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Peter Hughes

The Image of a Relation in Blood

> *By adhering in this manner and on those principles to our forefathers, we are guided not by the superstition of antiquarians, but by the spirit of philosophic analogy. In this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood ...*[1].

When Burke threw that sanguine figure into his *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* he was writing about tradition. When we come back to his analogy I want to suggest how and why his "image of a relation in blood" is a clue to the undoing of eighteenth-century literature and a key to unlocking the great mystery of the French Revolution, the violence that Burke both perceived and provoked. I want to start by probing a few of the texts in which this carnal image can be traced, at times even in the pulse of their prose, because of the subversive relations of this image in Burke, Tom Paine, and Mary Wollstonecraft, who knew that it figured in their debate but not how much its rhetorical force sapped and undermined their arguments.

My purpose is to understand that mystery, however briefly; to unmask that figure, however roughly. As Caleb Williams' pursuer, called a "blood hunter", insists in Godwin's novel, "So you please to pull off your face; or if you cannot do that, at least you can pull off your clothes, and let us see what your hump is made of"[2]. That command shows us something about Godwin's novel, about the meaning of all its tableaux and theatrical images, but it also hints, in

1 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968, p. 120. Further references will be given in the text.

2 *Caleb Williams,* London, Oxford University Press, 1979, World's Classics ed., 1982, p. 1972. Further references will be given in the text.

the scarifying implications of "pull off your face", at the violent cruelty that animates so much late eighteenth-century writing, though so often masked, as here and in Gothic fiction, by an incongruous veneer of decorous language overlaying horror that Nietzsche and Housman noticed in Greek tragedy. In reading Burke and Sade, strangely enough, we may miss the greater horror that underlies the "counterfeited ugliness" – to take another phrase from Caleb's self-description – of their language and narratives. But if we watch closely, we will notice the cuts and scars that mark what we are reading: the atheism of Sade's practical philosophers is undercut or suspended in moments of ecstasy by ejaculations directed to themselves as gods, and Godwin's "blood hunter" pricks up his ears when he hears that his suspected prey is a marginal figure raised or lowered to the third power. First, because he is a writer of "poetry and morality and history"; next, because he is "no more than a Jew" and finally as an imagined savage ("To my honest printer this seemed as strange as if they had been written by a Cherokee chieftain at the falls of the Missisippi"; 264). The Revolution's vision of fraternity, novel when compared to its ideals of liberty and equality, may have been evoked or even arisen in response to the exclusionary pressure that underlies so many images of revolt. By turning so obsessively to figures of generation, Burke and Paine begin to uncover the genocidal and degenerate impulses that their theories conceal.

This obsessive shift concerns me because it turns to deadly earnest the playful versions of exclusion and expulsion that appear so often in eighteenth-century satire. All those exiles in acrostic land, sylphs tormented by "fumes of burning chocolate" or, more darkly, Gulliver repelled by the smell of mortality and repulsing those who stink of it, foreshadow as play or even farce what later recurs as tragedy and horror. In writing his way through the September Massacres and the later Terror, Michelet credits Shakespearean tragedy with a unique power to represent the Revolution, just as elsewhere he discredits Scott's romancifying as a model for history[3]. The development or shift I am suggesting in eighteenth-century literature and

3 *Histoire de la Révolution française*, Paris, NRF Pléiade ed., 1952, 1, 1070-74.

discourse, in other words, implies that Marx got it the wrong way round in his Eighteenth Brumaire: we discover that what happened first as farce returns as tragedy. Thinking about this change makes me reflect on my own reading of and response to eighteenth-century writers.

