CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Relation between Swift's poetry and prose - Swift's contribution to poetry and an assessment of it

"What Writings had he left behind - ?
'I hear, they're of a different kind';
'A few, in verse; but most, in Prose -'
Some high-flown Pamphlets, I suppose -

Relation between Swift's Poetry and Prose:

Coleridge is perfectly right in his remark that -

"all our great poets have been prose writers, as Chaucer. Spenser, Milton; and this probably arose from their just sense of metre. For a true poet will never confound verse and prose" 2

We can acclaim Swift's greatness in this regard because of the extent to which his poetry and prose are of mutual and supporting interests.

1 Life and Character of Dr. Swift, p. 495, ll. 180-83.
Swift as a writer of prose won immediate recognition of his contemporaries. Orrery praised the 'masterly conciseness', which he regarded as unequalled by any writer. Delany, once, echoed his lordship's words. It is also interesting to note that the ideal Swift consciously pursued in the writing of poetry he followed in his prose. His prose is marked by the same characteristic self-restraint, clear and concise sentences, in which every word has its full value. Nowhere does Swift offer a distinction between the office of the poet and that of the prose-writer. Of course, the self-imposed barriers within which Swift works, both in prose and poetry, are inevitable for one who attaches to his art no more ambitious a purpose than to communicate what can be seen and known. As Swift's own verse shows, the absence of a self-conscious poetic identity encourages the poet to work within the same great range of occasions and purposes as is open to the writer of prose. The same commonsense, temporal issues which elicit prose-writing can also call forth the unapologetic display of verse-composition. The jocular scoops, ill-tempered assaults, transient moments of mirth, anger, or even idle curiosity which appeal to any man of nimble wits can be exploited for the exercise of poetic talent.

We have already seen identical themes and their treatment in Swift's poetry and prose while discussing...
the theme of his poetry in the last chapter. For example, the theme of his early poem *Ode to Dr. William Sancroft* with Sancroft's view on the independence of church was not only included but enlarged upon in his later prose work *A Tale of a Tub*. Another early poem, *A Description of Mother Lundwell's Cave*, of course, if we take it to have come from Swift's pen, is indebted to *Cooper's Hill*, which saves Denham partially in the *Battle of the Books*:

"Then, with a long spear, he (Homer) slew Denham, a stout modern, who from his father's side derived his lineage from Apollo, but his mother was of mortal race. He fell, and bit the earth. The celestial part Apollo took, and made it a star; but the terrestrial lay wallowing upon the ground."  

Sometimes a couplet of a poem may suggest a scene or situation in Swift's prose work. Such is the case with the last couplet of his satirical poem - *Verses on the Revival of the Order of the Bath*:

"And he who will leap over a Stick for the King
Is qualified best for a Dog in a String."  

It clearly anticipates the account in *Gulliver's Travels*, Book I, Chapter III of the trial of dexterity which the

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Lillipution candidates for the coloured silken threads were forced to undergo.

Now, if we consider his prose-style, we shall come across, as in his poetry, a certain conciseness that has perhaps never been equalled by any other writer. As a prose-writer Swift is markedly concise and David Nicol Smith is right in his comments:

"I do not think that he (Pope) is so concise as Swift" though in blissful ignorance Swift pays unstinted compliment to Pope:

"In Pope, I cannot read a Line,
But with a Sigh, I wish it mine:
When he can in one Couplet fix
More Sense than I can do in Six:"

We can have a very convincing proof of this conciseness of Swift in the fifth and sixth chapters of the Fourth Book of Gulliver's Travels:

"I said there was a Society of Men among us, bred up from their youth in the Art of proving by words multiplied for the purpose, that White is Black, and Black is White, according as they are paid. To this Society all the rest of the People are Slaves"

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6 Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D., p.497, Il.47-50.

This is surely Brobdingnagian in style - clear, masculine, and smooth; without multiplying unnecessary words or using various expressions. Here the attack is direct and unqualified, and hence dangerous.

