassment of the Nagles who were accused of leading the North Cork Catholics in Jacobite conspiracies. The intimidation by the Cork Protestants put enough pressure on the Lord Lieutenant to issue a proclamation enforcing the Penal Laws.[6] In the 1760s the Protestants of Cork and South Tipperary seized on the disturbances caused by the Whiteboys, reading their clandestine protests against landlords, who were changing established farming patterns, as symptoms of a wider Jacobite plot. By May 1762, two hundred and thirty-seven 'suspects', including one of the Garret Nagles, were in jail. This total of arrests is more numerous than any arrests in any Irish county (except possibly Carlow) during the rebellion months of 1798.[7] Burke at this time was working as a private secretary to Hamilton who was the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant Halifax. L.M. Cullen credits Burke in being instrumental in taking the response to the Munster Whiteboy scare out of the hands of the local Protestants and instigating a special commission of John Aston and Anthony Malone (who, like Burke, was the son of a convert) to investigate the matter. Aston's much quoted report, which is preserved in Burke's papers, decided that the Whiteboy

activities were local agrarian disturbances and were not aimed at the subversion of national government.

Over the course of 1765 and 1766, forty propertied Catholics were again arrested on charges of being Whiteboys. Fr Nicholas Sheehy, a distant kinsmen of Burke's, was acquitted in Dublin of charges of inciting rebellion but was hanged, drawn and quartered after a second trial in Clonmel found him guilty of instigating murder.[8] Shortly afterwards, three other minor Gaelic gentry figures, Edmund Sheehy (a cousin of Fr Nicholas), James Farrell and James Buxton, were also executed. Burke's papers contain a printed letter of Edmund Sheehy dated the day before his execution, manuscript copies of two petitions by Sheehy, the last speeches of all three gentlemen protesting their innocence, and a letter written by Buxton from Kilkenny Gaol, declaring that he had been promised a pardon if he would give evidence against certain Catholic gentlemen including Burke's relative James Nagle.[9] During these tense months, Garret Nagle of Ballylegan, James Nagle of Garnavilla in Tipperary, and Robert Nagle of Clogher, all conformed to the Church of Ireland in the hope of protecting themselves from persecution. In the spring of 1766 Burke was worried for the welfare of his Nagle relatives at Ballyduff. In a letter to his uncle Patrick he encouraged them to recognise their common cause with the plight of other members of their class:

> I am really solicitous for the welfare of all the people about the Blackwater, and most grateful for their friendship, in this I speak to all our friends, for I consider you all as one, and hope (as I am sure you do, if you are wise that you consider yourselves in the same way.)[10]

When some of Burke's Nagle relatives were themselves arrested, Burke left Rockingham, even though his patron's government was facing a crisis, and

returned to Ireland from August until October. He discreetly lobbied politicians and organised a brilliant defence team of Sir Lucius O'Brien, John Fitzgibbon, John Scott and Barry Yelverton who secured the release of the Nagles and other Catholic gentlemen. A few years later, Corkman James Barry painted Burke in the character of Ulysses, with the Cyclops in the background, blindly unaware of the escape of Ulysses' crew from his cave. The painting shows Burke with a *claíomh cinn airgid* (a silver headed sword), also mentioned as being worn by Cotter and O'Leary in the lament poems. Burke's sword is engraved with a faint fluer-de-lis trefoil, and he is depicted with his finger to his lips gesturing to a sweating Barry to move silently. The painting might be read as an apt summary of the role that Burke played in the troubled Cork region in the 1760s.

Burke was always discreet, if not actually surreptitious, in his actions on behalf of the Gaelic Catholics; the cause to which Burke gave most voice was the plight of India under the corrupt rule of the East India Tea Company, which acted as the surrogate government for the British crown. Burke devoted fourteen years to his defence of India's people and traditions. He led the committees which made meticulous reports on the East India Company and he sensationally persuaded the House of Commons to impeach Warren Hastings, Governor General of India, the man who had won India for the British. Philip Francis, who had fallen foul of Warren Hastings while in India, was of importance to Burke in the impeachment. Many scholars have been puzzled by the unlikely collaboration of the vindictive Francis and the idealistic Burke, but they shared the common background of a Dublin boyhood. Burke was a young student in Trinity, while Francis was at the school of Mr. Roe in Dublin, until he was twelve, when he went to join his father, Revd. Francis, tutor to Charles Fox, in England. Burke directed his literary executors that he wanted to be remembered by his Indian speeches, and he

himself began the task of preparing the speeches for publication, but it is no accident that Burke's Indian speeches were in fact the last body of his work to be laid before the public, printed decades after the first published speeches. Burke's argument that the British rule in India was corrupt did not find a receptive audience and his style of address was considered too impassioned and violent. There is nothing in the canon of English literature to prepare us for Burke's vengeful Indian laments; however, the strains of the Munster Gaelic genre of political lament and rebuke, *caoineadh 's cainte* can be heard most clearly.

Fanny Burney was friendly with Burke but she was also a Lady-in-waiting to the Queen and was firmly in Hastings' camp; in her diary she describes Hastings as "an injured and innocent man". Like all of Burke's critics, her vivid account of the second day of Burke's opening speech faults his language. She admits that "the wild and sudden flights of his fancy, bursting forth with creative imagination in language fluent, forceful and varied, had a charm for my ear". Burney declares that "at times, I confess, with all that I felt, wished, and thought concerning Mr. Hastings, the whirlwind of his eloquence nearly drew me into its vortex." Burke's language, however, failed to completely enthrall her: "though frequently he made me tremble by his strong and horrible representations, his own violence recovered me, by stigmatising his assertions with a personal ill-will and designing illiberality."[11] Burke's "designing illiberality" fits with the Gaelic tradition of personal lament for the body politic. Joep Leersen describes this identification of the public with a private voice as a "mixture of grand historical scale and intimacy of the ollamh's own learning".[12]

The conventions of Burke's Indian speeches were too strange for an English audience. The Encyclopaedia Britannica records that the impeachment,

"generally regarded as an injustice to Hastings", is "the most conspicuous illustration of the failings to which Burke was liable throughout his public life. His political positions were sometimes marred by gross distortions and errors of judgement." It is Burke's language that is specifically described as being 'distorted': "His Indian speeches fall at times into a violence of emotion and abuse, lacking restraint and proportion." Immediately following this statement is a description of Burke's lifetime companion, William, and his brother Richard as "doubtful characters" and the claim that "it is understandable that he appeared in some hostile eyes as hardly more than one of a clan of Irish adventurers." Burke is generally remembered as an outstanding British orator but whenever criticism is levelled at his eloquence, it is his Irishness that seems to be held accountable for his failures. Sir Philip Magnus explains that Burke did not always find a ready audience at Parliament: "Burke spoke always with a pronounced brogue, which helped to emphasise his strangeness, and his gestures when he was on his feet were ungainly."[13] Magnus is sensitive to the fact that Burke's Irish voice merely emphasised the "strangeness" of his speeches which are informed by a tradition other than the English. The meticulous entry by William Hunt on Burke in the Dictionary of National Biography also recounts that Burke's Irishness was a hindrance to his reception in the House of Commons: "Although he spoke with an Irish accent, with awkward action, and in a harsh tone, his 'imperial fancy' and commanding eloquence excited universal admiration. No Parliamentary orator has ever moved his audience as he now and again did." The telling phrase "now and again" points to those times when Burke was unable to bridge the divide between the stresses of his Irish accent and the conventions expected by an English audience.

One of Burke's more (in)famous speeches on India was the "Sixth Charge" in the impeachment of "Bribery and Corruption". The speech was dedicated to the memory of Nuncomar who had attempted to bring Hastings before the Board of Governors of the East India Tea Company and who had subsequently been arraigned by Hastings on charges of corruption, found guilty by Sir Elijah Impey, and hanged. Burke's description of Nuncomar bears many striking resemblances to the laments for the Cork Gaelic elite who were the perceived victims of political assassination. Burke describes Nuncomar as "a person illustrious for his birth, sacred with regard to his caste, opulent in fortune, eminent in situation." The catalogue of attributes that Burke ascribes to Nuncomar reads like the traditional Gaelic description of the glories of the slain leader, be he Cotter, Morty Óg, Fr Sheehy or Art O'Leary: "a man of most acknowledged talents and of such a superiority as made the whole people of Bengal appear to be an inferior race of beings compared to him: a man whose outward appearance and demeanour used to cause reverence and awe." The Indian caste system appealed to Burke and he paid full honours to the Brahmin, Rajah Nuncomar. He reminds the House of Lords that Nuncomar "was a man who (it is not degrading to your lordships to say) was equal in rank, according to the idea of his country, to any peer in this House, as sacred as a bishop, of as much gravity and authority as a judge, and who was prime minister in the country in which he lived."

Burke's expression of rage at the judicial murder of Nuncomar bears a strong affinity with the Munster poems which lament Cotter and the others. It is the assertion that Cotter and the other Gaelic Munster gentry were murdered by betrayal, corruption and treachery that distinguishes these poems as a separate sub-genre of the traditional elegies.[14] The echo of the poet who denounced the plot "*dar crochadh flaith na gCoitireach le díoltas námhad*," (by which the prince

of the Cotters was hanged by the revenge of the enemy) is heard in Burke's fury at the role of Hastings in the management of the show trial and execution of Nuncomar and in his efforts to bring the judge, Sir Elijah Impey to justice. Another of the Cotter poems describes "*coiste na nGall nár mheabhraigh féile/ach breabaireacht fhallsa, feall is éitheach...*"('a jury of English who did not contemplate generosity, but false bribery, treachery and perjury'). In supervising the publication of his speech Burke italicised what became his most famous indictment of Hastings: *for he has murdered this man by the hands of Sir Elijah Impey*". Uproar ensued at this charge of Burke's and he was duly censured by the House of Commons; however, the House also voted to continue with the impeachment and Burke hailed this as an endorsement of his actions. Later he was to say "the most brilliant day of my life, and that which I most wish to live over again, was the day I appeared at the bar of the House of Lords with the censure of the Commons in my hand." On this day Burke took the opportunity to defend his use of the word "murdered". He allowed that, legally and technically, Hastings could not be charged with murder but that after nine years' meditation on the "atrocious and evil" nature and consequence of that crime, he was of the opinion that, in "a moral and popular sense", Hastings had murdered Nuncomar.

