Loyalty, delirium and grief: the portraits of Richard Mansergh St George

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In 1797, the Irish artist J.D. Herbert and a number of other dinner guests in Dublin had the unfortunate experience of being chased around the room by their sabre-wielding host, Richard Mansergh St George, a wounded British Army veteran of the American Revolutionary War. Herbert had been invited by St George to paint for him at his estate at Headford Castle, in Galway, but the relationship came to an end after this incident, which Herbert described as a 'fit of insanity'. Herbert considered St George to be an 'unfortunate gentleman' who suffered from periodic 'aberrations of mind, from a fracture in his skull received in an action when he served in America'. St George died a year later, in February 1798, when his Cork tenants ambushed him as he was trying to forcefully suppress rebellious activity on his estate. It was an ignominious end to an eventful life, evoked to some extent by surviving portraiture and illustrations.[1]

Richard Mansergh St George's life is well-documented in portraiture of the late-eighteenth century even though Herbert never travelled to Headford Castle to paint. As a result of new research, no less than eight portraits of St George are known to survive. Four of the works are self-portraits executed on paper. The other four are oil portraits, one by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) and three by Hugh Douglas Hamilton (1740-1808). When considered together and alongside other extant works of art associated with St George, the eight portraits document a dramatic and tragic life. The collection of portraits serves as a window into the entangled histories of the American Revolution, the 1798 Irish Rebellion and the early Romantic era.

1 – Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), Richard St George Mansergh-St George
1776, oil on canvas, 230.2 x 156.1 cm
(National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1922)
(This digital record has been made available on NGV Collection Online through the generous support of digitisation champion Ms Carol Grigor through Metal Manufactures Ltd.)

IRISH SOLDIER, AMERICAN WAR

Born in about 1752 with the name Richard St George Mansergh, he was the son of James Mansergh, a British Army officer from county Cork, and Mary St George, the daughter of General Richard St George (1670-1755), colonel of Mansergh's regiment. General St George had served under King William III in the 1690s and belonged to the notorious Dublin Hellfire Club. He amassed both a great fortune and a scandalous reputation. In 1774, when Richard St George Mansergh stood to inherit land from a maternal relative, he added that additional surname to become Richard St George Mansergh St George, or Richard Mansergh St George for short. Besides his Galway lands, centred on the tower house of Headford Castle, the young St George owned additional lands in counties Cork, Tipperary and Kilkenny. Prior to his inheritance, St George's social and economic standing afforded him the opportunity to be educated in England, first at Westminster School beginning in 1766 and then at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1771.[2]

St George followed in his grandfather's and father's footsteps by purchasing, in 1775, a commission in the army, initially serving as a cornet in the 8th Regiment of Dragoons. A year later, he purchased an ensign's commission in the 4th Regiment of Foot, then stationed in America.[3] In response to the manpower demands of the emerging war in America, the British Army increased its recruiting efforts, particularly in Ireland. By one historian's estimate, about one-sixth of the soldiers and one-third of the officers who served in the army in America were Irish, and mostly Protestant.[4] For St George, the 'rebellion' in America provided him with an opportunity to show his courage and zeal. He shipped out across the Atlantic and fought in his first battles in and around New York city in the summer of 1776.

Immediately before he left for America, St George posed in his uniform for a full-length portrait by Thomas Gainsborough (Plate 1). An imposing and expensive picture at over two meters tall, the portrait may have been a gift for St George's mother (who lived in London at the time) as her only child went off to war.[5] British art historian Martin Myrone has argued that the portrait shows St George as a 'man of feeling' or a man with sensibility.[6] The loyal spaniel and the distant ship express the melancholy feeling of leaving home for battle and the looming violence of combat. The painting does not suggest a feeling of pride or triumph, as some military portraits do. At the time he posed for Gainsborough, St George was unmarried, and his father had died two years earlier. St George wears a black mourning band on his left forearm, which begs the following question: could this sign be in remembrance of his late father or perhaps in honour of comrades from his new regiment who had already fallen in America? Perhaps St George thought the portrait might serve as a memorial in case he did not return home to his widowed mother alive.

