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## Patron-Client Relationships in the Radical Enlightenment

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### Abstract

**My paper examines Lord Shelburne's relationships to his intellectual protégés, particularly Jeremy Bentham. I propose to analyze the reasons Shelburne drew thinkers (who have often been described as the radical Enlightenment) around himself, and what drew thinkers to him. Although patronage had been declared outdated in the middle of the eighteenth century by Samuel Johnson and Jean D'Alembert, and David Hume and Adam Smith misleadingly proclaimed that an independent existence was possible in the intellectual marketplace of a democratic print culture, most of the important writers (including Johnson, D'Alembert, Hume and Smith) of the eighteenth century received royal or aristocratic patronage. Indeed, patronage seems incompatible with the central motif of Enlightenment –independent thought or intellectual autonomy. However, if England could be said to have had an Enlightenment comparable to that in Scotland, France of America, it was largely composed of protégés of Lord Shelburne.**

The subject of my paper is Lord Shelburne's relationship to those he patronized, namely, Bentham, Price, Priestley, Smith, Franklin, Blackstone, William Jones the Orientalist, and Maurice Morgan, the emancipator of slaves. Also, through his patronage of André Morellet, Shelburne was connected to Helvétius, D'Holbach, Turgot and other *philosophes*, as well as their *patronnes*, such as Mme du Deffand, Mme de Boufflers and Mme Geoffrin. Shelburne arranged for Condorcet to be translated into English and Bentham into French. Because of his French connections, as well as his conciliatory position with respect to the Americans, George III chose him as first minister in 1782 in the attempt to come to terms with both the Americans and the French. Although Shelburne's poor reputation predated his term as first minister, began with the youthful and ambitious participation in the cabinet of "the great commoner", William Pitt who became the Earl of Chatham's in 1766, his attempt to secure peace, despite the conflicting

demands of the Americans and French, amplified the sobriquets of “the Jesuit of Berkeley Square” and especially Malagrida, the unfortunate Italian Jesuit unjustly executed for treason in an attempt on the life of the Portuguese king Joseph in 1758. In a maladroit attempt to be affable, Oliver Goldsmith exclaimed to Shelburne: “what can make People call your Lordship *Malagrida*? For by what ever I have heard Malagrida was a very *good sort of Man*.”<sup>1</sup>

The greatest patrons of the eighteenth century attempted by means of patronage to repair poor reputations. Catherine the Great, after murdering her husband and then the heir Ivan to the Russian throne supported Voltaire and Diderot (both of whom suppressed the French ambassador’s account of Catherine’s assumption of power), as well as D’Alembert, Grimm, Galiani, Condorcet and the Bentham brothers. Mme de Pompadour, Mme de Tencin and Mme du Deffand, three of the most important sponsors of *les lumières*, had racy and rather unsavoury pasts that were covered over by their sponsorship of arts and letters, and their protection of *philosophes*. An additional reason for patronizing philosophers was provided by Jean D’Alembert who accounted for “the patronage of the great” by his contention that they “are quite happy to be learned on condition that they can become so without trouble, and so wish to be able to judge a work of intelligence without hard study, in exchange for the benefits they promise to the author or for the friendship with which they think they honor him.”<sup>2</sup> D’Alembert’s account did not account for two of the three greatest patrons of the British Enlightenment; Baron Somers (who patronized Locke, Toland, Defoe and Tindal early in the century) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Argyll who patronized virtually everyone in the Scottish Enlightenment—even David Hume who

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<sup>1</sup>*Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale*, ed. Katherine C. Balderston (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), vol. 1, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, trans. Richard N. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 66.

sent the Duke the first copies of his books and grumbled about him not having the courage to get him a university position, obtained the position of librarian at the Faculty of Advocates thanks to Argyll. Somers and Argyll were intelligent and broadly educated, perhaps the intellectual equals of those they patronized.<sup>3</sup> But D'Alembert's account does explain the prominence of women in the French Enlightenment—as *patronnes* they obtained in their *salons* what men received in the *collèges*, and I think it also partially explains Shelburne's prominence as a patron. Bentham, who thought Shelburne to be a celestial presence, also wrote that he “had a most wretched education”.<sup>4</sup> David O Thomas wrote: “Shelburne delighted in surrounding himself with prominent intellectuals, and boasted that in his willingness to seek the advice of men like Dunning and Price he was superior to his leader Chatham.”<sup>5</sup>

All the major writers of the eighteenth century had royal or aristocratic patrons.<sup>6</sup> The Enlightenment could be defined as plebeian talent serving patrician purposes. The unpatronized exceptions might have been Thomas Paine and Jean-Louis de Lolme. Although he made no money from his best-selling books, Paine successfully lobbied state and federal governments in

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<sup>3</sup>See Robert Adams, ‘In Search of Baron Somers,’ in Perez Zagorin ed., *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press) and Roger Emerson, *Academic Patronage in the Scottish Enlightenment: Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>Mary P. Mack, *Jeremy Bentham: An Odyssey of Ideas, 1748-1792* (London: Heinemann, 1962), p. 370; *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), vol. 10, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup>David O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 145.

