a thoughtful traditionalism, the reactionary imperative presses conservatism in two rather different directions: first, to a critique and reconfiguration of the old regime; and second, to an absorption of the ideas and tactics of the very revolution or reform it opposes. What conservatism seeks to accomplish through that reconfiguration of the old and absorption of the new is to make privilege popular, to transform a tottering old regime into a dynamic, ideologically coherent movement of the masses. A new old regime, one could say, which brings the energy and dynamism of the street to the antique inequalities of a dilapidated estate.

As the forty-year dominion of the right begins to fade, however fitfully, writers like Sam Tanenhaus, Andrew Sullivan, Jeffrey Hart, Sidney Blumenthal, and John Dean claim that conservatism went into decline when Palin, or Bush, or Reagan, or Goldwater, or Buckley, or someone took it off the rails. Originally, the argument goes, conservatism was a responsible discipline of the governing classes, but somewhere between Joseph de Maistre and Joe the Plumber, it got carried away with itself. It became adventurous, fanatical, populist, ideological. What this story of decline overlooks—whether it emanates from the right or the left—is that all of these supposed vices of contemporary conservatism were present at the beginning, in the writings of Burke and Maistre, only they weren't viewed as vices. They were seen as virtues. Conservatism has always been a wilder and more extravagant movement than many realize—and it is precisely this wildness and extravagance that has been one of the sources of its continuing appeal.

It is hardly provocative to say that conservatism arose in reaction to the French Revolution. Most historically minded conservatives would agree.[2] But if we look more carefully at two emblematic voices of that reaction—Burke and Maistre—we find several surprising and seldom-noticed elements. The first is an antipathy,