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Imperial Characters: Home and Periphery in Eighteenth-Century Literature (review)

Lee F. Kahan

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1750” traces a familiar and staid narrative of secularization in eighteenth-century beliefs, practices, and institutions, in the Church of Scotland, especially as the church began to promote national and imperial interests over theological doctrine. Moderate Presbyterians served an important role in this secularization as they had to compensate for the behavior of the “vocal majority of Presbyterian clergy who repeatedly challenged the state’s authority over religious affairs.” To make the church more “palatable to the government” moderates championed the “new reason of the state, which was increasingly centered on economic growth.” Societies like Scotland’s Society for Reformation of Manners (SSRM) assisted the moderates, who often focused on the similarities between Christians, rather than ritualistic or doctrinal differences. Moderate clergymen “utilized these organizations to foster religious toleration.”

In “Irish Clergy and the Deist Controversy: Two Episodes in the Early British Enlightenment,” Scott Breuninger offers a lucid and engaging outline of familiar deist debates in Ireland. John Toland argued that “the essential truths of Christianity must be . . . describable or conceivable by reason,” while Peter Browne and Edward Synge countered that “knowledge of the divine was possible through analogy and that reason was not the sole determinant of truth.” For the deists, Anthony Collins argued “that rational thought should be free from all external authority,” while Berkeley asserted that freethinkers weaken virtue by weakening the “expectation of a future life.”

Rosemary Dixon’s “Sermon Publishing, Clerical Reading, and John Wilkins’s *Ecclesiastes*, 1646–1750,” thoughtfully outlines the development of one of the most published genres in the eighteenth century:

sermons. She begins with Bacon’s call in *Advancement of Learning* to write down “the best worke in Diuinitie.” John Wilkins responded in *Ecclesiastes*, “a hugely influential handbook for preachers, first published in 1646 and in its thirteenth edition by 1718.” An attempt “to organize and systematize theological knowledge,” *Ecclesiastes* helps explain the popularity of sermons. It shows that they “were perceived as the best form of English theological writing,” and “sermon collections could be used for systematic theological purposes.”

Matthew Binney Eastern Washington
University

TARA GHOSHAL WALLACE. *Imperial Characters: Home and Periphery in Eighteenth-Century Literature*. Lewisburg: Bucknell, 2010. Pp. 244. \$58.50.

Ms. Wallace’s *Imperial Characters* is the latest entry in a lineage of scholarship that examines how Britain forged its identity by defining and opposing itself to an “Other.” Colonialism, of course, provided Britain with a wealth of such “Others”; indeed, Linda Colley’s *Britons* suggests that it has only recently run out of them and that this loss has shaken British identity to its core. Like Colley, Ms. Wallace is interested in how Scotland and England forged a new British identity after the Acts of Union by contrasting themselves with a “foreign” threat. But she chooses none of the usual suspects: for her, England’s “other” is neither the French nor even principally the colonized. It is the colonial project itself. According to Ms. Wallace, writers of the period, both English and Scottish, depict the dangers that colonialism posed to the mother country by draining its natural resources and population and diluting its character with foreign goods and customs. In doing so, these authors repeatedly em-

phasize the homogeneous “British nature” of the domestic identity that the colonial project threatened. Ms. Wallace traces this cultural project from Behn to Walter Scott, pairing an English and a Scottish writer in most chapters to show how representations of colonialism on both sides of the border reinforced a collective sense of Britishness. Given the focus of the *Scriblerian*, this review will concentrate on her interpretations of Pope’s *Windsor-Forest* and Smollett’s *Humphry Clinker*.

Ms. Wallace moves deftly back and forth between brief but informative sections of historical context and careful close readings. In the opening chapter, for example, she examines Pope’s descriptions of Windsor Forest in the context of English concerns about the deforestation that resulted from expanding the imperial fleet. For her, the poem speaks back to this “depletion of native woodlands” through its frequent allusions to the Navy and its descriptions of “thin trees” that she finds “cautionary rather than celebratory.” Particularly convincing is her reading of the hunting scenes as a critique of conscription, which Pope deplors for depleting the moral resources of Britain by initiating the country swain into the imperial culture of violence. The conscripted swain then returns home “wily, coldhearted and destructive,” to persecute the very natural world that he used to protect.

