CHAPTER 1

Swift as Classic

> In all my Writings, I have had constant Regard to this great End, not to suit and apply them to particular Occasions and Circumstances of Time, of Place, or of Person; but to calculate them for universal Nature, and Mankind in general.
>
> (*PW* 1.174)[1]

MADNESS

In the preface to a tale of a tub (1704), swift finds a classic way to define the kind of writing that is not classic and the kind of reading that should properly accompany it. Shadowing this passage is Cicero's declaration in *De re publica* (*The Republic*) of the unchanging and everlasting law of right reason. In place of law, Swift gives us modern wit which, we are told, does not travel well. Even 'the smallest Transposal or Misapplication' can annihilate it (*PW* 1.26). Some jests are only comprehensible at Covent-Garden, some at Hyde-Park Corner. All the universal truths about modernity are sourced in its provinciality. Similarly, the intellectual position of a modern is open to parody, when it is rendered as a physical position:

> Too intense a Contemplation is not the Business of Flesh and Blood; it must by the necessary Course of Things, in a little Time, let go its Hold, and fall into Matter. Lovers, for the sake of Celestial Converse, are but another sort of Platonicks, who pretend to see Stars and Heaven in Ladies Eyes, and

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> to look or think no lower; but the same Pit is provided for both; and they seem a perfect Moral to the Story of that Philosopher, who, while his Thoughts and his Eyes were fixed upon the Constellations, found himself seduced by his lower Parts into a Ditch. (*PW* 1.189–90)

Here the transposition of the sexually candid phrase 'seduced by his lower parts' from the lovers to the philosopher, and from the idea of intercourse to the idea of falling into a ditch and from that to the reference to the human fall into the pit of hell makes the declaration of the writer's faith in matter more emphatic, and yet also ridicules it. Swift is indeed saying that the most extreme religious enthusiasts have a gross conception of the spiritual which is explicable in psychological and physiological terms; they are ultimately materialists. But the reader's attention is taken not only by the object of the attack but also by the position of the person or persona who conducts the assault. He may himself be an embodiment of the very thing he assaults; thus his tone of svelte disengagement is deceitful. To establish the voice of the norm and then to make it the voice of deviancy, while attributing to it every form of awareness except self-awareness, has at the very least a confusing effect. Swift produces a similar confusion at the level of form when he makes digressions central to his undertaking, thus making a nonsense of the standard opposition between digression and main text upon which his humour depends.

Swift's suppleness of phrasing and of figuration has the dual effect of intensifying and of vaporizing the detail of his more vertiginously satiric passages. The world he creates is packed tight and it is also empty. He dislocates the reader by revealing that the momentum of the logic of an argument or of a figure, or of both, can lead or can seem to lead the author into unexpected trouble. For the whole notion of authority and control is questioned when the language seems to take on a life of its own, independent of any authorial restraint. And yet to represent that very condition is itself an ingenious exercise in authorial mastery.

One of Swift's great gifts is to find a way of telling stories in the voice and accent of monomaniacs, obsessives, and ideologues who are entirely unaware of their fixated condition. Sometimes he plays the role of mimic; sometimes, more subtly and dismayingly, that of ventriloquist. In general, the mimicry creates ironic effects, the

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ventriloquial efforts, sustained for longer and with stonier dedication (*Gulliver's Travels*, *A Modest Proposal*), create parody. Fanaticism has great allure for Swift. His scorn for it is the more effective because of his relish for it; he has an eye for the behaviour of the crazed who believe themselves to be rational and who can persuade others of this too. The fanatic begins by surrendering his intelligence and is thereafter no longer exercised by the labour of using it. His energy is instead devoted to consuming it, energy converting mass, the adrenalin of madness masking its hyperactivity as the operation of reason. Sometimes we listen to juvenile opinions repeated endlessly with stentorian force, the loudness of voice indicating both the strength of the convictions and their echoing vacuity. At other times, the madness is quieter in tone. Rather than the crazed blusterings of a religious enthusiast, we have the assured expositions of an expert, delivered with a smiling sibilance.