St George developed a reputation for aggression and zeal while serving in America. On 23rd December 1776, he purchased a lieutenancy in the 52nd Regiment's light infantry company.[7] Light infantrymen were the army's elite troops – covering its movements, leading flanking manoeuvres and spearheading quick strikes. They wore distinctive, lightweight uniforms which contributed to their agility.[8] Martin Hunter (1757-1846), a

fellow 52nd Regiment lieutenant, remembered St George as being 'quite military mad' and 'a fine, high-spirited, gentleman-like young man, but uncommonly passionate'.[9] Hunter also remarked that St George liked to lead attacks from the front: 'I often thought St. George wished to be wounded, as he frequently said, "It is very extraordinary that I don't get a clink [i.e. a wound], for I am certain I go as much in the way of it as anybody."'[10] This sort of spirit seemed to suit his new role within the light infantry.

An armed entourage added to St George's presence on campaign. He brought a servant with him from home named Bernard, known as the 'Irish Priest'. St George dressed Bernard in military clothing and armed him with captured American weapons. Two men of African descent who had escaped from American slavery to seek their freedom with the British Army also followed St George. Unlike other British officers who often took on freedom-seeking men and women as servants, St George provided the formerly enslaved men with uniforms and weapons. Bernard and the two men of African descent accompanied St George into battle, but their ultimate fate is unknown.[11]

While successful for the British, the battles around Philadelphia in the autumn of 1777 rattled the young lieutenant. At the Battle of Brandywine on 11th September 1777, St George received his first wound. Shrapnel, or perhaps a lead ball, hit his heel and limited his ability to walk for a few days. The night after the battle, St George wrote a letter describing the intensity of the fight:

> 'Twas not like those of Covent Garden or Drury Lane ... There was a most infernal Fire of cannon & musketry, most incessant shouting – incline to the right! incline to the left! Halt! Charge &c. The balls ploughing up the ground. The Trees cracking over ones heads. The branches riven by the artillery – The leaves falling as in autumn by the grapeshot.[12]

Ten days later, shrieks and shouts pierced the night air as St George helped lead a surprise attack on an American encampment near the Paoli Tavern, west of Philadelphia. St George and his fellow light infantrymen engaged the enemy in bloody, hand-to-hand combat that left dozens of American soldiers dead and inflicted over two hundred casualties, many by bayonets.[13] Given the unconventional nature of the engagement, St George called it a 'dreadful scene of Havock' and 'a nocturnal bloody scene'.[14]

At the Battle of Germantown on 4th October 1777, St George, while leading men into battle, suffered the consequences of his brazen actions, abruptly ending his military career in America. He collapsed from 'a shocking wound in the head' at the onset of an American attack, having been hit by one of the first musket volleys fired by the American troops.[15] A fellow officer wrote that the shot gave St George a 'broken skull'.[16] A soldier in St George's company carried him from the battlefield and saved him from capture or bleeding to death. In Philadelphia, physicians operated on St George's head using a procedure known as trephination, in which a disk of his skull was removed using a circular saw called a trephine and the hole covered with a silver plate. He survived the operation, which Martin Hunter witnessed:

> When [St. George] was trepanned, I was the only person he knew, and he desired me to remain with him while the operation was performed. This was the first person

> I ever saw trepanned, and I am certain it will be the last. He bore the whole operation without saying a word ... He wore a little silver plate over the place he was trepanned.[17]

The procedure relieved pressure caused by fluid build-up around St George's brain and likely saved his life. However, he would never again fight in battle.

While serving in America, St George sketched caricatures. Before the war, he drew no less than ten 'macaroni' cartoons that London print-sellers Matthew and Mary Darly published in 1773-74 (Plate 2). His cartoons feature jokes that are part social commentary and part innuendo. One friend remembered that St George's 'wit, and genius for allegoric and humorous invention in the art of the pencil, are first rate'.[18] Martin Hunter recalled that 'St George drew caricatures uncommonly well' during the war.[19] Four of St George's campaign sketches from the American Revolutionary War are known to survive, three of which are self-portraits. They are rare examples of soldier artwork from the period, providing an eyewitness perspective of life on campaign. St George's sardonic wit, initially exhibited in his cartoons published in London, persisted as he faced the drudgeries and dangers of battle.

