

The Passion of Edmund Burke: “To Dr H——n” Revisited

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ABSTRACT This essay is the first detailed study of “To Dr H——n” (1748), a poem attributed to the young Edmund Burke. It argues that the ode’s addressee was the Catholic doctor Paul Hiffernan, and suggests that it responded to Hiffernan’s physico-theological *Reflections on the Structure and Passions of Man* (1748). Hiffernan and Burke were drawn together by efforts to reform Dublin theatrical culture, in a debate with fraught political and confessional dimensions. Set in this context, the ode sheds light on Burke’s early thinking on the passions, significant for the genesis of his *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), and reinforces the connection in his work of literary, moral, and political concerns. **KEYWORDS:** Irish Patriot reform discourse; physico-theology; anti-Sheridan campaign; Samson and Delilah in poetry; *The Reformer*; ludic texts

☞ This essay is the first detailed study of “To Dr H——n” (1748), a poem attributed to the eighteen-year-old Edmund Burke.¹ It identifies the addressee of the ode as the Catholic doctor and man of letters Paul Hiffernan, and elucidates the poem’s relationship with Hiffernan’s curious *Reflections on the Structure and Passions of Man* (1748).² Setting these works into dialogue helps to clarify the development of Burke’s thinking on the passions and contributes to our understanding of the deep connections in his writings—increasingly insisted on by Burke scholars—between the literary arts

1. Unless otherwise noted, quotations of the poem are from the printed edition in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, gen. ed. Paul Langford, vol. 1, *The Early Writings*, ed. T. O. McLoughlin and James T. Boulton (Oxford, 1997) [hereafter *EW*], 30–38; hereafter citations of the poem will be to *TDH*, by line number.

2. Paul Hiffernan, *Reflections on the Structure, and Passions of Man. The latter reduc’d to one common Principle* (Dublin: James Hooey, 1748); *Reflections on the Structure, and Passions, of Man, Under the following Heads* (London: G. Woodfall, 1748) [hereafter *Reflections*]. Barring the title pages, the texts of the editions are seemingly identical; references will follow the London edition’s pagination.

of poetry and theater, religion and learning, and public morality and politics, as well as between Burke's Dublin activities and his later career in London.³

After establishing Hiffernan as the ode's addressee, the essay sets "To Dr H—n" in the context of Burke's early literary activities and his comments on the passions, partly to strengthen its not-unassailable attribution to Burke and partly to gloss its portrayal of the unassailable power of erotic love. This leads to a consideration of a central philosophical problem for Hiffernan's *Reflections*—the source of the passions—a problem Burke posed in the ode and attempted again to resolve in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; rev. 2nd ed., 1759). Hiffernan's treatment of this question makes surprising Burke's apparent enthusiasm for the *Reflections*, but the treatise's broader program goes some way toward explaining Burke's engagement, which both reflects his Irish Patriot affiliations and anticipates the concerns and modes of the *Enquiry*. A concluding section reintegrates Burke's ode into its context of politically charged theatrical controversy and Irish Patriotism. The essay's approach is interdisciplinary. Drawing particularly on Richard Bourke's biography of Burke, it explores the intellectual history of several texts beyond the pale of canonical debate. It touches on cultural-historical questions about interconfessional interactions and social identity in colonial Ireland, in dialogue with the rich work of theater historian Helen Burke. Guided by literary and hermeneutic puzzles, the essay also considers questions of genre, mode, and intertextuality, adapting a model of the ludic text articulated by Yasmin Haskell that is fertile for interpreting eighteenth-century juvenilia and "undergraduate" productions.

"To Dr H—n" (henceforth *TDH*) was first attributed to Burke by T. O. McLoughlin and James Boulton in 1997, in the standard scholarly edition of Burke's works. It is preserved among Burke's papers in one unsigned manuscript, dated at its head ("Feb: 6: 1747" [i.e., 1748, new style]) and after its last line ("Feb: 19").⁴ It thus comes from Burke's late teens at Trinity College Dublin and the period of a "furor poeticus," when he produced a number of poems and verse translations (some pub-

3. See, variously, Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge, 1993); Frans De Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* (Oxford, 1996); F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998); Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge, 2003); Paddy Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, 2011); Ian Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit: Edmund Burke and the Role of the Critic in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, Calif., 2012); and Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, N.J., 2015).

4. The manuscript, F(M)A.xxiv.108–9, in the Fitzwilliam (Milton) Burke collection held at the Northamptonshire Records Office, Northampton, comprises two bifolia with stitching marks down their center folds. It belongs to a bundle of 115 items dating from the 1740s to the 1790s, containing miscellaneous poems (mostly from the latter part of the period), notes in Burke's hand, letters to Burke, notes by or relating to Edmund and Richard Burke, legal and financial documents, and a few of Jane Burke's papers.

lished) and included scraps of lyrics in his letters.⁵ The manuscript appears to be a fair copy with a handful of marginal changes and alternatives entered by the text hand. The hand is not obviously Burke's, but then others did transcribe his writings.⁶ The ode is a substantial poetic undertaking, weighing in at 249 lines of carefully crafted verse. After an extended celebratory invocation of H—n, it moves to the Old Testament figure of Samson, dramatizing in passionate dialogues the hero's fall at the hands of his lover Delilah, and exhorting the reader to visualize and empathize with the unfolding tragedy. Unifying *TDH* is the passion of love. In this, it resonates strongly with Burke's approach to the passions in the 1740s and 1750s, which was to issue in the *Philosophical Enquiry*. He wrote in the preface to the 1757 edition of the *Enquiry* that his primary subjects

had formerly engaged a great deal of his attention. But he often found himself greatly at a loss; he found that he was far from having any thing like an exact theory of our passions, or a knowledge of their genuine sources; he found that he could not reduce his notions to any fixed or consistent principles. (*EW*, 188)

The ode can be regarded as part of Burke's early wrestling with these subjects. Like the *Enquiry*, it summons up the sublime of Longinus, and worries over the beauty of the female sex. Parallels with Burke's other youthful writings extend to the poem's thematizing of freedom, its imitative mode, and a difficult-to-construe voice that can encourage readers to hover between "straight" and ironic interpretations.⁷ But if Burke can be relatively safely treated as the author of *TDH*, then its addressee has been less securely identified.

☞ To Dr. Whom?

McLoughlin and Boulton suggested that the ode most likely addressed the recently deceased Francis Hutcheson, the Irish-born moral philosopher with whose treatises on taste, passion, and morality Burke would engage in his *Enquiry* (*EW*, 30).⁸

5. Burke to Richard Shackleton, March 21, 1747, in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas Copeland (Chicago, 1958), 89.

6. Richard Bourke describes an example in "Party, Parliament, and Conquest in Newly Ascribed Burke Manuscripts," *Historical Journal* 55 (2012): 619–52 at 620–24. The hand of F(M) A.xxiv.108–9 is relatively unusual among Burke's papers in its formality, the extent of its flourishes, its use of contractions, and its capitalization norms.

7. On irony, imitation, and liberty, see the editors' commentary in *Writings*, 15–20; on literary imitation more broadly, see De Bruyn, *Literary Genres*. In another essay in preparation, I discuss the poem as an imitation of John Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* (1697).

8. *EW*, 30. The suggestion is followed, sometimes cautiously, by Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 120; Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit*, 265n73; Katherine O'Donnell, "'Dear Dicky,' 'Dear Dick,' 'Dear Friend,' 'Dear Shackleton': Edmund Burke's Love for Richard Shackleton," *Studies in English Literature* 46 (2006): 619–40 at 629–30.

The poem's vocabulary resonates especially with Hutcheson's *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (1728). Yet, as Helen Burke has noted in passing, a much more probable addressee is Paul Hiffernan (1719?–1777).⁹ Hiffernan needs some introduction, as an obscure character whose ease in making enemies and apparent shiftlessness in later life has left its mark on what exists in the way of biographical assessments. A nasty, untrustworthy, lazy, talentless hack and drunkard emerges from the scanty accounts of his career as a critic and playwright in London, where he lived from the 1750s.¹⁰ But in 1748 Hiffernan, roughly ten years older than Burke, may have struck the eighteen-year-old as a well-traveled, well-educated professional (while Burke was taking his own undergraduate examinations) and a published writer, offering firsthand knowledge of current natural philosophy and Continental debates on morality and politics.

In 1748, Hiffernan had recently returned to Dublin from France after training abortively for the priesthood and then studying medicine, allegedly meeting Rousseau in the course of his studies.¹¹ After some efforts in Dublin to practice as a doctor, he devoted himself to writing and later supported himself through his pen. Two poems had been published before his time in France: *The Poet*, dedicated to Swift; and *The Enthusiasm*, a patriotic encomium whose dedication urged the “young Gentlemen” of Trinity to emulate the Dean's example and “shake off” Ireland's “undeserved and malicious” reputation for “dulness.”¹² In the period of concern here, Hiffernan's activities as doctor and writer were closely connected, most obviously in *An Expostulatory Letter to the Venereal Doctor* (1747), which lamented the prevalence of quacks and the poor standing of venereal doctors in Ireland and advertised Hiffernan's own expertise as someone trained in cutting-edge treatments at Montpellier and Paris.¹³ Hiffernan also engaged strongly in the theater, philosophy, and journalism, taking part in an intense paper war alongside Edmund Burke and his small circle of

9. Helen Burke, “Speaking from Behind the Scenes: Edmund Burke and the Lucasians, 1748–49,” in *Edmund Burke's Irish Identities*, ed. Séan Donlan (Dublin, 2007), 43n42.

10. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *ODNB*], s.v. “Hiffernan, Paul (1719?–1777),” by Betty Rizzo, last modified September 23, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13222>; *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge, 2009), s.v. “Hiffernan, Paul,” by Patrick Geoghegan, accessed July 1, 2018, <https://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a3996>.