> And it is exactly at one Year old, that I propose to provide for them in such a Manner, as, instead of being a Charge upon their Parents, or the Parish, or wanting Food and Raiment for the rest of their Lives; they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the Feeding, and partly to the Cloathing, of many Thousands.
>
> (*PW* 12.110)

The frenzy of religious enthusiasm that had, in Swift's view, caused so much political and social strife in the seventeenth century was still a force to be reckoned with; his sojourn at Kilroot outside Belfast among the northern Presbyterians made that painfully clear to him. But in the new era of the Moderns, such frenzy had migrated into more secular forms; the good of mankind had taken over from redemption as the ostensible motive for virtuous action. Swift repeatedly assumes the persona of the 'most devoted Servant of all Modern Forms' (*PW* 1.27) seeking to accomplish 'the general Good of Mankind' (*PW* 1.77). Such a 'Modern' could be a politician, a hack writer, a religious bigot, an economist, a believer in the radical goodness or benevolence of humankind; whatever the role or profession, the Modern, by the abuse of 'feeling' or 'reason' – now beginning to separate into opposites – had become dangerously insane. Against the insanity of ideologues and sentimentalists, Swift responded in the classically satiric manner – by caricaturing them in stories that were

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parables or allegories or sermons although these were often written in the well-named 'realistic' mode of the Moderns – that of the 'history' or novel.

The constitutional historian Hallam, writing in 1827, argued that Swift's writings in *The Examiner* and elsewhere are the first in which a government, rather than seeking a solution in the law of libel, decided to 'retaliate with unsparing invective and calumny' against its vociferous enemies in the press.[2] Swift was indeed a remarkably effective political journalist. Yet Hallam, like many others, locates Swift in his historical circumstances and still implies that there is in his writings something fierce and repellent the explanation for which must be sought beyond history. This alternative source is Swift's psyche, to which many commentators have claimed special access.

Thus, enseamed within the long history of commentary on Swift the writer is the commentary on Swift's psychology and pathology. Madness, illness, sexual disturbance, revulsion at the human body and its functions, and a whole fleet of other guesses or claims are cited to explain what is remarkable about his work. This, we have been told for two and a half centuries, is what ultimately gives to Swift's work that intensity which distinguishes it from that of the other great satirists with whom he is often compared or associated – Juvenal, Rabelais, Pope, Dryden, Voltaire. The diseased subjectivity of the author is paraded as the cause of or simply described as misanthropy. Swift's eccentricity then becomes the basis for a dark view of human nature that has to be disavowed (on the grounds that it is a slur on humankind) or admitted (on the grounds that it is a penetrating truth discoverable only by the disturbed). The very brilliance of Swift's rhetoric is taken to be an index of a deep-seated disturbance that finds the corruptions and vices (radical or contingent) of his contemporaries so offensive. So his 'madness' restricts the range but deepens the reach of his access to certain aspects of human experience denied to the unafflicted. It is ironic indeed that Swift, who so often used madness as an emblem of the Modern's self-involvement, should himself be subject to this kind of interpretation. It is as though he had become for his readers one of his own adopted personae.

It is Swift's impersonation of the forms of modernity's assault on traditional moralities that makes him so anomalously and yet decisively

