



CHANGE AND EXCHANGE DEGENERATION IN SWIFT AND BURKE

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Born in 1729, Edmund Burke never benefited from a potentially fruitful exchange with that other Dubliner, Jonathan Swift, who died in a much impaired state in 1745. Yet cultural companionship is evident from his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, where *Gulliver's Travels* is significantly evoked, albeit sparsely and allusively so, against the background of political degeneration. Indeed, Swift's most direct address of the issue was in *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), more precisely in "A Battle of the Books",¹ but Burke's concern was with *Gulliver's Travels* and, accordingly, it is on the basis of the latter that the following enquiry is conducted. Burke's evocations come with a wink to the learned, from a masterpiece of 1790 to one of 1726, and he refers to Swift as an authority since the issues of the bygone days of the Walpolean era, pitting Whig against Tory, were no longer of the same divisiveness; even though his attitude to the French Revolution made him as controversial as Swift had been before him, changes in context and purposes are not negligible. They do not attach, crudely put, to political affiliations: Swift's Toryism and Burke's Whiggism were not waterproof, there had been endless realignments within the two parties, and what emerges is a common indictment of the counterproductive rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment.² Ostensibly, Burke contrasted the positive Glorious Revolution with the French Revolution, yet his doubts about the former cannot fail to evoke Swift's on what it eventually brought about in Ireland.³

¹ I am indebted to Hermann J. Real for the reminder.

² The phrase, Age of Enlightenment, appeared in English in 1889 [CLARK 9 and n]. "Siècle de [sic] lumières" seems to have been of more normal usage on the French side of the Channel. The English expatriate, Robert Merry, used it in his *Réflexions politiques sur la nouvelle constitution qui se prépare en France, adressées à la république* [15]: see ROGERS 260.

³ See Swift's *Drapier's Letters* (1724) and *Modest Proposal* (1729); BURKE 1792 : 79. On Swift and Burke's Irish companionship, see DEANE, mostly Ch. 2, "Swift and Burke:

Both were also worried about the status of learning in a degenerate body politic, but they did not start from the same premises and their historiographical conclusions testify to intellectual reshuffling.

From Gulliver's Travels to Burke's counter-revolutionary writings

Taking to task light-headed advocates of "resistance and revolution" [BURKE 1982 : 154-155], Burke refers to them as "professors", one of the two terms, with "projectors", used in Swift's account of the Academy of Lagado. These are just armchair revolutionaries. There is another set, however, "eager politicians out of parliament", amongst them Richard Price whose *Dissertation on the Love of Our Country* (1789) triggered the writing of *Reflections*, who come closer to Swift's own projectors: "considering their speculative designs as of infinite value, and the actual arrangement of the state as of no estimation, they are at best indifferent about it" [155]. Burke's reaction to such impracticality and desperate cultivation of the blank slate calls to mind that of Lord Munodi, Gulliver's informer about the new ways spreading over Balnibarbi from the Flying Island of Laputa and the Academy of Lagado, most notably when Burke lets fly at the geometrical fancy of the French revolutionaries who divide their country into squares [286].⁴ Tellingly, "the modern usage" described by Munodi started "about forty years ago" [SWIFT 1985 : III, iv, 221], approximately the time of the Glorious Revolution. Two revolutions produce like effects and alienate those most committed to the public. Munodi, "being not very well with the Court, and pressed by many of his friends", finally complies with the projectors and is much the worse for it [III, iv, 220-223]. To Burke, the result of unbridled speculation must be that "[t]he country gentleman [...], the officer by sea and land, the man of liberal views and habits, attached to no profession, will be as completely excluded from the government of his country as if he were legislatively proscribed" [BURKE 1982 : 312]. At least Munodi had the bitter possibility of surrendering. In Burke's dramatic exaggeration, overlooking that some of those potential outcasts actually sided with the Revolution, there does not appear to be any such option. The *assignats* will make life strictly impossible to those who cannot participate in the new economic order.