<sup>6</sup>See John Lough, *Writer and Public in France from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), chap. 4; Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 1-2; Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 68, 282.

America for pensions, land and a slave boy called Joe for his efforts on behalf of liberty. Paine certainly and De Lolme probably attempted to obtain Shelburne's patronage. With De Lolme's failure to obtain a patron, he was forced, in his chosen land of liberty, to make money by writing *The History of the Flagellants* (1777).<sup>7</sup> The eighteenth century proves John Stuart Mill to be totally wrong; political repression and censorship in France, and the political control of universities in Scotland, were much more favourable to the flourishing of thought than in England (with less need of political protectors, and with a relatively free press for intellectuals to sell their wares). England, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had more freedom and less thought than Scotland, France or Prussia.

While most thinkers of the eighteenth century enjoyed royal or aristocratic patronage, the dominant myth of those who prized intellectual autonomy was to assert that thinkers could earn an independent existence in the marketplace of ideas and that booksellers had become the modern patrons of writers. For example, Ernest Mossner's claim that Hume was the first distinguished man of letters in Britain to make a modest fortune from literature alone.<sup>8</sup> ignores the income Hume derived as companion to the mad Marquess of Annandale, and as secretary to General St. Clair, General Conway and Earl of Hertford. Although distorted, the self-image of the men of the Enlightenment could not be ignored. Shelburne was sufficiently intelligent to give his protégés the appearance of independence. He was "extraordinarily sensitive to Priestley's amour-propre, not overpowering him with financial arguments, but assuring him that the position

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<sup>7</sup>See David Liebermann's introduction to Jean Louis De Lolme, *The Constitution of England* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007).

<sup>8</sup>Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954), p. 4.

entailed necessary and useful work for which he was particularly qualified.”<sup>9</sup> Although assured that his independence would not be compromised, Priestley thought it inadvisable to write on politics or metaphysics while in Shelburne’s employ (although he returned to writing his materialist metaphysics and the politics of radical dissent as Shelburne’s pensioner). Bentham reported that when Lord Shelburne asked him what services he could perform for his patron, Bentham proudly responded that he was like the prophet Balaam who could only speak “the word that God putteth in my mouth.” Bentham asserted that Shelburne understood his statement to be “a declaration of independence” and that the services he performed for Shelburne were “in the pursuit of the *greatest happiness* principle.” Bentham said that his refusal to serve Shelburne served “to endear me to him.”<sup>10</sup>

Patron-client relationships may be difficult to define, for Shelburne’s relationship to his “friends”—Julian Pitt-Rivers described patron-client relationships as “lop-sided friendships”<sup>11</sup> —varied from individual to individual. Joseph Priestley was paid by Shelburne as a librarian and companion, while he devoted his time to chemical experiments, just as Burke was paid by Rockingham and Fitzwilliam. Burke defined patronage as “the tribute opulence owes to genius”.<sup>12</sup> Rousseau held patronage to be the consideration that wealth owes to talent and

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<sup>9</sup>Robert E. Schofield, *The Enlightenment of Joseph Priestley: A Study of His Life and Work from 1733 to 1773* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 271.

<sup>10</sup>*The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. John Bowring (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), vol. 1, p. 249; vol. 10, pp. 116-17.

<sup>11</sup>Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 140.

<sup>12</sup>Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly in Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: University Press, 1993), 271.

