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ANTI-SEMITISM, MILLENARIANISM, AND RADICAL DISSENT IN EDMUND BURKE'S *REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE*

Frans De Bruyn

The status of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as a classic text in political theory can be ascribed to the thoroughness with which it articulates a philosophical argument for political conservatism and to its undeniable rhetorical and literary power.¹ From its first appearance late in 1790, readers have responded to the astonishing range of cultural, historical, intellectual, and literary reference in the *Reflections* (as, indeed, in Burke's other writings on the French Revolution). John Thelwall makes the point tellingly, if disapprovingly, in reviewing one of Burke's later antirevolutionary tracts: "The rage of *Juvenil*, and the playful levity of *Horace*, are not sufficient; and Billingsgate and the shambles are forced into alliance with the muses, the classics, and the sciences, to supply him with terms and metaphors sufficiently forcible to express the mighty hatred with which he labours."² Thelwall shrewdly identifies an important and sometimes disconcerting feature of Burke's rhetorical virtuosity: his ability to press into service the full compass of eighteenth-century cultural discourse, from the high, polite, and exalted to the low, popular, and scurrilous.

There is much to admire in this eloquence, but its copiousness and impetuosity sometimes find display in unattractive, indeed blameworthy, modes of expression. An instance of this, infrequently remarked upon, is Burke's intermittent deployment in the *Reflections* of a language of anti-Semitism.³ One critic who has drawn attention to this aspect of Burke's text is Tom Paulin, who addresses the

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problem in a review of Anthony Julius's monograph, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*. In his review, Paulin remarks on William Empson's speculation, briefly taken up by Julius, that Eliot's anti-Semitism was in part an expression of his "rejection of his family's Unitarianism, and his hostility to his father."⁴ Paulin finds the connection between Unitarianism and Judaism persuasive, but he argues that this correlation makes sense only if one probes down to a "deeper cultural base" whose foundation was laid down, in part, by Burke:

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, two leading Unitarians of that period—Richard Price and Joseph Priestley—are attacked and anti-semitic prejudice is mobilised against their enlightened form of Christianity by ringing changes on the name of the meeting-house—the Old Jewry—where Price delivered his famous discourse "On the Love of our Country" which praised the Williamite, American and French Revolutions and provoked Burke's polemic. Burke attacks "money-jobbers, usurers and Jews", and identifies Price's writings on economics and statistics with Jewish business activities. He had a particular hatred of Lord George Gordon, who led the anti-Catholic Protestant Association and who converted to Judaism. In *Reflections*, he refers to Gordon, the instigator of the Gordon Riots, as "our protestant Rabbin". He wants his readers to see reform and revolution as part of a Jewish conspiracy to destroy an organic, hierarchical society. Unitarianism and Judaism deny the divinity of Christ, and it is this denial which, at this late point in his career, incenses Burke. . . .⁵

This account of the *Reflections* appears to take its cue from an earlier passage in Julius's study. There the "counter-revolutionary polemics of Burke and de Maistre" are identified as the origin of a "vituperative caricature of liberalism," which displays a special animus against liberal Jewish political thought. Whereas liberalism had historically meant, among other things, "the primacy of conscience, which in turn entailed the separation of church and state, the right of religious freedom, the right of civil disobedience, and a scepticism about the benefits of universal suffrage," it had become for Eliot, as for Burke before him, "the sum of everything that corrodes the traditional, that disturbs existing orders, that undermines foundations." The active agent of this alleged cultural decay is the deracinated, free-thinking Jew.⁶

As evidence for his reading of the *Reflections*, Paulin cites several undeniably derogatory passages in the text, yet a sympathetic reader of Burke might well be forgiven for responding with some degree of puzzlement. How is one to square this view of Burke's thought with his previous, seemingly unequivocal, declarations in favor of a broadly construed policy of religious toleration? In the 1770s he not only supported Dissenting campaigns to extend religious toleration in England, but declared that his ideas of toleration went "far beyond even theirs." Thus, he stated in a letter to the lay theologian William Burgh (9 February 1775): "I would give a full civil protection, in which I include an immunity, from all disturbance of their publick religious worship, and a power of teaching in schools, as well as Temples, to Jews Mahometans and even Pagans; especially if they are already possessed of any of those advantages by long and prescriptive usage; which is as sacred in this exercise of Rights, as in any other."⁷ Some years later, when a minister of the Church of Scotland wrote Burke to defend his fellow clergymen

against allegations of an inflammatory, anti-Catholic bias in their preaching, Burke responded: "I could not prevail on myself to bestow on the Synagogue, the Mosque or the Pogoda, the language which your Pulpits lavish upon a great part of the Christian world."⁸

Beyond the sphere of religious toleration, Burke evinced a lifelong solicitude for oppressed individuals of various descriptions, urging leniency in the cases of convicted rioters, mutineers, and sodomites, and defending the rights of Africans and the people of India. About his crusade against Warren Hastings and the East India Company, a cause that many of his countrymen deemed quixotic, he insisted: "I have no party in this Business . . . but among a set of people, who have none of your Lillies and Roses in their faces; but who are the images of the great Pattern as well as you and I. I know what I am doing; whether the white people like it or not."⁹ In the case of Samuel Hoheb, a Jew whose property had been seized after the capture of the Dutch West Indian island of St. Eustatius by Admiral Rodney in 1781, that solicitude extended to a public attack on Rodney's brutal conduct. In bringing Hoheb's case to the attention of the House of Commons, Burke charged that British forces were persecuting a people, "whom of all others it ought to be the care and the wish of human nations to protect, the Jews. Having no fixed settlement in any part of the world . . . they are thrown upon the benevolence of nations, and claim protection and civility from their weakness, as well as from their utility. They were a people, who by shunning the profession of any, could give no well-founded jealousy to any state."¹⁰ Burke's championing of Hoheb was motivated, at least in part, by his political opposition to the ongoing British war against the rebelling American colonies.¹¹ Yet he could easily have made his point without appealing to a general, principled argument on behalf of powerless Jews everywhere.

On the face of things, then, the presence of an anti-Semitic strain in Burke's writings on the French Revolution confronts the reader with the apparent paradox of a writer in whose texts declared political doctrine and rhetorical expression are found at odds. It might be questioned how much of a paradox this really is, given that similarly contradictory views were widely held among Burke's Enlightenment contemporaries. Perhaps the most notorious example is Voltaire, whose Enlightenment radicalism coexisted with unremittingly hostile and scurrilous opinions about the Jewish people.¹² Even Montesquieu, who held benevolent views about the plight of Jews in Christian Europe, falls back on well-worn stereotypes in his *Lettres persanes*: "Know that wherever there is money there are Jews . . . Among Christians, as among us, they display an invincible devotion to their religion, which amounts almost to folly."¹³ One might seek to dissolve this paradox in Burke's case by arguing that the disparaging references encountered in his writings are few in number and relatively mild in tone. This comparative restraint (in contrast with the violence of much eighteenth-century anti-Semitic sentiment, such as that of Voltaire) might be adduced as mitigating evidence in Burke's case, as tending to narrow the gap between his momentary outbursts of polemical intemperance and his more dispassionate and (by implication) more attractive arguments favoring toleration. Explaining away the problem in some such fashion as this, however, evades the difficulties posed by the very decision to invoke anti-Jewish feeling at all. Setting aside Burke himself, his recourse to this mode of

aspersion speaks volumes about the character of eighteenth-century public discourse and the cultural potency of anti-Semitic stereotypes in the period. These issues, in turn, prompt further questions on how anti-Semitic discourse functioned, what it communicated, and why it was effective. Burke was, as Conor Cruise O'Brien has noted, a "conscious and deliberate propagandist"—indeed, a pioneer in modern techniques of political propaganda—and his "mobbish" decision to exploit the prejudices of his countrymen in order to persuade them helps reveal his purposes in writing the *Reflections*, and casts an unexpected light on the "spirit of philosophic analogy" that shapes his argument.¹⁴