This "moral and popular sense" that Nuncomar was murdered by the judiciary is felt most keenly and personally by Burke. The injustice of the execution of Cotter, Morty Óg, and the Sheehys was remembered in the numerous laments and one of the chief functions in the recitation of these laments was that they served as protests which kept alive the anger at such persecution and oppression. Burke's anxiety that his Indian speeches be published stems from his perception both that the "terrible example" of the atrocities committed in India

and the efforts to have them brought to light must be remembered: "Therefore *I* say, *Remember.*"[15]

"I must return to my Indian vomit" - [16]
Caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal

The laments for the victims of political assassination can be read as a subset of a larger group of Munster poems, the *Caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal* /Lament for fallen nobility. A hallmark of the poetry composed in eighteenth century Munster is the poets' concern with the affairs of the Gaelic (erstwhile) nobility. According to L.M. Cullen, eighteenth-century Munster Gaelic poetry differs from the other three provinces in that its material is exclusively the aspirations and nostalgia of a landed or upper class in reduced circumstances:

> essentially aristocratic in outlook....Munster poetry [of the eighteenth century]...reflects the outlook of a far from insubstantial though still restricted class. The sense of oppression that it has suggested to many should be attributed rightly to identification by this group with the landed class uprooted in the social and political upheavals of the seventeenth century.[17]

The *caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal* was the most popular genre among the Munster poets.[18]

In the classical age of Gaelic poetry a lament or *Marbhna* was a stock poem composed by the family Bard on the burial of a noble. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many elegies were composed for aristocrats who were still alive but had been dispossessed of their inheritance. Instead of the carefully preserved genealogies of the deceased which the classical Bard recited in his modulated syllabic *Marbhna* , the eighteenth century poet marshalled a pageant of great heroes of Irish history as a supportive tribe for the dispossessed. The

lament for an individual person was superseded by a lament for a political order. The public loss of the Gaelic aristocratic order and culture was expressed as the personal grief of the poet. Breandán Ó Buachalla writes that this "emergence of a communal 'voice' in Irish political poetry is, perhaps, the most significant change in its narrative modes in the early modern period."[19]

The Munster poets' lament poetry for the fallen nobility shaped local memories of people, events and other stories in a stock formula. The poet sought to evoke a communal response among the audience to what was presented as his own subjective emotional experience of grief but he required both the consent and shared knowledge of the intended audience in order to succeed. The narrating voice which structures these Munster laments is less an individual personality than a representative social being. The sincerity of the voice of the poet has the ambiguous charge of an actor who manifests his experience as representative of others. The *caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal* speak both directly about specific chieftains and symbolically about the plight of the nation's leaders. The 'high style' of the genre, compared to the quotidian *caoineadh* of keening women, stresses the wider significance of these laments which refer to a communal experience and understanding of the past. The *caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal* is a means of making an accommodation with history; it is concerned not only with historical but also with the moral significance of the events and circumstances recounted in the verses. The demise and exile of specific noble families is interpreted as a challenge to the spirit of the Gaels and their culture. The poets bring to bear the whole weight of the tradition of Gaelic oral poetics in creating an indomitable linguistic resistance to this challenge.

Burke's intense effort and emotion in his speeches on India seem quite extraordinary: why does he care so much about a dark people, so foreign and so far away? Conor Cruise O'Brien makes a most persuasive reading of Burke's speeches on India as a palimpsest for Burke's deep preoccupation with Ireland. Burke's effort and emotion can also be given a context when placed in the tradition of the *caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal.* Burke adopts a persona similar to that of the Gaelic poets whereby he presents a personal, emotional reaction to events in India as being an appropriate representation of the colonial atrocities committed there. Like the Gaelic poets he also highlights the plight of particular nobles such as Almas Ali Khan, the Begums of Oudh, Mohammed Reza Khan, Maharaja Nuncomar, and the Rajah of Benares, Chait Singh, who become the icons of the devastation of the nation, in this case, India, under British rule. The *caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal* is a poetics of both of grief and resistance and Burke, while mourning the destruction of India, also praises the glories of its civilisation.

Making a comparison between the famous lament poems of Aodhagán Ó Rathaille and Burke's Indian speeches displays more precisely how the strategies and metaphors of the Munster Gaelic elegy echoes in Burke's voice. Daniel Corkery describes Ó Rathaille's elegies as "the swan-song of the patrician Ireland of his youth."[20] Ó Rathaille was born in the Sliabh Luachra district of east Kerry, near the border with Cork, between 1670 and 1680. He was the foremost Munster poet of his generation and performances of his work flourish still among Gaelic speakers. Ó Rathaille travelled widely in Kerry, Cork and Limerick, visiting those, such as the Nagles, who were still in a position to provide the lavish hospitality of the old Gaelic order. He had a good formal schooling; his first name Aodhagán/Aogán or Egan suggests that his family were related to the Egans who

were the traditional *ollamhs* or bards to the McCarthymore family. Burke could have had no memories of hearing Ó Rathaille, who died shortly after Burke was born, but the poetry and music sessions performed at Ballyduff would certainly have included compositions by the acknowledged master.

A frequent theme in Ó Rathaille's poetry is the lament for those dispossessed because of their loyalty to the Stuart cause, particularly the MacCarthys and Brownes. Ó Rathaille's birthplace, Sliabh Luachra, had been Mac Carthaigh territory but in the preceding century the Brownes had come in and Ó Rathaille's family were tenants of the Brownes. Sir Nicholas Browne had supported James II and so lost his lands in the confiscations of 1693, leaving Ó Rathaille without a patron, a severe blow to this poet whom Corkery describes as "frankly aristocratic."[21] In one of Ó Rathaille's finest poems, the stormy seas of Tonn Tóime are mirrored in the poet's mind and soul as he laments the MacCarthys who are no longer in a position to help him:

Dá maireadh an rí díonmhar ó bhruach na Leamhan
's an ghasra do bhí ag roinn leis lér thrua mo chall
i gceannas na gcríoch gcaoin gcluthar gcuanach gcam,
go dealbh i dtír dhaoineach[22] *níor bhuan mo chlann.*

If that guardian King from the bank of the Leamhan lived on,
with all who shared his fate (and would pity my plight)
to rule that soft, snug region, bayed and harboured,
my people would not stay poor in a populous country.

Do shearg mo chroí im chlíteach, do bhuair mo leann,

na seabhaic nár fríth cinnte, agár dhual an eang
ó Chaiseal go Toinn Chlíona 's go Tuamhain thall,
a mbailte 's a dtír díthchreachta ag sluaghaibh Gall.

My heart has dried in my ribs, my humours soured, that
those never-niggardly lords, whose holdings ranged
from Caiseal to Clíona's Wave and out to Thomond,
are savaged by alien hordes in land and townland.

One of the most anthologised sections of Burke's work comes from his speech on Fox's East India Bill where the "young men (boys almost)" are described as the 'alien horde' that leaves England to infest India. They govern India "without society and without sympathy with the natives". He describes them as:

> animated with all the avarice of age, and all the impetuosity of youth, they roll in one after another; wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting.[23]

There is an uncanny echo between the rolling waves of English youth who launch themselves on India as birds of prey and passage, and the stormy waves of Tonn Tóime which haunt Ó Rathaille's poem and seem to possess his mind:

A thonnsa thíos is airde géim go hard,
meabhair mo chinnse clóite ód bhéiceach tá;
cabhair dá dtíodh arís ar Éirinn bhán,
do ghlam nach binn do dhingfinn féin id bhráid.

You wave down there, lifting your loudest roar,

the wits in my head are worsted by your wails.
If help ever came to Ireland again
I'ld wedge your ugly howling down your throat!

Burke ends his description of the conquering English youth in India with an image reminiscent of Ó Rathaille: "and the cries of India are given to seas and winds, to be blown about, in every breaking up of the monsoon, over a remote and unhearing ocean."

In the same manner as Ó Rathaille's Gaelic laments, Burke's laments for the destruction of Indian society were also a vehicle for praising the glories of that culture. Ó Rathaille's long elegy on Dónall Ó Ceallacháin, who died in 1709 contains a vibrant description of the lavish Gaelic 'Big House' which survived into the eighteenth century:

poirt ar chruitibh dá seinm go celomhar,
startha dá léamh ag lucht léinn is eolais,
mar a mbíodh trácht gan cháim ar ordaibh
is ar gach sloinne dár gineadh san Eoraip;

harp-tunes playing melodiously
histories read by the learned and wise,
with flawless accounts of every Order
and family name that arose in Europe;[24]

Burke was an ardent student of India, reading all he could about it and interviewing men who had returned from there. He gives many depictions of the

riches of Indian cultural achievement which serve to reinforce the horror at the destruction caused by the British system of plunder, extortion and corruption. It was quite contrary to the usual practice of the European eighteenth century to praise the social organisation, cultural achievements, economic viability and civility of traditional societies but this is precisely what Burke does time and again in his Indian speeches. In Burke's speech on Fox's East India Bill which he vainly hoped would be 'the *magna charta* of Hindostan," we hear about India as a country whose people had been "cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods". In India there have been "(and the skeletons still remain) princes once of great dignity, authority and opulence"; there still survive "an antient and venerable priesthood, the depository of their laws, learning and history" and "a nobility of great antiquity". India's merchants and bankers "have once vied in capital with the bank of England". Burke describes India as a country which could still boast "millions of ingenious manufacturers and mechanicks" but had been so rudely handled of late that one of its great potentates, the Grand Mogul, "the descendent of Tamerlane, now stands in need of the common necessaries of life".

Burke was committed to expose the corrupt system promulgated by the East India Company and a constant feature of his Indian speeches was the revelation of the hypocritical charades of the East India Company in their pretended application of the due process of law and commerce: "In that ambiguous government everything favours fraud, everything favours peculation, everything favours violence, everything favours concealment...the great Indian opera, - an opera of fraud, deceptions, and harlequin tricks."[25] Burke shows how the Nawab of Oudh was no independent prince but a vassal of Warren Hastings. In another instance Burke reveals how the Nabob of Arcot was a puppet governor, a pawn

in the tiered-system of 'tax-farming' and extortion, presided over by the East India Company. Burke details how the pretended 'debts' of the Nabob of Arcot to his 'creditors', Paul Benfield and his associates in the East India Tea Company, was a collusive partnership, used as a pretext to extort treasure from "the miserable plaintiffs of a ruined country." Burke declares that "the Nabob of Arcot is always ready, nay, he earnestly, and with eagerness and passion, contends for delivering up to these pretended creditors his territory and his subjects." Ó Rathaille also castigates the colonial system of the middle-men, the tithe proctors, and tax collectors of hearth-money which strips the land and its people of their resources.

Behind the legalistic facade of forfeiture and resettlement of lands, and the directives of commerce and trade, Ó Rathaille had seen the destruction of a once vibrant culture:

Gríofa is Heidges, - gan cheilg im scéalaibh,
I leabaidh an Iarla, is pian 's is céasta!

Griffin and Hedges, - without deceit is my tale -
In the Earl's bed, it is pain and torture!

A Dhia tá ar neimh do chluin na scéalta,
A Rí na bhfeart, is a Athair naomhtha,
Créad fá'r fhuilngis a ionad ag béaraibh,
A chíos aca, is é sinnil in' éagmuis!