In *Myself Conversing with Rebel Prisoners according to the Rules of Chivalry*, St George depicts himself mocking a captured officer from the Continental Army (Plate 3). According to St George's written description on the reverse, the sketch portrays him guarding two captured American officers following a battle in New York in 1776. The American officer with crossed arms is turning his head in disgust at being guarded and given orders by St George, a lower-ranking officer. Since British officers considered those

3 – Richard Mansergh St George (c.1752-1798), Myself Conversing with Rebel Prisoners according to the Rules of Chivalry
1777-78, watercolour and ink on paper, 14.3 x 15.9 cm

4 – Richard Mansergh St George Myself on Picquet in a Tempest Disdaining a Cloak
1777-78, watercolour and ink on paper, 18.7 x 14.3 cm

(both courtesy Harlan Crow Library, Dallas, Texas)

opposite

2 – Richard Mansergh St George Timothy Tallow and his wife going to Graves Hall on a Sunday
published by Matthew & Mary Darly, 10th August 1772, hand-coloured etching, 24.9 x 35 cm (plate size) (courtesy Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University)

5 – Richard Mansergh St George (c.1752-1798), My Triumphant Entry into Philadelphia 1777-78, watercolour and ink on paper, 26 x 23.8 cm (courtesy Harlan Crow Library, Dallas, Texas)

holding rank in the Continental Army to be rebels commissioned by an illegal government, St George and his peers may have considered American ranks to be irrelevant. Some British officers also viewed American equivalents as social inferiors who were not fit to be gentlemen with rank. St George seems to relish that power dynamic in this sketch. The other American soldier on the left wears a cap decorated with the phrase 'Death or Liberty', a purposeful inversion of the famous revolutionary motto 'Liberty or Death' to emphasize St George's disdain for his enemy.

Myself on Picquet in a Tempest Disdaining a Cloak illustrates the campaign experience that St George and his fellow light infantry officers shared, while adding a lighthearted perspective (Plate 4). St George depicted himself (seated at the centre) at an advanced post on guard duty smoking a pipe. A man in a red jacket and gaitered trousers brings him a blanket coat. This figure is presumably Bernard, the 'Irish Priest'. St George shows himself refusing the coat as an expression of his composure and stoicism, while his uniform reflects how some officers adapted to the warm weather, exposure to rain and extensive marching that they faced in the field. Trousers were preferred instead of breeches and stockings, a short jacket and a broad-brimmed hat instead of a coat and cap. The war in America proved to be a tough physical and psychological test, leading one fellow officer to call it 'a Savage Life'.[20]

St George's third self-portrait from the Revolutionary War, *My Triumphant Entry into Philadelphia*, is the most dramatic of his surviving wartime sketches (Plate 5). The scene shows St George, draped in a blue blanket, being carted off the battlefield at Germantown following his severe head wound. He is joined in the cart by other British

Army casualties. On his way to Philadelphia for medical treatment, St George's bloody head is tended to by a man in a red jacket, presumably Bernard. A man of African descent is shown driving the cart pulled by two horses, while a light infantryman walks alongside. The figure at the centre in the blue-trimmed coat is Captain John West of the 4th Regiment, a friend of St George's. He is identifiable because of St George's description of the scene written on the back of the sketch: 'My Dear Friend West met me in ye Cart as He was marching with the Grenadiers to support us and took me by the Hand—and wept as I have been since told.'