Rather than to resolve these contradictions, the aim here is to explore their complexity and to conceive how Burke could entertain seemingly antithetical attitudes of toleration and of suspicion towards British Jewry. What of the passages to which Paulin refers in his summary of Burkean anti-Semitic discourse? It seems to me that some of the emphases in his reading are misplaced, and other materially important aspects of Burke's text go unmentioned. I am thinking in particular of the famous passage depicting the forced return of the King and Queen of France from Versailles to Paris as a *via dolorosa*, which introduces the anti-Semitic theme of Jewish complicity in the crucifixion of Jesus. The key to understanding what (and how) these passages signify lies, I will argue, with Burke's habit, especially pronounced in the *Reflections*, of reading the events of his time typologically. By "typology" I mean a mode of historical interpretation, originally applied to the Christian Bible, that sees recurrent patterns in history, with earlier events or persons foreshadowing and prefiguring later ones. Thus, the French Revolution is presented in the *Reflections* as an antitype or typological fulfillment of the English Civil War, and both events reflect precursory biblical patterns, notably the passion and death of Jesus and the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and the book of Revelation. Burke's references to Jews and Judaism are an integral part of this typological pattern. They center on what he conceived from the beginning to be the paramount constitutional and ideological challenge of the French Revolution: its rejection of religion as the primary constituent of social and political order and its consequent instigation of "a war against all sects and all religions."¹⁵ A primary battlefield in this "war" is the economic sphere, as is evidenced in the Revolutionary government's alienation of church property. The link Burke sees between an intellectual and an economic assault upon the Church in Revolutionary France accounts for his repeated intermixing of religious and economic stereotypes in his anti-Jewish characterizations. A final issue is what this reading of the *Reflections* implies for any larger interpretation of the text: to what extent is Burke's defense of European culture and history, couched in terms of tradition, prejudice, and natural feeling, compromised by his appeal to anti-Semitic opinions nurtured by that tradition?

Before proceeding to an analysis of the text, it is important to clarify the use of the term "anti-Semitism" in this paper. For us, as readers at the onset of the twenty-first century, the term is laden with a burden of horror and history in some respects unique to our era. The word itself was coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr, a German political agitator and anti-Jewish writer, and its rise into common usage coincided with a virulent new phase in anti-Jewish feeling, expressed in ideologies of nationalism and racial purity. The earliest use of the term in En-

lish is recorded by the *OED* as occurring in 1881. In this connection Hannah Arendt has argued: "The beginnings of the modern antisemitic movement date back everywhere to the last third of the nineteenth century."¹⁶ To refer, then, to "anti-Semitic" elements in Burke's writings might seem to import a historical anachronism into the discussion and, in a sense, to beg the question at issue, which is to inquire into his recourse to anti-Jewish statements. The record of his political and authorial career shows unequivocally that he would have recoiled with abhorrence from the racial anti-Semitism of the twentieth century. Indeed, it behooves us to approach Burke on this point with some humility for, as Stephen Greenblatt reminds us, "historical hindsight gives us an unearned wisdom" about the disastrous consequences of anti-Semitism.¹⁷ In attempting to arrive at a historically contextualized view of Burke's anti-Jewish rhetoric, my purpose is neither to arraign nor to exonerate, but rather to understand him.¹⁸ Equally importantly, through Burke we may approach a greater understanding of ourselves, of the fact that anti-Semitism all too often disfigures the greatest achievements of Western civilization. To use the term "anti-Semitism" in the present context is thus entirely appropriate, because in current usage it denotes all forms of anti-Jewish defamation and because the ways in which anti-Semitism has manifested itself in our time cannot be separated from its earlier history.

To obviate the problem that the term may lose analytical rigor when used in such a general sense, it can be qualified, as the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* points out, "by an adjective denoting the specific cause, nature, or rationale of a manifestation of anti-Jewish passion or action." Accordingly, one can distinguish, for example, among economic, racial, religious, or social anti-Semitism.¹⁹ In this schema, Burke's anti-Jewish statements are to be categorized as religious and economic, but with a uniquely eighteenth-century English inflection. His religious anti-Jewish characterizations are bound up with a powerful conservative political discourse of established religion, by which the English nation defined itself in terms of its national Anglican church. In this view of the nation, W. D. Rubinstein observes, the Jews had no place: "While by the eighteenth century no one in England advocated the persecution of Jews . . . on the continental model, the presence in England of Jews—as well as Protestant Dissenters and, above all, Roman Catholics—was widely begrudged as the presence of a group which manifestly formed no part of this national English consensual matrix of governance (Rubinstein, 49)."²⁰ Burke's expressions of economic hostility towards the Jews draws on a second strand of political discourse, the "Country Party" critique of paper-money despotism (expanding public credit and the national debt) associated with the opposition to Walpole and the Whigs in the 1720s and 30s. The chief organ of the opposition to Walpole, Lord Bolingbroke's *The Craftsman*, identifies the Jews as part of the fraternity of stockjobbers who serve as agents of the new financial economy. The durability of this populist oppositional vocabulary, complete with its identification of Jews and stockjobbers, is reflected in William Cobbett's violent attacks, a century later, on the ever-flourishing parasitism of the monied interest. In both its "religious" and "economic" manifestations, then, Burke's anti-Semitic rhetoric is colored by a distinctively English political language, designed to resonate on a deep level with his English audience (Rubinstein, 51–4).



Burke's allusions to Jews in the *Reflections* are mainly of two kinds: first, explicit mentions that invoke commonplace anti-Semitic stereotypes and, second, more oblique references that are left to be inferred by the reader. In the first category are his characterizations of Jews as moneylenders and stockjobbers, as a disreputable part of the "monied interest" that has joined forces with "political Men of Letters" to foment revolution against the established aristocratic and ecclesiastical order (8.160). References to "Jew brokers" surface, for instance, in Burke's unfavorable analysis of the membership of the French National Assembly. He pauses at one point to compare the caliber of the Assembly's members with the talents shown by the English parliamentary opponents of Charles I in the 1640s. The latter men, among whom Burke singles out Cromwell, "had long views. They aimed at the rule, not the destruction of their country. They were men of great civil, and great military talents, and if the terror, the ornament of their age. They were not like Jew brokers contending with each other who could best remedy with fraudulent circulation and depreciated paper the wretchedness and ruin brought on their country by their degenerate councils" (8.99). Unlike previous revolutions, however, the French Revolution aims to abolish all distinctions of rank, virtue, and honor. "The next generation of the nobility will resemble the artificers and clowns, and money-jobbers, usurers, and Jews, who will be always their fellows, sometimes their masters" (8.100). Here, the stereotype of the Jewish trader, whose concerns extend no further than to his money and the conditions that affect his profit and loss, is invoked as a lurid illustration of Burke's fear that the rulers of France will henceforth be men "confined to professional and faculty habits," whose interests remain restricted to a "narrow circle," rather than gentlemen bred and qualified to take an impartial, "comprehensive connected view" of their society and its interests (8.95). Though Burke is expressing here a general principle that informed his political outlook throughout his life, he conflates it in this passage with the long-standing anti-Semitic idea that the Jews constitute a narrow-minded and self-interested state within a state. As such, they are deemed to lack any capacity for citizenship and political leadership.

The same characterization of Jews as stockjobbers resurfaces in the context of Burke's fears about the actions of the National Assembly to reduce the independence of the French Church and to despoil Church property in order to ameliorate the desperate condition of French public finances. He declares passionately that "the commons of Great Britain . . . will never seek their resource from the confiscation of the estates of the church and poor. Sacrilege and proscription are not among the ways and means in our committee of supply. The Jews in Change Alley have not yet dared to hint their hopes of a mortgage on the revenues belonging to the see of Canterbury" (8.154). Elsewhere in the text, as part of a lengthy series of rhetorical questions about the future course of the Revolution, he inquires: "Is episcopacy to be abolished? Are the church lands to be sold to Jews and jobbers; or given to bribe new-invented municipal republics into a participation in sacrilege?" (8.105) The refrain of economic anti-Semitism in this passage operates ultimately in tandem with the more prevalent religious strain, mirroring a central insight of Burke's analysis of the revolution. In his view, not only had the failed financial wheeling and dealing of the ancien régime

contributed to the revolution's onset, but now the financial interest, in alliance with men of letters, is seeking to erect on the ruins of the Gallican Church a new paper-money despotism (compared to which Walpole's regime paled in insignificance).