Such reflections evoke what Gerald Graff presents as a challenge for the future, "the issue of 'how we situate ourselves' in reference to literary texts"[4]. One part of our situation is challenging enough: who and where are we? But there is a hidden challenge in the fact that so many of the eighteenth-century texts we are concerned with here were read then as literature but are no longer: histories, treatises, biographies, polemics; in short, all writing of quality with any claim to permanence. The shifting relation, is both *ours* to the text and the *text's* to us. The sense that what we are reading is at the same time reading us becomes oppressive when we are involved with Burke or Sade, who issue so many orders ("History will record", "Encore un effort!") and make so many claims on our attention that force us to be at once readers and citizens, reflective and ecstatic. But even when we have to do with Locke or Hume, Swift or Gibbon, who have more subtle designs on us, we have to do still with texts that cannot be grasped, let alone enjoyed, without responding to their claim to strike outside the text through satire, or irony, or truth. Rhetorical readings in general, and deconstruction in particular, have led us to stress the ways in which rhetoric or fiction subverts reference: Burke's anarchic allusions subvert Britain's ancient constitution, Restif's old flames generate present incests by bearing, it seems, only daughters. The individual talent wins out over tradition every time. Or so it seems.

But there is another perspective offered by eighteenth-century literature, the other side of the pendulum swing, from which the extra-textual or referential claim can be seen to be endlessly subverting figurative language and rhetorical pattern. What provokes metaphors and drives us to irony, to saying the thing that is not, if not a

4 *Professing Literature,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 262.

need to be understood without suffering the consequences of being understood literally, of being taken in deadly earnest rather than according to the rules of the game? The language of most eighteenth-century writing is deniable, which means that its referential force depends upon the judgment of the reader rather than upon the meaning of the words. Think of the opening lines of Pope's *Epistle to Augustus:*

> While you, great Patron of Mankind! sustain
> The balanced World, and open all the Main;
> Your Country, chief, in Arms abroad defend,
> At home, with Morals, Arts, and Laws amend;

where both this poem and the Horation intertext are lashed across a historical (and of course polemical) judgment to inflict satiric pain on George II. The reader's pleasure in this is not only or chiefly in grasping the point and joke that "Praise undeserved is scandal in disguise" but also in knowing that both reader and poet can at will revoke or deny the irony.

One of the clearest signs that this converse of the rhetoric/reference ambivalence has been suppressed appears in Paul de Man's essay "The Epistemology of Metaphor", which opens with a spirited reading of Locke's attack on the abuse of words involved in metaphor, and indeed in all the tropes. De Man rightly seizes on the tirade of tropes Locke turns against the abuse of words through tropes. Such abuse is equated with incest, parricide, sacrilege; and with each example, as de Man observes, "the ethical tension has considerably increased ... The full list of examples – 'motion', 'light', 'gold', 'man', 'manslaughter', 'parricide', 'adultery', 'incest' – sounds more like a Greek tragedy than the enlightened moderation one tends to associate with the author of *On Government*"[5]. Such a shift through language into political tragedy is in fact what Burke and Sade later bring about through their translation of catachresis into action. We will return to this proleptic and prophetic account, which

5 In *Critical Inquiry,* 5:1, Autumn 1978, 21.

illuminates the later use of language in Burke and Sade, where actual or alleged parricide and incest have become prohibited or performative through writing itself: "Genocide, and parricide, and sacrilege, are but fictions of superstition ...", "[L'inceste] nous est dicté par les premières lois de la nature ...". But what is most striking about de Man's account is its insistence on *meaning* as Locke's criterion for understanding of truth and certainty, a criterion Locke seems to dismantle through his own writing. But Locke makes it clear that the final criterion is not meaning but *judgment*:

> Thus the Mind has two Faculties, conversant about Truth and Falsehood.
>
> *First, Knowledge,* whereby it certainly perceives, and is undoubtedly satisfied of the Agreement or Disagreement of any *Ideas.*
>
> *Secondly, Judgment,* which is the putting *Ideas together* or separating them from one another in the Mind, when their certain Agreement or Disagreement is not perceived, but presumed to be so; which is, as the Word imports, taken to be so before it certainly appears. And if it so unites, or separates them, as in Reality Things are, it is *right Judgment*[6].

It is as though Locke had been read as a palimpsest of Descartes, swerving between certainty and bafflement. Yet Locke throughout is actually trying to untie the blood-knots made by taking figures for acts. And this is the kind of making that Burke and Sade are engaged in and implicated by, a process and a discourse that overrides and overdrafts any attempt to arrest or to judge it.