The three wartime self-portraits do not show moments of military triumph. They instead add satire to the challenges St George faced in America, from his personal interactions with the enemy, to the difficulties of life on campaign, to his grievous wound. The intended audience for the sketches is unclear. St George, however, is known to have shown his caricatures, possibly including these examples, to curious onlookers in a folio that he carried around after the war. The sketches may have been personally useful to St George to remember, comprehend and share the realities of war he faced.[21]

WOUNDED VETERAN

Richard Mansergh St George constantly felt the effects of the war in America in unusual ways. His head wound, particularly the silver plate embedded in his skull, provided him with daily torments and hallucinations for the rest of his life. Each day he felt the pain of war. In 1792, St George wrote:

> I have not one Second of Ease—No Effort nor medicine no trick can procure it—I take laudanum by advice—I try to divert thoughts [of] pain by every method every one proposes—I take snuff—I walk till I am fatigued read write weary myself drink wine—but in vain ... I can not as I have in the pain of the body obtain momentary Ease.[22]

Following his return to Ireland, St George chose to wear a black silk cap to cover his wound, and a black robe. His friends noted that he continued to sketch 'lively and spirited scenes' but now also drew 'melancholy or horrific subjects'.[23] He befriended fellow artists, voiced his emotions and shared his trauma-induced visions.[24]

Seeking a warmer climate to ease his agony and to go on a tour fit for a gentleman, St George travelled to Naples in the 1780s. There he met the painter Xavier della Gatta (1758-1829). Della Gatta, a well-known artist despite his youthfulness, painted landscapes that capture the beauty of the Bay of Naples. He was a master of painting with gouache, which gives his works soft tones compared to oil paints. Among the earliest known dated examples of della Gatta's work are two battle paintings that St George most likely commissioned.[25]

St George worked with della Gatta to create two paintings of the battles of Paoli and Germantown in 1782 based on St George's eyewitness testimony (Plates 6, 7). Each painting is a composite scene, merging different actions from each battle into a single view. Some of the vignettes bear similarities to St George's wartime sketches, evidence

6 – Xavier della Gatta (1777-1829), Battle of Paoli
1782, gouache on paper, 36.2 x 58.7 cm (Museum of the American Revolution)

of the link between della Gatta and St George. The foreground of each painting also includes identifiable comrades of the former light infantry lieutenant. For example, the centre-foreground of the Paoli painting depicts Lieutenant Martin Hunter bandaging his right hand (a wound that Hunter received at the battle). The Germantown painting shows St George in the left-foreground being carried off the battlefield following his head wound.[26]

Both paintings dramatise and illustrate the physical and emotional costs of war that St George felt for the rest of his life. Neither shows a triumphant action. Instead, they capture moments of chaos for St George and his comrades. The Paoli painting is full of violent hand-to-hand combat. The Germantown scene shows the British Army retreating before their successful counterattack. In addition to the paintings, St George preserved the uniform and hat that he wore at the Battle of Germantown. His mother kept the relics in a trunk with a handwritten note:

> In this Box or Trunk are the shirt hat and cloaths &c which Capt M St George my dear son had on him the day he received the dangerous wound in his head by a musket Bullet in an action with the Rebels the 4th of October 1777 at Germantown about five miles from Philadelphia.[27]

The act of keeping such meaningful objects and commissioning the two paintings may have been cathartic, as tangible reminders of his military career.

Two portraits painted by Hugh Douglas Hamilton in the 1790s capture Richard Mansergh St George's appearance following the war in America. One is an oval oil on canvas, likely a study for the other more refined oil on panel work (Plates 8, 9).[28] The portraits show St George in his silk cap and robe with an expression of longing. Irish

7 – Xavier della Gatta (1777-1829), BATTLE OF GERMANTOWN
1782, gouache on paper, 35.9 x 58.4 cm (Museum of the American Revolution)

women Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, who lived together in Wales as the 'Ladies of Llangollen', met the curiously costumed St George in 1788. Butler described him as being 'dressed in the deepest mourning'.[29] Like the earlier portrait by Gainsborough, the two portraits convey a feeling of St George's outward appearance of melancholy.

