Introduction

Prior to writing *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Jonathan Swift, an Anglican priest and already the greatest satirist in the English language, wrote the most consequential treatise on foreign policy in the early eighteenth century: *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711). This pamphlet became the definitive argument in the decisive country for putting a stop to nearly two decades of war in Europe and around the world. The Peace of Utrecht, several treaties signed in 1713–14, became the most influential diplomatic settlement between the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and Peace of Vienna in 1815 and a significant milestone in the evolution of the international system of states.[1]

Utrecht marked the end of a long conflict between Louis XIV of France and his neighbors beginning in the 1660s. The "Utrecht system" undergirded a period of relative stability until 1740, when the War of Austrian Succession broke out.[2] For the first time, a major European treaty included the phrase "balance of power" in its provisions, declaring that a "just Balance of Power ... is the best and most solid foundation of mutual friendship and a lasting general concord."[3] As such, Utrecht is often cited as an exemplar of the modern understanding of international relations. It also inspired an influential line of revolutionary philosophical projects centered on the notion of "perpetual peace," from the Abbé de Saint-Pierre to Emmanuel Kant and beyond, and marked an important episode in the development of theories of European public law, European Union, and global governance.[4]

The treaty came about because France and Britain began to sag under the vast expense of blood and treasure after fighting almost ceaselessly since 1688. Louis XIV and Queen Anne sought peace as they neared the end of their lives. Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke rose to power in 1710 and took an abrupt and controversial decision to defect from the alliance and secretly negotiate the preliminaries of a peace treaty alone with France, rather than invading deep into French

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territory in pursuit of total victory. Abandonment of the allies contributed to Britain's reputation as "perfidious Albion," though it avoided driving France to desperation and succeeded in ending the war.[5]

Swift became Oxford's chief propagandist and hence the most influential apologist for this notorious strategic maneuver and treaty.[6] Since Britain played the critical role in bringing about the peace, Swift can be said to have left a mark on European history entirely aside from his imaginative writings – the most famous of which, *Gulliver*, was "universally read, from the Cabinet-council to the Nursery" and expanded his polemic against war to a worldwide audience (*Corr.*, III, 47).

Swift did not have a hand in making British policy, but close studies have vindicated his importance as propagandist – and that during the largest pamphlet controversy that had yet occurred, when public opinion, parliament, and the press emerged as powerful forces influencing foreign policy. Historian G. M. Trevelyan was not wrong in his oft-quoted summation that Swift "had done more during three years' residence in London to settle the immediate fate of parties and nations than did ever any other literary man in the annals of England."[7] Of course, if Swift had stayed in Ireland, other talented propagandists would have filled the role. Oxford was well known for his ingenuity at harnessing the London press and manipulating opinion to suit his administration's ends. Daniel Defoe wrote for Oxford during this period and produced a larger body of foreign policy writings than Swift, similarly underrated.[8] But given that Defoe was already engaged, and that Swift surpassed his fellow pamphleteers in *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, no other writer would likely have matched his accomplishment.

The Tory leaders provided Swift with inside information and privileged him above others, underscoring his savvy. His greatest effort, *The Conduct of the Allies*, remains a masterpiece of foreign policy writing and, along with its lesser sequel, *Some Remarks on the Barrier Treaty* (1712), offers the fullest articulation of the main line of British strategy at a critical juncture in history.[9] The sensational popularity of the *Conduct* suggests that it had a real impact on opinion – and the peace negotiations only narrowly survived parliamentary obstruction. Subsequent Prime Minister Robert Walpole claimed that in the *Conduct* "was to be found the whole Scheme of the Proceeding of that Session."[10]

While Swift's biography is known, his extraordinary transformation from the vicar of Laracor in Ireland to the *chef de propagande* of Great Britain is still underrated. His sudden ability to write with complete facility and authority on European affairs would be inexplicable if not for his

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apprenticeship with one of England's leading diplomats of the seventeenth century, Sir William Temple, friend of William III and champion of balance-of-power foreign policy.[11] Partly because of Temple, partly because of Oxford and Bolingbroke, and most of all because of his own brilliant interaction with history, literature, and political philosophy, Swift understood grand strategy and statecraft better than his literary rivals. He was a profound thinker, spoke with the authority of the Church of England, and increasingly channeled a "savage indignation" that would later inspire the *Drapier's Letters* (1724–25), *Gulliver*, and *A Modest Proposal* (1729).[12]

The international dimension of Swift's thought is generally underappreciated, with a footnote's worth of valuable exceptions.[13] Scholars have done tremendous work on Swift's politics but have focused on the domestic spheres of England and Ireland – namely his sectarian and partisan affiliations (Whig or Tory), his Anglo-Irish colonial identity, and his governing ideology ("libertarian" or "authoritarian").[14] This focus is understandable because Swift, like most people and writers, prioritized the domestic scene. In the process, however, scholars have overlooked or underweighted his heightened awareness of the international realm and the way it intruded upon the domestic – that is, his concept of international society; opinions on diplomacy, foreign policy, trade, and international law; internationalist balance-of-power theory; and distrust of both absolutist and republican models of government that he observed abroad. As a result they have neglected his characteristic attempts to neutralize the extreme rage of party during his day and seek a third way, or nuanced solution, to domestic and international political problems.