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a modern writer. The loss of secure authority is disturbing because it is so often exposed by the serene confidence of the first-person narrator who embodies the modern spirit by showing that its investment in personal, authentic experience is foolhardy and yet securely insecure. Swift does indeed record some of the ways in which a traditional moral discourse mutates into a modern commercial discourse and how, in the process, the claims to Christian or moral behaviour are the more aggressive as the grounds for such behaviour are abandoned. Yet his intensities are still disproportionate to such explanations. The question recurrently is, in what does this difference, or this radically disturbing element, consist? In this form, the question is never satisfactorily answered. But it has been countered by the contradictory claim that Swift displays the fundamental sanity that is always to be found in classic writers.[3] Yet the accounts of his sanity inevitably segue into assertions of the intensity with which he defended traditional commonplace beliefs; the trouble is that the descriptions of the intensity return the commentator to the issue of Swift's uniqueness and the problem of distinguishing this from extremism or imbalance. Revulsion and disgust at physical and sexual functions are the most alarming elements in this intensity, even though these are traditional features in satiric writing. F. R. Leavis finds Swift shares 'a peculiar emotional intensity' with 'the shallowest complacencies of Augustan common sense'.[4] In an essay more noticed than distinguished, George Orwell sees Swift as a commonplace and reactionary thinker, obsessed with dirt and disease, and yet redeemed by a Leavislike 'terrible intensity of vision'; this vagueness aids Orwell towards his well-known declaration 'that, if the force of belief is behind it, a world-view which only passes the test of sanity is sufficient to produce a great work of art'.[5] Edward Said takes issue with Orwell and, by implication, with Leavis, of whose essay Orwell's is a rewriting, arguing that Swift is, above all things, a self-conscious intellectual, a writer in a world of power.[6] Even with Said, there seems to be a relation, more sensed than articulated, between Swift's intensity and his sanity. The sanity is always under threat from the intensity; an ordinary and an extraordinary universe are combined within one vision that can thus appear either commonplace or uniquely uncompromising. As with the various arguments about Swift's 'style', there is little agreement on what constitutes it. He writes in various

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registers, but no one of them seems to predominate sufficiently to be called his 'style', even though again a conflict between the homely and the commonplace on the one hand and something remarkably and intensely fierce is widely remarked.[7]

Swift can thus combine contraries of the most compelling kind. John Wesley cites from Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* in his 'Doctrine of Original Sin' (1757) to demonstrate the ineluctable depravity of human nature, while in *The Enquirer* (1797), the anarchist/utilitarian William Godwin sees the Houyhnhnms as emblems of human perfectibility. An Anglican priest and traditional Christian who could not tolerate any threat to the supremacy of the national Church, in England or in Ireland,[8] he was, in Sir James Mackintosh's words, 'an ecclesiastical Tory, even while he was a political Whig'.[9] The need to defend his Church in the circumstances of England and Ireland in the long crisis that stretched from the 1640s to the 1730s may explain the venomous ingenuity that he deployed to secure a position that varied from the threatened to the indefensible.[10] His Anglicanism or his 'Toryism', even if wholly traditional, makes him seem like an ideological curiosity, especially when combined with a coarseness of invective that threatens all established values.

Swift's coarseness and 'misanthropy' were often linked to one another and to his final state of madness. Sir Walter Scott claimed the grossness of Swift's writing could be explained by the author's mental 'peculiarities' and the conditions of the time; it was the combination that was 'nearly allied to the misanthropy' which preceded his final madness. Scott's attempts to understand Swift scarcely soften his ultimate condemnation of Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, 'this libel on human nature',[11] but they certainly form a telling contrast with the disturbed rant of Thackeray in his 'English Humorists', an essay that steeply intensified the tone of outrage that had been a recurrent feature of reaction to Swift and specifically to Book IV, at least since the comments of Lord Orrery and Patrick Delany in 1752 and 1754 respectively.

POLITENESS AND CIVIC VIRTUE

One other way of discounting Swift as an exceptionally misanthropic author is to see him as a writer in the 'selfish' or cynical tradition of

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those authors from La Rochefoucauld to Hobbes, from Mandeville to Helvétius, who have been routinely accused of having a narrow and gloomy view of human nature, because they give primacy to the passion of self-love. Mandeville was especially notorious during Swift's lifetime for his great work, *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714 and 1729). It is not that Swift is in any sense like Mandeville, although they are sometimes paired together. Mandeville is renowned for his attack, not on virtue as such, but on the ways in which it had been traditionally understood, especially if it depended upon a denial of self-love or selfishness as a motor principle in human behaviour or on the overly sanguine and demonstrably foolish view of the benevolists like Shaftesbury who 'seems to require and expect Goodness in his Species, as we do a sweet Taste in Grapes and China Oranges, of which, if any of them are sour, we boldly pronounce that they are not come to that Perfection their Nature is capable of'.[12]

