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Inventing Burke: Edmund Burke and the Conservative Party, 1790-1918

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INVENTING BURKE:

Edmund Burke and the Conservative Party, 1790-1918

By

Hannah Z. Sidney

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2014

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

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Hannah Z. Sidney

Advisor: Professor Corey Robin

This thesis explores the circumstances by which Edmund Burke came to be regarded as the father of Anglo-conservatism. Conventional wisdom assumes Burke was hailed as a Conservative oracle from the moment *Reflections on the Revolution in France* appeared. In fact, nineteenth century Conservatives considered Burke a “Whig” who had erred on most critical issues: slavery, Crown prerogative, Ireland, empire.

In the twentieth century, however, the advent of universal suffrage and the demise of the Liberal party forced Conservatives to develop an identity which might compete with Labour’s mass appeal. It also shifted the locus of Conservative ire from liberalism to socialism. Conservatives came to see themselves as protectors of the individual and their opponents as latter-day Jacobins obsessed with a reified State. A key figure is Hugh Cecil, whose *Conservatism* (1912) was among the first monographs to define Conservative identity in this way and to trace Conservatism’s origins to Burke.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my advisor, **Corey Robin**, in whose seminar I first became acquainted with Edmund Burke. Professor Robin is unfailingly generous with his time, thoughtful in his criticisms, and a staunch advocate for his students. He is also, and above all, an excellent teacher.

My **parents-in-law**, **brother**, and **siblings-in-law** cheered, moaned, applauded, or wailed as the situation demanded, always feigning far greater enthusiasm for nineteenth century English politics than they actually possess. If that be not true love, then what is?

This thesis – and I – would have remained incomplete without **David**, closest of confidantes, keenest of editors, and the least snobbish person I know, who cares deeply about ideas and not one whit about degrees, but who has badly wanted this for me only because I wanted it for myself.

Finally, I thank my **parents**, whose boundless devotion, wise counsel, and undimmed faith in my prospects for yet securing a Nobel Prize sustain me in moments of weakness and doubt. My parents were my first and best teachers; from them I learned to ask, to think, to joy in the printed word, and never to employ one adjective if two were available. I aspire always to make them proud, and I dedicate this thesis to them with love and gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION

Burke: the Founder of Conservatism?

On 27 January 1806, four days after the untimely passing of the Right Honourable William Pitt from general “failure of a number of vital organs,”¹ the House of Commons convened to discuss, among other things, the erection of a monument to the erstwhile Tory Prime Minister, lately Chancellor of the Exchequer. The motion, first put forward on 24 January by Henry Lascelles, intentionally invoked the language adopted by the House when it paid honors to Pitt’s father, Lord Chatham, in 1778, for “it is provoking no difference of opinion to say, that his son was at least as great a man as he was.”²

The proposal met with warm endorsements from Earl Temple, the Grenvilles, and a variety of lesser Tory lights, each nearly tripping over his fellow in the rush to heap encomiums on the departed. Lord Lovaine was so convinced “of the great and brilliant talents of the lamented object of the motion” that he could not content himself with “silent acquiescence;” Mr. Isaac Browne drew comparisons with Augustus Caesar; Mr. Hiley Addington felt unable even to estimate the value of Mr. Pitt’s services, their “eminence and splendour,” the “pride and happiness” of a life, such as his, spent in their support. Resistance, carefully couched, came from the more radical Whigs, though even Charles James Fox, Pitt’s great parliamentary rival, acknowledged the respect “he entertained for many of Mr. Pitt’s personal qualities.”³

It was here that William Windham rose to object. Windham, *primus inter pares* among the coterie of young bucks surrounding Edmund Burke during his final years at Beaconsfield,

¹ John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt: the Consuming Struggle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 826. The precise cause of death remains unclear, but the evidence suggests gastrointestinal failure exacerbated by life-long gout and the remedies prescribed to treat it.

² Henry Lascelles, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 6, col. 42 (27 Jan 1806).

³ *Ibid.*, cols. 43, 44, 61, 62.

had long been seen as the standard bearer of “Burkeanism” against Pittite pragmatism. His anger he now directed not against Pitt personally, though the two had entertained a violent, mutual antipathy, but against the members of the party seated opposite:

[I]f it will be said, that transcendent abilities, long and important services, long experience, and application of the mind to the important interests of the country, should claim as high a reward as is given to the most successful admirals or generals, I shall then ask, where were all those qualities and endowments more conspicuous than in the late Mr. Burke? Mr. Burke, however, was not honoured with a public funeral. And yet Mr. Burke was inferior to no man in the splendour of his talents, nor in the purity of his mind, nor in genuine and disinterested patriotism... Where then is the difference of the cases?

The answer, Windham charged, lay not in Whig intransigence, which would have been understandable; it lay rather in Tory discomfiture with the fullness of Burke’s views. Men who

took Mr. Burke as the leader of their opinions, who cried him up to the skies, who founded themselves upon what he had done...were afraid, that if they consented to such honours, it would appear as if they approved of all the sentiments of that great man, some of which were, perhaps, of too high a tone for them to relish. They, therefore, would not, at that time, have agreed to a resolution which would have declared Mr. Burke an excellent statesman.⁴

This accusation should surprise, for it is a commonplace that Burke was, per the title of Arthur Anthony Baumann’s 1929 manifesto, the “Founder of Conservatism.”⁵ As Robert Nisbet emphatically contends: “[The] philosophical substance [of Conservatism] was brought into being in 1790 by Edmund Burke with his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Rarely in the history of thought has a body of ideas been as closely dependent upon a single man as modern conservatism is upon Edmund Burke.”⁶ Peter Viereck, R. J. White, Quintin Hogg, and the School of Kirk likewise locate Conservatism’s origins in Burke’s reaction to the Revolution.⁷

⁴ *Ibid*, cols. 50-51.

⁵ A. A. B[aumann], *Burke: the Founder of Conservatism, a Study by A. A. B., with which is Printed a Letter to a Noble Lord by Edmund Burke* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1929).

⁶ Robert Nisbet, “Sources of Conservatism,” from *Conservatism: Dreams and Reality* (1986), in *Edmund Burke: Appraisals and Applications*, ed. Daniel Ritchie (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1990), p. 275.

⁷ Peter Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited: the Revolt Against Revolt, 1815-1945* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1949); *The Conservative Tradition*, ed. R. J. White (New York: New York University Press, 1957); [Quintin

Further examples might swiftly be adduced. Indeed, *Wikipedia* informs us simply that “[i]n the English-speaking world, Burke is regarded by most political experts as the father of modern Anglo-conservatism,” without providing a source.⁸

And yet, this thesis argues, the truism is of recent vintage. Until the twentieth century, the French Revolution was less central to the identity of the Tory Party than later Conservatives – and historians – have supposed, and the party’s relationship to Burke was fraught with ambivalence. On many of the issues of greatest concern to English political life, Burke, so far as Conservatives were concerned, had staked positions on the wrong side: wrong on slavery, on Catholic emancipation, on Ireland and, especially in the heady days of *fin-de-siècle* New Imperialism, on empire.

Part One will offer a detailed reading of the daily parliamentary debates – from 1803, when *Hansard* became the officially sanctioned record,⁹ through 1902 and Salisbury’s retirement from high office – in order to demonstrate that Burke was, if not a “poor, weak, infirm and despised old man,” then certainly a figure of confusion to most MPs. “I cannot discover that he was much better understood by those of his own party [than he was by the Whigs],” wrote Hazlitt, “if we may judge from the little affinity there is between his mode of reasoning and theirs.”¹⁰ Part One will also glance at some of the leading nineteenth century Tory journals, confirming that parliamentary and extra-parliamentary sentiment regarding Burke largely aligned. It will then turn across the aisle to survey the struggle of the party opposite to

Hogg], Lord Hailsham, *The Conservative Case* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1959); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: from Burke to Eliot* (rev. ed.) (Washington, DC: Henry Regnery, 1960).

⁸ Someone, perhaps a non-English speaker, has appended a request for citation, but no one has stepped forward to provide it. “Edmund Burke,” *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Burke (accessed 13 Jan 2013).

⁹ Although the name *Hansard* (or *Hansard’s*) dates only to 1812, when Thomas Hansard purchased the transcription enterprise from a financially straightened William Cobbett. From 1803 to 1812, the record, naturally enough, was called *Cobbett’s*.

¹⁰ William Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Burke” (1807), in *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters* (London: William Hone, 1819), p. 367. The portrait, “written in a fit of extravagant candor,” is a generous paean to “an enemy.”

understand the man whom its members had once claimed as their own and who, until very near the end, ardently insisted that it was *he*, and not *they*, who sought to uphold the settlement of 1688.¹¹ How did the Whigs square Burke's earlier defense of one revolution with his savage repudiation of another? How did they react to the disarray he left within their ranks by his "conversion" to toryism? Part One will conclude by briefly documenting the efforts of the Liberals, as the Whigs' successors, to resolve the Riddle of Burke by re-casting him in their own image.

If nineteenth century Burke, as we shall see, was a profusion of things – a utilitarian rationalist, a Romantic organicist, or perhaps just a fickle rhetorician but certainly no Tory – how did he come, in the twentieth century, to be judged "plainly the first of English Conservative thinkers in influence and importance?"¹² What changed? Why and to what end was Burke reclaimed from the clutch of Liberal scholars like Morley and Stephen, whose interpretations of Burke dominated the late Victorian landscape? In answering these questions, Part Two will examine the rise of "programmatic" Conservatism in the first decade-and-a-half of the twentieth century, with specific attention to the career and person of Hugh Cecil, youngest child of the third Marquess of Salisbury. Cecil's *Conservatism*, a slim *cri de coeur*, was the first published work to explicitly enthrone Burke as the father of the modern Tory Party.

The volume appeared in 1912, another in a series of trying years for Edwardian Conservatives, who occupied the opposition benches for eight years and suffered defeat in three general elections between 1900 and the outbreak of the First World War. Beset by fears of (especially imperial) decline, confronted by Labour's growing clout, struggling to articulate

¹¹ Most famously in Edmund Burke, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), in *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Daniel E. Ritchie (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1992), pp. 73-201.

¹² Anthony Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection: the Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in England from Hooker to Oakeshott* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 56.

answers to, or at least “positions” on, the burning issues of the day, the Conservatives were a party in search of an identity. In the nineteenth century they hadn’t needed one, because direct appeals to the public were modest, and coalitions were not rigidly organized. Politics was an inward-gazing business conducted over dinner at Brooks’ or the Carleton and in the pages of the better *Reviews* by overlapping sets of acquaintances, though with an ear cocked toward the noise from outside. Power hinged upon the adroit execution of the parliamentary and administrative arts.

The enshrinement of (near) universal suffrage upended this decorous calculus. In the age of mass franchise, it is less by management that parties are sustained than by the hustings and the stump speech. The Conservatives, subsisting now on the electorate’s good will, nervously realized that the strength of their appeal could no longer reside solely in its defensive aspects. The democratic temper demanded the direct projection of a positive self. “Who are you,” the voter was liable to ask, “and what is it that you stand for?” Labour’s success was evidently fortified by the skill with which it wielded the appurtenances of the modern party: the slogan, the platform, the predictable vote. The Tories had to respond to this new dispensation or risk permanent irrelevance.

The rise of Burke the vatic Conservative sage, and the fixing of the French Revolution as the party’s *stunde null*, thus parallel the rise of Big-C Conservatism, the self-conscious partisanship of the group, as distinguished from small-c, or “essential,” conservatism – that “natural” indisposition to aggressive change which proved so marked a feature of English political life in the nineteenth century. Disraeli may have craved ideological purity, violently attacking Sir Robert Peel in much the same way that a young Robert Cecil would later attack Disraeli, but both men, once atop the greasy pole, quickly shed their doctrinal preoccupations for

the pragmatism of their predecessors. The Conservative fixation with establishing an apostolic succession (who were the true Tory prophets?) would flower in earnest only after Salisbury ceded the reins, and then by political necessity more than choice.

PART I:

The Nineteenth Century, 1790-1902

There was no stronger party man than Burke. He was a Whig of the Whigs. He glorified Whigs. He inspired the Whigs. He was, if I may so express myself, the prose Poet Laureate of Whiggery.

-- Earl of Rosebery, 30 October 1894

In the “three quarters of a century since [Edmund Burke’s] voice ceased to heard in [the House of Commons] on great public questions” begins an article penned in 1867 by John Morley for the *Fortnightly Review*, the celebrated Liberal magazine of which he was then editor, “opinion on the place to which he is entitled...has touched every extreme. Tories have extolled him as the saviour of Europe. Whigs have detested him as the destroyer of his party.”¹ On its face, Morley’s observation offers a commonplace: the Tories delighted in Burke’s anti-Jacobinism; the Whigs felt betrayed by it. The insight lies in what has been left tacit, for Morley is carefully specific. He writes only of the French Revolution, and of partisan reaction to it. He does *not* declare Burke beloved of the Tories or ideologically disdained by the Whigs. Rather, Morley implies, as did Windham, that the Tories thought Burke (mostly) right and enlightened on the Revolution *and largely wrong on everything else*, while the Whigs thought the reverse, which is why their aggrievement at his senescent apostasy was so great.

We tend to assume that Conservatives looked upon Burke in the nineteenth century as they would in the twentieth, when a party spokesman urged confidence with the following: “In [Burke] is contained all that is necessary for political salvation. ‘Back to Burke’ ought still to be our motto.”² But is the presumption accurate, or an anachronistic misreading of a far more ambivalent past? Perhaps the best place to begin is in the pages of *Hansard*, since it is from Westminster that the parties set forth their public faces. If conventional wisdom holds true, we would expect to encounter approving pronouncements about Burke from Conservatives, and cutting retorts from their opponents, whereas in fact, the reverse more frequently obtains. Not

* The quote on the preceding page is from Thomas F. G. Coates, *Lord Rosebery, his Life and Speeches*, vol. 2 (London: Hutchinson, 1900), p. 1013.

¹ John Morley, “Edmund Burke: Part I,” *Fortnightly Review* 1 (2) (1 Feb 1867), ed. John Morley (London: Chapman & Hall, 1867), p. 129. Morley’s fascination with Burke could not be confined to a single article, and he would make three more stabs at taking the measure of the man: *Edmund Burke: a Historical Study* (1867); an essay for *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1876); and a review for his *English Men of Letters* series (1879).

² T. E. Utley, “The State and the Individual” (1953), a lecture to the Conservative Political Centre, quoted in Leon D. Epstein, “Politics of British Conservatism,” *American Political Science Review* 48 (1) (Mar 1954), p. 28.

once in the century after his death did the Tories look upon Burke as anything other than a “Whig.” They may have found much in him to respect, but when they traced the lineaments of a distinctively Tory tradition, the route always ran through Disraeli to Pitt and Canning, and then back to Bolingbroke, sometimes widening to include Wellington, Shelburne, and even George III, but never Burke. Why not?

CHAPTER ONE

Birth-pangs: Pitt to Party, 1790-1832

In the months immediately following its publication in 1790, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* enjoyed acclaim as the hymnal of the newly self-conscious establishmentarian forces in England. From on high, the work was hailed by no less than George III, most loyal of Loyalists and with whom Burke had long quarreled, as “a good book, a very good book; every gentleman *ought* to read it.”¹ From on low, it spawned a cottage industry of pamphlets, broadsheets and ballads designed to translate Burke’s more erudite speculations for the tub-thumping masses.² Burke himself, seeming to repudiate his protestations of fidelity to the Whigs,³ now spoke of the “cackling of us poor tory geese to alarm the garrison of the Capitol.”⁴

Yet the marriage between Burke and the Tories carried an air of convenience from the outset. William Pitt, the party’s frigid and cautious leader, proved immune to Burke’s charms. The rank-and-file, sponsors of military intervention, nevertheless disdained Burke’s rhetorical excesses. While they were “prepared to sustain a limited war,” they were “not dedicated to the counter-revolutionary principle.”⁵ And for every Whig who alleged Burke had turned Tory, there stood a Tory insisting that Burke remained a closet Whig, a “sublime Arch Jesuit” who

¹ Quoted in John Morley, *Burke*, English Men of Letters (London: Macmillan, 1879), p. 152.

² For a detailed survey, see Robert Hole, “British Counter-Revolutionary Popular Propaganda in the 1790s,” in *Britain and Revolutionary France*, ed. Colin Jones (Exeter, U.K.: University of Exeter, 1983), pp. 53-69.

³ As late as 1793, responding to Charles James Fox: “He [Burke] could say for himself that he had deserted no party, and that of those with whom he had been accustomed to act there was not one that differed from him in opinion on the present state of affairs.” *Parl. Hist.*, vol. 30, col. 555 (28 Feb 1793).

⁴ Edmund Burke, “Letter IV, to the Earl Fitzwilliam” (1795), in *Four Letters on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France*, ed. Edward J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892), p. 334.

⁵ Conor Cruise O’Brien, “The Manifesto of a Counter-Revolution,” introduction to Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O’Brien (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1969), p. 56.

devoted “the greatest exertion of his talents in the service of tyranny,” as *The Public Advertiser*, a newspaper supportive of the government, sneered in a review of the *Reflections*.⁶

The Tories had three reasons to be wary of Burke: he wasn’t a proper “party man;” he was intemperate; he wasn’t really a Tory at all. The first charge bore less taint in these years – parties were still nebulous constructs⁷ – but it made for unease. The Tories well remembered the anger directed against Burke for airing dirty laundry and making public his breach with the Foxites in *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), when “[p]rivate conversation and private insinuation” might better have accommodated “modes to means...the only way of producing effect in ordinary hands.”⁸ A statesman capable of such a “wicked book – in which his friends, in a fit of patriotism, have been basely sacrificed,”⁹ struck the Tories, not unreasonably, as a bad political bet.

As to the justice of the second charge, it “will inevitably be a matter of opinion and taste.”¹⁰ Some members found Burke’s effusions convivial, even exhilarating; others found them tiresome. Sketches from the time had benches emptying as Burke rose, for “the fashionable triflers...could listen to nothing but an epigram...[and] so left him nearly alone with the few necessary attendants of ministers.”¹¹ And as events in France came to consume entirely his attentions, members grew “tired of listening to declamation, or had not sufficient taste to be

⁶ 10 Nov 1790, quoted in F. P. Lock, *Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 137.

⁷ Sustained use in political conversation even of the terms “left” and “right” did not exist in England before the mid-1830s. On this point, and on the lack of satisfactory labels for English factions before 1832 more generally, see James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 3-7.

⁸ Earl [William Wentworth] Fitzwilliam to Burke, 18 Sep 1791, in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke Between the Year 1744 and the Period of his Decease, in 1797*, vol. 3, eds. Earl [Charles William] Fitzwilliam and Sir Richard Bourke (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1844), p. 334.

⁹ Charles Burney, recounting the reaction of Whig acquaintances to his daughter Frances, 17 Aug 1791, quoted in F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, Vol. 2: 1784-1797* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 385.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

¹¹ John Timbs, *Anecdote Lives of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, and Edmund Burke* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1880), p. 336.

amused when [he] ingeniously wandered from the question.”¹² The very immoderation of Burke’s tone gave the first charge its tang: excessive feeling was deemed *prima facie* evidence of independence from party.

The third charge was the gravest, because it goes to the heart of the matter: What did it mean to be a “non-Whig” in the first decades of the nineteenth century? Semantic awkwardness inheres in any attempt to even name the party. “Conservative” as a mark of political identification was not commonplace in England until the 1830s, probably stimulated by the debut (and then demise) of Chateaubriand’s *Le Conservateur*. Time and circumstance had shorn “Tory” of its indigenous connotations, though it retained some purchase as a political term of art. The label dated to the fratricidal years 1679-1681, and referred (first derogatorily) to the Royalist champions of the heir presumptive, James, Duke of York, in his bid for the English throne. Against them arrayed the Whigs, who demanded for Parliament the right to alter the succession and exclude the Catholic James, thus asserting the supremacy of statute over royal entitlement. The Glorious Revolution of 1688, by tilting the balance decisively in favor of the Whigs and permanently fixing the Protestant line, engineered the sort of ironic reversal with which history brims: the Whigs were now cast as the Establishment party, the Tories as malcontented partisans of the Stuart cause (that is, of favoring the return of the Catholic branch of the royal family to power). In Bolingbroke’s schematic but still useful definitions, seventeenth and early eighteenth century Toryism represented “divine, hereditary, indefeasible right [of kings to rule], lineal succession, passive obedience, prerogative, non-resistance, slavery, nay, and sometimes popery too,” while the Whigs exemplified “the power and majesty of the people, an original contract, the

¹² Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1790), in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 45.

authority and independency of Parliament, liberty, resistance, exclusion, abdication, deposition.”¹³

But the distinctions between “Whig” and “Tory” had long since decayed into obsolescence, even if “the nominal were preserved and have done...a good part of the mischief which the real did before.”¹⁴ Far from merely acquiescing to the settlement of 1688, the Tories of Burke’s day “regard[ed] themselves as the true upholders of the old Whig constitution”¹⁵ and as the spiritual, if not lineal, descendants of its drafters. “[T]he old Tory party are [*sic*] the representatives and successors of the great men of the revolution,” insisted one High Churchman, “for I am not aware of any doctrines held by them which are not now held by the Tories; whilst instances can be quoted of [Whig] men who, inheriting their blood and honours, have violated every principle, for the sake of which those, their illustrious ancestors, would have sacrificed everything.”¹⁶ No late-eighteenth century Englishman would have presumed a role for the Divine in affairs of state or challenged constitutional restraints on the monarchy, even if the extent of the Crown’s circumscription remained in dispute. “There was scarcely a Tory statesman or writer of distinction who would have hesitated, as far as principle was concerned, to call himself a Whig.... Bolingbroke avowedly bases his political theories on the old Whig principles; Swift...declares that he is still, what he always was, a Whig of the Revolution settlement; Pope bitterly denounces Walpole in glowing lines which Warton declares to be the incarnation of Whiggism.”¹⁷ Tories stood for defense of rank, privilege, and property, but so did

¹³ [Henry St. John, Viscount] Bolingbroke, *A Dissertation Upon Parties* (pub. serially beginning 1733; book form 1735), in *Bolingbroke, Political Writings*, ed. David Armitage, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁵ H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain* (New York: Homes and Meier, 1977), p. 317.