Burke elaborates this scenario considerably in *A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), written as a kind of postscript to or clarification of the *Reflections*. Referring to the replacement of those French bishops who refused to acquiesce in the reconstitution of the Church, he launches into a violent outburst:

Have not men . . . been made bishops, for no other merit than having acted as instruments of atheists; for no other merit than having thrown the children's bread to dogs; and in order to gorge the whole gang of usurers, pedlars, and itinerant Jew-discounters at the corners of streets, starved the poor of their Christian flocks, and their own brother pastors? Have not such men been made bishops to administer in temples, in which . . . the churchwardens ought to take security for the altar plate, and not so much as to trust the chalice in their sacrilegious hands, so long as Jews have assignats on ecclesiastical plunder, to exchange for the silver stolen from churches? I am told, that the very sons of such Jew-jobbers have been made bishops; persons not to be suspected of any sort of *Christian* superstition. . . . We know who it was that drove the money-changers out of the temple. We see too who it is that brings them in again. We have in London very respectable persons of the Jewish nation, whom we will keep: but we have of the same tribe others of a very different description,—housebreakers, and receivers of stolen goods, and forgers of paper currency, more than we can conveniently hang. These we can spare to France, to fill the new episcopal thrones: men well versed in swearing; and who will scruple no oath which the fertile genius of any of your reformers can devise (8.304).

The beginning of the paragraph immediately following this passage offers a clue to Burke's rhetorical intentions here. He states: "In matters so ridiculous, it is hard to be grave. On a view of their consequences it is almost inhuman to treat them lightly" (8.305). It would appear that his immediate rhetorical purpose is to burlesque French ecclesiastical policy, to caricature the actions of the revolutionary government in a broadly satirical and ironic way. If so, this is a burlesque treatment with a furious edge—even for a writer known to be heavy-handed (if supremely inventive) in this vein. The central strategy of burlesque, as in Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, is to treat grave subjects and weighty individuals in a ridiculous manner, and there is a hint of Burke's awareness of the conventions of this mode in his contrast between "respectable persons of the Jewish nation" and "others" of the "same tribe," the latter constituting fair game according to the rules of burlesque. He strategically exploits the social and cultural gulf in England between "respectable" Sephardic Jews and their impoverished Ashkenazi counterparts ("pedlars and itinerant Jew-discounters"). Distinguishing between the "respectable" and the "unworthy" was a ploy sometimes used by cautious writers in order to avoid offending established Anglo-Jewish families.²¹

But even so, the passage has a violence about it beyond the demands of burlesque. An instance of this is Burke's ironic, overdetermined allusion in the

phrase, “having thrown the children’s bread to dogs,” to an episode in the gospels that bluntly underscores the differentiation of Jew from Gentile.²² Added to this is his reference to the moneychangers whom Jesus harried from the precincts of the temple in Jerusalem and whom the French, in a plain reversal of the action of Jesus, have now readmitted. The latter citation (of Matthew 21:12–3) provides a biblical warrant for the “functional metonym” by which all financial dealers, brokers, and stockjobbers were pejoratively referred to as “Jews,” and by which the name of their London place of business, Change Alley, was taken to evoke its biblical prototype, the fraternity of moneychangers whose tables Jesus angrily overturned.²³ In blaming the Revolutionaries in France for bringing back the moneychangers, Burke is pursuing a typological strategy that equates the French Revolutionaries with the Jews, and both these groups with English Dissenters and their regicide Puritan forebears. More ominously, Burke’s biblical allusions, especially the events in Matthew 21, which took place in the run-up to Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion, hint at the most corrosive anti-Semitic charge of all: that the Jews are deicides, the crucifiers of the Messiah. This is an element of anti-Semitic discourse that Burke, for the most part, leaves for his readers to piece together, but its imprint is to be found, as will appear, at the very heart of the *Reflections*.

Before turning to the “implied” anti-Semitism of the text, however, one further explicit attack demands attention. The passage in question is a virtuoso set-piece in which Burke characterizes Lord George Gordon, of the infamous Gordon Riots of 1780, as the archetypal libeler of the French Royal family. The passage appears in the context of Burke’s defense of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette against various calumnious rumors circulated by their political enemies, especially attacks upon the reputation of the Queen:

We spurn from us with disgust and indignation the slanders of those who bring us their anecdotes with the attestation of the flower-de-luce [sic] on their shoulder. We have Lord George Gordon fast in Newgate; and neither his being a public proselyte to Judaism, nor his having, in his zeal against Catholick priests and all sorts of ecclesiastics, raised a mob (excuse the term, it is still in use here) which pulled down all our prisons, have preserved to him a liberty, of which he did not render himself worthy by a virtuous use of it. We have rebuilt Newgate, and tenanted the mansion. We have prisons almost as strong as the Bastile, for those who dare to libel the queens of France. In this spiritual retreat, let the noble libeller remain. Let him there meditate on his Thalmud, until he learns a conduct more becoming his birth and parts, and not so disgraceful to the antient religion to which he has become a proselyte; or until some persons from your side of the water, to please your new Hebrew brethren, shall ransom him. He may then be enabled to purchase, with the old hoards of the synagogue, and a very small poundage, on the long compound interest of the thirty pieces of silver (Dr. Price has shewn us what miracles compound interest will perform in 1790 years) the lands which are lately discovered to have been usurped by the Gallican church. Send us your popish Archbishop of Paris, and we will send you our protestant Rabbin. (8.135)

This passage shows Burke at the top of his rhetorical form, marshaling with a keen journalistic eye a series of disparate facts into an imaginative, narra-

tive order that subserves the central lines of his argument. Three of these facts in Gordon's case are that as leader of the Protestant Association he had incited a violent opposition to the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 (a measure dear to Burke's heart); that he had converted to Judaism in 1786; and that he was sentenced in 1788 to five years' imprisonment in Newgate, having been found guilty of libeling the Queen of France, the French Ambassador, and the "Administration of the Laws" in England.²⁴ Burke weaves these details—none of which is, in and of itself, especially significant—into a cautionary tale of the fate that awaits one who makes light of the religion of his forefathers and of the social position into which he is born. By his demagogic conduct during the time of the Gordon Riots, Lord George betrayed the obligations of his caste and embraced instead the values of the mob. By his conversion to Judaism and his bigoted contempt for Roman Catholicism, he demonstrated a fatal lack of seriousness about religion and its indispensability to the social order.²⁵ Highlighted in this way, his turbulent life serves as an apt emblem of the political themes that preoccupy Burke in the *Reflections*. Indeed, his career and conversion illustrate Burke's assertion, already cited, that the "next generation of the nobility will resemble the . . . Jews, who will be always their fellows, sometimes their masters" (8.100). Yet, the crowning touch that must have made Gordon an irresistible subject for Burke's pen is the fact that he had been convicted for libeling Marie-Antoinette. This circumstance points the reader back to the emotional core of Burke's text: his nostalgic, romantic portrait of Marie-Antoinette as a young woman at Versailles. Gordon's published defamation of the Queen thus serves to prove Burke's lament that "the age of chivalry is gone" (8.127).²⁶

Gordon's seemingly unaccountable conversion to Judaism provoked a good deal of comment, much of it derisive, in the press. Frank Felsenstein shows how thoroughly Burke's characterization of him echoes, in its details, "popular sentiment regarding [his] conversion to Judaism," as reflected in prints and published accounts (Felsenstein, 115–8). An example of this is the suggestion that he should "meditate on the Thalmud" while imprisoned in Newgate. This stroke draws on press reports that Gordon was studying the Talmud at the moment of his arrest in Birmingham. But a purely Burkean addition is the recommendation that Gordon should avail himself of some of the interest collected over the centuries on the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. This ancient anti-Semitic slur, which implies that the Jews have collectively profited from Judas's betrayal and therefore share in his guilt, reinforces the explicit stereotypes Burke has been exploiting about Jewish avarice. It hints, once again, at the central accusation, which he never quite brings himself to state openly, that the Jews are expressly responsible for Christ's crucifixion. The reverend Dr. Richard Price, chief representative in the *Reflections* of religious Dissent and reforming Enlightenment thought, is held culpable by association, for it is he who has devised the means to calculate the compound interest that has accrued for almost 1,800 years on Judas's blood-money. Once again, Burke makes opportunistic use of a seemingly adventitious detail, in this case, Price's authorship of several economic tracts on actuarial questions and the national debt.²⁷ These writings mark him as one of those "sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators" who have swept away the age of chivalry. In Burke's view, Price and Gordon are birds of a feather:

both are identified with radical Protestant causes, both have criticized the monarchy of France, and both are latter-day Judases and thus, by implication, quintessential Jews.²⁸ Gordon's conversion to Judaism is Calvinist/Dissenting philo-Semitism gone mad; in a bizarre reversal of Christian missionary zeal, Gordon, Price, and the French Revolutionaries—"new evangelists" all—seek to convert the English to foreign ideas and religious practises. An anxiety about the Judaization of England is conflated with a fear of the "spirit of proselytism" displayed by radical writers on both sides of the Channel (8.160).²⁹



