

Many parts of *Riotous Performances* are stand-alone gems of cultural-historical analysis. Burke's iconoclastic reading of Chesterfield's lord-lieutenancy, already mentioned, is such, as is her depiction of a young Edmund Burke, caught up in the Dublin paper wars of 1740s and revealed through his correspondence. Again and again, a seemingly unpromising digression—a discussion of, say, eighteenth-century arguments for consuming Irish-made goods (in particular, Irish woolen “stuff”)—becomes something relevant and revelatory. In short, Burke uses theatrical controversy as a lever with which to crack the culture and politics of eighteenth-century Ireland wide open.

The field of eighteenth-century Irish studies needs books like *Riotous Performances*, books that combine interpretation of texts with interpretation of material culture, wide contexts with microhistory, archival research with theorized critique. Most crucially, perhaps, Burke helps the study of eighteenth-century Irish theater break out from the sidelines, becoming more central to the study of the eighteenth century and to the study of the theater more generally. It is gratifying, therefore, to see that since the publication of *Riotous Performances*, Burke has continued to work in this direction, with articles forthcoming in loci like *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730–1830* and *Theatre Research International*.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, *Riotous Performances* will remain a rich and suggestive resource for many years to come.

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The British Eighteenth Century and Global Critique. *Clement Hawes*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Pp. xi+257.

If you want to understand what Clement Hawes is up to in this book, it will help to know that Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995) is a favorite movie of the Aryan Right, white supremacy's own blockbuster. White supremacists now regularly point to William Wallace as one of history's great defenders of freckled virtue. The white-on-blue Cross of Saint

3. See Helen M. Burke, “Acting in the Periphery: The Irish Theatre,” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730–1830*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), “Jacobin Revolutionary Theatre and the Early Circus: Astley's Dublin Amphitheatre in the 1790s,” *Theatre Research International* (forthcoming), and “Country Matters: Irish Wagery and the British Theatrical Tradition,” in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance, 1660–1800*, ed. Michael Corder and Peter Holland (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

Andrew has joined the swastika and the Confederate flag, which it resembles, as one of the movement's blazons. Neoconfederate groups have begun attending Scottish festivals or Caledonian games, which they see as paramilitary displays of Nordic manhood, on the notion, it seems, that caber tossing is one of the few remaining sports that has not been taken over by Black and Latino athletes—a kind of hot-weather hockey. When the Redcoats invade the next time—abetted, one imagines, by the Black Panthers—we will assault them with the trunks of oaks. The groups, reportedly, have been screening *Braveheart* to recruit new members for the cause. In some ways, this is rather odd, since *Braveheart* is a one-race movie, wall-to-wall white. Thirteenth-century Scotland had no Black people to fight—had barely the Jews for a pogrom. On the fringe Right, then, the movie has become a parable of competing forms of whiteness, pitting a primal, highland whiteness—coded as Celtic, peripheral, Scottish, U.S. Southern, Appalachian—against a tainted, lowland and coastal whiteness—coded as Anglo, urban, U.S. Northern, Yankee: corrupt, cosmopolitan, girlishly aristocratic.

So Hawes is wondering, in effect, how Scotland ever became SKKKotland. And what he wants us to see is that *Braveheart*-style white supremacy is one of the distinctive achievements of British imperialism in the nineteenth century. This is even odder than it initially looks. We can think here about some of modern Europe's most basic political categories: empire, nation, race. Even if you think, as many do, that all of these notions are toxic, that we would be better off without any of them, you will have to concede all the same that they are quite variedly toxic—that each is fatal in its own peculiar, mutually incompatible way. Empires are by definition multinational and they have nearly always been multiracial, as well, the unwitting engines of racial mixture (and not of racial consolidation). In modern times, then, nationalism has been the only reliably effective anti-imperial ideology, but nations are, in turn, not intuitively racial constructions. Race is something else again, since it sorts people broadly, by continents, and not by those continents' miscellaneous regional subgroupings. Race is inherently multinational, like empire, and yet it can come in an anti-imperial variant of its own, as signaled, historically, by the prefix *pan-*: pan-African, pan-Latino, and so on. What is remarkable about nineteenth-century British imperialism, in these terms, is that it did the hard work of papering over these differences. It got race and nation and empire to all line up: the very term "Britain" was the product of an imperialist and racially anchored nationalism, of the English and the Welsh and the Scots making common cause out of the whiteness that empire had allowed them to discover.

