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Portraits of Politicians: An Analysis of Three Character Sketches in Burke's Speech "On American Taxation"

> I had a conversation with Lord Erskine upon the qualifications of Burke as an orator. Lord Erskine said that his defect was *episode.* "A public speaker," he said, "should never be *episodical* – it is a very great mistake. I hold it to be a rule respecting public speaking, which ought never to be violated, that the speaker should not introduce into his oratory insular brilliant passages – they always tend to call off the minds of his hearers, and to make them wander from what ought to be the main business of his speech. If he wishes to introduce brilliant passages, *they should run along the line of his subject matter,* and never quit it. Burke's episodes were highly beautiful – I know nothing more beautiful, but they were his defects in speaking."[1]

The above critique, worthy of consideration surely because of the source, describes a supposed defect in Edmund Burke's habitual rhetorical procedures. Is this comment another bit of testimony to reinforce the old "dinner-bell" theory? If Burke often went on refining while the Parliament thought of dining was it partially because he introduced digressions (or episodes, as Erskine would have it) into his oratory which resulted in tedium for his audience?

In this paper, I would like to draw attention to the three character sketches of Grenville, Townshend, and Chatham in Burke's famous speech, "On American Taxation", given in the House of Commons on April 19, 1774. These portraits of politicians (located approximately in the middle of this long speech) might appear at first reading to be the kind of insular brilliant passages Erskine was referring to that would cause the hearers' minds to wander from the main business of this speech. I would argue, however, that these pictures are not passages which distract from Burke's argument; indeed I think the opposite is true – they serve a functional purpose since they actually *portray* or *embody* the argument. Furthermore, these character sketches reveal

Burke's use of a rhetorical technique providing the sort of vivid or lively impressions recommended in the rhetorical theory of his day. In order to accomplish my purpose, I will discuss the doctrine of vivid portraiture as found in the rhetorical-aesthetic theory of the eighteenth century; secondly, I will show how Burke's portraits follow that theory and, in addition, serve a practical purpose in the argumentative strategy he employed.

Eighteenth-century Rhetorical-Aesthetic Theory

When Burke, in his speech on American Taxation, paints his word portraits, he is composing in harmony with the dominant rhetorical-aesthetic theory of his day. During the eighteenth century, intellectuals were preoccupied with the fine arts and often drew parallels among them. Since they often considered art as mimetic, the arts could be divided on the basis of the means used to do the imitation and, perhaps, the sense for which the art was primarily intended. Thus, music imitated for the ear, painting for the eye, etc. For example, the Abbé Charles Batteux, in his *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un même principe* (1746), considered art to be an imitation of beautiful nature and included in the fine arts music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and the dance.[2] Such broad theorizing promoted the attempts to see similarities among the arts and to describe one art in terms of another. These speculations combined with a visually centered sensationalist aesthetic (e.g., Addison, in his *Spectator*) to produce an interesting poetic-rhetorical theory. For example, if painting and poetry are similar, then poetry is really a speaking picture. And, by extension all of the verbal arts are similar to painting, and thus can be speaking pictures. Addison and many others made the "pleasures of the imagination" central to the fine arts. Understandably these notions became entwined to the point where vivid description in poetry and rhetoric became a central theme. Many theories of discourse of this period suggested that the poet or orator should use language in a way to make ideas of the imagination vivid; he should use language to "paint in glowing colors".[3]

Because of the emphasis on the visual in much of the analysis of perception of the time, the mind became analogous to a *camera obscura;* and a speaker's audience or the reader of literature both

become "spectators" to the visual scenes which the poet and orator paint. John Lawson, who was a lecturer on oratory at Burke's alma mater, writes in his *Lectures Concerning Oratory* in praise of the ancients:

> The poets . . . wrought up these passages [their narrations] with their utmost Skill. If you read the History of the Death of Polyxena: of Oedipus blinding himself . . . and the beautiful one of Ajax killing himself; I am persuaded that you will be delighted with them, and acknowledge them to be Models of perfect Narration. What Choice of Circumstances: What Order, Clearness, and Brevity in relating. . . . And above all, what natural, affecting, bold Painting. This art of the Ancients seemeth indeed to make the whole Tragedy uniform; you appear to be a Spectator no less of what is related than of what is represented.[4]

As Lawson would have it, a narration of circumstances can be vivid enough to make the *scene described* as real as what is actually *portrayed* on the stage. A poet or speaker who uses words properly can make us a spectator of the scene he is describing. The ideas of the imagination become almost as vivid as actual sense perception.