¹⁶ Sir Robert Harry Inglis, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 9, col. 435 (17 Dec 1831).

¹⁷ William John Courthope, “The Liberal Movement in English Literature, II: the Conservatism of the Eighteenth Century,” *National Review* 4 (19) (Sep 1884) (London: W. H. Allen, 1885), p. 23.

the Whigs. Tories opposed the French Revolution, but again, so did many Whigs.¹⁸ The issues over which the two sides *really* split were rather: slavery; royal prerogative; Ireland; “economical reforms;” and the franchise. The Revolution heightened conversational pitch – especially on electoral reform, and whether it sufficed to forestall unrest – but the disputes themselves predated 1789. As we just noted, Parliament had been haggling over the scope of monarchical power for at least one hundred years; slavery had excited passions since the middle of the century; Ireland was a perennial wound.

On the first three of these – slavery, the Crown, and Ireland – Burke left an extensive paper trail, and one not designed to gladden Tory hearts. As early as 1757, he expressed dismay over a trade “which must depend for its support upon the annual murder of several thousands of innocent men” and that could only be justified by “the necessity we are under of peopling our colonies.”¹⁹ He excoriated the manner in which “the power of the Crown, almost dead and rotten as Prerogative, has grown up anew...under the name of Influence,”²⁰ and as Paymaster General labored to impose limits on sinecures and pensions. His opposition to the Irish Penal Laws, and general compassion for Irish Catholics, left him vulnerable to savage mockery.²¹ And it would be wrong to conclude that at the end, fear of the French menace overwhelmed earlier principles; instead, Jacobinism was added to his list of evils. “I think I can hardly overrate the malignit[ies]

¹⁸ The Duke of Portland, for instance, “recommended the constitutional principles of the *Reflections*” to his sons “as ‘the true Whig creed,’” and chose to remain in Pitt’s ministry after 1794. John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck: the Making of a Liberal Imperialist, 1774-1839* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 40-41.

¹⁹ [Edmund Burke with] William Burke, *An Account of the European Settlements in America, in Six Parts*, vol. 2 (1757), in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 9 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1846), p. 301. Burke later proposed a bill for the gradual abolition of slavery, and supported William Wilberforce’s efforts in 1789 and 1791.

²⁰ Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), in *Burke: pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. Ian Harris, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 123.

²¹ “It was not until after the part he took in the French Revolution that the caricaturists of his day ceased to represent him in the garb of an ecclesiastic of the Church of Rome.” Timbs, p. 194. An oft-reprinted cartoon was James Gillray’s “Cincinnatus in Retirement” (1782), which depicted Burke as an Irish Jesuit eating out of a potato-filled relic.

of...Protestant ascendancy, as they affect Ireland; or of indianism [*sic*], as they affect these countries and as they affect Asia; or of jacobinism [*sic*] as they affect all Europe.” The last, he admitted, “was the greatest evil,” but “it readily combines with the others and flows from them.”²² Burke thus managed to taint even his hostility toward the Revolution in Tory eyes by associating it with Ireland and India, reviving suspicions of crypto-popery and reminding everyone of his obsessive pursuit of William Hastings, for which the Tories did not soon forgive him.²³

The dominance of earlier concerns like slavery and the Crown after 1789 illuminates a seeming peculiarity: the often effusive respect paid Burke in these initial posthumous decades by Whigs, while Tories tended to hedge their compliments round with qualifiers. “A man whose words...were well calculated to leave a lasting impression on their hearers” thought Lord Grenville, the once and future prime minister and committed Foxite.²⁴ Fox himself, as though there had been no rupture, glowingly described his former friend as “an illustrious man...distinguished in every way, and in nothing more, than for his great humanity,” before recalling “the most brilliant and convincing speech that ever was...delivered in this or any other place, by a consummate master of eloquence [i.e., Burke]...though it would be impossible to represent.”²⁵ Significantly, Grenville was discussing paper credit, Fox an end to the slave trade.

In the same vein: Henry Grattan, defending Catholic emancipation, embraces “our Burke.” Benjamin Hobhouse, Priestley’s champion, urges consideration of the measured views on debt payment of Mr. Burke, that “eloquent orator and sagacious statesman.” Burke was “a

²² Edmund Burke, “A Second Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe” (26 May 1795), in *Letters, Speeches and Tracts on Irish Affairs*, introd. Matthew Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1881), p. 336.

²³ In 1811, a still-piqued critic for the *Quarterly Review* wondered how “the wild and extravagant declamation [against Hastings] of a Burke” could have swayed the public. [John Barrow], “Wilks’s *Sketches of the South of India*,” *Quarterly Review* 6 (11) (Oct 1811) (New York: D. and G. Bruce, 1812), p. 106.

²⁴ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 1, col. 310 (13 Dec 1803). This is Burke’s first mention in *Hansard*.

²⁵ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 7, cols. 581, 584 (10 Jun 1806).

person of the most extraordinary talents” (Lord Holland on the repeal of Catholic disabilities); he retained “liberal and enlightened views” (Sir Maurice Fitzgerald, on granting funds to the College of Maynooth, an Irish seminary); his reports on India were drawn “with great perspicuity and extensive learning” (Thomas Creevy, criticizing the East India Company); he was one of “four of the most illustrious statesmen that ever graced the annals of the British Senate” (William Elliot, presenting a petition from Irish Catholics); his efforts to remedy colonial abuses proceeded from a “profound knowledge and pure system of moral duty...[and his] accomplishment[s]...raised a lasting and imperishable claim on the affections and the gratitude of his country” (Anthony Browne, urging improvements to the system for distributing colonial offices).²⁶

Tories, on the other hand, were more apt to sound like Patrick Duigenan. Having “established himself as a kind of anti-Papal incarnation,”²⁷ he took to speaking darkly of “active and able Romish agents, particularly the late Mr. Edmund Burke, [who] imposed upon [the ministry] the grossest falsehoods and misrepresentations [about Ireland].”²⁸ Those less inclined to wholesale censure but still uncomfortable with the Burkean canon contrived to distinguish between younger, misguided Burke and his mature self. “[I] c[an] not help recollecting the instance of a distinguished character,” said one, “[I] mean the late Mr. Burke, who had been most active in the early part of his political career in reforming and abolishing offices, and in limiting the prerogative of the crown, and who lived to lament and condemn all those reforms, abolitions, and limitations.”²⁹ On Ireland, where such contrivance could not be maintained without

²⁶ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 4, cols. 840-841, 940 (13 May 1805). Vol. 6, col. 734 (14 Apr 1806). Vol. 9, col. 415 (13 Apr 1807). Vol. 11, col. 588 (25 May 1808). Vol. 21, col. 673 (6 Feb 1812). Vol. 24, col. 743 (25 Feb 1813). Vol. 27, col. 366 (28 Mar 1814).

²⁷ Charles Phillips, *Curran and his Contemporaries* (4th ed.) (Edinburgh, U.K.: William Blackwood, 1851), p. 61.

²⁸ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 4, col. 886 (13 May 1805).

²⁹ W[illiam] Dundas, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 10, col. 98 (25 Jan 1808).

violence, the Tories elided in dignified silence over Burke's Catholic sympathies, of which they were all too uncomfortably aware,³⁰ and instead accentuated the features of his thought most amenable to their own. Much was made, for instance, of Burke's devotion to the Act of Settlement as the "corner-stone" of the Constitution, from which Daniel Webber deduced that Burke would have opposed modifications to the Irish Penal Laws. "You are now called on," he admonished his colleagues, "to take down this corner-stone, [and] unsettle that which [Burke] has declared to have been for ever settled."³¹ Similarly, William Scott denounced the election of Catholics to Parliament on the grounds that it presupposed the uncoupling of religious and civil institutions, which Burke, "a luminous and eloquent political philosopher," had denied: "This principle [of Englishmen's attachment to their religious national establishment] 'runs through the whole system of their polity' [wrote Burke]... They consider it as the foundation of their whole constitution, with which, and with every part of which, it holds an indissoluble union."³²

Whigs were quick to resist, and at length. The tone was generally affronted, if civil, as when Francis Horner rose to

repel the aspersions which had been thrown upon the memory of one of the proudest ornaments of this or any other country, by the inconsiderate observations of the right hon[ourable] gent[leman, i.e., William Dundas, who maintained that Burke "had lived to lament" his reformist impulses]. [I] den[y] that the latter part of Mr. Burke's life went in any way to invalidate or contradict the sincerity of his earlier efforts. Those who were...acquainted with his very last work, knew that he took honour and credit to himself for having pursued such measures as tended to every species of economical reform; they knew that, to the latest hour of his splendid career, he was as zealous and as sincere an enemy to rapine and public malversation as he was in the most vigorous period of his memorable life.³³

³⁰ See Sir Robert Peel's admission that Burke was a "most anxious advocate of the Roman Catholic claims." *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 36, col. 415 (9 May 1817).

³¹ *Ibid.*, col. 366.

³² *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 5, col. 966 (14 May 1805).

³³ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 10, col. 99 (25 Jan 1808).

Only when conversation turned to Ireland, the most intimate of Burke's preoccupations, did Tory "misrepresentation" goad his Whig disciples beyond endurance, and therefore beyond *politesse*. "An illustrious friend of mine [is] now no more," lamented one, pointedly recalling to attention the want of such reverential language from Tory tongues. "[His] memory will ever be cherished next to my heart; [his] virtues as well as talents will ever live in my fondest regard...; [he was] a political philosopher, no less enlightened than eloquent...; a statesman, whose loss his country has every day more and more reason to deplore, as a public calamity." But sorrow gave way to indignation at the violence with which the opposition had torn one of Burke's sentences

from its place, to make it the foundation of objections to the present measure of relief [for Roman Catholics]; a measure which the great authority himself...never ceased, from his first entrance into public life to the moment of his death, to recommend. ... I very much fear, that my right hon[ourable] and learned friend [i.e., William Scott] has only been dressing up in more decent apparel a set of idle vagabond fallacies which have been already more than once whipped through the town as public cheats and impostors. ... I cannot refrain from declaring at once my surprise and my affliction, that...[Burke] should now experience the treatment, which he was too much used to receive during his life from the least respectable of his adversaries; that his opinions should be imperfectly and partially quoted, to hold him up to the world, as inconsistent with himself.³⁴

Such to-ing and fro-ing – what did the Great Man believe and when did he believe it? – recurred persistently in these years. Decrying the move to abolish a certain Crown grant, the Tories asserted that Burke's 1782 bill "did not look to those sweeping measures which were now contemplated," while the Whigs charged the Tories with "totally misapprehend[ing] [Burke]" and seizing "scraps and shreds of his principles."³⁵ Two years later, revisiting the same ground, the Tories had Burke opposing any reduction in office "that contributed to the splendour of the Crown," while the Whigs had him maintaining that the Privy Purse was part of the Civil List and

³⁴ Doctor [French] Laurence, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 4, cols. 971-972 (14 May 1805).

³⁵ [Alexander] Boswell and [William Wentworth-Fitzwilliam], Lord Milton, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 36, cols. 689, 690 (19 May 1817).

therefore under parliamentary control.³⁶ Burke, despised the Whigs, was “so often quoted but so little understood” on electoral reform; he “very justly said” that the English had never inclined to disorder, and would not, after being granted the franchise, “despoil” the rich. Burke, scoffed the Tories, would have been discomposd to find his name brought forward on this issue, for “the whole tenor of [his] later sentiments...was opposed to such a reform.” He had endorsed fair representation of *property* rather than populace, and alterations to the system only “as was called for by the necessity of remedying...abuse.”³⁷

Both the Tory *and* Whig positions on Burke were not without merit, and some blame for the confusion must lie with the inconstant source material. The contention that Burke would have opposed further efforts at Catholic emancipation cannot simply be dismissed as casuistry. When Sir Robert Peel pointed out that Burke had distinguished between “franchise” and “office,” or “rule” and “instrumentality” (i.e., that Catholics might be granted the right to vote but not to serve), and had opposed repeal of the Test Acts in 1791,³⁸ he was correct, though whether Burke meant the injunction to be temporary or permanent was unclear. Especially in deliberations over the purse and the franchise, Tories could very plausibly divide Burke’s career into an “earlier part...when he was a liberal...reformer,” and a later part, when he vigorously defended “the established political system.”³⁹ They could further argue, again with reason, that the Whigs were stretching Burke far beyond where he would have wished to go. “The [Catholic] emancipation which he contended for,” asserted *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1825, “was, in every point, different from that which now bears the name. The most important things

³⁶ Sir Alexander Hope, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 39, col. 1020 (16 Mar 1819). [Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice], Marquis of Lansdowne, vol. 39, col. 1255 (30 Mar 1819).

³⁷ G[eorge] Banks and Hart Davis, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 2, cols. 1297, 1303 (3 Mar 1831).

³⁸ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 36, col. 370 (9 May 1817). Also: (series 2) vol. 4, cols. 991-992 (28 Feb 1821). Vol. 9, col. 587 (28 May 1823). The Test Acts prohibited Catholics, Dissenters, and Nonconformists from holding public office.

³⁹ Frank O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke*, Political Thinkers (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 70-71.

that he recommended have been already conceded to the Catholics; they have got more in the elective franchise than he would ever have granted them; and with regard to their admission to power, his plan would only have admitted them into the *Irish* Government...it would NOT have brought them into the *English* government.”⁴⁰

How might one determine where to situate Burke ideologically, and therefore one’s feelings toward him, when there seemed to have existed so many varieties of the man? Sir Charles Grey gave voice to the not uncommon complaint that Burke’s writings were “a magazine of arguments for and against every side of almost every question.”⁴¹ “[W]e may say with Mr. Burke,” murmured another parliamentarian acerbically, “who has been quoted on the other side, and who may be quoted for any side of almost any question.”⁴² Anticipating the accusation, Burke had mounted a pre-emptive defense as “one who would preserve consistency by varying his means to secure the unity of his end,”⁴³ although the precise location of that “end,” as we see, was itself subject to dispute. Later, when Whig-Tory rancor had subsided and Burke’s “betrayal” ceased to offend, post-partisan interpretations placed him beyond the reach of party cant. “His greatness,” Matthew Arnold would write, “is that he lived in a world which neither English Liberalism nor English Toryism is apt to enter; — the world of ideas, not the world of catchwords.”⁴⁴

In these early decades, however, the choices were two. Tories exulted that Burke had come down on the right side in the end and redeemed his previous heresies, though the heresies still rankled. Lord Fife, who “hated Fox...never really liked Burke...[and] disapproved of Pitt’s

⁴⁰ [David Robinson], “Life of Burke,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 17 (96) (Jan 1825) (London: T. Cadell, 1825), p. 15, ftnt.

⁴¹ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 31, col. 343 (23 May 1815).

⁴² [John] Hobhouse, *Parl. Debs.* (series 2) vol. 15, col. 685 (27 Apr 1826).

⁴³ Burke, *Reflections*, in O’Brien, ed., p. 377.

⁴⁴ Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1865), in Ritchie, ed., pp. 27-28.

earlier reforming motions,”⁴⁵ who honored Queen Charlotte for deliberately snubbing Burke,⁴⁶ forgave all after the *Reflections* appeared in print. “I filled a Bumper to Mr. Burke and the British Constitution,” he trilled to his agent William Rose. “Did you ever expect to see this? I never spoke to [Burke], from the speech on the Regency [Crisis], but now all is done away by the Pamphlet I sent you.”⁴⁷ Whigs, on the other hand, grew convinced that Burke had gone mad: “[I]t must be a matter of perfect notoriety...the perversion that the intellect of that eminent man underwent, on all points that directly or indirectly could be supposed to have any connection with the French Revolution, or with which any of the principles applicable to that great event could at all be brought into contact.”⁴⁸ The words “mad” and “madness” were mostly commissioned to provide verbal punch, but sometimes also in an earnest attempt to diagnose a perceived clinical condition.⁴⁹

Had Burke abstained from putting quill to paper after 1790 and contented himself with the intermittent poisonous barb, events might well have proceeded along their conventionally assumed course, with the “indomitable Pitt...ma[king] Burke’s *Reflections* his bible” and “the opposing poles of conservation and innovation” lodging themselves irrevocably in the “public consciousness.”⁵⁰ But this was not exactly how it ran. Burke continued to write, and the more he wrote, the more perturbed the Tories grew. We have always been told that Burke’s later compositions form the backbone of the Tory catechism. Not so, or at least not yet. While the

⁴⁵ *Lord Fife and his Factor, Being the Correspondence of James, Second Lord Fife, 1729-1809*, eds. Alistair and Henrietta Tayler (London: William Heinemann, 1925), p. 2.

⁴⁶ To his nephew Sir James Grant, 30 Mar 1789, *Ibid*, p. 204.

⁴⁷ 10 May 1792, *Ibid*, p. 235. The Regency Crisis found Parliament debating whether the dissipated Prince of Wales (later George IV) should be declared regent because of his father’s insanity.

⁴⁸ [Henry] Brougham, *Parl. Debs.* (series 2) vol. 18, col. 775 (26 Feb 1828).

⁴⁹ The historian Henry Thomas Buckle later lent the diagnosis a “scientific” imprimatur: “[I]t would be affectation to deny that Burke, in the last few years of his life, fell into a state of complete hallucination. When the French Revolution broke out, his mind, already fainting under the weight of incessant labour, could not support the contemplation of an event so unprecedented... And, when the crimes...continued to increase, then it was that the feelings of Burke finally mastered his reason.” *History of Civilization in England*, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton, 1870), p. 334.

⁵⁰ Kirk, *Mind*, pp. 6, 126.

bulk of the back-bench, as we said, inclined toward intervention, they viewed such action purely as a defensive measure. Discomfort with the enthusiasms of the man whom one Tory dismissed as “the timid alarmist of the French Revolution” remained palpable.⁵¹ If Burke leaned too far to the “left” for the Tories on slavery, Ireland, and the Crown, his stance on war with France was too dogmatic and uncompromising in the other direction.

The leading Tory journals of the day reflected this ambivalence. Like Lord Fife, the *British Critic*, the mouthpiece of High Anglicanism, extolled the *Reflections* as an “immortal work,” and *Three Memorials on French Affairs* (1797) as “a tract of the highest political consequence, the opinions and reasonings of which still deserve to be maturely weighed by every statesman in Europe.”⁵² But it reacted to *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796) with unease: “Mr. Burke...paints, in the most glaring colors...and writes a most bitter satire... To us, this all appears pernicious.” Burke’s refusal to accommodate the French seemed unwise when circumstances demanded a realist approach: “The inexorable perseverance in war...is neither necessary, nor likely to prove effectual... Our conduct, at least, has been steady and consistent. We entered into the war reluctantly, we continue it with reluctance. We began to fight, *not against a system*, but in defence of certain continental objects.”⁵³ The *London Quarterly Review*, moderate Toryism’s riposte to the *Edinburgh Review*, similarly deduced an imperative for political modesty, since “[i]t might indeed easily be shewn that, in some important respects, the...revolution embarrassed even the eagle perception of Mr. Burke.” By no means had the journal forgotten “the *utter and the middle darkness* of the reign of Regicide,” nor the “sanguinary vindictiveness with which the

⁵¹ [Robert John] Wilmot, *Parl. Debs.* (series 2) vol. 4, col. 654 (13 Feb 1821). He is erroneously listed as “Mr. William Wilmot” in the digitized Hansard: hansard.millbanksystems.com/people/mr-william-wilmot. Presumably, his first name has been confused with that of the other MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, William Shepherd Kinnersley.

⁵² “Lally’s Defence of the Emigrants,” *British Critic* 9 (Jun 1797) (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1797), p. 654. [Robert Nares], preface to *British Critic* 10 (Jul-Dec 1797) (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1798), p. xi.

⁵³ “Mr. Burke’s ‘Two Letters to Parliament,’” *British Critic* 8 (Dec 1796) (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1796), pp. 665, 666.

revolutionists persecuted each other,” and certainly not “the forked tongues of the popular leaders...hissing forth the cant of *philanthropy* and *cosmopolitanism*” to cloud impressionable Foxite minds. Nevertheless, “amid the difficulties which...surrounded the political path of England,” Pitt’s mixture of “wariness and decision” proved a surer guide to the whirls and eddies of a revolution “governed by fortune” than Burke’s obduracy.⁵⁴ John Heriot, editor of the *True Briton*, a ministerial organ, roundly abused the *Letters* on the grounds that its author, though he had “one foot in the grave...wished to do the world all the mischief he could before he left it.”⁵⁵

Parliamentary debates from these years contain few passages from the *Reflections* or the letters Burke penned at the end of his life. Fox and his allies thought the post-1790 *oeuvre* a severe error and avoided it whenever possible. The governing Pittite coalition, nominally Tory, was even less inclined to protracted conflict; its coloring was conservative (in the small-c sense), its focus debt reduction and free trade, “the attainment of which would necessarily be impeded by the expenses of a foreign war.”⁵⁶ In 1795, the Prime Minister wrote Lord Auckland: “I shall be particularly glad of an opportunity of conversing with you... Th[e point] respecting [the high price and scarcity of] corn is above all pressing.” As to Burke’s letter prophesying ruin if negotiations with France were pursued, it “is like other rhapsodies from the same pen, in which there is much to admire, and nothing to agree with.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ [Robert Grant], “Gifford’s *Life of the Rt. Hon. W. Pitt*,” *Quarterly Review* 4 (7) (Aug 1810) (New York: D. and G. Bruce, 1811), pp. 239, 240, 241, 250-251, 252.