But here a clarification is necessary. Hawes is an eighteenth-centuryist, and he is less interested in explaining the nineteenth century than he is in denouncing it. His book's central argument is that the English eighteenth century has been widely misunderstood—or worse, that some three generations of critical theorists have, by polemicizing endlessly against the totalitarian Enlightenment, framed the eighteenth century for the nineteenth century's crimes. Hawes means, then, to retrieve for us a better eighteenth century than the one we think we know, to help us retrace our steps to the missed turn in modern English culture, to show us what English letters looked like before they were freighted with the nineteenth century's lethally settled notions of nation and race.

But then who did the freighting? This is where *Braveheart* comes in: it turns out that the Scots bear most of the blame—or at least that is how Hawes tells it in what is easily the book's best chapter, which offers a new reading of James Macpherson and the Ossian affair. Where most twentieth-century criticism passed over Macpherson in silence, content to write him off as a versifying charlatan, the trend in the recent scholarship has been to rehabilitate him by making Ossian into an early (though lamentably fictional) Celtic nationalist. Hawes is determined to stop this trend in its tracks—to re-indict Macpherson on charges of fraud, and his argument here is both complex and compelling: the Ossian poems were not counterstrikes against Culloden and its aftermath; they were not designed to break Scotland's ties with England, but precisely to strengthen them, to make the Celtic past compatible with English literary sensibilities—and then also, by extension, to make Scotland a full copartner in the British Empire. *Fingal* posed as a primordial Scottish epic, to be sure, but then it is all the more remarkable that it did so in English and was backed by Edinburgh's Anglo-Scottish elite, who paid Macpherson for his trouble. And the poem itself took as its villains not the imperialists and nation builders of London—which is what an anticolonial reading would dictate—but the Irish, who are routinely insulted in its verse.

Hawes's attack on Ossian commands our attention, because he thinks of the Macpherson affair not as a fluke that literary history can cheerfully ignore but as a signpost to some of that history's most basic trends. In the late eighteenth century, English and Scottish letters took on the task of inventing traditions for themselves, of fabricating roots for a new British nation. They looked into the mythical past and found their imperial greatness foretold there. Hawes is making a provocative point: that imperial Britishness did not, in fact, demand the obliteration of Scottishness and the final triumph of Englishness. It assumed only that the English and Scots could close ranks and thus

that a certain Scottishness would be made available to the English, much as Scotland would be (lightly) Anglicized. We are more familiar with this kind of ethnic bargain from the further reaches of the empire. When white settlers in this or that colony have wanted to distinguish themselves from the English, they have generally done so by refashioning their whiteness on the model of some indigenous group: English settlers become American by styling themselves Mohawk or Navajo—white Indians; English New Zealanders turn Kiwi by selectively adopting Maori icons and words and rituals. The surprise, then, is to find that this all happened in the metropolis, as well. The Celts were called in to bolster a new imperial British identity, to thicken an Englishness that had been stretched thin by expansion, that had become the mere ether of empire.

Most of Hawes's book is made up of readings of canonical eighteenth-century British writers alongside prominent postcolonial works from the late twentieth century—and perhaps we can begin to guess his strategy. Hawes wants to attack the Ossian moment in British cultural history from both sides, as it were, to catch it in a literary pincer movement. Having proclaimed the bardic revival the heavy in British history, Hawes then lets the eighteenth century play the hero's part, simply by virtue of not yet being *that*, of not yet sporting a pilfered kilt. Eighteenth-century writing provides the all-important prehistory to full-fledged British imperialism. When we read it, we are eavesdropping on a still unsettled conversation about nationality and race, a conversation in which those terms are still up for grabs, still hotly contested—which means that Swift and Sterne and their fellows can model for us what it might mean not to think racially or nationalistically. Hawes wants to retrieve for us the traditions of an enlightened literary cosmopolitanism that the late eighteenth century's balladeers and regional novelists cut short. He wants to say at the same time that the best Asian and African and Black American novelists working today are not, as commonly understood, writing against the European Enlightenment. They are that Enlightenment's heirs, and their writing, which is brimming over with references to the Augustan canon, testifies proudly to this bequest. It is not all that unusual for postcolonial critics to read non-European novels alongside their Anglo forerunners, as Hawes does here. It is a tried and true strategy of postcolonial intro classes, in fact: Coetzee's *Foe* alongside *Robinson Crusoe*; Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* alongside *Jane Eyre*. But what marks Hawes out is that he does not read these books in opposition to—or really even in dialogue with—one another. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* becomes a simple extension of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* is a canny updating of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. This

isn't so much "the empire writes back" as "the empire writes in grateful acknowledgment of."

