
NON·IMMEMOR

‘Richard Mansergh St George. By Himself’: Hugh Douglas Hamilton’s portrait reconsidered

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‘PORTRAITS RUN AGAINST PORTRAITS’

With the reinauguration of art exhibitions in Dublin in 1800, after a twenty-year hiatus, a generation of Irish portrait patrons was finally afforded an experience long enjoyed by their English counterparts – the public display of their likenesses. The work of the contemporary portraitist Hugh Douglas Hamilton featured prominently. He exhibited six works at the inaugural show and a further twenty-two during the run of exhibitions that ensued over the following three years. Beyond their individual merits, perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of the paintings Hamilton displayed was the rich variety of approaches they offered to the task of capturing a resemblance, from an intense chiaroscuro head and shoulders portrait of Richard Lovell Edgeworth to full-length formal depictions of the Earl of Londonderry and Mr Hamilton posed in front of stock portrait drapes; from a representation of Viscountess Mount Charles and her son in a wild landscape to several scenes of domestic contentment in the fashionable neo-classical style.

Such inventiveness, far removed from the ‘production line’ approach of earlier generations of portrait artists, was hardly exclusive to Hamilton’s output around the turn of the century. As in Dublin, so too in London, where the first rank of portraitists, most notably John Hoppner, William Beechey and Thomas Lawrence, were locked in fierce competition for pre-eminence. Joseph Farington records how this was played out on the walls of the Royal Academy exhibitions, where ‘portraits run against portraits’ and novelty was required to attract the notice of critics and future clients.[1] Yet, while this diversity could, in an English context (characterised by a long-standing, regular exhibition culture), be attributed to modish whim, in contemporary Ireland (where exhibitions were

1 – Hugh Douglas Hamilton, Portrait of Lieutenant Richard Mansergh St George c.1795, oil on canvas, 228 x 146.2 cm (detail) (© National Gallery of Ireland)

rare) it took on a decidedly more complex hue. For Hamilton's upper-class Protestant client base, the 1790s was a time of crisis. Their self-image, 'inextricably bound up with their sense of hereditary superiority over Catholics', had been fractured by a number of attacks on their privileged isolationism. England's increasing ambivalence towards them, coupled with the immediate local threat of radical action, left them uncertain of their role and fearful for their lives.[2] Consequently, a period of entrenchment began, resulting in the first appearance and rapid dissemination of their now standard nomenclature 'the Protestant Ascendancy'. Yet, while the desire to create a unified, secure Protestant power base was strong, the project was fraught with difficulty. Far from a homogenous cultural group, the differences between them far outweighed their shared religious affiliation.[3]

It is in light of this process of projection and slippage that I wish to reconsider one of Hamilton's most celebrated works – his gothic-tinged portrait of the landlord and soldier, Richard Mansergh St George, *c*.1795 (Plate 1). The discovery of a new self-portrait sketch by the sitter and a number of unexploited documentary sources offers new insight into Hamilton's tour de force and suggests the way in which the medium of portraiture allowed for an exploration of male identity during the eighteenth century's troubled closing years.

HAMILTON AND THE DEPICTION OF MELANCHOLY

THE FRAGMENTATION OF A SECURE SENSE OF SELF, WHICH ARGUABLY BECAME THE shibboleth of the Protestant Ascendancy in the 1790s, is nowhere more apparent than in Richard Mansergh St George's remarkable portrait, a painting which, while ostensibly in memoriam to the sitter's recently deceased wife, is emphatically about St George himself. Foregrounded, leaning against a large stone sarcophagus, St George stands apart from the dozens of self-effacing widows Robert Rosenblum has identified as a recurring motif in late eighteenth-century art.[4] Facing the viewer, his eyes dramatically raised to the heavens, St George presents an arresting figure, eclipsing the memory of his wife with his own complex persona. Unsurprisingly, the painting, perhaps the best known of Hamilton's productions, has been the subject of some scrutiny in recent scholarship. Fintan Cullen locates the portrait firmly within the context of the local political upheavals in which St George was later to lose his life. Echoing the nineteenth-century writer Thomas Mulvany's characterisation of St George as 'the last man', Cullen reads the painting as a general cry 'for the continuation of a class'. For Martin Myrone, the portrait is symptomatic of wider issues in the transformation of heroic art in the second half of the eighteenth century and 'the catastrophic effects on masculine exemplarity produced by imperial crisis'.[5]

Certainly, in any discussion of the portrait, the tendency has been to treat it as an isolated masterpiece, an anomaly in Hamilton's oeuvre, 'one of those works which seem to have been born not made ... an endless model for painters ... a model for Hamilton'.[6]