Swift is not at all given to any revision or reconsideration of the traditional Christian concepts of virtue, none of which would have denied the power of self-love, although Shaftesbury's malleability on the topic was anathema to him. The best-known Anglican synthesis of traditional and modern ethical systems is Bishop Joseph Butler's *Fifteen Sermons*, published in the same year as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). It is milder in tone and more accommodating than Swift, but not fundamentally different in its doctrinal basis. However, Swift is extraordinary in the degree to which he is both repelled and fascinated by humankind's resourcefulness in disguising viciousness and corruption as virtue. Pride is a fundamental sin, hypocrisy the age-old disguise that it wears. Mandeville shocked his readers because he claimed that what had been taken to be the antithesis of virtue was that in which virtue consisted. His argument was the more upsetting because it further claimed that now, in a polite age, some of the old barbaric distinctions – like that between sin and virtue – could be abandoned and replaced by something more rational and enlightened, more in conformity with human nature and the human capacity to master and order a secular world – especially the world of material goods and luxury.[13] When the hunger for luxury and consumption has become a virtue, then a key Swiftian inversion has truly been realized.

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Swift may not have mastered the economic discourse that was developing to describe the emergent systems of the colonial and Atlantic worlds of which Ireland formed a part.[14] But he understood enough to recognize that a form of rational analysis based on quantification was beginning to dominate in social and moral thinking and to introduce those new norms of civility and politeness that were so assiduously promoted in contemporary writing. Mandeville had given terms like 'luxury' and 'consumption' a bad name by showing their intimate connection with dirt and selfishness and the welfare of society in general.[15] These associations were redescribed by Hutcheson in a more muted, less scandalous manner; yet he retained the declaration that goodness (interpreted as the happiness or welfare of the many) was something that could be quantified and that the impulse to produce it was something that could be, indeed could not but be, strongly felt; and that to act in accord with such a feeling was to be in accord with our God-given nature. Thus an affective morality that could be quantified in its effects was now available for the polite world of commerce, where markets expanded to meet the demands of appetite and appetite had lost many of its traditional and pejorative connotations. Appetite provided the dynamic for an economy of gratification for the self and for others. This was the world of the modern economist and of the modern moralist; in short, of utilitarianism. In Swift's view it was no more than a glossy version of the self-involved fanaticisms of religious sectaries who had, just as much as the Moderns, believed in a version of the 'inner light' of personal conviction and its harmony with God's wish. Like the Moderns, these old-generation bigots believed that the authority of an opinion lay in the strength with which it was held. To Swift, this was a dangerous and ludicrous conviction; it sought and found authority within itself and demanded universal consent to this discovery. On the other hand, the emphasis upon consequence and the weakened role of intention or motive allowed for so much computational casuistry that moral judgement seemed to depend upon the ingenuity of the apologist rather than on any antecedent and traditional body of truth.

Yet it is also true that Swift used the conversational mode of address so favoured by those who wished to establish a standard of politeness in social and literary forms that would allow England to compete with

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France and with an idea of ancient Rome. The dissonance between civility and savagery in Swift is a studied satiric effect, but it also implies a repudiation of the belief in the 'progress' of politeness and the triumph of prudence and moderation over factional enthusiasm celebrated by Hume in particular.[16] Hume's version of the development of English literary style from the mid seventeenth to the early eighteenth century is a case in point; it was only in Swift's era that English letters emulated the French, the 'judicious imitators' of the Ancients.[17] With Swift, however, the civil mode is often sustained in circumstances so grotesque that its imperturbability becomes a symptom of disturbance. The heroic and the tragic dimensions of human existence do not fit within this reduced and mundane world; yet their inversion into various extreme forms of debauchery is perfectly in accord with its appalling and dead carnality. Swift dissects the 'Carcass of Humane Nature' (*PW* 1.77) to divert rather than instruct. The analytic and instructive exposure becomes pornographic and shocking. It is a disturbingly modern mode of defending the Ancients. In satirizing the modern world of innovation and inversion Swift also demonstrates its displacement of the traditional world it sometimes imitates and at other times derides.