Their violence and the mysterious violence of the French Revolution have the same genesis and genetic code. To understand their identity we need to turn first to the mystery of revolutionary violence. To Robert Darnton, in a conspectual essay, there seems no answer: "The violence itself remains a mystery, the kind of phenomenon that may force one back into metahistorical explanations: original sin, unleashed libido, or the cunning of a dialectic. For my part, I confess myself incapable of explaining the ultimate cause of revolutionary violence, but I think I can make out some of the conse-

6 *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* ed. Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 653. Further references will be given in the text.

quences"[7]. Some of these results, as Darnton points out, were a remaking of society and a giddy sense that everything was possible. Even more, what may result is exactly the triumph of will that, in their apparently opposed ways, Burke and Sade both desired: "the reordering of things-as-they-are so they are no longer experienced as given but rather as willed, in accordance with convictions about how things ought to be". And yet it might be said that the most lasting and ominous of the consequences of this violence is the conviction or even dogma that revolution provokes it and makes it inevitable. According to one conservative point of view, manifest in Simon Schama's *Citizens* and the large audience it appeals to, violent revolution disrupted a slow and peaceable process of reform. The implication of his argument, that revolution is ever thus, has actually been shared by a long line of revolutionaries, notably by Lenin; and this conviction has repeatedly turned self-fulfilling as red terror has wiped out libertarian or anarchist movements or even, as in the Spanish Civil War, actual governments. The peaceful revolution in Eastern Europe, the most important in two hundred years, has been mostly free of violence, but the double bind of reactionary fears and radical doctrines creates the danger that it will reappear. Even the most hopeful or benevolent observer, cannot overlook the intimate links between Burke's sublime taboos, Sade's moral vertigo, and the ecstatic "possibilism" of revolution's early stages[8]. The difference lies in very different attitudes toward generation and the generation of words.

Burke laid so vivid a stain of sacrilege on the French Revolution, and so patriarchal an ideal of tradition as blood-lineage on the Counter-Revolution, that it is easy to overlook the body of evidence and of witnesses that could support a different view of both movements. It is certainly true that many perceived the French Revolution

7 "What Was Revolutionary about the French Revolution", *New York Review of Books,* 35: 1-2, January 19, 1989, 3-10, 6.

8 The phrase is Darnton's, and so too is the identification of this state with millenarian fraternity: *op. cit.,* 10.

as a cataclysm unlike any seen before[9], but it was also often to the same audience the realization of fears or probabilities that they had entertained for years. The idea that revolution was on its way, as Franco Venturi has shown, ran back to the beginning of the century, and was substantiated not only by enthusiasm for the Roman republic that we find in authors as different as Swift and Montesquieu, but also by actual upheavals that confirmed their most dramatic expectations[10]. The Genoese Revolution of 1746, to take only one example among several, convinced the Marquis d'Argenson, the French King's chief minister, who had the benefit of firsthand reports from his son, that it would be followed by a wave spreading across Europe. His opinion was widely shared, and twenty years later Gibbon was if anything even more alert to the meaning of a revolutionary struggle and resistance to invasion that cost sixty thousand lives: "I was less amused by the marble palaces of Genoa, than by the recent memorials of her deliverance (in December 1746) from the Austrian tyranny; and I took a military survey of every scene of action within the enclosure of her double walls"[11]. Because the uprising of the Genoese people was directed against both the ruling nobles and the occupying Austrians, its revolutionary character has sometimes been belittled or denied. But the oppression and class hatred within Genoa was notorious, and in 1728 Montesquieu noted how unequal before the law were the people and the aristocracy: "This offensive difference reduces the people to despair, and I have not seen a single Genoese who does not detest his rulers"[12]. Gibbon too noted in his *Journal* how the people had formed a popular assembly that en-

9 Ronald Paulson has shown this to have been a great challenge to both artists and poets: see his *Representations of Revolution*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1983, esp. pp. 1-36.

10 *Ideology and Utopia in the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 1968.

11 *Memoirs of my Life and Writings*, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, London, Methuen, 1900, 161-62.

