

# “THE SPOUTING RANT OF HIGH-TONED EXCLAMATION”: THE ART OF ORAL/AURAL CARICATURE IN PAINE’S *RIGHTS OF MAN*

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**Abstract:** Taking as its starting point Steven Blakemore’s contention that Thomas Paine’s purpose, in writing *Rights of Man*, was to “linguistically suppress” Edmund Burke, this article explores a comparatively neglected aspect of this attempt at linguistic suppression, namely the deliberate use of punctuation by Paine to undermine his opponent’s authority. Paine’s memorable phrase to characterize Burke’s style, “The spouting rant of high-toned exclamation,” is not simply an instance of the author’s verbal inventiveness. It is deeply rooted in the rich soil of mid- to late eighteenth century Britain, when grammar, punctuation and elocution became the topic of a growing number of books, in a cultural context in which “reading” was widely understood to mean “reading aloud.” Even so-called “silent reading” could not go without a certain amount of subvocalization, thanks to which the reader could be said to “hear,” even internally, the words on the page. All reading therefore involving a degree of performance, this allowed Paine to make devastating use of the exclamation mark to distort significant quotations from Burke and alter the nature of the emotions the original text was supposed to convey. This reminds us that political caricature can be no less oral/aural than visual.

**Keywords:** Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, caricature, elocution, exclamation, performance, punctuation, theatrical

Thomas Paine’s classic work in defence of the French Revolution, *Rights of Man*,<sup>1</sup> has been assessed from a variety of angles, ranging from the history of political ideas to linguistic and stylistic approaches meant to highlight the novelty of his way of writing. As Paine was prompted to write *Rights of Man* as a response to

<sup>1</sup> All quotations below are from the first edition (of Part 1): *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* (London: J.S. Jordan, 1791).

Edmund Burke's own *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,<sup>2</sup> much has been made of the linguistic differences between Paine's and Burke's respective idioms. One of the main proponents of this "linguistic turn" in the study of the French Revolution debate,<sup>3</sup> Steven Blakemore,<sup>4</sup> has laid particular emphasis on Paine's combative use of language "to exclude or linguistically suppress any rival source or founder."<sup>5</sup> *Rights of Man* can therefore be viewed as an attempt "to expunge or 'read out' of existence anyone he felt threatened his privileged position [as the author of a new political world]."<sup>6</sup> It is the purpose of this article to show that this process of "linguistic suppression" is closely tied to the nature of *Rights of Man* as an oral/aural production, a dimension that has been comparatively neglected and that needs to be recovered to get a better grasp of the variety of strategies Paine made use of to discredit Burke's thought.

One of Paine's most forceful blows is struck early on in the book. This is the well-known prelude to the savage debunking of Burke's account of his first "vision" of Marie-Antoinette, one of the purple patches of *Reflections*:

As to the tragic paintings by which Mr. Burke has outraged his own imagination, and seeks to work upon that of his readers, they are very well calculated for theatrical representation, where facts are manufactured for the sake of show, and accommodated to produce, through the weakness of sympathy, a weeping effect. But Mr. Burke should recollect that he is writing History, and not *Plays*; and that his readers will expect truth, and not the spouting rant of high-toned exclamation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Paine refers to the first edition of Burke's work, from which my own quotations are taken: *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings of Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event. In a Letter Intended to have been Sent to a Gentleman in Paris* (London: J. Dodsley, 1790).

<sup>3</sup> William Stafford, "Shall We Take the Linguistic Turn? British Radicalism in the Era of the French Revolution," *Historical Journal* 43, no. 2 (2000): 583-94. The seminal work that gave rise to the linguistic turn is James T. Boulton's *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963). A more recent contribution is Jane Hodson, *Language and Revolution in Burke, Wollstonecraft, Paine, and Godwin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Steven Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language: The French Revolution as Linguistic Event* (Hanover, NH: Brown University Press / University Press of New England, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Steven Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation: Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, and the Rewriting of the French Revolution* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 43.

<sup>6</sup> Blakemore, *Crisis in Representation*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, 21.

Paine then immediately proceeds to excoriate Burke’s text by quoting and sarcastically commenting on a few significant extracts, in a passage that will be examined later. We need first to realize the full implications of the last phrase in the quotation above, “the spouting rant of high-toned exclamation,” which is rooted in the eighteenth-century revival of the theory of elocution, to which contemporary reflections on the use of punctuation must also be added.

