

foreign capitals with one change of clothes, or their newspapers rotate them quickly through the bureaus—from China, to the metropolitan desk, to Paris, to Washington—in the mistaken belief that facility, not familiarity, is the hallmark of good journalism. With the possible exception of the *Atlantic*, the *New Yorker* is the only American publication that still offers its writers the conditions under which reflective and well-considered foreign reporting might be undertaken.

One wonders, though, whether there is still an American audience for this sort of journalism. I am told that *Europeans* has been getting rave American reviews, none of which have I seen. But I wonder how many American reviewers really understand it, for it makes real demands on our attention and our prejudices. Americans should find it hard to reconcile themselves with Miss Kramer's portraits of disunity, bred as they are to believe that national dif-

ferences arose from the state of nature through poverty, ignorance, religion, or war, and will disappear with them. (Assuming marginal tax rates are kept down too.) They now find it hard to imagine an ephemeral bond of national character surviving in a region grown rich, educated, secular, and finally at peace. They have lost the habit of speaking intelligently about national character because they fear being called racists or hearing lectures on the moral perils of stereotyping. So they mouth the bureaucratic platitudes of affirmative action at home, but find themselves completely at sea when they use the same language to understand the exotic intrigues of the Old World. We Americans have become both too lazy and too pious, I fear, to appreciate the real lessons of Jane Kramer's *Europeans*, and will instead turn to publications like *The European* to find a phoney, white-bread cosmopolitanism that looks so reassuringly like our own. □

### EDMUND BURKE: HIS LIFE AND OPINIONS

Stanley Ayling/St. Martin's Press/715 pp. \$26.00

Maurice Cranston

The life of Edmund Burke has always been something of a mystery—partly because he chose to make it one. In eighteenth-century England, it would hardly have been possible for an Irishman with a Roman Catholic mother and no money to acquire a seat in Parliament and a prominent place in the Whig party without keeping a good many things dark. One consequence of this is that Burke has had to wait a very long time for anything like an adequate biography. However, the appearance in 1978 of the *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, in a magisterial edition by the American scholar Thomas W. Copeland, brought to light much that had previously been veiled, and Burke now awaits his definitive biographer. Stanley Ayling is not that definitive biographer, but his book is more than acceptable as a provisional biography, soundly based on the researches of Copeland and distinguished by the three great virtues of literary style: brevity, clarity, and euphony.

Burke has the reputation in the textbooks of being a turncoat, a vigorous champion of the American Revolution in 1776 who became a bitter critic of

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the French Revolution in 1789; a liberal who, for no very creditable reason, became an arch-conservative. By tracing the evolution of Burke's political opinions, his biographer shows that this is a false notion based on a failure to understand either what Burke was saying or the situation in which he found himself.

Burke was a Christian without being a sectarian. Coming from a family half Anglican, half Catholic, and being educated by Quakers, he made his own distillation of the essentials of Christianity from these competing conceptions of its truths, and to those essentials he clung with steadfast faith. It was his consolation and support in his climb up the greasy pole of an English political career, from the back streets of journalism to the forefront of parliamentary eminence. He could support the American revolutionists in 1776 because he could see that they were godly men "appealing to heaven" (as Locke had once described the taking up of arms in the defense of historic rights); he condemned the French revolutionists of 1789 because they were rationalists, trying to overthrow their church and king, and remodel society on the impious assumption that heaven could be built on earth.

But the man of faith was also a man of action—bold, it would appear from what Ayling reports, to the point of recklessness. At school and college in Ireland, Burke already displayed his undoubted talent for writing, and against all advice to earn a safe living in the law in London, he chose both to abandon that profession in favor of literature at the age of twenty-six, and to acquire a wife at the age of twenty-eight. Significantly, his first published book was an attack on the anti-Christian ideas of Lord Bolingbroke called *A Vindication of Natural Society*. He wrote in the form of a satire, and like many satires it was not well understood by readers and enjoyed only a mixed success.

Literature did not make young Burke's fortune or even make up for the loss of the allowance that his father cut off. So Burke turned to journalistic hack work, then to editing the *Annual Register* and accepting a commission,

which he never completed, to write a history of England. His need for money was all the greater since Burke was very much a family man, having besides a wife, a brother, Richard Burke, and a distant kinsman, William Burke, whom he called his cousin, on his hands. When Burke sought the acquaintance of various grandees in the hope of securing some of the patronage that was on offer in the then expanding British Empire, he wanted that patronage more for his dependents than for himself. His own ambitions were less to be employed by the state than to legislate for it in the House of Commons. That required a different kind of patronage—the backing of a party leader and the friendship of someone who controlled an available seat—most elections being simply fixed. In the end he found a leader in Lord Rockingham, who ran the Whig party, and a rich friend in Lord Verney, who arranged for Burke to be elected

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as member of Parliament for Wendover at the age of thirty-six.