11. “Memoirs of Dr. Paul Hiffernan,” *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, May 1794, 297–301 and 416–23 at 297; *ODNB*, s.v. “Hiffernan, Paul.”

12. P[aul] H[iffernan], *The Poet, A Poem* (Dublin: James Hooey, 1739); P[aul] H[iffernan], *The Enthusiasm. A Poem. With a Character of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (Dublin: James Hooey, 1739), 2.

13. P[aul] H[iffernan], M. D., *An Expostulatory Letter to the Venereal Doctor* (Dublin, 1747). A later Latin pamphlet, *Eroto-Machia* (Cnidus, 5755 [i.e., London, 1755]), more extravagantly combined intimate medicine with poetic and religious pretensions, a set of interests explored further below.

friends against Thomas Sheridan, the director of the Theatre Royal in Smock Alley.¹⁴ Although the full extent of collaboration and ideological conformity between Hiffennan and Burke's friends is debatable, Helen Burke is undoubtedly right to see their productions "as intricately interwoven assertions by two groups" of self-identified Patriots.¹⁵

At stake for Burke's circle were personal aspirations—his friend Beaumont Brennan wanted Sheridan to stage his play *The Lawsuit*—that were also part of a larger Irish Patriot program. The taste exhibited and inculcated in the theater was crucial to the morality and flourishing of the nation, argued Burke's circle in their main contribution to the debate, a short-lived paper called *The Reformer* (January 28 to April 21, 1748). Improving Irish taste meant not only reforming audience behavior and professional standards in the theater (reforms Sheridan himself undertook) but also weaning spectators off an immature dependence on English fare by encouraging "such Productions of our own as promise a Genius," productions that should themselves model taste and morality.¹⁶ Also at stake was a more directly political agenda, prosecuted particularly by Hiffennan in his paper *The Tickler*, since critics aligned Sheridan not only with the Lord Lieutenancy and English metropolitan culture, but also with the Dublin politician Charles Lucas. Lucas was an apothecary turned populist and (at that time) vehemently anti-Catholic agitator who used Smock Alley as one of his forums, speaking out at the theater, writing in Sheridan's favor, and eventually renting him lodgings at his house.

According to Burke's roommate and coconspirator William Dennis, it was through Hiffennan's recommendation to the printer Joseph Cotter that Burke's first publication appeared, *Punch's Petition to Mr Sh[erida]n* (January 1748). A letter from Dennis to Burke's closest school friend, Richard Shackleton, relates a chance meeting with Hiffennan, who praised Burke's manuscript pamphlet, and invited them to join "a party of friends which he has secured already." This "association in defence of Irish wit" will "persecute [Sheridan] daily from different printers," "charging the town with a heap of papers on Sheridan, proving him an arrogant ass," until Brennan's play is produced, "and we have established liberty on the stage, and taste among the people."¹⁷

14. The episode is treated in detail by Helen Burke, *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theater, 1712–1784* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2003), 149–208. See also Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 58–65; Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit*, 124–42; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 1:54–59; T. O. McLoughlin, "The Context of Edmund Burke's *The Reformer*," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 2 (1987): 37–55; McLoughlin, "Did Burke Write *The Reformer*?" *Notes and Queries* 39 (1992): 474–77.

15. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, 152.

16. *The Reformer*, no. 1 (January 28, 1747/8), in *EW*, 68.

17. William Dennis to Richard Shackleton, January 14, 1748, in James Prior, *The Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, vol. 2 (London, 1837), 317–18.

The letter's characterization of Hiffernan as "one Dr. Hiffernan, a poet, philosopher, and play-wright in this town," points to him as the addressee of *TDH*.¹⁸ The ode opens by hailing H—n as a master of the "Delian" arts of "Physick, Philosophy, & Poetry." He is the successor to "great Longinus," author of *On the Sublime*, and credited with Longinus's dual merits of rescuing the arts "From Ignorance & Vitious Taste," and fathoming "The Structure of Man's Passions & . . . / The source from whence they flow" (lines 5, 8, 13, 10, 3–4).¹⁹ Although Hutcheson could be styled a doctor (*EW*, 31n1), he was no physician, while Hiffernan was nicknamed "the Doctor" and published under the initials P. H. M.D.²⁰ And only Hiffernan was a published poet. *The Enthusiasm* indeed repeatedly invokes Apollo and turns on a classical rhetoric of ascent and inflation that might indicate Hiffernan's youthful engagement with the sublime.²¹

The Reformer suggests still closer connections between Hiffernan and *TDH*. On January 28, just over a week before the ode's opening date, the paper's first issue announced the aims of dispelling "Ignorance" and "restoring Taste to its long usurped Rights" (*EW*, 68, 69). It included a mock advertisement satirizing Charles Lucas, written almost certainly by Hiffernan.²² And it contained a notice for subscriptions to "*Reflexions on the Structure and Passions of Man. The latter reduced to one common Principal*," by "P. H. ## M. D." (*EW*, 71). The pairing of structure with the passions and emphasis on tracing the passions' single source matches the language of the ode more closely than does the title of Hutcheson's *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*—so closely in fact that we might wonder whether the ode was once intended as a dedication for publication alongside Hiffernan's *Reflections*.²³ The advertisement promises that the *Reflections* will be published "positively . . . in the Month of *February*," but, as Richard Bourke notes, on March 17 the *Reformer* was still reassuring readers that the book would soon appear (and that subscribers' down payments had not been thrown away).²⁴ When the *Reflections* were eventually published, they showed Hiffernan again invoking the Delian god: the

18. Dennis to Shackleton, January 14, 1748, in Prior, *Life of Oliver Goldsmith*, 2:316.

19. As Burke's editors note, Longinus was believed to have written a lost treatise on the passions (*EW*, 32n1).

20. See *ODNB*, s.v. "Hiffernan, Paul." *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, s.v. "Hiffernan, Paul," suggests that Hiffernan's claim to be a fully qualified doctor "was probably spurious."

21. H[iffernan], *The Enthusiasm*; on poetic ascent, compare H[iffernan], *The Poet*, 7. There is also a borrowing from Longinus in *Reflections*, 26, when Hiffernan observes that "Man alone can find nothing in this World, that can satisfy the Immensity of his Desires; an obvious convincing Proof of his being designed for a nobler End." Compare Longinus, *On the Sublime* 35.2–3.

22. See *EW*, 69–70; Burke, *Riotous Performances*, 174–78.

23. A more distant possibility is that the manuscript was prepared for presentation at the literary-rhetorical club that Burke founded in his student days. On the practice of preparing fair copies of poems, see the club minutes in *The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*, ed. Arthur P. I. Samuels and Arthur Warren Samuels (Cambridge, 1923), 268.

24. *EW*, 71; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 62.

author advertises his status as a doctor, and plays up the connection between health and poetry—the physician and poet—under the patronage of Apollo.²⁵ Finally, the opening apostrophe to H—n in the ode structurally recalls the opening of a programmatic poem in the first issue of *The Reformer*:

Say, H—n, for thou canst truly say,
 To thee is given to know
 The Structure of Man's Passions, & display
 The source from whence they flow[.]
 (*TDH*, lines 1–4)

O yes! O yes! if any Man can tell
 Where WIT or SENSE are fled, or where they dwell;
 Let him stand forth[.]
 (*EW*, 69)²⁶

Evidently, then, *TDH* is addressed to Hifferran and belongs in some extended way to the “heap of papers” produced to “establish liberty on the stage, and taste among the people.” While scholars have debated the political and religious dimensions of this group of writings, situating *TDH* and the *Reflections* in this context draws attention to the young Patriots’ overlapping concern with the passions.

☞ Eros before the *Philosophical Enquiry*

The identification of Hifferran as the addressee of *TDH* resolves numerous details of the ode’s language and context. But it also raises fresh questions about this peculiar poem’s textual history and its relationships to the theater, the *Reflections*, and Burke’s contemporaneous engagement with the passions. This is especially true both because the ode is no straightforward paean to its addressee, and because in its involved poetic construction and relatively imposing length, it seems to escape any narrow identification of purpose. After a seven-stanza proem, the remaining thirty-four stanzas of irregular verse tell the story of Samson and Delilah, from the hero’s triumphant return to his consort after defeating the Philistines, to his capture at her hands, blinding, and death. The ode’s central topic is love, and the proem’s long first sentences (lines 1–20) introduce this passion, repeatedly entreating H—n to “Say . . . , for thou canst truly say,” “Say then since thou canst tell / What strange despotick Laws, / What unseen & mysterious Cause / Rules these that love, & love, alas! too well” (lines 1, 17–20). In fact, a long parenthesis from lines 1–17 makes the invocation of H—n a mere aside.²⁷ The effect is ironic, particularly given the invocation’s

25. *Reflections*, 20–22.

26. In *TDH*, lines 17–20, a second invocation to H—n uses the rhyme *tell/well*.

27. F(M)A.xxiv.108a; the parenthesis is absent in *EW*.

fulsome praise of a virtually unknown figure as the only man in history to successfully combine medicine, philosophy, and poetry.²⁸ The addressee, moreover, has no right of reply at the poem's end, disappearing entirely after the proem. For all we know, the two unequal halves of the poem were conceived at different times and somewhat awkwardly combined. But rhetorically, the existing structure suggests that the addressee has no real answers for Burke. Pointing in this direction, Boulton and McLoughlin noted that Hutcheson (as assumed addressee) had treated love "generally" and "superficially" in his treatises, "underestimat[ing]" what Burke's *Enquiry* would portray as a "prime cause of human action": the nexus of love, beauty, sexual desire, and sociability.²⁹

Certainly, H——n is sidelined from the ode. If this is a song of praise, then it might be construed as a skeptical or hesitant one. In view of its difficult-to-place mode, I approach this piece of juvenilia as "ludic," borrowing the sense Yasmin Haskell gives the term for eighteenth-century classroom poetry. Literally "of the school," ludic productions have playful, exploratory, and often ironic aspects; and they are play-ful, related to cultures of theatricality, impersonation, and performance.³⁰ Given that *TDH* was apparently never published, its author may well have decided it was a failed exploration. Nonetheless, with this ludic mode in mind, we can attempt exploratory answers to questions of attribution. Could the ode be by another member of Burke's or Hiffernan's circles? Although not invulnerable, the poem's attribution to Burke is supported by his biography and parallels with his other early writings, especially his anxieties about erotic love.