⁵⁵ Quoted in William Cobbett, “Reply to a Ministerial Attack upon the Political Character of Mr. Windham,” *Cobbett’s Annual Register* 2 (8) (21-28 Aug 1802) (London: T. C. Hansard, 1810), p. 145, ftnt. Ironically, Heriot had earlier been installed at Burke’s urging at *The True Briton*’s evening sister, *The Sun*, to counteract the other dailies’ “Jacobin influence.” See the introductory notes to an excerpt from the *Antijacobin* newspaper, in *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy*, ed. Marilyn Butler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 214.

⁵⁶ Sir George Cornwall Lewis, *Essays on the Administration of Great Britain from 1783 to 1830 Contributed to the Edinburgh Review*, ed. Sir Edmund Head (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1864), p. 135. Pitt’s “exclusive attachment to pounds, shillings, and pence” was frequent grist for the satirical mill.

⁵⁷ 8 Nov 1795, in *The Journal and Correspondence of William, Lord Auckland*, vol. 3, ed. [Robert John Eden], Bishop of Bath and Wells (London: Richard Bentley, 1862), p. 320.

Such extracts of the *Reflections* as *do* appear in the early volumes of *Hansard* almost always emerged from the mouths of Whigs, though they tended, by selecting unrepresentative bits, to re-make the work into a vehicle for promoting Whig causes, or into a cudgel with which to beat the Tories. The *Reflections* is first quoted on 14 May 1805 to contest the Tory position on Irish Catholic relief;⁵⁸ next to argue for redressing the depreciation of paper currency;⁵⁹ then to indict the Tories for inflaming the public against Catholics by dredging up ancient outrages, just as the revolutionaries, in Burke's depiction, had attempted to "direct...opinion in France" by exposing "upon the stage...the crimes of Charles 9, and the cardinal of Loraine."⁶⁰

The Tories, by contrast, did not move to acknowledge the *Reflections* until 1817, when Lord Sidmouth, responding with alarm to episodes of unrest, urged his colleagues to meet the "dangers to which [the country] w[as] exposed...with corresponding spirit, determination, and vigour," per "the advice of one of the most gifted and enlightened men that had ever lived [i.e., Burke]." Sidmouth closed by reading "from the commencement of Mr. Burke's *Reflections*" and calling for the suspension of *habeas corpus*.⁶¹ But just as one starts to prepare for a Tory embrace of Burke, in the next instance of quotation, a full two years later, Robert John Wilmot chides Burke for applying "to the lower orders the appellation of 'the swinish multitude,'" a remark which every man "who looked with due feelings upon the poor must deprecate."⁶²

Odd enough to find the Tories ignoring their putative bible or combing it with a disapproving eye. Even odder, as time goes on, to find many Whigs endorsing that bible's most counter-revolutionary parts! By 1815, a founder of the Dublin Whig Club was extolling Burke

⁵⁸ Doctor [French] Laurence, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 4, cols. 966, 971-972.

⁵⁹ [George] Eden, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 20, col. 915 (15 Jul 1811).

⁶⁰ Sir Samuel Romilly, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 22, cols. 939-940 (24 Apr 1812).

⁶¹ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 35, col. 558 (24 Feb 1817). Sidmouth's plea would shortly result in passage of the "Gagging Acts."

⁶² *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 41, col. 652 (2 Dec 1819).

as “a prodigy of nature and acquisition:” he “foresaw everything – his knowledge of history amounted to a power of foretelling;... [W]hat other men conceived to be the vigour of [France’s] constitution, he knew to be no more than the paroxysm of her madness, and then, prophet-like, he pronounced the destinies of France, and, in his prophetic fury, admonished nations.”⁶³ Sir James Mackintosh, whose *Vindiciae Gallicae* is counted the most ambitious challenge to the *Reflections*, told the House following Napoleon’s defeat: “This great man [i.e., Burke], in the latter part of his life...was often justly celebrated for that spirit of philosophical prophecy, which enabled him early to discern...all the misfortunes which the leaders of the French Revolution were to bring on the world by their erroneous principles of reformation. But...his foresight was not limited to one party or to one source of evil. In [the second *Letter on a Regicide Peace*]...he clearly enough points out [many others].”⁶⁴

Like Alice peering through the Looking Glass into an inverted world, we here witness the budding reconciliation of the parties’ positions on the Revolution. The ever closer “approximation of Tory and Whig political principles” (on which more in Chapter Two) was one cause;⁶⁵ the war another. For many Whigs – for many Radicals – the bloom had come off the rose, and they were “now willing to learn continuity, gradualness, and organicism from Burke,” even if they could not fully “accept his historical diagnosis of the essence of the Revolution, nor his rejection on principle of any revolution.”⁶⁶ Coleridge, Southey and especially Wordsworth gave this turn poetic voice. In his *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* (1793), Wordsworth condemned Burke’s “infatuated moralis[m].” “Alas! The obstinacy and perversion of men is

⁶³ [Henry] Grattan, *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 31, col. 428 (25 May 1815).

⁶⁴ *Parl. Debs.* (series 1) vol. 30, col. 929 (27 Apr 1815).

⁶⁵ Hedva Ben-Israel, *English Historians on the French Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 52.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

such that...in order to reign in peace [Liberty] must establish herself by violence.”⁶⁷ By 1831, however, Burke had become “wisest of the moderns,” and Wordsworth’s ardor for reform had subsided: “I am averse, with...Burke, to all *hot* reformations, i.e. to every sudden change in political institutions on a large scale.”⁶⁸

Genius of Burke! forgive the pen seduced
By specious wonders, and too slow to tell
Of what the ingenuous, what bewildered Men
Beginning to mistrust their boastful guides,
And wise men, willing to grow wiser, caught,
Rapt auditors!⁶⁹

On the Tory side, the path reversed. As dread of domestic upheaval faded, there came occasion to reconsider “an occurrence which originally appeared of a nature altogether negative”⁷⁰ but which in some respects actually consolidated a *new* conservative order. Already in 1824, the *Quarterly* judged the Revolution not merely acceptable but salubrious, albeit in a highly restricted sense. “We cannot pretend to deny that Mr. Burke was guilty of one political crime:” failing to anticipate that “the French Revolution has, *in the ultimate issue of events*, proved beneficial to France; and...other nations have...in the sequel, if not in consequence of it, advanced in freedom.” Though an exceedingly great man, Burke was perhaps overly “possessed by some abstract notion of excellence,” and so his “alarms at the danger of the contagion of French doctrines...will continue to be questioned.”⁷¹ By 1829, even his assessment of cause – in particular his gauzy eulogiums for the Bourbons – caught uncomfortably in the throats of a party increasingly allied to the middle classes. “It cannot be believed that the privileged

⁶⁷ In *Wordsworth’s Political Writings*, eds. W. J. B. Owen and J. W. Smyser (Penrith, U.K.: Humanities-EBooks, 2009), pp. 29, 33.

⁶⁸ To Benjamin Haydon, 8 Jul 1831, in *Benjamin Robert Haydon: Correspondence and Table-Talk*, vol. 2, ed. Frederic Wordsworth Haydon (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), p. 40.

⁶⁹ William Wordsworth, “Genius of Burke” (1832), from *The Fourteen Book Prelude*, Book 7 (1850), ll. 512-517. [Grant], p. 233.

⁷¹ [John Wilson Croker], “Prior’s *Life of Burke*,” *Quarterly Review* 34 (68) (Sep 1826) (London: John Murray, 1826), pp. 470, 471, 479, 481.

orders...generally [fit Burke's] description[s],” as these “contradict the whole mass of facts...before the public.” It was precisely “the boundlessly audacious extravagance of an extensive and dissolute court,” together with other systemic deformities, that led to “the decay of the main supports” and ultimately revolution.⁷²

The Tories thus retreated when charged with “misappropriating” Burke, and never suggested that Whig claims of partiality toward him were dishonest, or weaker than their own. How could they? Whereas the Whigs needed only to speculate on a small share of an otherwise luminous career – and cannot an old man, beset by personal sorrow,⁷³ be excused for allowing emotion to overmaster reason? – the Tories felt constantly pressed to explain away all but Burke’s final years, and even those saw him harshly critical of “Protestantism” and “Indianism.” What is more, on a personal level, the Tories frankly disliked him, or at least found him wanting. His highly-colored oratory grated beside Pitt’s judiciousness. His excessively vigorous prosecution of war with France would have committed the country too soon and too steeply. And in hindsight, even his clairvoyance showed itself imperfect, exaggerating the risks posed by the Revolution to English institutions and liberties.

⁷² [Robert Southey], “State and Prospects of the Country,” *Quarterly Review* 39 (78) (Apr 1829) (London: John Murray, 1829), p. 485.

⁷³ The unexpected loss of his son Richard in 1794 threw Burke into paroxysms of grief from which he never fully recovered. He himself passed away three years later.

CHAPTER TWO

Equipoise: Reform Bill to Reform Bill, 1832-1868

In 1831, Francis Jeffrey, a Scottish grandee with reformist sympathies, surveyed the political landscape: “The real battle that is soon to be fought, and the only one worth fighting for, is not between Whigs and Tories, Liberals and Illiberals and such gentlemanlike denominations, but between property and no property – swing and the law.” He implored “our Tory opponents” to “range themselves under our standard” and “not make a mutiny” against Earl Grey’s incipient Whig government, for “[we] are bound by [the] fearful peril” of unchecked popular anger, which could only be defeated by professing common cause.¹

Jeffrey need not have worried. Notwithstanding that the following June saw contentious passage of the First Reform Act and the formal birth of the Conservative party in response, the space between Tories and Whigs had over the course of the eighteenth century grown less meaningful than it initially was or would again become after 1860. The Tories of Jeffrey’s day judged themselves (co-) custodians of 1688, while the leading Whigs hardly qualified as democrats. Their courting of public opinion had far more to do with an urge to *épater le opposition* than with a desire to grant votes to the un-propertied, whose distress touched all but the very radical only in remote fashion. “The people” tended to gain in luster proportional to one’s remove from office, and the Tories played the game with equal skill. Indeed, in 1829 and 1830, the clamor to extend the franchise emanated loudest from the “Court Party,” a band of restive Tories who seized upon the issue to parade their discontent with the high-handed administrative style of their own front bench. It was only after the Tories fell to Grey in November 1830 that “the exigencies of parliamentary politics...induce[d] an historical amnesia,”

¹ To [William] Empson, 31 Jan 1831, in Lord [Henry] Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey with a Selection from his Correspondence*, vol. 2 (2nd ed.) (Edinburgh, U.K.: Adam and Charles Black, 1853), pp. 233-234.

for a shattered party could not be reconstituted by admitting that its members had conspired in the shattering.²

This is not to suggest that political life in these decades floated along complacently. The mid-Victorian settlement was the child of uneasy compromise, and the appearance of social cohesion masked to some degree the unresolved tensions between state and province, individual and collective. W. L. Burn, whose *Age of Equipoise* (1964) christened the generation, reminded his readers that “if there was equipoise, it was not deliberately planned or contrived. It was the outcome of a temporary balance of forces; but of forces struggling, pushing, shoving to better their positions.”³ Nevertheless, the general blurring of political attitudes, encouraged by a liberal drift of opinion during the century’s second quarter, produced for a time a marked disinclination toward extremes. “The ideal Tory and the ideal Whig,” thought Coleridge, concur “in the necessity and benefit of an exact balance of the three estates: but the Tory was more jealous of the balance being deranged by the people; the Whig, of its being deranged by the Crown. But this was a habit, a jealousy only;...and accordingly, they might each...pass from one side to the other, as the ultimate object required it.”⁴ Consensus had emerged specifically around electoral reform: there was to be no more of it from the Whigs, and no attempt to repeal or amend existing legislation by the Tories. This agreement provided the “common ground for high politics until the early [eighteen] fifties,”⁵ and as late as 1865, “though it generated sporadic bouts of ill-coordinated activity...[franchise reform] resemble[d] nothing so much as a corpse on the

² D. C. Moore, “The Other Face of Reform,” *Victorian Studies* 5 (1) (Sep 1961), p. 9.

³ W. L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: a Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p. 82.

⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Ideal Whig and Tory” (28 Jan 1832), in *The Table Talk and Omiana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. T. Ashe (London: George Bell, 1888), p. 148.

⁵ See Bruce Coleman, *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), p. 62.

dissecting table.”⁶ The *Quarterly*, for one, expressed confidence that “[t]he Whigs, while they are in power, have but little desire to disturb our institutions – they will do no more than just as much as may be absolutely necessary to keep their Radical friends quiet – they soon become *acclimatized* in the Tory atmosphere of Downing Street... The stronger [the Conservatives] are, the better will the Whigs be able to resist the movements of their troublesome...[Radical] allies.”⁷

The result was a highly adaptable, often hard-headed mode of governance. Since formal institutionalization was relatively minimal, and party boundaries remained porous, centrist groupings often held the balance of power. Success at the ballot box depended upon stepping beyond one’s own ranks to poach voters from the other side. Men crossed the aisle (as when some Tories became Liberals over repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846); switched positions (Tories were indifferent to, then favored, then opposed, then favored, protectionism); and allowed themselves to be led by former adversaries (e.g., the Liberals by the Canningite Lord Palmerston). Disraeli in *Coningsby* (1844) might have counseled “high philosophy,” or Creed, over “low practice,”⁸ but he was speaking to the intellectuals, and ministers ignored him. Both parties – at least when in command – practiced a non-dogmatic Whiggism that would have struck Burke as entirely congenial. Indeed, argues F. P. Lock, Burke “exercised a more general influence on Victorian political thinking than can be traced through what was actually written about him... By 1830, many of his ideas had become commonplaces of Victorian thought.”⁹ Other scholars speak similarly of “a kind of diffused Burkeanism...best revealed in the

⁶ K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 237.

⁷ [John Wilson Croker], “Peel Policy,” *Quarterly Review* 81 (161) (Jun 1847) (New York: Leonard Scott, 1847), p. 165.

⁸ “But after all, who were to form the government, and what was the government to be? Was it to be a Tory government, or an Enlightened-Spirit-of-the-Age Liberal-Moderate-Reform government; was it to be a government of high philosophy or of low practice; of principle or of expediency; of great measures or of little men?” Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby, or The New Generation* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1900), p. 93.

⁹ Lock, *Burke’s Reflections*, pp. 186-187.

commonplaces which later became part of the intellectual stock of Liberals as well as of Whigs and Tories.”¹⁰

As many of the disputes which occupied Burke receded, he ceased to be regarded as a figure of direct relevance. Tory passions were no longer kindled by his Whiggishness, while the Whigs now elided over the more bellicose aspects of his thought. Burke the man became simply Burke the liberal archetype, whose life could be studied “as a kind of manual of statesmanship.”¹¹ His rectitude suited the era’s earnestness and high moral tone; his support for Free Trade, a topic of particular heat in the 1840s, placed him in the mainstream;¹² and his status as an authority on government mattered in an age of constitutional fetish. “The greatest philosopher and statesman of his own or any other age or country,” pronounced one prominent Conservative civil servant in 1854.¹³ “Th[e] most illustrious ornament this House ever possessed,” concurred another in 1856.¹⁴

Yet the esteem in which Burke was held did not fundamentally alter perceptions of his political identity. He was no more, to Conservatives, a progenitor than he had been before, which is to say, not at all. When Lord Monteagle proudly brandished membership in “the party of Fox and of Burke,”¹⁵ the Tories did not protest. Before the 1870s, the only allusions to Burke in *Hansard* as a (capital-C) Conservative came from Irish members, who loathed their kinsman as a sell-out and sycophant. Sir William Shee called Burke, with heavy irony, “the prince of

¹⁰ Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: a Study in Nineteenth Century Intellectual History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 20.

¹¹ Lock, *Burke’s Reflections*, p. 178.

¹² See his *Tract on the Popery Laws* (1765) and *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), in which he advocated Smithian liberalism. Whether this makes him C. B. Macpherson’s out-and-out “apologist for the pure market society” is doubtful. [C. B. Macpherson, “Edmund Burke and the ‘New Conservatism,’” *Science and Society* 22 (3) (Sum 1958), pp. 231-239]. Macpherson ignores, for instance, Burke opposition to Pitt’s Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions (1785), which hoped to use free trade to encourage Ireland’s imperial integration.

¹³ G[eorge] A[lexander] Hamilton, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 132, col. 392 (4 Apr 1854).

¹⁴ [Samuel] Warren, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 141, col. 818 (10 Apr 1856).

¹⁵ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 139, col. 1363 (5 Aug 1853).

Conservative statesmen,”¹⁶ which was gentle enough, at least when compared to the blistering attack launched by Daniel O’Connell, leader of the radical faction, on “the high Tory name” of “Mr. Burke...none higher, none dearer to that class of persons who are opposed to this measure [of parliamentary reform].” O’Connell continued:

But what did Mr. Burke do for the country? He did something for himself – he rendered himself rich and comfortable by the course he pursued, and the country, be it recollected, has to pay the pensions granted to him up to this hour... He might have been a great man; but Burke was brought into this House by the borough-mongers, and his greatness and his value were lost to the country. His epitaph was written long before his death: — Here lies our good Edmund, whose genius was such, We scarcely can praise it, or blame it, too much; Who, born for the universe, narrow’d his mind, And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.¹⁷

But O’Connell stood virtually alone, both in his spleen and in his rejection of Burke as a “high Tory.”¹⁸ The high Tories certainly didn’t see him that way. He is notably absent from the roll call of “heroic spirits, beautiful and swift, ever in the van and foremost of their age” whom George Smythe, the “leader and spoilt child of Young England,” summoned in 1847 to defend the movement’s vision of the party.¹⁹ Smythe lists “Hobbes and Bolingbroke, Hume and Adam Smith, Wyndham and Cobham, Pitt and Grenville, Canning and Huskisson,” asking rhetorically, “Are the traditions of the Tory Party the noblest pedigree in the world?... Are the illustrations that glorious martyrology which opens with the name of Falkland and closes with the name of Canning?” When Smythe is accused of “having departed from true Toryism,” it is with Pitt, of all men, with whom “he takes sanctuary.” Pitt “defeated, if he could not conquer, a narrow...and

¹⁶ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 126, col. 1636 (20 Feb 1855).

¹⁷ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 3, cols. 205-206 (8 Mar 1831). The last lines are from “Retaliation” (1774), a popular doggerel by the Anglo-Irish poet Oliver Goldsmith.

¹⁸ The prominent exception is George Croly, whose 1840 biography of Burke insisted that all right-thinking Englishmen are Tories at heart, even, or perhaps especially, those from the outside: “Let him still bear what name he will, he is essentially a supporter of the rank into which he has fought his way.” *A Memoir of the Political Life of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, with Extracts from his Writings* (London: Thomas Cadell, 1840), pp. 165-166.

¹⁹ Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1966), p. 170. “Young England,” a coterie of intellectual patricians led by Disraeli, sought to revive the paternalistic toryism they imagined to have flourished under Stafford and Bolingbroke.

a monopolising aristocracy; he raised the commercial class to those high places which, in a commercial country, are their heritage; he enacted those measures of free trade which he had inherited...from Bolingbroke; he sympathised with those great spirits of 1789 in France...; he forecast a large measure of conciliation to Ireland.”²⁰

In part, Smythe’s selections were compelled by prudence. Since his passing, Pitt had undergone beatification, and fealty to his memory – frequently misconceived – was a prerequisite for higher office. Of the “genuine Pitt” sacrificed to Tory conceit, Macaulay bitterly remarked that the Prime Minister’s legacy “suffered much less from his assailants than from his eulogists.... [H]is name [has become] the rallying cry of a class of men with whom...he was accidentally and temporarily connected, but to whom, on almost all great questions of principle, he was diametrically opposed.”²¹ All the same, the reasons Smythe provides for Pitt’s standing as a Tory eminence make the neglect of Burke even more perplexing. Burke, too, robustly criticized an upper class grown wayward and grasping, championed un- (or less) restricted trade, and advocated gentler treatment of Catholics. True, he was now – history is rich with such ironies – faulted by many Tories for his intransigent stance on France, but on the whole, he stood far closer in spirit to Young England than Pitt. Indeed, Burke’s politics, by way of Sir Walter Scott’s novels, deeply informed the highly-colored, medieval romanticism of Smythe and his friends.²² Yet the debt to Burke is never acknowledged.