'The Territories of the Heart.' : 11-27. On Burke and Ireland, see also O'BRIEN'S 1969 introduction to Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and his *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*; FUCHS; GIBBONS.

⁴ Siéyès's plan never materialised. Why Burke did not mention that is explained by LOCK [II : 290-291].

The second passage in *Reflections* bears on the shortage of money in France between the publication of Necker's *De l'Administration des Finances de la France* (1785) and the present day, as if the country "had been for some time past under the special direction of the learned academicians of Lagado and Balnibarbi", and Burke adds the following note: "See Gulliver's Travels for the idea of countries governed by philosophers" [238].⁵ He points to emigration, population decline and soaring unemployment and mendicancy in Paris, while "the leaders of the legislative clubs and coffee-houses are intoxicated with admiration at their own wisdom and ability" [238-239]. No more of a direct Swiftian influence is to be found in *Reflections*, nor in Burke's other writings of the revolutionary era, but there is enough for a general proximity with Swift to emerge, based on what is worst in Gulliverian politics. The absurdity of the egalitarian "appointment by lot" [139]⁶ is faintly evocative of "leaping and creeping" in Lilliput [SWIFT 1985 : I, iii, 75].⁷ The Lilliputian degeneration is indeed balanced by the Brobdingnagians' restoration of their ancient constitution, which includes a settlement of the militia [ii, vii, 179] This recalls the centrality of the militia issue in the outbreak of the Great Rebellion [KENYON 2 and n], matching Burke's detailed worries over the unruly French army exposed to revolutionary propaganda [Burke 1982 : 330-350]. As for Munodi's resignation to his fate, it first re-emerges in a comparatively optimistic mood at the end of *Reflections*, where "transmigrations" will, in some unpredictable manner, terminate the present state of French politics, "purified by fire and blood", and then, much more gloomily so, the year after, when Burke contemplates that Providence may have deserted this world and that the supporters of the old order "will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men".⁸ *Reflections* also has, in its narrative of the Journées d'Octobre of 1789, the mournful

⁵ Burke does not italicise Swift's title.

⁶ Clark [BURKE 2001 : 206-207n] relates the issue of "appointment by lot" to a 1772 attack, by Soames Jenyns, on Burke's theory of party in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, 1770, 306-81, not with whatever occurred during the French Revolution. Jenyns viewed appointment by lot as a satisfactory alternative to ambition.

⁷ Burke leaves out what also emerges in the Lilliput passage, namely, the replacement of fame by celebrity which was one of the growing worries of the time. On the latter issue, see Czennia.

⁸ BURKE 1982 : 376; 1791 : 393. See COL, "The Limits of Providentialist Interpretations of Edmund Burke : What Crime, What Punishment?" : 113-126.

phrase, “[b]ut now all is to be changed” [BURKE 1982 : 171] which matches Swift’s overall despair with the possibility of regeneration.

It is the treatment of degeneration that ultimately explains the differences between Swift and Burke, tenuous though they initially seem to be. Lilliput’s present-day “scandalous corruptions,” the effect of “the degenerate nature of man”, are traced to “the grandfather of the Emperor now reigning”, and “grew to the present height by the gradual increase of party and faction” [SWIFT 1985 : I, vi, 96]. A more religious brand of degeneration started with the emperor’s great-grandfather, arguably Henry VIII, leading to the commotions of the seventeenth century down to and including the Glorious Revolution [I, iv, 85]. Other passages loosely connect Henry VIII, the murderer of Thomas More [III, vii, 241] and spoiler of the Church,⁹ with the plight of the Jacobites.¹⁰ As for Swift’s indictment of “party and faction” and corrective commendation of the King of Brobdingnag, their proximity to Bolingbroke’s rhetoric runs against Burke’s party theory.¹¹ However, Burke’s description of the religious policies of the National Assembly relates them, though he extenuates Henry’s wrongdoings by contrast, to “the tyrant, Harry the Eighth of England” [BURKE 1982 : 217-218], but little does he suggest of a possible regeneration, as against the nearly-perfect Brobdingnagian reversal of the Lilliputian predicament: Brobdingnag’s restorer was “this Prince’s grandfather” [SWIFT 1985 : II, vii, 178-79]. Burke’s world of immediate history offers none of the solutions of Swift’s fictional history.