Such a reading is undoubtedly encouraged by St George's violent and untimely death in 1798. While the portrait obviously predates this event, it has inevitably coloured its historical reception, transforming it into an icon of universal suffering and bolstering its claims for status as Hamilton's finest, most keenly felt work. The artist's facility for the melancholic mode was, in fact, evident several years before his involvement with St George, manifesting itself in his work in its traditional association with foreign travel, long considered an effective cure for melancholic temperaments. *Henry Boyle, Viscount Boyle, later 3rd Earl of Shannon*, painted while both sitter and artist were in Rome, *c*.1791, is an exemplary exercise in fashionable melancholia, the inevitable result of the popular 'cult of sensibility', by which the accoutrements of mourning could be appropriated as shorthand for a noble sentimental character, without reference to any particular bereavement.[7]

Other portraits struck a similarly grave note with rather more substance. Sharing a Roman setting with *Henry Boyle*, Hamilton's pastel portrait of Sir James Graham commemorated the death of Graham's old college friend Jonas Brooke, who had died in Milan of a fever in July 1784 at the age of 26.[8] Likewise, Hamilton's oil painting, *Lady Frances Beresford mourning at her husband's tomb*, records genuine grieving. Now lost, its composition is known through Thomas Mulvany's contemporary description:

> her ladyship ... leaned over her lost treasure and seemed in direct mental communication with another world. The countenance was one of calm, religious resignation; yet the tremor of the lip and the slight elevation of the pointed brow, gave notice of a passing struggle within ... It was a work of deep and wholesome feeling, enlisting all our finer sympathies.[9]

Yet, even against the backdrop of these earlier essays in melancholy, it is undeniable that *Richard Mansergh St George* carries a unique emotional charge. The transformation of the polite, socially acceptable grief of *James Graham* or the 'wholesome feeling' of *Lady Frances Beresford* into the epic tragedy of *St George* appears to owe much to the strange character and genius of the sitter. In both Cullen and Myrone's critiques of St George's portrait, much is rightly made of the extraordinary commission letter St George is believed to have written to Henry Fuseli.[10] He had been in contact with the Swiss artist since at least 1783, when he hosted a pageant held in Fuseli's honour by their mutual friend Sir Brooke Boothby.[11] St George evidently maintained their acquaintance after this event, as the famous literary hostesses Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, better known as the Ladies of Llangollen, recorded a 'note from Col. Mansergh St George (who it seems arrived last night at the Town) ... desiring to know whether we had heard from Fueselé [sic]' in July 1788.[12] Fuseli's failure to execute the commission and the circumstances surrounding its appropriation by Hamilton are now unknown, though evidence suggests that St George was in Rome in 1785-86 and he may have been impressed by Hamilton's work there.[13] St George's letter to Fuseli was never sent, but in it he outlines in some detail the way in which he wished to be portrayed, eager to 'express ... such conceptions methodically and considerately as a man should'.[14]

ST GEORGE'S SELF-PORTRAIT

WHILE THE EXISTENCE OF THE LETTER INDICATES THAT THE DESIGN OF THE PORTRAIT may have been unusually collaborative, a newly discovered drawing by St George suggests that he may have had an even greater hand in the fashioning of his image than has previously been assumed (Plate 2).[15] In a large, undated pen and ink self-portrait, St George appears in a similar contrapposto pose, leaning against a pile of stones in a panoramic landscape. Swathed in a black robe and wearing a black cap (perhaps the cap he habitually wore to cover his war wound), he surveys the ruins of a castle entrance with the same distant gaze reproduced by Hamilton. Inscribed in handwriting on the reverse 'Rd. Mansergh St George. By Himself', this atmospheric sketch concentrates less on a recognisable likeness of the protagonist and more on his emotional state. Though the face is well drawn, the figure of St George is dwarfed by his surroundings, communicating the idea that this is less a physical self-portrait than a mental one, and that, in accordance with the Rousseauian concept of nature, the landscape was capable of reflecting certain feelings.[16]

In this sense, the figure and landscape are one. In a curious mix of imaginary and potentially topographical elements, the dark, inky ground, the heavy, stormy sky, the lonely, barren island and the jagged, broken tree speak eloquently of St George's anguished state of mind, and appear remarkably close in conception to the prescriptive illustration for Melancholy in the edition of Cesare Ripa's well-known *Iconologia*, published in Italy between 1764 and 1766.[17] Equally, the old women flanking the castle entrance may figure as emblems of *vanitas*, perhaps in conjunction with the symbolic tradition of the gateway they guard, marking the transition from one state to another, whether from life to death or ignorance to self-realisation, achieved through St George's particular brand of brooding contemplation. At the same time, the stones against which St George leans and the landscape behind are reminiscent of the geography of Lough Corrib, known for its abundance of prehistoric archaeological remains, which was 'about a mile' from Headford town on St George's county Galway estate.[18]