The association of Price and his Unitarian brethren with Jewishness is reinforced, as Paulin notes, by Burke's drum-beat references in the text to the "Old Jewry," the street in which stood the meeting-house or church where Price preached the sermon that galvanized Burke. Readers familiar with London would have known that Old Jewry Street had been the center of the Jewish quarter in medieval London and that the Great Synagogue had stood there before the Jews were expelled from England in 1290 (to be readmitted, after a fashion, by Cromwell in the 1650s). The very site of Price's meeting-house thus marks it, together with its congregants, as the successor to the synagogue that had once stood in very nearly the same place. Michael Ragussis notes the powerful rhetorical effect of Burke's insistent reiterations: "Burke turns the simple designation of place—'the dissenting meeting house of the Old Jewry'—into the infectious sign of an as yet undefined (though nonetheless threatening) principle of Jewishness, so that the place-name eventually marks the speaker, the speech, the audience, the contents of the speech, and an entire species of discourse" (Ragussis, 120).

Without explicitly making the connections, Burke sets up his typological equivalencies in such a way that a rich subtext of implication and innuendo opens up to the careful reader. On a historical level, his association of Dissenters and Jews recalls a widespread (though by no means universal) philo-Semitism among Puritan supporters of the English revolution. Hugh Peter, whom Burke identifies as Price's predecessor, was a well-known promoter of the formal readmission of the Jews to England, an identification sufficiently public to become the subject, after the Restoration, of a satirical print in which Peter is depicted standing before St. Paul's cathedral proclaiming: "Let it out to ye Jews."³⁰ Cromwell was also strongly behind the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to accord the Jews *legal* readmission to England, and when that failed, he contrived nonetheless to extend them security of property and religion. The widespread and persistent reports that the Jewish community in London was prepared to pay large sums for the use of St. Paul's as a synagogue are echoed in the fears Burke expresses about the sale of French church lands to "Jews and jobbers" (8.105). Puritan sympathy for the Jews did not go unnoticed among Royalist propagandists, who pressed the link between Puritan regicides and Jewish deicides. "No marvell," declared one writer in 1648–9, "that those which intend to crucifie their *King*, should shake hands with them that crucified their *Saviour*."³¹ A cursory survey of commemorative sermons in the eighteenth century memorializing the death of Charles I shows the persistence of this identification down to Burke's time.³²

Burke is also relying on a much more generalized cultural/theological identification between Dissenter and Jew arising out of the conviction prevalent among militant Protestants that a special providence is to be discerned in the history and destiny of the reformed churches. In this view, Protestants are now God's chosen people: their trials and vicissitudes mirror those recorded in the Old Testament history of the children of Israel. Roman Catholic persecution of Protestants, for instance, is to be understood as a latter-day Babylonian captivity, as some observers in England were quick to note when they hailed the French Revolution as portending the downfall of Babylon (that is, the Church of Rome). The author of *The Illuminator, or Looking-Glass of the Times* declared in 1797: "The world has witnessed the partial accomplishment of those prophecies, by which were predicted the rise and fall of Antichrist, or the Papacy; and of those ten kingdoms which were to partake of her whoredoms and abominations. . . . Instance the French nation, nay the recent revolution at Rome, has fully proved this."³³

In *The Illuminator*, biblical history is seen through the filter of millenarianism, a Christian version of historical eschatology that draws much of its inspiration from the New Testament book of Revelation, especially chapter 20. That chapter recounts a vision of the end of history, when Satan will be bound in a bottomless pit and Christ will inaugurate the millennium—a thousand years of peace, righteousness, justice, and freedom—culminating in the Last Judgment and the end of earthly existence. Although the French Revolution inspired a good deal of apocalyptic and millenarian speculation, it has been observed that this view of the Revolution did not achieve any real currency until several years after the fall of the Bastille: "The public at large seems . . . to have begun markedly to respond to this interpretation only with the further unfolding of events in France: the overthrow of the existing ecclesiastical order—extinguishing the Pope's authority—the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic (1791–92). Then and for several years afterwards, a cheap and plentiful supply of [millenarian] extracts and adaptations . . . became available."³⁴

In the *Reflections*, Burke is anxious to oppose the current of teleological optimism he has detected in the interpretations placed on events in France during the early months of the Revolution.³⁵ He remarks ironically on what he calls Price's "fit of unguarded transport" in his sermon at the Old Jewry: "I allow this prophet to break forth into hymns of joy and thanksgiving on an event which appears like the precursor of the Millenium [sic], and the projected fifth monarchy, in the destruction of all church establishments" (8.123). What Burke has in mind here is the rousing peroration of Price's sermon, in which the preacher hails the "eventful period" he has lived to see and prophesies a glorious new era in human history: "And now, methinks, I see the ardor for liberty catching and spreading, a general amendment beginning in human affairs. . . . Be encouraged, all ye friends of freedom and writers in its defence! . . . Behold, the light you have struck out, after setting America free, reflected to France and there kindled into a blaze that lays despotism in ashes and warms and illuminates Europe!"³⁶ There is a kind of uncanny prescience in the way Burke picks up on Price's rhetorical enthusiasm, for if millenarian accounts of the French Revolution did not really take hold with the public until 1791–92, the *Reflections* must then be judged to

have been well beforehand in its prognosis of events—perhaps even having had the unintended effect of giving currency to the very view of events Burke wished to discredit.

Burke could easily have passed by the closing paragraphs of Price's discourse in silence—it is natural, after all, to end an oration on an inspiring note. Instead, they become the central focus of his own text, appearing there in an extensive citation (see 8.115–6) and occasioning the most famous pages of prose he ever wrote. To Price's optimistic millenarian vision of human concord, which the preacher introduces by citing the *nunc dimittis* of Simeon,³⁷ who had been privileged to witness the birth of Jesus, Burke opposes an apocalypse of a different kind, in which “the rebellious are outlawed, cast forth, and exiled, from this world of reason, and order, and peace, and virtue, and fruitful penitence, into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow” (8.147). Where Price sees the French “*King led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects*” (8.116), Burke is reminded of the “triumphing” of the radical Puritan divine Hugh Peter at the time of the trial and execution of Charles I in 1649. The death of Charles I and the humiliation of Louis XVI are both figured in the *Reflections* as recapitulations of the passion and death of Jesus.³⁸ The return of the King and Queen of France to Paris is a *via dolorosa* on which they are “made to taste, drop by drop, more than the bitterness of death, in the slow torture of a journey of twelve miles, protracted to six hours” (8.122); and the King, in an evocation of Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, is described as holding “to his lips . . . the cup of human misery full to the brim,” which he drinks “to the dregs” (8.121). Burke exploits the lingering sense, even in an age of constitutional monarchy, of the sanctity of royalty, of the king as the “Lord's anointed,” and thus intensifies the parallel with the Passion story. The death of Charles I, and now the “persecution” of Louis XVI, assume the contours of what Herbert Lindenberger calls a “martyr play, [which,] whether about a saint, a monarch, or simply some exemplary individual, can never completely escape being an imitation of Christ.”³⁹

Regicides (the Puritan prosecutors of Charles I) and would-be regicides (Price, radical Dissenters, and the French Revolutionaries) are thus closely connected, in Burke's mind, with deicides (the Jews), hence the identification of Price with Judas Iscariot. In the *Reflections*, Burke is content, as I have already suggested, simply to hint at these connections and to leave the anti-Semitic charge floating indeterminately between the lines of the text. But in his private correspondence he was less guarded. Upon learning in the summer of 1791 that the King and Queen of France had been arrested at Varennes, putting to an end their attempted escape from the country, Burke wrote, in a letter to the Marquis de Bouillé (13 July 1791):

As to France—I believe it is the only Country upon earth, thro which, for so long a way, a spectacle of suffering Royalty . . . could have passd, without any other sentiment, than that of the most barbarous and outrageous insolence. . . . But those who have deny'd the God of humanity, and made the Apotheosis of Voltaire, are deprived of all the feelings of nature and of Grace. They cry “give unto us Barrabbas”. When they suffer as the Jews, they will have more pity from good men, than they are intitled to from any they have shewn to suffering dignity and Innocence. (*Corr.*, 6:291)

Here the parallel between the suffering of the royal family and the passion of Jesus is made fully explicit: the people of France are now figured as the Jewish mob that, in the biblical account, called for Pilate to release the murderer Barabbas, rather than to set free Jesus (see Matthew 27 and Luke 23). Burke makes this identification doubly significant. Beyond the sacrilege they have visited upon their King, the French have shown themselves to be intellectual deicides. By their embrace of the skepticism of Voltaire, they have “deny’d the God of humanity” and have thereby symbolically murdered him.