An essential preliminary step is to get out of the way the misleading distinction between so-called “silent reading” and the practice of reading aloud, as if these were utterly distinct, incompatible modes of reading. These should be viewed not in terms of distinct alternatives, but as the two extreme points of a continuum, from hearing an internal voice reading out in the mind the text on the page, through silently moving one’s lips while reading, reading out softly to oneself, and reading out loud, either to oneself or to an audience.

Reading is not just about the eyes following the lines on paper, be they handwritten or printed; it involves bodily activities which readers are not even aware of, but which can be measured nonetheless. The study of what actually happens when people read silently shows that the muscles in the throat are unconsciously involved during the act of reading. The physical reality of “subvocalization” has been amply documented thanks to the use of electromyograms, showing that “a certain amount of subvocalization – which in essence means a certain amount of inaudible reading aloud – is present to some degree or other in all readers.”<sup>8</sup> There is therefore no such thing as “silent reading” as such, or more accurately, “silent reading” involves a much wider array of physical and physiological processes than is often assumed.

In the eighteenth century, the activity of reading was generally understood as “reading aloud,” so much so that this almost went without saying.<sup>9</sup> Books with titles containing the phrase “the art of reading,” such as John Rice’s *Introduction to the Art of Reading with Energy and Propriety* (1765) or Thomas Sheridan’s *Lectures on the Art of Reading* (1775), were a staple of rhetorical literature; and what this phrase referred to, as is clear from Rice’s title, was the art of reading aloud, the assumption being that many – if not all – texts were meant to be understood and

<sup>8</sup> A.K. Gavrilov, “Techniques of Reading in Classical Antiquity,” *Classical Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1997): 60.

<sup>9</sup> In this respect, eighteenth-century reading practices did not differ from a much longer tradition. On the oral dimension of early modern reading, see Jennifer Richards, *Voices and Books in the English Renaissance: A New History of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

enjoyed as performance, not simply to be read silently.<sup>10</sup> This raised the question of how to devise an adequate system of symbols to help a reader find the correct mood and tone when reading aloud a particular work. In Sheridan's words: "Thus they [children] will early be initiated into the practice of considering reading, to be nothing more than speaking at sight, by the assistance of letters; in the same manner as singing at sight is performed in music, by the help of notes."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the phrase "reading aloud" as such does not mean much, hence the need to provide readers with symbols helping them to perform a given text adequately.

One of the most systematic attempts of the kind was Joshua Steele's *Prosodia Rationalis: An Essay Towards Establishing the Melody and Measure of Speech to be Expressed and Perpetuated by Peculiar Symbols* (1775), in which he tried to codify a system of "peculiar symbols," on the model of musical notation, to give unambiguous instructions on the way in which a text ought to be performed. Much of the book was devoted to the right way of reading poetry and drama. Steele gave a rendering of what Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (Act 3, Scene 1) should sound like, with specific marks meant to give precise indications about the tone to be adopted.<sup>12</sup> But when Steele heard David Garrick's interpretation of Hamlet's soliloquy, he was in for a shock:

Since writing the foregoing treatise, I have heard Mr. Garrick in the character of Hamlet; and the principal differences that I can remember, between his manner, and what I have marked in the treatise, are as follow:

In the first place, that speech, or soliloque, which I (for want of better judgment) have noted in the stile of a ranting actor, swelled with *forte* and softened with *piano*, he delivered with little or no distinction of piano and forte, but nearly uniform; something below the ordinary force, or, as a musician would say, *sotto voce*, or *sempre poco piano*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Jay Fliegelman makes this point with regard to the American *Declaration of Independence* (1776): "By viewing the Declaration as a text meant to be read silently rather than to be heard as performance we have lost sight of crucial mid-eighteenth century assumptions about speakers and personal expression, about rhetoric and the art of reading (a phrase that, as in John Rice's title, still had the primary sense of reading aloud), assumptions necessary to a full understanding of Revolutionary American culture." Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading*. In *Two Parts: Containing Part I. The Art of Reading Prose. Part II. The Art of Reading Verse* (London: J. Dodsley and C. Dilly, 1787), 105.

<sup>12</sup> Joshua Steele, *An Essay towards Establishing the Melody and Measure of Speech to be Expressed and Perpetuated by Peculiar Symbols* (London: J. Almon, 1775), 40-46.