The inclusion of such details in St George's drawing may reflect the artist's known antiquarian interests,[19] but, in a more complex way, may also indicate what Paul Gilroy has identified as a common post-colonial tendency towards 'geo-piety' – a reverence for the past and affinity with the natural landscape adopted by those faced with the sudden and radical loss of their moral and political legitimacy.[20] Though in Hamilton's later portrait the backdrop was transposed to a less geographically specific grove, said to bear resemblance to the island tomb of St George's hero Rousseau at Ermenonville,[21] St George's troubled relationship with his inherited soil and concern for the impoverished state of his lands on his return from the American wars undoubtedly contributed to the anguish so evident in Hamilton's depiction. Borrowed from the European context of his earlier work in the melancholic mode, Hamilton's cypress trees act as a veil drawn over the troubled ownership of the cairns and mountains of home, akin to 'the thin soil of vol-

2 – Richard Mansergh St George, SELF-PORTRAIT
c.1790?, pen and ink on paper, 36.5 x 24 cm (private collection)

canic countries spread lightly over subterranean fires', in the memorable words of fellow Hamilton-sitter, Arthur Browne.[22]

St George's artistic talent first manifested itself in London in the early 1770s, when he produced a number of designs for caricatures lampooning contemporary fashionable life, and developed further when he was posted to the American wars in 1776. St George's friend General Sir Martin Hunter recalls that he was always 'sketching and grouping (generally with pen and ink) all sorts of figures in a very masterly manner, and with surprising rapidity'. Significantly, Hunter adds:

> His remarks while at this occupation were entertaining, from their aptness and vivacity. 'Such a man' would he say, pointing to a figure, 'is a man of approved courage. This, with the large key in his hand, is a confidential man; I place the utmost reliance on him...' The figures of themselves wonderfully corresponded with all this.[23]

St George's running commentary suggests his interest in easily legible character types, and accords with the bold, fictional quality of much of the writing he has left behind. Even when dealing with the harsh facts of life on his impoverished Galway estate, St George was unable to resist the urge to embroider and play up the most wretched scenes. Describing an exploratory foray onto his land he recounts: 'On visiting one of these villages a large fire was lighted, round which the naked inhabitants stood, while I examined

into the state of their distresses and imagined I was surrounded by savages of those countries near the South Pole.' [24] Similarly, in a rambling series of letters to the administration in Dublin Castle written over the course of March 1794, St George outlines various 'Designs on my Life' with the suspenseful flourish of a novelist. In a thrilling account of one particular incident, described over several pages in far more detail than the State can have required for its records, St George recalls a night-time visit from two of his tenants, Lieutenant Neville and Mr French, whom he discovered drinking wine at his dining table:

> Mr Neville perceived my suspicion and winked at French ... their manner excited my apprehensions – I never experienced so much fear or rather horror ... French with a malicious sneer winking at Neville [replied] 'we will give you a quieting draught' ... I felt confidence having a sharp knife near on which I laid my hand.[25]

ROUSSEAU AND THE ART OF ROLE-PLAY

Such a heightened world-view was arguably shaped by St George's interest in Rousseauian philosophy, a fascination confirmed by the Ladies of Llangollen's account of his first visit to them, when he:

> ...related many curious anecdotes of Rousseau, and as he draws admirably, we requested he would give us some idea of the face and person of this unfortunate and inimitable genius. He very obligingly took out his pencil and drew two figures (I am persuaded striking likenesses) of poor Rousseau in a dress lined and trimmed with fur, and a large muff.[26]

As a confirmed admirer of the French philosopher, St George would almost certainly have read his recently published autobiographical *Confessions*, which appeared posthumously in the mid-1780s. In this work the author notes how, in his early years, reading came before experience, courtesy of his dead mother's romances, and that subsequently throughout his life he viewed the world through the distorting lens of fiction: 'a dangerous method ... [which] left me with some bizarre and romantic notions about human life of which experience and reflection have never quite managed to cure me'.[27]

Fiction provided Rousseau with his first model for human behaviour, and thereafter in *Confessions*, whenever the real world dissatisfied him, he built an alternative fantasy world to shut out or make sense of his frustrations.[28] Tellingly, following his famous spat with David Hume in which he accused his former friend of plotting against his life, Hume concluded that, considering Rousseau's 'happy, gay and indeed sociable' behaviour at the very time when he was accusing him of the blackest treason, the Frenchman was simply acting out a part:

> I thus recognised in my friend that common weakness, which always desires to be the centre of attention by passing for a man oppressed by misfortune, illness and

> persecution, even when he is at his happiest and most tranquil. His affectation of extreme sensibility was a pretence too often repeated to make an impression on any man who knew him as well as I did.[29]