The "illusions" of love were something Burke's influential schoolmaster Abraham Shackleton, his friend Richard's father, considered "injurious to morals, and subversive of sound principles."³¹ Burke's poem fragment "Almighty Selflove," included in a letter to Richard, set out to "trace the Passions to this common source," self-love, "vulgarly call[ed] love of women."³² This strikes an obvious chord with the *Reflections*' advertised claim to trace the passions to a single source and with *TDH*'s assumption that this common source will be eros; the authors clearly shared an interest in Enlightenment methods of reducing complex phenomena to first principles.

28. Burke's undergraduate poetic taste certainly extended to mocking his friends; see "On a Bad Poet's Turning Critic," in *Poems on Several Occasions* (Dublin, 1748), 96–97; *EW*, 44–45.

29. *EW*, 31. Of course, identifying the ode's addressee as Hiffernan does not exclude seeing within it a pushback against Hutcheson.

30. Yasmin Haskell, "Arts and Games of Love: Genre, Gender and Special Friendships in Eighteenth-Century Jesuit Poetry," in *Ordering Emotions in Europe*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Leiden, 2015), 225–44; Haskell, "Latinitas Iesu: Neo-Latin Writing and the Literary-Emotional Communities of the Old Society of Jesus," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov, last modified April 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190639631.013.21>.

31. Advertisement for Ballitore school, quoted in "Sketch of the Life, with Some Original Anecdotes of Mr. Burke," in *Beauties of the Late Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, vol. 1 (London, 1798), ii.

32. Burke to Shackleton, July 10, 1744, *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 28–29.

Burke's early misapprehensions about love also peep through in other poetic writings. In a translation of Theocritus, Burke added a new, cruel image of how "Love, who rules the strong" "dragged along" Adonis and "Lashed him."³³ Again, in a published paraphrase of Virgil from this period, he takes the Latin poet's question—why does the Sun stay so long under the ocean on winter nights?—and glosses it with his own: "What Love detains [the Sun's chariots] in the Realms below?"³⁴

The connection of love with cords, lashes, reins, and binding is continued and intensified in *TDH*. Following the biblical narrative of Judges, the poem relates Delilah's repeated attempts to constrain Samson—with bowstrings, new cords, and by tying his hair up in a loom, before finally cutting his hair. It makes these physical bindings, along with the paralysis of sleep, into a mirror of the hero's binding by his own desire. In a scenario like that in Burke's Virgil paraphrase, Delilah cuts Samson's hair as "soon as Somnus' gilded Reins / Bound in their silken Fold / The man whom strongest brazen Chains / Had not the power to hold" (lines 209–12).³⁵ In the poem's opening, Love is a "Divinity" whose "Rage" conquers the wise and the strong (lines 26–27). And the poem ends with the death of Samson, "with slaughter'd Foes oerwhelm'd," after pulling down the pillars of the Philistine temple (line 242). In Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671)—the ode's primary literary precursor in treating the story of Samson—this ending offered a vindication of God's purposes through the vicissitudes of human weakness and desire. But for *TDH*, the mighty warrior's death reinforces the still mightier power of love. The last stanza points the moral:

Such is the Power of mighty Love
Which not alone can move
The weak enfeebled mind,
But furious in it's Course
With more than human Force
The noblest Soul fast in it's Chains can bind—
(Lines 244–49)³⁶

The poetics of binding and the theme of tyrannical eros, then, connect Burke's early poetry.

33. See *Leadbeater Papers*, vol. 1, ed. Mary Leadbeater (London, 1862), 170.

34. "O fortunatos nimium, &c. paraphras'd," line 46, in *Poems*, 15–22; *EW*, 38–43.

35. The parallel between the sojourn of the sun and that of Samson is perhaps more than incidental given the tradition of deriving Samson's name from "Shemesh, the sun" and comparing him with the sun as "strong man" in Psalm 19, as well as with the sun/Son of God. Matthew Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, 5th ed., vol. 1 (London, 1761), commentary on Judges 13:24. The tradition is drawn on in Handel's *Samson*, act 3, scene 1. See Miranda Stan-
yon, "The Changes, or Plus ça change? Newburgh Hamilton's Early Writings and the Politics of Handel's Librettos," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142 (2017): 221–55 at 249.

36. For the deleted word, see F(M)A.xxiv.109a.

An immediate occasion and particular friendship also contextualize the poem: a few days before the ode was begun, Burke had received a poem from Richard Shackleton dedicated to his “Mistresses.”³⁷ Katherine O’Donnell has briefly but suggestively presented *TDH* as a riposte to Shackleton that, for her, reveals Burke’s pervasive discomfort with heterosexual desire and female company, a discomfort magnified by erotic affection for Shackleton, who was soon to be married.³⁸ Burke’s letters to Shackleton repeatedly worry about eros. In 1744, for example, he writes about an unhappy lover who had recently committed suicide in Dublin. This “convinced [him] that there is such a thing as love” and “that it may . . . be the source of as many misfortunes” as others said; he reflected, “with how much craft and sutlety our great Enemy endeavours by all means to work our Destruction, how he lays a bait in every thing.”³⁹

Love and the passions were further explored in the well-known “club” or “Academy of Belles Lettres” founded by Burke and university friends, which may still have been meeting in 1748. Held twice weekly for debate, speechifying, recitation, procedural rulemaking and rulebreaking, the program of the club has continuities with the 1748 campaign to reform theatrical taste as well as with Burke’s later career in Parliament. It was also a central site for Burke’s practice of virtuous homosocial friendship and for working through what the *Enquiry* would call his “exact theory of our passions.” As the records of the club make plain, speakers did not always adopt their own opinions in debate and could be given prescribed roles. Burke’s statements on the passions in this context must therefore be read cautiously: again, as ludic but not therefore necessarily insincere. In this context, commonplaces are particularly revealing of what Burke thought to be common knowledge. When ordered to make an “extempore commonplace of the Sermon” on the Mount, Burke is recorded to have begun by “observ[ing] how much the Christian morality exceeds the best heathen by refining our passions, not only our actions, but their spring, the heart. Our divine physician heals the corrupted source.”⁴⁰ After another meeting, when the club decided to ban a debate on the restriction of Irish trade by the English (a ban Burke opposed), someone proposes the topic of the eradication of the passions. “Burke [is] for it.”⁴¹ At the following meeting, half a year before our poem, Burke’s speech

declaims against the passions, as ye Root whence every vice has its
nourishment & growth. Wisdome & virtue, ye children, & graces of ye

37. Burke to Richard Shackleton, February 2, 1747/8, *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 101; compare *EW*, 30.

38. O’Donnell, “Dear Dicky,” 629–30.

39. Burke to Shackleton, July 7, 1744, in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 28, quoted in O’Donnell, “Dear Dicky,” 631.

40. “The Minute Book and Notes,” May 29, 1747, in *The Early Life Correspondence and Writings*, ed. Samuels and Samuels, 252.

41. “The Minute Book and Notes,” May 1, 1747, 236.

Mind: The Passions enemies to both, & Continual Rebels to Reason & Decorum. At ye Fall of Man, . . . his own Frame [was cursed] with these destructive seeds of Wickedness: Tis true they cannot be extirpated, but they should be suppressed, and as ye purchase of ye Fruit of ye Earth is ye labour that keeps down ye weeds, so ye title to Happiness is Virtue and a due exercise of Reason in subduing ye Passions.⁴²

Burke lost this debate: the club's vice president for the night judged that he had changed his tack since the previous meeting and argued for the control rather than the extirpation of the passions, which he himself conceded was impossible in a fallen world.

TDH offers another rehearsal of this bleak scenario. Samson possesses reason enough to see through Delilah's attempts to hand him over to the Philistines. But eros itself corrupts the virtues that should allow him to choose reason over passion.⁴³ Love is countered by "Truth," "Reason" (lines 50, 177), and the countervailing passions of desire for glory and fear of capture. But all ultimately prove ineffectual. In his last deliberation, "Now his strong Love impell'd, / His Reason now rebell'd, / But stronger Love decided the Debate" (lines 176–78). At the outset, Delilah's company is a "pleasing Lethe" where the martial hero "drown[s] each anxious Care" (lines 36, 34); after Samson's capitulation to his lover, "fir'd with her Beauties he greedily drew / Large Draughts of Love's poisonous Joys[,] / Till with th'intoxicating Potion drunk" (lines 203–5). In the 1750s Burke would repeatedly describe reason as a strong liquor that needs careful handling,⁴⁴ but here it is love of female beauty that is a depraving drug.

The *Reformer* shares some of this set against romantic love, warning would-be contributors that it will publish no frivolous love poems and reprimanding Sheridan for allowing kissing and other lewd behavior on the stage.⁴⁵ But it also has a more differentiated view of affective life, drawing for instance on the commonplace distinction between the passions (which dramatists should seek to move) and the appetites (to which they more commonly appeal).⁴⁶ *Reformer* 6, after relating a conversation

42. "The Minute Book and Notes," June 5, 1747, 268.

