

12-2018

[Review of] *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914: An Intellectual History*. By Emily Jones. Oxford Historical Monographs. Edited by P. Clavin et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. x+274. \$90.00.

Philip Harling

University of Kentucky, harling@uky.edu

Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/history_facpub

 Part of the [Political History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Harling, Philip, "[Review of] *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914: An Intellectual History*. By Emily Jones. Oxford Historical Monographs. Edited by P. Clavin et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. x+274. \$90.00." (2018). *History Faculty Publications*. 9.

https://uknowledge.uky.edu/history_facpub/9

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

[**Review of**] *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914: An Intellectual History*. By **Emily Jones**. **Oxford Historical Monographs**. Edited by **P. Clavin et al.** **Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017**. Pp. **x+274**. \$**90.00**.

Notes/Citation Information

Published in *The Journal of Modern History*, v. 90, no. 4, p. 937-939.

© 2018 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

The copyright holder has granted the permission for posting the article here.

Digital Object Identifier (DOI)

<https://doi.org/10.1086/700142>

‘impolite’ and threatening noise” (164) to attack and discredit diverse genres of cheap print and popular forms of speech. But chapter 6 inverts rather than repeats this theme. Working with a different set of authors, from Aphra Behn to Adam Smith, McDowell shows where figures of Billingsgate “eloquence” with its “obscenities, slang, hyperbole and occupational argot” (193) and portrayals of fishwives (female hawkers, vendors, and sellers of fish) who were “verbally victorious” over “gentlemen” were used to critique the spread of reading and the artificial dictats and mealy-mouthed politeness promoted by print.

The strengths of *The Invention of the Oral* are that it brilliantly reproduces eighteenth-century writers’ “both-and” thinking—their habit of seeing and productively deploying multiple sides of an issue rather than plumping for one side of an “either-or;” that it fully demonstrates the interest and value of paying closer attention to contemporaries’ comments on orality and print; and that this leads us to question and critically reexamine our modern scholarly terms and taxonomies. It seems a little churlish to observe that it is never quite clear why these particular male authors figure as the most important embodiments of the developmental history being proposed, since they were not all as influential then as they subsequently became. Nor is it quite clear why this particular developmental history is presented as the sole source of “the late twentieth-century development of the compound terms ‘oral culture’ and ‘popular oral culture’” (287). As the partly anomalous chapter on satirical representations of fishwives suggests, other things were being printed and argued that could equally be construed as part of the “prehistory” (187) of these concepts. Why should Billingsgate not figure as part of the prehistory of Rap, or vendors’ verbal victories over *gentlemen* as an ancestor of popular late night satire? Why are critiques in “plebeian discourse” of gentrified forms of print, not likewise to be viewed as part of the long history of popular preference for oral and visual forms of entertainment and for information derived from “cheap print”?

EVE TAVOR BANNET

University of Oklahoma

Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914: An Intellectual History. By *Emily Jones*. Oxford Historical Monographs. Edited by *P. Clavin* et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. x+274. \$90.00.

When we think of British *C*/conservatism (both the party-political and the social philosophy) we think of Edmund Burke. A preference for slow and “organic” change and dislike for “mechanical” theories and systems of governance; a reverence for history and tradition; a deep respect for religion, property, and order—these are the foundations of what we still tend to call “Burkean” *C*/conservatism 220 years after Burke’s death. The association between Burke and such ideas has taken on the status of an immemorial truism. But the great value of Emily Jones’s perceptive and erudite book is to show that this association was the outcome of a century of writing about Burke that only gradually turned him into a *C*/conservative master spirit. Hers is a compelling and admirably well-researched study in the construction of a durable political tradition.

The reception history of Edmund Burke over the “long” nineteenth century was tortuous. It took many decades for his public image to evolve from that of an apostate Whig with a hyperactive imagination to an oracular “founder” of modern Conservatism. In the first half of the century, Whigs and Tories alike admired Burke’s eloquence, but neither side felt they could fashion his disparate body of ideas into a usable political creed. The

heirs of Charles James Fox could not forgive Burke for breaking with their idol and turning so dramatically on the French Revolution. The heirs of the younger Pitt, for their part, continued to suspect Burke for his early writings, in which he weighed the British monarchy and the East India Company in the balance and found both wanting, and in which he expressed a tad too much sympathy with American rebels and Irish Catholics. Burke was from an ancient Irish family, and his Irishness was another thing that English commentators tended to stress for a couple of generations after his death. Some saw in him a certain kind of Celtic wisdom, while others stressed a Celtic passion that devolved into madness in his last few years. Either way, Burke was deemed an Irish oddity—the father of his own crotchets and eccentricities rather than the father of any kind of British political tradition.