<sup>13</sup> Steele, *Melody and Measure*, 47.

The discrepancy between Garrick’s interpretation of the soliloquy, and that of Steele, is staggering, leading to a thoroughly different perception of the meaning and import of the text by the hearer. Of even more relevance for us is the fact that Steele describes the style in which he had chosen to note the speech as that of “a ranting actor” – this phrase eerily resonates with Paine’s view of Burke’s tone in *Reflections*.

Yet such an elaborate system of symbols as that devised by Steele, ingenious as it was, was unlikely to take hold, and it failed to do so. A simpler, and ultimately more promising, route to achieve the same result was through the proper use of punctuation, a topic to which contemporary grammars devoted whole chapters, as in Robert Lowth’s *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1761), or Daniel Fenning’s *New Grammar of the English Language* (1771).<sup>14</sup> A large number of treatises on this specific subject were also published over the same period, such as James Burrow’s *Essay on Punctuation* (1772) and Joseph Robertson’s book of the same title (1785).

The standard view was that punctuation played a major role in clarifying the grammatical and logical structure of a text. It could be easily shown that faulty punctuation could and did lead to particularly absurd sentences and statements, which could be easily rectified by placing punctuation in the right place. But beyond the grammatical theory of punctuation, it is the other function of “pointing” that attracted even more interest: punctuation as an indication of duration, proportion between the parts of speech, and crucially, of emotion. Attention to these features represents a striking reassertion and development of the older, rhetorical theory of punctuation.<sup>15</sup>

Burrow, for example, argued:

Some People indeed speak rapidly; some, slowly; some make many Pauses; some, fewer; some, longer; some, shorter: But this makes no Difference with regard to the *Facility of Pointing*; because the PROPORTION between the pauses will not be thereby altered; and the whole affair of Pointing is to *mark those Proportions* upon *Paper*, conformably to the Pauses really made and the Proportion really observed between them in actual Pronunciation.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century linguistic theories, see Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Thus reversing the shift charted by Neil Rhodes in the sixteenth century, from a predominantly rhetorical to a logical function of punctuation: Neil Rhodes, “Punctuation as Rhetorical Notation? From Colon to Semicolon,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2019): 87-106. For a global history of punctuation, see M.B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: A History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> James Burrow, *De Ratione et Usu Interpungendi: An Essay on Punctuation* (London: B. Tovey, 1772), 9.

Theorists such as Fenning even attempted to quantify the duration of every symbol: this often took the form of a question-and-answer session between the instructor and his charge, on the model of a catechism:

- Q. How long should we stop at a *Comma*?  
A. As long as we can count *one*.  
Q. How long should we stop at a *Semicolon*?  
A. As long as we can count *two*.  
Q. How long should we stop at a *Colon*?  
A. As long as we can count *three*.  
Q. How long should we stop at a *Period*, or *Full Stop*?  
A. As long as we can count *four*.<sup>17</sup>

What makes the picture even more complex, however, is the existence of symbols meant to express emotions, but in such a broad, general way that interpreting their actual meaning depends on the context, and on the way the readers make sense of what they read. The best instance of this is the exclamation mark. This Jack-of-all-trades of punctuation can be endowed with such a vast array of meanings that it is the most ambiguous of all, open to the most widely diverging interpretations:

The *latter* [EXCLAMATIONIS Nota] is used, he says, to express *various Affections, each of which might perhaps seem to deserve a particular distinct Mark (peculiare signum)* if it could be conveniently so contrived: And he gives several Examples (from *Tully*) of several different Kinds of Exclamation at present expressed by the *same* Mark; viz. *Admiration, Wishing, Grief, Pity, Indignation, Contempt, and Sneer*.<sup>18</sup>

The ambiguity of exclamation lies in the fact that although it is first and foremost “the voice of nature, when she is agitated, amazed, or transported,”<sup>19</sup> when over-used it becomes the very opposite, a sure index of false, unnatural feelings and meretriciousness. Writers, and young writers in particular, were therefore strongly urged to refrain from indulging in the use of exclamation marks, a sign of bad taste and poor judgment: “On this occasion, it may not be

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Fenning, *A New Grammar of the English Language; or An Easy Introduction to the Art of Speaking and writing English with Propriety and Correctness* (London: S. Crowder, 1771), 156.