12 "Lettre sur Gênes", *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard/Pléiade ed., 1949, I, 916: "Cette affreuse différence met le Peuple au désespoir, et je n'ai pas vu un seul Génois qui ne déteste ses souverains".

forced its decrees under pain of death[13]. And yet all of these events and perceptions were free of either the fraternal enthusiasm or the genetic terror that marked the revolution in France. It may be a first step in understanding the mystery of this violence to notice that the one seems to come with the other. And the absence of fraternity, as in the more moderate process and discourse of the American Revolution, seems conversely to have implied, even perhaps to have resulted from, the absence of a terror based upon a patriarchal transmission of blood and power.

What generates the words of Burke's *Reflections* is in part the expressive power of the *patria potestas,* in Roman law the right and duty of the father to punish the child and household member, even by the death penalty. But this discourse is shadowed through the *Reflections* by a willed silence, by what Coleridge might have called "holy dread", on the subject of this power and the *arcana imperii* that surround it. Both speech and silence can be heard in a passage such as the following,

> ... we have consecrated the state, that no man should approach to look into its defects or corruptions but with due caution; that he should never dream of beginning its reformation by its subversion; that he should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude. By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent to pieces, and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds, and wild incantations, they may regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father's life (194).

Burke so often exceeds any comment that might be made about him or his style, but even here we should notice the way he tempers the extravagance of his argument through the insistence on the silence of fear and trembling. His prohibition, as Michel Foucault has observed of "mutisme" on dangerous or delicate subjects, is not so

13 *Miscellaneous Works,* ed. John, Lord Sheffield, London, John Murray, 1814, 2nd ed., I, 181.

much a limit to his discourse as one of its elements and part of its strategy[14]. This is all the more so here, where what must not be hinted at is in fact said outright, though by apparent indirection: that the state is marked by defects, corruptions, and faults; that the idiom of politics is one of wounds, poisons and frenzy; and that, ironically, it is through such fatal means that his enemies plan to "regenerate the paternal constitution".

This emphasis on the fatal dangers of public life and of any proposed reforms brings to mind what George Armstrong Kelly described as "mortal politics" under the *ancien régime* and the first years of the Revolution[15]. What his perceptive study brings out is the pervasion of French life and discourse well before the revolution by an "idiom of politics" that made death and violence, not life and conciliation, the linguistic matrix and showplace of a culture that has so often been presented as peaceable and easy-going. We learn, for example, that even the concept and practice of terror, far from being an invention of the Jacobins, had become by 1770 an instrument of royal and reactionary policy. Malesherbes warned the Comte d'Artois in 1774 "against 'those evil maxims (one of which claims) ... that power is never enough respected unless terror marches before it'". As Kelly observes, "This plane of discourse was a kind of Lockeanism tempered by the aristocrat's self-esteem in the possession of his hereditary office. Terror, as in 1793, was directed against a kind of privilege in the name of the levelling impulse of the state. Yet 'terror', in this instance, was royal, not Jacobin, nor republican ... " (302-303). Furthermore, even the charge of defiling generation that is so much part of Burke's attack on the Jacobins had been repeatedly made against the corruption and degeneration of the court, especially by ardent members of the military aristocracy (*noblesse d'épée*), who often urged warlike virtue and violent sacrifice as the only way to redeem what Sade was to describe as an old and corrupt society.

14 *La Volonté de savoir, Histoire de la sexualité,* I, Paris, Gallimard/ NRF, 1976, 38.

15 "Mortal Politics in Eighteenth-Century France", *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques,* 13, 1, Spring 1986.

The *arcana imperii* that Burke saw desecrated by the mob had already been exposed by nobles for whom it was a house of the dead. Vauvenargues closes his *éloge* and lament for a young friend and fellow-officer lost during the Marshal de Belle-Isle's winter retreat from Prague in 1741: "Open, fearful tombs; solitary ghosts, speak, speak, to us. But what an impenetrable silence! O sad abandonment! O terror!" (149). In an inversion that shows both the brilliance and the strangeness of the *Reflections,* Burke rehearses and reverses against the Revolution an idiom of generation and consecration that had long been turned against a degenerate and corrupted *ancien régime.*