As he continued to wear this distinctive clothing ensemble and struggle with hallucinations and pain, St George befriended three contributors to what became known as the early Romantic era – poet Anna Seward (1742-1809), intellectual Sir Brooke Boothby (1744-1824), and painter Henry Fuseli (1741-1825). Seward was one of St George's greatest admirers. She shared her deep affection for his 'mixture of dignified reserve, interesting sweetness, high spirit, and varied intelligence' in her poetry, such as the 'Epistle to Colonel St. George', written in April 1783.[30] Boothby, who also wrote poetry and translated Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* into English, shared St George's love of art and theatrics. Fuseli achieved his greatest fame for the dark painting *The Nightmare* (1781), which shocked contemporaries when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1782. Boothby owned the original canvas.[31] According to Martin Myrone, *The Nightmare* 'swiftly confirmed [Fuseli's] reputation as a painter of the horrible, fantastic and perverse'.[32] As a direct response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the artistic convention of realism, the ever -expanding Industrial Revolution and the violence of war and revolution, Romantic artists such as Seward, Boothby and Fuseli emphasised the mysterious power of human emotion in their works.[33]

In the summer of 1783, St George, Boothby, Fuseli and Seward came together to perform an outdoor medieval fantasy play at a property St George owned near Bristol in

England. The 'pageant' was held to 'surprize & amuse the great Wizard painter' Fuseli. Orchestrated by St George and Boothby, each participant had to dress in costume and play a part. St George led Fuseli into the woods where they encountered Boothby dressed in a full suit of armour. St George then 'slunk away', leaving the knight and the wizard to fight against others enchanted by the evil wizard 'Urma' (a character invented by Fuseli). Together they slayed grotesque monsters gnawing on bleeding heads, rescued a maiden from a spell and listened to fairies sing their praises. Seward brought the evening to a close by coming down from a tree singing to St George. Seward made reference to John André, the beloved British army officer who was hanged for conspiring with the infamous traitor Benedict Arnold. To Seward, both André and St George represented the best and brightest gentlemen of the British Empire who fought in America. While André lost his life, St George returned from America with a wound that would come to symbolise, from Seward's perspective, Britain's disturbing loss of thirteen of its American colonies that same year.[34]

Clues that help interpret the pageant's meaning lie in a self-portrait of St George from the 1780s or 1790s (Plate 10). St George, dressed in his distinctive cap and robe, stands in a barren landscape near a lake. Two dark, hooded figures peer at him from the steps of a ruined castle. St George's inscription on the reverse may be a deliberate double entendre: 'Rd. Mansergh St. George By himself'. The image is at the same time a self-portrait and a reflection of personal darkness.[35] The sketch may be a record of one of St George's trauma-induced hallucinations, which he described in a letter to Henry Fuseli: 'I am daily visited with convulsive attacks—three this very day—melted down also by nightly hallucinations and dreadful visions and suggestions—sudden delirium also—yesterday one terrible to recollect—and many more a few days previously.'[36] Contemporaries remembered that St George sketched 'melancholy or horrific subjects' and constantly featured 'knights, halls, battlements, feats of arms, with store of ladies' in his pictures. St George called them his 'dramatic effusions'.[37] It is possible that hallucinations and related sketches, like this self-portrait, motivated his fantasy pageant.

The evil wizard 'Urma', Henry Fuseli's invented pageant character, may have influenced St George's self-portrait. Fuseli included the character in a few of his works, notably *Belisane and Percival under the Enchantment of Urma* (Plate 11). Dressed in a black hooded robe, Urma kept people in chains and tormented them.[38] The two hooded figures in the self-portrait appear strikingly similar to Fuseli's depictions of Urma. Perhaps the two figures are symbolic of St George's wartime head wound, a personal demon of his. The wound, however, was not the only demon that haunted St George's life.

9 – Hugh Douglas Hamilton (1740-1808), Richard Mansergh St George
1790s, oil on panel, 58.1 x 47.6 cm
(private collection)

opposite

8 – Hugh Douglas Hamilton (1740-1808), Richard Mansergh St George
1790s, oil on canvas, 49.8 x 41.9 cm
(courtesy Peter Bland)

10 – Richard Mansergh St George (c.1752-1798), Self-portrait
1780s-90s, watercolour and ink on paper, 25.1 x 37.8 cm (detail)
(Museum of the American Revolution, Gift of Mr Roger Shuttlewood)

11 – Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), Belisane and Percival under the Enchantment of Urma
published by John Raphael Smith, 1782, mezzotint, 45.1 x 55.9 cm (plate size)
(Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection)