Perhaps the clearest exposition of this rhetorical-poetic-aesthetic concept is found in Lord Kames' *Elements of Criticism* (1762) in his notion of "ideal presence". Kames' *Elements* is one of the many works in the second half of the eighteenth century that took a decidedly psychological approach to criticism since he wanted to explain the working of human nature as it applied to art. According to Kames, "ideal presence may be properly termed a *waking* dream."[5] If one were to look at an apple on a table, one would be experiencing real presence. If one were to picture that apple – with all its qualities of color, shape, texture, weight, etc., in one's mind, one would be experiencing ideal presence. Ideal presence is a continuum; at the one end is real presence, at the other, "reflective remembrance". Reflective remembrance is merely calling to mind some past experience without picturing the details or characteristics of that experience in one's mind. "Though ideal presence is thus distinguished from real presence on the one side, and from reflective remembrance on the other, it is, however, variable without any precise limits; rising sometimes toward the former, and often sinking toward the latter."[6] Exertion of memory can help us bring back a past experience to such distinctness or vividness that it approaches real presence. A lazy memory content with a vague recollection of the real situation sinks more nearly to reflective

remembrance. Is it possible to experience ideal presence if one has not sensed the real presence of an object or situation? For the senses of the eye and ear it is. As Kames said, "I proceed to consider the idea of a thing I never saw, raised in me by speech, by writing, or by painting. The idea, with respect to the present subject [ideal presence], is of the same nature with an idea of memory. . . . A lively and accurate description of an important event, raises in me ideas no less distinct than if I had been originally an eye-witness: I am insensibly transformed into a spectator; and have an impression that every incident is passing in my presence."[7] Kames points out that a poet or orator creates ideal presence through language. "The power of language to raise emotions, depends entirely on the raising such lively and distinct images as are here described; the reader's passions are never sensibly moved, till he be thrown into a kind of reverie; in which state, forgetting that he is reading, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness."[8] If the speaker's goal, then, is to procure an emotional response from the listener, he can do so only if his descriptive language is accurate and lively enough to produce a copy of the original impression in his mind and in the mind of his listeners. For this end, the student should be trained in the use of vivid imagery and other stylistic devices which produce emotional responses. His descriptions should engage the imagination of the listeners to such a degree that they become emotionally involved in the idea that is being transmitted.

There was an emphasis on vivid description in many treatises on aesthetics, rhetoric, and poetics in the eighteenth century; and they recommended clear and concrete presentation of verbal portraits. The particular stress on vivid or lively description in poetic treatises of the day contributed, no doubt, to the popularity of the descriptive poems of the time, such as Thomson's *Seasons* in England (one of Burke's favorites) and Brockes' poems in Germany. The fondness for detailed description was also part and parcel of the well-known change in the eighteenth century away from the abstract and general to the concrete and particular which has so often been remarked upon. But the point I want to stress is that for the theorists of the day verbal portraits were considered to fulfill three important functions: (1) they appealed to the imagination and thus held the audience's attention; (2) they were important for emotional arousal; (3) they also functioned as argument.

Actually, many theorists thought that a lively description not only helped the audience to understand or visualize an idea, but that vivid ideas were more readily accepted by an audience.

Although the notion of the lively idea or vivid description as found, for example, in Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, is an old idea in rhetoric, poetics, and aesthetics, there is no doubt that the concept was particularly revived and stressed in the eighteenth century. The importance of ancient theories of the imagination in the realm of knowledge and belief is explained well in the following passages by Kenneth Burke:

> Perhaps because theories of imagination, as a kind of *knowledge*, work best in those areas where poetic and scientist thought overlap, the concern with "imagination" as a suasive device does not reach full expression until the modern era. Also, such concern in the classical rhetorics was often treated in terms of "actualization" (*energeia*, the use of words that suggest purposive movement) and "vividness" (*enargeia*). . . .
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> Longinus tells us that in his day, imagination (*phantasia*, which contributes to *enargeia*) had "come to be used of passages where, inspired by enthusiasm and passion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience." After citing examples in *poetry* which "show a strongly mythic exaggeration, far beyond the limits of literal belief," he says that the "best use of imagination" in *rhetoric* is to convince the audience of the "reality and truth" of the speaker's assertions. He also cites passages from Demosthenes where, according to him, imagination persuades by going beyond mere argument. ("When combined with argument, it not only convinces the audience, it positively masters them.")[9]

Many of Edmund Burke's contemporaries agreed with Longinus that vivid description convinces the audience of the reality and truth of the orator's statements and with Demosthenes' claim that it persuades by mastering the audience.