And not only in France. Tom Paine's response to Burke, *The Rights of Man,* from beginning to end plays with his term *generation* until it becomes its nemesis or opposite. Its early appearance is as a collective noun for contemporaries, but repeated with such heavy emphasis that it starts to sound like the kind of group he has just identified as "upstart Governments":

> If any generation of men ever possessed the right of dictating the mode by which the world should be governed for ever, it was the first generation that existed; and if that generation did it not, no succeeding generation can show any authority for doing it, nor can set any up. The illuminating and divine principle of the equal rights of man (for it has its origin from the Maker of man) relates, not only to the living individuals, but to generations of men succeeding each other. Every generation is equal in rights to the generations which precede it, by the same rule that every individual is born equal in rights with his contemporary[16].

The word turns more and more into the kind of mismatch or catachresis that would have vindicated Locke. In praising the abolition of titles under the new French Constitution, Paine sums up "and, of consequence, all that class of equivocal generation which in some countries is called '*aristocracy*' and in others '*nobility*', is done away with, and the *peer* is exalted into MAN" (59). The phrase "equivocal

16 London, J. M. Dent, 1906, 42. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

generation" might evoke Locke's linkage of incest and metaphor, but it might also remind us of the charge, repeated during the eighteenth century, of the bodily and mental decay of the nobility.

Paine puts it in terms that shift from nobles to Jews: "Aristocracy has a tendency to degenerate the human species. By the universal economy of nature it is known, and by the instance of the Jews it is proved, that the human species has a tendency to degenerate, in any small number of persons, when separated from the general stock of society, and inter-marrying with each other" (63). As in Godwin's characterizing of the pariah Caleb Williams as a Jew, we should be sensitive to another association of opposites, of linkage here between blood-descent and expulsion. Caleb Williams is a marginal or outcast figure because he has opposed the ultra-aristocratic claims of Falkland – and hence he is marginalized as a Jew. Paine wants to suggest that incest leads to degeneration, above all when it occurs within an exclusive and excluded group – and hence he thinks of the Jews. We are here touching the edge of our mystery; for although the principle of inclusion or exclusion in Burke and Paine is "the image of a relation in blood" that becomes the possession and transmission of power, it creates a division within society that is unanswerable and, as Paine objects, irrevocable. It also creates an impulse toward expulsion and exclusion that is essential to anti-Semitism. To revoke this division becomes the goal of fraternity, to maintain or recover it the goal of tradition and legitimacy. The violent attempts to reach these goals become the central conflict of the Revolution. But there can be little doubt that the fraternal embrace was quickly broken by terror.

More open to doubt or question, but I think a further and deeper part of the mystery, is the relation between transgression, attacked by Burke and exalted by Sade, and expulsion. If we could grasp that relation we would be close to understanding both our cultural fate and a way out of it hinted at in some few modern writers, and in several from the eighteenth-century. I want to close by suggesting how this mystery is finally elucidated by the written and literary implications of Burke's *Reflections*. What we find in them is the generation of words in at least two senses. First as the production of words in patterns charged with erotic energy. Second,

as kinds of discourse about contemporary events or visions that displace those events or cause others, that enact or avert those visions. The time of the French Revolution was a generation of words in that sense, perhaps even the first. It was only a few years later that Hegel suggested in a letter that this kind of generation through publication and propaganda had created a new order of being, a new mode of perception: "Publication is such a godlike power; printed, the matter often looks utterly different from what is said or done ..."[17].

Two oddly converging texts, one from Locke, the other from Mary Wollstonecraft, may suggest how transgression and expulsion are linked through the generation of words. In a passage that presents an even more mismatched example of naming and troping than those we have seen, Locke asks by what differences can we distinguish an idiot child, (a "changeling", with further meaning of one left in exchange for one stolen), from a baboon (a "drill"):

> Shall the difference of hair only on the Skin, be a mark of a different internal specifick Constitution between a Changeling and a Drill, when they agree in Shape, and want of Reason, and Speech? ... if History lie not, Women have conceived by Drills; and what real *Species*, by that measure, such a Production will be in Nature, will be a new Question ... This Child we see was very near being excluded out of the *Species* of *Man*, barely by his Shape. He escaped very narrowly as he was, and 'this certain a Figure a little more odly turn'd had cast him, and he had been executed as a thing not to be allowed to pass for a Man (452-54).