Of course morality always has a say. Gulliver may snort when reading the Brobdingnagian moralist’s account of a putative degeneration in size,¹² but,

⁹ See SWIFT, *Concerning That Universal Hatred, Which Prevails Against The Clergy* (24 May 1736). *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift* XIII : 125-126; on Swift’s treatment of Henry VIII, see HIGGINS 1995 : 134.

¹⁰ On the complexities of such connections, see COL, “The Moralists’ Adventure : Rewriting History in *Gulliver’s Travels*” : 235-238.

¹¹ BURKE 1770 : 375-376. Lock plays down Burke’s theory of party since, he argues, “[t]here would always be [...] a single party of virtue fighting against several factions of unprincipled knaves” [LOCK 1999 : 296]. Burke made a significant exception to his general scorn for Bolingbroke when it came to the latter’s acknowledgement of the foundational place of monarchy [BURKE 1982 : 230].

¹² SWIFT 1985 : II, vii, 178; EDDY [123] mentions Nicholas Henrion, *Une eschelle chronologique de la différence des tailles humaines depuis la création du monde jusqu’à Jésus Christ* (1718). See also ALLEN; HARRIS; JONES; PASSMANN. Hermann J. Real kindly drew my attention to the post-Eddy publications.

once in Houyhnhnmland, he similarly moralises about the physical degeneration of British aristocrats [IV, vi, 304]. Such laments, which evoke those of the prolongevitists [REAL 117-135], are loosely echoed by Burke's gibes at the cowardice of French aristocrats and the effeminacy of French revolutionaries.¹³ However, Burke's suggestions have less of Swift's stress on morals, including his conviction that man has degenerated, and a supposedly superior past. In *Present Discontents*, Burke derides the token opposition of those who glory in the heroism of past ages, "a full feast of admiration of the Grecian commonwealths and of our true Saxon constitution" [BURKE 1770 : 312]. This ties up with his later attack on armchair revolutionaries who dodge the taxing duties of constructive opposition, but he does not explain how political degeneration ever came to pass. He mostly offers to restore Parliament to its original function, that of a check on the executive power [333, 347]; all in all, in spite of an exaggerated concern with the "king's men" that may largely result from Lord Rockingham's expectations on his secretary [LOCK 1999 : 227], this is level-headed Burke. Things are more intricate with the French Revolution. His Gothic descriptions¹⁴ ally with a much heavier dose of conspiracy theory,¹⁵ but that this should be the bottom line is no foregone conclusion.

Learning and the political world

Swift and Burke provide ample material to disbelieve the positive connotations that the rationalistic Enlightenment has come to enjoy. Burke associates expressions that relate to "light" with the *tabula rasa* piously expected by rabid Protestant Dissent in Britain, which he counters by commending the "just prejudice" where man's "duty" connects with his "nature."¹⁶ His worries are best exemplified by his quote from Rabaut Saint-Étienne, although he does not call attention to the latter's Protestantism:

¹³ BURKE 1982 : 169-170; 1796-97 : 167-168.

¹⁴ "Out of the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man" [BURKE 1796-97 : 155].

¹⁵ BURKE 1982 : 211-214, 257, 265 and n; 1791 : 382-83. For Burke's conspiracy theory, see DEANE 66-85.

¹⁶ For those related expressions, in keeping with Clark's identification of "Age of Enlightenment" as anachronistic, see BURKE 1982 : 182n, 183, 308; 1996 : 124, for a quote from Samuel Butler's anti-Puritan *Hudibras* (1663-1678). On Burke's provocative use of "prejudice" [BURKE 1982 : 183], see COL 2001 : 218-227.