Priestley insisted that patronage was particularly due to the costs of experimental sciences.<sup>13</sup> Shelburne paid Smith 400 pounds yearly—more than his salary-- to board his brother Fitzmaurice at Glasgow. He obtained a judgeship for the Orientalist, William Jones. Shelburne's personal secretary, Maurice Morgan was made advisor on colonial affairs, and then undersecretary of colonial affairs during Shelburne's ministry: Morgan proposed to buy slaves settle them as free farmers in land he had purchased in West Florida.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the American rebellion put an end to this experiment designed to counter the dominant position of the Enlightenment that slave labour was necessary for tropical climates, as D'Alembert and Raynal followed Montesquieu in linking heat and coercion, or just the simple racism of Voltaire, Hume and Kant who thought Blacks incapable of independent farming.<sup>15</sup> Price and Bentham received nothing material from Shelburne besides extended hospitality at Bowood but both thinkers thought Shelburne would help implement their ideas on fiscal and penal reform. Bentham's desire for Shelburne's patronage exhibited a practical bent, a scorn for mere theoreticians. Bentham thought Plato,

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<sup>13</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions and Correspondence*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, eds. Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters and Peter G. Stillman (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990), vol. 5, p. 243; Joseph Priestley, *The History and Present State of Electricity with Original Experiments* (London: C. Bathurst et al, 1775), xv-xvi. This work was first published in 1767, before Price introduced Priestley to Shelburne in 1772, the year before Shelburne employed Priestley.

<sup>14</sup>Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 214-17.

<sup>15</sup>See D'Alembert's preface to Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent and J.V. Pritchard (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914) and Guillaume Thomas Raynal, *Essai sur l'administration de St. Dominique* [1785] (Port au Prince; Mozard, 1790), ix. Sankar Muthu's *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton: University Press, 2003) incorrectly presents Diderot and Raynal as opponents of imperialism, and Raynal and Kant as opposed to slavery. See Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), 298-9, 344.

Descartes, Leibniz and Kant “were philosophers merely; he [Bentham] was a statesman.”<sup>16</sup>

If Bentham regarded himself as superior to the greatest of philosophers, Shelburne helped to confirm his high opinion of himself. Adam Smith, as noted above, wrote of the psychological benefits of patronage: “What most of all charms us in our benefactor, is the concord between his sentiments and our own, with regard to what interests us so nearly as the worth of our own character, and the esteem that is due to us. We are delighted to find a person who values us as we value ourselves, and distinguishes us from the rest of mankind, with an attention not unlike that with which we distinguish ourselves.”<sup>17</sup> Patrons are not merely impartial spectators, not *hoi polloi* who merely praise but those whose praise is praiseworthy. Shelburne’s patronage provided Bentham more with psychic than material income. Bentham wrote that Shelburne “raised me. . .from the bottomless pit of humiliation—he made me feel I was something.”<sup>18</sup> The only cloud in the sunny relationship between Bentham and Shelburne was, after the Lord had fallen out with Colonel Barré, Shelburne’s spokesman in the House of Commons, Bentham wished to replace him as Member of Parliament for Colne. Bentham wrote Shelburne a 61 page letter explaining why the philosopher would be a great statesman, but Shelburne gently turned Bentham’s request down. Bentham responded: “you must allow me to snarl at you a little, now and then, while I kiss the beautiful hands you set to stroke me.”<sup>19</sup> Shelburne made Bentham feel like something or made him feel the power of metamorphosis from mere philosopher to philosopher-king as messiah. In a peculiarly English version of the Enlightenment’s dream of

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<sup>16</sup>Mack, *Jeremy Bentham*, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup>Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), p. 95.

<sup>18</sup>Bentham, *Works*, vol. 10, p. 115.



power, Bentham wrote:

there came out to me a good man named Ld. S. and he said unto me, what shall I do to be saved? . . .I said unto him to take up my book and follow me. We trudged about a long while. . .till we spied a man named George who had been afflicted with an incurable blindness and deafness for many years. I said unto my apostle give him a page of my book that he may read.... then fell the scales from his eyes, and not seeing what better he could do with himself, he followed us. We had not travelled far before we saw a woman named Britannia lying by the waterside all in rags with a sleeping lion at her feet.... She started up fresher, farther and more alive than ever; the lion wagged his tail and fawned upon us like a spaniel.<sup>20</sup>

Bentham's dream was that utilitarianism could redeem Britannia, as soon as Shelburne persuaded King George to follow Bentham's doctrine.

When I defined enlightenment as plebeian talent serving patrician purposes, I did not mean to suggest that royal and aristocratic patrons were conservatively dragging back the radical freedom of thought. Indeed Bentham became more democratic as result of Shelburne's patronage—he credited Shelburne with teaching him not to fear the power of the people--,<sup>21</sup> just as Locke became more liberal from the patronage of Lord Shaftesbury. Bentham, like many of the *philosophes*, admired enlightened despots; before meeting Shelburne, Bentham was pleased that he lived and “could write in the age of Catherine, of Joseph, of Frederic, of Gustavus, and of Leopold.” The plans of Bentham's brother Samuel's Panoptikon had been drafted for Catherine the Great when the Benthams, like Diderot, “went off to Russia, ardent admirers of Catherine the Great and her projected reforms-from-above.”<sup>22</sup>

Burke's opposition to the French Revolution was sparked by Richard Price's paeon of

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p. 245.