GRIEF-STRICKEN HUSBAND

St George's other demon, the lingering psychological pain he felt over the sudden death of his wife, Anne Stepney St George, inspired a third portrait of St George by Hugh Douglas Hamilton (Plate 12). Painted in about 1796, four years after she died, the over two-metre-tall canvas attracted significant critical attention soon after its creation. Visitors who saw this portrait of St George in its first public exhibition in 1801 at the Society of Artists in Dublin proclaimed it to be one of Hugh Douglas Hamilton's finest works. An editorialist in the *Freeman's Journal* praised the portrait when he saw it: 'We have not amongst the best works of the British School a finer picture.'[39] Another viewer described the portrait as showing 'a man versed in misfortune, whose accounts with the world are closed and who cares not how soon he should be removed to another'.[40] Indeed, St George commissioned this portrait as he struggled to cope with the loss of his wife. Hamilton's portrait is further evidence of how St George turned to art to help manage his psychological and physical suffering and serves as an entry point into the story of his own life's violent end.

Hamilton depicts St George clutching his head at an imagined representation of Anne's tomb, which bore the Latin inscription 'NON IMMEMOR' (not forgotten). St George wears the blue jacket and buff trousers of the British Army's 18th Light Dragoons, a unit he joined in 1794.[41] Hamilton painted St George without his distinctive black silk cap, which, according to one of his contemporaries, St George stopped wearing as early as 1796.[42] His choice to discard the cap could have been tied to his return to active military service. Soon after his wife's death on 12th August 1792, St George wrote about his state of mind:

> Affliction is a curious thing. Her threatening aspect becomes mild on a near approach. Her snakes become lambent, and lick our wounds. She has an agreeable ugliness. But perhaps I am partial; for we have long been playfellows ... I have suffered the worst; in due time, my present agony will be mellowed into those sweet regrets, that delicious desiderium, the balm which the mind naturally produces for its own cure.[43]

At this dark moment, St George had thoughts of ending his own life and could not comprehend why his wife had been taken from him so suddenly.

Wedded in London in 1788, the St Georges experienced just four years of marriage. It is currently unclear how or when Richard and Anne met, but they may have corresponded during Richard's military service in America when Anne was married to her first husband Benjamin Burton Doyne (d.1785).[44] Anne Stepney St George gave birth to two sons, Richard James Mansergh St George (1789-1857) and Stepney St George (1791-1847). In the summer of 1791, she posed along with her older son for a portrait by George Romney (Plate 13). Richard Mansergh St George later referred to the picture as 'the sacred portrait'.[45]

St George also expressed his grief in a letter to his friend Henry Fuseli. He began the letter by describing his numbness, how he had 'lost all, the balm of life, the vital principle is destroyed. I would give millions, if I possessed them to feel what grief as I have

heard people talk of'. He blamed his wife's death on 'some supernatural creature'.[46] The letter, at times rambling, reveals St George's fragile psychological state. St George chiefly used this letter to commission a painting from Fuseli that he could use to express his grief to his sons. St George shared his plan to have the painting, along with the portrait of his wife, kept in a locked, purpose-built room in Headford Castle and later revealed to his sons when they were mature enough to understand their father's emotions. St George told Fuseli that 'You can never believe that a picture is important to the future welfare of children.' He suggested that Fuseli could use existing portraits of himself, including a miniature, a charcoal sketch, and the portrait by Gainsborough, to paint St George's face in case he died before Fuseli could finish the painting. To differentiate from previous portraits, though, St George instructed Fuseli to paint his face with an 'expression of convulsive horror and incurability, delirium'.[47]

St George may have been inspired to commission Henry Fuseli from Sir Brooke Boothby. Boothby's five-year-old daughter Penelope had died in 1791 and he commissioned Fuseli to create a painting of her to cope with his grief (Plate 14). Fuseli painted Penelope's 'apotheosis', or ascension into heaven, with his characteristic romantic flair. In 1796, Boothby wrote a poem that described how St George was one of the few people who could understand his grief: 'Dear Mansergh! of the few this breast who share, and share in pitying sympathy its woe, you best my vast excess of passion know.'[48] It is unknown, however, if Fuseli ever painted St George's portrait. St George's rambling letter to Fuseli, incomplete and unsent, remains in the possession of his descendants. Hamilton's portrait may have been a substitute. Considering the differences between Fuseli's and Hamilton's artistic styles, it is difficult to speculate about whether Hamilton's portrait met St George's original desires or if he wanted something darker like Boothby's commission.