The infanticidal chill of that last sentence marks the point at which transgression ("Women have conceived by Drills") turns toward exclusion and extermination ("executed as a thing"). The difference between life and death is a near-run thing that is decided by arbitrary power ("very near being excluded"). Reading it I am reminded of Restif de la Bretonne's account of the mock-trials by appearance and manner that decided the fate of the victims of the September Massa-

17 Letter of 8 July 1807 in *Briefe von und an Hegel,* ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg, 1961, I, 176: "Und doch ist die Publizität eine so göttliche Macht; gedruckt sieht die Sache oft ganz anders aus als gesagt und getan ...".

cres. Or of more recent images of triage, show-trials, and the off-loading of transports at railway sidings. Mary Wollstonecraft opens by attributing "all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity" to "one grand cause – want of chastity in men"[18]. This leads them, and her argument, into a catachresis: "So voluptuous, indeed, often grows the lustful prowler, that he refines on female softness. Something more soft than women is then sought for; till, in Italy and Portugal, men attend the levees of equivocal beings, to sigh for more than female languor." The recurrence here of the equivocal, as "beings" rather than as Paine's "generation", calls attention once again to the lineage between catachresis and sexual transgression. And once again, as Wollstonecraft continues, to exclusion and exposure:

> The weak enervated women who particularly catch the attention of libertines, are unfit to be mothers, though they may conceive; so that the rich sensualist, who has rioted among women, spreading depravity and misery, when he wishes to perpetuate his name, receives from his wife only a half-formed being that inherits both its father's and mother's weakness.
>
> Contrasting the humanity of the present age with the barbarism of antiquity, great stress has been laid on the savage custom of exposing the children whom their parents could not maintain; whilst the man of sensibility ... (249-50).

Wollstonecraft goes on to show how transgression ("promiscuous amours") both creates and makes unavoidable a modern form of infanticide ("a most destructive barrenness") as the woman abandons or neglects her child. Both she and her "man of sensibility" are degenerate in blood, is an equivocal token that cannot "be allowed to pass for a Man".

In taking up Burke's language of generation even as they opposed its apparent argument, Paine and Wollstonecraft find themselves repeating its movement from transgression to expulsion, echoing the movement toward violence occulted by his interpretation of invented events but revealed by his allusions and examples, which circle obsessively around the outrages named by Locke as examples

18 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* ed. Miriam Kramnick, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975, 249. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

of the abuse of language: incest, parricide, and manslaughter. The common-law name for manslaughter, "chance-medley", which Locke makes part of his argument, captures the mismatched, violent, and capricious character of the offence. It may also capture or identify the missing term or link that joins transgression to extermination in the mystery of violence, joining as it were the chance to the medley. The link has been identified most clearly in recent anthropological theories concerning taboo. I am thinking in particular of the theory of Mary Douglas that what is thought to be taboo and defiling is what does not fit in a single category, but is rather a chance-medley that straddles or violates categories[19]. Pigs wallow in the mud but walk on dry land and are hence, both in themselves and in the pork they generate, targets of taboo. What are to be condemned as equivocal beings or chance-medleys constantly shifts according to cultural and stylistic change. As we can see in the history of women preaching, fur coats, or sodomy. It is not so much behavior that decides as it is the ability (or inability) of groups and individuals to codify behavior through systems of signs, law-codes, works of art and literature[20]. And it is through its power to make and break codes of behavior that Burke's *Reflections* should continue to fascinate and appall us. He not only created a whole new code of transgressions but also broke that code through a prophetic discourse of expulsion and officially sanctioned violence. The Marquis de Sade was against the death penalty (though he had nothing against killing), but Burke, like de Maistre, transforms political chance-medley and riot into parricide or even deicide. His *Reflections* invite princes and kings to treat every revolutionary or even reformer as a transgressor – starting with Constitutional France as a whole – deserving extermination. Their acceptance of this invitation was what created within France the conditions of the Terror, which responded in kind by transforming chance-medleys of opinion and opposition, of birth and origin,