²⁰ In a speech at Canterbury, 6 Jul 1847, quoted in the introductory biographical sketch by E[mily] A[nn, Viscountess] Strangford to George Sydney-Smythe, *Angela Pisani: a Novel*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1875), pp. xxiv-xxv. In *Endymion* (1880), excerpts are placed in the mouth of the “profligate but unsentimental; unprincipled but unromantic” Mr. Waldershare, a character based on Smythe. “He is a wonderful man, Mr. Waldershare,” said Mr. Vigo to Rodney, “but I fear not practical.” Benjamin Disraeli, *Novels and Tales by the Earl of Beaconsfield with Portrait and Sketch of his Life, Vol. 11: Endymion* (London: Longmans, Green, 1881), p. 173.

²¹ Thomas Babington Macaulay, “William Pitt” (1859), in *The Life and Works of Lord Macaulay Complete*, vol. 7 (London: Longmans, Green, 1906), p. 411.

²² See Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 325-326.

Or consider Disraeli. In *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835), the most significant of his early political writings, a catalogue of England's "wise ancestors" since the Reformation finds Burke in the company of "that extraordinary being, Henry the Eighth," Burleigh, Cecil, Walsingham, Sir Edward Coke, Selden, Strafford and Pym, Cromwell, Clarendon, Sir William Temple, King William, Lord Somers, the Dukes of Marlborough and Argyll, Sir Robert Walpole, Lords Mansfield and Hardwicke.²³ In later novels like *Sybil* (1845), resentment over slights endured while scaling the greasy pole attained truculent articulation, with Burke, another outsider and hired hand, as Disraeli's twin, forced "to submit to the yolk" yet always and ever nursing his humiliation.²⁴ "The supreme genius," Disraeli crowned Burke, with "a voice like the Apocalypse," who "poured forth the vials of his hoarded vengeance into the agitated heart of Christendom...stimulated the panic of a world by the wild pictures of his inspired imagination...rent in twain the proud oligarchy that had dared to use and to insult him."²⁵ In the Commons, Disraeli tendered even more fulsome praise: "[O]ne of the most brilliant ornaments of this House, to whom we are always referring as the most eloquent of orators, the most profound of sages, and if we mention him as a statesman it is only to abuse the Whigs for not having placed him in the Cabinet." And: "One of the greatest men who ever sat in this House." And: "A man of transcendent talents."²⁶ The very substance of Disraeli's political

²³ [Benjamin] Disraeli the Younger, *Vindication of the English Constitution in a Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835), p. 62.

²⁴ On Disraeli's affinity for Burke as a supplier of "intellect" to a deficient aristocracy, see Paul Smith, "Disraeli's Politics," in *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851*, eds. Charles Richmond and Paul Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 172.

²⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil; or the Two Nations* (London: Longmans, Green, 1919), pp. 15, 17.

²⁶ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 137, col. 2012 (30 Apr 1855). Vol. 174, col. 1224 (18 Apr 1864). Vol. 224, col. 1176 (31 May 1875).

thought, according to his biographers, was “deeply penetrated with the spirit and sentiment of Burke’s later writings.”²⁷

And yet – Burke played virtually no part in the “new myth” with which Disraeli “endowed the history of Toryism.”²⁸ It is rather *Bolingbroke*, another political *bricoleur*, who in *Vindication* becomes the key figure in the party’s development. By “embracing the national cause,” a precursor for Disraeli of his own “One Nation,” Bolingbroke “eradicated...all those absurd and odious doctrines which Toryism had adventitiously adopted, clearly developed its essential and permanent character...and...laid the foundation for the future accession of the Tory party to power.”²⁹ In *Sybil*, Burke’s “genius” resides in his restoration of “the moral existence” of the *Whigs* after they had become “putrescent in the nostrils of the nation.” Burke achieved for his party what “Bolingbroke had done for the tories.”³⁰ Even Disraeli’s selection of the honorific Lord Beaconsfield, his biographers suggest, implied fraternity with Burke the “eminent pillar of the British Constitution”³¹ rather than with Burke the Victorian Conservative idol, an understandable distinction, since Burke the Victorian Conservative is a chimera.

“That arch-Whig trumpeter,” Disraeli teased, even if the Whiggishness no longer roused fury, and even if it could no longer be ascertained with precision what the term “Whig” actually meant. “What is a Whig [nowadays]?” wondered the *National Review*. “The question is not as simple as at first sight it would appear... Some people are disposed to deny his existence, to include him in the vague term ‘Liberal,’ and to treat the Moderate and Advanced Liberal...as

²⁷ William Flavelle Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, Vol. 1: 1804-1837* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 308.

²⁸ Noel O’Sullivan, *Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1976), p. 101.

²⁹ Disraeli, *Vindication*, p. 188.

³⁰ *Idem*, *Sybil*, pp. 15, 16.

³¹ George Earl Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, Vol. 5: 1868-1876* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), p. 518.

mere varieties of the same type.”³² Lord Cowper’s “Desultory Reflections,” all agreed, inadequately redressed the definitional deficiency despite the author’s “peculiar authority” as the scion of a storied Whig family. In occupying a golden center from which dogma had been banished, his Whigs resembled nothing so much as Conservatives.³³ Disraeli himself, playing his games of paradox, inverted conventional classifications to criticize Pitt for discarding his “Tory” credentials – “hostility to borough-mongering, economy, French alliance, and admirable commercial treaties” – under the impress of conflict and the influence of Burke. “The latter half [of Pitt’s career] is pure Whiggism, close parliaments, war with France, national debt and commercial restriction.”³⁴ This “light scoff of a bantering spirit”³⁵ should be taken with several grains of salt, but one thing it makes clear: Disraeli may have maintained high regard for Burke the *man*, but from Burke the *Whig politician* (however defined) it was prudent to hold oneself aloof.

To propose otherwise would have been to startle colleagues and adversaries alike. In much the same way that the reformer Pitt resisted Macaulay’s efforts to pry him loose from Conservatives, the conservative Burke remained annexed to the Liberals, upon whom he had been entailed by the Whigs. His ideas may have coincided awkwardly with the Liberals’ “anti-clerical, anti-monarchical...individualistic” ethos, which imagined that “everyone was, or was about to be, good and great and free;”³⁶ but no matter. The Liberals would fit him into their schema(s), even if they had to resort to strenuous redaction or outright inconsistency in the process.

³² Earl [Henry] Percy, “What is a Whig?” *National Review* 1 (4) (Jun 1883) (London: W. H. Allen, 1883), p. 540.

³³ Earl [Francis] Cowper, “Desultory Reflections of a Whig,” *Nineteenth Century* 13 (75) (May 1883), ed. James Knowles (London: Keegan Paul, 1883), pp. 729-739.

³⁴ To Sir William Harcourt, 1873, quoted in William Flavelle Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, Vol. 2: 1837-1846* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 297.

³⁵ Lord [Archibald] Rosebery, *Pitt* (London: Macmillan, 1892), p. 278.

³⁶ E. S. P. Haynes, *Early Victorian and Other Papers* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1908), pp. viii, 3.

Thus: for conservative Liberals like Macaulay, Burke was the philosopher of gradualism, whose disgust at the violence in France paralleled their own fears after 1848.³⁷ Macaulay's reductive rationalism may have chafed at the manner in which Burke allowed imagination to carry him "beyond the bounds of justice and good sense,"³⁸ but the hindrance was obviated by ignoring the "passionate" elements in Burke's thought and focusing on notions of prescription and precedent. For liberal Radicals like Henry Maine, by contrast, striving to detach themselves from Macaulay's cool and considered Whiggism but coming also to distrust democracy, it was precisely "that terrible essence of daring genius" in Burke which they found so revivifying.³⁹ To them, Burke was a Romantic whose organicism took a proto-Darwinian coloration.⁴⁰ For Gladstone, Burke was a "teacher or idol...in politics,"⁴¹ to whom he and a generation of followers remained intellectually indebted, especially on matters imperial.⁴² A diary note from 18 December 1885, as Ireland envenomed its Liberal host: "Read Burke; what a magazine of wisdom on Ireland and America." On 9 January 1886: "Made many extracts from Burke – *sometimes almost divine*."⁴³ Finally, and most famously, for Liberal positivists, Burke was a utilitarian whose rejection of abstractions prefigured Bentham.⁴⁴

³⁷ See Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Burleigh and His Times" (1832), in *The Life and Works of Lord Macaulay Complete*, vol. 5 (London: Longmans, Green, 1897), p. 594.

³⁸ *Idem*, "Warren Hastings" (1841), in *The Life and Works of Lord Macaulay Complete*, vol. 6 (London: Longmans, Green, 1904), p. 620.

³⁹ [Walter Bagehot], "The First Edinburgh Reviewers," *National Review* 1 (2) (Oct 1855) (London: Robert Theobald, 1855), p. 263. Though also a conservative Liberal, Bagehot cast a critical eye on the inability of his compatriots to appreciate that "the most convincing arguments – and some of those in...Burke...may work a far firmer persuasion than any neat and abstract statement."

⁴⁰ See John W. Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals: Continuity and Change in English Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 9, 14.

⁴¹ Autobiographical note, 22 Jul 1894, quoted in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, Vol. 1: 1809-1859* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), p. 208.

⁴² See Eugenio Biagini, "Exporting 'Western and Beneficent Institutions': Gladstone and Empire, 1880-1885," in *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, eds. David Bebbington and Roger Swift (Liverpool, U.K.: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 202-224.

⁴³ Quoted in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, Vol. 3: 1880-1898* (New York: Macmillan, 1904), p. 280.

⁴⁴ For the role played by Morley, Stephen and Lecky in the "embourgeoisement of Burke," see Isaac Kramnick, "The Left and Edmund Burke," *Political Theory* 11 (2) (May 1983), pp. 194-197.

This last was, from the mid- to late- nineteenth century, the dominant conception of Burke, for utilitarianism, with its emphasis on individualistic psychology, was one of the dominant strands in liberal thought as well as the dominant administrative temper.⁴⁵ It helped also that Burke's most energetic biographer, John Morley, claimed for his subject standing as "the greatest statesman who has adhered to this doctrine [of general utility]." Burke "must be pronounced to have been much nearer to the best, most vital, and most durable part of the Revolution than he knew, and than his successors have supposed," because the Revolution enshrined utility, "in its widest sense, [as] the practical standard of the right of any government to the allegiance of its subjects."⁴⁶

Inasmuch as Victorian Liberalism was a many splendored thing, often divided against itself, we might expect it to furnish us with an array of Burkes. Yet the sheer range of interpretations, often veering toward the absurd, indicates how far afield Liberals liked to wander. Burke can no more be styled a utilitarian than a Darwinian *avant la lettre*, or utilitarian only if the term is very loosely deployed.⁴⁷ In effect, what bound these Burkes together was simply that none were "Conservative" because their promoters identified as "Liberal." What is more, while Gladstone's Burke was too disposed toward imperial decentralization for the Tories' taste, Macaulay's Burke suited them quite well, and even Maine's Burke would have appealed to the romantics and Social Darwinians among them. Yes, Burke seemed lodged in Liberal quarters, but so precariously that Disraeli, one feels, could have carried him off if he had wanted to.

⁴⁵ See Coleman, p. 121.

⁴⁶ John Morley, *Edmund Burke: a Historical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1867), p. 310.

⁴⁷ One who favors such loose deployment is J. R. Dinwiddy, "Utility and Natural Law in Burke's Thought: a Reconsideration," in *Radicalism and Reform in Britain: 1780-1850*, introd. H. T. Dickinson (London: Hambledon, 1992), pp. 229-252.

He didn't, primarily, because of Ireland, "that cloud in the west, that coming storm, the minister of G-d's retribution upon...half-atoned injustice"⁴⁸ against which both parties braced. Smythe's tribute to Pitt notwithstanding, most back-bench Tories saw the defense of Anglicanism as central to their mission, or if not, at least felt pressure to conciliate anti-Catholic sentiment in the constituencies by taking a hard line. Under such circumstances, one could not persuasively exhibit the great advocate of Irish Catholics as a Tory. If he could be kept at remove – but that was impossible; he was too deeply entwined with the Irish Question. Sooner or later, his authority would be sent for. The numbers confirm this: references to Burke in *Hansard* peak at 190 in the tumultuous decade 1831-1840, when Parliament wrestled with franchise reform, slavery, the East India Company's authority, agricultural distress, "subversive" associations, the revenues owed the Irish Church – all subjects on which Burke expended significant energies. Thereafter, the figures decline: from 155 (1841-1850) to 111 (1861-1870), never rising above 80 after 1870. Yearly totals mostly fail to exceed single digits after 1860. In 1868, however, as Parliament took up Irish disestablishment, Burke is mentioned 35 times.

On 30 March, Gladstone, who had already bent his energies toward pacifying Ireland and would shortly accede to the premiership, summoned Burke in support of the Irish Church Act. "There is no greater authority on this question," he said, and Burke had been adamant that the Anglican Church in Ireland "has unhappily been...all along a cause of estrangement and disunion."⁴⁹ John Coleridge, great-nephew of the poet, urged the House to turn to Burke "in order to see by what force and fraud [Establishment] was originally set up."⁵⁰ In response, the Tories spent parts of that year and the next insisting that Burke's policy had been

⁴⁸ Gladstone to his wife, 1845, quoted in Morley, *Life: Vol. 1*, p. 383.

⁴⁹ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 191, cols. 477, 478.

⁵⁰ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 191, col. 844 (3 Apr 1868).

misrepresented.⁵¹ Extracts from letters to his son were brandished.⁵² Complaints were voiced: Burke had already treated “the incorporation of religious influence with civil government” to exhaustion, so why were the Liberals re-hashing the subject?⁵³ Or: Burke had already argued that the Coronation Oath bound the monarch, in the language of the statute, “to maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the United Church of England and Ireland,” so why were some alleging otherwise?⁵⁴ The Liberals immediately counterattacked. Hadn’t Burke described the Protestant ascendancy as “a division of the people of Ireland into two classes—the one to have all the rights...the other to be mere hewers of wood and drawers of water?”⁵⁵ Hadn’t he advocated equitable distribution of income to all churches?⁵⁶ Hadn’t he remarked that the Penal Laws deprived the Irish Catholic “not only of his civil and religious rights, but of his rights as guardian of his own children?”⁵⁷

For Disraeli and his Tories, then, emancipating Burke from Liberal control was no longer impeded by overall philosophical compatibility, as before 1832. In fact, as the Liberals drifted from their Whig origins, they increasingly put Burke to uses odder and more misshapen than any the Tories might have devised. The problem was rather the indissoluble link between Burke and Ireland. Why would the Tories elect as guide a statesman whose position on so fundamental a question they had either to ignore or obfuscate?

⁵¹ See [John] Walrond, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 191, col. 1360 (27 Apr 1868). [Spencer] Walpole, *Ibid.*, col. 1642 (30 Apr 1868). Gathorne Hardy, vol. 192, col. 734 (22 May 1868).

⁵² [Anthony] Lefroy, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 192, col. 1209 (5 Jun 1868).

⁵³ Dr. [John] Ball, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 194, col. 1803 (19 Mar 1869).

⁵⁴ [William Trench], Earl of Clancarty, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 196, col. 1889 (15 Jun 1869).

⁵⁵ G[eorge] H[enry] Moore, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 194, col. 2065 (23 Mar 1869).

⁵⁶ [Robert] Bourke, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 196, col. 397 (7 May 1869).

⁵⁷ [Granville Leveson-Gower], Earl Granville, *Ibid.*, col. 1652 (14 Jun 1869).

CHAPTER THREE

Consolidation: Disraeli to Salisbury, 1868-1902

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Liberals under Gladstone exhibited symptoms of severe strain. The party, murmured the intelligentsia, had become cavalier caretakers of Burke's legacy, catering to the most extreme members, by which was meant primarily the Irish nationalists. "[We Liberals] are being asked to join...in a policy of connivance at revolutionary measures," warned George Goschen. "[We are] fighting the battle of order before the world."¹ And indeed, the Home Rule crisis ruptured the mid-Victorian consensus economically, politically, and imperially. It destroyed the minimal and neutral state to which the Liberals had been wedded since the uneasy alliance of Whigs and Radicals brought them into existence. It forced the abandonment of free trade, threatened imperial cohesion, and toppled a two-party system long administered by an Oxbridge-educated, Anglican elite.

The "libertarian" wing, angered by the assault on classical economics, was the first to abandon Gladstone and seek shelter on the Conservative side of the aisle. Later, Joseph Chamberlain, John Bright, and the "Whiggish" peers – Lords Hartington and Rosebery, Earls Derby and Northbrook, Baron Rothschild – seceded to form the Liberal-Unionists, before merging with the Conservatives. Having welcomed a significant portion of the party opposite into their ranks, the Tories could now honestly style themselves the redoubt of Burkean liberalism: economically *laissez-faire*, politically circumspect, keen to preserve institutional structures. The kind of "plunder" Gladstone prepared to offer Parnell, on the other hand, was very un-Burkean, as the Duke of Argyll worried already in 1869: "I think [the language of self-reproach] tends to make men...expect sweeping changes, corresponding in importance to the

¹ "Warring Upon Gladstone," 8 Dec 1886, *New York Times*, p. 1, col. A.

depths of the repentance we [Liberals] express... I feel as anxious as anyone about the state of Ireland. But I am quite...afraid of heroic remedies.”² By 1886, concern had given way to bitterness:

[A] very enthusiastic and gushing friend of mine who is in favour of Home Rule wrote to me some months ago —“If you wish to understand the Irish Question and the duty of this country to Ireland, give your days and nights to the pages of Edmund Burke.” Well, that was a very agreeable prescription; I have given myself to the pages of Edmund Burke. Those pages are full of incomparable dignity and wisdom...but my conscience always obliged me to confess that by the context of these passages it was perfectly clear that Edmund Burke was thinking and speaking of a condition of things which was absolutely different from that which now exists. He was speaking and thinking of a small Protestant Parliament, with the mass of the nation excluded from representation. He was thinking of the rights of the Irish people to be emancipated and to become Members of their own Legislature. He was thinking of the monstrous iniquities perpetrated by the trading classes of this country in the exclusion of Free Trade from the Irish people. He was not thinking of anything which is comparable to the condition of things with which we have now to deal.³

The Tories, of course, had long protested Liberals’ delight in stretching Burke far beyond what his pronouncements might support. If a considerable portion of the accused party now concurred, and over *Ireland*, then surely the last of Gladstone’s pretensions to stand as Burke’s heir had been dispatched. The moment of appropriation beckoned. And yet, Conservative apathy is palpable, at least if we judge by *Hansard*. In the deliberations over the First Home Rule Bill and the aftermath of its failure (1886-1887), Burke garnered 36 mentions; 30 of these came from Liberals and Irish nationalists. They lavished the American example with attention,⁴ twice lauding the *Speech on Conciliation* (1775) as the greatest oration “perhaps ever delivered in that House.” The more radical flattered themselves by making explicit the analogy between Burke’s heroism and their own: “[I]n that superb combination of genius and eloquence and

² To Gladstone, 29 Nov 1869, in *George Douglas Eighth Duke of Argyll, K.G., K.T. (1823-1900): Autobiography and Memoirs*, vol. 2, ed. [Ina Erskine Campbell], Dowager Duchess of Argyll (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1906), pp. 254-255.

³ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 306, cols. 1266, 1268 (10 Jun 1886).

⁴ Sir William Harcourt, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 310, cols. 1315-1316 (11 Feb 1887). [Henry] Labouchere, vol. 313, col. 99 (31 Mar 1887). Sir Charles Russell, *Ibid.*, col. 552 (5 Apr 1887). [Hugh] Childers, *Ibid.*, col. 735 (12 Apr 1887).

wisdom [i.e., the *Speech on Conciliation*], the principles for which the [Gladstone] Government [is] now contending were defended with masterly power.”⁵

The Tories, in response, mustered two glancing appeals to Burke.⁶ What is more: Lord Randolph Churchill, deriding Sir William Harcourt’s rather expedient conversion to Home Rule, casually classed Burke with Fox as fathers of the *Gladstonian* position: “The great weakness of the right hon[ourable] Gentleman [i.e., Harcourt]...is, that he has not allowed a decent interval to elapse between his preaching of the doctrines of Lord Sidmouth and Lord Castlereagh and his preaching of the principles of Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke. He now preaches the principles of Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke; but it is only about twelve months ago he was preaching the doctrines of Lord Sidmouth and Lord Castlereagh.”⁷ This, ironically, as many *Liberals* were deploring Gladstone’s adoption “of the extreme democratic principle, which Burke had so strongly condemned,” publicly voicing doubts that Burke would have favored “handing Ireland over to a Nationalist majority,” and lamenting Hartington’s turn *away* from “the principles of Mr. Burke.”⁸

The general absence of Tory references to Burke in these debates is best explained with recourse to Chapter Two. Burke’s deep and tender association with his native land precluded a challenge to Liberal claims on him, parlous as those were becoming. If experience had taught the Tories anything, it was that the square peg of Burke’s Irish advocacy could not be fitted into

⁵ Henry H. Fowler, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 306, col. 522 (31 May 1886). In very similar language: [Anthony] Mundella, vol. 314, col. 75 (26 Apr 1887). The *Speech* is also quoted by Sir Lyon Playfair, vol. 313, col. 910 (14 Apr 1887); [Robert] Wallace, vol. 315, col. 1378 (8 Jun 1887); Sir William Harcourt, *Ibid*, col. 1538 (9 Jun 1887). But see the challenge from [Edmond] Wodehouse (Liberal Unionist), vol. 306, col. 913 (3 Jun 1886), who extracts from the *Speech* to argue *against* Home Rule.

⁶ Colonel E[dwin] Hughes, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3), vol. 305, col. 1214 (17 May 1886). Lord John Manners, vol. 306, col. 527 (31 May 1886).