The international context helps to explain Swift's controversial self-image as Whig in politics and Tory in religion. "In order to preserve the Constitution entire in Church and State," he wrote, "whoever hath a true Value for both, would be sure to avoid the Extreams of *Whig* for the Sake of the former, and the Extreams of *Tory* on Account of the latter" (*PW*, 11, 25). To be Tory in matters of church and Whig in matters of state meant to compromise, insisting on the privileges of the Church of England while accepting the Glorious Revolution. It also carried foreign policy implications, such as willingness to negotiate with France, despite opposing absolutism at home, and wariness of Dutch influence, despite acceptance of some core liberal principles of government they promulgated.[15]

Meanwhile political theorists, historians of international thought, and scholars of international relations have only a passing acquaintance with Swift. Swift's relevance to their field can be glimpsed in frequent but informal references to neologisms, images, and concepts from *Gulliver* to

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elucidate their ideas. Within academic international relations, the "Lilliputian" state, or microstate, has become almost a subfield, while the opposite term, "Brobdingnagian," for giant states or superpowers, is not entirely forgotten.[16] Academics and popular writers have long discussed the foreign policy of the United Kingdom and the United States by invoking the image of Gulliver bound up in ropes by little people, or shaking off the ropes. More profoundly, Swift's term "Yahoo" refers to mankind in a Hobbesian state of nature, a foundational concept of political theory and international relations, especially the realist school that emphasizes fear, insecurity, self-interest, and power maximization. Thomas Hobbes exerted a lasting influence on Swift, as he did with nearly every political thinker after him, but Swift's challenge to Hobbism has been forgotten or marginalized as scholars overcorrected from the realization that Swift was not simply a follower of John Locke.[17]

Swift's refusal to fit into the Hobbes–Locke dichotomy alone should ensure that his writing remains relevant in the twenty-first century, an era of renewed great power competition, when debates about human nature and international relations have regained urgency.[18] Yet there is limited understanding of what Swift thought about power politics, international society, or international law. Hardly ever is it recognized that the inventor of the strange terms just mentioned – and their associated thought-experiments, which are still useful and valid – also wrote the greatest defense of the most influential peace treaty of the early eighteenth century. In short, Swift was one of the most successful foreign policy polemicists of European history during the eighteenth century and Enlightenment, yet his engagement with diplomacy and international relations lies neglected as an aspect of both his literary legacy and modern international thought.

To be clear, it would be impossible not to notice the various international elements of Swift's works, given his importance in British and Irish literary history.[19] But only a few scholars have engaged with his writings on war, peace, and alliances – always in articles or short sections – and none have tried to reconstruct his international thought as a whole. Most critics have fallen victim to the well-documented "domestic bias" of political philosophy, which goes back to Plato and is attested all the way through the twentieth century, when distinctly international political theory began to take shape.[20] There were exceptions to this bias of course, from Aristotle onward – and one of the important findings of this study is that Swift was one of the exceptions. Despite never leaving the British Isles, he largely, not entirely, cured himself of the domestic bias by means of his reading, training, speculation, and deeply personal sense of alienation

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between England and Ireland. The resulting internationalist perspective differentiates his work: He gained a rare ability to inspect his society from the outside. Eventually, he rose to the pantheon of great political writers – such as Plato, Saint Thomas More, and George Orwell – who dreamed up entire worlds to articulate foundational ethical and political theories concretely and unforgettably. Orwell, of course, counted Swift among his few favorites.[21]

Swift not only wrote *Gulliver* and the *Conduct of the Allies* but also a range of essays, pamphlets, and poems on foreign affairs, including the *History of the Last Session of Parliament, and of the Peace of Utrecht* (written 1713, published 1758), otherwise known as the *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen* – his second-longest work and one that has only begun to receive the critical attention it deserves.[22] Foreign policy and international relations make up too large a share of his works to leave to desultory discussion. The approach here is interdisciplinary as it must be because Swift, like Hobbes and Locke, never articulated a comprehensive theoretical view of international politics in a single treatise.[23] I draw from his corpus and various fields of contemporary knowledge – history, literature, politics, theology, law, and economics – to piece together the puzzle. I do not aim to belabor every reference he makes to foreign countries or address every aspect of international thought, but rather to capture the main thrust of his theoretical and practical approaches to diplomacy, foreign policy, and international politics during the major events of his life. I also try to integrate this international thinking into ongoing debates about domestic politics to gain a full understanding of what we might call his *grand strategy*, or overall concept of England's national means and ends. Swift used the term "Stratagem" but preferred terms like "Maxims of Policy," "Maxims of State," or simply "Politicks."[24]