Burke's Speech

Overall Strategy: Men or *Measures or Men* and *Measures*

Having discussed briefly the notion of vivid description I turn now to a consideration of Burke's speech on American taxation. I would like to point out his rhetorical goal and strategy, to suggest what function his portraits fulfilled, and, finally, to show how they do follow one aspect of the rhetorical theory discussed above.

Burke's short-range purpose was to convince the members of Parliament to abandon the tax on tea. His long-range goal, however, was to get the members of Parliament to forget any scheme to raise a parliamentary revenue from the colonies by direct taxation. The plan of the speech falls into two parts. In the first part, he says that he will speak about the "narrow and simple" grounds of deliberation and confines his attack to Lord North and the policy of taxing tea.[10] In the second, or "historical" part of the speech, however, Burke goes back to review the policy of England toward America from the time of the Act of Navigation. This section takes a broader view of the question and in it Burke presents his famous descriptions of the characters of Grenville, Chatham, and Townshend.

In his exordium, Burke had said that he would not consider "men or measures, rather than as they shall seem to me to deserve it" (242). Why did Burke seemingly interrupt his argument to take the time to paint the characters of these men? Several factors help explain why Burke chose the rhetorical strategy of discussing men as well as measures. In the first place to discuss only the issues or only the men responsible for them would have been foreign to Burke's nature. As Bryant has said, Burke's speeches are "the most complete, thorough, orderly, and exhaustive treatments of whole subjects."[11] Burke was not a speaker who normally attacked a question from one point of view; rather, he surrounded a subject. Or, as Goodrich remarked, one of his characteristics was his comprehensiveness. "He looked on a subject like a man standing upon an eminence, taking a large and rounded view of it on every side."[12] Thus, Burke would naturally consider the changes in England's policy toward the colonies, as well as determining what men were responsible for them and try to establish the reasons for their adoption.

A second reason why Burke included the discussion of men may be found in the Chathamite slogan of "measures, not men". Burke was trying to establish the thesis that men are the ones who create policy. As he says, "The characters of . . . men are of much importance. Great men are the guide-posts and land-marks in the state" (260). In short, he is saying that, in a world where men are considered to have any influence on the "springs of action", one ought not to draw a strict distinction between men and the policies which they support.

For Burke to have concentrated only on a denunciation of the men who supported the policies being debated would have been inimicable

to his comprehensive manner of treating a subject. Then, too, when a speaker attacks a policy by means of attacking the men associated with it, he often includes an implied accusation of the entire character and motives of the sponsor. However, if Burke had merely denounced such men as Chatham, Townshend, and Grenville, he would have been working against his own purposes. As Burke himself notes, Chatham's age, rank, services, and fall from power had canonized him in popular esteem. In like manner, a speaker who was interested in a favorable hearing had to be judicious and decorous in attacking the character of Grenville, who was no longer living, but still had friends in the House.

Certainly Parliament was not unused to hearing ridicule, invective, and strong personal attacks. Burke, himself, was known to be somewhat passionate and immoderate in attacking those who opposed his views. Still a speaker, perhaps, might consider the use of ridicule and invective more effective if the votes are on his side. A speaker who is advocating measures that are conciliatory and peace-making, a speaker who is pleading for restoration of mutual confidence and a policy of sane moderation, however, is probably wise not to resort to an over-aggressive and violent attack. In discussing the present ministry, Burke was certainly an aggressive debater; but there was no reason in his historical discussion to stir up resentment by attacking several of the former leading lights. As Morley remarked about Burke's efforts on behalf of America, "Burke was conscious that he could trust nothing to the sympathy or prepossessions of his readers, and this put him upon unwonted persuasiveness."[13]

Burke chose to discuss measures and policy in great detail, but he also dwelt at some length upon the men who had created the policy he was attacking. In his speech, Burke was working for conciliation; yet he was discussing the personalities of men he sometimes had opposed; he was speaking to an audience which included many for whom one or the other of these three men was a hero. In order to avoid the implication that he was attacking the motives or abilities of these statesmen, he had to tread very carefully. He does not label them traitors, nor evil men nor men of little ability. What Burke does is to describe four periods of English policy toward the colonies – in the first period, England only regulated colonial commerce, and all went well; in the second, Grenville tried to raise revenue from the colonies and dissension arose; in the third, the Rockingham administration removed the Stamp Act and

quiet was restored; in the fourth, the revenue act of 1767 was passed and trouble arose again. And now who was responsible for the problems during the second period? – Grenville. And who undercut the Rockingham's in the third period? – Pitt. Who was responsible for the fatal policies in the fourth period? – Chatham and Townshend.