<sup>18</sup> Burrow, *Essay on Punctuation*, 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Robertson, *An Essay on Punctuation* (London: J. Walter, 1785), 103.

improper to caution the young and inexperienced writer against the immoderate use of exclamations. Whenever we see a page in prose, profusely interspersed with points of admiration, we generally find it full of unnatural reveries, rants, and bombast.”<sup>20</sup>

The “rant” and “bombast” to which Robertson refers remind us of the “stile of the ranting actor” described by Steele, which goes yet again to show that the reading of a text is to be understood in terms of performance. There is something inherently theatrical about reading, be it to oneself or to others. The bane of ‘theatricality’ affects more particularly the “public declamation” of texts; this is the pitfall to be avoided, the height of affectation and unnaturalness. A main feature of theatrical declamation is the high pitch with which a speech is orally delivered, with the unpleasant aural effect this has on the audience:

Most persons, thro’ want of skill and practice, when they read or speak in public, fall into one of the extremes. Either thro’ timidity and diffidence they use the low pitch, in which they are not heard at all, or with so much trouble to the listener, as soon to weary attention; or if they aim at avoiding this fault, they run into the high pitch, which is productive of consequences equally bad.<sup>21</sup>

The charge has a ring of familiarity to it. This is exactly the reproach that was levelled at Burke, in scathing terms, by Mary Wollstonecraft in her response to *Reflections*: “Even the Ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your pathetic exclamations.”<sup>22</sup> Paine’s “theatrical representation” directly echoes Wollstonecraft’s “theatrical attitudes,” a notion that is further elaborated on in this other well-known passage from *Rights of Man*:

He is not affected by the reality of distress touching his heart, but by the showy resemblance of it striking his imagination. He pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird. Accustomed to kiss the aristocratical hand that hath purloined him from himself, he degenerates into a composition of art, and the genuine soul of nature forsakes him. His hero or his heroine must

<sup>20</sup> Robertson, *Essay on Punctuation*, 113.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution: Together with Two Dissertations on Language; and Some Other Tracts Relative to those Subjects* (London: J. Dodsley, 1787), 104.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: J. Johnson, 1790), 5. In the second edition, published the same year, “sentimental exclamations” is substituted for “pathetic exclamations.”

be a tragedy-victim expiring in show, and not the real prisoner of misery, sliding into death in the silence of a dungeon.<sup>23</sup>

We should be wary of taking such assertions at face value, or of taking it for granted that Paine's voice is purely that of nature, reason and common sense, as opposed to Burke's supposed artificiality and theatricality. It is a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black; as Jay Fliegelman rightly argues, "one man's theatricality was another's voice of nature."<sup>24</sup> As theatricals go, Paine's "prisoner of misery, sliding into death in the silence of a dungeon" is no less melodramatic than anything in Burke – and Paine certainly knew how to play with alliterations to increase the pathos of the scene.

To return to our starting point, Paine's phrase, "the spouting rant of high-toned exclamation," therefore has a clear ancestry. It is deeply rooted in contemporary reflections on elocution, and on reading as performance. It casts Burke in the persona of the ham actor; every single word of the phrase is a blow against a particular aspect of Burke's stance: his delivery is declamatory, bombastic, melodramatic and ultimately void of meaning ("spouting rant"<sup>25</sup>); it is shrill and high-pitched, an artificial distortion of the voice that is an affront to nature and an assault on the hearing of the audience ("high-toned"). As for "exclamation," the term points both to an exaggerated tone of delivery which cannot be sustained for any length of time, and to the exclamation marks that are meant to signal to the reader in what way Burke's words are to be interpreted. The entire paragraph, culminating in this final phrase, is precisely calculated "to work

<sup>23</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)) supplies the following definitions:  
"spout, v. (*figurative*): 4.a. *transitive*. To utter (words, a speech, etc.) or express (views or ideas) in a lengthy or declamatory way, or without thought or reflection; (also simply) to recite (a passage, quotation, etc.). Also with *out*.  
4.b. *intransitive*. To speak in a lengthy or declamatory way, or without thought or reflection; to speechify; to prattle."  
"rant, v.: 1.a. *intransitive*. To talk or declaim in an extravagant or hyperbolic manner; to use bombastic language; (esp. of an actor) to orate or speak in a melodramatic or grandiose style. Now chiefly *depreciative*."  
"rant, n.: 2.a. An extravagant, bombastic, or declamatory speech or utterance; (now *esp.*) a long, angry, or impassioned speech; a tirade.  
3.a. Hyperbolic, declamatory, or bombastic language or sentiments; extravagant, empty declamation.  
3.b. Chiefly *depreciative*. Used of actors or public speakers: a declamatory way of speaking; melodramatic, grandiose, or bombastic oration or delivery."