Burke had already decided that a man could not command any respect in Parliament unless he was himself a landowner, and so, with the help of mortgages and loans and perhaps some financial tricks of one kind and another, he acquired a large country house in Buckinghamshire; and there,

in company with numerous Irish kinsfolk, he kept up the appearance—despite all the debts and the delapidation of the fabric—of a gentleman of substance. In Parliament Burke always spoke and acted as if he were himself as grand as any Whig grandee.

He demonstrated his independence to marvelous effect after he had left the seat at Wendover for Bristol and in-

formed his constituents there, in an immortal letter, that he did not, as they imagined, represent Bristol, and its petty local interests, but England and the interests of the entire Kingdom. To the Whig party, Burke was a one-man think tank; not just a speechwriter, but a political theorist and parliamentary strategist. The rewards he received never matched his services.

Ayling remarks that Burke was not considered to be "Cabinet material," despite his being "the brains and maybe the conscience of the party." When the Duke of Portland was putting together a Whig administration in the 1780s, the best job he was willing to offer Burke was that of paymaster, although he did at least propose as well to grant him a life pension of £2,000. It seems that Burke's parliamentary colleagues mistrusted his brilliance as much as they admired it. Sir William Young described him as "folly personified, shaking his cap and bells under the laurels of genius."

It was during Burke's six years as M.P. for Bristol that the American Revolution took place, and Burke achieved his greatest fame in Parliament as a champion of the Americans' claim to freedom. "No way is open," he warned the House of Commons, "but to comply with the American spirit as necessary; or, if you please, to submit to it as to a necessary evil. The question is not whether you have the right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not in your interest to make them happy."

Burke uttered these words in a speech that lasted two-and-a-half hours. His leader, Rockingham, congratulated him, but the majority in the House were unmoved by his argument—his constituents in Bristol even less so, since they suffered financially from the American troubles. It is worth noting that Burke did not speak of the Americans having a "right" to independence. He said that the Americans, if only because they were mostly of English origin, had a "fierce love of liberty"—and "an Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery." He warned the English that they would never overcome the Americans' love of liberty by force, and since sound politics was the art of the possible, they should yield graciously to American demands by negotiation.

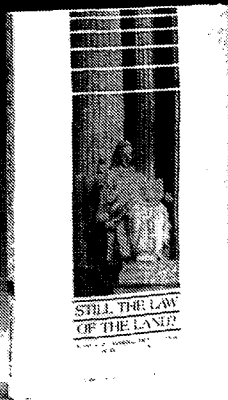
This speech was perhaps the most celebrated of all Burke's speeches in Parliament. His most celebrated address to the public was his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which he wrote soon after the storming of the

Bastille in 1789 and published in 1790. When the French Revolution first began, Burke believed, as most people did, that the French were simply out to copy the English Revolution of 1688 and replace their absolutist monarchy with a constitutional one. But whereas most liberals and progressives in England went on thinking this for the next few years, Burke realized in a matter of weeks that something quite different was happening in France. The French Revolution had been taken over by the ideology of human perfectability, which Burke associated with the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Burke saw that fanatical left-wing politicians, backed up by a hysterical mob filled with envy for ancient privilege, were out to transform France into an army or anthill of equals, in which men would be "forced to be free" by means of Terror. Months before Robespierre sent his victims in droves to the guillotine, Burke discerned that that would be an inevitable outcome of the kind of revolution on which the French had embarked.

The English Revolution of 1688 and the American Revolution of 1776, Burke argued, were both largely conservative revolutions, dismissing despotic innovations in order to restore traditional liberties and institutions. Both sought to defend established property and established religion, which the French Revolutionists were destroying, unleashing more and more violence in the process. The French enterprise of transforming the whole of society in a matter of weeks was the utmost folly. "If justice requires reform," he wrote, "the work itself requires more minds than one age can furnish. You would not cure great public evils by resolving that there should be no more monarchs, nor ministers of state, nor of the gospel, no interpreters of law, no general officers, no public councils. You might change the names. . . . But wise men will apply their remedies to vices, not to names; to the causes of evil which are permanent, not to the transitory modes in which they appear."

These last words encapsulate the whole philosophy by which Burke's life in politics was inspired, and which he tried in all his speeches and publications to impress upon others—namely that imperfection is part of the unchanging human condition, but that specific abuses and injustice can, with great effort, sometimes be corrected. Far from his career in politics being a movement from liberalism to conservatism, he developed—if he developed at all—from a conservative reformer into a reforming conservative; political beliefs that always went together with the faith of a nonsectarian Christian. □

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**FINAL DISCLOSURE: THE FULL TRUTH ABOUT  
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David W. Belin/Charles Scribner's Sons/249 pp. \$19.95

Karl O'Lessker

David Belin's *Final Disclosure* purports to be "the full truth about the assassination of President Kennedy," but the first thing to be said about the book is that it contains absolutely nothing new about the assassination. Having served as counsel to the Warren Commission and as executive director of the Rockefeller Commission of CIA Activities Within the United States, Belin merely offers a reprise of the Warren Commission findings, which have, after all, been in the public record since 1964. To these he adds material from the Rockefeller Commission report, which has been in the public record since 1975, and from the House Assassination Committee report, which was published in 1979.