Burke’s anxiety to discredit Price’s millenarian enthusiasm conveys another deposit of anti-Semitism that is never explicitly acknowledged. Borrowing a page from Jonathan Swift, he portrays Price and the radical Dissenters as irrational enthusiasts utterly out of touch with reality. He accomplishes this characterization by playing up Price’s millenarianism as the half-baked dabbling in obscure biblical prophecy of one who is intoxicated by the “fumes of his oracular tripod” (8.117). He traces Price’s millenarian longing back to the Old Testament prophecies of Daniel, which had inspired the radical Puritan sect known as the Fifth Monarchy Men. These prophecies were equally a source of Jewish messianism, the expectation that a king will emerge from the Davidic line who will restore the glory of Israel and inaugurate a golden age some time in the future. The Jews also figured prominently in Christian millenarianism, for it was widely held that the millennium would be heralded by the restoration of the dispersed Jews to their homeland and that the apocalypse would be inaugurated by their conversion to Christianity.⁴⁰ Burke relies on these associations to brand Price and his ideas in the minds of his readers as other or alien—as unfitted to the religious and cultural temper of the true-born Englishman. A clear measure of the currency and power of this disparaging view of millenarianism, with messianic Jews playing a central symbolic role, is the effective use James Gillray and other eighteenth-century caricaturists make of it in their satirical political prints. A prime example is Gillray’s print *The Prophet of the Hebrews—the Prince of Peace—conducting the Jews to the Promis’d-Land* (1795), which portrays the millenarian prophet Richard Brothers conducting a bedraggled flock of impoverished, itinerant Jews to the “Gate of Jerusalem.” Felsenstein sums up the import of this print aptly: “Gillray imagines the conversion of the Jews as the trigger that unleashes an apocalyptic nightmare, in which the anarchic forces of the infernal world are ultimately triumphant. The print is a stunningly clever parody of the philo-Semitic dream of converting the Jews as a prelude to the Christian apocalypse.”⁴¹



It seems clear, as the foregoing analysis has sought to demonstrate, that Burke’s anti-Semitic sallies in the *Reflections* are more than incidental. They are interwoven in complex ways with the central themes and languages deployed in the text. Yet the violence and extremism of his rhetoric have proved perennially troubling to readers striving to reconcile the text’s rhetorical ends and means. Iain McCalman brings the conundrum sharply into focus: “The language was so violent and emotional, equating preachers and atheist philosophes, lawgivers and madmen, Dissenters and Jewish brokers—saturated with references to lunatics,

criminals, and cannibals. How could one equate the elderly and respectable Unitarian preacher Dr. Price with the Civil War enthusiast and regicide Hugh Peters? . . . Why did this great Whig proponent of toleration sprinkle his pages with anti-Semitic jibes?"⁴² In short, the question remains what this rhetoric was meant to accomplish. What exact message was Burke hoping to convey to his audience?

Paulin argues that he wanted his readers "to see reform and revolution as part of a Jewish conspiracy to destroy an organic, hierarchical society," but this is to ascribe a prominence to Jewish actors in the *Reflections* and to confer upon them a degree of agency out of all proportion to what is actually suggested in the text.⁴³ When one moves from the textual specifics of Burke's anti-Semitic characterizations to the overall argument of the *Reflections*, the Jewish people recede to the margins of the picture. For instance, when Burke mentions the Jews in connection with the plunder of the Gallican Church, he refers to them as little more than instruments of the bishops who have been appointed by the French National Assembly expressly for this purpose. It is these bishops who have "starved the poor of their Christian flocks" in order to feed the "usurers, pedlars, and itinerant Jew-discounters at the corners of streets" (8.304); the latter, who are characterized as little more than vagabonds, simply profit by an occasion that others have handed them. Insofar as the Revolution is indeed a conspiracy of "cabals of literary men" and "monied people" to overthrow traditional hierarchies, it is a conspiracy in which the Jews are well-nigh invisible:

[The French] system has very many partizans in every country in Europe, but particularly in England, where they are already formed into a body, comprehending most of the dissenters of the three leading denominations; to these are readily aggregated all who are dissenters in character, temper, and disposition, though not belonging to any of their congregations—that is, all the restless people who resemble them, of all ranks and all parties—Whigs and even Tories—the whole race of half-bred speculators;—all the Atheists, Deists, and Socinians;—all those who hate the Clergy, and envy the Nobility,—a good many among the monied people;—the East Indians almost to a man, who cannot bear to find that their present importance does not bear a proportion to their wealth (8.345).

In this passage, cited from *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), Jews make no appearance, except, perhaps, as a shadowy presence of "half-bred speculators." So far as the monied interest is concerned, Burke is far more alarmed about East Indian Nabobs—the likes of Warren Hastings—than he is about Jewish stockjobbers. As for intellectual, rather than financial, speculators, the central threat comes from English Dissenters and radical thinkers, together with their French allies, the philosophes.

It seems significant that Burke's references to Jews are pretty much confined to the first third of the *Reflections*. These pages contain the strongly worded, emotional passages for which the book is famous, and their particular focus is the four establishments (of religion, monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy) that underpin the British constitution. Of these constitutional pillars, the religious establishment receives Burke's closest scrutiny, for it is the foundation on which the whole fabric of society is erected. "We know," he affirms, "that religion is the

basis of civil society and the source of all good and of all comfort" (8.141). Religion consecrates the political institutions of the state and ennobles those who occupy high office, it infuses those who exercise power with a sense of awe and responsibility, and it checks the willfulness and pride of both rulers and the people (8.142–5). For this reason, in all previous revolutions and reforms, "nations have begun the fabric of a new government, or the reformation of an old, by establishing originally, or by enforcing with greater exactness some rites or other of religion" (8.88). By seeking to eliminate the constitutional, political power of the established Church, however, the new order promulgated by the French and endorsed by Price proceeds in precisely the opposite fashion.

Indeed, Price's millenarian expectations, as expressed elsewhere in his writings, are explicitly linked to the abolition of established religion. In "The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind," a sermon preached at the Old Jewry Meeting-House in April 1787, he foresees the dawn of a new era but warns that forces of reaction in the Church will mobilize to prevent its arrival:

A more prosperous state of things is to take place on this earth. The stone which was cut out of the mountain without human force is hereafter to fill the whole earth, and the kingdom of the Messiah to become universal. Reason and scripture lead to this expectation. Remember then in your endeavours to enlighten and reform mankind that you are co-operating with Providence. . . . Think not, however, that you have no difficulties to encounter. It will not be strange that an alarm should be taken about the danger of the church. There is a jealousy natural to church establishments (especially when undermined by time and the spread of knowledge) which may produce such an alarm.⁴⁴

In this sermon, Price cites the standard scriptural passages foretelling the millennium (including that favorite of the Fifth Monarchy Men, the stone mentioned in Daniel 2 which will hereafter fill the whole earth), but he describes its advent in terms that conflate Christian eschatology with a growing Enlightenment optimism about the progressive nature of history and human development. Price is a post-millenarian who anticipates that the second coming of Christ will not take place until *after* life on earth has been perfected and Christianity has spread to the four corners of the world.⁴⁵ But, Christianity will become the universal religion only when it loses "that connection with civil power which has debased it, and which now in almost every Christian country turns it into a scheme of worldly emolument and policy, and supports error and superstition under the name of it" (Price, 160). It is not Price's millenarianism, as such, that Burke fears and despises, but rather Price's radical and politicized reading of those "signs of the times" which presage the imminent arrival of the millennium.