43. The reason–passion dichotomy is not strongly suggested by the biblical Samson narrative, Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, or Handel's *Samson*, but neither should it be seen as novel to Burke. Spiritual interpretations of Samson had a long history, which continued into the mid-eighteenth century in texts such as Gérard de Lairesse's widely disseminated *The Art of Painting*, trans. John Fritsch (London, 1738), 412–13, where, in a discussion of passions, the artist interpreted the battle between Samson and Delilah as one between "Understanding" (symbolized by Samson's hair) and "corrupt Affections."

44. Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 79–80.

45. *Reformer*, no. 1, in *EW*, 68; *Reformer*, no. 3 (February 11, 1747/8), in *EW*, 79.

46. *Reformer* no. 3, in *EW*, 80. Montesquieu made the same distinction in his controversial amatory romance *Le Temple de Gnide* (*The Temple at Cnidus*; 1725), a text Hiffernan alluded to in the mock publication details of *Eroto-Machia* ("Cnidi, Typis templi superiorum, Sub Montesquiani capitis signo, In luco ritibus sacro" [Cnidus, printed at the temple of the gods, under the sign of Montesquieu's head, in the grove sacred to the rites]).

with “Asper” and his dire predictions about the future of Ireland, refers the debate on the state of the nation to the state of the passions and their reform.⁴⁷ In other words, passions are to play a constructive role at the base of the program to reform taste and in doing so to reform morals.

Burke’s activities in this period, we might conclude, reflect an unfixed understanding of affective life that is developing performatively in sociable exchanges with a close circle of friends and with an imagined public whose fate will also be shaped by the health of its passions. He is strongly influenced by moral discourses connecting the passions to the vices (and virtues), seduction and sin. This vocabulary drops away in the *Enquiry* but leaves its mark in Burke’s conviction that securing religion and encouraging virtue means developing a soft science of feeling and properly defining morality’s (indirect) connection to immediate feeling. He is also drawn to a position that traces the passions to a hidden source in our fallen natures and susceptibility to self-love, an ur-passion that might masquerade as love of women (as in the fragment “Almighty Selflove”) or flow into apparently disinterested and benevolent sentiments like love of learning—for, according to another early fragment, when men of erudition forget that their aim should be “virtue” rather than “knowledge,” learning becomes that form of self-love known as “vanity,” and they are “immersed as deeply as any in the passions, prejudices, and vain opinions of the vulgar.”⁴⁸

Tracing the Passions to a Single Source

The question of whether self-love is the spring of the passions is shared by Burke’s early writings and Hiffernan’s *Reflections*, although the connection is neither unique nor straightforward. The primary motivating force of self-love was intensely debated across eighteenth-century Europe. Its roots could be traced to pessimistic Augustinianism or Epicurean philosophy. The rule of self-love was contested by Hutcheson, for instance, in his response to Hobbes and Reformed theology but was also a hallmark of Jansenism, with its emphasis on humanity’s fallen nature, and it again featured in ostensibly secular social theories like Bernard Mandeville’s, where self-love becomes a social virtue, since following our own competing self-interests will ironically contribute to a flourishing social whole.⁴⁹ Self-love frequently appears paradoxical in its ethical ramifications and blurry in its boundaries with pride, vanity, and self-interest. Stressing the social and comparative nature of self-love in the guise of *amour propre* (sometimes distinguished from *amour de soi*), Rousseau would see the passion as a cause of human corruption and improvement alike. In doing so he recalled the

47. *Reformer*, no. 6 (March 3, 1747/8), in *EW*, 91.

48. Burke, “Several Scattered Hints concerning Philosophy and Learning,” in *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, ed. H. V. F. Somerset (London, 1957), 82.

49. On Hutcheson, see James Moore, “The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: On the Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford, 1990), 47–49.

conflicted status of self-love in the writings of Augustine, as a source of man's "primal destruction" and as inseparable from true love of God.⁵⁰

The position Burke came to in the *Enquiry* firmly rejects a monocausal explanation of the passions centering on self-love, and a conflation of self-interested and society-oriented passions, though not without refuting parallel attempts to establish a natural virtuous sociability located in humans' immediate perceptions or feelings by thinkers like Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. The *Enquiry* famously works along Lockean lines to identify two positive sources for the passions—in pleasure and pain, the irreducible ideas of sensation—generating feelings of love and fear that operate not unlike the Newtonian forces of attraction and repulsion governing the physical universe.⁵¹ Explicitly separating his schema from that of Locke, where pleasure and pain exist on a single continuum of feeling, Burke also argues that our fundamental state is dispassionate tranquility, affected by neither pleasure nor pain, and he establishes "delight" as a feeling lying between terror and tranquility, and characteristic of the sublime.⁵²

The ode can be seen as reflecting an early moment in this thinking but not a step in a linear history of thought. The many differences between the ode and treatise may plausibly relate to genre as well as the passage of time. While *TDH* presents nothing like the *Enquiry*'s systematic and innovative account of the passions, the ode with its narrative form and poetic commonplaces does show Burke entertaining a more dangerous and messy kind of passion than the "mixed passion which we call love" (*PE*, 1.10) in the treatise, where pain and pleasure are tidied away into mutually exclusive categories and filed under modularized chapter headings. Love and the society of sex are not all-powerful in the *Enquiry* as they are in *TDH*. Indeed, some critics see love and beauty as carefully policed in the treatise, "defanged" and shrunk as part of a class-inflected and gendered strategy to control the power of luxury and refinement to corrupt gentlemanly civic virtue.⁵³ Such dangers are certainly already registered in *TDH*, where tyrannical love "can make / The Savage Soul refin'd" and "break" "each rugged Passion" to disastrous effects for the Israelite hero (lines 21–22, 23). Yet

50. See Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition* (Oxford, 2010); *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, s.v. "Jean Jacques Rousseau," by Christopher Bertram, last modified May 26, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/rousseau/>; Oliver O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in Augustine* (New Haven, Conn., 1980), 1; and Rowan Williams, "Augustinian Love," in *On Augustine* (London, 2016), 191–206.

51. On Burke and Newton, see Steffen Ducheyne, "'Communicating a Sort of Philosophical Solidity to Taste': Newtonian Elements in Burke's Methodology in *Philosophical Enquiry*," in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's "Philosophical Enquiry"*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michael Funk Deckard (Dordrecht, 2012), 57–68.

52. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 2nd ed. (London, 1759), pt. 1, sects. 2–4. Hereafter cited as *PE*, by part and section number.

53. See Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*, 1–2. On the gentleman-politician, see also De Bruyn, *Literary Genres*, 111–65.

in the *Enquiry*, fear, stemming from pain, is our strongest passion. And while Burke concedes that the “pleasure” of sexual love “is of a lively character, rapturous and violent, and confessedly the highest pleasure of sense,” its “absence” nonetheless “scarce amounts to an uneasiness; and except at particular times, I do not think it affects at all”—certainly lovesickness has no “connection with positive pain” (*PE*, 1.8). For the *Enquiry*, the narrator of the ode must be a knave or fool when he laments, with Samson, “What could he do? he knew full well / ’Twas death the Mystery to tell, / But could he live, & languish in her hate!” (lines 173–75).

As we might expect from the author of *TDH*, in the *Enquiry* the beautiful is rigorously separated from ideas of utility and morality. Nonetheless, forming inducements to sociable sympathy and tenderness, beautiful objects also of necessity pose no significant danger to the observer. Admiration, respect, and terror are reserved for the dichotomously opposed category of the sublime. Not for the *Enquiry* the “enraged Beauty” of Delilah, raging like “Boreas when he sweeps / The Summits of the Thracian mountains / Or on the Surface of the deeps” (lines 169–72). The beautiful is “small,” “smooth,” gently varied, and “of a delicate frame without any remarkable appearance of strength” in the treatise (*PE*, 3.18). The ode brings home none too subtly the irony that the “softer Passions” (*TDH*, line 220) can overpower apparently more vehement feelings, oriented toward immediate safety (fear) or toward public action and exertion (desire for glory, anger, or patriotism).⁵⁴ As for the sublime, in *TDH* it appears fleetingly as a marker of rhetorical-critical excellence and a synonym for loftiness (“Longinus” rescued the Muses and elevated them “on Sublime” [i.e., on high, lines 9, 12])—but not, apparently, a complex affective blend of astonishment and delight invoked to explain, say, the raging of the wind over the mountains and oceans.

It is intriguing to speculate on Hiffennan’s contribution to Burke’s early thinking on this complex of ideas. *The Reflections* draws strongly on the discourse on self-love. Hiffennan cites as predecessors for his account of the passions the poet Edward Young, then known as the author of a series of satires reissued as *Love of Fame: The Universal Passion* (1728), and the seventeenth-century wits La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld.⁵⁵ The latter’s *Maxims*, also a source for La Bruyère, can be taken to represent a skeptical-aristocratic view of the universal sway of self-love (*amour propre*).⁵⁶ The

54. On the extensive and complex tradition that separates calm from vehement passions, see Kirk Essary and Yasmin Haskell, “Calm and Violent Passions: The Genealogy of a Distinction from Quintilian to Hume,” *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 3 (2018): 55–81. Essary and Haskell discuss (most relevantly for Burke) Hutcheson and Hume, but also a wider European context, including French Jesuits active during Hiffennan’s time in France.

55. *Reflections*, vi. Cited hereafter in the text.