⁷ Lord Randolph Churchill, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 321, cols. 388-389 (12 Sep 1887). Sidmouth zealously resisted further concessions to Catholics after 1793. Castlereagh played a pivotal role in crushing the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and in securing passage of the 1800 Act of Union.

⁸ Thomas Macknight, *Ulster as it is: or, Twenty Eight Years’ Experience as an Irish Editor*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1896), pp. 184, 188-189, 221-222, and *passim*.

the round hole of Protestant unionism without force, as Lord Henry Thring hastened to remind them: “The Marquess of Salisbury has said that the term ‘national aspirations,’ as applied to Ireland, was merely ‘modern jargon.’ It might be jargon, but it was the jargon of Swift, of Flood, of Grattan, of O’Connell, of Burke, and of Lord John Russell.”⁹

The specific lack of appeal Burke held for Churchill and the Fourth Party *frondeurs* whom he was leading in a charge against the Tory front benches, however, rested on more than resistance to Irish aspirations, especially since Churchill’s antagonism carried a whiff of opportunism.¹⁰ In effect, Burke was too hidebound for the Tory Democrats. The exquisite concern for the extra-parliamentary masses, the populist pandering on which they staked their arguments for “revitalization,” would have been alien to Burke.¹¹ For “Lord Randolph Churchill, and Sir John Gorst...the toadies and sycophants of democracy,” sneered one pamphleteer, styling himself “A Plain Tory,” “Burke is the very reverse of the[ir] ideal.... [T]o them he seems little better than a fool – for he never knew how to prostitute his talents to win the cheers of the mob... [F]rom the caucus and wire-puller’s standpoint, Burke was not a success, he was never a cringing, fawning, puppet.” Rather than adhering modestly to St. Paul’s injunction “‘Not with eye-service as men pleasers...but to the Lord and not unto men’...the Randolphian crew are too busy flagellating the followers of Burke and the conscientious Conservative fogeys.”¹² And indeed, a defense in the *National Review* of Churchill’s unexpected resignation

⁹ *Parl. Debs.* (series 4) vol. 17, col. 413 (7 Sep 1893).

¹⁰ For a synopsis of the historiographical dispute over the purity of Churchill’s opposition, see R. E. Quinault, “Lord Randolph Churchill and Home Rule,” in *Reactions to Irish Nationalism, 1865-1914*, introd. Alan O’Day (London: Hambledon, 1987), pp. 319-320.

¹¹ Although cf. Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), who contends that “reactionary populism runs...throughout conservative discourse from the very beginning,” and that Burke, especially in his later writings, urged Churchillian “reconfiguration” and “absorption of the...dynamism of the street” upon the aristocracy as the best means of securing its privileges. Whether or not this is correct, we may say with confidence that Churchill never saw Burke in this light.

¹² “A Plain Tory” [Henry Page Croft], *Tory Democracy and Conservative Policy* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), dedication, pp. 23, 24.

in 1886 from Salisbury's cabinet omits Burke as it traces the pedigree of Tory Democratic principles "through Lord Randolph and Lord Beaconsfield back to Pitt and Bolingbroke... [S]alvation of the party is only to be found in the popular Toryism of which Lord Randolph is the prophet."¹³ Burke was *not* such a prophet. Disraeli was – he practically invented popular Toryism, while Pitt championed the middle classes, and Bolingbroke liked to gesture toward "antitheses between the Court and Country party."¹⁴

And yet – our Conservative polemicist, making savage hay out of Churchill's convictionless democracy, stops short of installing Burke in his own establishmentarian pantheon. Instead, he pointedly distinguishes between "followers of Burke" and "conscientious Conservative fogeys." The former likely refers to Morley, who, though an estimable intellect and moral force, was not a Conservative. The latter, never identified outright, included the journalist and barrister T. E. Kebbel, Disraeli's eager Boswell and "the very embodiment of the political opinions that were associated with the *Standard* [magazine]...in the days when it was justly regarded as expressing" the views "of the squire and the country parson."¹⁵ It should not then surprise us that Kebbel's *History of Toryism* (1886) brackets Burke with Newcastle, Fox, and Rockingham among "the old Whig Party...which had beaten Lord North and had been beaten by Mr. Pitt." Unlike Pitt, with whom the Conservative departure commences, Burke was an enemy of Free Trade and parliamentary reform, playing to "Irish prejudices." Even in foreign affairs, the one area in which he was "right, if too soon," his influence is negligible, for the "idealist" school he represented "has nearly died out." Burke emerges not a Tory or even a proto-Tory, but a member

¹³ Ernest W. Beckett, "Lord Randolph Churchill Appeals Unto Caesar," *National Review* 9 (49) (Mar 1887) (London: W. H. Allen, 1887), pp. 24, 25.

¹⁴ A. A. Baumann, "The Truth About Tory Democracy," *Ibid*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Edward Porritt, "A Boswell to Beaconsfield," *Forum* 39 (1) (Jul 1907) (New York: Forum, 1908), p. 103.

of a group which “left [its] sting in the constitution and expired”¹⁶ – still and always, as for Disraeli, a *Whig*, and therefore irrelevant.

But what of Disraeli’s successor Lord Salisbury, “that strange, powerful, inscrutable, brilliant, destructive deadweight”¹⁷ who sat atop the last of the patrician governments from 1881 to 1902? He had been, before his accession to the premiership, greatly preoccupied with fixing Conservative First Principles, and his principles, scholars inform us, were those of Burke. Salisbury was a “constitutionalist after the manner of Burke... [T]he axioms which governed all of his political views were those of the historical, or...‘naturalistic’ school, of which Burke was practically the founder.”¹⁸ And: “Salisbury had a Burkean conception” of society, in which “the rich, powerful, educated and civilized,” aided by the right practice of religion, led by example.¹⁹ And: “The classic rationalization of his position is to be located in Burke.”²⁰ In “Disintegration” (1883), the last and most famous of his essays for the *Quarterly Review*, he reflected mordantly on the growth of class antagonisms and the decline of public spirit, blaming Radical excesses and endless Whig concessions. His concern was “to rally the ‘constitutional’ forces...and to claim for the Conservative party the function of representing the cause of national unity.”²¹ The spirit of Burke fairly leaps from the pages. But the man Burke goes unmentioned.

Throughout Salisbury’s extensive corpus, one counts no more than a handful of direct allusions to Burke, unlike Pitt and Castlereagh, “his great teachers and exemplars in public

¹⁶ T. E. Kebbel, *A History of Toryism, from the Accession of Mr. Pitt to Power in 1789 to the Death of Lord Beaconsfield in 1881* (London: W. H. Allen, 1886), pp. 1-2, 47, 52, 337, 380.

¹⁷ Lord Curzon, quoted in Barbara Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: a Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914* (New York: Bantam, 1966), p. 12.

¹⁸ “Lord Salisbury and the *Quarterly Review*: the *Quarterly Review*, 1860-1883,” *Quarterly Review* 199 (397) (Jan 1904) (London: John Murray, 1904), p. 300.

¹⁹ Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 384.

²⁰ David Steele, *Lord Salisbury: a Political Biography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 18.

²¹ Paul Smith, introductory notes to “Disintegration,” in *Lord Salisbury on Politics: a Selection from his Articles in the Quarterly Review, 1860-1883*, ed. Paul Smith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 337.

life,”²² to whom he devoted three lengthy reviews. An 1866 article refers in passing to “the ‘Old Whigs’ – the moderate and constitutional successors of Mr. Burke.”²³ A colleague is remembered in the Lords with “the celebrated exclamation of Burke – ‘What shadows we are; what shadows we pursue!’”²⁴ This is flimsy stuff. Other mentions, moreover, are critical. Burke is several times chastised in one piece for sacrificing “theory to practice” by contradicting his own rhetoric on economic reform and Free Trade: “[He] remained as blind as ever to the value of political character, and never compassed sufficient foresight to forego a single chance of inflicting a temporary embarrassment upon [his] rival’s [i.e. Pitt’s] government.”²⁵ In a series of scabrous critiques, Disraeli had likewise been indicted; no blacker charge existed in Salisbury’s portfolio than of valuing expedience over truth.²⁶

In this instance, the frosty reception accorded Burke rested at least partly on temperamental disparities. If the third Marquess was “Burkean” in outlook, in cast of mind he was “too utilitarian, too lacking in reverence for authority, prescription and tradition, too cynical and pessimistic” to represent “typical Toryism,”²⁷ or, we might add, to properly understand Burke. One scholar goes so far as to contrast “the Conservatism of a Burke which stood by ancient institutions as the expression of a divine will and that of Salisbury which recognised that...change[s] had to be justified...in terms of the social benefits they were likely to bring; between a Conservatism that regarded the State as an ‘organism’ and one which likened it to a

²² “Salisbury and the *Quarterly*,” p. 321.

²³ [Salisbury, then Viscount Cranborne], “The Change of Ministry,” in Smith, ed., p. 231.

²⁴ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 310, col. 7 (27 Jan 1887). The quote is from a speech Burke gave in Bristol (Sep 1780). As far as I can determine, this is Salisbury’s only mention of Burke in Parliament.

²⁵ [Salisbury, then Lord Robert Cecil], “Stanhope’s Life of Pitt: – I” (1861), in *Essays by the Late Marquess of Salisbury, K.G.: Biographical* (London: John Murray, 1905), p. 91.

²⁶ An example: [Lord Salisbury], “The Past and the Future of Conservative Policy,” *Quarterly Review* 127 (254) (Oct 1869) (London: John Murray, 1869), pp. 538-561.

²⁷ Paul Smith, Introduction, in Smith, ed., p. 3.

‘joint-stock company.’”²⁸ While the divide is overstated, the point remains useful. Salisbury’s conservatism was hard, “masculine and logical...a controlling and protecting than a light-giving force.”²⁹ Thus he admired Pitt for his “grandeur of intellect,” his “example of pure and self-denying patriotism,” his “lofty forgetfulness of self.”³⁰ Castlereagh impressed him with his “calm, cold and self-contained temperament,”³¹ his “cool, self-restrained sagacity.”³² Burke disappointed on all accounts: fervent, immediate, needy, and always conscious of the political side to things.

But this does not explain the continuing indifference to Burke of the “typical Tory.” It had never been a matter of disposition: for him, unlike as for Salisbury, “sentiment, tradition and interest...operated as nutriments.”³³ It could no longer be attributed to Ireland: in 1893, the Second Home Rule Bill collapsed in a welter of recrimination, and Gladstone fled one final time from public life. The obstacle, I suspect, was empire, that sprawling mass which had “prospered so signally under [Victoria’s] sway”³⁴ and was now approaching its ostentatious acme. Prior to the 1870s, imperialism played a minor role in the Tory tradition, and if anything, was associated with the Whiggism of Palmerston. Under Disraeli, however, the Tories effected the reconciliation of landed and urban property by linking them both to empire, which subsequently became one of the party’s *sine quibus non*. Once, the insinuation ran, Britannia’s dominions had been things above whim or faction; but now it fell to the Tories to carry the standard alone.

²⁸ Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, *The Political Thought of Lord Salisbury, 1854-1868* (London: Constable, 1967), p. 153. The State as “joint-stock company” is from [Salisbury, then] Lord Robert Gascoigne Cecil, “The Theories of Parliamentary Reform,” in *Oxford Essays Contributed by Members of the University, 1858* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1858), p. 63.

²⁹ [John Buchan], “Lord Salisbury’s Political Writings,” *Spectator* 92 (3,943) (23 Jan 1904) (London: John Baker, 1904), p. 121.

³⁰ [Salisbury], “Pitt: – I,” in *Essays by the Late Marquess*, pp. 132, 133, 134.

³¹ *Idem*, “Lord Castlereagh” (1862), *Ibid*, p. 68.

³² *Idem*, “Stanhope’s Life of Pitt: – II” (1862), *Ibid*, p. 159.

³³ Smith, Introduction, p. 2.

³⁴ Edgar Sanderson, *The British Empire in the Nineteenth Century: its Progress and Expansion at Home and Abroad*, vol. 1 (London: Blackie & Son, 1899), p. 1.

Gladstone seemed to care for the colonies only insofar as they embodied “freedom and voluntarism,” forgetting that “the best mode of preserving wealth is power. A country, and especially a maritime country, must get possession of the strong places of this world.”³⁵

Naturally, Disraeli was mindful that fondness for the empire could unite holders of land and stock; anxious preservers of the social *status quo*; and the “lower orders” into a potent Conservative constituency with “general cross-class appeal.”³⁶

The *fin-de-siècle* threats to England’s commercial supremacy, and the erosion of national confidence, thus galled the Party of Patriotism for reasons tactical – imperial weakness meant party weakness – but also altruistic. As they “watched their beloved country sliding to disaster,” many on the right brooded “in a mood of despairing rage.”³⁷ Gladstone is “letting down our Empire,” the Queen fretted to Lady Ely in characteristically breathless prose, “quite *contrary* to Lord Palmerston’s *policy*, which, whatever faults he had, *was always for keeping up England*, which of late years had *quite* gone down, so that we were *despised abroad*... Our position in India, and in the colonies, *must be upheld*... I never COULD have the slightest *particle* of confidence in Mr. Gladstone *after* his violent, mischievous and dangerous conduct for the last three years.”³⁸ Between 1880 and 1900, Britain’s foreign trade grew by a mere 25%, whereas Belgium’s rose by 56%, Germany’s by 63%, and the Netherlands’ by an astounding 172%.³⁹ Tables of comparative naval strength at the end of 1891 revealed Britain lagging behind France

³⁵ [Benjamin] Disraeli, *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 169, col. 96 (5 Feb 1863).

³⁶ See E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: the Politics, Economics and Ideology of the Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 60-61.

³⁷ G. R. Searle, “Critics of Edwardian Society: the Case of the Radical Right,” in *The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability, 1900-1914*, ed. Alan O’Day (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 79.

³⁸ 21 Sep 1879, in *The Nineteenth Century Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, ed. H. J. Hanham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 47-48.

³⁹ William Woodruff, *The Impact of Western Man: a Study of Europe’s Role in the World’s Economy, 1750-1960* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1966), pp. 314-331.

and Germany in the production of naval ships.⁴⁰ The success of a “combined assault by the nations of the world upon [our] commercial supremacy,” worried Chamberlain in 1898, “would...menace [our existence] in a way in which it never has been threatened” since Napoleon.⁴¹

The empire’s sanctity had become a Conservative shibboleth, and though Burke accepted Britain’s colonial rights and the benefits her suzerainty conferred,⁴² he had never indulged in the rhetoric of enthusiasm, certainly not the “vulgar, blatant, and inept” version which “squeak[ed] through the penny trumpets and swagger[ed] in the music halls” at the *fin-de-siècle*.⁴³ The Liberals were acutely aware of this reticence, and pressed their advantage. “It is the fashion now-a-days,” said H. H. Fowler in the aftermath of the First Boer War (1880-1881),

to sneer at higher grounds being imported into affairs of State... [T]he noble Marquess [of Salisbury]...has thrown on this proposition [of a peace treaty with the Boers] all the scorn of his cynical eloquence... [But] I prefer the ethics and the statesmanship of Edmund Burke to the ethics and the statesmanship of Lord Salisbury. Burke has said that “the principles of true politics are those of morality”... [Gladstone’s] Government...ha[s] had the courage to subordinate pride, and power, and prestige to the difficult, and sometimes unpleasant, duty of undoing a great wrong; and in accomplishing that they have surrounded the Imperial rule in South Africa with a strength, a dignity, and a Christian character.⁴⁴

Again and again as the First Boer War merged into the Second (1899-1902), the Liberals and their Irish nationalist allies evoked America and Burke’s generosity toward the colonists, just as they had in deliberations over Home Rule. John Redmond: “Burke and Sheridan and

⁴⁰ Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share: a Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1995* (3rd ed.) (London: Longman, 1996), p. 124.

⁴¹ In a speech at Birmingham, 13 May 1898, quoted in J. A. S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Athlone, 1964), p. 169.

⁴² See O’Gorman, p. 76.

⁴³ [E. B. Iwan-Müller?], “England After War,” *Fortnightly Review* 72 (427) (1 Jul 1902), ed. William Courtney (New York: Leonard Scott, 1902), p. 2. Historians generally classify Burke with empire’s critics, most recently Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). But cf. Dennis O’Keeffe, *Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers: Edmund Burke* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 28-30.

⁴⁴ *Parl. Debs.* (series 3) vol. 263, col. 1806 (25 Jul 1881).

Grattan...took precisely the same stand in [the war with America] that we their humbler countrymen take today upon the question of this [Boer] war. They had to face the self-same abuse... But who in the world of politics dares to say now that they were not absolutely in the right?" His younger brother William: "The speeches then delivered by Burke and Chatham might have been delivered at this very day in regard to the war in South Africa." James Boyle: "[We], [t]he Irish Nationalist Members who advocated right, justice, and freedom, were accused from the Treasury Bench [by Sir John Broderick, Secretary of State for War] of talking cant. Were the speeches of Burke and Lord Chatham cant[?]"⁴⁵

If a gauntlet had been thrust down, the Tories chose, revealingly, to ignore it. They did not dispute the portrait of Burke here sketched. They did not challenge the assumption of parallels between 1776 and 1899. They did not, in fact, acknowledge Burke at all. Instead, hearkening to popular support for the war,⁴⁶ they indicted the Liberals for dismantling the scaffold of England's greatness, which the latter furiously denied. "It is the exact opposite of the truth," protested James Bryce. "[T]he term [traitors] is applied to persons who simply say that this war is a ghastly and unnecessary blunder."⁴⁷ What vexed most Liberals (the Irish pursued their own agenda) was not yet imperialism *per se* – the patrician classes still believed, if apologetically, in "Crown and Flag and Fleet and Throne, Duty with Beauty, Malta with Gibraltar, State with Great, [and] Honour escorting Freedom across the Deep Ocean."⁴⁸ What rankled was rather the crude, un-Burkean manner in which those imperial instincts were being exercised.

⁴⁵ *Parl. Debs.* (series 4) vol. 78, col. 835 (7 Feb 1900). Vol. 79, col. 846 (22 Feb 1900). Vol. 89, col. 1279 (26 Feb 1901).

⁴⁶ J[oseph] Chamberlain, *Parl. Debs.* (series 4) vol. 78, cols. 622-623 (5 Feb 1900).

⁴⁷ *Parl. Debs.* (series 4) vol. 99, col. 1030 (15 Aug 1901).

⁴⁸ James Morris, *Pax Britannica: the Climax of an Empire* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), pp. 344-345.

Lord Curzon, it is said, did not much care for Burke. He preferred Pitt and Canning, because “principles were more important than ideas, and efficient administration more important than either.”⁴⁹ If nineteenth century Tories pledged fidelity to any canon, it was the canon of flexibility. Occasionally, some restive member of the elite – a Disraeli or a Salisbury – might dabble in dogma, but only before ascending to power. The party did not profess to practice or express a distinctive brand of conservatism, and therefore felt slight obligation to conjure specifically Conservative heroes. On such occasions as hero-conjuring promised tactical or psychological benefits, Castlereagh might be summoned, perhaps Shelburne, certainly Bolingbroke and Pitt, Disraeli after 1880 – but never Burke. Burke belonged not to the Tories but to the Whigs, and the distinction, though increasingly without difference, retained some significance as long as the Whigs and after them the Liberals survived to don the Burkean mantle: over slavery and the Crown, then Ireland, then empire.

Eventually, however, Victoria gave reluctant way to Edward, and the nineteenth century to the twentieth. Liberal England (and the Liberal Party) died a Strange Death, Labour rose, and the story changed.

⁴⁹ David Gilmour, *Curzon: Imperial Statesman* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1994), p. 28.

PART II:

The Twentieth Century, 1902-1914

What I shall identify as conservatism is a long-lasting body of political doctrine... It is, above all, the political doctrine of Burke... Since Burke it has taken the form of a continuous tradition.

-- Anthony Quinton, Conservative philosopher

The power of democracy operates not only, of course, through the left wing or socialist parties...but also through and by means of the profound modifications which it effects in the whole character...of the parties of the right. For if a man were asked to name the greatest single achievement of the British Labour Party over the past twenty five years, he might well answer, the transformation of the British Conservative Party. The mills of democracy grind slow but they grind exceedingly small.

-- John Strachey, Labour politician

CHAPTER FOUR

Willoughby de Broke and the Tory Radicals

1900 found Britain in acute crisis, or, perhaps better said, struggling to keep acute crisis at bay. The aura of economic and martial invincibility had frayed; the Irish were embittered; the natives restless. Cartographers continued coating continents in red at a dizzying rate, but statesmen were undecieved. Lord Rosebery saw only “a little island, so lonely in these northern seas, viewed with...such hostility..., so friendless amongst nations which count their armies by embattled millions.”¹ At the same time, the two Reform Acts had enlarged the electorate to about five million, and working-class sentiment recrudesced with a vehemence unmatched since the Chartist heyday. The Bryant & May girls struck in 1888, London dockworkers in 1889, the miners of Yorkshire in 1893, when more than thirty million working days were lost through strikes overall.² The masses “were becoming involved in politics and could not be relied on to follow their masters,” and the rise of what was once called “class consciousness” threatened the traditional devices by which the gentry justified its rule.³

The bewildered and unruly Tories stumbled about under Balfour, and in the 1906 general election their seat count fell to its lowest in history (157). In some respects, the “deficiencies” that Samuel Huntington later diagnosed in Cold War American conservatism were prefigured in

* The quotes on the preceding page are from Anthony Quinton with Anne Norton, “Conservatism,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, vol. 2 (2nd ed.), eds. Robert E. Goodin, Philip Petit, and Thomas Pogge (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 285. John Strachey, foreword to Arnold A. Rogow, *The Labour Government and British Industry* (Oxford, U.K.: Basil Blackwell, 1955), p. x. I understand Strachey to write with satisfaction, but others have read him as grimly acknowledging Labour’s failure to effect more dramatic alterations. For instance: Frans Coetzee, *For Party or Country: Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Popular Conservatism in Edwardian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 162.