Fintan Cullen has analysed and interpreted the meaning and symbolism of Hamilton's portrait of St George, arguing that the portrait captures a man of sensibility and matches the mourning conventions of the late-eighteenth century. Cullen also recognises the Irish political context in which this portrait was painted. The republican ideals of the American Revolution and the social levelling promised by the French Revolution threatened the social, political and economic dominance of Ireland's Protestant ascendancy. The United Irishmen and the Catholic Defenders, the future leaders of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, believed that the ideals of people such as St George – those who remained loyal to the British monarchy and supported the firm power of the Protestant landed gentry – as antithetical to their future vision for Ireland. Cullen argues that St George's portrait is about maintaining 'continuity and stability' through mourning the loss of the past and by showing off St George's social and military stature. Martin Myrone and Ruth Kenny have built upon Cullen's thesis and considered how Hamilton's portrait reflects upon the tumultuous Revolutionary era and its connections to early Romanticism.[49]

As suggested through the portrait, St George struggled with the dramatic changes that shook his life and his native land in the 1790s. The same month that Anne Stepney St

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12 – Hugh Douglas Hamilton (1740-1808), Portrait of Lieutenant Richard Mansergh Saint George c.1796, oil on canvas, 228 x 146.2 cm (National Gallery of Ireland Collection; photo © NGI)


NON·IMMEMOR

13 – George Romney (1734-1802), Portrait of Mrs. St. George and Child
1791, oil on canvas, 147.3 x 111.8 cm
(August Heckscher Collection, Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, N.Y.)

14 – Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), The Apotheosis of Penelope Boothby
1792-1794, oil on canvas, 213.5 x 121.5 cm (courtesy of Wolverhampton Art Gallery)

George died, French Revolutionaries stormed the Tuileries Palace. Months later, King Louis XVI lost his head to the guillotine. The French Revolutionaries, inspired in part by the American Revolution, promised to topple European social hierarchy and replace it with social equality. Religion and property rights came under attack, too. The news of the French Revolution mobilised the United Irishmen, which began to form in 1791 in Belfast and Dublin. They believed in equal rights for Irishmen and the end of religious persecution ingrained in government.[50] St George considered the United Irishmen, and the associated Defenders, to be rebels who threatened the stability and traditions of monarchs and gentlemen, like himself. They directly challenged the foundations of St George's life and the British Empire.

St George took aggressive action to prevent any activity that he deemed to be rebellious on his Irish estates. He wrote periodic reports to the Irish government at Dublin Castle describing the lawlessness he witnessed on his properties in western Ireland.[51] For example, a fellow Galway landlord, Richard Martin of Ballynahinch Castle, opposed St George's authority. According to St George, Martin obstructed justice, freed men whom St George arrested and threatened his life. Some people perceived St George's actions as symptoms of his troubled mind.[52] He also held growing concerns about the condition of his properties, which provided him his wealth. To his friend Boothby, St George wrote about the disorder of his tenants at Headford: 'I examined into the state of their distresses and imagined I was surrounded by savages of those Countries near the South Pole where the means of life are not sufficient for the support of man.' St George suggested constructing a linen factory to improve the lives of the people who owed him rent, but it is unknown if he ever followed through with this plan.[53]