56. La Rochefoucauld’s early readers connected the *Maxims* with Jansenism but also with (more properly “skeptical”) libertinism. The text’s association with an aristocratic author was important from the beginning of its reception. See the introduction to François de La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections*, trans. with notes and introduction by E. H. Blackmore, A. M. Blackmore, and Francine Giguère (Oxford, 2007), xxvi–xxxiii.

epigraph observes that "Our virtues are, most often, only vices in disguise," and the opening swathe of maxims elaborates on this sentiment, setting reason and passion at loggerheads, and aligning vice with our almost inescapable obedience to disguised self-love, "the greatest flatterer" and "cleverest" enemy.⁵⁷ "Passions are unjust and self-interested, which makes it dangerous to follow them; so we should mistrust them even when they seem most reasonable," and yet "[w]e do not have enough strength to follow our reason."⁵⁸ Like the young Burke in "Almighty Selflove" ("vulgarly call[ed] love of women"), the *Maxims* maintain that "there is no passion so powerfully ruled by self-love as love."⁵⁹

Hiffernan's own account is far more optimistic, but similarly traces "All our Passions, virtuous or vicious," to "one common Principle," a theologically justified form of self-interest described as "*the ever restless Desire of bettering our present State*" after the Fall: "We see it thro' Clouds, and natural Instinct prompts us to pursue it" (24). The vicious passions, however, take pride of place, "fall[ing] collectively under the Denomination of *Vanity*" (24), and comprehending the military, social, and political passions of glory, honor, nobility, learning, and—shading into virtue—wit and satire. Emulation, introduced as "the Spring of all laudable Actions," is in fact also treated equivocally, as an instinct that can verge into competition and Schadenfreude (52). The text continues to fail to separate laudable and deplorable passions in its survey of criticism (entwined with wit), friendship, love, and finally pride. Pride is acknowledged to "run into" "self-love" to such a degree that "it is often hard to separate them" (70), and they are consequently treated together. After three-quarters of a chapter railing against the evils of self-love, Hiffernan briefly asks readers to cherish the "Quintessence" of self-love for similar reasons as emulation is cherished, and concludes by listening to the "whisper[ings]" of his own self-love, congratulating him for writing "these scattered Thoughts" "*to kindle Reflection*" in fellow men (75).

What might the young Burke have made of this analysis of the "secret movements of the Soul" (*TDH*, line 14)? As the foregoing outline indicates, Hiffernan is not a prepossessing candidate for the honors heaped on him in *TDH*. The *Reflections* offer a rough-and-ready compendium of commonplaces on the passions, stylistically unpolished and conceptually disordered. As an occasion for a cautionary ode on eros, the *Reflections* are also a curious choice. Not only do they not make romantic love their guiding passion, disposing of it in a few pages; but they also see love as "the most noble Passion, when legitimate, either Sex is capable of; being, next to Divine Adoration, what we are principally designed for while on Earth" (66). Women almost entirely escape censure in Hiffernan's warnings against errors in love, and the "sacred Mysteries" (69) of marriage are accorded a respect compromised only by the *Reflections'* tendency toward prurience. By comparison with the *Reformer's* distaste

57. La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims*, 3–5 (maxims 2, 4).

58. La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims*, 5–7, 15 (maxims 9, 42).

59. La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims*, 75 (maxim 262).

for kissing on stage, the *Reflections* seem frank: “The End of Love is, or ought to be, to *Marry*”; Hifferran explains, “which, indeed, most People do, go to Bed, and get Children” (68). Hifferran, a self-described “Single Sinner” (69), has already struck a lightly rakish, man-of-the-world pose in the text’s first section. He finds the structure of the body ripe for comments on women’s “peculiar Ornaments”—which some “prudently veil” while others “industriously display”—and his “particular Regard . . . for the *Ladies* obliges [him], in quality of a Physician, to make a Digression . . . in their Behalf, on what has been a long Time the Object of [his] Patriot Concern,” that is, the wearing of corsets and “tight Shoes” (13–14). Somewhat questionable discussions of sexual love and the fair sex were in fact not unusual with Hifferran, something one can imagine perturbing the young Burke, if he knew this.⁶⁰ Upon his death, Hifferran was remembered as a writer distinguished by “a remarkably vulgar train of thinking, and as remarkably vulgar a mode of expressing his thoughts.”⁶¹ Yet at this stage in his career, testing the boundaries of good taste had a practical and even programmatic purpose, as Hifferran was evidently positioning himself not simply as a doctor but one specializing in venereal medicine broadly conceived.⁶²

What does all this mean for Burke’s ode? A possible reading of *TDH* is as a somewhat oblique critique of Hifferran. Beyond this, one explanation for the mismatch between the texts is that Burke had not read the *Reflections* before composing his ode: after all, *TDH* was apparently completed by February 19, at least a month before the publication of Hifferran’s treatise. Two details, however, suggest that Burke was familiar with some points of the text, if perhaps from conversation or early drafts. First, Hifferran’s section “On the Structure of Man” begins with the human head, “The *Summit* of the noble Fabric, . . . shaded with useful ornamental Hair, which flowing in gentle Ringlets, have oft proved sufficient Chains to hold the proudest Heart enslav’d” (10). Second, in the discussion of vanity at the beginning of the account of the passions, Hifferran takes as his exemplum King Solomon, reputed author of the phrase “*Vanity of Vanities, and all is Vanity*.”⁶³ A paragon of wisdom, Solomon nonetheless “abandoned himself to Women, Idolatory, and all worldly Enjoyments.”

60. In *The Poet*, 5, Hifferran had extolled the chaste life of the young poet, yet lingered over the “repeated Crimes” committed by his foil, a “Rich” fool who only finds “Pleasure” in “ly[ing]” with “vile Women, or some kindred Rake.” Hifferran was lampooned for supposed venery and filthiness in *A Faithful Narrative of the Barbarous and Bloody Murder of P-l H-ff-n, M. D. Committed by himself, on Monday the 17th Day of October* (Dublin, 1748), 2–3, 5. An interest in romance appears alongside the theme of self-love in his comedy *The Self-Enamour’d: Or, the Ladies’ Doctor* (Dublin, 1750). Burke, *Riotous Performances*, 193, suggests that a version of this comedy was advertised in the *Reformer* as *The Lady’s Physician* and staged in Dublin’s Capel Street theater as part of Hifferran’s campaign against Sheridan in 1747/8.

61. *Westminster Magazine*, June 1777, quoted in ODNB, s.v. “Hifferran, Paul.”

62. While *An Expostulatory Letter to the Venereal Doctor* discusses venereal disease, *Eroto-Machia* seems to focus on virility.

63. *Reflections*, 25; Ecclesiastes 1:2.

Vice courted him in her flattering Variety of Dress. Pleasure danc'd
before him Night and Day. . . . As in the surfeiting of his unsatisfied
Heart, he from the Throne look'd down on all Pleasure human Grandeur
can afford, he broke indignant her enchanting Fetters that kept him so
long enthralld[.] (25)

Images of creatures fettered by desire thus appear at two key structuring points in the *Reflections*. The latter sees an Old Testament hero "surfeiting" himself on a feast of personified female pleasure. The former draws attention to hair both useful and ornamental, a description ironically fitting for the "flowing hair" that gives Samson his strength (*TDH*, line 147). As if to underscore the intertextual relationship, in *TDH* a pivoting stanza between the invocation to Hiffernan and the narrative of Samson and Delilah alludes to Solomon and Samson as complementary exemplars of the universal empire of love:

The greatest King, the wisest Sage
Has fall'n a Victim to his Rage,
And his Divinity been forc'd t'adore,
The strongest man, who without Spear or Shield
With slaughtered hosts has dy'd thènsanguin'd Field
Has kneel'd obsequious & confest his Power.

(Lines 25–30)

On this evidence, Burke's ode seems closely engaged with the *Reflections*, even while the texts diverge on the single source of the passions, and while Hiffernan's account of the passions cannot be seen as the single source and explanatory context for Burke's unruly poem. And yet there is more to the *Reflections* than its system of the passions. A fuller overview of the treatise will help to place more closely Burke's engagement with the piece by showing its participation in the apparently disparate discourses of physico-theology and patriot politics.

☞ Physico-theology and Patriot Politics: Hiffernan's *Reflections* in the Round

The *Body* is raised on two Pillars, cut by a middle Motion at the Knee; they variously move as the Mind directs: While our Body remains supported by one, the other, advancing, changes its Situation, which remains firm in its Turn, and so alternately, till we reach the wish'd-for Point.

—Hiffernan, *Reflections*, 16

The *Reflections* might strike readers as a plodding text. Hiffernan's only "philosophical" work, it has been treated briefly by Bourke for its attack on the penal laws—laws

later condemned by Burke—but has otherwise attracted little attention.⁶⁴ Betty Rizzo writes drily that it “was published without enhancing the author’s reputation,” and although an edition was published in London as well as Dublin, it is hard to imagine a large appreciative audience for Hiffernan’s often banal reflections and jarring mixture of genres, modes, and targets.⁶⁵ The *Reflections* sets out as a work of physico-theology, that major eighteenth-century mode of natural theology that aimed to popularize new experimental science and to harmonize its findings with orthodox Christianity. Hiffernan’s own popularizing aims are advertised in a dedication “To Common Sense” (the only “Patron that would not be displeas’d” [iii] by parts of the work—an early indication that the text does not merely rehearse common knowledge). In the spirit of William Derham’s encyclopedic *Physico-Theology: Or, a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God from his Works of Creation* (1711–12), Hiffernan’s “first Design was to give a cursory View of the *Animal Oeconomy*, but [he] was dissuaded, and advised, to confine [himself] to what is intelligible by all Capacities.”⁶⁶ Hiffernan now modestly offers a “*short easy Chain of Reflections on our Structure and Passions, . . . not perhaps unnecessary to diffuse so desirable a Study, and so seldom pursued*” as “a Knowledge of our selves” (vi).