The second half of the nineteenth century was much kinder to Burke. From the 1860s there was a stronger tendency for Tories to praise the *Reflections*, while Liberals hailed his earlier critiques of royal prerogative and imperial excess. Both sides had come to revere Burke's dislike of abstract theory and sudden political change and his admiration for British institutions. These were sources of near-unanimous reverence by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, when virtually everyone could agree that the "British constitution" was the key to Britain's status as the greatest power the world had ever known. Thus Burke was well on his way to canonical status when the Irish Home Rule debates of the mid-1880s to the early 1890s cemented his status as a formidable and intellectually consistent political thinker. In an especially interesting chapter, Jones shows that both sides drew considerably on Burke's writings to support their arguments. Gladstone and company cited Burke's sympathy for Catholic relief and his stress on voluntary political ties in making their arguments for Home Rule. Liberal Unionists and Conservatives countered with a "Burkean" emphasis on the need to preserve the unity of the Empire and to protect the Protestant minority in Ireland from what they feared would be the Jacobinical zeal of a Catholic majority backed by the authority of a revolutionary Irish legislature. The long, zigzag course that turned Burke into a political thinker whose conservatism was both an abstract political philosophy and the basis of a specific party tradition was completed in the Edwardian era. By then, idealist philosophers such as John MacCunn and Tory politicians such as F. E. Smith and Lord Hugh Cecil were habitually citing Burke as the progenitor and champion of several vague but axiomatic conservative beliefs—hostility to sudden or dramatic constitutional change, the dogged defense of private property and the establishment in church and state, and a staunch respect for the organic nature of society. There was at this same time a vogue for identifying Burke with these C/conservative virtues in university syllabi, extension courses, school textbooks, and cheap editions of key Burkean texts, notably the *Reflections*.

One can of course find a few quibbles with even as admirable a book as Jones's. There is scarcely a mention of Tom Paine, and the dialectical relationship between Burke and Paine was surely the stuff of much interesting Victorian commentary—as it continues to be. There is likewise scarcely a mention of *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), in which Burke closely identified himself with the laissez-faire ideals of Adam Smith, famously (or infamously) lauding "the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God." The sacralization of the market was of course a pronounced Victorian trait, and it would have been instructive to see how Burke was used in this particular form of worship. While in Victorian thought the market was inspired by God, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to say that in contemporary neoliberal thought the market has replaced God. What would Burke have thought of the "creative destruction" of the market? This is a kind of destruction most outspokenly embraced by a Thatcherite (and Reaganite) right that still claims Burke for a father, but one that has wreaked havoc on the "little platoons" of society that Burke identified in *Reflections* as the "first link in the series by which

we proceed toward a love to our country, and to mankind.” It is not entirely fair to fault a book for what it is not about. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to follow Jones into a contemporary analysis of the ongoing uses—and abuses—of the still-venerated Burke.

PHILIP HARLING

University of Kentucky

Winston Churchill in British Art, 1900 to the Present Day: The Titan with Many Faces. By *Jonathan Black*.

London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Pp. xxiv+288. \$29.95 (cloth); \$26.99 (EPUB or PDF e-book).

This is a life of Churchill refracted through the work of the British or British-based artists who portrayed him from 1900, when he was first elected to the House of Commons, right up to the present day. Jonathan Black is an art historian, and reading him is rather like visiting a major exhibition in the company of its curator. No such collection as this, embracing the work of painters, sculptors, photographers, and cartoonists, has ever been assembled before. There are ninety-five illustrations in black and white and twelve colored plates, with the provenance of each work meticulously researched. Some of the items belong to a long-established Churchill iconography that includes the paintings of Orpen, Lavery, Sickert, and Sutherland, the photography of Beaton and Karsh, the sculptures of Epstein and Nemon, and the rugged, hunched figure of Roberts-Jones’s statue in Parliament Square. Churchill’s “finest hour” is captured in two famous cartoons of 1940: David Low’s “All Behind You Winston” (May 14) and Sidney Strube’s portrayal of Churchill as a bulldog (June 8). Such famous images select themselves, but Black has searched assiduously for other materials that are less well known but no less interesting. The first of his illustrations is a photograph of Churchill on campaign in Egypt in 1898, taken in Cairo in the studio of a Mr. J. Heyman. The last is a screen print of 2010 by Sarah Haines, based on a photograph of Churchill in Cairo in 1942.

Enjoyable though it is to browse through the pictures, the substance of the book lies in the text, which is both scholarly and original. As a famous politician and great war leader Churchill was bound to be photographed, caricatured, painted, and sculpted. But as Black points out, there was a potent chemistry between subject and artist. Churchill was a showman who understood that imagery was as important as language in democratic politics. Cartoonists, meanwhile, rejoiced in the variety of roles he played and the diversity of costumes in which he appeared. For a painter or sculptor, observing him in a series of sittings, he was a profoundly human but phenomenal being with a wondrous array of qualities, all in primary colors. There was something about Churchill that brought out the best in artists of all kinds and gave rise to a uniquely rewarding visual legacy. It has, admittedly, little or nothing to tell us about the workings of politics and government. But it is rich in insights into his character and helpful, too, in reflecting the way in which political perceptions of him changed over time.

Black provides an amusing account of goings on at the National Liberal Club, which in 1915 gratefully accepted the donation of a portrait of Churchill by Ernest Townsend, but twice banished it to the basement during periods when they disapproved of his politics, only to put it on show again in 1943 in the presence of Churchill himself. It still hangs there, close to the basement stairs, doubtless ready to be moved again if necessary. On the personal side Churchill’s relationship with his cousin, the sculptress Clare Sheridan, is touchingly described. A political innocent who fell in love, in swift succession, with Lenin and Trotsky, the buc-