Tous les établissemens en France couronnent le malheur du peuple: pour le rendre heureux il faut le renouveler; changer ses idées; changer ses loix; changer ses mœurs; ... changer les hommes; ... changer les choses; changer les mots ... tout détruire; oui, tout détruire: puisque tout est à recréer [BURKE 1982 : 279n].¹⁷

Burke may have exaggerated the extent of Dissenting support for the French Revolution [LOCK 2006 : 343-344], but central to Rabaut's most strident demands ("changer les choses; changer les mots") is a perversion of the status of learning: the latter could not but be subordinated to the new political categories. It will be "cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude" [BURKE 1982 : 173]. Tellingly enough, the indefinite article was replaced in hostile responses by the definite "the," which helped stir "popular demonstrations against [Burke's] book".¹⁸ By surreptitiously altering an author's point, the egalitarian age was attributing a new status to learning.

Swift had sensed the same, as exemplified by Lagado's creation of a new, ultimately police-oriented, world-view. What started as an egalitarian attempt to redress the monopoly of book-writing by scholars and geniuses [SWIFT 1985 : III, v, 227] is followed in the next chapter, even though there is no strict causality, by Gulliver's suggestion of an alarming practical application in deciphering correspondences [III, vi, 236-237]. In both cases the outcome is counter-productive. The new-fangled learning laboriously emerges from the combination of loose words, and subversive meaning is just as painfully constructed from Procrustean grids. Gulliver's offer of a made-in-England, or "Langden", improvement evokes the clumsy, yet stubborn strivings to defuse the Atterbury plot.¹⁹ Democratic learning thus opens onto an oppressive police state, but Burke's own account of such developments is somewhat disappointing given the countless opportunities offered by the heated time of the French Revolution. The clearest allusions he makes to correspondences between revolutionary societies show that they are conducted rather largely in an open manner.²⁰ The new subverters have already achieved so much that there is no call for them to disguise their meaning, and they can export it brazenly.

¹⁷ Original spelling in *Reflections* retained.

¹⁸ BURKE 1982 : 385. Paine scholars apparently repeat the substitution, as does Foner [PAINE 15].

¹⁹ Swift may not have entirely perceived the Jacobite dimension of the plot [HIGGINS 16-17], which partial lack of perception certainly helped him light-heartedly to satirise Walpolean repression.

²⁰ BURKE 1982 : 88, 93, 213 (respecting Enlightenment *philosophes*), 263 and n., 265.

But the real difference attaches to what specific connection of politics and learning the two authors would have recommended. A momentous change can be observed from Swift to Burke. Indeed, both were deeply indebted to the classics, but although Burke did regard them as a most felicitous source of moral inspiration, as shown by his frequent quotes of Cicero, he would have been distinctly uneasy about enforcing the whole of their recommendations beyond rather general praises of their insistence on a hierarchical society.²¹ One of his gibes against the “king’s men” is that they had a “scheme of perfection to be realized in a monarchy far beyond the visionary republic of Plato” [BURKE 1770 : 320],²² which sheds light on the significance of his later distinction between the public and the private. Obviously, the French Revolution brought matters to a head, as shown by his indictment of Rousseau in *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791)²³ and his evocation of the replacement of family affections by Roman-inspired fanatical politics [BURKE 1796-97 : 209]. But, while he holds that a debased literary output, in the form of Rousseau’s *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), is used to degrade morals and the social hierarchy [BURKE 1907-10 : 541-542], he does not indicate what kind of literature can remedy such threats to traditional views. Whether this should be to his credit, as one aware that literature cannot be expected to moralise, even socialise, or an indication that he did not wish to discern that all forms of morals and learning obey some kind of hegemony, be it social, political, moral, religious or otherwise, is a difficult point to assess. He may have also recognised, just like Alexander Pope in the *Dunciad*, that modernity uses relativism in order, most consciously and politically so, to impose its own blind spots and terminate independent investigation.²⁴ The immorality of the Revolution was the seedbed of what he described as a new, inverted religion which he termed “atheism by establishment” [BURKE 1796-97 : 207-208]. In any case, disinterested learning and a disinterested “natural aristocracy” [BURKE 1996 : 154-156] seem to move together in his writings, and the inevitable

²¹ BURKE 1982 : 300 on Montesquieu’s approval of the ancients in this respect.