<sup>20</sup>Bentham papers, cited in Norris, *Shelburne and Reform*, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup>Mack, *Jeremy Bentham*, p. 380.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, pp. 112, 362.

praise to the dawning New Jerusalem. Price was Shelburne's *protégé* and Burke took aim, through Price, at Shelburne. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke attacked Shelburne's circle at Bowood when he assaulted Price for his connections "with literary caballers, and intriguing philosophers; with political theologians, and theological politicians, both at home and abroad"<sup>23</sup> and may have alluded to Shelburne's pensioner, the chemist and radical, Joseph Priestley, when he characterized the revolutionary spirit of freedom as "the wild gas, the fixed air is plainly broke loose."<sup>24</sup> As he wrote to Philip Francis, while composing his *Reflections*: "I intend no controversy with Dr. Price or Lord Shelburne or any other of their set. I mean to set in a full View the danger from their wicked principles and their black hearts;..."<sup>25</sup> Shelburne is not mentioned in Burke's *Reflections* or in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, written in response to the Whig peers who attacked Burke's acceptance of a pension for his *Reflections*, but it is clear that Burke had a visceral hatred of landed aristocrats who would not stand up for the interests of their class, and relied on commoners, like Burke, to maintain the proper balance of property.

Shelburne was an Englishman (although despised by the English as Irish) who was not an enemy of the American and French Revolutions, and who supported many friends of these revolutions. His reputation from the 1760s through the 1790s as disloyal, treacherous and ambitious may have been attributable to his political positions rather than his character.

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<sup>23</sup>Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 11; Mitchell wrote (*xiii*) that "No passage in the *Reflections* is more bitter than that which discusses these men" [Shelburne's circle at Bowood].

<sup>24</sup>Burke, *Reflections*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, p. 314.

Shelburne has been described as “an original political thinker in a conservative age,”<sup>26</sup> and Samuel Johnson thought Shelburne quite able for an aristocrat: “His parts, Sir, are pretty well for a Lord; but would not be distinguished in a man who had nothing else but his parts.”<sup>27</sup> Shelburne held to the self image of Enlightenment; he declared his two cardinal principles to be: “*The first is, to be bound to no man*” and “The second essential rule is, *to see with your own eyes.*”<sup>28</sup> Of course, Shelburne did not see just with his own eyes but with those he patronized, and the circle at Bowood, Shelburne’s country estate in Wiltshire, bound thinkers and Shelburne within patron-client relationships. If England could be said to have had an Enlightenment, it was produced by a man who gathered his intellectual superiors and social inferiors at Bowood. As Roger Chartier observed, writing books is no different than making a movie; it is a collaborative project.<sup>29</sup> Enlightenment thinkers, and their patrons, thought of themselves as independent *auteurs*, putting their individual vision on the silver screen, but the writer/director depends on a producer, actors and an audience for the film to be made and distributed. Writers have to negotiate the potentially conflicting demands of patrons, readers and a general public that, in times and places, is overseen by a censorious police. The Enlightenment illusion of individual autonomy or intellectual independence might well have empowered eighteenth-century writers as a group but ultimately proved deadly to thought. Despite their illusions of self-sufficiency, no philosopher

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<sup>26</sup>Peter Brown, *The Chathamites: A Study in the Relationship between Personalities and Ideas in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1967), p. 104.

<sup>27</sup>*Boswell’s Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1887), vol. 3, pp. 35-36.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*, vol. 2, pp. 337-38.

<sup>29</sup>Chartier made this comment to a conference in London in 1998, shortly after seeing the movie *Shakespeare in Love*, which presents the bard’s *Romeo and Juliet* as a collective project.

has lived off the marketplace of ideas. The eighteenth century was fortunate in having both royal and aristocratic patrons; we are fortunate in having governmental and corporate support for scholarship and thought. May I take the opportunity of thanking my patron, the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada for enabling me to research this topic and to come to San Francisco. Those who support Hume's, Smith's and Gibbon's illusion that booksellers are the modern patrons of literature are more likely to be sponsored by right-wing corporations than those of us who take the opposite point of view.