

DANIEL I. O'NEILL. *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire*. Berkeley Series in British Studies. Berkeley Series in British Studies 10. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016. Pp. 272. \$70.00 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2017.108

Some works of scholarship improve our understanding subtly, while others aim for something like a “paradigm shift.” In *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* Daniel O'Neill has some success with the former effort, but he appears to aim at a more fundamental change in our view of Burke and, perhaps, of the British Empire. O'Neill is less successful with this ambitious aim, which, despite helping to animate the book, compromises the overall effort. Nevertheless, this is a contribution to Burke scholarship, and to the scholarship of the British Empire, that is worthy of readers' attention.

Long a relatively neglected field, Burke's relationship to questions of imperialism has emerged in recent decades as a fruitful and important area of study. O'Neill draws on recent scholarship of British imperialism and colonialism and places Burke within it. O'Neill uses the Ornamentalist/Orientalist model (emphasizing sameness and otherness) that has come to dominate much of the scholarship of imperialism. O'Neill finds that Burke employs both arguments, and also that some of Burke's uses of Ornamentalism and Orientalism are quite different from those that have come to be associated with typical nineteenth-century imperialist thought. Given all this, and the fact that the Ornamentalist/Orientalist model is controversial, one might question how much this contributes to a better understanding of Burke. Nevertheless, O'Neill's work proves useful in his efforts to improve our understanding of the early development of British thought on imperialism and colonialism.

Much recent scholarship on imperialism has become caught up in the question of the roles of liberalism and conservatism. The work most responsible for this debate's prominence has been Uday Singh Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire* (1999). Mehta closely associates liberalism with imperialism; he also highlights Burke's conservative critiques of British imperial policies as a contrast with the liberal view. This perspective has gained considerable traction, but it has also prompted responses by those who wish to associate conservatism, not liberalism, more closely with imperialism. O'Neill is of this camp, and it is from works of this camp that he tends to draw. Although O'Neill is a scholar of Burke, he is no fan of him, and he is especially irked that Burke is invoked as a critic of empire. He is a man on a mission to ensure that Burke is identified in the public's mind as an imperialist.

As announced on the book's back cover, Burke is “widely believed to be an opponent of empire” but is really “a passionate supporter and staunch defender of the British Empire.” This is the central point that O'Neill wishes to make, but as his primary argument it is problematic. On the one hand, few Burke scholars believe that he is an opponent of empire. The general view is that Burke was a sharp critic of various aspects of imperial and colonial policy but acknowledged the legitimacy of Britain's various holdings, sought to maintain them, and seemed to see the empire as a good thing. O'Neill himself admits that even Mehta does not hold that Burke opposes empire. To the extent that O'Neill argues that Burke was no opponent of empire, he is largely fighting a straw man, at least as far as scholarly thought is concerned.

On the other hand, to the extent that O'Neill seeks to argue beyond this—that Burke was a “passionate” imperialist and a “promoter” of empire—he is on shaky ground. As a prominent member of Parliament, Burke had ample opportunity to articulate such views clearly, and no reason to refrain from doing so; it is therefore difficult to understand why such a position can only be gleaned from indirect hints here and there. For example, O'Neill makes much of Burke's references to “Providence,” suggesting that Burke sees for Britain a divine commission to civilize the world through imperial conquest and rule, but, again, Burke never really says this, and his, and others', use of “Providence” is a complex topic that has been the

subject of considerable scholarly literature, ignored by O'Neill. Indeed, while O'Neill makes ample use of scholarship on imperialism, especially that which accords with his perspective, he makes little use of Burke scholarship, and, despite attempting to position himself as an iconoclast of sorts, he generally fails to engage seriously with potentially challenging scholarship.

The vast bulk of Burke's speeches and writings had immediate political purposes, and their rhetoric is geared toward persuading others to accede to those (usually reformist) purposes. Caution and sensitivity must be employed when taking political rhetoric created with one purpose in mind and applying snippets of it to another. While there is much sound scholarship in this book, too often O'Neill edges close to a "political attack ad" approach—hunting through reams of material for phrases that can be "spun" to support one's predetermined characterization.

O'Neill is on much more solid ground—and, despite his suggestion to the contrary, once again in general agreement with most scholarship—when he highlights connections between Burke's anti-French Revolutionary conservatism and his statements on imperial matters. But he oversimplifies, making religion and landed gentry—certainly important elements for Burke—his sole criteria. There is a flatness to O'Neill's Burke. Indeed, O'Neill explicitly denies the admixture of liberal elements that the vast majority of scholars have seen in the conservatism of Burke, a Whig MP. O'Neill repeatedly emphasizes that Burke's outlook was entirely illiberal, even declaring, without qualification, that "Burke despised any notion of democracy." Despite its controversial nature, O'Neill treats his extreme perspective on Burke less as an assertion that demands careful defense than as a premise to be taken for granted.

Edmund Burke cautioned against approaches characterized by oversimplification, by dogmatic positions hastily adopted on the basis of scant evidence, and by inadequate attention to complexity, particulars, and nuance. While there is much in *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* to recommend it, it would be a better book if O'Neill had, at least in this one instance, heeded Burke.

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SARA PENNELL. *The Birth of the English Kitchen, 1600–1850*. Cultures of Early Modern Europe. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. Pp. 256. \$114.00 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2017.109

The elusiveness of early modern English kitchens strikes from at least three directions: (1) they were too core to the operation of civilization to survive without the forces of change erasing earlier forms; (2) they were so thoroughly created through the choreography of activities taking place within them to leave records that come anywhere close to reflecting the flow of such time-patterning actions; and (3), most problematic of all, they were and continue to be associated with women. The fact that they were not exclusively female spaces is an important message that Sara Pennell has to impart in *The Birth of the English Kitchen, 1600–1850* (129–33), however, it is not through rightly re-associating kitchens with male work, especially in commercial kitchens, that we will find a way out of a vicious circle and inductive cul-de-sac: women's work is so comprehensively undervalued across time and space that even Pennell's plethora of fascinating insights about the premodern kitchen may not be enough to change our collective minds about the role that we accord all these purposeful spaces of food preparation.