The overriding message Swift conveys is *the importance of individual agency and ethical decision making in determining the relative value of liberty and security in political conflicts at home and abroad*. Scholars who have studied his politics are accurate in identifying a monarchical or paternalistic element but inaccurate in reducing Swift to an essentially authoritarian political identity. The definition of "authoritarian," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "favouring or characterized by obedience to (esp. political) authority as opp[osed] to personal liberty; tyrannical, dictatorial."[25] More complex definitions appear in the extensive literature on the topic in sociology and political science but do not fundamentally differ.[26] Swift always stood against absolute, despotic, and "arbitrary Power" – "which, notwithstanding all that *Hobbes*, *Filmer*, and others

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have said to its Advantage," he wrote, "I look upon as a greater Evil than *Anarchy* it self; as much as a *Savage* is in a happier State of Life, than a *Slave* at the Oar" (*PW*, 11, 15). And Swift said this without a shred of idealism about the "noble savage," a term his cousin John Dryden coined. As priest and moralist, he gave slightly more weight to human agency than structural factors in assessing social and political systems and conflicts.[27] Thus he accorded a decisive role to executive action and prerogative yet insisted they stay contained within the rule of law. "The adjusting *Power* and *Freedom* [are] an Effect and Consequence of maturer Thinking," he wrote, "and this is no where so duly regulated as in a limited Monarchy" (*PW*, 11, 18). His thinking on foreign policy, diplomacy, and international relations helps to explain this fundamental political and philosophical stance, which is not always well understood. It contains elements of political realism and idealism. Orwell famously called Swift a "Tory anarchist."[28]

That term sticks, despite plenty of caveats, because it captures Swift's rare mastery of opposing forces – his idiosyncratic combination of order and disorder, conservatism and radicalism. The "Tory" element cannot be denied, though Swift always loathed political parties. His fierce loyalty to the established Church of England and insistence on religious conformity entailed conceptions of liberty and equality that were much more confined than those motivating the American and French revolutions over a century after his birth.[29] Unlike radical republicans and religious dissenters, he adhered to monarchism and refused to countenance the separation of church and state – he was "an entire Friend to the established Church" (*Corr.*, 1, 213). Yet he shared some foundational Lockean ideas with the aristocratic and liberal American founding fathers, namely government by consent and the right to resist tyranny. Benjamin Franklin and John Adams admired his works – and not only because of his animosity toward the Hanoverian kings and boycotting of English goods. They fundamentally agreed on the constitutional division of powers, which is essential to liberalism and incompatible with authoritarianism or absolutism.[30]

Jacobitism, or loyalty to the exiled James II and his dynasty against the Protestant succession, has been proposed as the key to Swift's combination of High Church Toryism and Lockean resistance to tyranny.[31] Swift, however, adhered to the Glorious Revolution and Declaration of Rights of 1689, upheld his oath to the British crown, and endorsed legislative supremacy. At times, he indulged in violent rhetoric and revealed some Jacobite sympathies. But the claim that he incited readers to commit violence or rebellion would be false, which is why scholars avoid making

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it.[32] His intellectual and political opponents served as the greatest jingoists and warmongers of his time, whether in the conflicts with Catholic France and Spain or the oppression of Catholic Ireland. Swift expressed controversial opinions about nearly everything – for example, accusations of atheism thwarted his ambitions in the church – but he fell under government scrutiny for being a "Renegado Divine," not a militant.[33]

This study attempts to revive a different appellation for Swift: "ecclesiastical statesman."[34] As a priest, eventually Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, his strategic and political thinking should be characterized as a form of clerical statecraft. But it was not the most cynical form. He lived under Protestant governments where the priestly establishment had lost much of its power since the time of Henry VIII and Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. He formed his political ideals amid a great flowering of classical republicanism. He never subscribed to the ruthless "priestcraft" on the opposite side of the Channel, embodied in the Roman Catholic Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, masterminds of the Bourbon dynasty's bid for supremacy in Europe. On the contrary, he satirized Henry IV's and Louis XIV's lust for power and condemned the latter's attempts to "fright Children from their Bread and Butter; lay waste, plunder, dragoon, massacre Subject and Stranger, Friend and Foe, Male and Female," which would include the Huguenots (*CW*, 1, 107). Still, he relentlessly pursued an English bishopric and raged with bitter disappointment for falling short. The result was a writer with a deadly oblique rhetorical attack – not a worm-tongued royal adviser or member of the House of Lords.[35]