Though we have no reason to doubt St George's genuine grief for his wife, Rousseau's storytelling flair and 'affectation of extreme sensibility' find their visual echo in the highly dramatic hyperbolic flavour of Hamilton's painting, which artist and sitter were planning only a few years after *Confessions* first appeared. On first viewing the portrait, one is immediately struck by St George's exaggerated pose. His hysterical rolling eyes and knitted eyebrows suggest Hamilton's adherence to the clear and unambiguous vocabulary of expression advocated by the late seventeenth-century art theorist Charles Le Brun, an interest that may have stemmed from the inclusion of his teachings in the syllabus of Hamilton's alma mater, the Dublin Schools, and be further reflected in the five prints after Le Brun which featured in Hamilton's posthumous sale of effects.[30] Sidestepping contemporary criticisms of Le Brun's system, which censured its limitations and ability to distract artists from nature, Hamilton appears to have followed certain elements of Le Brun's prescriptive illustration for 'Bodily and Mental Pain' closely.[31] The extent to which he has enhanced St George's facial features to suggest the dashing handsomeness of a romantic hero is also made clear when the full-length is compared with a far more sober head and shoulders portrait of the same sitter, which must date to about the same time, when St George was around forty years of age.[32] Dressed in black, with his habitual cap in place, St George's pale, drawn face appears as a spectral presence against the sombre grey background. In a fascinating counterpoint to the robust, curly headed figure of the full-length, this portrait presents St George's appearance as it was described by friends and associates at the time, characterised by 'the want of manly features in a pale fair face'.[33]

In his idealised conception of St George's countenance in the first painting, Hamilton may have taken visual cues from Gainsborough's earlier portrait of the sitter as a fresh-faced young man, prior to his ill-fated American tour, a painting which St George had promised in his commission letter that the appointed artist could see.[34] Prefiguring the composition and atmosphere of Hamilton's full-length, Gainsborough depicts his subject leaning disconsolately against a rock in an open-air setting, dressed in military costume, the red sash and white breeches of which echo between the images. However, comparison of the sword in both paintings also reveals interesting differences between the two works. In Gainsborough's portrait it is quite proportionate, hanging by St George's side as a standard part of his uniform. In Hamilton's portrait, it has almost doubled in size, scraping the ground between his legs in a rather incongruous manner. Such exaggeration lends an unreal, mythical quality to this depiction of a soldier who, though bearing the physical scars of real military action, seems, like his hero, Rousseau, to be playing a part. Indeed, St George's theatrical air and oversized blade invite comparison with the prominent display of such weaponry in a satirical caricature he produced for the well-known London publisher Matthew Darly in 1772. Entitled *Strollers performing Hamlet before*

the Squire, the print demonstrates St George's familiarity with the world of acting, as it pokes fun at the overstated performances of a group of travelling players who strut across their makeshift stage with grossly exaggerated gestures (Plate 3). The figure to the left carries a sword in a handsome sling, while his combatant waves his menacingly in the air.

However, St Georges's steel recalls nothing so emphatically as 'the magic sword' prop which featured prominently in Sir Brooke Boothby's pageant for Fuseli held on St George's English estate ten years earlier. In the central scene of the pageant's fanciful story, acted out by Fuseli's friends, Boothby plays a virtuous knight who wins a fight with a growling monster in a cavern, thus winning back 'the charmed sword, which hangs suspended from ye bough of a blasted oak'. As he snatches it, 'thunder rolls and Lightenings flash ... The victorious Knight waves the magic Sword, won from ye Monster's guard over the sleeping Knight and Lady. They awake slowly from their long repose.' [35] Proceedings closed with an explicit comparison between the fictional knight and St George, who was praised as a 'living hero'. The scenes enacted in the pageant were clearly inspired by two of Fuseli's own paintings, featuring Urma, a magician who held ladies and their knights in bondage by means of a spell.[36] In *Percival Delivering Belisane from the Enchantment of Urma*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1783, an oversized sword takes centre stage, and it does not seem implausible that Hamilton may have, consciously or otherwise, felt the influence of Fuseli – the intended artist for the portrait – and adopted a heightened pictorial register not usually native to his work.

