

Mannered Imperialism: The Scottish Enlightenment and the Atlantic Empire.

My paper looks at some Anglophone writers in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, principally from the perspective of the Scottish “literati”. The period is framed by two traumas, as contemporaries saw them. The first is the two revolutions that convulsed England and Scotland from 1603 to 1688, which saw Royal absolutism and divine right opposed by a chaos of competing radicalisms, all claiming for themselves certainty in politics and religion. The second is a repetition. As a newly global power, the United Kingdom confronts its American colonies with the vocabulary of absolutism. The colonies reply with a vocabulary drawn from 17th century radicalism. The colonies will not play what Kipling called “the great game” of absolutist imperialism, but perhaps they became entrapped in the alternative evil, termed by Hume and others, “enthusiasm”. Like Graham Greene in the *Innocent American*, Hume would have recognized the Bush II genre of politics as dangerously enthusiastic.

My interest is in what lies within the frame. Locke and Shaftesbury, drawing on unacknowledged Dutch and German traditions, emphasized the importance of manners. Where Hobbes identified war as the necessary consequence of our not being able to discern the intentions of others – hence, rationally we must prepare for the worst – the two English writers, given more sophisticated impetus by the Scots, insisted that conversation, convention, compromise, the coffee house and the magazine could place the other inside ourselves, and provide a better alternative to Hobbes’ sovereign. The ballroom and the rowers in the boat are metaphors that substitute restrained consent for external coercion.