The Character Sketches: Portraying Politicians as Tragic Heroes

Although Burke is picturing these men to trace the flaws of their policy to their characters, I think it would be helpful to view these portraits as little dramas and to look at the way Burke portrays their characters in dramatistic terms. For example, Burke's approach is reminiscent of the speech of Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar.* As Antony begins his speech over Caesar's body, he talks of Brutus and the conspirators as "honorable men". The honorific term, however, by subtle transformation, becomes a term of condemnation.[14] Burke, too, begins his character sketches, on the whole, by praising the individual for his good traits. He said of Grenville:

> Here began to dawn the first glimmerings of this new colony system. It appeared more distinctly afterward, when it was devolved upon a person [Mr. Grenville] to whom, on other accounts, this country owes very great obligations. I do believe that he had a very serious desire to benefit the public. . . . He generally considered his objects in lights that were rather too detached. . . . with the best intentions in the world, he first brought this fatal scheme into form, and established it by act of Parliament.
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> No man can believe that at this time of day I mean to lean on the venerable memory of a great man, whose loss we deplore in common. Our little party differences have been long ago composed; and I have acted more with him, and certainly with more pleasure with him, than ever I acted against him. Undoubtedly Mr. Grenville was a first-rate figure in this country. . . . If he was ambitious, I will say this for him, his ambition was of a noble and generous strain. It was to raise himself, not by the low, pimping politics of a court, but to win his way to power through the laborious gradations of public service, and to secure himself a well-earned rank in Parliament by a thorough knowledge of its constitution, and a perfect practice in all its business (251).

But Grenville was an honorable man. . . . However, the fatal flaw in his character, according to Burke, was that he was bred to the law. Although Burke begins by praising a legal education, he gradually and subtly turns to a major drawback of legalistic minds. Legalistic minds are "rarely minds of remarkable enlargement" (251). So long as things go in accustomed paths, such minds can operate; but "when the

high-roads are broken up, and the waters out, when a new and troubled scene is opened, and the file affords no precedent, then it is that a greater knowledge of mankind, and a far more exquisite comprehension of things is requisite than ever office gave, or than office can ever give" (251). Although Grenville was a "hero", he had, indeed, a tragic flaw. True, Burke says, that if such a person fell into errors, "it must be from defects not intrinsical; they must be rather sought in the particular habits of his life" (251). Here was a noble man who, because of one defect, caused tragic consequences for his country even though his constitutional flaw was learned and not innate.

In these sketches, Burke dwells on the good qualities and talents of each man before he mentions their tragic flaws. His portrayal shows no contempt or disrespect for these three men. His skillful characterizations ought not to have antagonized those who venerated and respected the men in question. With Chatham, of course, he had to be particularly careful. And in his discussion of that hero, the dramatic element is heightened.

> Another scene was opened, and other actors appeared on the stage. The state, in the condition I have described it, was delivered into the hands of Lord Chatham – a great and celebrated name – a name that keeps the name of this country respectable in every other on the globe. . . .
>
> Sir, the venerable age of this great man, his merited rank, his superior eloquence, his splendid qualities, his eminent services, the vast space he fills in the eye of mankind, and, more than all the rest, his fall from power, which, like death, canonizes and sanctifies a great character, will not suffer me to censure any part of his conduct. I am afraid to flatter him; I am sure I am not disposed to blame him. Let those who have betrayed him by their adulation, insult him with their malevolence. But what I do not presume to censure, I may have leave to lament. For a wise man, he seemed to me at that time to be governed too much by general maxims. . . . One or two of these maxims. . . led him into measures that were greatly mischievous to himself; and, for that reason, among others, perhaps, fatal to his country; measures, the effects of which, I am afraid, are forever incurable (259).

As Burke develops the scenario Chatham's tragic flaw was in putting together an administration that contained men of all views and parties. And because that administration did not contain men who had a similar body of political principles, measures were passed under his administration which were contrary to his own views. There is probably no more striking or well-known passage in the Burkian corpus (excepting, perhaps, his apostrophe to the dauphiness in the *Reflections* or his characterization of the Duke of Bedford in his "Letter to a Noble

Lord") than his description of Chatham's cabinet in the speech "On American Taxation". The description fulfills the functions above described, and the word "cabinet" brings to mind a metaphor where Burke portrays a "piece of furniture" to exemplify the political alliance forged by Chatham. The metaphor grows and develops under Burke's pen in an organic way. The audience can visualize a piece of the carpenter's trade and refer the traits exhibited back to the political "cabinet" being discussed. "He [Chatham] made an administration so checkered and speckled; he put together a piece of joinery so crossly indented and whimsically dovetailed; a cabinet so variously inlaid; such a piece of diversified mosaic; such a tesselated pavement without cement; here a bit of black stone, and there a bit of white; patriots and courtiers, king's friends and Republicans, Whigs and Tories, treacherous friends and open enemies; that it was indeed a very curious show, but utterly unsafe to touch, and unsure to stand on" (259).[15]