19 See the opening chapters of *Purity and Danger*, London, Routledge / Ark. ed, 1984.

20 I am indebted here to conversations with Diane Owen Hughes, and to a reading of her historical studies of codifying behavior.

into defilement that had to be expelled from the *sana pars* of the state. As the reign of virtue and terror spread from the guillotine onto foreign battlefields, resonance of the *sana pars,* of what was healthy, sane, sound, pure, orthodox – all of them meanings of the endlessly repeated *sain* – created the echo of sick, crazed, unsound, polluted, treasonous. France became an echo chamber, and trying to rid it and its frontiers of these echoes involved endless violence and warfare whose victims ran outward and downward from Saint-Just and Robespierre in Paris to the ragged soldiers in Lorraine. As Pierre Klossowski has perceived about the relation between these leaders and their followers during the Terror, "From the point of view of the masses, they were absolutely sound men, and they themselves knew that the best index of the soundness of a man could be recognized by the masses from his determination to sacrifice them"[21]. Writing in praise of Richardson's novels, Diderot noticed that in them the index of virtue is the willingness to sacrifice oneself, of a hero or heroine to die rather than transgress. In the mortal politics made both republican and royalist by Burke, every one can show heroism by sacrificial death; and those who do not deserve to die by the Terror.

At the heart of the mystery is Burke's discourse, his way of generating words. Novalis framed the paradox of the *Reflections* when he noted: "Many anti-revolutionary books have been written for the Revolution. But Burke has written a revolutionary book against the Revolution"[22]. Novalis made this judgment in 1797, close enough to the events and the text to be spared our later pieties. In explaining to his notebook what he meant by his own epigram, he goes on to describe the Revolution in medical and genital terms:

21 Marquis de Sade, *Oeuvres complètes,* Paris, Ed. Tête de Feuilles, 351-52. "Du point de vue des masses, c'étaient des hommes parfaitement sains; et eux-mêmes savaient que le meilleur indice de la santé d'un homme, les masses le reconnaissent à sa résolution de les sacrifier."

22 In *Vermischte Bemerkungen, Novalis: Werke, Tagebücher, und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs,* ed. Hans Joachim Mäl and Richard Samuel, Munich, Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978, 2, 278: "Es sind viele antirevolutionaire Bücher für die Revolution geschrieben worden. Burke hat aber ein revolutionaires Buch gegen die Revolution geschrieben."

> Most observers of the Revolution, especially the clever and fashionable, have described it as a life-threatening and contagious disease ... – many have held it to be a purely local illness – the inspired opponents insisted on castration – They clearly saw – that this alleged disease was nothing other than the crisis of the onset of puberty (378)[23].

Burke was certainly on Novalis' mind when he thought of inspired opponents (*Genievollsten Gegner*) of the Revolution. Castration, given the erotic intensity he attributes to the revolutionaries – think of the phallic bayonets his account plunges into the Queen's bed at Versailles – would imply a verbal as well as a physical wound, because Burke's attack on the revolutionaries is not only directed against the acts of the French but also against the discourse of their English supporters. Part of Burke's rhetorical excess is an attempt to outdo the eloquence of the likes of Richard Price, whose sermon provoked a two-fold attack: "The Theban and Thracian Orgies, acted in France and applauded only in the Old Jewry, I assure you, kindle prophetic enthusiasm in the minds of very few people in this kingdom ..." (165). The impact of Burke's *Reflections* on the Continent was immense, and it was made even greater by a feature of its style and argument that Novalis may have been pointing to in calling it a "revolutionary book". From George Kelly's study of death and violence as an idiom of politics in eighteenth-century France and from what we have seen of the *Reflections* we can see that Burke turned against the revolutionaries much of the rhetorical tirade that had been directed for years against the terror and transgressions of the *ancien régime*[24]. This may further tangle the blood-lines of Burke's argument, but it also increases his eloquence, which comes in the

23 "Die meisten Beobachter der Revolution, besonders die Klugen und Vornehmen haben sie für eine lebensgefährliche und ansteckende Kranckheit erklärt ... manche haben es für eine blos locale Kranckheit gehalten – die Genievollsten Gegner drangen auf Castration – sie merckten wohl – dass diese angebliche Kranckheit nichts, als Krise der eintretenden Pubertät sey."