St George's apparent appropriation of the role of the pageant's hero draws attention to his own real-life dilemma – his perceived inability to inhabit the role of the mourning widower entirely authentically. As Arthur Browne elaborates in his contemporary discourse 'On the Passion of Grief':

> Those who have not felt it sincerely cannot describe it, and those who have are too much agitated at the time of its extreme violence to describe its effects, and when freed by time from their misery, find the recollection too painful to admit of analyzation. The descriptions of it therefore are poetical not natural.[37]

St George's commission letter appears to bear out Browne's conclusions, for while he claims to have 'lost all, the balm of life', he adds, 'I would give millions, if I possessed them to feel what grief as I have heard people talk of. I want a Crisis!' In a later passage, he claims, somewhat curiously: 'I cannot weep. I have tried mechanical means to do it', and, in a telling admission, dismisses the preceding lengthy account of his state of mind as 'jargon', declaring that it 'has too much the air of description for real suffering'.[38] It is here that the precise role of the painting becomes clear: as a kind of substitute for real emotion, for the self-proclaimed falsity of his verbose outburst serves 'to impress you how important to me is the picture I mentioned'. Mirroring Rousseau's 'dangerous pact of the self with language' in which he 'accepted not just to write about himself and his problems, but to embody them in the very manner of his writing',[39] this sense of substitution, conscious or otherwise, seems to have flavoured much of St George's thinking

3 – Richard Mansergh St George, Strollers performing Hamlet before the Squire
published by M. Darly, 18th April 1772,etching, 33.1 x 42.2 cm (plate size)
(courtesy Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University)

and writing. In his *Account of the State of Affairs in and about Headford, Co. Galway*, written around 1790 after his return from America, he described 'the land eaten to the bone, the inclosures in ruins, the trees cut down and a universal scene of devastation'. He professes a desire to establish 'a linen manufacture under proper regulation' and

> give encouragement to manufactures – tradesmen – mechanicks and industrious people in general, and to induce such to settle in my town – I will give them ground to build on and all encouragement in my power – long leases at a moderate or no rent & as soon as I can afford it will build houses for them.

Yet he doubts the willingness or ability of his tenants to make the enterprise a success, dismissing them as 'riotous and easily excited to any act of violence and opposition to the law ... they are indolent in the extreme and averse to all manner of improvement and are ungrateful for encouragement.' [40] Admitting defeat before he has even begun, the account, sprawling over sixteen pages, appears to have sufficiently exercised St George's sense of compassion, precluding the need for real action. In his heartfelt description of his tenants' wretchedness, he displays his credentials as a man of feeling, but as Terry Eagleton suggests 'Pathos and pity ... are impulses as tender as they are impotent, more substitutes for

action than they are spurs to it ... Politically speaking, the cult of sensibility is strikingly ambivalent.' [41]

In St George's case, the report allowed him to play the part of the good landlord without requiring him to follow through. A note appended to the bottom by his friend Sir Brooke Boothby confirms such a view, coolly appraising the document as 'an excellent and most curious account of the deplorable state of Ireland', while justifying the author's inertia: 'Such impediments can only be removed by powerful engines – money or authority might either of them effect much, but you have no money to spare and delegated authority besides what it loses in force, will never be directed to the good purpose you propose.' St George's subsequent act of inking over his friend's pencil-written comment appears to seal the fate of his mooted improvements.[42]

The propensity for role-playing which St George reveals in his writing and ultimately in his portrait seems to accord with Andrea Henderson's contention that the Gothic represents a world 'emptied of content', an idea encapsulated by the airy hollow of St George's military helmet, lying discarded in a pile of brambles in Hamilton's painting. As the ghostly double of Romanticism, the Gothic promotes a view of the world in which life appears 'theatrical', a 'death-in-life' and 'embodied selves become mere actors or caricatures'.[43] While indulging in such fantasy, however, gothic melancholy, as a pictorial trope, revealed a desire to find a way back to more stable values and a certain authenticity, 'to a point where the national culture was, irrespective of the suffering that much of the privilege was built on, both comprehensible and habitable'.[44] The visual paradox created by this search for authenticity in the empty carapace of the gothic form was perhaps the most apt reflection of the absurd position in which the Anglo-Irish protestant elite found itself by the 1790s, still hanging onto the trappings of power in the form of the 'big house' and the glamour of official positions (in St George's case, that of magistrate), yet increasingly impotent in terms of real political power or any form of local control. Absurdity, described as the defining national characteristic of Ireland by Oliver Goldsmith as early as 1762, had now become the ruling elite's fatal flaw.[45] Unable to fall back on ancient bloodlines or ties to the soil, which had always been conditional and ambivalent, they were equally unable to profit from newer modes of personal valuation based on capitalist success, as St George's estate account amply demonstrates.[46] Maria Edgeworth's contemporary novel about the lives of the Anglo-Irish elite, *Castle Rackrent*, written between 1794 and 1798, focuses on the absurd behaviour that came to fill this void. Nominally set in the past 'before the year 1782', and prefaced with the observation 'that the manners depicted in the following pages are not those of the present age',[47] Edgeworth's satiric portrait was undoubtedly a reflection of the years in which she was writing. Its biting indictment of the follies of a class encompassed a wide range of curious behaviour, from that of the excessively hospitable Sir Patrick, who fitted up the chicken house for the purpose of accommodating guests on long winter nights, to the less humorous but no less absurd antics of his litigation-minded successor Sir Murtagh, upholder of dozens of futile lawsuits.[48]