Swift is contemporary with Addison, but his prose style shows strong kinship with freedom of expression of the past generation. In so far as Swift can be paired with anybody in matters of style it would be with Robert South, who himself was rather old-fashioned compared with his contemporaries Tillotson, Temple and Dryden. The prose style of Swift is the strongest contrast to that of Johnson - the latter's style so formal, rotund, sententious and long drawn out; Swift's so simple, concise, and almost conversational. Jingling rhymes of the simple structure became in his hands a vehicle for the same qualities as we find in his prose - vivid pictures of scenes, wit, humour, fun, and of course irony. Like his great contemporary Defoe, Jonathan Swift used direct and simple prose but with far more vigour and brilliance. He showed that prose could be made ultimately dependent upon the mind and the quality of thought rather than upon decorative devices or upon flourishes of rhetoric. Swift had given much attention to the problem of language and its use and among his critical writings is A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue where he writes:
"They have joined the most obdurate consonants with one intervening vowel, only to shorten a syllable; and their taste in time became so depraved, that what was at first a poetical license, not to be justified, they made their choice, alleging, that the words pronounced at length sounded faint and languid. This was a pretence to take up the same custom in prose; so that most of the books we see now-a-days, are full of those manglings and abbreviations." 8

As in his unyielding ethical rigidity he is of the seventeenth rather than the eighteenth century, so in prose-style his manner is not that of Addison and Steele or again of Bolingbroke but of the earlier period. The true definition of style - 'proper words in proper places' 9 pronounced in A Letter to a young Clergyman, Lately enter'd into Holy Orders 9 has been followed by him both in his verse and prose writings.

It is generally presumed that the use of metaphor tends to obscure the essential nature of prose because it substitutes a poetic equivalence for a direct statement. We may read Swift for many pages without encountering imagery of any kind, except such as was at that time embodied in common speech.

The following passage quoted from his prose masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels* will clearly bear out the fact that Swift is, in general, unusually sparing of simile and metaphor as adumbrated in the lines:

"No Simile shall be begun,
With rising or with setting Sun:
And let the secret Head of Nile
Be ever banish'd from your Isle" 10

"On the fifth of November, which was the beginning of summer in those parts, the Weather being very lazy, the seamen spied a rock, within half a cable's length of the ship; but the wind was so strong, that we were driven directly upon it, and immediately split. Six of the crew, of whom I was one, having let down the boat into the sea, made a shift to get clear of the ship and the rock. We rowed, by my computation, about three leagues, till we were able to work no longer, being already spent with labour while we were in the ship. We therefore trusted ourselves to the mercy of the waves, and in about half an hour the boat was overset by a sudden flurry from the north. What became of my companions in the boat, as well as of those who escaped on the rock or were left in the vessel, I cannot tell; but conclude they were all lost. For my own part, I swam as fortune directed me, and was pushed forward by wind and tide.

I often let my legs drop, and could feel no bottom; but when I was almost gone, and able to struggle no longer, I found myself within my depth; and by this time the storm was much abated. The declivity was so small, that I walked near a mile before I got to the shore, which I conjectured was about eight o'clock in the evening.  

In the passage there is not a single simile or metaphor. There is not even a direct comparison such as we find later in the book. In narrative prose, such as quoted above, there is no need for either illumination or decoration. The author knows that metaphors would merely impede the action and has therefore, properly discarded.  

In this connection it will be very interesting to note that George Orwell read *Gulliver's Travels*—

"at least seven times at different stages in his life, the first time the night before his eighth birth-day"  

and thence began a literary attachment which he celebrated in one of his great essays — *Politics vs. Literature* (1946). It also provided a model for his own allegory *Animal Farm*, which shares with *Gulliver's Travels* the rare merit of giving pleasure and instructions equally to politicians and children. Orwell's loyalty to Swift was virtually

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unwavering throughout his life.