Price warns his auditors that the waning of established religion will be accompanied by alarms about "the danger of the church." He has in mind the Tory rallying cry of "Church and King," which was raised periodically during the eighteenth century in times of political agitation. The slogan was used, as George Rudé notes, to incite riots and demonstrations on behalf of conservative causes: "Where other movements . . . are concerned to destroy privilege or absolute mon-

archy, or to enlarge the frontiers of religious toleration, these rioters proclaim their attachment to the established order and traditional way of life against their disruption by 'Jacobins,' 'unbelievers,' 'foreigners,' or other alien elements."⁴⁶ Especially noteworthy in the present context is the clamor that erupted in 1753 after the Pelham administration passed the Jewish Naturalization Act. The agitation, conducted largely through the press, included suitably updated versions of the old cry: "Church and King, without mass, meeting, or synagogue!" and "No Jews; Christianity and the Constitution."⁴⁷ Some elements of the political satire deployed at the time, such as the following doggerel verses aimed at England's bishops, who had overwhelmingly supported the "Jew Bill" in the House of Lords, directly anticipate the terms of Burke's anti-Jewish satirical strokes:

Sell Christ and the Church! And B[ishops] to sell 'em?
Is Herod still living? Was Herod a P[elham]?
Hail B[ishops] Apostate! Hail King of the Jews!
—Beware! Oh, beware, of old Judas's Noose.⁴⁸

The English bishops are here accused of the same complicity that Burke later detects in their French counterparts, and the arch-betrayer Judas is once again invoked as a monitory emblem. Equally present, moreover, is the ominous subtext of connivance in the persecution and death of Christ the savior.

The episode of the "Jew Bill" is instructive, for it demonstrates the political potency of anti-Jewish propaganda in eighteenth-century Britain and furnishes a compendium of the insults used on such occasions. In assessing this polemical outburst, however, one confronts interpretative difficulties similar to those posed by Burke's anti-Semitic rhetoric in the *Reflections*. Confined largely to the Opposition press, the clamor over the Naturalization Bill erupted suddenly at a point when parliamentary consideration of the measure was well advanced, and it died down equally abruptly after the Pelham administration was forced to the humiliation of repealing the Act later in the same year. This circumstance has prompted some historians to argue that the real aim of Opposition agitation was not to incite anti-Jewish hatred but to embarrass the Court Whigs and prepare the ground for the 1754 general election: "its violence, at bottom, was that of unrestrained political partisanship rather than anti-Jewish hysteria" (Perry, 194).⁴⁹ In this view, the low standards of eighteenth-century political and journalistic decorum must be factored into any evaluation of the controversy. As we have seen, an analogous argument could be made in Burke's case by emphasizing the contextually specific use he makes of anti-Semitic rhetoric. But more recent considerations of the "Jew Bill" controversy draw a darker picture. Taking up Perry's general conclusion, Todd Endelman argues: "The clamor may have been precipitated for short-term political gains, but the feelings it allowed to surface and on which it played were hardly contrived for the occasion. . . . The very fact that the opposition saw there were political advantages to be gained by exploiting the latent religious anti-Semitism of the population is a testimony to the real existence of those feelings."⁵⁰

In pursuing the parallels that can be drawn between the rabble-rousing tactics of opponents to the "Jew Bill" and Burke's own blend of "Church in danger" and anti-Semitic rhetoric, one confronts a deep irony in his strategy. On one level, the *Reflections* dramatizes the calamitous consequences in France of sub-

mitting to the dictates of the mob, yet on another level it stirs up in its English readers the very “mobbish” instincts it otherwise deprecates. As Rudé’s analysis of “Church and King” campaigns shows, a key element in their effectiveness was their appeal to popular sentiments of xenophobia. Whether defined in terms of religious, cultural, or political difference, such anti-foreign prejudice habitually fastened upon the figure of the Jew—doubly alien by reason of both origin and religion—as a means of supplying stubbornly irrational preconceptions with an ostensible objectivity. Burke plays heavily on the strength of national identity in his readers, emphasizing Englishness as “the image of a relation in blood” and differentiating the “cold sluggishness of [the English] national character” from the dangerous volatility of the French (8.84, 137). He defines the particular “genius” of the English people as the product of a long, shared historical experience, but such appeals to a sense of national difference also function on a more visceral level, mobilizing a tribal identity that by its very nature excludes those, like the French and the Jews, whose descent, history, language, and culture are distinct from the shaping influences of Englishness. The impact of the *Reflections* on its first readers, its capacity to stimulate passionate political debate in its own time, cannot be understood in isolation from its remarkable emotional access to deep-seated feelings in its audience. Burke’s anti-Semitic rhetoric is briefly, yet powerfully contributory to this emotional power of the text.

Given the largely religious context of Burke’s anti-Semitic rhetoric, it may be useful to canvass Conor Cruise O’Brien’s influential biographical hypothesis that Burke’s ambivalent feelings about his Irish and Roman Catholic connections can help explain many of the contradictions and emotional tensions that marked his long political career. Emotional attachments that could not be expressed openly in print or in the world of English politics might find oblique expression. A case in point would be Burke’s violent denunciation of the anti-Catholic Gordon as an apostate, as a “Protestant Rabbin.” For most eighteenth-century Englishmen, the real religious “Others” to be feared and decried were not the Jews but the Roman Catholics, and anti-Catholicism was by far the most prominent form of religious bigotry during the period. Unlike most of his fellow subjects, however, Burke was not in a position to express his Englishness in terms of anti-Catholic prejudice, a circumstance that may have prompted him, whether consciously or not, to displace the spectre of alterity onto the Jews.



It remains to consider what Burke’s introduction of anti-Jewish passages into the *Reflections* implies for present-day readers of this classic political text. Those passages prompt, first of all, a reconsideration of some of his most deeply held political convictions. Take, for example, his defense of prejudice as a valuable repository of the wisdom of generations. It would seem that the experience of anti-Semitism calls this key argument of conservatism into question, or at least demands that it be carefully reconsidered. As a repository of reason or “the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages,” prejudices are, Burke argues, of ever increasing value: “the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them” (8.138). But the durability of anti-

Semitism in European history undermines the criterion of longevity as a measure of value and argues for different modes of discrimination to be used in evaluating the benefits of those prejudices with which a society is imbued. Burke is, of course, fully aware that the term “prejudice” can have a negative signification—he mentions “blindest prejudice” (8.146) as a danger to the state—but that simply underscores the necessity of redefining his terms and their application with greater rigor. Other key concepts in Burke’s political philosophy, such as “tradition” and “natural feeling,” are vulnerable to a similar critique.

Equally put to the test is Burke’s celebrated commitment to religious toleration. To return for a moment to the letter to William Burgh, cited in the opening paragraphs of this essay, Burke there qualifies the broad toleration he is prepared to concede to “Jews Mahometans and . . . Pagans” with the proviso that such a concession can (and indeed must) be made without prejudice to the legitimacy of a policy that favors one form of worship over all others as the established national religion: “toleration does not exclude national preference, either as to modes or opinions; and all the lawful and honest means which may be used for the support of that preference.” Indeed, Burke frequently argued that a generous doctrine of toleration was the “best part of Christianity” and of established Anglicanism.⁵¹ In his view, Christian charity showed itself at its best and the Christian religion best recommended itself to the unbeliever by tolerating all genuine and sincerely held forms of religious belief: “Christian charity consists in allowing others a latitude of opinion, in putting a restraint upon your own mind, and in not suffering the zeal of the Lord’s House absolutely to eat you up.”⁵² But, this policy of toleration was always calculated to buttress the position of the Church of England, for Burke thought that by showing an enlightened and tolerant face, the established Church would gain the loyalty and affection of the people far more effectively than through coercive laws and state policies.⁵³ Toleration remains, finally, an asymmetrical relation posited on the notion of the other as *other*.