²² Since *Present Discontents* targeted Bolingbroke’s assumed posthumous influence, the gibe at Plato slyly echoes Bolingbroke’s own attack on “Platonic politics” [BOLINGBROKE 381].

²³ BURKE 1907-10 : 536-542. For an earlier, and milder, attack on Rousseau, see BURKE 1982 : 283-284.

²⁴ Such parallels are all the more illuminating since Burke uses Pope’s phrase, “Grand Anarch,” to refer to Mirabeau (Letter to Richard Burke, 10 October 1789) [BURKE 2001 : 62]. On Pope’s *Dunciad* (1728-43) and its parallels to the intricacies and blind spots of our present-day “supposed free play of signifiers,” see BUTLER 296.

connection of the private and public does not signify that the former should be subsumed under the latter.

Swift's position is more of a conundrum. Specific forms of learning and their accompaniment, literary production, are closely articulated with what Gulliver depicts as an acceptable, unless it be ideal, form of government. But this comes in such varied contexts that one must first identify what would have been repellent to Burke. The Houyhnhnms have stifled affections among them,²⁵ an echo of corrupt Lilliput [SWIFT 1985 : I, vi, 98]. Small wonder that the Houyhnhnms should hope to preserve their society through the castration of the Yahoos [IV, ix, 320-321], and that Gulliver should make a sail out of young Yahoo hides,²⁶ in which Burke could have recognised an early version of his cannibalistic reading of the French Revolution.²⁷

These passages from *Gulliver's Travels* have been read, by the so-called 'hard' school, as indications that there was something genocidal about Swift himself, not just his character and narrator [RAWSON]. The antagonistic 'soft' school, though it correctly identifies the ironical distance between Swift and Gulliver [CLIFFORD 33-49], does not appear to explain why all the literary output described in the *Travels* is tersely supportive of the values of the land—with the exception of Lagado's—, which brings together what the 'soft' school views as the negative models of Lilliput and Houyhnhnmland and the much more admirable one of Brobdingnag. This can be interpreted as ample evidence that Swift wholeheartedly supported Spartan and Roman civic ways, from the Lilliputian family and education system down to Houyhnhnmland's extermination policies and, accordingly, that he did not single out Brobdingnag.²⁸ But this fails to account for the stylistic distance between the ideal and the rendering. Swift was a thorough indicter of what Gulliver terms "virtuosos" [SWIFT 1985 : IV, x, 325], but the very manner, oblique, snide and ironical, in which he brings to shadowy light both his agreement and disagreement with Gulliver, whose own style is indeed an

²⁵ SWIFT 1985, : IV, viii, 316-317. Such absolute indifference could be contradicted by the death of the bereaved mare: "she died about three months after". But Gulliver's laconic formulation is both Houyhnhnmly unsentimental—her life came to a purely natural termination—and suggestive of an indispensable distance from his report of an entirely rational society [ix, 322-323].

²⁶ SWIFT 1985 : IV, x, 330. The connection with *A Modest Proposal* cannot be missed.

²⁷ BURKE 1982 : 159, 167n ("cette caverne d'Anthropophages," quoting Lally-Tollendal on the Journées d'Octobre, 1789); BURKE 1796-97 : 212, where Burke covers a range of desecrations, from actual cannibalism to "abominable insults on the bodies."