Burke characterized Charles Townshend as:

> the delight and ornament of this House, and the charm of every society which he honored with his presence (111). There are many young members in the House (such of late has been the rapid succession of public men) who never saw that prodigy, Charles Townshend, nor, of course, know what a ferment he was able to excite in every thing, by the violent ebullition of his mixed virtues and failings. . . . But he had no failings which were not owing to a noble cause -- to an ardent, generous, perhaps an immoderate passion for fame -- a passion which is the instinct of all great souls. He worshiped that goddess wheresoever she appeared; but he paid his particular devotions to her in her favorite habitation, in her chosen temple, the House of Commons (260).

His failing was a desire to please. He had a passion for fame. At one point, Burke apologizes for the length of his character sketches, in fact, just prior to the discussion of Townshend's personality.

In technique, then, Burke begins primarily by praising three heroes, moves gradually to each character trait that was a flaw, then traces the fatal policy back to that flaw. In his portraits he weaves back and forth from the man to his measures and leaves no doubt that each man's weakness had an effect on policy. Of Townshend, for example, he says, "For failings he had, undoubtedly. Many of us remember them. We are this day considering the effects of them" (260). The typical failing of each man is used as a means of heightening and personifying the weakness in policy which developed out of that failing. These dramatizations, then, become detailed rhetorical strategies for making somewhat "abstract" governmental policy "personal" -- for portraying

complex political issues in dramatic and human terms. In a sense, each of these *dramatis personae* embodied a policy. These scenarios hold up to the Parliament a flaw in a man and in his policy; they portray in terms of living characters the flaw that led to calamitous policies. Burke parades these heroes across the stage and lets the audience "*see* before their eyes" a series of events which show what he wants them to believe. Thus, these portraits of statesmen become artistic and vital parts of the persuasive effort. Viewed dramatistically their functional purpose is made clear and the error of the critics who viewed them as mere "purple passages" becomes manifest.

A careful dramatistic analysis reveals these three "episodes", then, not as neglecting the matter of the speech, nor even of running along the line of the subject matter, but rather as being an organic part of the argument because they embody the argument and set it before the eyes of the audience.

Sir Ernest Barker in his forward to H.V.F. Somerset's edition of some of the early works of Burke from the papers at the Sheffield library, writes:

> The young Burke, in his views of religion and his ideas of men and their characters, already anticipates and foreshadows the mature Burke of later years — . . . When, again, he sketches and analyses 'characters', as he does in many of the items of the Note-Book, he is already giving evidence of that psychological insight and that subtle understanding of human motives, which inspired his later and greater works. It may be, indeed, that he began by imitating an English trend and tradition of character-drawing which is already conspicuous in our seventeenth-century literature (and not least in Clarendon's writings): but if he began as an imitator, he ended as an artist and creator in his own right, and throughout his life he studied and painted characters (characters engaged and moulding action in the great world of politics) as his contemporary Reynolds studied and painted his sitters.[16]

This quotation relates Burke's character sketches in his speech to the literary tradition, but I quote it primarily because of the reference to Reynolds and to "painting". For Burke is trying to paint characters with words and set these portraits before the eyes of his audience. Could those who knew Townshend (and even those who had not) almost see him again in Parliament in their "mind's eye"? Might they more readily nod in agreement, saying to themselves, "Yes, yes, that is how he was!"

That these descriptions of three great men are not "episodical" in a perjorative sense, but contribute to the argument, was already noticed

by the perceptive critic of public address, Chauncey Goodrich, in his *Select British Eloquence,* where he wrote, "The several parts [of the speech "On American Taxation"] support each other, and the whole forms a complete system of thought. The sketches of Mr. Grenville, Mr. Townshend, Lord Chatham, and his administration, are not strictly excrescences, though it would be unsafe for any man less gifted than Mr. Burke to arrest the progress of the discussion and conduct his audience through such a picture-gallery of statesmen."[17] We might even say about some of the figures in Burke's portraits of politicians what was once remarked to Hannah More of Burke's speaking: "How closely that fellow reasons in metaphor!"[18]

Strategy of Argument and Ethos

There is still another way in which these dramas of character play a functional role in the argument that Burke is developing. Richard Whately, in his *Elements of Rhetoric,* has a discussion of the psychology of argument. He suggests that arguments from cause to effect and by example are particularly effective if used together. But he suggests that they should be used with the cause-to-effect argument first and the example afterwards. If, for instance, one wants to prove that a certain man has committed a crime, do not bring an example of it first. For if the judges believe him to be a man of good character, the evidence will be dismissed in their minds – it will not carry much weight. If, on the other hand, you show a *reason* why a man might commit a crime (he is covetous) and then give an example, the judges will lend an ear to the evidence.[19] Put in another way, an example of supposed misconduct will not be believed if it does not seem to fit the character of the accused; on the other hand, a single example will have much force if it seems to be in keeping with the man's character. Burke follows this psychology of argument exactly. He shows how the characters of these men caused their policies and then gives examples to support the causal reasoning.