Such excessive behaviour in the fictional realm found its real-life counterpart in St George's capricious behaviour in social situations. The Ladies of Llangollen were at first charmed by him on his visit to their part of Wales in the spring and summer of 1788. In the journal in which they both made entries, he is described on 4th February as 'one of the most pleasing men I ever conversed with'. Yet, by 23rd July, they noted: 'Col. and Mrs St George and Miss Stepney propose settling in the neighbourhood of Llangollen if they can get a House. We shall take care not to be troubled with their visits.' [49]

The circumstances of their falling out are no longer known, but St George's impetuous and unpredictable character almost inevitably played a part in their estrangement; it had previously been hinted at in his acerbic caricatures of the 1770s, such as the aforementioned *Strollers performing Hamlet before the Squire*, in which he had revealed his scorn for the vulgar ostentation and philistinism of the contemporary upper classes and spared no mercy in turning on the society which he kept as a wealthy young landowner.[50] Such rash disregard for accepted conduct is also fatally reflected in his bizarre behaviour on the day of his death, 9th February 1798, at the hands of a gang of tenants on his Cork estate at Macrony, Kilworth. As reported in a letter written a week later by his friend Revd Mr Collis of Castle Cooke, county Cork, St George had heard reports of insurgent activity on his land associated with the Defender movement, a radical Catholic secret society which had evolved in the 1780s to overturn the church establishment, the English land settlement and the social hierarchy.[51] On the afternoon of the ill-fated day, St George is said to have walked through a local wood 'attended by a great number of his tenants and others who flocked there out of Curiousity':

> ...in his wild and imprudent stile [St George] was exclaiming against Defenderism in which he said they were all united, and desired them to tell their Commander Captain Dee he had so little dread of him that he wou'd spend that night at the Lodge house without arms or any Guard, which he accordingly did, sending away Mr Robertson in the evening and Yeaman Servant who attended him both as a Servant and Guard, though he most earnestly entreated permission to remain with him. As Collis adds: 'It is remarkable that he never ventured out any distance even in the daytime without his guard armed with a Blunderbuss and a case of pistols besides both their hangers, and that day as if infatuated left all his arms here.' [52]

This swaggering performance was to be St George's last, for that night, acting on his words, a group of Defenders entered the house where he was staying and, 'armed with Guns and Blunderbusses', 'battered the Skulls' of both St George and his host Mr Uniake. In its incautious and passionate bravado, aptly described in contemporary reports as 'fool hardiness' and a 'contempt for danger',[53] St George's futile and ultimately fatal gesture recalls the 'masculine' behaviour of a long-gone chivalrous past, when such naïve trust might have provoked admiration and recantation in the hearts of his tenants. But this was Ireland in the 1790s, not some folkloric tale, and the ending was predictably grizzly.[54]

And yet, behind the swagger of St George's last hours and the portrait he left

behind, lay a search for a useful role: less a cry 'for the continuation of a class', in Fintan Cullen's words,[55] than a mournful, somewhat masochist admission of its inherent futility, which might act as a warning to subsequent generations. Indeed, this desire for a worthwhile function played an explicit role in the portrait's commissioning process and the elaborate plans to lock it away in a special room in the Mansion House in Dublin after it was finished. If St George was redundant in his own age, he could be of use to his children at an unspecified time in the future, when, at 'their most impressionable', they would suddenly see 'the Image of their Father and Mother', and 'this dreadful and strange apparition' would act as a 'sudden and powerful impulse' to guide them on the path of righteousness.[56]

CONCLUSION

By drawing attention to the incongruity of certain aspects of St George's portrait, this is not to suggest that it was in any way disingenuous or insincere. Hamilton's painting appears to have struck a profound chord with contemporary viewers, who reveled in the emotional legibility that St George promoted and exhibited their own brand of excess in the portrait's rapturous reception. In a critique every bit as florid as St George's own prose, the reviewer for the *Hibernian Journal* practises his own form of substitution, suggesting that the curious masochism identified in the painting's subject was a feeling readily understood by a Dublin audience:

> And St George – Oh St GEORGE! While the eyes, the heart – the soul of him who now writes, would avow him all thyself when witnessing thy resigned, yet thrilling agony at the sepulchre of thy love, he almost envies thee thy after-fate – wishes to be what he beholds, and blesses those merciful ruffians who delivered thee from the pangs of cureless grief, to be reunited to her FOR EVER.[57]

While the hyperbole with which St George's portrait was received may appear excessive to modern sensibilities, his close involvement in the work's conception and the unusually empathetic identification it encouraged suggest a cultural reinvestment in the portrait genre around this time and a new belief in its powers of communication. Perhaps taking their cue from the particular development of the post-Revolution French art scene, where individually commissioned portraiture was gaining renewed prestige after several years in the critical desert, Irish sitters and audiences could certainly identify with the French need for 'an affirmation of personal identity' after the collective, public atrocities committed during the Terror.[58] If Hamilton's portrait of St George ultimately fails to provide such affirmation, it is undoubtedly a glorious and compelling failure: a remarkable testament to the perceived potency of image-making in times of crisis and the complex dance between real life and its painted reflection.