And Belin discovers, to his own great satisfaction, that the Warren Commission was absolutely dead solid perfect in its conclusions—the only admissible reservation being that the CIA concealed from the commission its ongoing efforts to assassinate Dr. Castro, who might have taken umbrage and thus siced his admirer, Lee Harvey Oswald, on President Kennedy, a possibility that, alas, we shall never be able to explore, thanks to the well-intentioned but violent intervention of Jack Ruby.

The bare-bones conclusions of the Warren Commission can be easily summarized: First, that Oswald acted alone in shooting Kennedy and Officer J. D. Tippit (who was killed in a shoot-out at a downtown theater less than an hour after the assassination); and second, that Jack Ruby acted on impulse in killing Oswald, in order to spare Mrs. Kennedy the anguish of appearing at Oswald's trial (Ruby also did it, in his words, "for the Jews of America").

From the beginning there were grave doubts about these and other conclusions of the Warren Commission. For example, how could Oswald, an indifferent marksman, have been so murderously accurate with two of his three shots, fired at a moving target from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository building? How could a

*Karl O'Lessker, a senior editor of The American Spectator and adjunct senior research fellow at the Hudson Institute, is a member of the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission.*

single bullet have exploded the President's head and still retain enough velocity to pass through Governor John Connally's body—and then later be found in a pristine state? Were there three shots—the number fired from Oswald's rifle—or more than three, as some witnesses claimed? And what of the possibility that Oswald and/or Ruby acted as agents for other parties—Cuba or the Mafia or the CIA, or some combination of them?

These are only a few of the multitude of issues that have plagued all efforts to reach a consensus on the assassination. So peculiar have been some of the circumstances—the disappearance of Kennedy's brain and crucial notes from the autopsy, for instance, or the unaccountable sums of money which Oswald had from time to time—that theories have sprung up (and been published) that would do credit to Robert Ludlum. Other, more sober theories suffer from the great defect (as Belin points out) of coming into being only by omitting inconvenient facts. Still others, however, are not so easily dismissed, and these Belin handles by ignoring them.

In fact, Belin's treatment of accounts that differ from the Warren Commission report borders on the hysterical. Everyone who has ever proposed an alternate theory he labels an "assassination sensationalist," a phrase he uses unflinchingly throughout the book. Thus such careful investigators as Sylvia Meagher (*Accessories After the Fact*), Josiah Thompson (*Six Seconds in Dallas*), and Anthony Summers (*Conspiracy*) are lumped together with such undeniable "sensationalists" as Mark Lane, George O'Toole, and David Lifton, among many others. Meagher and Summers he mentions only once, and that in connection with the murder of Officer Tippit, while Thompson's important work he ignores altogether.

Most egregious, in my view, is his refusal to consider Anthony Summers's remarkable investigative reporting on Oswald's movements and associations. If there is anything we need to know about Oswald, it is whether he acted alone, as the Warren Commission would have it, or was involved in some

sort of conspiracy. Not all of Summers's findings may be correct, yet even if only some of them are, they are enormously suggestive. But Belin has nothing to say about them.

To be sure, he makes a nearly unassailable case for Oswald's guilt as the murderer of Officer Tippit and as at least one of the gunmen who fired at President Kennedy. (Alternative accounts have held that Oswald was, in his own words, "a patsy," who might even have been impersonated for some time prior to the assassination—the so-called Second Oswald theory.) The evidence accumulated by the Warren Commission in these matters is almost as strong as Belin thinks it is—though here, too, he refuses to acknowledge some disturbing evidence to the contrary.

But the rest of *Final Disclosure*, far from clearing away other doubts about the commission's report, only intensifies them. This is because Belin devotes almost half his book to discussing the CIA's misdeeds, including

its involvement in a variety of efforts to assassinate Castro. And he cites Castro's warning of September 1963 that if those efforts didn't cease, he would order retaliation against America's leaders. Now, given Oswald's apparent devotion to Castro, and given his still-mysterious trip to Mexico City that same month, it is not entirely "sensationalist" to wonder whether there might not have been some connection between the two men. Indeed, Belin raises just that question at the very end of the book. But he considers not one shred of evidence beyond what the Warren Commission turned up.

More disturbing, he weighs none of the evidence that has been found concerning Oswald's other possible associations—some of them bitterly anti-Castro. For example, consider the fact that Oswald's employer during his New Orleans days, in the spring of 1963, was a wealthy backer of the Crusade to Free Cuba Committee; and

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