The aspiration to classic status in literature (and in other arts) was central to the long disputes between Ancients and Moderns in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It seemed obvious to the 'Ancients' in this dispute that if any modern work were to prove as durable as the Greek and Latin classics, it must in some sense be an imitation of those features in the originals that had given them such lasting appeal. This was a much-contested feature of the theory of imitation. Against that, it was argued that the modern was specific to itself, and that imitation of the classics was rarely creative and almost always slavish or routine. Swift entered into this dispute with the famous defence of his mentor Sir William Temple against the redoubtable and much-superior scholar Richard Bentley in *The Battle of the Books* (1704). But he especially emphasized how absurd and dangerous it was to replace the inherited traditions of the classics with work of recent vintage. Thus he dramatizes in his satires the distinction between the local and the universal, almost always tying the local not only to a particular time and place but also to the psychic freakishness of a disturbed or deranged subjectivity or to the

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sociological novelty of the professional writer dependent upon patronage and/or the market to an unprecedented degree. A swarm of Grub Street hacks could scarcely be expected to produce a literature that would rival the serenity and wisdom of the ancient classics. They were doomed to a momentary notoriety rather than elected to a long-lasting fame unless, that is, their notoriety were to be so commemorated in the satire they provoked, that it would there be permanently preserved as an emblem of foolishness and pride. These hack writers, Swift (and Pope) would argue, were hopelessly marooned in the present moment precisely because they affected to ignore or dispense with the past.

IRELAND

Swift witnessed two revolutions. One was the Glorious Revolution of 1688–9 which initiated a profound reordering of the internal world of the British isles. This was an intricate process. Among its most notable events were the end of the Jacobite war in Ireland and the establishment of Protestant power after 1691; the Penal Laws passed from 1695 against the Irish Catholics to destroy them as a political, economic, and cultural force; the Union of England and Scotland to form Great Britain in 1707; the abortive attempts by Irish Protestants to assert a meaningful independence, especially in economic matters, against Great Britain; the defeats of the Jacobite cause in 1715 and in 1745, the year of Swift's death, and the destruction of Scottish Gaelic culture. The other revolution was European. It was completed by the Treaty of Utrecht which brought an end to the War of the Spanish Succession and Louis XIV's ambitions for a universal monarchy that would dominate the continent. It created the system of nation-states and inaugurated the *ancien régime*, a system that was to endure for no more than seventy-five years and was to be replaced, after another titanic struggle between Britain and France, in 1815.

Swift's work certainly belongs in this modern European world, partly because of its oblique relationship to the European Enlightenment, partly because its mixed English and Irish origins enabled him to question the new alliances between power and civility that were so fundamental to Britain's and Europe's self-images. A common feature of the commentary on Ireland and on Irish writing, then and since, has been

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its preoccupation with the issues of Irish peripherality and its troubled relationship to a metropolitan centre, usually London, occasionally Paris. In 1922, T. S. Eliot, continuing the Arnoldian search for the universal element in literature that would supervene over provinciality, claimed that Joyce's *Ulysses* was 'the first Irish work since that of Swift to possess absolute European significance'.[18] The remark indicates Swift's importance, as well as Eliot's ignorance of other Irish authors, including many of Swift's contemporaries. Swift was one of a gifted generation of writers whose political conception of Ireland was integral to their work or to the commentary it provoked or to both. Outrage at Ireland's ill-treatment at English hands, hatred of its provinciality and squalor, and the encouragement within it of a species of economic and political autonomy are evident in the more than sixty Irish pamphlets he wrote, particularly in the decades of the 1720s and 1730s. Of these, *The Drapier's Letters* and *A Modest Proposal* are the most widely advertised as works that have a universal moral and political appeal.

Nevertheless, it is somewhat remarkable that Swift's reputation in this regard should exceed that of contemporaries like John Toland or Francis Hutcheson, both of whom were much less confined and orthodox than he in their opinions. Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) had several targets, among them the exercise of political control through the creation by a priestly elite of mystery about religious matters.[19] The confessional basis of the British state, most especially as it applied to Ireland, could be said to be challenged by Toland's argument; no sect, no Church had a claim as such to total political control. But it is clear that Toland, although born as an Irish-speaking Catholic, came to detest 'Popery, Prelacy, and arbitrary power',[20] and that his attack on 'priestcraft' was more truly directed at Roman Catholicism than at Anglicanism. Nevertheless, the book was a rational Dissenter's credo; no churchman in particular could accept the deistic implications of its arguments. Toland's politics were, however, solidly Protestant and chauvinist. He had, as he said in a pamphlet of 1701, two chief aims – 'the stopping of the progress of the *French* Greatness' and keeping '*England* the head of the Protestant Interest all over the World',[21] even if this meant finding a way to accept the monarchy of William III by regarding it as a 'commonwealth'. Yet his criticisms of Anglican sectarianism and of