¹ In a speech at Bath, 27 Oct 1899, quoted in Coates, p. 1002.

² Brian R. Mitchell and Phyllis Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 72.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass Producing Traditions: Europe 1870-1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 268.

the disorders of Edwardian conservatism: “Many...Conservatives appear uncertain as to what they wish to defend. Some simply continue the old identification of conservatism with business liberalism. Others are radical aristocrats, ill at ease in and disgusted with...society as it exists today... Secondly, many...Conservatives are...vague as to the nature and source of the threat to what they wish to conserve. Historically, conservatism has always been the response to a direct and immediate challenge...[but now], the...Conservatives fashion...threats out of abstract ‘isms.’”⁴ The difference, however, is that the fears of the Cold Warriors – at least in Huntington’s telling – were largely “imaginary,” whereas for the Edwardians, they were real and urgent. The party was bearing horrified witness to nothing less than the disintegration of the urban community, and with it the social basis of its power: by 1885, half of Conservative seats came from metropolitan constituencies.⁵

The venerable English traditions of cooperation and deference had long encouraged the assumption of common interests among the industrial classes, militating against the “horizontalism” that set wage-earners against employers. “There is no doubt,” asserts one historian, “that the middle-class Radicals of the Birmingham tradition regarded themselves not as representatives of their class but of their community, and continued to stress this idea” through the 1880s. Cobden, certainly, “would never have understood the modern tendency to group employers” with landowners “as forming a class apart from what is now called ‘Labour.’” Conservatives could thus simultaneously represent the commercial elite, the salaried middle class

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” *American Political Science Review* 51 (2) (Jun 1957), p. 471.

⁵ See James Cornford, “The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Victorian Studies* 7 (1) (Sep 1963), p. 42. Historians usually finger Disraeli as the hero of the party’s shift from county to borough, but Cornford credits provincial Conservatives. If anything, he argues, Disraeli was overly wedded to traditional political conventions.

and large swaths of the working poor in a particular area without undue strain, as once they had represented the rural landlord, tenant farmer, and laborer.

The revival of working-class radicalism shattered the hierarchical compact, and with it the last vestiges of an eighteenth century party structure. No longer could one espouse the view “that votes should be cast in favour of ‘the several interests of the entire body of electors,’” for that body lay comatose, having devolved, or decomposed, into assorted segments, each of which had to be catered to.⁶ Hence Churchill’s eagerness to present the Tories as a “progressive” force, and hence Salisbury’s attentiveness to mass politics despite his anti-democratic convictions. Yet party leaders remained painfully aware that working-class conservatism was a fickle thing, susceptible to gross material appeals from the other side. Tory strength still resided with the “ruling classes,” though after 1870 this came increasingly to mean the urban elites and suburban bourgeoisie; the patriciate, undermined by urban expansion, death taxes, and political reforms, slid inexorably toward irrelevance. As late as 1900, “gentlemen” still comprised over 35% of Conservative voters, but in 1910 the number fell to 26%. More significantly, by 1905 a mere 14% of Conservative MPs came from aristocratic social backgrounds; just 17 % drew their wealth primarily from land.⁷

The changing face of the electorate altered the organization, and ultimately the very identity, of the Tories, or rather, it obliged them to begin assembling one. Nineteenth century high politics, with its ill-defined factions, confined electorate, and generally incrementalist tenor, rendered partisan self-construction superfluous. Legislators prided themselves on their disdain for dogmas, totems, and, to the frustration of their front benches, predictable voting patterns. Labour, by contrast, embraced all the characteristics of the modern party: disciplined ranks,

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁷ See W. L. Guttsman, “The British Political Elite and the Class Structure,” in *Elites and Power in British Society*, eds. [Philip] Stanworth and [Anthony] Giddens (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 28-30.

consistent votes, resolute identification with a specific body of thought. The traditionalists, pragmatists, and moderates, who in the 1880s had disdained Churchill's program as "plagiarism tempered by epigram,"⁸ now confronted the need to clarify just what "conservatism" signified, and how it was instantiated in the Conservative party. Could one expect to triumph at the polls merely by being the "nay" to radicalism's "yea?"

Eventually, the Tories grasped that if they persisted in piecemeal resistance to Labour without addressing the deeper question of what they stood for, as opposed to what their position ought to be on this or that issue, they might win a battle or two but they would lose the war. Nor was it clear just what the authentic Conservative position *was* on this or that issue to begin with. The Tories, after all, had been against, or at least indifferent to, imperial expansion before they favored it; they had promoted then abandoned then promoted Free Trade. "Little Englandism" or protectionism had as much right to shelter under the Tory umbrella as social imperialism or the *laissez-faire* economics many in the party now espoused. By neglecting principles, the Tories encouraged internecine conflict, which only diluted their message further.⁹

Initially, however, all this was dimly grasped, and the party floundered, confronting the socialist challenge tactically rather than programmatically. Labour enjoyed clarity; it hewed to a platform. If Conservatives did not follow suit, they risked dissolving into incoherence. "The Tory Party is not a Liberal-Radical-Unionist party," the journalist Ernest Iwan-Müller reprimanded Leopold Maxse, editor of the *National Review*. "Sometimes I doubt if you believe in the existence of a Tory party at all."¹⁰ A deluge of papers, pamphlets and monographs poured forth from Tory pens on the burning topics of the day, especially trade preferences, colonial

⁸ Baumann, "Tory Democracy," p. 4.

⁹ On the "stratification of the right" and its ever shifting alliances, see Searle, pp. 82-84.

¹⁰ Quoted in Alan Sykes, "The Radical Right and the Crisis of Conservatism Before the First World War," *Historical Journal* 26 (3) (Sep 1983), p. 663.

administration, and defense. Balfour's *Economic Notes on Insular Free Trade* appeared in 1904, while he was still Prime Minister, followed by Alfred Bigland's *England's Future Under Tariff Reform* (1907) and George Tryon's *Tariff Reform* (1908). *The Compatriots Club Lectures* (1905) brought together papers on aspects of imperial affairs, including the proper distribution of colonial populations, the economic bases for union, and the relationship between tariffs and armaments. The "Unauthorised Programme" (1908) advocated wide ranging reforms of tariffs, taxes, the House of Lords, and social programs, as well as compulsory military service. F. E. Smith urged inclusivity in *Unionist Policy and Other Essays* (1912), as did Leo Amery in *Union and Strength* (1912), while Alfred Milner revived the federalist cause in *The Nation and the Empire* (1913).

What is notable about this profusion is not the variousness in and of itself – although that, too, is revealing – but the absence of ideological pleading. Balfour, for instance, invoked neither creed nor eminences in defense of Free Trade. He endorsed the approach not because it was "Conservative" or because Peel once approved it, but because he deemed it sensible given the circumstances under which the country labored (though by that logic, the reformers' heresies could be shown equally sensible, and therein lay the rub). Milner, likewise arguing from exigency rather than authority, went further, positioning party and conviction as antitheses. A muscular imperial policy was "true" inasmuch as it *transcended* political divisions and the scramble for power: "With regard to almost any Imperial question [party distinctions] have absolutely [no meaning]... [I]f men everywhere were considering the question on its merits...there would often be general agreement, whereas now we have artificial differences and bitter controversy." The "accidents of party warfare" had closed minds on the Left to empire's

consequence.¹¹ The words “conservative” and “conservatives” (capitalized and not) appear only three times in the introduction, “Tory” or “Tories” not at all.

Milner’s appeal to an older ideal of rule by reasonableness, or by petition to the disinterested Nation, no longer held; in the Age of Labour it betokened not pragmatism but stupidity. “In England today,” mourned Arthur Boutwood in 1913, “alarmed and unhelpful voices are warning of a coming Revolution. Their warning is belated, for the Revolution is already accomplished, and what is approaching is merely the final catastrophe. That accomplished Revolution...has been made possible, or at least facilitated, by the long abstention of the Conservative Party from anything and everything that deserves the name of thought.”¹² The problem was that the traditionalists – “docile” Conservatives, Maxse called them – clutched still at the old faith in Parliament as the center of the universe and seemed unwilling or unable to advance a coherent statement of principles. Exasperated, Maxse looked to the “keener,” radical elements: the Diehards and affiliates who took their cues from men like Lord Willoughby de Broke, and the “social imperialists” who advocated “national efficiency.” What made these groups radical was partly their emphasis on social reform and military service and their indifference to issues that had so exercised an earlier generation, like religious education or the House of Lords. But even more, it was their “revolutionary principles and...demagogic methods,” in Hugh Cecil’s tart rebuke, which carried a strong Continental flavor.¹³ The mid-Victorian ideal of comity they dismissed as a silly affectation: “Forceful language, threats, even

¹¹ Lord [Alfred] Milner, *The Nation and the Empire: Being a Collection of Speeches and Addresses* (London: Constable, 1913), pp. xv, xx.

¹² Arthur Boutwood, *National Revival: a Re-Statement of Tory Principles*, introd. [Richard Verney], Lord Willoughby de Broke (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1913), p. 4.

¹³ At the opening meeting of the Glasgow Parliamentary Debating Association, quoted in “News of the Week,” *Spectator* 95 (4,034) (21 Oct 1905) (London: John Baker, 1905), p. 594.

actual violence were legitimate weapons in the era of mass politics,”¹⁴ as were manifestos, platforms and simple ideas simply repeated. “The British Constitution,” de Broke wrote Maxse, “is the only thing the Conservative Electors understand.... First principles, First principles, and again First principles are what we must preach.... No more tactics.”¹⁵ “[A] more systematic and positive political theory,” urged Lord Malmesbury in his introduction to *The New Order* (1908), a collation of essays by members of the Confederacy, a semi-secret group of fanatical tariff reformers,¹⁶ “is much felt by the party. Unionism would hardly gain more even by the longed for return of Mr. [Joseph] Chamberlain to the fighting line...than it would if some philosophical writer of genius were forthcoming to lay the permanent foundations of its twentieth century policy.” But as there appeared little prospect of “finding a contemporary Hobbes or Burke to provide [us] with a political philosophy,” the Unionists would have to go it alone.¹⁷

And so the call for a Conservative creed went forth. But in what might such a creed consist? Accord proved elusive, partly because the Right was confused and fragmented to begin with, partly because the felt need to produce a “constructive” program – and thereby triumph at the polls – sometimes overrode coherence. But the consensus assumed that it had something to do with what de Broke called “the welfare of all the classes from the point of view of National and Imperial development,” Malmesbury “progressive Unionism,” or Boutwood the “reconstruction of national identity,”¹⁸ and that it was symbolized by the Empire, and possibly by

¹⁴ Gregory D. Phillips, “Lord Willoughby de Broke and the Politics of Radical Toryism, 1909-1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 20 (1) (Aut 1980), p. 206.

¹⁵ 29 Jan 1911, quoted in *Ibid*, p. 207.

¹⁶ Very little has been written about the Confederacy, as befits a semi-secret group. An effort to dispel some myths is Alan Sykes, “The Confederacy and the Purge of the Unionist Free Traders, 1906-1910,” *Historical Journal* 18 (2) (Jun 1975), pp. 349-366. According to Sykes, *The New Order* was ghosted by Thomas Comyn-Platt, the Confederates’ secretary.

¹⁷ Lord [James] Malmesbury, “Unionist Philosophy: an Introductory Essay,” in *The New Order: Essays in Unionist Policy*, ed. Lord Malmesbury (London: Francis Griffiths, 1908), p. 4.

¹⁸ [Richard Verney], Lord Willoughby de Broke, “The Tory Tradition,” *National Review* 58 (344) (Oct 1911), p. 208. Malmesbury, p. 6. Boutwood, p. 16.

the Constitution. In other words, Conservatism served as a positive riposte to the discontents of socialist “class warfare.” Whereas the latter preached resentment and envy, the former encouraged “personal contact and sympathy between all classes,” united by the emollient bonds of Religion, Patriotism, Character, and Education.¹⁹

As the embodiments *in nuce* of these ideal concepts – the form made flesh – de Broke, to the Establishment’s astonished relief, eschewed “the violent and puerile personalities which have unhappily become the rule in recent numbers of the *National Review*,”²⁰ and instead reached for the usual suspects. “Let us drink copiously at the fount of Bolingbroke, Pitt, and Beaconsfield,” since “[t]he road to...office can only be found...by adhering to their doctrines.”²¹ Burke, we notice, has been excluded, and though de Broke lapses briefly into imitation – “[I]t may be here remarked that tradition and sentiment and even prejudice play and always have played such a leading part in our history that they are forces that must be reckoned with” – he hastens to qualify his aside. Tradition, sentiment and prejudice have their place, but “[a] very large body of men and women who are Conservatives in the National as well as in the Parliamentary sense do not hold their views merely from [such] feeling[s]...but from a deep-rooted conviction that the bedrock of the Empire is the stability of those institutions that in their opinion made England a Nation.”²² Burke maintained no such conviction. He well knew that “stability” was often a mask for sclerosis, empire’s undoing rather than its “bedrock.” Moreover, he repeatedly rejected the twinning of empire and institution, as in the draft text of a speech on India, in which he ruminated on the contradictions between the aims and methods of colonial rule: “I do not wonder, that we find the greatest difficulties in the exclusive administration of that...intricate

¹⁹ Willoughby de Broke, “Tory Tradition,” p. 212.

²⁰ “Magazines,” *Spectator [Literary Supplement]* 107 (4,345) (7 Oct 1911) (London: John Baker, 1911), p. 554.

²¹ Willoughby de Broke, “Tory Tradition,” p. 208.

²² *Ibid*, p. 209.

mass of Interests... Under any form of government, this would be difficult; under ours, it comes to be a matter of the greatest complexity; because, in an hundred instances, the Interest of our Empire is scarcely to be reconciled to the interest of our Constitution.”²³

Still, the imperial issue should not be overplayed, for it was not of itself insurmountable. The Tories were no longer “quite so romantically minded” about their overseas possessions, and whatever amorous conviction they retained was admixed with the tactical desire to beat “the Liberal Party into an irremediable mess of political blood and brains,” in George Dangerfield’s inimitable locution.²⁴ The primary concern was to lubricate an increasingly unworkable system and prevent it from becoming a millstone around everyone’s neck; to tame its excesses; and as far as possible to paint over the ugliness. In fact, the Edwardian empire, gentled and smoothed into a great federated whole, was now conceived of in terms not far removed from Burke’s “Ciceronian” vision of subordinate protectorates.²⁵ In 1777, for example, Burke sought to reassure his constituents that “if ever one man lived more zealous than another for the supremacy of parliament, and the rights of the imperial crown, it was myself.” At the same time, “[I]n the comprehensive dominion which the divine Providence had put into our hands...it was our duty...to conform our government to the character and circumstances of the several people who composed this mighty and strangely diversified mass... I was persuaded that government was a practical thing...and not [made] to furnish out a spectacle of uniformity.”²⁶ One hundred and forty years later, Leo Amery explained “Imperial Unity” thusly:

We mean that all the various territories and peoples now comprised within the British Empire – the United Kingdom, the great self-governing Dominions, the Empire of India,

²³ Probably 1782, quoted in David Bromwich, introduction to *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters, Edmund Burke*, ed. David Bromwich (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 15.

²⁴ George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Capricorn, 1961), pp. 79-80.

²⁵ For the argument that Burke’s model of empire was “Cicero’s ideal for Rome,” see Peter Marshall’s review of *On Empire, Liberty and Reform, Reviews in History* (154), <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/154> (accessed 4 Aug 2013).

²⁶ Edmund Burke, “A Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol on the Affairs of America,” in Bromwich, ed., pp. 164, 168.

the various dependencies all over the world – shall remain permanently and indissolubly bound together for the defence of their common interests, and for the development of a common civilisation. We mean that while each part shall enjoy the utmost freedom compatible with the stage of political and general development which it may have attained, it shall yet remain united to the rest... We mean that all its members shall remain citizens of a single world-wide state with a duty and a loyalty towards that state, none the less real and intense because of the co-existence with it of a duty and a loyalty towards the particular nation or community within the Empire to which they may belong.²⁷

On colonial policy, then, the Tories had sidled fairly close to Burke; once traitorous, his approach now appeared the height of decency and common sense. More vexing for the Radicals was the post-partisan cloak which lay still about him, a bequest of the later Victorians. The epithet “Whig” no longer stung – the party was dead, its successors catatonic – and this eliminated the need for caveat to accompany approbation, but it did not help Burke’s bid for inclusion in the Radical Tory pantheon when what was wanted were distinctly *partisan* figures. Indeed, many establishment Conservatives admired Burke precisely *because* he floated above faction, seeing in him a model of their own efforts at detachment. “Burke was neither a Liberal nor a Conservative,” Balfour remarked to the House “or...was both perhaps I ought to say,”²⁸ which only made matters worse from the Radical point of view.

Fundamentally, though, Burke cut awkwardly against the Radical narrative, which cast the looming battle as between sectarian socialists and national Tories. The point is crucial, for the Conservative Party as a whole was coming round to the idea that Socialism rather than Liberalism was the enemy. The question was rather: how, or in what way? The Radicals pointed the finger at socialism’s divisiveness, contrasting the class-bound myopia of the Left with the broad, empathetic patriotism of the Right. Labour might preen on its tender concern for the downtrodden, but actually, the Tories had been there first. “The whole history and teaching

²⁷ Leopold Amery, “Imperial Unity,” an address to the Chatham Club, 15 Jul 1910, in *Union and Strength: a Series of Papers on Imperial Questions* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), p. 2.

²⁸ *Hansard*, HC (series 5) vol. 21, col. 1756 (21 Feb 1911).

of the Tory Party,” insisted de Broke, “is packed with constructive Social Reform. The Tories were the only Party who took any notice of the working classes before they had the vote.”²⁹ W. H. Mallock, among the first Conservatives to sound the socialist tocsin, suggested as much already in 1884: “[T]he great primary instincts...which are appealed to and perverted by the leaders of Socialism, are the great primary instincts...which underlie all true Conservatism, and are most vital to it.”³⁰

Hence the aptness for de Broke of Bolingbroke, Pitt, and Beaconsfield as “Prophets of Conservatism.”³¹ Bolingbroke championed “the good of the people” as “the ultimate and true end of government;”³² Pitt’s “policy of appealing from a selfish oligarchy to the mass of the voters” emancipated the nation and made possible England’s rise;³³ Beaconsfield’s subtle radicalism was explicitly patterned on Bolingbroke’s paternal model. Burke, on the other hand, though a meritocrat, never thrilled to the kind of populism which now mesmerized the Radicals. In the battle against socialism as limned by de Broke, a defender of hierarchy – even a magnanimous one – was useless.

Could the Radicals, in their eagerness to outflank the enemy, really be suggesting – and so blithely! – that socialism was a Tory creation? The irony galled the “docile” Conservatives, who were not, *pace* Maxse’s jibe, confined to a hidebound Old Guard or temporizing patricians like Balfour, a victim, the more impatient grumbled, of “what the old Romans called *vis inertiae*.”

²⁹ Willoughby de Broke, “Tory Tradition,” p. 211. Harold Macmillan would revive this line of argument, famously asserting in 1936 that “Toryism has always been a form of paternal socialism.” Quoted in Anthony Sampson, *Harold Macmillan: a Study in Ambiguity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), p. 33.

³⁰ W. H. Mallock, “Conservatism and Socialism,” *National Review* 2 (11) (Jan 1884) (London: W. H. Allen, 1884), p. 701. On Mallock’s importance to the Conservative resistance, see John W. Mason, “Political Economy and the Response to Socialism in Britain, 1870-1914,” *Historical Journal* 23 (3) (Sep 1980), pp. 581-585.

³¹ Willoughby de Broke, “Tory Tradition,” p. 208.

³² [Henry St. John, Viscount] Bolingbroke, *The Idea of a Patriot King* (1738), in Armitage, ed., p. 244.

³³ Arthur Hassall, *Life of Viscount Bolingbroke* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1889), p. 210.

He [i]s fond of standing still and doing nothing.”³⁴ Comprising a significant portion of the party, the “dociles” included younger moderates, practical tariff reformers, and libertarians like the Cecils. These men also looked on anxiously as the party drifted. Yet the New Conservatism repelled them, in style as much as in substance. It was too enamored of the State, too controlling. The Right was paying perverse homage to the Left by stealing its methods and inverting them to buttress the *status quo*. “[I]t is not a single issue but the whole attitude they [Maxse *et al*] adopt toward politics which is intolerable,” Hugh Cecil complained. “I cannot read...the *National Review*...without being driven into violent antagonism. Even when I agree with the conclusion, the reasons and method of argument are such as to make me hate my own opinions.”³⁵ His eldest brother James, now fourth Marquess, furiously dismissed “Milnerism [i.e., social imperialism]” as “a complete change in our method of Government from the English system to the German system: from freedom to compulsion,” and confidently predicted that the British would reject the “drill sergeant’s method.”³⁶

What was more, the moderates fretted, the mentality of compulsion had leeches into the gears of the party apparatus, becoming not just a mode of thought but a *modus operandi*. If Conservatism was now coterminous with unity, then deviation from the reformist line – which by 1910 had virtually captured the party – demonstrated *disunity*, therefore disloyalty. Victims of this intolerance, like the Cecils, who were nothing if not fiercely independent, cried “dictation” and accused the Radicals of “repudiating the ancient ideal of the independent country gentlemen whose unfettered patriotic consciences were the guarantee of the best traditions of

³⁴ [Rowland] Hunt, *Parl. Debs.* (series 4) vol. 169, cols. 793-794 (19 Feb 1907).