²⁸ This appears from HIGGINS 1983. Higgins does not address the 'hard' and 'soft' schools opposition, but the drift of his article is rather decidedly 'hard' school.

odd mix of plainness and luxuriance, definitely cannot tally with the obverse of a virtuoso's method. One has "a text that insists on undermining its own credibility as it goes on" [SWIFT 2012 : 31]. And it might be apposite to remember that Gulliver's Stoic, made-in-Houyhnhnmland ideal is deflated when Swift snaps that "the stoical scheme of supplying our wants, by lopping off our desires, is like cutting off our feet when we want shoes" [SWIFT 1939-1974 : 1-244].

In spite of the indispensable correctives that must be brought to 'hard'-school scholarship, the significant shift from Swift to Burke is that the latter's intellectual equipment was not so heavily influenced as Swift's by ancient references and civic humanism. Conversely, he echoed Bernard Mandeville's articulation of private vices and public virtues when he argued that the farmer's interest could never be that his labourers were destitute to the point of not being an adequate workforce.²⁹ He was also aware that alarming bridges existed between past and present.³⁰ Thus, he was in a position to reassess the connection of private and *oikos* life and productivity, which may have enabled him to ridicule the French Revolution as a phoney resurrection of ancient Sparta and Rome, and to do so with all the more gusto since the latter models were of no such moment to him as they were still to Swift. Accordingly, the latter trod a narrow plank, between explicit approval and implicit deflation, which Burke did not have to bother himself about.

Historiographical perspectives

There nonetheless remains the striking common ground of wishful thinking, even self-suggestion, that the two authors address from different, though not entirely conflicting angles. Like other Tories of his time, Swift used the ancient constitution against the Hanoverians and Walpole in the same manner that the Whigs and their Parliamentary predecessors had, earlier on, wielded it against the Stuarts; however, he also had secret doubts,

²⁹ BURKE 1795 : 88. On the importance of commerce in the Whig worldview, Burke's adhesion to it and his distance when it came to the *assignats*, see BURKE 2005 : xviii-xxii.

³⁰ Burke has a pre-Tocquevillian awareness of continuous, and excessive, State intervention from the Ancien Régime to the Revolution [BURKE 1795 : 108-109]. The two views—the overwhelming insistence on the revolutionary blank slate and the occasional stress on continuity—are hardly harmonised, as if he suffered reverse difficulties to those of Tocqueville who admitted, one year before his death in 1859, that some obscure point stubbornly resisted his dominant continuity theory (Tocqueville, letter to Louis de Kergorlay) [FURET 256n].

possibly inspired by Sir Henry Spelman and Robert Brady, about its historical validity. Bolingbroke's similar qualms were committed to posthumous publication while, in his lifetime, he relied heavily on the subversive theory now that the tables could be turned on those who devised it. Swift, conversely, inserted his doubts cryptically in the Struldrugg episode of *Gulliver's Travels*. If the Struldruggs lose their memory, then, analogically so, access to an immemorial, unwritten constitution is undermined.³¹ Later on, David Hume also let fly at the ancient constitution in his *History of England* (1754-1761), which may be echoed in Burke's sneers at the "true Saxon constitution". More came in *Reflections*. Arguing that, from Coke to Blackstone, English lawyers always attempted to relate existing charters to "the still more antient standing law of the kingdom", Burke makes the following muddled point:

In the matter of fact, for the greater part, these authors appear to be in the right; perhaps not always: but if the lawyers mistake in some particulars, it proves my position still the more strongly; because it demonstrates the powerful prepossession towards antiquity, with which the minds of all our lawyers and legislators, and of all the people whom they wish to influence, have been always filled; and the stationary policy of this kingdom in considering their most sacred rights and franchises as an *inheritance* [BURKE 1982 : 117-118].