Why have you suffered his place to be held by bears,

O King of miracles, and Holy Father,

O, God who art in heaven, who hears the news,

That they have his rent and he is straitened for want of it! [26]

A central point in Hastings' defence was that the same moral standards do not apply to India as to Europe. At the opening of the prosecution against Hastings, Burke declares that "I am afraid, that, from the habits acquired by moving within a circumscribed sphere, we may be induced rather to endeavour at forcing Nature into that municipal circle than to enlarge the circle of national justice to the necessities of the empire we have obtained." Burke denounces the "geographical morality, by which the duties of men, in public and private situations, are not to be governed by their relation to the great Governor of the Universe, or by their relation to mankind, but by climates, degrees of longitude, parallels, not of life, but of latitudes."[27] Burke argues that morality ought not be a relative geographical concept but he also successfully argues that English law in India must give prior respect to the customs and traditions of India. Speaking on the Bengal Judicature Bill, designed to restrict the use of English law in Bengal, Burke says that English judges had encroached "on the most sacred privileges of the people", violating their dearest rights, showing contempt for their religious ceremonies and mysteries, inflicting cruel punishments, which in the eyes of the Indians were "new, strange and obnoxious". Burke announces that "...we must now be guided as we ought to have been with respect to America, by studying the genius, the temper, and the manners of the people, and adapting to them the laws that we establish." It was a remarkable achievement that as a private member in opposition Burke was able to persuade Parliament to pass the bill.

It was, perhaps, Burke's experience of living among the Gaelic underground gentry of North Cork that first convinced him that ancient cultures and traditions deserve respect. Ó Rathaille frequently demonstrates this point in his laments:

Tír gan eaglais chneasta ná cléirigh!
Tír le mioscais, noch d'itheadar faolchoin!
Tír do cuireadh go tubaisteach, traochta
Fá smacht namhad is amhas is méirleach!

A land without a meek church or clergy!
A land which wolves have spitefully devoured!
A land placed in misfortune and subjection
Beneath the tyranny of enemies and mercenaries and robbers!

It is in their imaginative evocation of the organic destruction of Ireland/India that Ó Rathaille and Burke are now both best remembered. They depicted lands so devastated that they are beyond the redemption of natural renewal, in the words of Ó Rathaille:

A mianach ríoghdha, a coill 'sa haolbhach,
Do dóigheadh do briseadh a connadh 's a caolbhach

Her princely mines, her woods, her lime quarries,
Burnt and broken, her trees young and old;

Tír do doirteadh fá chosaibh na méirleach!
Tír na ngaibhne - is treighid go héag liom!

A land poured out under the feet of robbers!

A land of fetters - it is sickness to me unto death!

Tír gan tartha gan tairbhe i nÉirinn!

Tír gan turadh gan buinne gan buinne gan réiltean!

Tír do nochtadh gan fothain gan géaga!

Tír do brisheadh le fuirinn an Bhéarla!

A land stripped naked, without shelter or boughs!

A land without dry weather, without a stream, without a star!

In Ireland a land without produce or anything of worth!

A land broken down by the English-prating band![28]

Conor Cruise O'Brien points out that, in pleading for repeal of the Irish Penal Laws during his speech at the Guildhall in Bristol, (a politically suicidal speech), Burke introduces an image that he is to use consistently throughout his Indian speeches; that is the image of the diseased body politic, corrupted by English misrule and spreading contagion as it rots. Referring to the Penal Laws against Gaelic Catholic Ireland, Burke vows to God that he would sooner put a man to instant death for his opinions rather than "fret him with a feverish being, tainted with the jail-distemper of a contagious servitude, to keep him above ground an animated mass of putrefaction, corrupted himself, and corrupting all about him."[29] A few months later, when Burke is arguing against maintaining secrecy in investigating Indian affairs, he again introduces images of physical corruption bursting into eruptions from diseased blood.[30] In his speech on Almas Ali Khan, Burke declares that "By authorising the massacres which have been so foully

perpetrated and repeated in India, Britain was now become a land of blood." One of Ó Rathaille's poems is such a graphic account of a bleeding Ireland that it is known by the title: The Wounds of the Land of Fodla. In his 'death-bed' poem, '*Cabhair ní ghairfead'*/ 'No help I'll call', composed around 1728, blood pours over Ireland:

com Loch Deirg 'na ruide 'gus Toinn Tóime
ó lom an Cuireata cluiche ar an Rí coróinneach.

Reddened are Loch Dearg's narrows and the Wave of Tóim
since the Knave has skinned the crowned King in the game.[31]

In the speech on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts, Burke declares: "That debt forms the foul putrid mucus, in which are engendered the whole brood of creeping ascarides, all the endless involutions, the eternal knot, added to a knot of those inexpugnable tape-worms which devour the nutriment, and eat up the bowels of India." Ó Rathaille's poetry also depicts similar, startling images of political/physical decay. In '*Cabhair ní ghairfead*' , the land, the Gaelic nobility, Gaelic culture and the poet himself are all parched and putrefying. The entire interdependent social/natural order is perverted:

ár gcodhnach uile, glac-chumasach shíl Eoghain,
is tollta a chuisle, 'gus d'imigh a bhrí ar feochadh.

Our prime strong-handed prop, of the seed of Eoghan
-his sinews are pierced and his vigour is withered up.

The "emptied and embowled" India, as encapsulated by Burke, is prefigured in Ó Rathaille's verse:

Do thonnchrith m'inchinn, d'imigh mo phríomhdhóchas,
poll im ionathar, biora nimhe trím dhrólainn,
ár bhfonn, ár bhfothain, ár monga 's ár mínchóngair
i ngeall le pinginn ag foirinn ó chrích Dhóbhair.

Wave-shaken is my brain, my chief hope gone.
There's a hole in my gut, foul spikes through my bowels.
Our land, our shelter, our woods and our level ways
are pawned for a penny by a crew from the land of Dover.

Goll na Rinne, na Cille 'gus chríche Eoghanacht
do lom a ghoile le huireaspa ar díth córach;
an seabhac agá bhfuilid sin uile 's a gcíosóireacht

That lord of the Rinn and Cill, and the Eoghanacht country
-want and injustice have wasted away his strength.
A hawk now holds those places, and takes their rent [32]

Burke prophesies that God will seek redress for the wretched oppression of India and in his lament for Almas Ali Khan he called on the House to recognise "certain indications of a malediction which the dreadful wretchedness we had entailed on a people much better than we, had brought at last on our own heads."[33] There is no precedent in the English literary canon for such a curious notion that the Indians are "a people much better" than the English.[34] Gaelic poetry, however, is both full of scorn for the uncouth and uncultured English and also promises

divine restoration and renewal from overseas. From as early as the first decades as the seventeenth century, Gaelic poetry prophesied, promised or prayed that the sins that the English committed throughout Ireland would inevitably lead to their destruction by an avenging God and this theme is expressed frequently by Ó Rathaille and his contemporaries.[35] Voicing such opinions as Burke did in his speeches on India in 1783 and 1784 inspired a lot of laughter and derision in the House. His persistence in arguing the case of India was a politically ludicrous act. It was Fox's East India Bill (largely written by Burke) which had brought down the Fox-North coalition. Pitt also had made the Bill the focus of his successful election campaign. Neither Fox's much depleted party nor Pitt's government had any sympathy with Burke's Indian cause. Burke's passion, his notions and his language were considered strange, outlandish and laughable.

In his speech on Fox's East India Bill, Burke was mocked and jeered, particularly during his recital of the trials of the Begums of Oudh. The Begums were the mother, Sujah Dowlah, and grandmother of the Nabob of Oudh, who maintained a precarious rule with the very costly support of Hastings. The Begums were tortured in efforts to discover the location of the family jewels. As Burke tells it:

> The instrument chosen by Mr. Hastings to despoil the relict of Sujah Dowlah was her own son, the reigning Nabob of Oudh. It was the pious hand of a son that was selected to tear from his mother and grandmother the provision of their age, the maintenance of his brethren, and of all the ancient household of his father.

While the narrative of this plot occasioned loud laughter at the English Parliament, it was a story very familiar to Gaelic speakers and excited a much different reaction. Many *Aisling* or vision poems depict Ireland as an young/old woman who needs her lover/sons to rescue her from the defilement of boors and

restore her to her rightful position of power and reverence due. Burke's use of this Gaelic trope of feminising the political plight of the country is prefigured in many of Ó Rathaille's laments:

Tír bhocht bhuaidheartha, is uaigneach céasta!
Tír gan fear, gan mac, gan chéile!
Tír gan lúth, gan fonn, gan éisteacht!
Tír gan comhthrom do bhochtaibh le déanamh!

A land poor, afflicted, lonely, and tortured! A land without a man, without a son, without a spouse!
A land without vigour, or spirit, or hearing!
A land in which is no justice to be done to the poor![36]

In spite of his struggle to gain a receptive audience for his speeches on India, Burke persisted. The turning point came after his speech on the Nabob of Arcot's debts, which displays in detail how the East India Company orchestrated extortion. During the speech he derides Pitt's efforts to squeeze taxes out of Ireland while turning a blind eye to the extravagances of the East India Company. At the end of his speech Burke strikes a pose reminiscent of the Munster poets who, time after time, bemoan their vulnerability without the patronage of the Great Lords and renew their pledges to remain faithful to the ancient Gaelic order. Burke acknowledges and embraces his own isolated position to repeal the abuses in India: "Baffled, discountenanced, subdued, discredited, as the cause of humanity is, it will only be the dearer to me." He pledges that he will support anyone at anytime who will work towards "the relief of our distressed fellow-citizens in India, and towards a subversion of the present most corrupt and

oppressive system for its government."[37] Due to the lone force of that speech Burke began to find allies and by the following year not only the Whigs but also the opposition under Pitt were united in impeaching Hastings.

Even as he agreed to the impeachment, Pitt felt it necessary to address the issue of Burke's use of language in his Indian speeches. Pitt admitted that he was once of the opinion that "the language of those who chiefly promoted the present proceedings was too full of acerbity, and much too passionate and exaggerated". His defence of this language was also an argument for proceeding with the impeachment as he argued that, in considering the nature of the alleged crimes and the strong presumption that the allegations would be proved, he could not expect that those gentlemen "when reciting what they thought actions of treachery, actions of violence and oppression, and demanding an investigation into those actions, should speak a language different from that which would naturally arise from the contemplation of those actions."[38]

Burke himself had offered a defence of his strange Indian language as early as his Speech on Fox's East India Bill where he admitted that "we are so little acquainted with Indian details; the instruments of oppression under which the people suffer are so hard to be understood; and even the names of the sufferers are so uncouth and strange to our ears, that it is very difficult for our sympathy to fix upon these objects." He describes coming down the stairs from the committee room, having studied reports from India, his mind full of atrocities: "yet if we should venture to express ourselves in the proper language of our sentiments, to other gentlemen not at all prepared to enter into the cause of them, nothing could appear more harsh and dissonant, more violent and unaccountable, than our language and behaviour." He suggests that "All these circumstances are

not...very favourable to the idea of our attempting to govern India at all." Moving swiftly on he announces: "But there we are; there are we placed by the Sovereign Disposer: and we must do the best we can in our situation." He summarises this defence of his 'language and behaviour' by declaring that "The situation of man is the preceptor of his duty." This aphorism is at once a statement of his position and a plea for understanding from his audience. In order for his speeches to have an effect Burke needs to constitute a social relationship with his audience. He wants the members of the House of Commons to consider their historical position and in this light to reflect on their duties. In reminding the members of their historical moment he is attempting to steer Parliament towards considering its role in India and he wants his speeches to be regarded as just pleadings for those robbed and oppressed by British rule.