Finally, one other important feature of Burke's descriptions of character may have worked an effect on his audience through the margins of attention and perception – in a subtle and unconscious way. Kenneth Burke has argued that the old rhetoric stressed persuasion and was based on conscious attempts to manipulate men; the "new

rhetoric" is based on identification and utilizes unconscious means as well. Edmund Burke identifies or establishes a common ground among all three men because he finds a fatal flaw in each which led to a tragic policy. Although Burke finds these characteristics to be flaws in these men, we can also say that these flaws have a common aspect themselves in that, consciously or unconsciously, it so happens that these flaws seem to be Edmund Burke's strengths.

Grenville, for example, was a man of great talents; but he was bred to the law, a field which does not open and liberalize the mind. Burke, himself, had found the study of law a "pinched and meager diet"[20] and, therefore, had turned to literary pursuits. Early in the speech, Burke condemns the Ministry for not "having large and liberal ideas in the management of great affairs." Certainly Burke's own thought is characterized by the large and philosophical view he had of most questions or, as he states in his speech "On Conciliation with the Colonies", "Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom; and a great empire and little minds go ill together" (291).

Chatham's great error was in putting together an administration that contained men of all views and parties. And because the administration did not contain men who had a similar body of political principles, measures were passed under his administration which were contrary to his own views. Burke clearly believed in the idea of men of like purposes standing together to work for a consistent policy based on a particular political philosophy. In fact, the idea of political parties, which was just beginning to take shape at that time, was "most explicitly advanced and defended by Edmund Burke".[21]

Townshend's fatal weakness was the lack of any guiding principles and a desire to please or reflect prevailing opinion. Again, although disputed, Burke was a man with a fairly consistent general philosophy of government to which he faithfully adhered, no matter what the consequences. He was one of the few politicians of any day who had the courage to tell his constituents that he would not be bound by their opinion, but would use his own judgment in Parliament. As he said, he wanted to be a "pillar of the state, and not a weathercock on top of the edifice . . . of no use but to indicate the shiftings of every fashionable gale."[22]

In a subtle way, then, Burke's character sketches do more than "decorate" the speech and add to the argument. By stressing the

weaknesses of these men's characters and policies, he may have indirectly called attention to his own strong points. By sketching the negative outlines of these men, Burke was simultaneously drawing the positive lines of himself. In short, by choosing the material he did, Burke managed to paint a desirable self-portrait.

Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that the three character sketches in Burke's speech on American taxation are not merely "purple passages" or digression, but an organic part of his argument. These portrayals embody Burke's thesis and are intended to allow the audience not only to view the situation in a certain light, but actually to *see* matters as he does and to believe as he does. They are the high points in the overall architectonic of his rhetorical strategy. These dramatic portraits are at the centre of the speech where theme and image are fused into a harmonious wholeness. The theme "faulty measures" is incarnated and portrayed by the presentation of living pictures of tragic men. Quintilian would have understood and approved. In describing how to effect the emotions of an audience he wrote:

> There are certain experiences which the Greeks call φαντασίαι and the Romans *visions*, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes. It is the man who is really sensitive to such impressions who will have the greatest power over the emotions. Some writers describe the possessor of this power of vivid imagination, whereby things, words and actions are presented in the most realistic manner, by the Greek word εὐφαντασίωτος.[23]

Although, Quintilian's statement relates *enargeia* primarily to emotional arousal in this passage, there is no doubt (as my opening sketch explained) that detailed, vivid descriptions were considered important persuasive devices in the rhetorical tradition; they could function to help create belief and to "overpower" or "master" an audience. Two decades ago Robert Oliver, in his analysis of Burke's rhetorical methods, wrote the following: "As has been illustrated Burke's two general methods were conciliation and attack. It should be added that for both of them this great aim was to create a vivid impression. In his many explanations, illustrations, examples, analogies, images, and in the close relationship which he always maintained between general prin-

ciples and specific instances, he seems to have been convinced that *vivid conception induces belief.*"[24] Burke, unlike the great Roman orator-statesman Cicero, did not set down his ideas on rhetorical theory in any treatise. But, as Bryant explains, Burke thought that the "key-passage in any rhetorical performance, oral or written, should involve a thought, an image, and a sentiment: the thought to provide the matter for the intellect, the image to make it *vivid to the senses,* and the sentiment to reinforce it through the affections, or emotions."[25]