Need it be added that the "matter of fact" was precisely most questionable? Burke's hesitations then emerge in a more open manner than Swift's in the Struldrugg episode but, simultaneously, he presses the foundational, because emotional, validity of the ancient constitution. He goes on to remind the French that they "had the elements of a constitution very nearly as good as could be wished". They should have "derived [their] claims from a more early race of ancestors" than their immediate, allegedly oppressed predecessors, would accordingly "have been taught to respect [themselves]", and would have recognised "that it was [their] country [they] worshipped, in the person of [their] king", which "would have given new examples of wisdom to the world".³² In a word, the restoration of their discontinued liberties would have been an even greater feat of strength than whatever was observable in a more favoured Britain.

³¹ On Spelman and Brady, see POCOCK 1990 : 91-123, 182-228. On the complexities of Bolingbrokean thinking, see COL 2006. On the Struldruggs, see SWIFT 1985 : III, x, 251-60, and, together with the above-mentioned article by Real, BOUCÉ and COL 2011.

³² BURKE 1982 : 122-123; see also COL 2010 a.

Swift and Burke were cultivating some variety of the Platonic “noble lie,” recently translated as “needful falsehoods” or “royal lie”.³³ Socrates insists on how shameful he feels at imparting Glaucon with what comes little short of a brazen lie, and covers himself behind the pretence that he will give the citizens a “tale”. All of them, he says, were borne of the earth, in other words their country, God has made them of various metals of decreasing value, matching the respective functions of rulers, auxiliaries, and husbandmen and craftsmen, and such a hierarchy is not hereditary but permanently subject to merit or demerit. Much space is devoted to the silver auxiliaries so that they should be disciplined protectors of the city, not “wolves” or “savage tyrants”. One cannot help connecting this with Swift and Burke’s worries about the military, but it would be difficult to go much beyond and suggest that they accepted the whole of the tale, especially in its endorsement of social mobility. Lilliput does not seem to allow of it, Houyhnhnmland is thoroughly a caste system based on genetics and eugenics [SWIFT 1985 : I, vi, 97-99; IV, vi, 303-304, and viii, 316-317] and, quite tellingly so, the more positive model of Brobdingnag has nothing about it, except for Glumdalclitch’s rather trivial promotion to the queen’s service and likely demotion for failing to watch over Gulliver [II, iii, 140; viii, 183]. Burke, a “new man” himself, was content with stressing that the House of Commons’ openness to “merit” was just a marginal corrective to due recognition of hereditary distinction [BURKE 1982 : 132, 141].

Yet, to both Swift and Burke, the “noble lie” cannot but have meant something. In the first place, and unexpectedly so, its elevated demands made it impossible for them to endorse colonialism. In Burke’s eyes, Irish Protestants and East India Company administrators justified their conduct on the grounds that they rescued the natives from their barbarous ways, in similar fashion to those savage, emancipating conquerors of their own country, the French revolutionaries.³⁴ Something of a similar rhetoric is detectable in Gulliver’s indictment of the arrogance of British colonisers,³⁵ and, as far as Ireland is concerned, Swift’s “noble lie” would be that Irish Protestants should view themselves simply as Irish. In other words, all such colonisers were silver auxiliaries turned wolves. In the second place, Swift

³³ See PLATO, *The Republic*. All quotes from Book III of *The Republic*.

³⁴ The way “those sincere friends to the rights of mankind, the Romans, freed Greece, Macedon, and other nations” parallels the performance of French revolutionaries [BURKE 1982 : 298]. For the link between Irish Protestants, the East India Company and French revolutionaries, see DEANE 95-97.

³⁵ SWIFT 1985 : IV, xii, 342-44. I shall not enter into Gulliver’s naivety respecting a Houyhnhnm victory over European invaders.

and Burke's indebtedness to Plato would be more recognisable if one called the *Republic* passage a myth, in order to eliminate the negative implications that attach to lies.³⁶ To their minds, the ancient constitution was just as foundational as what Socrates would have pressed upon the citizens of his ideal republic. But, just as Socrates shielded himself behind a Phoenician tale, so did Swift and Burke draw from the historical forgery concocted by Sir Edward Coke. Socrates' accommodation of an alien tale purported to restore Athens to her earlier, and sounder, ways, which made him a subverter; Swift ostensibly drew from national material but, in more cryptic a manner than Socrates, indicated that he disbelieved it; Burke's case is slightly different.