Ó Rathaille also sought a social relationship with his audience and his evocative identifications of the personal and political plight of Ireland continues to this day to compel Gaelic audiences to experience themselves as an historical group, a group made through the forces and vicissitudes of historical circumstances with a duty to both past and future generations to restore the Gaelic people to their rightful destiny of controlling their own fortunes. Burke in his Indian speeches positions himself as Ó Rathaille does in his laments, by consciously dramatising the experience of political oppression. They both perform the role of outraged viewer, directing the attention of the audience to how past glories remain still in memory and so are present still as models of how things might yet be. Ó Rathaille's laments become more despairing and bleak as he gets older and the restoration of the Gaelic order looks ever more remote, but his evocative identification with the plight of the Gaelic nobility still persuade audiences to recognise themselves as a class, inheritors of a social, political, cultural, historical

caste, with potential for social, political, cultural, historical action. Burke's Indian speeches had much less success than Ó Rathaille's laments in finding, creating and maintaining such a relationship with an audience.

Noble Lords & Upstart Gentry

Pathos and sarcasm alternate in the *Caoineadh ar chéim síos na nuasal*, and the poet often pours scorn on the rising middle classes, both Protestant and Catholic, who were supplanting the old nobility. Gaelic life in seventeenth and eighteenth century Ireland was rife with class bitterness on the part of those who felt their rightful place at the head of the social and political order was being usurped by the low-born. Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis (The Parliament of *Clan Thomas*) is a famous, vituperative, seventeenth-century prose satire on the uncouth and lowly-born Irish and English class who began to prosper and come into social prominence with the defeat and exile of the Gaelic nobility.[39] Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis had a seminal influence on countless Gaelic compositions and it was alive in the *béaloideas* or oral culture of Gaelic speakers well into this century.[40]

Scholars have queried the apparent discrepancy between Burke's speeches in praise of nobility and that famous Letter to a Noble Lord (which is a furious, glorious assault on the Duke of Bedford.)[41] Burke's open letter to Bedford was a response to Bedford's speech in the House of Lords opposing Burke being granted a pension. According to L.M. Cullen: "A more compelling illustration of Burke's Irishness, if proof of it is required, is the very irreverent tone of his delving into the origins of the Bedford wealth and status in his Letter to a Noble Lord."[42] There is a national predilection in Ireland for having a long memory of previous ancestral generations, details of which are often presented as evidence for the

foibles, errors or pretensions of the current descendants. A quiet nod to the shared genealogical knowledge of the community often accompanies the comments of the 'begrudger' who critiques all pretensions and claims to glory in Irish society. Mártín Ó Cadhain records that he heard the *cosmuintir* (ordinary folk of the *Gaeltacht,*) retell Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis as a funny story without any implication that it might once have had political connotations but the Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis is a deeply political work and its scathing critique of the upstart gentry provides a valuable perspective on Burke's attack on Bedford as Burke launched his assault on the aristocrat by denigrating his pretensions to nobility.[43]

The first part of Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis is set in the great Gaelic kingdom of Mac Cárthaigh Mór in Kerry and Cork as the transition from Gaelic to English law began to develop at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Gaelic lords were no longer allowed their right to retain their tenants and exact from them service under the custom of Gaelic law and tenants had the right to go to English law if they felt themselves wronged. The new English settlers were much less demanding masters than the Gaelic and Old English lords and following the decline in population after the Nine Years War, the demand for labour exceeded the supply and so the churls were able to advance themselves economically.[44] The author of part one of Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis was a member of a learned family whose wealth and status would have depended on patronage by the Gaelic nobility. He also probably owned land or had a generous leasehold and therefore he would have suffered deeply both in material and emotional terms at the decline of the Gaelic nobility and the rise of the upstart rustics.[45]

The second part of Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis seems to have been written by another poet,[46] about forty years later than the first part, sometime after the death of Cromwell. While the Cromwellian settlement meant that a large number of Gaelic lords were dispossessed of their estates, the rural labourer and small tenant experienced improved conditions. The author seems to be a member of the gentry who might have lost land under Cromwell to regain some under Charles II; like the author of part one he is proud of his origins and humiliated by his reduced state.

The satire introduces us to the semi-satanic breed of *Clan Thomas* who have been ordained to be slaves to the nobles of Ireland but who watch every opportunity to throw off their yoke. The Nine Years' War that O'Neill waged against the British Crown in Ireland has so reduced the population and the fortunes of the Gaelic nobles that *Clan Thomas* take the opportunity to model themselves as aristocracy, dyeing their clothes blue and red and acquiring land, getting their children to learn rhetoric and philosophy and studying for the priesthood. The satire focuses on the *Clan Thomas*' pretentious use of the coarsest English and their desire for notice by English nobles. We quickly loathe the *Clan Thomas* when we witness their disgusting behaviour at a scolding match, a meeting, and a feast. In the words of Dineen:

> We stand and look on as they devour their meals, we hear the noise made by the fluids they drink as they descend their throats, we listen to their low oaths and foolish swagger about their high lineage, and we turn away in disgust. Surely the upstart or the snob was never elsewhere delineated in such vivid colours.[47]

Burke's vivid depiction the first Earl of Bedford, "Mr. Russell", as the arch upstart of British and Irish history rivals that depiction of the *Clan Thomas.* Like Anthony's description of Caesar's assassins in Shakespeare's play, Burke uses the frequent reiteration of "noble" as an epithet to describe and hence highlight the blatantly ignoble actions of the Duke. Burke describes Mr. Russell as the "prompt and greedy instrument of a *levelling* tyrant", King Henry VII. He describes how the "immoderate grants" which transformed Mr Russell into the Earl of Bedford came first from the confiscated property of the "ancient nobility of the land" and secondly from the "plunder of the Church". The despotic Henry VII was a lion who "having sucked the blood of his prey, threw the offal carcass to the jackal in waiting." This jackal, Bedford, "having tasted once the food of confiscation...became fierce and ravenous....His grants were from the aggregate and consolidated funds of judgements iniquitously legal, and from possessions voluntarily surrendered by the lawful proprietors with the gibbet at their door."

There is a strong affinity between Cromwell in Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis and Burke's descriptions of Henry VII " who oppressed all descriptions of his people, but who fell with particular fury on everything that was *great and noble*". Bedford and the *Clan Thomas* are alike in the "arts in which [they] served [their] master and made [their] fortune, to bring poverty, wretchedness and depopulation." In lines 839-47 of Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis the *Clan Thomas* explain how they commit crimes with impunity, while the county juries and the justices of the peace blame the "*daoine uaisle díomhaoine, leathdhaoine uaisle is sgramuiridhe d'iarmhur folanna uaisle*" (the idle aristocracy, the minor gentry and the scroungers among the tail-ends of noble families).[48] This description of the true Gaelic (*fíor Gael*) nobility by the *Clan Thomas* is further evidence of the outrageous inversion of the rightful order and values.

Burke asserts the noble merit by which he earned his pension in his comparison between his actions and the perversions of the founder of the House of Bedford. Burke declares that he endeavoured "to screen every man, in every class, from oppression," particularly "the high and eminent, who in the bad times of confiscating princes, confiscating Chief Governors, or confiscating Demagogues, are most exposed." The current noble Lord Bedford derives his fortune from "a gentleman raised by the arts of a court, and the protection of a Wolsey, to the eminence of a great and potent Lord, instigating a tyrant to injustice, to provoke a people to rebellion."

Eachtra Taidhg Dhuibh I´ Chróinín (The Adventures of Dark Tadhg Cronin) was a prose work of Ó Rathaille, written around 1713 on the model of Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis.[49] The immediate object of the satire is Tadhg Ó Cróinín, who was a notorious hearth-money collector and middle-man in Counties Kerry and Cork in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century. His genealogy is traced in the opening passage back to *Seán an Chuasáin, Mac Dhubhthaidh, Mac Liobair Lobhtha, Mac Lóbuis Ladhraigh, Mac Sátain* putting him firmly in the *Clan Thomas.* The context for the satire, like parts one and two of Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis, is the immediate aftermath of a large political upheaval in Ireland, in this case the confiscations which occurred after the War Between the Two Kings, when a significant majority of the landed Gaelic nobility yet again lost their estates. Like part one of Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis, Ó Rathaille's Eachtra Taidhg Dhuibh, is set in the district of the former Kerry kingdom of the Mac Cárthaigh Mór and like the older satirists, Ó Rathaille is:

> an ardent admirer of the great Irish families that stretch back through our history into the twilight of legend; he is a believer in aristocracy; but his

fiercest invectives are poured out against those who in the stress of a national crisis purchase a vulgar upstart nobility at the cost of honour and virtue.[50]

Burke's Letter to A Noble Lord is also written in the stress of a national crisis. In tracing Bedford's genealogy back to the dubious Mr Russell, Burke provides both a precedent and a warning on the behaviour of the current noble Duke of Bedford, infatuated with the democratic ideals of France. Bedford's antecedent was instrumental in engineering a "dishonourable peace with France", by ceding Boulogne which led to the eventual loss of Calais. Russell was also the minion of a King who "effected a *complete Parliamentary Reform* making them in their slavery and humiliation, the true and adequate representatives of a debased and undone people."

In his correspondence at the end of his life, Burke frequently expresses his disgust at the colonial attitudes towards India ("Indianism") and "the so-called Protestant Ascendancy" in the same sentences. It was through his private correspondence in these years that Burke applied his defence of the integrity of traditional society, most fully expressed on behalf of India, in pleading for the cause of Irish Catholics. Kevin Whelan describes Burke's contribution to the debate on the Catholic question in late eighteenth-century Ireland as the "most intriguing contribution ....precisely because he presented the Jacobite argument that the authentic Irish gentry were indeed the Catholics."[51] Burke promoted the pre-eminence of family and local loyalties against abstract claims to insist that a political system in Ireland which did not value the cultural traditions of the Catholics was doomed to failure. Such a ruling class could not endure because it lacked the necessary roots that enable the survival of all political systems; that is the mutual respect of the people they ruled. The Ascendancy Protestants, "that

Junto of Jobbers", were plebeian upstarts whose pretensions to aristocratic power and privilege inspired the resentment and loathing of the oppressed Catholic majority. The Protestant Ascendancy were like the French Jacobins in that they perverted the customary relations of stable societies. In a letter to Hercules Langrishe, he wrote that: "I think I can hardly overrate the malignity of the principles of Protestant ascendancy, as they affect Ireland; or of Indianism, as they affect these countries, and as they affect Asia; or of Jacobinism as they affect all Europe, and the state of human society itself."[52] Burke argued that Catholics must be admitted to the body politic for the survival of a cohesive political system in Ireland, otherwise their grievances would allow them be seduced by the Jacobin United Irishmen. According to Burke's analysis, Ireland's political system was the reverse of that in England. English history, supported by custom and precedent, validated the ruling class and enabled them to make an appeal to the common people to remain faithful to traditional ties. Ireland's recent past was a tale of conquest and dispossession of the native aristocracy, and the upstart gentry had no bonds of affection with the common people who were, justifiably in Burke's view, potentially seditious subversives.[53]

Referring to Burke's speeches on India, W.L. Renwick in the Oxford History of English Literature points to Burke's "Irish birthright of sustained invective" to describe Burke's mixture of lament and recrimination, so evident in his Indian speeches and his letter to Bedford, and so curious in the context of English literature. It is in the landscape of the grief-struck beauty of Ó Rathaille's laments for the fallen nobility and the furious satires on the *Clan Thomas*, that these compositions of Burke find their home.