24 This underground element in the *Reflections* could be set beside Conor Cruise O'Brien's persuasive suggestion that Burke was also, especially in writing about the Jacobins' attacks on religion, thinking about Ireland and the plight of Irish Catholics: see his Introduction to the Penguin edition cited throughout, especially pp. 35-41.

Reflections to seem generated by what Julia Kristeva has called "phobic desire"[25]. It is in this state that the conflict between attraction and revulsion blocks desire and concentrates all energy on the making and unmaking of figurative language; above all, in the *Reflections*, of the mismatched and catachrestic transgressions that cannot be resolved but only expelled into the world of events.

Guy Davenport has suggested how deep these associations may lie in our sense and use of language by pointing back to a lost cognate world: "Deep in the prehistory of Greek there was a word root constructed of a *k* or *g*, and *n*, and a vowel. The words springing from this root all have to do with reproduction, both sexual and intellectual: *generate, gonad, know, ignorant,* and forty others"[26]. I doubt that one of the forty others is *game,* even though dictionaries trace it back as far as the Gothic *gaman*, meaning a meeting or participation; and it is the expulsion of the play principle from the *Reflections*, and what it might imply for our reading and profession of eighteenth-century literature, that I should like to close with. This may seem a strange comment to make of a work that Paine said he could only consider as "a dramatic performance", but the theatricality of the *Reflections* is the reverse of play. It is the expulsion of tragedy from the stage, its impulsion as an *agon* into the world of events. Joel Barlow caught this double movement in two balanced clauses: " ... he conceives himself writing tragedy, without being confined to the obvious laws of fiction ... he paints ideal murders, that they may be avenged by the reality of a wide extended slaughter"[27]. Early in this essay I proposed that we restore through our shared reading of eighteenth-century literature the sense that so much of what we find worth reading reaches outside the text through irony, through satire; but that its outward reach is and must be a fiction, a deniable reference. The *Reflections* is the nemesis of that sense, just as it puts an end, in more than one sense, to the century's literature. The darker side of the *Reflections*, the revenge of this nemesis, is as we

25 *The Powers of Horror*, New York, Columbia U.P., 1982, 43-50.

26 "Eros the Bittersweet", *Grand Street*, 6, 3, Spring 1987, 187.

27 Quoted in *Edmund Burke,* ed. Isaac Kranmick, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1974, p.

have seen the twisting into prophecies and events whose outward reach enters causally into history and "mortal politics". It is one of the first works, soon to be followed by many among the Romantics, that refused to accept the secrecy of the world as an answer to its questions. Man poses questions, as Wolfgang Hildesheimer has put it, but the world keeps silent. Burke's retort to this is to compel the world and history to speak through his voice ("History will record ..."), a voice that engenders words expressed as events. It is one response to the world, one whose power of expression tends toward the extermination of voices other than its own. But there is another response possible for us: the play of ideas, the dance of words. *Der Mensch fragt. Die Welt schweigt. Der Mensch spielt.*

Zusammenfassung

All die Exile in Achrostichons Landen in den Satiren des 18. Jahrhunderts, die auf absurde Weise mit dem Gedanken von Ausschluss und Ausweisung, Verwandtschaft und Vatermord spielen, deuten an, was später als Tragödie und Greuel in der Französischen Revolution wiederkehrt. Burkes Zitat "image of a relation in blood" wird hier sowohl als Hinweis auf den Ruin der Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts als auch als Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Französischen Revolution gelesen. Dieses Bild erscheint bei verschiedenen Autoren, die sich zwar seiner Bedeutung bewusst waren, jedoch nicht realisierten, wie sehr es ihre eigenen Argumente untergrub. Es soll hier genauer analysiert werden, ebenso wie die brutale Grausamkeit, die so viele der Werke aus dem späten 18. Jahrhundert und der Romantik durchzieht.