

<p><b>James Barry.</b> <b>Portrait of Edmund Burke,</b> <b>1771, oil on canvas,</b> <b>76 x 64 cm (30 x 25')</b></p>	<p>Initial analysis</p>	<p>The composition has a diagonal design, from left to right, accentuated by the serpentine curve of the sitter's left arm and collar and the counter-curve of the chair back and quill pen.</p>
<p>Male figure dressed in a brown quilted jacket with a beige collar and a white shirt of which a cuff and part of the collar are visible. He holds a quill pen over the white pages of an open book into which he appears to be in the process of writing. This book lies on a table or desk top. What may be an ink well is partly seen at the back. In front of him, above his writing table an inset shelf displays the spines of two books, one larger than the other and the top edge of a third are displayed on an inset shelf. The back of the ornate chair on which he sits is partly visible. The background is a brown and grey wall.</p> <p>The figure is strongly lit from the right and this creates shadows from the fingers in his right hand.</p> <p>The face is seen mainly from its left side. His brown eyes look into a distance towards the left as if in thought.</p>	 <p>The painting is in The Provost House, Trinity College, Dublin.</p>	<p>The sitter is turned away from the viewer so that we see the locks of his hair down his back. His receding hair is a ginger brown emphasised by the strong lighting. His head is turned to the left and partly towards the viewer, but does not give the opportunity of meeting the gaze of the viewer.</p> <p>The lips, eyes and posture give the impression of thinking, of a mind considering what to write next. The sitter is the author of <i>A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful</i> published in 1757. The <i>Enquiry</i> had a profound effect on the aesthetics of many generations, from the Romantics through to artists and thinkers in our present time. Barry made explicit use of Burke's suggestions in his painted and printed works.</p>

Burke was an Irish author, orator, political theorist and philosopher. He moved to London in 1750 and served as a Whig member of Parliament from 1766 until 1794. In the twentieth century he became widely regarded as one of the philosophical founders of modern conservatism. In *A Vindication of Natural Society: A View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind*, 1756, Burke contrasted natural Liberty with natural Religion, and set out three general forms of government, which he described as: Despotism, the simplest and most universal, where 'unbounded Power proceeds Step by Step, until it has eradicated every laudable Principle'; Aristocracy, which is scarcely better, as 'a Genoese, or a Venetian Republic, is a concealed Despotism'; and giddy Democracy, where the common people are 'intoxicated with the Flatteries of their Orators'. William Godwin called him the first Anarchist philosopher.<sup>1</sup> In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790, he condemned the destruction of the fabric of traditional institutions of state and society and condemned the persecution of the Catholic Church. The tract was strongly opposed by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *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*, 1790 and in her subsequent *Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures of Political and Moral Subjects*, 1792. The tract was also condemned by Thomas Paine in *Rights of man: being an answer to Mr. Burke's attack on the French revolution*, 1791. In her 1790 tract, Wollstonecraft attacked Burke's misuse of language as more than a rhetorical or aesthetic failure saying that Burke's tract reflects an ahistorical and irrational view of human freedom.

<sup>1</sup> William Godwin. *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, 1793. Godwin was married to Mary Wollstonecraft.