³⁵ To his brother Robert, Jan 1915, quoted in E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 7.

³⁶ Quoted in Rhodri Williams, *Defending the Empire: the Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899-1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 147.

English public life.”³⁷ “Great is the g-d Caucus,” wrote Lord Rosebery savagely as the Conservatives staggered to defeat in the 1906 elections. “[L]et us fall down and worship him,” for “high minded, honourable independence, however much recommended by ability, is anathema to our political system...Party unalloyed is to rule the roost.”³⁸ Lord Crawford, not unsympathetic to tariff reform, yet appraising the “frenzied haste” with which the Radicals conducted business, their penchant for “pushing matters too far,” wondered if they were not remaking the party so completely as to destroy it: “The older section of Conservatives...alleg[e] that in order to achieve [their] fiscal ideal [the Radicals] would sacrifice the Church, Constitution, the land and the Union.” Added Crawford: “There is some exaggeration to this view, but the substratum of truth is there.”³⁹

³⁷ Coetzee, p. 163. See also Hugh Cecil’s letter to *The Times*, 30 Apr 1904.

³⁸ To Hugh Cecil, quoted in Kenneth Rose, *The Later Cecils* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 241.

³⁹ 12 Feb 1906 and 29 Jun 1907, in *The Crawford Papers: the Journals of David Lindsay, Twenty Seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Balcarres, 1871-1940, During the Years 1892-1940*, ed. John Vincent (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 92, 102.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hugh Cecil's *Conservatism* and Burke Triumphant

The Conservative party was being dismantled from within, driven “by a lot of members,” Lord Crawford charged in his diary, “who for present purposes have ceased to be Conservative.”¹ Perhaps, surmised Hugh Cecil, they “had been hypnotised by Mr. Chamberlain’s undoubted genius.”² Whatever the cause, the establishmentarians proved unable to compete with the *frisson* which the Radicals offered a battered caucus, and the patient labors of Balfour’s front bench were overwhelmed by the clamor of the Radicals’ grass roots machine. De Broke and his friends, it appeared, had stumbled upon a new truth: populism of right *and* left could flourish in the age of universal suffrage; it was classical liberalism that found itself condemned.

And so the programmatic campaigning was left to the Radicals. Partly, the traditionalists were hamstrung by their dismay at the turn the party had taken, too disoriented and aghast to rally. Partly, the search for doctrine carried taint by association, bound up with what Robert Cecil called the Radicals’ “whole way of looking at politics [, which] appears to me utterly sordid and materialistic, not yet corrupt but on the high road to corruption.”³ To produce a counter-doctrine was to play the Radical game. But even if the traditionalists *had* been willing to engage, they felt hard pressed to explain what their brand of Conservatism represented. The Radicals, like their socialist *doppelgängers*, flaunted a message both pithy and positive, whereas the traditionalists tended to speak of what they were not rather than what they were. “Let the Conservative party remember,” counseled Balfour, “that Conservatism ought not to resemble

¹ 12 Feb 1906, Crawford, p. 92.

² “News of the Week,” p. 594.

³ Quoted in Coetzee, p. 94.

Radicalism.” Bland declarations of “utility,” or bromidic descriptions (again from Balfour) of an ideology guided by “a view which takes account of the historical principles by which we came to be what we are, that endeavours always to meet new circumstances by new expedients,”⁴ fell somnolent and inert on a restless audience.

Into the breach stepped Hugh Cecil, Linky or Linkey to his intimates, the fifth son of the third Marquess of Salisbury. He was a curious character: tall, thin, and stooped, the voice querulous and high-pitched, the face pale and bony, the hands restlessly plucking at his coat. Like the rest of the third Marquess’s children, Cecil was a voracious (if haphazard) reader, careless of proper form, quarrelsome, dogmatic, and morally tendentious. He delighted, in the words of one biographer, “to express extreme views in the most unacceptable form that could be devised,”⁵ and he held many such views, especially on matters ecclesiastical, which for him were tightly twined with politics. His oratory “could fascinate, interest, amuse, delight, inspire,” recalled the *Times*’ obituarist, “yet he could not persuade.”⁶

Mostly this was true, for he retained a romantic’s susceptibility to causes either irrelevant (prohibiting a man from marrying his deceased wife’s sister) or unhelpful (contesting the emasculation of the Lords). Yet it was he, extravagant as this may sound, whom we should grant considerable credit with fixing the particulars of the modern Conservative identity in the popular mind and with establishing Burke as Conservative tribune. In an unobtrusive little apologia called *Conservatism* commissioned for the Home University Library series on Modern Knowledge, he wrote, by way of preamble:

⁴ Arthur James Balfour, “Extract from a Speech Delivered in Manchester,” 12 Jan 1904, in *Fiscal Reform: Speeches Delivered by the Right Hon. Arthur James Balfour, M.P., from June 1880 to December 1905* (London: Longmans, Green, 1906), p. 143.

⁵ Rose, pp. 231-232. For a tender and amusing portrait on which all subsequent biographers of the Cecils have drawn, see the memoir by Lord David Cecil, younger son of the fourth Marquess. *The Cecils of Hatfield House: an English Ruling Family* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

⁶ Quoted in Arthur Mejia, “Lord Hugh Cecil: Religion and Liberty,” in *Edwardian Conservatism: Five Studies in Adaptation*, eds. J. A. Thompson and Arthur Mejia (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 13.

[W]hat brought Conservatism into existence was the French Revolution... [F]rom 1790 the whole of English politics was cut in two by the influence of the French Revolution and its principles, and those who stood emphatically against the revolutionary movement made the party in politics which we now call Conservative... And in Burke Conservatism found its first and perhaps greatest teacher, who poured forth with extraordinary rhetorical power the language of an anti-revolutionary faith, and gave to the Conservative movement the dignity of a philosophical creed and the fervour of a religious crusade. Burke is commonly regarded as a Whig...but this is really a serious misapprehension. Burke was a conservative all his life...[for] the essential characteristic of a Tory is that in controversies relating to Church and King he takes the royal...side.⁷

Part One, it is hoped, puts paid to this *précis*. While the Revolution widened political ruptures, it did not create them; the most incendiary topics of nineteenth century debate predated 1789; and Conservatives stumbled upon Burke's essential Conservatism only round about the twentieth century's second decade. Indeed, as late as 1911, Conservative parliamentarians still spoke of "Burke and other great Liberals;" or "the Liberal party from the days of Burke and Gladstone."⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the canon of conventional wisdom, had yet in 1910 to revise its entry for Burke, authored by Morley in 1873, which held the impeachment of Hastings, not the assault on Jacobinism, to be the most "laborious and formidable enterprise of [Burke's] life."⁹

So if Cecil's assertions now retain the air of commonplaces, they did not in 1912, when *Conservatism* first appeared, though it is interesting – and instructive – that less notice was taken of their novelty than one might have expected. A review in the *Spectator*, then among England's most influential Conservative weeklies and edited by Cecil's Free Trade *confrère*, John Strachey, carries a note of mild surprise, as though, probing Cecil's thesis, the critic is not certain that it sounds right to the ear: "Pitt and Burke, says Lord Hugh Cecil, were the chief creators of

⁷ Hugh Cecil, *Conservatism* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1912), pp. 39-40, 41.

⁸ Sir Alfred Cripps, *Hansard*, HC (series 5) vol. 25, col. 1247 (10 May 1911). Sir Henry Craik, vol. 10, col. 977 (6 Sep 1909).

⁹ J. Mo. [John Morley], "Burke, Edmund," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Vol. 4: *Bisharin to Calgary* (11th ed.) (New York: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1910), p. 830.

Conservatism... We should prefer to say that Burke was essentially a Whig in spirit, but that he tested every reform offered for the benefit of humanity by his marvelous penetration in foreseeing its course.”¹⁰ “It is held by Lord Hugh Cecil,” Walter Elliot commented – and not, quite obviously, by Elliot, who elsewhere indicated his partiality to *la longue durée* – “that the French Revolution is the real origin of modern Conservatism.” Elliott deemed otherwise, but at least “there is this to be said [in Cecil’s favor], that the arrival of the logicians in power...wrenches the world violently to the form which we all recognise.”¹¹ The *Atlantic*, too, singled out the dating of Conservatism to Burke and Pitt as “the most interesting,” because original, portion of the volume.¹²

On the other hand, Algernon Cecil, writing in the *Quarterly Review*, found it “no more necessary...to devote time to a proof of the identity of the theory of checks and balances with the doctrine of the mean [which he takes to be a central tenet of Conservatism] than to show that Burke is the supreme doctor of the corresponding school of thought. These things are palpable and do not admit of serious dispute.”¹³ And A. A. Baumann in the *Fortnightly* bridled that Cecil had not gone *far enough* in his installation of Burke as Conservative fountain-head. Overall, Cecil may have done the Great Man “justice,” but the charge of obsolescence in the case of the *Reflections* was misguided, and the denial of Burke’s imperial instincts “incomprehensible,” unless “the *Reflections* are the only piece of Burke which Lord Hugh Cecil has read.”¹⁴

How to explain the absence of a vigorous dissent from, or at least inspection of, *Conservatism’s* embrace of Burke? If anything, commentators were more apt to squirm over

¹⁰ “Conservatism” [Review], *Spectator* 108 (4,376) (11 May 1912) (London: John Baker, 1912), p. 761.

¹¹ Walter Elliot, *Toryism and the Twentieth Century*, introd. Stanley Baldwin (London: Philip Allan, 1927), p. 54.

¹² Agnes Repplier, “Consolations of the Conservative,” *Atlantic Monthly* 124 (6) (Dec 1919) (Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1919), p. 761.

¹³ Algernon Cecil, “Some Reflections on Patriotism,” *Quarterly Review* 220 (438) (Jan 1914) (London: John Murray, 1914), p. 212.

¹⁴ A. A. Baumann, “Lord Hugh Cecil on Conservatism,” *Fortnightly Review* 92 (517) (1 Jul 1912), ed. William Courtney (London: Chapman & Hall, 1912), p. 41.

Cecil's unabashed Christian moralism, which struck even Baumann as too impractical a guide to governance.¹⁵ In part, the ready adoption of Burke was an individual matter. Algernon Cecil, son of Hugh's paternal uncle and weaned on the same brew of clericalism and caution as his cousin, naturally agreed that "the liturgy of the English Church may be regarded as the philosophy of the Conservative party."¹⁶ Baumann had for a while nursed a vision of Burke as lighter of the Conservative lamp, an idea upon which he would elaborate in his 1929 preface to *Letter to a Noble Lord*.

But something more profound was also at play. We here behold one of those junctures when an individual – in this case, Hugh Cecil – stumbles upon a formulation quite unconsciously, unconsciously because it is an expression of his own deeply held beliefs rather than a calculated finger to the wind, and in so doing gives voice to a previously undifferentiated mass of emotion. The traditional / libertarian Conservatives, as we said, were not content to go quietly into the night; they, too, felt menaced by socialism. But they did not know how concisely or positively to articulate their antagonism. Chamberlain was a pied piper, and Willoughby de Broke was a socialist *manqué*, but what exactly were they? Once Cecil provided the answer, it seemed blazingly obvious: they were the party of liberty and personal freedom, of "moderate reform on conservative lines."¹⁷

They were, in other words, the Victorian Liberals reincarnated, for "moderate reform" was not an innovative rallying cry. The phrase had tripped off English tongues since the early nineteenth century, when the "rewriting and vulgarizing [of Parliament's] history in a Whiggish-

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁶ Algernon Cecil, p. 210.

¹⁷ Cecil, *Conservatism*, p. 64.

democratic direction” began in earnest.¹⁸ By mid-century, “moderate reform” had become shorthand for a systemic political style, the bedrock of an imprecise constitutionalism to which both parties nevertheless acquiesced as part of the order of things.

A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.¹⁹

But the Liberals – who, as successors to the Whigs, had first claim on “moderate reform” – were near death, and Labour made a mockery of Tennyson’s subtleties, so the (big-C) Conservatives, into whom nearly all (small-c) conservatives had by now been enfolded, quite naturally adopted the call. The modern Conservative Party, as home not only to the older “Tory,” but also the “conservative” (i.e., Whig) and “imperial” interests,²⁰ ought to become, cried Cecil – indeed was becoming – the exclusive preserve for that endangered species of nineteenth century liberalism it had in the past occasionally opposed.²¹ “Why was I not born in an age when there were Whigs and Tories,” he mused to Balfour, “either of whom one could join without much dislocation, instead of Radicals and Preferentialists, both of whom nauseate me?”²²

This was Cecil’s first innovation: to underline in prose the rapprochement between Whigs, Liberals and Tories that had commenced under Disraeli and quickened in the shambolic aftermath of the Home Rule bills and the rise of Labour. Once an internecine affair between conservative Tories and their slightly-less conservative opponents, politics had become a

¹⁸ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 20.

¹⁹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “You Ask Me, Why” (1842), ll. 9-12.

²⁰ Cecil, *Conservatism*, p. 71.

²¹ See O’Sullivan, p. 111.

²² 4 May 1907, quoted in Neal Blewett, “Free Fooders, Balfourites, Whole Hoggers: Factionalism within the Unionist Party, 1906-10,” *Historical Journal* 11 (1) (1968), pp. 103-104.

Manichean conflict between Radicals and *all* conservatives;²³ that is, between those who made a fetish of the State – whether from left or right – and those, like Cecil, who upheld the older individualistic ethos. “I look upon our Constitution,” he waxed lyrically to the House,

with much more than the reverence with which a man of good taste would look upon an ancient and beautiful building. I look upon it as the temple of the twin deities of *Liberty and Order* [emphasis mine] which Englishmen have so long worshipped to the glory of their country. Let us then go into the temple...and saturate ourselves with its atmosphere; and then, continuing its traditions, let us adorn and embellish it, and then we, too, shall partake of something of its renown... In this way we shall attain to a measure of its immortality, and high on the eminence of its glory we shall find that our fame will stand safe and secure – safe from the waters of oblivion, and safe from the tide of time.²⁴

Socialism threatened, yes, not because it was *divisive*, as de Broke imagined, but because it was *unconstitutional*, in the sense that it cared nothing for the Rule of Law, or the rights of property, or the inviolability of a man’s privacy; in short: for the pith and marrow of Englishness. “[N]ot only are the working classes devoted to personal liberty, but all classes are. It is a tradition which has been handed down.”²⁵ Men were blinded to socialism’s corruptions by their “impatience of manifest evils” and their eagerness “for some short cut,” failing to understand that

the search for short cuts will become mischievous indeed if we are thus led away from what is the true path of progress. If we enfeeble human nature by removing from it the discipline of liberty, then certainly we shall not be merely standing still, we shall be wandering astray; and while we use the machinery of the State to get, as we think, somewhat nearer the solution of this problem or that, we shall all the time be destroying that on which the State itself depends...[:] the individual character, with its power of self-control and courageous choice between right and wrong.²⁶

²³ Although Cecil’s father, prone to grand pessimisms, had framed the struggle thusly already in 1859. [Salisbury, then Lord Robert Cecil], “English Politics and Parties,” *Bentley’s Quarterly Review* 1 (1) (Mar 1859) (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), pp. 6, 11. See also *Idem*, “Four Years of a Reforming Administration,” *Quarterly Review* 113 (225) (Jan 1863) (London: John Murray, 1863), pp. 253-288. It became a constant lament of Salisbury’s that the coalition of Whigs and Radicals served only to advance the interests of the latter. The Whigs naturally belonged on the Tory side, for “it is only under [the] lead [of moderate Liberals] that a Conservative Party in the future could be formed. Pure ‘squire’ Conservatism is played out.” To Earl [Henry] Carnarvon, 24 Apr 1868, quoted in Smith, Introduction, p. 86.

²⁴ *Hansard*, HC (series 5) vol. 15, col. 1342 (30 Mar 1910).

²⁵ *Hansard*, HC (series 5) vol. 60, col. 1293 (1 Apr 1914).

²⁶ Hugh Cecil, *Liberty and Authority* (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), pp. 63, 64-65.

Into such a crusade one drafted not an amoral pragmatist like Peel, who “suit[ed] his means to his ends like an engineer;” nor a magus like Disraeli, who “was too quick where Peel had been to slow...[and] rated too low the moral disaster that was involved in...outrunning the reformers.” One rather drafted a passionate philosopher-statesman like Burke, whose “conservatism was in truth an unbridled passion” and to whom “the causes of *liberty and order* [emphasis mine] were immensely more interesting than the greatness and power of his country.”²⁷

If Cecil’s first innovation was to pour the old wine of Liberalism into new Conservative bottles, this was his second innovation: to position the *Reflections* as synecdoche of their author. It is true that Morley had already declared Burke’s “later history no more than the development of the principles of his early history,” but the aim was to run a through line from the youthful Whiggery to the subsequent counter-revolutionism.²⁸ Cecil turned Morley’s argument on its head, reading the later horror back into the youthful Whiggery. Burke “was a conservative all his life... [W]hen [he] moved from Whiggism to Toryism, the conservatism *which had always been his dominant political conviction* [emphasis mine] added to the vehemence of his Toryism.”²⁹ By the time Sir Geoffrey Butler’s *The Tory Tradition* (1914) appeared in print, what was most vital in Burke had been further compressed and the youthful Whiggery jettisoned altogether. To entangle oneself in the search for consistency was a waste, for the first three-quarters of Burke’s life were immaterial: “The Revolution marked as clear a turning-point for him as did the vision on the road to Damascus for St. Paul. Therefore it is possible to disregard

²⁷ *Idem, Conservatism*, pp. 42, 69, 70-71.

²⁸ Morley, *Burke: a Historical Study*, p. 35.

²⁹ Cecil, *Conservatism*, pp. 40, 41-42.

his views upon Parliamentary, Colonial, and Imperial Government; and to concentrate upon his opposition to the Revolution... It would be indeed superfluous to take up any other line.”³⁰

With his prolix and conflicted corpus pruned to a few sentences, the hesitations cheerfully waved aside, Burke’s annointment proceeds with relentless logic. The Jacobins were dreamers infatuated with a reified *patrie*. The *Reflections* were a prescient fulmination against the perils of just such an omniscient State.

But Burke saw into the eternal meaning of the Revolution...argu[ing] only that unerring eye for danger which the mother-bird possesses. What then was in danger? A specific form of liberty!... The Anglo-Saxon peoples look backward to regain their liberties, not forward to create them; and each separate person’s freedom is secured, not by high-sounding general pronouncements, but by the provision of specific remedies for each infringement of it. It is an ordered liberty, built upon precedent and buttressed by the Common Law... [T]he most penetrating political philosopher of the eighteenth century [i.e., Burke] vindicated by the success of [his] life-work the right of...Englishmen to abjure abstractions.³¹

The Conservative Party is the protector of personal autonomy from the panaceas and *a priori* premises of socialism, which, like Jacobinism, pre-judge the individual, or restrain him, or presume to know him in his infinite mystery, or else make no account for his frailties. Thus, if: socialism [a] equals (moderate) Jacobinism [b]. And: Burke [c] abhorred Jacobinism [b]. And: Conservatives [d] abhor socialism [a]. Then: Burke [c] is a Conservative [d]. Or, in Cecil’s more felicitous phrasing:

[T]here is in the socialist movement...an element of Jacobinism... The Jacobin went indeed to lengths to which no reasonable socialist would dream of following, but there is sometimes a taint of Jacobinism in socialist language. We seem sometimes to catch the Jacobin accent of reckless disregard of private rights; of merciless hatred towards those who, perhaps through no fault of their own, have become associated with some real or fancied abuse; of that disposition, not gradually to develop one state of society out of another, but to make a clean sweep of institutions in the interest of a half-thought-out reform. It is in so far as these elements are present in the socialist movement that

³⁰ Geoffrey G. Butler, *The Tory Tradition: Bolingbroke, Burke, Disraeli, Salisbury* (London: John Murray, 1914), p. 33.

³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 34, 36.

Conservatism is opposed to it. Conservatism arose to resist Jacobinism, and that is to this day its most...fundamental characteristic.³²

So completely has this constellation of propositions captured the Conservative imagination – so intuitive and inevitable does it now seem – that we have forgotten its very recent history. For one thing, it presupposes a systematicity that Burke was not necessarily assumed to enjoy. His Victorian heirs, quite as much as his contemporaries, treated him before anything else as a *politician*, the in-house pen of the Rockinghamites, whose rhetorical set-pieces aimed at persuasion above principle. Even Morley, claiming Burke for the utilitarians, never thought he could be reduced to his utilitarianism. It was only near the end of the nineteenth century, when he was chanced upon by the new breed of academic “specialists,” that Burke found himself endowed with the rigor suitable to a philosopher. The earliest instance, William Graham’s *English Political Philosophy* (1899), an account of the “most influential [English thinkers] in the field of practice,” included Burke with Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Mill, and Maine. Contra Cecil, however, Graham regarded Burke not as New Order’s harbinger but as Dying Order’s panegyrist: “At the hour Burke was writing his scheme of things, the outlines of a...greater world were laid down,” so that “we are now...more separated” from Burke’s England than his was “from the England of the Wars of the Roses... We cannot now feel as he felt.”³³ John MacCunn, whose *Political Philosophy of Burke* (1913) first accentuated the “theistic metaphysics” underpinning his protagonist’s *weltanschauung* (a later obsession of Cold War Conservatives like Peter Stanlis and Francis Canavan), nevertheless toiled in Morley’s shadow, and so inclined to the older interpretation of Burke as a Whig reformer constrained by an insufficiently generous (because undemocratic) vision. MacCunn’s Burke, while far from

³² Cecil, *Conservatism*, pp. 248-249.