upon [the imagination] of his [Paine’s] readers,” conjuring up a mental image of Burke as a charlatan whose reflections (both with a small and a capital ‘r’) are discredited even before they are considered and weighed, on account of their manner of delivery. Paine’s strategy consists in “[elevating] the performative aspect of speech over the argumentative,”<sup>26</sup> by attuning in advance his readers’ ears to *listen* to Burke’s own words in a certain way. By staging an oral/aural performance of Burke’s text, he simultaneously undermines its authority, and that of its author.

Once the readers/ spectators/ hearers have been warmed up, and just as they have been made to expect to hear Burke’s “spouting rant,” Paine lifts the curtain and allows Burke, or perhaps rather his puppet, to speak in his own words:

When we see a man dramatically lamenting in a publication intended to be believed, that, “*The age of chivalry is gone! that The glory of Europe is extinguished for ever! that The unbought grace of life (if any one knows what it is), the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize, is gone!*” and all this because the Quixot age of chivalry nonsense is gone, what opinion can we form of his judgment, or what regard can we pay to his facts? In the rhapsody of his imagination, he has discovered a world of windmills, and his sorrows are, that there are no Quixots to attack them. But if the age of aristocracy, like that of chivalry, should fall, and they had originally some connection, Mr. Burke, the trumpeter of the Order, may continue his parody to the end, and finish with exclaiming – “*Othello’s occupation’s gone!*”<sup>27</sup>

Burke’s puppet is not alone on the stage. Like a ventriloquist holding up Burke’s dummy and pretending to speak with Burke’s voice, Paine is there all along, making fun of Burke’s pretensions (“a publication intended to be believed”), facetiously nudging and winking at the audience to give them the cue when it is time for a good laugh (“if anyone knows what it is”), never letting go to make sure his readers/listeners are firmly kept on (his) side. Burke is indeed quoted, but the few, italicized, sentences his ventriloquizing figure is allowed to say are squeezed into the uninterrupted flow of Paine’s sarcasms, and to top it all, the exclamation marks signal his sentences as the shrill utterances of a severely deranged mind.

As has been stated earlier, exclamation marks are in themselves ambiguous, not tied to any specific meaning. In this instance, there is hardly any ambiguity

<sup>26</sup> Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> Paine, *Rights of Man*, 22.

left, as Paine has framed and tailored Burke's sentences so that they can only sound like a grotesque, self-indulgent, sentimental wail. As Burrow writes: "An Exclamation (!) is used in admiring, applauding, or bewailing; and it requires the Elevation of the Voice, and the same Time as a Period."<sup>28</sup>

Yet what we have been reading and hearing so far is Burke as interpreted by Paine. This begs the question of Paine's reliability as a quoter from *Reflections*. For a start, the three sentences he has singled out form only a very limited sample from a longer passage (the phrasing retained by Paine is highlighted in bold):

I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. – But **the age of chivalry is gone**. – That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and **the glory of Europe is extinguished forever**. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. **The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize is gone!** It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness.<sup>29</sup>

But more importantly still, Paine has also deliberately played havoc with Burke's nuanced punctuation, by placing an exclamation mark at the end of two of the three phrases he has selected, which are italicized for good measure, to further intensify the reader's perception that his hearing is assaulted by the piercing shrieks issuing from the mouth of an unhinged orator.

In reality, Burke's punctuation is a good deal more sober and sedate than Paine makes it sound. The discrepancy between Paine's rendering of Burke's tone and what Burke himself had actually written is as striking as the difference between Burrow's interpretation of Hamlet's soliloquy ("in the stile of a ranting actor"), and its controlled, subdued version when played by David Garrick ("*sotto voce*, or *sempre poco piano*").

If we now compare Burke's actual punctuation, and the rhythm and tone this suggests in the light of contemporary treatises on punctuation, we shall realize the extent to which Paine's treatment is disingenuous. For a start, the three phrases

<sup>28</sup> Burrow, *Essay on Punctuation*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, 112-13.