St George met his demise near Fermoy, county Cork, in February 1798, where he had travelled to subdue rumoured disobedience. St George assembled an armed guard and sought help from the British Army to destroy stockpiled weapons, admonish tenants who illegally cut down trees supposedly to make shafts for iron pike heads, and scare off suspected Defenders and United Irishmen. He threatened to burn the homes of anyone he deemed treasonous. According to one observer, St George stood before his tenants 'in his wild and imprudent state' railing against 'ruffians'.[54] On the evening of 9th February 1798, St George boasted that he would stay in the home of Jasper Uniacke at nearby Araglin without the presence of an armed guard. He dared his tenants to retaliate. That night, a number of men ambushed and killed both St George and Uniacke in the house.[55]

Richard Mansergh St George's gruesome death shocked Ireland. News of his killing quickly spread in Irish newspapers and put the already tense country on edge. Three men were hanged for the murders.[56] Just a few months later, in May 1798, the United Irishmen launched their rebellion. Six months of fighting left over thirty thousand Irish men, women and children dead, regardless of their loyalties.[57] St George was one of the first casualties of the conflict that year. He was buried in the St George family vault at St Mary's Church (Church of Ireland) in Athlone, following a large military funeral. The sermon preached that day ridiculed the 'Demon of Rebellion' and called for steadfast loyalty to George III.[58] The large portrait of St George grieving at his wife's tomb became a visual record of his troubled life and violent death. Irish author and clergyman Caesar

Otway paid a visit to Headford Castle in 1838 to see the portrait on display. Otway wrote, 'I remember the cruel slaughter of this brave and eccentric man ... I don't wonder that he who inherits, along with Colonel St George's virtues, his unshaken loyalty and Protestantism, should wish to have a fosse and ramparts round his dwelling.'[59]

CONCLUSION

The eight surviving portraits of Richard Mansergh St George provide an intimate look into the life of a person caught up in revolution. At first glance, St George appears only to have been the enemy of revolution, having fought against people he called 'rebels' in both America and Ireland. But at the same time, St George's portraits are evidence of his contributions to the revolutionary aspects of the early Romantic era, specifically engagement with fantasy and the metaphysical, and the artistic expression of intense emotions. He outwardly embraced Romanticism as he faced the physical and psychological pain visible in his portraits from the 1780s and 1790s. One obituarist recalled that St George's 'distinguishing trait, and what gave something of an eccentric cast to his conduct throughout life, was romance. This was the source from which his actions in general seem to have taken their tinge.'[60] St George's portraits and story help to illuminate an era of great change in the Atlantic World.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With thanks to Fintan Cullen, Ruth Kenny, Martin Mansergh, Philip Mead, Martin Myrone, Robert O'Byrne, Norma Owens, Brendan Rooney, R. Scott Stephenson, Mark A. Turdo, Gregory J.W. Urwin, the Museum of the American Revolution and the Irish Georgian Society for their support and encouragement to tell this story. The St George, Mansergh, Treherne and Bland families deserve recognition for sharing their collections and their knowledge of their colourful ancestor.

ENDNOTES

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18 Anna Seward, *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (ed. Walter Scott), 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1810) II, 216.

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20 William Dansey, *Captured Rebel Flag: The letters of Captain William Dansey 33rd Regiment of Foot 1776-1777* (ed. Paul Dansey), (Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, 2010) 33.

21 St George's fourth surviving sketch from the war is titled *A Virginian Rifleman* and shows one of his common battlefield adversaries firing from behind a tree. Herbert, *Irish Varieties*, 39.

22 David H. Weinglass (ed.), *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli* (New York, 1982) 68.

23 Herbert, *Irish Varieties*, 39.

24 *Gentleman's Magazine* (London), February 1798, 97.

25 No receipt or other paperwork documenting St George's commissioning of the two paintings is known to survive. However, *Battle of Paoli* is signed and dated by Xavier della Gatta and St George is known to have travelled to Naples in the 1780s; see Eva Mary Bell (ed.), *The Hamwood Papers of the Ladies of Llangollen and Caroline Hamilton* (London, 1930) 74; Weinglass (ed.), *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 70. For more information on Xavier della Gatta, see the publications *Gouaches Napoletane del Settecento e dell' Ottocento* (Naples, 1985) and *Gouaches del '700* (Naples, 2007).

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36 Weinglass (ed.), *The Collected English Letters of Henry Fuseli*, 71.

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