³³ William Graham, *English Political Philosophy from Hobbes to Maine* (London: Edward Arnold, 1899), pp. xx, 171.

Graham's benighted reactionary, is hardly Cecil's Conservative muse, either. Mostly, he disappoints: "[H]ow much of the strife and embitterment of the nineteenth century might have been averted if this master in politics [i.e., Burke] had given the reins to his imagination as freely...in looking forward as in looking backwards to ancestors. But it was not in that path he was to walk. Somehow, though not, as we have seen, without reasons, his faith failed him. It was strong enough to make the course of history divine... But it could not inspire an ideal of social and constitutional progress."³⁴

Secondly, these propositions presume that Burke's thought is not only to some degree consistent, but consistently *Conservative* in the Cecilian sense, or compassing a Conservative core. George Croly, Rector of St. Stephen's, who conceived his 1840 biography of Burke expressly to counter the depredations of Chartism, anticipated Cecil in his insistence that "the language which [Burke] held in [*Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontent* (1770)] is the language which he breathed from his expiring tongue – sacred honour for established institutions, hatred of worthless change, and just respect for the natural influence of rank, birth, and property. The change was not in the writer, but in the men."³⁵ But Croly, as we saw in Part One, stood alone in dissent. Nearly all nineteenth century observers of Burke, whether approving or critical, supposed his basic instincts to be Whiggish, and his counter-revolutionary fervor to therefore present a paradox needing elucidation. Graham, the first academic to affirm Burke's Conservative bona fides, concentrated on the *Reflections* as the primary repository of Burke's theories of government and society (and the primary source of his entitlement to the

³⁴ John MacCunn, *The Political Philosophy of Burke* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), p. 271. Stanlis did not himself consider MacCunn a precursor, though he praised him as "one of Burke's better critics," because the merest hint of utilitarianism was anathema to Stanlis. See Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke: the Enlightenment and Revolution*, forwrd. Russell Kirk (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991), p. 7.

³⁵ Croly, p. 64.

appellation “political philosopher”). But he did so with barely concealed contempt, his sympathies lying all on the side of Burke’s adversaries:

In every direction [Burke] was a reactionary or rather a conservative, in full and entire sympathy with things as they are, with no belief in...progress... In fact, he finds his ideal rather in the past than the future. We see with him in all cases the fond backward glance on an imaginary past, never the forward hopeful one; a yearning for an idealised and vanished age of chivalry, never the belief in or the wish for the more glorious future which was coming, which Condorcet and many of his contemporaries hailed from afar, and the hope of which sustained them in the hour of death.³⁶

This silly caricature is hardly just (or sound scholarship), but it demonstrates that on those rare occasions pre-Cecil when Conservative Burke presented himself, he came in for scorn rather than approbation.

Thirdly, the propositions forget that in the first decade of the twentieth century the energy lay all on the Radical Tory side. Balfour’s accretionism appeared utterly discredited, and Free Trade had been, if not vanquished, then worn down to a shadow resistance. “Gone indeed is the pure individualism of Lord Morley and Lord Hugh Cecil with its profound distrust of all state action,” a member of the Chamberlain clan confidently trumpeted.³⁷ Lord Rosebery floated the possibility of a “central Conservative party comprising the Free Trade element” in a letter to the *Times*, but nothing came of the overture.³⁸ The frustrations of the moderates burred as an undercurrent, never ripening into real assertiveness and failing to assume a concrete shape until Cecil gave them one. One would have been foolish to wager with any confidence on the triumph of Liberal Conservatism. But that is what occurred, and it occurred because Cecil successfully re-defined socialism as a threat to English *values* rather than *unity*, and in the process re-defined Conservative identity.

³⁶ Graham, p. 167.

³⁷ Norman Chamberlain, Jun 1908, quoted in Green, *Crisis*, p. 261.

³⁸ 3 Aug 1904. See Crawford, p. 76.

To the role of publicist for the Conservative-cum-Liberal order, Cecil was uniquely suited. In the first place, he retained, in the best Cecilian manner, an intellect of critical bent (except, notoriously, on matters of religion), and his speeches were often praised as having gone some way in remedying his party's supposed philosophical deficiencies. "Lord Hugh Cecil brings to bear upon the discussion of any subject a mind of the most brilliant acuteness," the Liberal Earl of Crewe generously acknowledged.³⁹ G. K. Chesterton, though critical of Cecil's quiescence, nevertheless thought him "one of the two or three ablest modern Conservatives," and a worthy interlocutor.⁴⁰ When "a leading twentieth century philosopher of conservatism"⁴¹ pronounces with such clarity on the origins and nature of his guiding ideology, people are apt to listen, especially when, as one Liberal journalist noted in 1913, they find "so few [other] modern expressions of a general theory of Tory politics" on which to draw.⁴²

In the second place, Cecil functioned within the party as a kind of bridge figure, or rather, a neither-here-nor-there-man. His appeal to the traditionalists was cemented by a web of kinships – son of a staunchly conservative prime minister and cousin of a slightly wafflier one – and by the brand of "staid nineteenth century Toryism" he practiced, which "owed so much to the inspiration of Edmund Burke."⁴³ He was an adamant foe of Home Rule, and an equally adamant advocate of Free Trade, "as convinced a believer in the free market as any robber baron."⁴⁴ At the same time, he allied with the Diehards, and was for a time styled the leader of a band of glittering, independent-minded Tories – the "Hughlians" – who made rebellious

³⁹ *Parl. Debs.* (series 4) vol. 161, col. 1401 (26 Jul 1906).

⁴⁰ G. K. Chesterton, "What is a Conservative?" *Dublin Review* (Oct 1912), reprinted in *Littell's Living Age* (275) (3,569) (30 Nov 1912) (Boston: The Living Age, 1912), p. 551.

⁴¹ Peter Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers: from John Adams to Winston Churchill* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 10.

⁴² W. Lyon Blease, *A Short History of English Liberalism* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1913), p. 22, fn. 1.

⁴³ Rose, p. 252.

⁴⁴ Arthur Aughey, Greta Jones, and W. T. M. Riches, *The Conservative Political Tradition in Britain and the United States* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), p. 7.

mischievous. He was given to fits of dramatic theater in the Radical style, famously shouting down Asquith's maiden address as Prime Minister.

Politically, this relegated him near the margins, for he proved an uncertain ally unable to satisfy any constituency, "neither the Unionists because he is a Free Trader nor the Radicals because of his reactionary sacerdotal views,"⁴⁵ neither the rank-and-file nor the leadership, whom he understandably vexed. On the plain of abstraction, however, that same independence granted him enormous allure. Here was a man who parsed for verity, not popularity. "[Lord Hugh Cecil] is one of the extremely few men in the House for whom expediency is repellant rather than alluring," observed a parliamentary correspondent. "[He] is implacable in integrity, almost acrid in his reverence for truth."⁴⁶ This is why de Broke included Cecil in a small gathering at which Arthur Boutwood presented a paper on "Conservative principles," though Boutwood's principles, subsequently published as *National Revival*, were hardly Cecil's.

Nor, of course, were de Broke's, yet shortly after *Conservatism's* release, we find him lauding the Unionist Party as "the political heir to the matchless tradition of Chatham, Pitt, *Burke* [emphasis mine], and Beaconsfield,"⁴⁷ when before, the Irishman was notably absent from the roster of Prophets at whose "fount" all good Tories were urged to drink. This alone is testament to the rapidity with which Cecil's conception of the party was coming to predominate. De Broke, to be sure, had not abandoned his fascination with developing "a National and Imperial consciousness" or with then fashionable concepts like efficiency and race regeneration.⁴⁸ Still, his article is littered with Cecilian key-words. Among the "eternal principles" of Toryism ought

⁴⁵ L. R. Farnell, Rector of Exeter College, opposing Cecil's candidacy for the Oxford University seat, Jun 1909, quoted in Rose, p. 248.

⁴⁶ Henry W. Lucy, "An Honest Man" (1901) and "Lord Hugh Cecil" (1905), in *The Balfourian Parliament, 1900-1905* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1906), pp. 44, 360.

⁴⁷ [Richard Verney], Lord Willoughby de Broke, "National Toryism," *National Review* 59 (351) (May 1912), p. 416.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 418, 420.

to be “the inalienable right to private property, not forgetting its duties; and the maxim that a State divided against itself cannot stand.” Less “eternal” but still crucial is “the demand that there should be a public recognition of religion through the connection between Church and State.” Later: “We do not cling to the Union and to the Constitution in Church and State from...superstition, but because we believe...that they embody in a form of permanence and power the principles of Law, Order, Liberty and Religion.” Then: the “three great governing ideas of National Toryism” are “Justice, Unity and Freedom.” The “grim resolve of the Ulstermen,” one of Toryism’s moral credits, draws inspiration from “Burke and Mr. Bonar Law,” who believe “that the standard of Liberty and Justice is not to be measured by the arbitrary will of politicians.”⁴⁹ Again and again: liberty and justice, order, law, and freedom. In *Conservatism*, Cecil had sketched the six “main themes expounded in the *Reflections*” undergirding Conservative thought:

In the first place, Burke insisted on *the importance of religion* and the value of its recognition by the State. Secondly, he hated and denounced with his whole heart *injustice to individuals* committed in the course of...reform. Thirdly, he attacked the revolutionary conception of equality, and maintained *the reality and necessity of the distinctions of rank and station*. Fourthly, he upheld *private property* as an institution sacred in itself and vital to the well-being of society. Fifthly, he regarded *human society as an organism*...and an organism about which there is much that is mysterious. Sixthly...he urged the necessity of keeping *continuity with the past* and making changes as gradually and with as slight dislocation as possible.⁵⁰

Aside from the third theme, to which de Broke would have objected as too baldly stated but with which, in principle, he agreed;⁵¹ and the sixth theme, which would have struck him as morally salubrious but politically untenable, Cecil’s footprints are all over de Broke’s essay.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 416, 418, 419, 420.

⁵⁰ Cecil, *Conservatism*, p. 48.

⁵¹ See Sykes, “Radical Right,” p. 668. Willoughby de Broke’s venom was directed against the rich not for their wealth, but for “not behaving as the rich should.”

And so: just as Hugh Cecil dated the formal “birthday of Conservatism” to May, 1790, when Burke, with high flourish and a well-placed dagger, cast aside his friendship with Fox on the Commons floor,⁵² so we may date the birth of what J. H. Plumb derided as The Cult of Burke⁵³ to February, 1912, and the publication of Cecil’s influential manifesto. 1914 brought *The Tory Tradition* and, with its subtitle *Bolingbroke-Burke-Disraeli-Salisbury*, the formal installation of the Tory succession. The war years were mostly devoid of Burkeana, Conservative attention generally being fastened elsewhere, but afterward, the allusions began tumbling out, sharpened by the instantiation of the socialist threat in the ungainly form of Soviet Russia. Russell Kirk might have grumbled over the Great War’s failure to stimulate the American appetite for Burke,⁵⁴ but this was not true in Britain, where the connection between Jacobinism and Bolshevism was drawn almost immediately by the jurist A. V. Dicey, a Liberal who had reached the Conservative terminus by way of Liberal Unionism. “Burke in 1790 expressed his opinion on the state of France,” wrote Dicey in 1918. “His words, if (as in my version thereof) ‘Russia’ be substituted for ‘France,’ and ‘Russian’ for ‘French,’ apply to the Russia of to-day, and supply his comment on Bolshevism.”⁵⁵ Echoed A. A. Baumann: “Much of Burke’s writing against the French Revolution...might with only a change of names be addressed to the Bolsheviks, who so improved upon the [Jacobin] model that they have murdered and robbed a million and a half where Robespierre and Co. murdered and robbed thousands.”⁵⁶

Such ahistorical quarrying of the Burkean cannon naturally drives many in the academy to distraction. “[D]espite the obvious discontinuities between his age and our own,” rails F. P.

⁵² Cecil, *Conservatism*, pp. 42-44.

⁵³ J. H. Plumb, “Burke and His Cult,” *New York Review of Books* 4 (1) (11 Feb 1965), pp. 14-15.

⁵⁴ Kirk, Foreword, p. xi.

⁵⁵ A. V. Dicey, “Burke on Bolshevism,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 84 (498) (Aug 1918) (New York: Leonard Scott, 1918), p. 274.

⁵⁶ Baumann, *Founder*, p. 56.

Lock, seeming almost to blame the victim, “Burke’s ability to frame plausible generalizations has allowed his maxims to be cited...long after the disappearance of the hierarchical and aristocratic society for which they were intended. In a secular and populist society...his ideas cannot have any direct relevance to modern political conditions. Nevertheless, modern conservatives frequently try to...turn him to their own purposes.”⁵⁷ But scholarly pique has never much mattered to the laity – indeed, in some circles it is wielded as a badge of honor – and so the “turning” of Burke continued apace.

⁵⁷ Lock, *Burke’s Reflections*, p. 192.

CONCLUSION

A Twentieth Century Invention

By the end of the Second World War, the establishment of Burke as the intellectual redoubt from which Conservatives would launch their attacks had been firmly secured. In 1954, the political scientist Leon Epstein remarked on the “special prominence” given by the party to “the articles of faith stemming from Edmund Burke,” the profusion of quotations from his later writings littering its campaign material. This reliance on the *Reflections* was “natural enough,” thought Epstein; Burke’s “admiration for constitutional tradition, respect for the established religion, and belief in evolutionary and organic change all suit the Conservative temper. The present role of the party is not seen in such a very different light from the time when Tories...found in [Burke’s] reaction to the French Revolution the intellectual fount of modern Conservatism.”¹

Epstein’s synopsis errs, of course. It was *Hugh Cecil* who first located “the intellectual fount of modern Conservatism” in the *Reflections*’s pages. The nineteenth century Tories always assumed Burke’s fundamental Whiggishness, his senescent tergiversation notwithstanding. Even during the mid-century interlude of political comity that ran between the two Reform Bills, when ideology had been temporarily sated, the Tories never undertook to wrest Burke from the Whigs or their Liberal successors. On nearly all topics of consequence to Parliament from Burke’s death to Salisbury’s retirement – slavery, reform, and Crown prerogative; then, Ireland; finally, empire – Burke’s positions and those of the Tories could not be squared without casuistry. Of what worth were a handful of histrionic speeches, strikingly rendered and accommodating to the counter-revolutionary cause though they might have been, when set beside an extensive and

¹ Epstein, p. 28.

unrecanted trail of error? (Never mind that as the Tories came to modulate their antagonism toward the Revolution, Burke's obduracy weighed less in his favor.) That there was much in him to admire, the Tories readily acknowledged; they were even prepared to concede him a seat among England's greatest statesmen. But that he was a Conservative, or usefully employed for specifically Conservative purposes – this they denied. Disraeli esteemed Burke as much as anyone, but he never offered him up as a predecessor; neither did Lord Salisbury, though he breathed Burkeanism.

But Salisbury stood athwart a fast-moving tide, and once gone from office, it no longer seemed possible to yell “stop.” As the newly enlarged electorate bent an increasingly receptive ear toward messages emanating from the Left, Conservatives went in search of a stable storyline which might compete with Labour's appeal. The tale they ultimately told themselves – “In the beginning was Burke” – rested on an appropriated Whig-Liberal vocabulary many Tories had previously shunned, and by concentrating Burke's *oeuvre* down to its counter-revolutionary essentials. The demands of mass politics obliged parties to “brand” themselves; the factors discussed in Part Two eventually canalized Conservative efforts toward Burke.

Yet despite its recent past, the Brand of Burke remains impervious to inquiry. It fits too neatly with the dominant Conservative self-conception to be held as anything other than an evident truth. The rise of “Thatcherism” ignited the ire of so many within Thatcher's own party precisely because it provocatively and unapologetically disrupted the presumed line of continuity from Burke by “dancing with dogma.”² It became a common complaint among Thatcher's detractors that she wished “to wipe out the past,”³ and a common counter-complaint among her

² Ian Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma: Britain Under Thatcherism* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1992) is the classic expression of the Conservative critique by a leading “wet.”

³ Michael Wolff, a close advisor to Thatcher's predecessor, Edward Heath, quoted in David Willetts with Richard Forsdyke, *After the Landslide: Learning the Lessons of 1906 and 1945*, report for the Centre for Policy Studies (1

champions that such criticisms rested on a dogged attachment to “Liberal-Conservatism,” of which “Lord [RAB] Butler” was judged the primary post-war exponent.⁴ RAB, of course, was the nephew and pupil of Sir Geoffrey, he of *The Tory Tradition*. So whether one stood for or against Thatcher, one implicitly accepted a presentation of Conservative history which placed a moderate Burkeanism (as adumbrated by Hugh Cecil) at its center, and which saw Thatcherism as providing a decisive break.

In the wake of Hobsbawm and Ranger and a thousand monographs since, it is taken for granted that the more organic a convention or belief appears to be, the less likely it is to remain so upon inspection. Perhaps, then, the revelation that the identity of the Conservative Party has been peculiarly bent around a set of propositions will strike the reader as really no revelation at all. Yet we would be grossly mistaken if we concluded that the “invention” of this identity was intentional. Hugh Cecil reached for Burke amid the welter of doubt and dissatisfaction buffeting Edwardian Conservatives because in Burke he found confirmation for prejudices long ago formed. That his reading of Burke and his sense of the Conservative mission should be colored by his private preoccupations is natural enough; that his perspective should resonate with, and be adopted with such alacrity by, large sections of his party is the striking thing.

It would be more accurate, therefore, to say that the Brand of Burke is a *simplification* wrapped around a large nugget of truth. As Part One demonstrated, much in Burke is quite convivial to the Tory way of thinking, and a good deal more is confusing and so amenable to multiple interpretations. Without acknowledging this core of convergence between man and brand, we cannot begin to explain the latter’s seemingly effortless passage from contrivance to

Sep 1999), p. 97, <http://www.cps.org.uk/files/reports/original/111221165304-Afterthelandslidesep1999DavidWilletts.pdf> (accessed 3 Nov 2013).

⁴ See Maurice Cowling, “The Present Position,” in *Conservative Essays*, ed. Maurice Cowling (London: Cassell, 1978), p. 13.

doctrine. The wholly false rarely persuades, though this alone is insufficient. Far more waits to be written on the socio-psychological processes which allowed Edwardian Conservatives to slide into Burke's arms and forget, almost overnight, their prior ambivalence.

And once enveloped, there they have, by and large, remained. The immense staying power of the Brand of Burke also demands further investigation. I have pointed to the glimmerings of an answer, I think, by speaking of key-words and symbols. If we regard the brand less as a set of prescriptions than as a language, we can see that it does not really instruct Conservatives *what* to think but *how*. In an oft-cited passage from *The Conservative Case* (1959), Quintin Hogg, drawing heavily on Hugh Cecil, lays the matter out plainly enough:

Conservatives see no inconsistency in having opposed Liberals and Whigs in the name of authority, Socialists in the name of freedom. The ground is the same, but it is being attacked from a different direction. The great heresy of the nineteenth century was self-interest. But today the boot is on the other foot. When the predominant left-wing philosophy was Liberalism, the danger was too much liberty...

But to-day the predominant theory of the Left is Socialism, and the danger is not too much but too little freedom. The great heresy of our age is no longer self-interest, it is State-worship, and instead of the altars being ablaze in honour of Mammon, we make our children pass through the fire to Moloch.

In each fight Conservatives have taken the same stand. Abused and traduced as reactionaries and out of touch with the times, *they opposed the excessive individualism of the Liberals in the name of the same principle as that in defence of which they now oppose Socialism – the Rule of Law...the friend by whose good offices authority and liberty can alone be reconciled [emphasis mine].*⁵

This is what Ian Gilmour meant when he famously maintained that the “true Conservative course...is to stick as closely as possible to the centre, with a slight Right incline.” The center, after all, occupies a relative rather than a fixed position. If “British Conservatism...is not an ‘ism,’”⁶ it is only in the sense that Conservative ideology is best

⁵ Hailsham, pp. 66-67.

⁶ Ian Gilmour, *Inside Right: a Study of Conservatism* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), pp. 121, 130.

regarded as “a set of beliefs governing conduct” rather than “a systematic scheme of ideas.”⁷ That these beliefs may owe more to Hugh Cecil than to Edmund Burke should not discomfit us overmuch, for history is full of such benign distortions. And besides, the “real...theme of History,” G. M. Young informs us, “is not what happened, but what people felt about it when it was happening,”⁸ or, we might add, what people *remembered* feeling afterward, even if they felt nothing like it at the time. The venerable relationship between Edmund Burke and the Conservative Party carries no less significance for being a contention rather than a fact.

⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary* supplies both definitions for “ideology.”

⁸ G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (2nd ed.) (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. vi.

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