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monarchy were sufficient to make him appear radical in comparison with Swift and he signally lacked diplomacy and seemed almost to fear tact. 'There was not in his whole composition, one single grain of that useful quality which *Swift* calls *modern discretion*.'[22]

Hutcheson, who appears much less threatening politically than Toland, perhaps struck more deeply at the moral basis of Swift's and of Anglican political thought when he argued, in his *Inquiry* (1725), against the spirit of sectarianism and its link with exclusivity and despotism; the consequences were the destruction of 'national love', social harmony, and civil society itself.[23] Although the question of toleration for Catholics is thereby raised, it forms no central part of Hutcheson's project, since the search for the 'basis of moral knowledge independent of church authority and available to the ordinary reasonable and conscientious person'[24] was a specifically Protestant search. In Ireland especially, the universalist claims for such a basis were always threatened by the charge of sectarianism and would in the end succumb to it. But before that could happen, a particular conception of civil society as an instrument of moral improvement was formulated not in Ireland, but in Scotland, where Hutcheson became a famous teacher and earned the title of the father of Scottish philosophy. Thus, on the rare occasions when they were not wholly absorbed into accounts of English political and moral philosophy, Toland was assigned to Europe and Hutcheson to Scotland. Swift, while a classic of English writing, was nevertheless also and always associated with Ireland.

Or, more exactly, with two Irelands. One is the Ireland of the Protestant patriots, the other is the country of Irish nationalism, predominantly Catholic. The latter was to have its first signal success with the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, the act which finally brought an end to the confessional Protestant British state that emerged in 1688; the former was to end in 1800–1 with the Act of Union that created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and began with the publication of William Molyneux's *The Case of Ireland . . . Stated* (1698).[25] It is with this latter group that Swift has been most frequently and persuasively associated. Certainly his *Drapier's Letters* and Molyneux's pamphlet have been widely regarded as the source books for the eighteenth century's Protestant nationalism, that culminated in 1782 when Henry Grattan

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reportedly welcomed legislative independence with the words, 'Spirit of Swift! Spirit of Molyneux! Your genius has prevailed. Ireland is now a nation.' By the end of the century, despite the 1798 Rebellion and the Union that extinguished the experiment in independence, Molyneux and Swift had been elevated from spokesmen for an exclusively Protestant patriotism to a nobler, more inclusive role: Irish minds had been opened by this pair and had been taught to 'nurture the seeds of freedom, and to vindicate those rights, which heaven has bestowed upon the human race'.[26]

This was the benign 'national' view of Swift as the first author who had been driven beyond the limits of his initial view of Ireland and the Irish to embrace a more generous, if paternalistic, vision of the moral and economic duties and imperatives involved in the Protestant interest in Ireland. It was not uncontested. In his famous *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824), Thomas Moore presents an alternative view of an intolerant Swift who 'for the misery and degradation of his Roman Catholic countrymen ... seems to have cared little more than his own Gulliver would for the suffering of so many disfranchised Yahoos'.[27]

The spirit of party certainly heightened Swift's view of the Irish–English relationship, especially after his career in English politics came to an end with the accession of Queen Anne. In the next five years, that relationship degenerated into a bitter and humiliating dispute. Molyneux had argued that Ireland was a separate kingdom, not a colony. Yet Swift, like many others, was sorely struck by the melancholy consequences for Ireland of the English connection – the conditions of poverty and famine, the punitive commercial relationship, the formation of the patriot 'persona' as a surrogate identity for a minority group that was parasitically dependent on the polity it attempted to resist.[28]

This was intensified by Swift's awareness of the very different relationship established in 1707 by the union between England and Scotland. A community of Dissenters, with a marked commercial tendency, had been given preferential treatment over a community of Anglicans with a record of political loyalty and much more need of every form of political, economic, religious, and cultural support. The Wood's halfpence affair led from small beginnings to a significant victory that had wide implications, some of them exaggerated in retrospect, although the exaggerations