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ENDNOTES

1 Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (eds), 16 vols (New Haven and London, 1978-84) IV, 1193 (5th April 1799).

2 Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996) 107.

3 L.J. Proudfoot, 'Spatial Transformation and Social Agency: Property, Society and Improvement, c.1700 to c.1900' in B.J. Graham and L.J. Proudfoot (eds), *An Historical Geography of Ireland* (London, 1993) 225.

4 Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (Princeton, 1974) 39-40. Many of these grieving widows are represented with an image of their lost spouse. At the very least, their faces are generally covered or turned from the viewer in profile.

5 T.J. Mulvany, 'Memoirs of Native Artists: Hugh Douglas Hamilton', *Dublin Monthly Magazine*, January 1842, 72. Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: the representation of Ireland 1750-1930* (Cork, 1997) 114. Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750-1810* (New Haven and London, 2005) 227-30.

6 *Hibernian Journal*, 6th June 1801.

7 If any particular tragedy befell Boyle during his time in Italy, his father's extensive correspondence with him throughout his stay makes no reference to it. Richard Boyle, Earl of Shannon, *Lord Shannon's Letters to his Son 1790-1802*, Esther Hewitt (ed.), (Belfast, 1982) and National Library of Ireland (NLI), Boyle Papers, MSS 13,295-13,306. Regrettably, Boyle's replies to his father's correspondence are no longer extant.

8 According to the travel journals of Brooke's tutor, Revd John Parkinson, Brooke himself had 'sat to Mr Hamilton for his Picture' on 28th May 1784 when the two were in Venice. This pastel, now lost, is often confused with Graham's commemorative portrait. Private collection, MS, 'Journal of Dr John Parkinson in Italy' 1783-84. Quoted by F. Russell, Christie's sale catalogue, 23rd May 1994, 130.

9 Mulvany, 'Memoirs of Native Artists', 72.

10 Cullen, *Visual Politics*, 195, n.92; Myrone, *Bodybuilding*, 227-30.

11 Myrone, *Bodybuilding*, 227-30.

12 'The Diary of the Ladies of Llangollen' (28th July 1788) in Lady Eleanor Butler, Sarah Ponsonby and Caroline Hamilton, *The Hamwood Papers of the Ladies of Llangollen*, and Caroline Hamilton (ed.) *G.H. Bell* (London, 1930) 118.

13 John Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800* (New Haven and London, 1997) 836.

14 Full text of letter reproduced in David H. Weinglass (ed.), *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli* (Munich and New York, 1982) 66-71. See Fintan Cullen, 'Hugh Douglas Hamilton: Painter of the Heart', *Burlington Magazine*, 125, 1983, 417-21.

15 I am grateful to Jane Munro at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for communicating discovery of this drawing.

16 Julie Rugg 'From Reason to Regulation: 1760-1850' in Peter Jupp and Clare Gittings (eds), *Death in England* (Manchester, 1999) 211.

17 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, Count Cesare Orlandi (ed.), (Perugia (1593), 1764-66). Ripa's original work

was not illustrated. Succeeding editions often added pictures of their own devising – individual to each publication – to accompany the text.

[18] NLI, POS 5483, 'Charles Frizell's Maps of the Estate of Richard St George Mansergh St George Esq. in the County of Galway in 1775'. Olive Alcock, Kathy de hÓra and Paul Gosling (eds), *Archaelogical Inventory of County Galway, Volume 2: North Galway* (Dublin, 1999) 4.

[19] Cullen, *Visual Politics*, 109.

[20] Paul Gilroy, *After Empire – Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (Abingdon, 2004) 127.

[21] Cullen, *Visual Politics*, 107.

[22] Arthur Browne in a pamphlet of 1787, cited in James Anthony Froude, *The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, 3 vols (London, 1872-74) III, 523. Browne, lawyer and MP, sat to Hamilton for a head and shoulders portrait in oil *c*.1795-1800, now in the collection at Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

[23] Sir Martin Hunter, *The Journal of Gen Sir Martin Hunter and some letters of his wife Lady Hunter* (Edinburgh, 1894) 21.

[24] TCD, MS 1749/2 'An Account of the State of Affairs in and about Headford, Co Galway by Richard Mansergh St George with a note by Sir B Boothby c.1790'.