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[1] W.L. Renwick, The Rise of the Romantics, 1789-1815 The Oxford History of English Literature, vol. 9 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) 19

[2] Kevin Whelan, The Tree of Liberty (Cork: Cork UP, in association with Field Day, 1996) 186, n. 162. (Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha has worked on this cycle or genre of poems, though as yet there is no published edition.)

[3] Froude The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century Vol 1, (London: Longmans, 1872) 433.

[4] Froude's Two Chiefs of Dunboy ends with a translation of the lament for O'Sullivan who was pursued by an expedition from Cork city to the outermost reaches of the Beara peninsula.

[5] Burke also had a number of copies of the rare Trial of J. Donnellan, published in Kilkenny in 1781, Captain Donnellan was accused of fatally poisoning his brother-in-law, a young English Lord.

[6] L. M. Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics," Cork History and Society Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer eds. (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1993) 560-565.

[7] Cullen 568.

[8] Richard Burke, a cousin of Burke's, was married to a sister of the priest.

[9] Thomas W. Copeland, et al., eds. The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78) 249.

[10] Correspondence vol. 1, 289.

[11] Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay 1842-6, 7 vols., 16 February 1788, vol. 4, 95-96.

[12] Joep Leersen, Mere Irish and the Fíor Ghael (Cork: Cork UP in association with Field Day, 1996) 219.

[13] Sir Philip Magnus, Edmund Burke: A Prophet of the Eighteenth Century. (London: John Murray, 1939) 77.

[14] Ó Buachalla gives a long list of quotations from Cotter laments which illustrate this point, "A Cork Jacobite," Cork History and Society 483.

[15] Correspondence vol. 9, 238.

[16] Correspondence vol. 7, 147.

[17] L.M. Cullen, The Hidden Ireland: Reassessment of a Concept (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1988) 27. Cullen seeks to rewrite what he considers an a-historical conflation of peasant and 'middling-rank' by Daniel Corkery in his classic The Hidden Ireland. Corkery's Chapter Two, however, does discuss "The Big House" that is the Gaelic Big House which is seen to be vital to the sponsorship of Gaelic culture in the eighteenth-century. Corkery's thesis is that Gaelic culture in Munster was common to prince and pauper but its guardianship passed slowly over the century from the aristocrats to the poor. "It was a culture alien neither to poor Gael nor to rich Gael; but every passing year, of course, saw it become more and more peculiarly the appanage of the poor." (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, tenth impression, 1996) 66.

[18] P.S. Dinneen and Tadhg O'Donoghue (eds.) Dánta Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille (London: Irish Texts Society, 1911) lvi.

[19] Breandán Ó Buachalla, "Review of Michelle O'Riordan's *Poetry and Politics in Early Modern Ireland* " Eighteenth Century Ireland 7: 1992 173.

[20] Corkery, 163. Ó Rathaille wrote many laments the most famous being: The Wounds of the Land of Fodla, When the Bishop of Cork was sent over the Sea by the Heretics, Elegy on John Brown, On the Death of John O'Mahony, On the Death of O'Callaghan, Elegy on Diarmuid O'Leary of Killeen, On the Death of Gerald, Son of the Knight of Glin, On the Banishment of the Nobles, Elegy on MacCarthy of Palice, and To the Chieftain Eoghan, Son of Cormac Riabhach MacCarthy: titled Fr Dinnen, Dánta Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille (London: Irish Texts Society, 1900, 1903, 1911).

[21] Corkery 162.

[22] This poem is usually titled by editors as '*An tan d'aistrigh go Duibhneachaibh láimh le Tonn Tóime i gCiarraíghe*' (When he moved to Duibhneacha, beside Tonn Tóime in Kerry). I am following the change of Dhuibhneach (a place name) to Dhaoineach (populous) suggested by Breandán Ó Buachalla in his article "In A Hovel By the Sea," The Irish Review 14: 1993, 48-55. Ó Buachalla argues against reading O'Rathaille's poetry as strictly biographical personal lyrics. The rest of the text and translation is to be found in An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the

Dispossessed curtha i láthair ag Seán Ó Tuama with translations into English verse by Thomas Kinsella, (Baile Átha Cliath: Dolmen Press i gcomhar le Bord na Gaeilge, 1994,) 140-141.
[23] Speech On Fox's East India Bill, 1 December 1783.
[24] Ó Tuama and Kinsella, 144-145.
[25] Fourth Day of the Speech in Reply.
[26] Entitled by Dineen, The Ruin that Befell the Great Families of Erin, Dánta Aodhagáin Uí Rathaille, (London: Irish Texts Society, 1900) 6-11.
[27] Opening Speech at the Prosecution of Warren Hastings.
[28] Dineen, 1900, 6-11. Translation by Corkery, 160-161.
[29] Speech at the Guildhall in Bristol, September 1780.
[30] Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Great Melody (London: Minerva, 1993) 309-310.
[31] Ó Tuama and Kinsella 164-165.
[32] Ó Tuama and Kinsella 164-167.
[33] Speech on Almas Ali Khan 30 July 1784.
[34] If we are looking for followers of Burke's sentiments it might be salutary to remember that Margaret Thatcher's favourite poet has of course given us the memorable Gunga Din.
[35] See Breandán Ó Buachalla's discussion of the work of Philip O'Sullivan Beare in Aisling Ghéar and also "James Our True King," Political Thought in Ireland since the Seventeenth Century Ed. D. George Boyce et al. (London: Routledge, 1993).
[36] Corkery 160.
[37] Speech on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts, 28 February 1785.
[38] Parliamentary History, 9 May 1787.
[39] Osborn J. Bergin, ed. Gadelica 1 (1912-1913).
[40] N.J.A. Williams, ed. Páirlement Chloinne Tomáis (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1981) lxii-lxv.
[41] Issac Kramnick, The Rage of Edmund Burke (New York: Basic Books, 1977).
[42] L.M. Cullen, "Review of Conor Cruise O'Brien's *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*," Eighteenth Century Ireland (vol. 8, 1993) 154.
[43] Williams lxv.
[44] Margaret Mac Curtain, Tudor and Stuart Ireland (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1972) 118-9.
[45] Williams xxx.
[46] Williams xxxiv ff.
[47] "In reading their squabbles, their foolish conflicts on questions of ancestry, down through the ages, we feels that we are getting a vivid glimpse of the brawls, disunion, traitorism of a certain species of Irishman that has ever been a foul stain on the pages of Irish history." Dineen, 1900 xxxvi - xxxvii. Dineen was mistaken in his belief that O'Rathaille composed Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis.
[48] Translation by Williams 86.
[49] Dineen (1911) 287-298.
[50] Dineen (1900) xxxvii.
[51] Whelan 37.
[52] Correspondence vol. 7, 254.
[53] Seamus Deane, ed., "Edmund Burke 1791-1797," The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing vol. 2 (3 Vols., Derry, 1991) 807-809; Cruise O'Brien 3-57; L.M. Cullen, "Burke, Ireland and Revolution," Eighteenth-Century Life 16 : (1992) 21-42.

"Homage of a Nation" - Burke and the Aisling

....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 just began to move in,
- glittering like the morning-star,
full of life, and splendour and joy.

Brightness most bright I beheld on the way, forlorn.
Crystal of crystal her eye, blue touched with green.
Sweetness most sweet her voice, not stern with age.
Colour and pallor appeared in her flushed cheeks.

Curling and curling, each strand of her yellow hair
as it took the dew from the grass in its ample sweep;
a jewel more glittering than glass on her high bosom
-created, when she was created, in a higher world.

A band of cruel ruffians and assassins,
reeking with his blood,
rushed into the chamber of the queen,
and pierced with an hundred strokes
of bayonets and poniards the bed,
from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked,
and through ways unknown to the murderers
had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband,
not secure of his own life for a moment.

True tidings she revealed me, most forlorn,
tidings of one returning by royal right,
tidings of the crew ruined who drove him out,
and tidings I keep from my poem for sheer fear.

Foolish past folly, I came to her very presence
bound tightly, her prisoner (she likewise a prisoner....).
I invoked Mary's Son for succour: she started from me
and vanished like light to the fairy dwelling of Luachair.
(verses from Aogán Ó Rathaille "Gile na Gile" translation by Thomas Kinsella)

On hearing the name 'Edmund Burke', the first thing that people remember is his most frequently anthologised passage from the Reflections about Marie Antoinette, which begins with the words: "It is sixteen or seventeen years since last I saw the Queen of France,... ." His contrasting vision of Marie Antoinette sees her shimmering in the air of Versailles and then fleeing, stripped nearly naked, while Jacobins pierce her bed with bayonets and poniards. Since the initial publication of Reflections, Burke's presentation of Marie Antoinette has been considered strange, fanciful, overly sentimental and vaguely salacious. This final chapter compares Burke's evocation of Marie Antoinette with the Gaelic political-vision poetry known as the *Aisling*. The curiosities and extravagances of Burke's depiction of Marie Antoinette disappear when it is read as a traditional *Aisling*. The Irish dimension to Burke's work in the 1790s is also examined in order to properly contextualise his Reflections. Burke's writings on Ireland and France share many salient features: both are narratives on nationality, concerned with the mechanics of domination and oppression, and both seek national restoration. While Burke's Reflections is still generally regarded as the text of a reactionary conservative, an anomaly in an otherwise impeccably liberal career, in the context of Ireland the restoration that Burke sought to achieve was a radical threat to the status quo.

At an early stage of his composition of Reflections, Burke sent a draft to Philip Francis. In response to Burke's passage about the Queen, Francis wrote: "In my opinion all you say about the Queen is pure foppery. If she be a perfect female character you ought to take your ground upon her virtues. If she be the reverse it is ridiculous in any but a Lover, to place her personal charms in opposition to her crimes."[1] He replied immediately, declaring that his "recollection of the manner in which [he] saw the Queen of France" and the contrast "between that brilliancy,

Splendour, and beauty, with the prostrate Homage of a Nation to her" and "the abominable Scene of 1789" made him cry as he was writing. "These Tears came again into my Eyes almost as often as I looked at the description. They may again." He concludes with a startling claim for his *fantasia*, his rhetorical visualisation, of Marie Antoinette:

> You do not believe this fact, or that these are my real feelings, but that the whole is affected, or as you express it, "downright Foppery". My friend, I tell you it is truth - and that it is true, and will be true, when you and I are no more, and will exist as long as men - with their Natural feelings exist. I shall say no more on this Foppery of mine.[2]

Francis has the last word on the subject, writing to Burke on the publication of Reflections he says: "Once for all, I wish you would let me teach you to write English."[3]

Burke's fellow-Irishman had a point: Burke's evocation of Marie Antoinette drew on the Gaelic tradition rather than the English canon. The Burkean vision of Marie Antoinette is the earliest English version of the *Aisling.* which has a long lineage in Irish poetry. In the old Celtic tales it was a common theme that the hero saw a beautiful maiden, in either a dream or a mystical vision, fell in love with her, and on his waking or after she vanished from his sight, began to travel the world in search of this *spéirbhean* (literally 'skywoman').[4] The eighteenth century *Aislingí na Mumhan* (Munster Aislings) are especially renowned in the Gaelic tradition, and are associated with the Jacobite songs and literature in the wider realms of Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. The *spéirbhean* in the Munster poet's vision is the personification of Ireland and she is waiting for her lover, sometimes identified as a Stuart, to come from over the seas to rescue her from defilement by a boorish master. The *Aisling* had a well rehearsed plot which

started with a description of the sudden appearance of the maiden as she seemed to hover in the sky, shining in loveliness; then she flees and the poet follows her, to see her being abused by louts and boors. She bemoans her misfortunes and tells of her trust in her absent deliverer and lover, her belief in his speedy arrival and the fidelity with which she clings to his love. The poem ends with the poet 'coming to earth', out of his reverie, but desirous to be still in that intangible communication.