Derham’s work had been composed for the Boyle Lectures, founded by the experimental philosopher Robert Boyle “for proving the Christian religion against notorious Infidels . . . not descending lower to any controversies, that are among Christians,” and “to answer” new “difficulties” arising in theology.⁶⁷ Appropriately, the *Reflections*’ ultimate aim is to demonstrate, through rational but commonsensical analysis of human nature, “*that among the Thousand other Proofs, the Infinity of the Creator is demonstrable from the various Lights, in which we can contemplate every Object*” (vii). The attributes of God, this wide-reaching program implies, are open to common reflection—by no means abstruse and contestable—and yet Hiffernan is already careful to maintain space for the many “Proofs” of revelation, since deism and its denial of the necessity of revealed religion form the principal new “difficulties” countered by physico-theology.

Publishing in this established genre had obvious benefits in terms of marketability and self-promotion, and ostensibly cast Hiffernan in a different light—as a benign educator, pious devotee of polite literature (poetic quotations are frequent), and cosmopolitan man of science (comparisons between British and French practices are also common)—than the angry, low, and fatalistic critic “Asper,” who appears in

64. Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 62–63.

65. ODNB, s.v. “Hiffernan, Paul”

66. In this, it chimes with the claim in *An Expostulatory Letter to the Venereal Doctor*, 5, that “No Disorder can be rationally known, or judiciously attack’d but by him who has an entire Knowledge of *Animal CEconomy*.”

67. Robert Boyle, *Works*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas Birch and Henry Miles (London, 1744), 105.

the pages of *The Tickler* and occasionally *The Reformer*.⁶⁸ Yet physico-theology is ultimately turned to polemical ends in the *Reflections*. In Hiffernan's hands, it first takes on a Patriot aspect congruent with the campaign of the "Irish wits" against Sheridan: Hiffernan reminds readers that the "Sagacious BOYLE," who "looks all Nature thro' with *Eyes of Inquisition*," was "born at *Lismore*, one of the greatest Unravellers of Nature, and foremost Honours of this Kingdom."⁶⁹ The alignment of Boyle with a positively coded "Inquisition" moreover hints, perhaps playfully, at the fact that the *Reflections* will connect physico-theology with a particular Irish socio-religious agenda: Boyle's program was associated with (Anglican) Latitudinarianism, but, as the *Reflections* unfold, they prize open a space for Catholic toleration discourse and criticism of the Ascendancy in Ireland.

This pro-Catholic discourse is highlighted by the structure of the *Reflections*. After a section on the construction of man—essentially a top-to-toe blazon of our external body parts, interlarded with effusions on the beauty of creation, citations from contemporary and classical literature, and those doctor's notes on the proper care of the female body—and a second section on the passions, the *Reflections* culminates in a section on "The Transitoriness of Life; Death; Religion, &c." The main burden of this section is the vanity of life and transitoriness of worldly dominion, themes adumbrated in the section on the passions. The rhetoric ramps up in a closing defense of revealed religion as necessitated by original sin (again, growing from the account of the passions, with their source in our instinct to restore our state after the Fall). On the face of it, this seals the work's credentials as physico-theology; yet the insistence on toleration is harnessed to topical polemic against anti-Catholic policies, sentiments, and writings—like Charles Lucas's—which had been strengthened in the wake of the Battle of the Boyne and rekindled in recent responses to the Jacobite rising in Scotland. The mode of the text largely swerves here from its often vacuous explanations and pious maxims to undisguised satire.

In this section, promoters of intolerance are "wicked Interpreters" of scripture, serving "private Ambition, or implacable Malice." Any "lunatic Zeal" for sectarian violence should land the laity in a madhouse (84). Hiffernan explicitly savages Henry Brooke's anti-Catholic tract *The Farmer's Letters to the Protestants of Ireland* (1745), and scorns Brooke's imitators: "bit by the same mad Dog," they attempt to "commit

68. Hiffernan did not use the Asper persona consistently, but Asper appears to be the name of a clown tickling Lucas on the title page of *Tickler*; Asper is also the name of a friend who visits the Reformer in no. 6. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, 174–81. The name is used in an altered sense in an attack on Hiffernan, *Asper, against Buffone; or, A Warning to the Tickler* (Dublin, [1748?]).

69. *Reflections*, 90. On the shifting political valence of physico-theology in the previous decade and its relationship with the Patriot opposition in England, see Philip Connell, "Newtonian Physico-Theology and the Varieties of Whiggism in James Thomson's *The Seasons*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 72 (2009): 1–28.

a Rape on” Fame, yet remain in “invincible Obscurity” (84–85).⁷⁰ Ironically, Hifferran goes on to advocate for “Christian *Compassion*,” which, rather than indulging in “hate,” persuades by “good Example, Complacency of Manners, Mildness, and Sweetness of Temper.” It surely does little for the book’s conciliatory tone that this sentiment is supported by references to the deist Voltaire and paradigmatic (if flexibly deployed) atheist Lucretius (86–87). Most pointedly, Hifferran excoriates the penal laws against primogeniture among Catholics, unless the heir converted to the Church of Ireland, and against Catholics’ adoption of orphans (87, 89). By encouraging family discord and limiting charity and friendship, these laws are “sapping Society in its Foundation, and stifling Nature in her Cradle, and a sure Method to beget a Nation of Rascals” (87).

Crucially, however, especially in the context of Hifferran’s relationship with Burke and the question of the latter’s disaffection with English rule, these evils are framed as national rather than imperial failures. Ireland is “a certain Island in *Europe* [who] stands infamously famous in the Eyes of her next Neighbours,” and who is undermined further by “every *mistaken* Step she takes to rise in their Esteem”: “Thus the iniquitous Servant of a discerning Master, by every unfair Scheme he proposes to ingratiate himself with him, but betrays more and more his Weakness, and Want of Principle” (87). England, by implication, is the good master and estimable neighbor, a point underscored by long quotations from the English Catholic Alexander Pope that serve to instruct readers in the true “Order of Nature” and offices of brotherly love (88). There is, then, a generalized critique of zealous lay people and “Clergy of all Sects” who need to reform their passions in conformity with God’s universal love. Beyond this, however, the pointed targets of the *Reflections* are not English lawmakers or Anglican divines but rather “Those Gentlemen in whom the *legislative* Power is vested,” and an “unchristian Gentry” whom he accuses of “abandoning *Religion*” (89). These are, to be sure, usefully vague formulations. There may be a subtext here about a native gentry that has abandoned its Catholicism in order to retain its land, and an implicit call for reconversions, and yet this would remain an undercurrent, sitting fairly uncomfortably with the general train of arguments defending dispossessed and victimized Catholic former landowners. The overt message plays to a Swiftian Patriot discourse—already activated in Hifferran’s early *Enthusiasm* and present in *The Reformer*—on the need to reform the Irish parliament and the practices of absentee landlords and other exploitative members of the “gentry.”⁷¹ In other words, Hifferran’s rhetoric, while provocative and genre-bending, keeps within the

70. Compare Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 62. In 1745–47, Sheridan sometimes hired Brooke to write paratheatrical patriotic material for Smock Alley and advertised his pieces using the “Farmer” moniker. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, 127–28.

71. The Patriot discourse in *The Enthusiasm*, which alludes to parliamentary reform, is orthodoxly pro-union, asking only (in its last couplet) that future poets “make *Hibernia*’s Name, / As join’d by Pow’r to *Albion*, join’d by Fame”; Hifferran, *The Enthusiasm*, 7.

bounds of Patriot reform discourse, rather than constituting outright anti-English dissent.

We can locate the young Burke, then, within a network of Patriot writers who could draw, however variously and however disingenuously, on a shared discourse of religious toleration and Christian *feeling* amenable to Church of Ireland, Catholic, and indeed Dissenting positions. This is suggestive for thinking through Burke's affiliations in this period. Burke's engagements with Hiffernan and his part in the paper war against Sheridan might suggest his own anticolonial sentiments, fueled by his Catholic heritage and connections. Helen Burke makes a strong case for the connections between the anti-Sheridan campaign in 1748 and the "Gentlemen's Quarrel" at Smock Alley the previous year—initiated by raucous Connaught gentlemen acting up against the polite theater espoused by Sheridan—and for the way this quarrel encoded a struggle between a Catholic or convert gentry, on one hand, and metropolitan-aligned Protestants, on the other. The "Burke-Hiffernan struggle," she concludes, was an "effort to pull down a new kind of populist Irish Protestant hegemony and a concurrent attempt to reassert the political and cultural leadership role of the traditional—Gaelic and Old English—Irish gentry."⁷² For her, the *Reformer's* ongoing engagement with Hiffernan and his Tickler-Asper persona shows most clearly that Edmund Burke was willing for his heteroglossic voice to speak from a "dispossessed Irish Catholic" as well as an "Irish Protestant patriot" tradition.⁷³

Burke is undoubtedly right to stress the layered nature of texts and personal identities, and, alongside analyses of the *Reformer* especially by T. O. McLoughlin, her work helps to undermine the accent on English-oriented and more exclusively Protestant sympathies discerned by critics like Ian Crowe.⁷⁴ The engagement with Hiffernan in *TDH* is grist to this mill. While locating the *Reformer* within long-standing English critiques of the stage, McLoughlin characterized the paper as a distinctive local project that "crusades for an Irish identity for Irish culture" and that identifies the "theatre as a manifestation of the cultural vitality of a national socio-economic system."⁷⁵ According to Crowe, McLoughlin implies an anti-union position and "diverts us from the real significance of the Patriot program." Crowe by contrast calls the paper's "national appeal to home-grown talent incidental to the wider problem of the debasement of taste."⁷⁶ At best, this seems to misread McLoughlin's arguments

72. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, 153. Compare Burke, "Speaking from Behind the Scenes," 33.

73. Burke, "Speaking from Behind the Scenes," 40.

74. Crowe sees in the young Burke "a writer committed to a cosmopolitan rhetoric of Patriot affections, sympathetic to Catholicism only in the sense that he refused to see ecclesiology as a basis for constitutional policy." Dedicated to "The wider union of Ireland and Britain," he was largely untouched "by colonial resentments or imperial disaffection"; *Patriotism and Public Spirit*, 112.