[25] National Archive, Rebellion Papers 620/21/18, 'Information against various persons, Dublin 15th March 1794'.

[26] Butler and Ponsonby, 'Diary', 74-55 (4th February 1788).

[27] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions* (1782; Oxford, 2008) 8.

[28] Peter France, *Rousseau: Confessions* (Cambridge, 1987) 69.

[29] David Hume, 'Exposé succinct de la Contestation qui s'est élévé entre M. Hume et M. Rousseau avec les pieces justificatives' in Thomas Edward Ritchie (ed.), *An Account of the Life and Writings of David Hume Esq*. (1807; Bristol, 1990) Appendix III, 466-67 (my translation).

[30] Robert Dodsley's *The Preceptor*, 2 vols (London, 1748), the Dublin Schools' main teaching text, featured Le Brun's theories prominently. *A Catalogue of the Valuable Collection of Engravings, Books of Prints, and Few Pictures, the Genuine Property of that Ingenious and Admired Artist, Hugh Hamilton, Esq, Deceased*..., Christie's, London, Wednesday 15th May 1811, Lot 36, 'Five from Le Brun by Poilly, Edelinck, &c'. Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: the origin and influence of Charles Le Brun's' Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière'* (New Haven and London, 1994) 17-18.

[31] Critical censure of Le Brun had been growing ever since Roger de Piles first expressed doubts about his system in 1708. See Roger De Piles, *The Principles of Painting* (London, 1743; first published as *Cours de peinture par principes* in Paris, 1708) 104.

[32] A third oil portrait, of oval format, similar in conception to the head and shoulders portrait, was also completed by Hamilton (whereabouts now unknown).

[33] Letter from Anna Seward to Humphrey Repton, 13th April 1798; Anna Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward written between the years 1784 and 1807*, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1811) V, 68-69.

[34] Weinglass (ed.), *Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 66-71. Whether Hamilton did manage to see Gainsborough's portrait is unclear. It was not exhibited on completion in the 1770s, and its location in the 1790s remains obscure. Presumably it was in St George's own hands or those of a family member or associate if it was as readily accessible as his letter suggests. For further discussion of the Gainsborough portrait see Myrone, *Bodybuilding*, 237-38.

[35] Jacques Zonneveld, *Sir Brooke Boothby: Rousseau's Roving Baronet Friend* (Uitgeverij, 2003), 170-71.

[36] *ibid*., 168.

[37] Arthur Browne, *Miscellaneous sketches; or, hints for essays*, 2 vols (London, 1798) I, 125.
[38] Weinglass (ed.), *Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 66-71.
[39] France, *Rousseau: Confessions*, 98.
[40] TCD, MS 1749/2, 'Account of Headford'.
[41] Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1998) 80-81.
[42] TCD, MS 1749/2, 'Account of Headford'. St George's act of inking over the final comment is recorded in the TCD manuscripts catalogue.
[43] Andrea Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774-1830* (Cambridge, 1996) 38-39.
[44] Gilroy, *After Empire*, 97.
[45] Oliver Goldsmith, 'The Citizen of the World' (1762) in Arthur Friedman (ed.), *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, 5 vols (Oxford, 1966) II, 32.
[46] Henderson, *Romantic Identities*, 39.
[47] Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, George Watson (ed.), (Oxford (1800), 1999) 4.
[48] *ibid*., 10, 16.
[49] Butler and Ponsonby, 'Diary', 74-75, 115 (4th February 1788, 23rd July 1788).
[50] F.D. Klingender (ed.), *Hogarth and English Caricature* (London and New York, 1944) 53.
[51] See Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven and London, 1982) 35-50.
[52] TCD, MS 1749/1, 'Letter from the Rev. Mr Collis of Castle Cooke, Co. Cork to 'Frank', 16th February 1798. St George was one of three magistrates killed in these months, all of whom were besieged by assailants while they slept. R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801* (Oxford, 1979) 536-37.
[53] *Dublin Evening Post*, 22nd February 1798; *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 13th February 1798.
[54] That St George did, however, inspire a certain amount of fantasy and storytelling amongst his journalistic contemporaries is suggested by the melodramatic and embroidered account of his death reported in *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 15th February 1798. The erroneous belief that he was 'felled to the ground with a rusty scythe', as reported in the *Journal*, is still in circulation today.
[55] Cullen, *Visual Politics*, 114.
[56] Weinglass (ed.), *Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 66-71.
[57] *Hibernian Journal*, 6th June 1801.
[58] Tony Halliday, *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (Manchester, 1999) 86, 125; Philippe Bordes, *Portraiture in Paris around 1800: Cooper Penrose by Jacques-Louis David*, exhibition catalogue (San Diego, 2004) 20.

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