Burke's vision of Marie Antoinette is a perfectly formed *Aisling.*[5] She is a *spéirbhean* , hovering on the horizon: "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 just began to move in, glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendour and joy." A comparison between Ó Rathaille's "*Gile na Gile*", perhaps the most famous of the Munster *Aislingí*, and Burke's vision of Marie Antoinette demonstrates how faithful Burke remained to the Gaelic tradition[6]:

Gile na Gile do chonnarc ar slighe i n-uaigneas;
Criostal an chriostail a guirmruisc rinn-uaine;
Binneas an bhinnis a friotal nár chríon-ghruamdha;
Deirge is finne do fionnadh n-a gríos-ghruadhnaibh.

Brightness most bright I beheld on the way, forlorn.
Crystal of crystal her eye, blue touched with green.
Sweetness most sweet her voice, not stern with age.
Colour and pallor appeared in her flushed cheeks.

Caise na caise i ngach ruibe dá buidhe-chuachaibh
Bhaineas an ruithneadh den chruinne le rinn-scuabaidh;
Iorradh ga ghlaine 'ná gloine ar a bruinn bhuacaigh,
Do geineadh ar gheineamhain di-se 'san tír uachtraigh.

Curling and curling, each strand of her yellow hair
as it took the dew from the grass in its ample sweep;
a jewel more glittering than glass on her high bosom
created, when she was created, in a higher world.[7]

There is a lot of movement in the *Aislingí* as the *spéirbhean* takes the poet into the magical realm of symbol and reveals herself as Nation; she tries to flee the clutches of the usurpers and looks for redemption from abroad:

Fios fiosach dom d'inis, is ise go fíor-uaigneach,
fios filleadh don duine don ionad ba rí-dhualgas,
fios milleadh na droinge chuir eisean ar rinnruagairt,
's fios eile ná cuirfead im laoithibh le fíor-uamhan.

True tidings she revealed me, most forlorn,
tidings of one returning by royal right,
tidings of the crew ruined who drove him out,
and tidings I keep from my poem for sheer fear.

Leimhe na leimhe dom druidim 'na cruinntuairim,
im chine ag an gcime do snaidhmeadh go fíorchrua me;
ar ghoirm Mhic Mhuire dom fhortacht, do bhíog uamise,

is d'imigh an bhruinneal 'na luisne go bruín Luachra.

Foolish past folly, I came to her very presence
bound tightly, her prisoner (she likewise a prisoner....).
I invoked Mary's Son for succour: she started from me
and vanished like light to the fairy dwelling of Luachair.

Rithim le rith mire im rithibh go croí-luaimneach,
trí imeallaibh corraigh, trí mhongaibh, trí shlímruaitigh;
don tinne-bhrugh tigim - ní thuigim cén tslí fuaras-
go hionad na n-ionad do cumadh le draíocht dhruaga.

Heart pounding, I ran, with a frantic haste in my race,
by the margins of marshes, through swamps, over bare moors.
To a powerful palace I came, by paths most strange,
to that place of all places, erected by druid magic.

In Burke's vision of the *spéirbhean*/Marie Antoinette, she is presented as fleeing from a "band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with...blood". This band "rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and through ways unknown to the murderers had escaped to seek refuge". As in the *Aislingí* the "elevation and fall" of Marie Antoinette is the elevation and fall of an ancient order, she is undefended by armed protectors, degraded, sorrowful and left in desolation:

> 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 cavaliers.

> I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with an insult. But the age of chivalry is gone.

The boors who hold the *spéirbhean* Queen captive cannot see her in her emblematic role as the personification of the nation; in their eyes she is merely available for their crude sexual gratification:

Brisid fá scige go scigeamhail buíon ghruagach
is foireann de bhruinnealaibh sioscaithe dlaoi-chuachach;
i ngeimhealaibh geimheal me cuirid gan puinn suaimhnis,
's mo bhruinneal ar broinnibh ag broinnire broinnstuacach.

All in derision they tittered - a gang of goblins
and a bevy of slender maidens with twining tresses.
They bound me in bonds, denying the slightest comfort,
and a lumbering brute took hold of my girl by the breasts.

D'iniseas di-se, san bhfriotal dob fhíor uaimse,
nár chuibhe di snaidhmeadh le slibire slímbhuartha
's an duine ba ghile ar shliocht chine Scoit trí huaire
ag feitheamh ar ise bheith aige mar chaoin-nuachar.

I said to her then, in words that were full of truth,
how improper it was to join with that drawn gaunt creature
when a man the most fine, thrice over, of Scottish blood
was waiting to take her for his tender bride.

Ar chloistin mo ghutha di foileann go fíor-uaibhreach
is sileadh ag an bhfliche go life as a gríosghruannaibh
cuireann liom giolla dom choimirc ón mbruín uaithi-
's í gile na gile do chonnarc ar slí in uaigneas.

On hearing my voice she wept in high misery
and flowing tears fell down from her flushed cheeks.
She sent me a guard to guide me out of the palace.
-that brightness most bright I beheld on the way, forlorn.

Burke derides the revolutionaries in whose scheme of things "a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order." The boorish revolutionaries cannot appreciate the emblematic role of the monarchs but reduce the Queen to a position where she is nothing more than an animal. The calamitous fate of the *spéirbhean*/nation in Burke's Reflections is also a call to arms and the same is true of the *Aislingí* where the plight of the *spéirbhean* is presented as an appeal for collective redemption:

An Ceangal

Mo threighid, mo thubaist, mo thurainn, mo bhrón, mo dhíth!
an soilseach muirneach miochairgheal beoltais caoin
ag adharach foireanndubh mioscaiseach cóirneach buí,
's gan leigheas 'na goire go bhfillid na leoin tar toinn.

The Knot

Pain, disaster, downfall, sorrow and loss!

Our mild, bright, delicate, loving, fresh-lipped girl
with one of that black, horned, foreign, hate-crested crew
and no remedy near till our lions come over the sea.

As Burke was writing his Reflections and casting his thoughts back to the spring of 1773, when he saw Marie Antoinette, the memory of the Irish Jacobite, Count Patrick Darcy, must have come strongly to mind. Burke and his son Richard spent several weeks in Paris, being introduced to society by Count Darcy. Burke probably made the acquaintance of Darcy through his connection with the Frenches of County Galway.[8] Count Darcy was just the kind of man to impress Burke. He was only four years older than him, born into a prominent Irish Jacobite family, and had joined the flight of the Wild Geese to gain glory as a soldier in France. Darcy fought at the Battle of Fontenoy where the Irish Brigade was instrumental in forcing the massive Anglo-Hanoverian infantry formation to retreat with heavy losses. He was also a physician, a mathematician and an engineer, and he made a significant contribution to weapon design.[9] While in the company of the chivalrous Count Darcy, and perhaps other Irish Jacobite exiles, Burke saw Marie Antoinette, "then the dauphiness" at Versailles. It is no surprise then, that Burke's memory of Marie Antoinette presented itself in the quintessential Jacobite form of the *Aisling*. The intensity that could produce such a vision of Marie Antoinette/France is surprising in an English context but not in an Irish context.

There is further evidence for reading Burke's *Aisling* in an Irish context in Burke's own acknowledgment that the Reflections was directly inspired on reading the pamphlet of the proceedings of the Revolution Society, though he does not make explicit that the Society carried a resolution reiterating the anti-Catholic impetus

in the Glorious Revolution that delivered England "from Popery and Arbitrary Power." It also passed a "Congratulatory Address to the French National Assembly" and these congratulations, which were warmly welcomed in Paris, were conveyed in the same month that the property of the Catholic Church was annexed by the Assembly. The bulk of the pamphlet contained a sermon by Dr Richard Price, who was a protégé of Lord Shelburne, the man whom Burke held responsible for fomenting the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots. In his writings and speeches on the violent excesses of the French Revolution, Burke frequently refers to the Gordon Riots.[10] According to Conor Cruise O'Brien:

> The Revolution Society's proceedings had to impinge painfully on the buried 'Irish layer' of Burke's psyche. In particular, the language of the resolution carried by the Society immediately after Price's sermon reminded him of just how anti-Catholic the Glorious Revolution, which he was committed to revere, had actually been. It made his Jacobite ancestors walk, and reproach him for having betrayed his people.[11]

In his Reflections, Burke is careful not to explicitly mention the Catholicism of the French monarchy; instead he styles himself as a protector of Christian monarchs against atheistic revolutionaries. Anti-Catholic sectarianism was a powerful force in all segments of English society in the late eighteenth century and Burke would do his cause no good to draw attention to the Roman Catholicism of the Bourbons. The French aristocracy had given refuge to the émigré Gaelic elite over many generations and the *Aisling* poets conventionally looked to France to come to the aid of Gaelic Ireland. The pressure to speak in a coded way in defence of the French Catholic monarch must also have been an impetus for Burke's *Aisling*.

It was while Burke was preparing his Reflections for publication that he was presented with the opportunity to be of direct service to the Irish Catholics. The Catholic Bishop of Waterford, Thomas Hussey, wrote to Burke, transmitting a letter from the Catholic Committee to his son Richard; asking for Richard's help in drafting an Appeal to the nation. The Catholic Committee was committed to the removal of all legal and political liabilities on Catholics; nothing less than a full enfranchisement; and Burke and his son enthusiastically committed themselves to their cause. Richard went to Ireland in 1791 to act as agent to the Committee which occasioned a series of letters from Burke remarkable for their passionate and astute reading of the situation in Ireland and their testimony to Burke's sympathetic understanding of the attraction of the French Revolution for Irish Catholics.[12] While the Reflections gained international currency and Burke was publicly engaged in his crusade against the French Revolution, he was also committed to the liberation of the Irish Catholics from the oppressive rule of the Protestant interest, a commitment that complicates any simple depiction of him as a reactionary conservative. The Reflections seeks a restoration of a Catholic monarchy and the halt of a revolution; but the restoration of power to Catholics which Burke argues for in Irish letters clearly has revolutionary implications for the status quo in Ireland.