However, the most entertaining of these dialogues between literature and culture takes place in the section on *Humphry Clinker*, which the author argues is Smollett’s attempt to combat the recent wave of Scottish emigration by undermining the image of the colonies as an alternative to economic and political problems at home. She links Lismahago’s life among the Indians to several real-life cases of a similar kind that made the English public intense-

ly aware that colonization seemed to be working in the wrong direction. For Ms. Wallace, this anxiety is at the heart of the sexual tortures that the Indians inflict on Lismahago, through which the “European body” is symbolically penetrated and mastered, just as colonial “products and practices . . . penetrate and pervert British life” at home. While this scene raises concerns about reverse colonization, *Imperial Characters* shows that it also reiterates a common justification for why the attempt to assimilate the Indians has failed: their “drunken pleasure in torturing” suggests a nature impervious to the finer feelings of British culture. Of course, such dehumanization is virtually cliché in the colonial literature of the time and in recent criticism about it. However, Ms. Wallace gives it a new turn by examining it in the context of the Scottish Enlightenment’s use of the “noble savage” to critique the effects of the commercial revolution at home. By combining images of Indian violence with scenes of rabid consumerism, Smollett makes indigenous America home to the ills of savagery and civilization alike, thereby removing any ground for idealizing it as an alternative to commercial Britain.

Impressive as these readings are, Ms. Wallace’s emphasis on authorial intention and on the polemical nature of these texts perhaps leads her to downplay their tensions and ambivalences in favor of a single, coherent argument. This was especially apparent in the chapter on Pope, where her claims for “what Pope means” often rest on selections with “cautionary” implications that she culls from a forest of otherwise “celebratory” descriptions. Pope is rarely so subtle when he has an axe to grind. The same problem is true of Defoe, though to a lesser extent: Ms. Wallace convincingly demonstrates that his representations of America are “singularly inept”

as propaganda for emigration, but this does not mean that such ineptness is evidence of the contrary intention. After all, much of Defoe's work on economic matters is equally tension-laden and contradictory. Moreover, the desire to turn these texts into anti-colonial arguments sometimes comes at the expense of their dialogic character. This is particularly true of *Humphry Clinker*, in which the various characters' depictions of Scotland interrogate and undercut one another. Ms. Wallace is able to make the novel utter a coherent statement about the Union only by stitching together Bramble's and Lismahago's arguments about it, but those arguments are decidedly at odds in the novel itself—a dynamic made even more complicated by the fact that both speakers are unreliable. This left me wondering how she would reconcile the dialogic form of *Humphry Clinker* with the "polemical dialogue" that she traces between the novel and its culture.

Ultimately, it is to this subject of Anglo-Scottish relations, and not to studies of imperialism itself, that the book makes its most important contribution. As Ms. Wallace's frequent engagements with literary critics make clear, many of the British attitudes toward imperialism that she discusses have been addressed elsewhere. Her main insight, then, is that the discourse of imperialism functioned as a medium for facilitating new relations and identities at home. Given the frequent comparisons between Scotsmen and "savages" that appear in English literature during the period, I did wonder if other writers might have used colonial representations to reinforce national difference—perhaps even to facilitate what Janet Sorenson has called England's "internal colonization" of Scotland. In other words, while Ms. Wallace's texts all emphasize the value of a stable British identity that encompasses both ends

of the island, I wondered if representations of imperialism might have provided the medium for a larger, more contentious debate about how to imagine the new national community. Such demurs aside, *Imperial Characters* is valuable for scholars investigating British domestic and imperial identities.

Lee F. Kahan

Indiana University
South Bend

MICHAEL RAGUSSIS. *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania, 2010. Pp. 247. \$55.

Theatrical Nation provides a model of what cultural studies and the reinvigorated study of the "actual theater" of the eighteenth century can accomplish. London of the eighteenth century was undoubtedly multicultural, uncertain of its dynamic Englishness, and involved in a global economy that transformed it socially as well as economically and politically. This book shows that while Jewish and Scottish characters were more popular than ever during the Georgian period, ethnic minority audience members were increasingly ostracized as "an attempt to maintain them as purely theatrical." It continues the momentum that Mr. Ragussis established with his groundbreaking *Figures of Conversion: 'The Jewish Question' and English National Identity* (1995). His move to plays, long overdue, is worth the wait.

Though *Theatrical Nation* primarily studies London performances from the 1760s through the early nineteenth century, it also briefly considers the influences of earlier dramatic traditions and economic events since the 1690s that created the intense racial atmosphere of the later eighteenth-century theater experience. Mr. Ragussis wisely sets out to narrow his focus to the most commonly controversial