75. McLoughlin, "The Context of Edmund Burke's *The Reformer*," 42.

76. Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit*, 131–32.

about the *Reformer's* chafing at “English cultural dominance” and to risk simplifying the dynamics of empire.⁷⁷ It certainly glosses over the fact that some of the paper’s sharpest calls for Irish reform are articulated through critique *of*, and imagined critique *by*, England. “Our Countrymen are esteemed in a neighbouring Isle the dullest of Mankind,” observes the Reformer:

I don't know for what we deserve the Appellation more than the senseless Encouragement we give their wretched Productions; so plentifully do they supply, and so greedily do we swallow that Tide of fulsome *Plays, Novels, and Poems* which they pour on us, that they seem to make Stupidity their Science, and to have associated for the Destruction of Wit and Sense, and that we were bound to support them, while they despised us in return. (*EW*, 67)

England is not only a source of pollution, of course. It also provides examples for discerning emulation, is home to shared British resources (like Shakespeare), and acts as a brother nation with parallel strivings to reform bad taste.⁷⁸ We might see here part of the inevitable dialectic between the self-assigned “center” of empire and its “peripheries” that conditions Irish Patriot discourse, whether ultimately pro- or anti-union. That is, English Patriot discourse might unfold without reference to Ireland, but the reverse is not true. As postcolonial critics argue, in a structurally colonial context, thinking and writing the nation are always comparative tasks.⁷⁹

And yet Helen Burke risks overdrawing the picture of Burke’s convert identity and the politics of the 1748 paper war in another direction, first by assuming that at certain key points Edmund Burke authored or controlled the *Reformer*, and was unanimous with Hiffernan (hence the shorthand “the Burke-Hiffernan struggle”). Second, she ignores the distinctly non-Catholic and non-gentry interests that Burke’s circle evidently included in their opposition to Sheridan: witness Dennis’s letters to Richard Shackleton, which assumes the Quaker schoolteacher will support their schemes and write for the *Reformer*. As a consideration of the *Reflections* suggests, even Burke’s close engagement with Hiffernan in this period is not an engagement with a straightforwardly anti-colonial or a sectarian Catholic writer—even if it were the case that engagement meant covert or subconscious agreement. Clearly, as Burke herself by and large suggests, the agendas of Hiffernan and Burke and his friends were “interwoven” rather than aligned. If Hiffernan’s own stance is somewhat more muted than meets the eye, then, as Bourke has observed, the *Reformer* nonetheless comes

77. McLoughlin, “The Context of Edmund Burke’s *The Reformer*,” 55.

78. *Reformer*, no. 1, goes on to joke: “Since more than *Gothick* Barbarism can please at the other Side of the Channel; we intreat the Clergy of all Denominations to pray for our fallen Brethren in *England*” (*EW*, 69).

79. Compare Robert Young, “The Postcolonial Comparative,” *PMLA* 128 (2013): 683–89 at 688.

nowhere near the *Reflections*' outspoken arguments against the penal laws. Its general call to "establish a Spirit of Benevolence, good Sense and Religion," Bourke concludes, "circumnavigated the confessional divisions" of contemporary Ireland and concentrated instead on "the cultivation of taste" and "reason" especially among the gentry.⁸⁰ Having surveyed the structure of the *Reflections*, it is worth emphasizing not only its distance from the writings of Burke's circle as polemic but also its conformity with this general program: God bids us love our fellow man, the tract concludes (in part 3 and in a closing "Prayer"), and reflection on the structure of man makes plain that humans are indeed a lovable and praiseworthy sign of the Creator's work (part 1)—despite the ravages of the Fall, seen keenly in the corruption of the passions (part 2) and persecutions among Christians (part 3)—and so we are called to use our powers of reflection (one of "*the two great Ends of MAN*" [p. v] and of the *Reflections*) in order to recognize God's desires for us and reform our passions accordingly.

This admittedly charitable reading of the logic of the *Reflections* does not imply any crypto-Catholic leanings in the writings of Burke's group, of course, but it does help to understand what Burke might have seen in the text, or his discussion with Hiffernan about its concerns, to warrant such a long poem occasioned by this work (and one so ill-suited to serve as a simple puff). First, beyond its share in the broad campaign to reform morals and taste, themselves dependent on the passions, the *Reflections* likely appealed to Burke's own detailed interest in natural theology, linked with a latitudinarian position that remained hostile to deism and irreligion. According to a younger contemporary at Trinity, Michael Kearney, Burke had lent him books by Derham and other physico-theologians, and he had a "fondness for those writers that deduce the attributes of a supreme being from the works of nature."⁸¹ Burke's earliest book, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), would be a satire of the deist Bolingbroke. For William Dennis, the *Philosophical Enquiry* would correct the way Hutcheson unwittingly supported deism, since his philosophy "indirectly saps Religion by representing Virtue independent of it."⁸² Burke himself positioned the *Enquiry* as answering physico-theological purposes:

The more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we every where find of his wisdom who made it. If a discourse on the use of the parts of the body may be considered as an hymn to the Creator; the use of the passions, which are the organs of the mind, cannot be barren of praise to him, nor unproductive to ourselves of that noble and uncommon union of science and admiration, which

80. Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 63.

81. Michael Kearney to Edmond Malone, May 3, 1799, Bodl. MS Malone 39, fols. 29–30, Bodleian Library, quoted in Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 104.

82. William Dennis to Richard Shackleton, March 1758, Osborn Files 10.213, Beinecke Library, Yale University, quoted in Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 1:100.

a contemplation of the works of infinite wisdom alone can afford to a rational mind[.] (*PE*, 1.19)

When he compares his enquiry with discourses on the parts of the body, Burke recalls works like Hiffernan's, which opens its section "On the Structure of Man" by observing that "If *Galen a Pagan*, looked on himself dissecting a Cadaver, as singing a Hymn to the Praise of the Creator; a *Christian* Philosopher cannot think less nobly of himself, when he takes a Review of the human Structure actuated by the divine Particle, it's Soul."⁸³

Rather like the young Burke, too, Hiffernan in the *Reflections* deplores prejudice and blind submission to authority ("Give me to rise above all Prejudice of Tyrant Education" [91], implores the closing prayer). In keeping with some strands of Catholic Enlightenment, Hiffernan is even willing to question papal authority, for "whether commanded by *Popes, Emperors, or Kings*," Christians should "refuse that Doctrine which honest *Nature* cries, is wrong."⁸⁴ Yet Hiffernan does not therefore put ultimate faith in reason. Unusually among professed works of physico-theology, the *Reflections* touts its skepticism about the foundations of Newtonian science, while exhibiting the author's firsthand study of current medical research.⁸⁵ Hiffernan observes

83. *Reflections*, 9. This suggests less a pointed allusion to Hiffernan than a shared reference to Galen's famous "Hymn to Nature" in *The Function of the Parts*. Maud Gleason observes that Galen's "whole anatomical *oeuvre* is structured rhetorically as praise of nature (or the demiurge), whose providence and economy he hymns at every opportunity"; Gleason, "Shock and Awe: The Performance Dimension of Galen's Anatomy Demonstrations," in *Galen and the World of Knowledge*, ed. Christopher Gill, Tim Whitmarsh, and John Wilkins (Cambridge, 2009), 111.

84. *Reflections*, 89. See Ulrich Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (Oxford, 2016), especially 17–19; and Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300–1870* (Oxford, 2008), 145–58. Hiffernan's account of the passions may suggest some influence by Jansenism, a movement in conflict with papal authority. Conceivably, such strands in Catholic thought could have softened Burke's apparent dislike for the "acquired habit of Catholic servility" (Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 37), although support for Jansenism and conciliarism was unusual in Ireland. See Michael Brown, *The Irish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016), 125, 144–48.

85. On the Newtonian character of the Boyle Lectures, see Henry Guerlac and M. C. Jacob, "Bentley, Newton, and Providence: The Boyle Lectures Once More," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30 (1969): 307–18. The extent to which Hiffernan genuinely contradicts Newtonianism is debatable. Like Burke in the *Enquiry*, Newton and Locke were wary of efforts to reach final causes, although physico-theological discourse could be hazy on this point, when it came to celebrating Newton's philosophic insight into the causes of things ("*felix cognoscere causas*," read a commemorative coin for Newton struck in 1730, alluding to the happy man of Virgil's *Georgics* 2 who has learned the cause of things; see Connell, "Newtonian Physico-Theology," 20). Compare Ducheyne, "Newtonian Elements in Burke's Methodology," 63–64; and Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 82–83. Hiffernan's underlying voluntarism is probably shared with Newton, Boyle, and indeed Descartes, for whom "laws and the abrogations of laws were both manifestations of divine providence." See P. M. Heimann, "Voluntarism and Immanence: Conceptions of Nature in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no. 2 (1978): 271–83

that the "Corporal Part of Man," surveyed in the first section, was understood in ancient philosophy through the theory of the four elements; "Modern Philosophy founded on just Experiments, tho' of a quite different way of thinking, is perhaps as far distant from the first *Stamina* of Things" (23). And the "immortal Part, the Soul," with its attendant passions, is comprehended by neither of these philosophies, although the mysteries of the passions can be "penetrated" by empirical observation (24). A chapter on the vanity of learning asks, "May not System-Builders in *Physics* be compared to an idle *Apothecary* prattling on the secret Springs of Government"—an opportunistic swipe at Lucas—"or a *Cobler* torturing his poor Brain, about what passes in the Cabinets of Princes" (42). Given the rapid changes in scientific knowledge and "how limited the Mind of Man is, when prying into the Mechanism of Creation," the "most plausible System" should therefore be studied "with Caution" and an openness to new discoveries. Moderation is prudent in physics as in religion: "who knows" how long even the "Glory" of Newton will last? "This by all zealous NEWTONISTS will be turned into Ridicule," he predicts, "and I looked on as an *Arch-Heretic* in PHYSICS. His Experiments I revere, and do but glance at his general System."⁸⁶ Too great a faith in human reasoning is itself tyrannical, leading "[vulgarly called] Philosophers" (brackets in original) or "*School Smarts*" to "despotically limit [God's] Power" in their suppositions about the possible (44).