The advent of the French Revolution exposed to view the ambiguity of Burke’s views on religious toleration. Nowhere is the problematic character of those views more fully on display than in his anti-Jewish comments, which disparage Jews as housebreakers, fences, and forgers, while simultaneously lauding “respectable persons of the Jewish nation” and honoring Judaism as an “antient religion” (8.304, 135). The mark of respect Burke pays to the “antient religion” of Judaism follows from his conviction that what is ultimately at stake is not any given expression of religious belief or doctrine but rather the religious impulse itself and its irreducible necessity to all humanity, as he states in his second speech on toleration (17 March 1773):

Let it be but a serious religion, natural or revealed take what you can get. Lay hold cherish blow up the slightest spark. One day it may be a pure and holy flame. By this proceeding you form an alliance offensive and defensive against those great ministers of darkness who are endeavouring to shake all the works of God established in order and beauty. . . . The Honourable Gentleman would have us fight this confederacy of the powers of darkness with the single Arm of the church of England not only to fight against infidelity but to fight at the

same time with all the faith in the world except our own. In the moment we make a front against the Common Enemy to have to combat with all those who are the natural friends of our Cause. Strong as we are we are not equal to this. The Cause of the Church of England is included in that of Religion, not that of Religion in the Church of England.⁵⁴

So long as the Jews and, for that matter, the Dissenters confine themselves to the private exercise of their religious beliefs and observe the laws of the land, they should, in Burke's opinion, enjoy the benefits of toleration, but if they become lawbreakers or, in the case of the Dissenters, form a "*political* faction" that seeks to "overturn the [established] Church," they breach the limits of any toleration the state could reasonably grant.⁵⁵

Consequently, Burke's cosmopolitan embrace of religion in all its multifarious guises gives way in the 1790s to a renewed defensive concern for the integrity of established religion in Britain. If dissent from the established church became sufficiently public and widespread, then what would remain of the Church of England as an integral part of the English constitution, as the bulwark of religion in its native English manifestation? In response to this apprehension, Burke appears to fall back on a narrower conception of toleration that excludes anti-Trinitarians (those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity) from toleration's benefits. Thus, in his *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians* (11 May 1792), he reaffirms the laws relating to Trinitarian Christian sects in England, amongst which he numbers Catholics, Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Independents, and Quakers, but he opposes vehemently the extension of any legal relief to the avowedly anti-Trinitarian Unitarians. There is considerable irony in the position to which he retreats here, since he had always been and remained steadfastly reticent about his personal belief in (as opposed to his public profession of) orthodox Christian doctrine and continued to affirm, as he does in the *Reflections*, the "great principle" and "great object" that unite all religions (8.199). Yet, in practical terms, Burke's position on toleration in the 1790s became almost entirely indistinguishable from the narrower doctrinal conception that had shaped the national consensus on religious policy in eighteenth-century England.

In all this, the Jews figure as unwitting stage extras, as they had at the time of the "Jew Bill" in 1753. Their visible religious and ethnic difference could all too easily be invoked to symbolize those powers of darkness that Burke saw gathering against the forces of religion. He exploited anti-Jewish sentiment opportunistically when it suited his purposes; the tropes of both his and generally current anti-Jewish rhetoric melded with his primary political concerns, making them all the more potent and mutually reinforcing. But the evidence of the text does not warrant the conclusion advanced by Paulin that Burke consciously propagated a paranoid scenario of secret and deliberate "Jewish conspiracy." On this score J. G. A. Pocock's assessment of the *Reflections* shows greater balance. The "monied interest" that Burke feared consisted of public creditors—lenders to the state—whom he indeed portrays as co-conspirators with "political men of letters," striking "at the nobility through the crown and the church" (8.159–60). In their activities he saw "confederacies and correspondencies of the most extraordinary nature . . . forming, in several countries" (8.205)—like those of the Bavarian Illuminati (8.205 n). Pocock concludes: "He was not far from that identifica-

tion of Freemasons and Jews as the revolutionary underground which was to haunt the imagination of the Catholic Right for at least a century and a half, but he did not articulate it; and how far he saw the anti-Trinitarian Dissenters as the English expression of a universal malignancy is left for us to guess.”⁵⁶ One is reminded of a perceptive comment made by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in a review of Burke’s *A Letter to a Noble Lord*. Remarking that the *Letter* contains passages that could be construed as attacking the titled nobility of England, Coleridge states: “This is not the only instance to be met with in the course of Mr. Burke’s writings, in which he lays down propositions, from which his adversaries are entitled to draw strange corollaries. The egg is his: Paine and Barlow hatch it.”⁵⁷ Similarly, in exploiting anti-Jewish feeling as a weapon in his rhetorical arsenal against the French Revolution, Burke helped to unlock an intellectual Pandora’s box from which others were to conjure worse malevolence.⁵⁸

NOTES

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1. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, gen. ed. Paul Langford, 12 vols. [in progress] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–), vol. 8. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969). Hereafter, references to this work will appear in the text with the volume and page number, unless otherwise indicated.

2. John Thelwall, *Sober Reflections on the Seditious and Inflammatory Letter of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, to a Noble Lord* (London, 1796), 30.

3. One recent critic who does address the anti-Semitic dimension of the *Reflections* (in the context of a study of Jewish conversion and nineteenth-century English nationalism) is Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: “The Jewish Question” and English National Identity* (Durham and London: Duke Univ. Press, 1995), 119–24.

4. Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 268, n. 158.

5. Tom Paulin, “Undesirable,” *London Review of Books*, 9 May 1996, 15. Don Herzog also argues that “Burke . . . loathed Jews. Like Herzog, he shuddered at the vision of a Britain overwhelmed by them.” See Cobbett, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), 319 and *passim*.

6. Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*, 155–6.

7. *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland et al., 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, and Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958–78), 3:112. Further citations from the correspondence (hereafter abbreviated as *Corr.*) are noted in the text by volume and page numbers.

8. “To Dr John Erskine—12 June 1779,” *Corr.*, 4:85.

9. “To Miss Mary Palmer—19 January 1786,” *Corr.*, 5:255.

10. *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, 36 vols. (London: T. C. Hansard, 1814), 22:223–4 (14 May 1781). See also *Parliamentary History*, 22:775 (4 December 1781); and 22:1023–6 (4 February 1782).

11. See F. P. Lock’s discussion of this episode in *Edmund Burke: Volume I, 1730–1784* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 494–8.

12. See, for example, Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, ed. René Pomeau, 2 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1963), 2:61–4.
13. Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, trans. George R. Healy (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), “Letter LX,” 101.
14. Conor Cruise O’Brien, Introduction to Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 51. Burke himself used the term “mobbish” to describe the tactics he felt forced to adopt in order to prevent the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India, from being abandoned: “The *calm mode of Enquiry* would be a very temperate method of losing our Object; and a very certain mode of finding no calmness on the side of our adversary. Our being mobbish is our only chance of his being reasonable.” “To William Adam—4 January 1791,” *Corr.*, 6:197.
15. Edmund Burke, *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, gen. ed. Paul Langford, 12 vols. [in progress], (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–), 8:485. Subsequent citations of the Oxford edition are noted in the text by volume and page number.
16. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966), 35.
17. Stephen Greenblatt, “Marlowe, Marx, and Anti-Semitism,” in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 42.
18. See W. D. Rubinstein’s critique of some problematic biases in the recent historiography of Anglo-Jewry and his calls for a more nuanced perspective on anti-Semitism in modern British history, in *A History of the Jews in the English-Speaking World: Great Britain* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin’s, 1996), 28–35.
19. “Anti-Semitism,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, 16 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 3:87.
20. The importance of Protestantism and anti-Catholicism in the forging of British national identity is explored by Linda Colley in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New York and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 11–54.
21. Eighteenth-century Jews themselves emphasized these social and cultural distinctions. See Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, 3 vols., vol. 3, *From Voltaire to Wagner*, trans. Miriam Kochan (New York: Vanguard, 1975), 4–5. Poliakov comments, “The complexity of emancipation always demands the existence of someone more of a Jew than oneself.”
22. See Matthew 15:21–8 and Mark 7:24–30. In this biblical episode Jesus tells a Canaanite woman who has come to him for help that his mission on earth is to the Jews, the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” not to Gentiles. In the phrase Burke cites (quoting Jesus), Jews are characterized as “children” and Gentiles are referred to as “dogs.” Jesus’ use of the word “dogs,” a harsh term of insult used by both Jews and their enemies to designate outsiders and godless people, has long troubled Christian interpreters. See, for example, *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al., 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1951–57), 7:442–3.
23. For a thorough discussion of this and other anti-Jewish stereotypes in the eighteenth century, see Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660–1830* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995). Felsenstein takes up the “moneychanger” theme on pages 200–1. See also Herzog, *Poisoning*, 299–323, 515–7.
24. See *The Whole Proceedings on the Trials of Two Informations . . . against George Gordon, Esq. . . . One for a Libel on the Queen of France and the French Ambassador; the Other for a Libel on the Judges, and the Administration of the Laws in England* (London, 1787); and “A Narrative of the Proceedings . . . against Lord George Gordon,” *The Annual Register* 29 (1787): 239–48. A fairly detailed but partisan account of these and other events in Lord George Gordon’s life is given in Robert Watson, *A Life of Lord George Gordon: with a Philosophical Review of his Political Conduct* (London, 1795).
25. Interestingly, the remarks of the justice at Gordon’s sentencing, as reported in *The Annual Register*, broach the very themes that Burke emphasizes in his portrayal: “It were to be wished that