As a literary man who himself wrote an important treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful, Burke, no doubt, was familiar with the most recent rhetorical-poetical speculations of his day. But, perhaps, his Irish imagination alone provided the font for the portraits of tragic heroes by which he accomplished a fusion of theme and image that could function to hold his hearer's attention, arouse their emotions and simultaneously convey his argument on that April 19th when Burke, the House of Commons, and the topic of American taxation came together in the dynamic process of discourse.

Footnotes

1. From E.D. Clarke's *Journal,* quoted by James Prior, *Life of Burke,* 2nd edn; 2 vols., 1826: II, 473.
2. For a brief treatment of the relationship of rhetoric to other studies in the eighteenth century, see Vincent M. Bevilacqua, "Rhetoric and the Circle of Moral Studies: An Historiographic View," *QJS,* 55 (December, 1969), 343-357.
3. In *Spectator* No. 416, Addison claims that words can call up more lively images than nature itself.
4. John Lawson, *Lectures Concerning Oratory,* ed. E. Neal Claussen and Karl R. Wallace (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), pp.304-305. Locke created a popular view of the mind by applying the camera metaphor to the whole understanding: "For me thinks the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut off from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances or ideas of things without. Would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, . . . it would very much resemble the understanding of a man." *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* II.xi.17. Many of the theorists and philosophers of the eighteenth century, even if they did not think of all mental processes as involving images or pictures, held that the imagination dealt with the "conception of visible objects". Thus, if the arts of discourse intimately related to pleasures of the imagination, and the imagination deals with visible objects, it is the duty of the poet or orator to raise images or pictures in the minds of his hearers. Such theorizing, no doubt, had some effect on poetic and rhetorical theory; but in this paper I have emphasized the old doctrine of *ut pictura poesis,* which also played a major role in suggesting that poets should paint in glowing colors. One can hardly trace the popularity of the doctrine solely to empiricism since the notion of vivid description was also popular in early eighteenth-century Germany where the dominant philosophy was rationalistic. Theorists in England and on the Continent with many different philosophical outlooks (and some with no systematic philosophy at all) supported the notion of lively description in the

eighteenth century. The Common Sense school of philosophers (e.g. Reid, Beattie, Campbell) and such forerunners of Reid as Kames all were strong supporters of vivid description. Hume's opponent, Reid, stated the doctrine succinctly when he wrote, "It seems easier to form a lively conception of objects that are familiar, than of those that are not; our conceptions of visible objects are commonly the most lively, when other circumstances are equal. Hence, poets not only delight in the description of visible objects, but find means by metaphor, analogy, and allusion, to clothe every object they describe with visible qualities. The lively conception of these makes the object appear, as it were, before our eyes. Lord Kames, in his Elements of Criticism, has shown of what importance it is in works of taste, to give to objects described, what he calls *ideal presence*. To produce this in the mind, is indeed the capital aim of poetical and rhetorical description. It carries the man, as it were, out of himself, and makes him a spectator of the scene described. This ideal presence seems to me to be nothing else but a lively conception of the appearance which the object would make if really present to the eye." Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man,* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1969), pp.397-398. See also, George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric,* ed. Lloyd Bitzer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963). Bitzer, in his introduction to Campbell, says "The rhetor . . . must communicate ideas which feel lively and vivid to his hearers or readers." He also refers to vivid description as the "lively idea" and makes the concept central in Campbell's theory. See also, Gerald A. Hauser, "Empiricism, Description, and the New Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* 5 (Winter, 1972), 24-44. Hauser has alluded to some of the earlier rhetoricians who mentioned the "lively idea" and also pointed out that the notion was widespread in eighteenth-century England.

5. Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism,* 2 vols., 8th ed. (London: Vernor and Hood, 1805), I, 75. The best discussion of how Burke thought words work is by Dixon Wecter, "Burke's Theory Concerning Words, Images, and Emotions," *PMLA,* 55 (1940), 167-181. See also Boulton's introduction to the Inquiry and Burleigh T. Wilkins, "Burke on Words," *Studies in Burke and His Time,* 11 (Fall, 1969), 1305-1309.
6. Kames, I, 75.
7. Kames, I, 75-76.
8. Kames, I, 77.
9. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives and a Rhetoric of Motives* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1962), pp.602-603.
10. Edmund Burke, "On American Taxation," *Select British Eloquence,* ed. Chauncey Goodrich (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), p.243. Citations hereafter will appear as page number in parentheses in the text.
11. Donald C. Bryant, "The Contemporary Reception of Edmund Burke's Speaking," in *Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians,* ed. Raymond F. Howes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p.292.
12. Goodrich, p.238.
13. John Morley, "Burke", in *English Men of Letters* (New York: Arkell Weekly Company, 1895), II, 55-56.
14. "Thus, in *Julius Caesar,* Mark Antony cautiously begins his speech to the mob by using the expression 'honorable men' as a 'eulogistic appellative' for the murders of Caesar. And only gradually, by the ambiguities of irony to bridge the transition, does he dare convert it into the dyslogistic. Had he begun by using dyslogistic tonalities, he would have turned the mob fatally against himself." Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp.94-95.
15. Sir Samuel Romilly thought that the description of Chatham's cabinet was an example of Burke's letting his poetic imagination run away with him. In a letter to the Reverend John Roget, he wrote, "Certainly, never had any writer a more luxuriant imagination than Burke; he is more a poet than an orator; but do not you think that he indulges that poetical imagination to a fault? When he has once hold of a beautiful image, he forgets that its only use is to illustrate; the ornament becomes with him the subject, and he employs many

phrases to decorate and enrich the figure, while the matter of his speech is quite neglected. I think I could point out several instances of this in the speech I sent you (On American Taxation) if I had it before me. One I recollect is the character of Lord Chatham's second administration, which he calls a motley composition, a piece of joining work, a tesselated pavement, making several other allusions of the same kind. . . . The imagination of Burke properly restrained, and united to the force and irresistible reasoning of Fox, would form a perfect orator as to composition; for in delivery they are both defective." It is interesting that, although Romilly thought Burke's imagination ran away with him in this passage, the language was so striking that he could remember it and paraphrase it. See *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1840), I, 213-214. And Frederic Harrison made the following comment about Burke's description of the Chatham ministry: "Here we have Burke in the worst vices of his exuberance. The image is a jumble of tautology, in which rank rhetoric overpowers good sense: – it is literary glitter, not political judgment." See, Frederic Harrison, *Chatham* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1905), p.177.

16. *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, ed. H.V.F. Somerset (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), pp.x-xi.
17. Goodrich, p.241.
18. William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, 4 vols. (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1834), III, 378.
19. "Men are apt to listen with prejudice to the Arguments adduced to prove anything which appears *abstractedly* improbable: . . . and this prejudice is to be removed by the Argument from Cause to Effect, which thus prepares the way for the reception of the other arguments. For example, if a man who bore a good character were accused of corruption, the strongest evidence against him might avail little; but if he were proved to be of a covetous disposition, this, though it would not alone be allowed to substantiate the crime, would have great weight in inducing his judges to lend an ear to the evidence. And thus in what relates to the future also, the *a priori* Argument and Example support each other, when thus used in conjunction, and in the order prescribed. . . . Aristotle accordingly has remarked on the expediency of not placing Examples in the foremost rank of arguments; in which case, he says, a considerable number would be requisite; whereas, in *confirmation*, even one will have much weight." Obviously, Whately's treatise was written after Burke's speech; but the psychology of the order of enthymeme first and example second, as Whately points out, was suggested in Aristotle's rhetoric. Richard Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, ed. Douglas Ehninger (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), pp.137-138.
20. W.J. Bate, *Edmund Burke: Selected Works* (New York: Random House, 1960), p.4.
21. Donald C. Bryant, "A Scarecrow of Violence: Colonel Isaac Barre in the House of Commons," *Speech Monographs*, 28 (November, 1961), 233.
22. Speech on "The Bristol Election," Goodrich, p.297. I realize, of course, that there is much debate as to whether Burke had a consistent philosophy of government and, if so, what it was. Nevertheless, I agree with Bredvold and Ross more than some other commentators. They wrote, "Some of his ideas changed, especially as a result of the most shattering political event of his time, the French Revolution. And he never put them down in a systematic treatise where their relations show clearly. So it is remarkable, as one searches his works for his philosophy, how consistent and firm the outline is from youth to age." See *The Philosophy of Edmund Burke*, ed. Louis I. Bredvold and Ralph G. Ross (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p.1.
23. Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria*, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1921), II, 433-35.
24. Robert T. Oliver, *Four Who Spoke Out: Burke, Fox, Sheridan, Pitt* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1946), p.130. Emphasis mine.
25. Donald C. Bryant, "Edmund Burke on Oratory", *QJS* 19 (February, 1933), p.14. Emphasis mine.