While scholars routinely claim that scorn for the masses was Swift's characteristic political attribute, he aligned with popular opinion in the three most consequential political crises of his career – the impeachments of the Whig lords in 1701, the Utrecht peace controversy from 1710 to 1714, and the Wood's halfpence affair of 1722–25. In each case, as we will see, the international dimension reinforced his position. In 1701 and 1710–14, international affairs proved the decisive factor in his defense of the crown (first William III, then Anne) against the opposition of one house of parliament (first the Commons, then the Lords). In each case, the controversial royal actions he defended were neither illegal nor unjust – they addressed foreign exigencies and did not tend toward absolutism or imperialism. In 1722–25, Swift opposed royal overreach – not a sign of authoritarianism – and his cause triumphed again, earning him a reputation as the "Hibernian patriot" or defender of Irish liberty.[36] That reputation, however debatable, is reinforced by analysis of the international dimension of his work, especially *Gulliver*.

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Swift rejected democracy in principle – like his contemporaries – but he also, increasingly throughout his career, rejected oligarchy and autocracy. His ideal contained a *mixture* or balance of the three Platonic or Aristotelian sociopolitical elements – the One, the Few, and the Many – which scholars know but too often try to reduce to a single overriding element. Dividing power prevented excessive concentration. Swift applied this balance-of-power theory to international politics, thus opposing both imperialism and the notion of a federation of states.[37] By tracing the implications of his neoclassical and humanistic conception of balance of power, the reader will discover his place in modern international thought. It is somewhere between that of Locke and Hobbes – closer to Aristotle than either. Ironically, given Swift's hatred of both lawyers and Dutchmen, his view comes closest to that of Hugo Grotius, the father of international law. As this book shows, one could do worse than to think of Swift as a "Grotian rationalist" in international thought.[38]

The picture that emerges contains a few imposing features – not an elaborate design comparable to the study of full-time philosophers. Swift wrote pamphlets and fiction, not exhaustive treatises. Nevertheless, these few features will change the way that readers think about the past, present, and future of international society and politics, if only by making some critical concepts more vivid and human, as great storytellers do.[39] In *Gulliver*, for example, Swift illustrates his foreign policy ideal with the "extraordinary Stratagem" by which the giant Gulliver steals the navy of one small country to give it to another, producing a temporary balance of power. This cartoon encapsulates the historic counterrevolution in British foreign policy that led to the Peace of Utrecht and Britain's rise to global maritime empire – a sudden reversion from expeditionary continental war to a traditional "blue-water" foreign policy that scholars today often call "offshore balancing." As such, it goes a long way toward mythologizing British strategy as a descendant of Athenian and forebear of American strategy – albeit, in Swift's hands, without militarism.[40] This maritime policy was, in the mind of Swift and his mentors, necessarily and integrally connected to a domestic politics of constitutional monarchy, namely, *liberty within order*, that cannot be characterized accurately as absolutist or authoritarian.

Swift's ideas are useful to readers who face perennial controversies about the advantages and disadvantages of consensual and coercive forms of government and about how to form political values in a context in which domestic and international politics merge and interact in unpredictable and threatening ways, such as with extreme ideological divisions and

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foreign interference in domestic affairs. They also reveal the enduring importance of culture and imaginative literature in giving shape to such values.[41] Literature and satire are alternative modes of thought from political philosophy – while they contain elements of it, they also play with it, belittle it, and breathe life into it. "A political science which does not grasp the moral phenomena is crude," as Allan Bloom wrote of Shakespeare's politics, while "an art uninspired by the passion for justice is trivial."[42]

Swift saw countries of the world as part of a single human society. He opposed wars of aggression and imperialism while recognizing that war could not be permanently engineered out of existence by means of radical idealism. Diplomatic solutions required governments to be responsive to their people, respectful of other peoples, and open to trade and compromise. For these reasons, one would think that Swift's critics could agree on a more even-handed appraisal of his works, which I hope this book will provide.

In the process, readers will discover Swift's brilliant rebuke to personal and national hubris, the details of which are variously applicable and inapplicable to our world, but always surprising – and often hilarious. Perhaps also some false and self-obstructing divisions between realism and idealism can be broken down, so that twenty-first-century readers can think more broadly about how to preserve both liberty and security – and thus prevent real authoritarians from gaining a monopoly on grand strategy.

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Figure 2 Sir William Temple, Baronet, 1679, line engraving by Peter Vanderbank, after Sir Peter Lely (National Portrait Gallery, London).

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