Rarely has a student of the period said so bluntly what most eighteenth-centuryists secretly feel: that the period generally gets a bad rap, that it has a lot more to offer than petticoats and pettifoggery. Hawes is pushing his readers to recover the period's own iconoclasts, and he has an honorable sense of literature as a laboratory of dissent. But the book, on balance, fails to convince. For a start, there is the simple matter of chronology. Nationalist origin myths are not the invention of the late eighteenth century. Early Whig ideology relied on notions of the ancient constitution or Saxon liberty that date back at least to 1600 or so and that themselves superseded fables of an Arthurian or even a Trojan Britain. Hawes does us a service, no doubt, in underscoring how many major writers refused to go along with these fables of ethnogenesis, but if you celebrate a period's iconoclasts you are, by definition, disregarding its major trends—at which point it becomes unclear why we should not do the nineteenth century the same favor. But most of the book's problems actually lie elsewhere and can be traced to Hawes's frantic attack on nativism, which he has decided is the linchpin of racist, nationalist, and imperialist ideologies—all of them at once—on the view, apparently, that if you kill off the first, the others will wither after. This antinativism dictates all sorts of choices; the book sets out to discredit imperial nationalists, anti-imperial nationalists, primitivists, "reactionary indigenist obscurantists," and all the variously poststructuralist celebrations of the local or the micro (79). Hawes's antinationalist convictions are such that he wants us to celebrate those postcolonial writers who are figures of dissent within their countries of origin, and so he praises Salman Rushdie for despising most Indians, Wole Soyinka for socking it to the Nigerians, Charles Johnson for making it hard for Black Americans to own their blackness. The best thing about this new global fiction is that it "tends to the dismantling of reified identities" (135). What will remain, after literature has taught us to discard all fixed identity, is a bundle of "cosmopolitan sensibilities" (55). And the great precursor figure to the cosmopolitan postcolonials is Samuel Johnson, a "principled universalist" who subjected his own national traditions to careful scrutiny—witness his dry-eyed judgments on the great English authors—and is thus to be celebrated for his very crankiness (182).

The real trouble here, I think, is that Hawes treats enlightened cosmopolitanism as an abstract value to be invoked or an attitude to be modeled. But cosmopolitanism, like any other abstraction, has to find a material form in the world, has to find institutions and persons to embody it. And world history's most obviously cosmopolitan

institutions have, of course, been the great empires themselves. Hawes maintains an eerie silence on this score—or worse: his book’s drift, though never its stated program, is to stick up for empire and its program of enforced encounter. “However oppressive and alienating, empire implies contact and exchange: connections rather than hermetic insularity” (72). One occasionally gets the impression that empire is unjust only when it speaks with a brogue.

But Hawes is a literary critic and perhaps could be forgiven a certain historical fuzziness. The problem, then, is that this point holds true for the literature he discusses, as well. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* may be a bleak satire on the failures of South Asian decolonization, the hijacking of independence by corrupt Indian and Pakistani elites. But it is also a novel that asks us to view history through the eyes of a half-white factory owner, its narrator Saleem, who teaches us to despise ordinary Asians—whom he variously describes as “the monster,” “the monster in the streets,” and “the many-headed monster of the crowd”—before complaining, in the novel’s decisive final sentence, that India has been destroyed by the “annihilating whirlpool of the multitude.” It is also difficult to see how Hawes can exempt *Midnight’s Children* from his general attack on fables of national origin, since the book is overtly a fairy tale of the Indian nation, in which all the children born in the first hour of Hindustani independence literally have superpowers. In order to cast Rushdie as a heroically dissenting humanist, Hawes has to overlook some of the novel’s most basic features.

We can extend the point back to the eighteenth century. Hawes’s account of Johnson’s cosmopolitanism is genuinely puzzling, since evidence of Johnson’s national spirit is not hard to find. Johnson opposed the American Revolution; he threw his weight behind Warren Hastings in India; and he wrote short, thumping biographies of English naval heroes. He also compiled a rather famous dictionary of the English language, for which he took as one of his more pressing tasks the exclusion of fashionable Gallicisms. It is true that when Johnson wrote about the *Dictionary*, he often struck an antinationalist note, but then we should listen carefully to how this cosmopolitanism sounds: he says that Britain is a “new world” that he means “to invade,” so that even if he does not “complete the conquest,” future linguists might approach the British “to reduce them wholly to subjection and settle them under laws.”<sup>1</sup> When Johnson does not speak as an English-