The Catholic Committee had been founded in the 1760s but had become inactive after the foundation in 1782 of an Irish Parliament which was overwhelmingly opposed to 'Catholic Relief'. Inspired by the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, the Committee was revived in 1790. Another stimulus to its formation was the awareness that radical Dissenters, mostly Belfast Presbyterians, were actively in favour of the enfranchisement of Catholics as part of a general enlargement of the franchise

and radicalisation of politics. It was due to this tacit alliance between the Committee and the radical Dissenters that aristocratic landowners such as Lord Kenmare soon broke with the Committee and many of the bishops maintained a distance. Most prominent among the leaders of the Catholic Committee were wealthy merchants based in Dublin, such as John Keogh and Edward Byrne, who were happy to regard the Dissenters and the radical Society of United Irishmen as allies. The Committee's connection with Burke was, however, useful in allaying fears among conservative Catholics about the influence of the French Revolution on the Committee.[13]

It might be supposed that Burke would have made it his business to separate the Catholics from their radical allies, but, on the contrary, he fully appreciated the tactical advantage to the Catholics of making at least a tacit alliance with the Dissenters. In a letter to Richard dated 15 September 1791 he derided the policy of the Pitt Administration and the Irish government to try and effect a split between the Catholics and Dissenters.[14] He writes: "You are certainly in the Right not to suffer an incurable alienation between the Catholicks and the dissenters. If the Latter, do, bonâ fide, resolve to relieve their Country from this mass of absurd servitude, for so much they have merit, whatever their ulterior views may be."[15] Perhaps even more surprising than Burke's appreciation of the strategic advantage in a Catholic and Dissenter alliance is his warm praise for the radicals. He declares to Richard that he finds himself impressed with the radical Society of United Irishmen, excepting their desire for separation from Britain: "The papers of the Society of united Irishmen are rational manly, and proper, in every other respect".[16]

It is significant that Burke appreciated the "manly" address of the United Irishmen. On more than one occasion he bemoaned the "servility" of the Irish Catholics (and the Indians) under the yoke of colonial oppression. He remarks, somewhat flippantly, to Richard that it was the "servility" of the Catholics in Ireland that made them even worse than the Protestants. He qualifies this by saying:

> but that fault of servility since my time of observation is a little mended; The old ones indeed who had remembered with indignation, a slavery, which was yet but crude, and had still kept up something of the Spirit of the Struggle, were not debased; The second Growth, (most of all, they who touched the first Growth the nearest) and those whom I had seen in their meridian, when I began Life, whether Catholicks or converts, were, for the greater part, very low and abject.[17]

While Burke privately welcomed the cessation of that "fault of servility", he publicly warned that the Catholics' awareness of their stigmatised, disenfranchised and penalised status meant that they were most susceptible to French revolutionary ideas. He expressed the belief that full enfranchisement for the Catholics would mean that once the status of the Catholic gentry, merchants and clergy was securely established, they would lead the larger Catholic constituency away from radical influences. In 1792, however, he was far from impressed with the actions of the leading Catholic aristocrats, headed by Lord Kenmare, who set themselves against the democratic style of the middle class Catholic Committee and who tired to assert their aristocratic, conservative voice as the voice of the Catholics of Ireland.[18] When the Catholic Committee considered the idea of seeking a franchise on a basis of a £100 qualification, Burke wrote to Richard that:

> The hundred pound qualification is not a thing to be even whispered, because it would tend to make the world believe,...that, after all has been said, the Committee are like Lord Kenmare and his friends, who look only to the accommodation of a few Gentlemen, and leave the common people who are the heart and strength of the Cause of the Catholicks, and are the great Objects in all popular representation, completely in the Lurch.[19]

Burke's Reflections memorably used the model of the inheritance of property as an analogy for the transmission of the British Constitution but when it came to the practical concerns of the oppression of the Irish Catholics he was anxious to ensure that "the common people", those without significant property, would be protected in any future settlement. The ownership of inherited property might work very well as a metaphor for a citizen's participation in the British Constitution but Burke was horrified at the idea that ownership of property was to be the literal qualification for terms of full citizenship.

Burke used the opportunity of replying to a letter from Sir Hercules Langrishe to publicly make the point that resistance to Catholic enfranchisement would lead the Catholics towards the revolutionaries.[20] His letter was published in early 1792 while Langrishe's Catholic Relief Bill was being read in the Irish House of Commons. Langrishe's Bill encapsulated the aspirations of Lord Kenmare's group: it sought to remove Catholic disabilities in the areas of law, education, intermarriage and apprenticeships, but did not provide for enfranchisement. Langrishe had made the point to Burke that full enfranchisement was not possible as the Irish state had to be Protestant because the King's Coronation Oath obliges him to keep it so.[21] His Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe argues that the Coronation Oath is an oath to support the established Church only and not

Protestantism in general. He proceeds to argue against the notion that the Revolution Settlement ensured that Protestantism ought to be in a privileged position over Catholicism by deconstructing the concept of 'Protestant':

> If mere dissent from the Church of Rome be a merit, he that dissents the most perfectly is the most meritorious. In many points we hold strongly with that church [Catholicism]. He that dissents throughout with that church will dissent with the Church of England, and then it will be a part of his merit that he dissents with ourselves: ....A man is certainly the most perfect Protestant who protests against the whole Christian religion. Whether a person's having no Christian religion be a title to favor, in exclusion to the largest description of Christians, who hold all the doctrines of Christianity, though holding along with them some errors and some superfluities, is rather more than any man, who has not become recreant and apostate from his baptism, will, I believe, choose to affirm.[22]

This was a point that Burke had worked out some forty years earlier in the notebook that he shared with Will when he wrote that for a Catholic man to become a Protestant he had to omit a few minor articles of belief from his religious practice, and that Protestant religious belief was contained within the more extensive practices of Catholicism.[23] Throughout the 1790s Burke continued to put the term 'Protestant' under pressure in an effort to rock the foundations of sectarian oppression in Ireland[24]: "A religion that has for one of its dogmas, the servitude of all mankind that do not belong to it - is a vile Heresy, and this, I think one of the worst heresies of that Protestant Sect called Mahometanism."[25] Writing to Richard at the end of November 1792, Burke says that there were few things he wished for more than that the Established Churches of England and Ireland should be strong and secure in both countries.

Although "Much nearer" his heart than this wish was the "emancipation of that great body of my original countrymen". He said there was nothing in the established church's thirty-nine articles which was worth making "three millions of people slaves, to secure its teachings at public expense."[26]

In conjunction with destabilising the term 'Protestant' in his Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, Burke also qualifies the glory of the British revolution by making a distinction between the principles of the Glorious Revolution and the Irish Catholic experience of that Revolution: "I shall not think that the *deprivation of some millions of people of all the rights of the citizens, and all interest in the constitution, in which they were born,* was a thing conformable to the *declared principles* of the Revolution." He states that "the Revolution operated differently in England and Ireland."

> In England it was the struggle of the *great body* of the people for the establishment of their liberties, against the efforts of a very *small faction*, who would have oppressed them. In Ireland it was the establishment of the power of the smaller number, at the expence of the political liberties of the whole. It was, to say the truth, not a revolution, but a conquest, which is not to say a great deal in its favour.[27]

He proceeds to characterise English rule in Ireland, established in that 'revolution':

> All the penal laws of that unparalleled code of oppression, which were made after the last event, were manifestly the effects of national hatred and scorn towards a conquered people; whom the victors delighted to trample upon, and were not at all afraid to provoke. They were not the effect of their fears but of their security. ...They who carried out this system looked to the irresistible force of Great Britain for their support in

> their acts of power. They were quite certain that no complaints of the natives would be heard on this side of the water, with any other sentiments that those of contempt and indignation. Their cries only served to augment their torture.

Burke reminds the "*Anglo-Irish*" Langrishe that since the independent parliament of 1782 the Anglo-Irish are now no longer in the position of acting "the part of a *garrison*" and that in 1792 they ought to institute another period of reformation to admit all of the people of Ireland to a full share "in the protection of the *constitution*"[28]

Shortly after Burke had written his letter to Langrishe he told Richard that "I am writing a long Letter to you to publish it if you please."[29] Burke's opening address to Richard refers to the fact that he is currently closing the impeachment of Hastings and he remarks that Richard's work in Ireland is similar to Burke's work on behalf of India:

> You are engaged in an undertaking similar in its principle to mine. You are engaged in the relief of an oppressed people. In that service you must necessarily excite the same sort of passions in those who have exercised, and who wish to continue that oppression, that I have had to struggle with in this long labour. As your Father has done, you must make enemies of many of the rich, of the proud and the powerful.[30]

Burke's theme is the corrupt government of Ireland by the self-styled "Protestant Ascendancy". He allows that there might be individual "Eminent characters" but insists that "in a Country of monopoly there *can* be no patriotism. There may be a party spirit - but public spirit there can be none." As for liberty, there is no liberty to be found in Ireland: "a liberty made up of exclusion and proscription, continued for ages of four-fifths, perhaps, of the inhabitants of all ranks and fortunes! In

what does such liberty differ from the description of the most shocking kind of servitude?" He denounces that it will be said that some people are free as "the very description of despotism. *Partial freedom is privilege and prerogative, and not liberty*....[Liberty] is the portion of the mass of the citizens; and not the haughty license of some potent individual, or some predominant faction."

In the same manner as he deconstructs the concepts of 'Protestant' and the 'Glorious Revolution' in Ireland, he focuses on:

> The poor word ascendancy, so soft and melodious in its sound, so lenitive and emollient in its first usage, [which] is now employed to cover to the world, the most rigid and perhaps not the most wise of all plans of policy. ...This new *ascendancy* is the old mastership. It is neither more nor less than the resolution of one set of people in Ireland, to consider themselves as the sole citizens in the commonwealth; and to keep a dominion over the rest by reducing them to absolute slavery, under a military power; and thus fortified in their power, to divide the publick estate, which is the result of general contribution, as military booty, solely amongst themselves.[31]

In a gripping indictment of the Glorious Revolution in Ireland, "those "terrible, confiscatory, and exterminatory periods", Burke castigates the pedigree of those who style themselves the 'Protestant Ascendancy' and queries their claims both to Irish property and government. He reminds the Ascendancy that their property and power are founded on "acts of arbitrary Monarchs, ...inquisitions of corrupted tribunals, and tortured jurors; ...fictitious tenures, invented to dispossess whole unoffending tribes and their Chieftains." He cautions them against conjuring:

> up the ghosts from the ruins of castles and churches, to tell for what attempt to struggle for the independence of an Irish Legislature, and to

> raise armies of volunteers, without regular commissions from the Crown, in support of that independence, the estates of the old Irish Nobility and Gentry had been confiscated. They would not wantonly call on those phantoms, to tell by what English Acts of Parliament, forced upon two reluctant Kings, the lands of their Country were put up to a mean and scandalous auction in every goldsmith's shop in London, or chopped to pieces, and cut into rations, to pay the mercenary soldiery of a Regicide Usurper.

Burke states that: "They would not be so fond of titles under Cromwell," if they were to remember that he had "rebelled against the very Parliament whose sovereignty he asserted" and that Cromwell and the Parliament "which he served and which he betrayed had both of them rebelled" against the King. Burke asserts that "the Irish Nation, which [Cromwell] was sent to subdue and confiscate", had never risen against the King.[32] That unfinished letter to Richard shows just how passionately Burke shared the perceptions and feelings of the Irish Catholic Jacobites on the history of their nation.