Paine chose to highlight are wrenched from their overall context. Each marks a distinct stage in the progression of Burke's argument, which has a clearly elegiac ring about it.

Where Paine has Burke exclaim "*The age of chivalry is gone!*," a comparison with the original shows that the punctuation has been deliberately altered. What Burke had actually written was this: "I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. – But the age of chivalry is gone. –" The initial "but" has been excised in Paine's rendering, thereby altering the meaning of a sentence which made sense by contrast with what came immediately before. The phrase itself is carefully isolated, or insulated, by the use of the two dashes that set it apart from the rest of the text. When accounting for the correct use of the dash, Robertson argues that: "The proper use of it is, where the sentence breaks off abruptly; where the sense is suspended; where a significant pause is required; or where there is an unexpected turn in the sentiment."<sup>30</sup> Burke's use is a clear instance of the third category, "where a significant pause is required," which is exactly the effect achieved here, that of a pause in the argument leaving time for the reader to ponder the meaning of the events unfolding before his eyes, a meaning which for Burke is that the age of chivalry has come to an end.

In the same way, Paine substitutes "*The glory of Europe is extinguished for ever!*" for Burke's "and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever." By replacing the full stop with an exclamation mark, he deliberately heightens the pitch to make the sentence sound melodramatic. Moreover, by suppressing the semicolon and the initial conjunction that both connected this clause with what came immediately before, he severs the "connection subsisting between the two adjoining clauses,"<sup>31</sup> thereby making it sound shrill and gratuitous. In reality, Burke's phrase makes perfect sense in the wider context of his extended meditation on the passing of the age of chivalry: "That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever." After a short pause (until we count two) marked by a semi-colon, this sentence sounds like a melancholy farewell, with the muted, muffled final sound of the second syllable of "ever." This is a far cry from the shriek Burke's dummy is made to utter.

<sup>30</sup> Robertson, *Essay on Punctuation*, 129.

<sup>31</sup> "Some conjunctions, when they express an addition, an inference, an opposition, &c., admit of a semicolon before them. The proper point however does not depend upon any particular conjunction; but upon the degree of connection, subsisting between the two adjoining clauses." Robertson, *Essay on Punctuation*, 78.

On the face of it, the last phrase quoted by Paine seems faithful to the original. It does end, as in Paine's quotation, with an exclamation mark: "The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize is gone!" But as this is the third time Paine uses the exclamation mark to punctuate his quotations from Burke, this particular phrase can only be heard as the repetition of the same melodramatic wail the reader/hearer has already been made familiar with. Yet Burke himself makes a carefully controlled, economical use of a punctuation mark that should be used sparingly, precisely to avoid the bombastic effect Robertson had warned against. It is in fact the only exclamation mark Burke uses in the passage alluded to and (mis)quoted by Paine, making it all the more effective.

In the whole gamut of possible meanings exclamations can be endowed with, and when the tone of the entire passage is taken into account, there are other candidates than mere "bemoaning" to make sense of this particular exclamation. It gives a sense of sudden, unexpected realization, with a hint of disbelief and surprise; this effect is reinforced by the abrupt ending of the sentence, with an exclamation mark rather than a full stop. Or as Robertson would phrase it: "In reading, it requires an elevation of the voice, as the term exclamation implies; and such a pause, as may seem to give room for a momentary reflection."<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, I am certainly not claiming that there is only one way to read and understand Burke's classic passage, nor am I arguing that Paine is "wrong." What I hope to have shown is the extent to which punctuation and elocution can be, and were, weaponized to "work upon the imagination of readers," so as to provide an aural experience of texts that is deliberately not in line with their author's intention. It is a more radical and much faster way of deconstructing authority than through the lengthy process of rebutting arguments, and a reminder that political caricature can be oral/aural no less than visual.<sup>33</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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<sup>32</sup> Robertson, *Essay on Punctuation*, 103.

<sup>33</sup> The connection between oral/aural caricature and visual caricature has been deliberately left aside in this article for reasons of space. It calls for a distinct development, as satirical cartoons in the age of the French Revolution routinely staged well-known quotations from *Rights of Man*, *Reflections* and other works. This interaction is explored by Nicholas K. Robinson in *Edmund Burke: A Life in Caricature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

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