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themselves became important. The political conflict generated by the Irish–English relationship has deep connections with Swift's obsessive rhetorical figurings of the autonomous body and the body that has neither identity nor control and that can, as a consequence, issue only in excrement, vapours, or be represented merely as an object of consumption or derision.[29] From Swift's early allegorization of political and sexual union in *The Story of the Injured Lady* (1707), his determination to expose the actuality of a maimed condition and the cosmetic pretence of a 'normal' one had been intermittently expressed. This has often been said to provide the evidence for his misanthropy and, more specifically, his misogyny.[30]

But in the 1720s, its expression became both more intense and more consistent. In fact, as Emer Nolan argues, by 1729, the year of *A Modest Proposal*, the 'debate between civic virtue and homo economicus' has been transmogrified:

> *The Drapier* represented an ambivalent but useful blend of the language of economics and the language of civic virtue, but now the Proposer represents their divergence … there is no solution: this is a satire of both colonialism and of the resistance to colonialism, in the form in which it could then be articulated by protestant Ireland.[31]

The political impasse, finally exposed in and by the English–Irish colonial relationship, is figured finally as a murderous action in which the atrocity of nurturing children to be eaten is redescribed in the modern way as the production of a crop or commodity that satisfies a theory of economic behaviour. Swift's writing seems classically colonial to many precisely because of this internal disturbance; it is 'a rhetoric characterized by constant crisis, just as colonial rule itself continually creates its own crisis of authority'.[32]

Some earlier modern readings see Swift's work in general, and *Gulliver's Travels* in particular, as characteristic examples of the Enlightenment's assault on the assumptions of traditional authority. The unreliability or instability of the narrator is thus taken to be an index of the writer's awareness of a new form of sensory and intellectual relativism. That itself had a peculiarly Irish origin in the new epistemological questions raised by William Molyneux's work on optics, *Dioptrica nova* (1692), and Bishop Berkeley's *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709).[33] This at least has the merit of establishing a philosophical rather than a political connection

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between Swift and his compatriots that might account for or supplement the anxiety about authority and about the concession of trust to the government either of the senses or of the British state. But it is not often that Swift has been seen as a witting or unwitting contributor to the Enlightenment and its subversion of authority. It is the collapse of traditional authority, not the absurdity of its claims, that enraged him. He has left many after-images – the defender of Liberty, the creator of Irish national consciousness, the writer torn by his 'saeva indignatio' at the spectacle of injustice and corruption, the party hack, the greatest satirist of early modernity. These versions of him influenced the form of his commemoration by two of his country's greatest writers, Joyce and Yeats. In *Ulysses* (1922), he is the misanthropic dean: 'A hater of his kind ran from them to the wood of madness, his mane foaming in the moon, his eyeballs stars. Houyhnhnm, horsenostrilled.'[34]

In Yeats's play, *The Words upon the Window-pane* (1934), and in the Preface to it, which is a sustained, if shrill, meditation on Swift and on his notion, expressed as early as 1701 in *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissentions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome*, of 'the universal bent and current of a people', Swift becomes a tragic figure whose dread of 'the historic process became ... a dread of parentage'. He was of the traditional world that Rousseau and the French Revolution destroyed, profoundly opposed to democracy and yet that 'created the political nationality of Ireland'.[35]

Irish democracy's celebration of Swift has had many unintended ironies – one of which is that any democracy should celebrate one who so much dreaded its arrival. Eliot's strange pairing of Swift and Joyce helped to emphasize another. In 1978, Swift appeared on the Irish Republic's currency, on the ten-punt note; in 1994 he was replaced by Joyce. Now, perhaps sometime in the future of the euro currency, the Drapier might yet make another appearance on coin or paper. Even the shade of William Wood might smile at that Euro-Hibernian prospect.

NOTES

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2. Henry Hallam, *The Constitutional History of England from the Accession of Henry VII to the Death of George II*, 4 vols. (Paris: Baudry, 1827), vol. III, 446–67.

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