In sum, excessive faith in reason betrays another form of prejudice, in leading us to repose on "our confined Notion of Things," which will never be adequate to the wisdom of God (44). Recent scholarship identifies Burke's own positive reevaluation of prejudice and complicating of reason as occurring in the 1750s, after his move to England, study of common law, and writings against deism; and his acknowledgment of the role of reason within the affective sphere solidifies even later, after the publication of the *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757).⁸⁷ Yet certainly Burke's earlier life had already exposed him to less reductionist views of reason, albeit in this case cast in a form that does not quite command assent and linked with a confessional position that modern scholarship tends not to associate with the heart of Enlightenment thought.

at 272; further, James Force, "Providence and Newton's *Pantokrator*: Natural Law, Miracles, and Newtonian Science," in *Newton and Newtonianism: New Studies*, ed. James Force and Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht, 2004), 65–92; for a subtly contrasting position, Peter Harrison, "Was Newton a Voluntarist?," in *Newton and Newtonianism*, ed. Force and Hutton, 39–64.

86. *Reflections*, 41. In doubting Newton's overarching system, Hiffernan may register contemporary anxieties about Newton's heterodox theology, coming to light in posthumously published writings, and that of prominent Newtonians. See Scott Mandelbrote, "Eighteenth-Century Reactions to Newton's Anti-Trinitarianism," in *Newton and Newtonianism*, ed. Force and Hutton, 93–112. Hiffernan may also respond to Swift's satires on Newton and skepticism about scientific authority, on which see Gregory Lynall, *Swift and Science: The Satire, Politics, and Theology of Natural Knowledge, 1690–1730* (Basingstoke, U.K., 2012).

87. David Dwan, "Edmund Burke and the Emotions," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72 (2011): 571–93; Richard Bourke, "Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher Insole (Cambridge, 2012), 27–40.

“The Chief Uprose”: Samson, Patriot

The *Reflections* helps to locate Burke’s early writings within a multifaceted and not necessarily unified reform program developed among a network of young Irish Patriots concerned with right reason, the passions, taste, and morality. This contextualization allows me to return, in closing, to the relationship between *TDH* and the theater campaign that brought Hiffernan and Burke together, and to suggest another perspective on the ode’s ludic nature—that is, its mode of playful exploration and connection to literal sites of performance.

As Boulton and McLoughlin observe, Burke’s turn to Samson had topical relevance on February 6, 1748, given the Dublin premiere two days earlier of Handel’s *Samson*.⁸⁸ There is no evidence Burke saw the oratorio, an adaptation of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* by the former Trinity student Newburgh Hamilton.⁸⁹ He may have been aware that in 1743 Hamilton had dedicated *Samson*’s text to the Prince of Wales, then a rallying point for Whig Patriot opposition to Walpole in England, or more broadly that Handel’s oratorios aligned the Israelite and British nations, creating in *Samson* an implicit allegory about a difficult restoration of national strength under foreign oppression.⁹⁰ Whatever the case, a new reworking of the Samson material in contemporary Dublin might have incendiary implications. By 1748, the Patriot opposition to Walpole had lost its currency. In the years following the Jacobite uprising of 1745, an Irish narrative about a native hero seduced by a cruel mistress and slaughtered by heathen foes was open to a quite different allegorical reading. If many in mid-eighteenth-century Ireland felt that “popery,” in the sense of an underlying force of Catholic seditiousness, had run its course, then events in 1745 nonetheless had raised fears of Catholic rebellion—fears played on by Charles Lucas, rejected as groundless bigotry by Hiffernan’s *Tickler*, and deplored by the later Burke.⁹¹ Yet an ambiguous, ludic poem such as *TDH* might easily lend itself to narratives of native Irish dissatisfaction and resentment.

Samson’s epithets in *TDH* give a noticeably Gaelic slant to the hero, who is cast somewhat unusually as a young, noble, political leader as well as a one-man army: Samson is the “youthful Chief,” “the Chief [who] uprose,” “the youthful [manuscript: *love-sick*] Chief,” the “unwitting Chief,” “the Chieftain [who] greatly died.”⁹² The political connotations here suggest themselves more strongly given established Protestant Patriot representations of England as Ireland’s cruel mistress, a trope

88. *EW*, 31.

89. On Hamilton, see Stanyon, “*The Changes*.”

90. See Ruth Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), 292–93.

91. Compare Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 61–62, 217.

92. *TDH*, lines 42, 155, 62, 217, 243. On Samson and the interpretive tradition, see Deborah Rooke, “From Wild Man to War Hero: The Story of *Samson*,” chap. 5 in *Handel’s Israelite Oratorio Libretti: Sacred Drama and Biblical Exegesis* (Oxford, 2012).

already deployed in the theater.⁹³ The narrator's urgent summons in *TDH* to witness Samson's capture ("see where his foes have assail'd him," "Behold how he rages—Alas! he is bound"), and his "fruitless Pray'r" for the Philistines' mercy, also resonate with the Irish literary form of the "lament for the fallen nobility" (*caointe ar chéim síos na nuasal*), a subversive genre that Helen Burke suggests is put in the mouth of Hiffernan-Asper by the sympathetic writer of *Reformer*, no. 3.⁹⁴ Beyond the knowledge of particular genres and tropes that Burke might anticipate among his readers, there lies the broader convention of representing national relationships in gendered and sexual terms—whether in the discovery and penetration of virgin territories, imagining political union as seduction, rape, and marriage (as earlier in the century in Scotland), or the increasing figuring of Irish accommodation to England in poems about unfaithful and prostituted women.⁹⁵

The ode's portrayal of Samson clearly speaks to the activities of young Patriots hoping to reassert national vigor and virtue among the gentry. It dramatizes a connection between supposedly private lives devoted to leisure (taste, theater, feasting, venery) and public activity (morality, political and economic affairs, war). And it sets these in the context of problems shared by the theater with parliamentary politics and campaigning: freedom and constraint, speech and silence (Samson's deliberations, "mute [and] / Irresolute" [lines 133–34]; his repeated refusal to betray himself to Delilah; the latter's "wily Tongue" [line 80]). In other words, we can regard *TDH* not only as an exercise in thinking through the passions in response to a particular treatise but also as another way of presenting the argument that a reformation of taste and the passions was needed to renovate moral, political, and economic life in Ireland. In stressing the dangers facing the nation and its need to assert independence from depraved relationships with foreign powers, the poem perhaps unwittingly enters the field of anti-imperial dissent.

This finally suggests one possible reason for the ode's unpublished status, despite its elaborate poetic construction, evident revisions, and careful presentation. My speculation is not that Burke authored a crypto-Jacobite text suppressed because it was too hot to handle but rather that, in the immediate context of Dublin cultural life and Burke's activities in 1748, the ode would have been all too open to political

93. Burke, *Riotous Performances*, 86.

94. *TDH*, lines 223, 225, 232. Burke, "Speaking from Behind the Scenes," 40. O'Donnell argues that the same genre informs Burke's speeches on India. The argument is speculative, but it is worth rehearsing some of the genre's features in relation to *TDH*'s potential reception: these poetic laments are in the high style, helping to invest narratives of individual noblemen with moral and historical-national significance; and they can invoke pathos alongside scorn, with the poet acting as "outraged onlooker." Katherine O'Donnell, "Whether the White People Like It or Not: Edmund Burke's Speeches on India—*Caoineadh's Cáinte*," *Éire-Ireland* 37, nos. 3 & 4 (2002): 187–206, especially 195–96 at 195.

95. See especially Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance, 1660–1760* (Oxford, 2011); and Sarah McKibben, *Endangered Masculinities in Irish Poetry: 1540–1780* (Dublin, 2010).

readings that its creator may not have wanted to authorize. Writing of the Irish theater in the long eighteenth century, Helen Burke argues that “colonialism and modernity generated more politically ambiguous hybrids than properly reformed colonial subjects,” and that uncovering its “unorthodox ‘actors’” means turning “from centre stage to the theatrical peripheries—to the ‘shadow play’ . . . staged around the edges of the British colonial theatre and within the interstices of the British dramatic text.”⁹⁶ More than ambiguous human actors, my focus has been on overdetermined texts. The writings central to this essay were very much produced in the interstices of the British dramatic text (and of particular dramatic texts). And yet it is worth emphasizing that the author of *TDH* was apparently committed to being a “properly reformed” subject and to reforming other Britons. Like Milton’s closet drama *Samson Agonistes*, though in an altered sense, “To Dr H—n” may have been a dramatic text only ever equivocally intended to be “performed” in any public sphere.

For invaluable discussion of drafts and material relating to this essay, I would like to thank Richard Bourke, Yasmin Haskell, Chris Reid, Rachel Greene, Matthew Champion, members of the English and Cultural Studies Seminar and the Centre for the History of Emotions at the University of Western Australia, and the editors and reviewers of this journal. For advice on the manuscript of “To Dr H—n,” I am particularly grateful to T. O. McLoughlin, Richard Bourke, and Gavin Alexander. Research for this essay was supported by King’s College London, Christ’s College, Cambridge, and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions.

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96. Helen 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, 2007), 219, quoting David Lloyd, *Ireland after History* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1991), 77.