His aim was not to use the ancient constitution in a Cokean manner, given its serviceability in the Civil Wars of the 1640s; nor could he use it as a heroic myth since the latter blinded later politicians, at the time of *Present Discontents*, to the new dangers that were developing. He used it as a foundation, some kind of *auctoritas* from which everything was to develop, in order to maintain, not challenge, the existing balanced monarchy. This, obviously, was treading slippery ground, which he was fully aware of when referring to the "politic, well-wrought veil" drawn to pass the "meliorated order of succession" of 1688-89 [BURKE 1982 : 103]. So could his earlier awareness of the dulling effects of the ancient constitution be regarded as admission that it was of little service against political degeneration. This became a burning issue in the 1790s. In a new subversive age according to which the ancient constitution was a mere imposition by the privileged orders, Burke hoped that every single Briton, whatever his walk of life, would pay heed to the whole of the political ensemble, but he also stressed that those who know most must "provide" for those who know least, which is best achieved by true religious conduct instead of viewing religion "as a mere invention to keep the vulgar in obedience" [200]. In this he simply revisited Plato's distinction between the brass and iron citizens and the golden rulers and expected of the latter the self-discipline that Plato demanded of the silver auxiliaries.

Conversely, Swift's position was far more of a conjunction of reaction and revolution than Burke would ever have allowed for himself. This is best exemplified by Swift's attraction to regicide: he praised Ravailac in the ninth section of *A Tale of a Tub*, and this and other passages gleefully point to the Assassination Plot against William of Orange in 1696 [HIGGINS 1995 : 68-

³⁶ I wish to express my gratitude to Gerald J. Butler who drew my attention to this point.

74]. He also went the whole length of imagining, in the netherworld of Glubbudrib, Marcus Junius Brutus and Caesar on the best of terms, since Caesar recognised the surpassing glory of his own murderer's action.³⁷ Conversely, Burke's Brutus, at the time of the French Revolution, nauseatingly fuses Lucius Junius Brutus who sentenced his sons to death for plotting the restoration of the monarchy, and Caesar's adoptive son [BURKE 1796-97 : 209]. The notion of virtue was blatantly different to Swift and Burke. The Tory, Swift, drew from an Old Whig civic humanism; the New Whig, Burke, would have none of that, at least in such an extreme form.³⁸ A polite society had no room for strident excesses where "[t]enderness to individuals is considered as treason to the public" [BURKE 1982 : 161]. The younger Burke had already voiced that the State should not be "a bloody idol", demanding that family affections and friendship should be sacrificed [BURKE 1770 : 374-75]. Swift and his circle would have thought just the same, but their disaffection with the Hanoverian monarchy led them to endorse a subversive civic humanism which Burke balked at. The French Revolution, however, led him to shed much of his New Whig mind-set [BURKE 2005 : xxii, xxix-xxx, xxxiv], which indicates that he may have had misgivings about the erosion of traditional morality induced by the Revolution Settlement, among other things with the creation of the Bank of England in 1694 [COL 2010 b : 344-346]. But the French Revolution was a further deterrent to the regicidal glitter of civic humanism. What fascinating exchange might have gone on with Swift on this and related issues is sterile conjecture, some abortive additional paragraph to Gulliver's encounters with Glubbudrib's illustrious dead.

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³⁷ SWIFT 1985 : III, vii, 241. See also the Lindalino passage respecting regicide [III, iii, 215-217].

³⁸ The 'Old' and 'New' Whig appellations, as used here, have nothing to do with Burke's later taxonomy [BURKE 1996 : 254-261] but apply to the party's realignments in earlier decades as described in POCOCK 1991.

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