you would make a better use of your reading in the Bible, and not use the scripture style and phrase for the wicked purpose of promoting mutiny and sedition, and to undermine the laws of your country. . . . One is sorry that you, descended of an illustrious line of ancestry, should have so much dishonoured your family, by deviating from those rules, the observation of which induced their sovereigns at first to confer titles of distinction on your ancestors; and that you should prefer the mean ambition of being popular among thieves and pickpockets, and to stand as the champion of mischief, anarchy, and confusion" (*The Annual Register* 29 [1787]: 248). The judge's comment that Gordon prefers the company of "thieves and pickpockets" voices a common prejudice about Ashkenazi Jews, with whom Gordon associated after his conversion. Given that Burke was intimately associated with *The Annual Register* for many years, it seems not unlikely that his account of Gordon in the *Reflections* draws on reports in that journal.

26. Gordon's attacks on the Queen of France appeared in the *Public Advertiser* on 22 and 24 August 1786. See Watson, *A Life of Lord George Gordon*, 70–3.

27. See, for example, *Observations on Reversionary Payments; on Schemes for Providing Annuities for Widows and for Persons in Old Age; on the Method of Calculating the Values of Assurances on Lives; and on the National Debt* (London, 1771); and *An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the National Debt* (London, 1772).

28. Both were also political enemies of Burke on a more personal level. Gordon earned Burke's undying contempt for his role in the anti-Catholic agitation that culminated in the Gordon Riots, and Price was closely associated with William Petty, Earl of Shelburne and subsequently Marquess of Lansdowne, whom Burke distrusted intensely and held to blame for the fall of the Rockingham administration in 1782. On the reasons for Burke's dislike of Price, see Frederick Dreyer, "The Genesis of Burke's *Reflections*," *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978): 462–79. See also Mitchell's Introduction to volume 8 of Burke's *Writings and Speeches*, 9–11.

29. For an insightful analysis of Burke's reaction to Lord George, see Iain McCalman, "Mad Lord George and Madame La Motte: Riot and Sexuality in the Genesis of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*," *Journal of British Studies* 35 (1996): 357–60. On the Calvinist tradition of philo-Semitism, see Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, 3:34–5, 71–2.

30. Cited in David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603–1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 179.

31. Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, 178.

32. See, for example, J. B. Butler, *God's Judgments upon Regicides: A Sermon Preached in the Fleet-Prison, on the 30th Day of January 1682/3, Proving that the Bloud of that Pious Monarch, and Glorious Martyr, King Charles the First, Is Not Yet Expiated* (1683), 10, 23; Richard West, *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons . . . on . . . the Anniversary of the Martyrdom of King Charles I* (1710), 3, 6; Joseph Trapp, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London . . . on Friday, January 30. 1729. Being the Fast-Day for the Execrable Murder of King Charles I* (1729), 1–2. Later in the century, such parallels in commemorative sermons become more infrequent and are more carefully qualified.

33. *The Illuminator, or Looking-Glass of the Times; being a selection of wonderful predictions and prophecies, past, present, and to come* (London [1797]), iv–v.

34. Mayir Vreté, "The Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought 1790–1840," *Middle Eastern Studies* 8 (1972): 6.

35. For an overview of millenarian responses to the French Revolution, see Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975). The history of the Jews in France during the eighteenth century is recounted in Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968).

36. Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, in *Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 195–6.

37. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29–30 KJV).

38. I have explored this dimension of the *Reflections* in some detail elsewhere: see Frans De Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 188–92.

39. Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 45.

40. The English preoccupation with the questions of Jewish restoration and conversion has been studied in considerable detail. In addition to Katz, Ragussis, and Vreté, see Nabil I. Matar, “The Controversy over the Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought: 1701–1753,” *Durham University Journal* 49 (1988): 241–56.

41. Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, 97. Another print that exploits these same messianic and millenarian themes is the anonymous *A Prospect of the New Jerusalem*, which appeared in 1753, during the political controversy over the Jewish Naturalization Act or “Jew Bill”.

42. McCalman, “Mad Lord George and Madame La Motte,” 344.

43. Paulin, “Undesirable,” 15.

44. Price, *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind, in Political Writings*, 173.

45. Price’s post-millenarianism is far more congenial than the more catastrophic eschatology of pre-millenarianism to contemporary historical theories prognosticating trends of growing enlightenment, improvement, and progress in western societies: “One generation . . . communicates improvement to the next, and that to the next, till at last a progress in improvement may take place rapid and irresistible which may issue in the happiest state of things that can exist on this earth” (Price, *Evidence*, 167; see also 158–63).

46. George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730–1848* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), 135.

47. Quoted in Thomas W. Perry, *Public Opinion, Propaganda, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study of the Jew Bill of 1753*, Harvard Historical Monographs LI (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), 74, 97. See also *Parliamentary History* (for the year 1753) 15:95.

48. *London Evening-Post*, 1 September 1753, quoted in G. A. Cranfield, “The ‘London Evening-Post’ and the Jew Bill of 1753,” *Historical Journal* 8 (1965): 26.

49. Cranfield (*London Evening-Post*, 30) comes to a similar conclusion: “despite its ferocity, the campaign seems to have left behind it remarkably little ill-feeling or rancour. It was simply a curious interlude in English politics—arousing tremendous passions at the time, but with no lasting effects whatever.”

50. Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England 1714–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 90–1. See also Endelman, 60 n.; and Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, 189–90.

51. Edmund Burke, “Speech on Toleration Bill, 17 March 1773,” in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 2:385.

52. Burke, “Speech on Toleration Bill, 3 April 1772,” in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 2:370.

53. See the Introduction to volume 3 of *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 3:38–42.

54. Burke, “Speech on Toleration Bill, 17 March 1773,” in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 2:389.

55. *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians*, 11 May 1792, in Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 8 vols. (London: Bohn’s British Classics, 1854–89), 6:118.

56. “Editor’s Introduction” to Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), xxxi. See also Pocock, “Edmund Burke and the Redefinition of Enthusiasm: the Context as Counter-Revolution,” in *The French Revolution and the*

Creation of Modern Political Culture, vol. 3, *The Transformation of Political Culture 1789–1848* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), 30–1.

57. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Watchman* 1 (1 March 1796), in vol. 2, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), 2:36.

58. Léon Poliakov argues that the decisive impetus for theories placing Jews at the center of a revolutionary conspiracy involving the Freemasons and the Illuminati was Napoleon's convening of the "Grand Sanhedrin" in 1807. Before this date, states Poliakov: "anti-revolutionary polemicists only attributed to [Jews] an incidental and passive role; they were pawns being used by the great conspirators for their machinations . . ." (*History of Anti-Semitism*, 3:276–7). It might be argued that Burke encouraged conspiracy theories, given his praise, shortly before his death, for the first edition of the Abbé Augustin Barruel's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobitisme* (London, 1797), a book that alleged a conspiracy of philosophes, Freemasons, and Illuminati as the primary cause of the French Revolution. In his private, unpublished papers, Barruel later reported that he made the connection between the Jews and these secret societies in 1806: his source for this rumor of a Jewish-led conspiracy was the shadowy figure Jean-Baptiste Simonini, an Italian soldier. Barruel claims that he refrained from making this information public because of its incendiary nature. See "Souvenirs du P. Grivel sur les PP. Barruel et Feller," *Le contemporain: revue catholique*, 3ème série, 16 (1878): 62; see also Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, 3:282–3.