Burke's furious, erudite appraisal of Irish affairs in the 1790s superficially appears to be in strong contrast to his Reflections on the Revolution in France, which at that time were being hailed and derided as a bulwark of the autocratic *Ancien Regime*.[33] Burke's Irish letters in the 1790s appreciate the tactical advantage of a tacit alliance with the radical United Irishmen; he praises their "rational and manly" address, he bemoans the "servility" of the great mass of the oppressed Catholics and derides the aristocratic conservative self-interest of Lord Kenmare and his followers. He brilliantly deconstructs the power base of the status quo; putting the term 'Protestant Ascendancy' under severe pressure, he depicts the Glorious Revolution in Ireland as nothing more than a brutal conquest and he

reminds those who trace their property, pedigree and rule to that era, that their power stems from terror, confiscation and murder. Burke tells Richard that in working on behalf of Irish Catholics he is "engaged in the relief of an oppressed people....you must make enemies of many of the rich, of the proud and the powerful." On the surface these Irish letters of Burke might seem to be contradictory of much of the tone and some of the points made in his Reflections but both Burke's Reflections and his Irish letters share a distinctive common ground.

The compass of this common ground is to be found in Seamus Deane's perception that Burke's Reflections is the "first of Ireland's national narratives".[34] Burke's Reflections is propelled by a nostalgia that presents the national character as being formed through a kinship with an historical community that lives in a defined (national) territory; a nostalgia that also pervades the *Aislingí*, and his Irish letters from the 1790s. The Irish letters, the Reflections and the *Aislingí*, are all political visions, conceived on the brink of a dramatically envisioned descent into disaster; all are concerned to make an outcry against colonial domination of the many by the few. Burke does not view the French Revolution as a popularly inspired political movement but as a pernicious system designed by a small cabal of intellectual ideologues and in his last letter to Hercules Langrishe written in May 1795, Burke again returns to the point that "the principles of Protestant ascendancy" justify the "establishment of the power of the smaller number, at the expence of the political liberties of the whole". He writes:

> I think I can hardly overrate the malignity of the principles of Protestant ascendancy, as they affect Ireland; or of Indianism, as they affect these countries, and as they affect Asia; or of Jacobinism as they affect all

> Europe, and the state of human society itself. This last is the greatest evil. But it readily combines with the others, and flows from them.[35]

If the Reflections are the "first of Ireland's national narratives", Burke's Irish letters can be read as his dissertation on Ireland's national narrative. In the same manner as the *Aislingí na Mumhan*, the national narrative of Ireland has traditionally been a story impelled and checked by the historical narrative of the marginalised and defeated. The emphasis is on recurrence and renewal and the repetitive or prophetic quality of events is spoken of in sacred or folk terms; a mythic or remote historical era is glorified to lament its passing and praise its return. In contemporary Ireland, telling and retelling history is quite literally a vital action for Irish and for British nationalists, as it is in the expression of a pride in past achievements and prophecy for future glories, that a present identity can be structured.[36]

Until recently the national literature of Ireland has often been quite narrowly defined, the historical community has been read as consisting of just "two traditions'" and the territory of the Irish has been defined as the island of Ireland. In the early decades of this century W.B. Yeats claimed Burke as a liberal member of the Protestant Ascendancy:

> ...people that were
> Bound neither to Cause nor to State,
> Neither to slaves that were spat on,
> Nor to the tyrants that spat,
> The people of Burke and of Grattan
> That gave, though free to refuse -[37]

Scholars such as Seamus Deane and Conor Cruise O'Brien have dislodged this Yeatsian version of Burke and presented him as a more complex and intriguing figure and there can now be heard a new proliferation of Irish voices, of many ethnicities, of different races, from different parts of the world, with varying experiences of economics, gender and sexuality. It remains to be seen how Burke's voice will sound amidst this new Irish cacophony. A relatively recent manifestation of Burke's words is to be found spoken by the character Gar O'Donnell in Brian Friel's play Philadelphia Here I Come. Gar quotes the opening lines of Burke's *Aisling* on Marie Antoinette as a mantra, a valve through which he releases his confusion, rage and grief, on the night before he emigrates to America. The comfort that Gar gets in reciting Burke's lines is the comfort of chanting a traditional refrain, an indigenous tragic genre, an old hackneyed formula, that somehow can still bear the weight of an inexpressible pain.

This dissertation has surveyed many of the qualities that mark Burke's voice as distinctively Gaelic but perhaps this is now the historical moment to finally grant Burke's wish that his Indian speeches be regarded as his monument. It is in those speeches, where he drew so deeply from the Gaelic grief-stricken lament and scorching recrimination, that we can most fully appreciate Burke's sustained application of intellect and heart in seeking to acknowledge the pain of other people. As the colonial regime in this island is currently being reconfigured, the most difficult and necessary question to voice is: how can we acknowledge the pain of people who are not our tribe? Perhaps there are some answers to be found in Burke's optimistic belief that by a process of empathy and performance he could give witness to a suffering denied its dignity, could testify to a rage forbidden its voice: "I know what I am doing, whether the white people like it or not."[38]

[1] Thomas W. Copeland, et al., eds. The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958-78) 87.

[2] Correspondence vol. 6, 90.

[3] Correspondence vol. 6, 147.

[4] J.E. Caerwyn Williams agus Máirín Ní Mhuiríosa, Traidisiún Liteartha na nGael (Baile ÁthaCliath: An Clóchomhar l´ta, 1979) 269 ff.

[5] Since Wollstonecraft, feminists have criticised Burke's elision of the material conditions of actual women in his glorification of Marie Antoinette as emblem of France. The stereotypic reproduction of the nation as woman and the woman as national muse, so evident in the national literature of Ireland, erases the complexities of real pasts and occludes the lives lived by Irish women. The appropriation of women's bodies as cultural media through which the desire for a nation could be expressed left a heavy legacy for Irish women. (Gerardine Meaney, Woman: Symbol & Nation (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990) The potent figure of woman as national muse, as the object of poetry, proved to be a bind on Irish women's own creativity, as Eavan Boland describes it: "it seemed to me, I had been an element of design rather than an agent of change." A Kind of Scar: The Woman Poet in a National Tradition (Dublin: Attic Press, 1989) 14.

[6] Comparisons might also be made with one of the best loved of the *Aisling* poets, Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, who was a tutor with the Nagles of Annakissy during the Whiteboy arrests of the 1760s. It is possible that he and Burke may have met during that time. L.M. Cullen thinks its very likely that Ó Súilleabháin's awareness of political events was sharpened by his stay with the Nagles at that time of crisis. According to Cullen some of Ó Súilleabháin's most celebrated lines are "almost a paraphrase of thoughts that come up in Burke's writings. His language and views are those of the Blackwater, as are Burke's own." L.M. Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics," Cork History and Society eds. Patrick O'Flanagan and Cornelius G. Buttimer (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1993) 574. Though the Battle of Culloden was thirty years past, Ó Súilleabháin composed about twenty Jacobite *Aislingí*. Seán Ó Tuama says that "some of Eoghan Rua O´Súilleabháin's *Aisling* or vision poems, with all their extraordinary metrical virtuosity, live on into the present day in Irish-speaking communities in Munster as a type of highly-structured folk *lieder*." (An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed curtha i láthair ag Seán Ó Tuama with translations into English verse by Thomas Kinsella, (Baile Átha Cliath: Dolmen Press i gcomhar le Bord na Gaeilge, 1994,) xxv).

[7] Ó Tuama agus Kinsella, 150-153.

[8] L.M. Cullen, "The Blackwater Catholics" 537. The marriage of Juliana to Pat French gave Burke an entrée to the County Galway circle in Paris and London. According to Cullen: "Burke's actions in the late 1760s and early 1770s both in speculation and in East India affairs have to be seen in the context of the Irish interest in the French East India company which had close ties with the Colebrooke group."

[9] Correspondence vol. 3, 228-229. Cullen 538. I am indebted to Prof. D'Arcy, Emeritus, Magee College, Univeristy of Ulster, Derry, for information on Count Darcy.

[10] Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Great Melody (London: Minerva, 1993) 395 -396.

[11] Cruise O'Brien 396.

[12] Burke's candid, private letters to Richard were often sent care of Frank Kiernan in the Dublin Custom House. Burke feared interception by Dublin Castle. See in particular, letters from Edmund to Richard: Correspondence vol. 7, (January - March 1792) 8-12; 15-17; 29-31; 40-41; 48-50; 64-67; 80-84; 100-107; 118-120; (November 1792) 280-288; 289-293; 298-301.

[13] Thomas H.D. Mahoney, Edmund Burke and Ireland (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1960) 163.

[14] Correspondence vol. 6, 462.

[15] Correspondence vol.7, 118.

[16] Correspondence vol.7, 283. "They [the United Irishmen] think that Ministers here instruct the Castle and that the Castle sets the Jobbing ascendancy in motion; whereas it is now, wholly, and has, ever since I remember, been for the greater part, the direct contrary. The Junto in Ireland entirely governs the Castle; the Castle by its representations of the Country governs the Ministers here -So that the whole Evil has always orginated."

[17] Correspondence vol.7, 101.

[18] The British administration at Dublin Castle was happy to use Lord Kenmare to undermine the Catholic Committee's claim to represent Irish Catholics. See Correspondence vol.7, 32.
[19] Correspondence vol.7, 83.
[20] "Letter to Sir Herucles Langrishe" The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9 (R.B. McDowell Ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) 594-640.
[21] Letter to Edmund Burke 10 December 1791, quoted by Conor Cruise O'Brien, 477.
[22] The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9, 608.
[23] A Notebook of Edmund Burke: Poems, Characters, Essays and Other Sketches in the Hands of Edmund and William Burke ed. H.V.F. Somerset, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1957) 54. This appears to have been Burke's solution to a severely felt crisis of identity. See Isaac Kramnick The Rage of Edmund Burke for a comprehensive discussion of this period in Burke's life, see also The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9 410 n.1.

[24] "The Catholics of Ireland (as I have said) have the whole of our *positive* religion; our difference is only a Negation of certain Tenets of theirs. If we strip ourselves of *that* part of Catholicity we injure Christianity." The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9 679.
[25] Correspondence vol. 7 118.
[26] Correspondence vol. 7 118.
[27] The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9, 614.
[28] The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol.9, 618-619.
[29] Correspondence vol. 7 65. This refers to *Letter to Richard Burke post 19 February 1792*, The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9, 640ff.
[30] The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9, 640.
[31] The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9, 644.
[32] The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9, 654 - 655.
[33] In the words of RB McDowell: "It is incongruous to find the great champion of the old order in Europe attacking so strongly the Irish upholders of the *status quo*." The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke vol. 9, 421.
[34] Seamus Deane, Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 25.
[35] Correspondence vol. 8, 254.
[36] Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts: the Oral Construction of Oral History (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 92.
[37] W.B. Yeats, "The Tower," Collected Poems , (London: Macmillan,1985) 247. See also "The Seven Sages," 355.
[38] Correspondence vol. 5, 252.

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