1. See Johnson’s *Plan of an English Dictionary* (1747), in *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Arthur Murphy and Francis Pearson Walesby, 11 vols. (Oxford, 1825), 5:21. On the nationalist and imperial Johnson, see also Nicholas Hudson, *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

man, he speaks, fantastically, as a Roman imperialist, and this is the persona that we must hear speaking throughout his willfully onerous, doggedly classicist prose. Johnson does not just style himself the last northern humanist; he styles himself the last centurion. It is this voice that Macaulay and others will adopt half a century after Johnson's death when they explain that England was once gaily conquered by the Romans and again intellectually colonized during the revival of letters—Johnson's way of putting it is that the English emerged from the barbarity around the time of Shakespeare—which means that the British Empire exists merely to export the Renaissance, to guide the Indians through a process that the Anglos have already undergone, which is the liquidation of one's indigenous culture. Johnson can no doubt help us make short work of certain Celtic myths of racial purity, but he also bequeathed to the nineteenth century an alternate imperialism. The British did not build croft cottages in Calcutta; they built Palladian mansions. And Macaulay did not want Indians to read Welsh ballads; he wanted them to read Milton and Hume.

The problems do not end with Johnson. Hawes may have mixed feelings about empire, but he is eager all the same to establish the eighteenth century's anti-imperialist credentials. On this front, the book has some illuminating things to say about John Gay's *Polly*, the little-read sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, which unexpectedly moves its scene from London to the West Indies. But Hawes's proof text is, as one might expect, *Gulliver's Travels*, which he reads as a comprehensive attack on the first British Empire, a fierce satire on a middle-class Dissenter who travels the world in search of gain and finally learns to loathe his very Englishness. Hawes is on familiar territory here, furthering a case already made, often about the entire genre of eighteenth-century satire, by E. P. Thompson, Edward Said, Carole Fabricant, and others,<sup>2</sup> though no one else, to my knowledge, has thought to read *Tristram Shandy's* famous jokes about noses as a preemptive attack on a scientific racism that did not exist yet. If you are already convinced by the Left Swift or the Left Sterne, you will probably appreciate Hawes's anti-imperial amplification of the theme, and it is persuasive enough as far as it goes. But in order to keep the argument intact, Hawes has to ignore a considerable body of scholarship that sees the Tory satirists, including Sterne, as defending the old Christian and landed order, however oddly and obliquely and violently. Swift and

2. E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), esp. 216–18; Carole Fabricant, *Swift's Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Edward Said, *The World, the Text, the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 72–73.

Sterne were Anglican priests, and Hawes does not seem to appreciate how hard it is to turn these Tory churchmen into left-wing Enlighteners—a term he uses regularly—committed to democracy and rationality. Here is a partial list of the things that Swift and Sterne satirize: public debate, private debate, scholars, mathematicians, philosopher-kings, learned gentlemen, encyclopedists, and Dissenters. We can probably add empire to that list, at least in Swift's case, but it is not entirely clear what we'll have gained by doing so.

Hawes does not have to agree with the critics who have cataloged all that is orthodox and anti-Enlightenment in Swift & Co.,<sup>3</sup> but he might want to provide some fresh evidence to explain why those critics are wrong. Simply calling John Gay a proto-Marxist is not enough. Hawes's only fresh evidence that the men in wigs will save us is the use to which postcolonial writers have put them. There is a genuinely intriguing point here. Hawes is surely right to say that non-European writers have a more complicated and productive relationship to the English eighteenth century than one of simple, Foucault-inspired hostility. Once the *Opera Wonyosi* has come into the world, the public meanings of *The Beggar's Opera* have been permanently changed. But surely we will make better sense of that relationship if we think of non-European writers as creatively rewriting, adapting, and transforming their eighteenth-century sources, and not as straightforwardly extending those sources' legacy. Hawes seems to think that if a postcolonial writer consults an eighteenth-century text, that text must have been anti-imperialist all along—and it is this presumption of continuity that finally hobbles his argument. He is determined to locate the beginnings of postcolonial writing in the eighteenth century, to proclaim Johnson and John Gay to be the “great precursors” to postcolonial literature. It is more than a little mysterious that a critic who wants us to reject as fraudulent all fables of origin should be so determined to script one of his own. Hawes comes to us as a student of the Left-cosmopolitan eighteenth century, but he may in fact be its Ossian.

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3. See, e.g., Warren Montag, *The Unthinkable Swift: The Spontaneous Philosophy of a Church of England Man* (London: Verso, 1994); or Melvyn New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist: A Reading of "Tristram Shandy"* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1969).