Similarly, Huxley's novel *Brave New World* has elements in common with Swift's masterpiece *Gulliver's Travels*. Jerome Mockier very aptly shows us the fact that Huxley has revitalised Swiftian irony in the section of *Those Barren Leaves* dealing with Francis Chelfer (Chapter I) and "in, among other places, those two modest proposals for the future, *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence*". George Woodcock pinpoints the fact that "in the one novel which Huxley wrote about the American present—*After Many a Summer*—it is certainly the Houyhnhnms and the yahoos that predominate". Through the eyes of the weak and sniggering Gulliver the American life is seen in all its grotesque extravagance and mindless violence, personified in the death-obsessed millionaire, Joe Stoyte. Joe's descent into yahooid negation is counterbalanced by the elevated preachings of Mr. Propter. But Propter's presentation of the Huxleian position is as dead and didactic as the preachings of Swift's talking horses. Lastly, Mr. Louis MacNeice observes that "even Mr. Bernard Shaw takes the same rationalistic attitude towards Swift", and quotes Shaw:

When I say that I am an Irishman I mean that I was born in Ireland, and my native language is the English of Swift and not the unspeakable jargon of the mid-eighteenth century London newspapers.

We know that there was in the seventeenth century a general revolt against 'enthusiasm'. It was pushed in several directions, not always with direct reference to religious fanaticism. It is seen, for example, in the trends towards simplicity in the prose style of the second half of the century – a similar trend is of course apparent in verse as well. Simplicity was demanded in pulpit eloquence. At the beginning the eighteenth century too had often tended to excess of restraint. We may recall, in this connection, Swift's warning to a young gentleman taking orders, to avoid a moving manner of preaching. Swift's style, which generally consists of the most naked and simple terms, is strong, clear, and expressive just in keeping with his age. It is familiar without vulgarity or meanness, and beautiful without affectation or ornament. His A Tale of a Tub, Gulliver's Travels, and Draper's Letters are most remarkable among his prose works, and The Legion Club, Cadenus and Vanessa, and On Poetry. A Rhapsody are at the head of his poetical performances.

Once Swift had flung off the Pindaric, high falutin style, verse was for him as natural a medium of expression as prose, and in some spheres far more effective for emotional release. To a student of Swift, the gradual development of his genius, from his obscure Pindarics, to the restless flow of his The Legion Club, and from the somewhat stilted periods of the Dissections at Athens and Rome, to the unstudied simplicity of Gulliver's Travels, will afford at each turn, new object of interest, and new illustrations of the matchless power over words which Swift, in his maturity attained. But it appears that he expresses himself more fully and more continuously in his verse than in his prose. Most of his poems are more equable than his prose. They have the effect of releasing him, now and again, from his quarrel with the world. Even when the quarrel persists, it is free from the vexation of the prose. Indeed, there are many burdens which Swift could hardly have borne at all, but for the amateur nature of his poetry. Sir Harold Williams opines that "we are closer to Swift in his verse, and in his letters, than in his prose-writings"; and he quoted Dr. Elrington Ball 17 to make his position clear:

"without knowledge of his verse a true picture of Swift cannot be drawn. In his verse he sets forth his life as a panorama, he shows more clearly than

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Poems like *The Beats' Confession* or *The Day of Judgment* displays no more flattering an assessment of human habits and attainments than does the Fourth Voyage, yet they, like even the damning speech of the Brobdingnagian King, lack the savage intensity which dominates Gulliver's final response to what he has seen. The extreme naturalistic language of such poems as *A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed*, *The Lady's Dressing Room*, and *Strephon and Chloe* leads us to the occasional flashes of it in *Gulliver's Travels*. The horror of *A Modest Proposal*, tied with metrical exactitude and silky soliloquy, is shown by the great poem *On Dreams*, wherein Swift reflects that what we do by day we dream by night:

"For, when in Bed we rest out weary Limbs,
The Mind unburthen'd sports in various Whims,
The busy Head with mimick Art runs o'er
The Scenes and Actions of the Day before.

The drowsy Tyrant, by his Minions led,
To regal Rage devotes some Patriot's Head.
With equal Terrors, not with equal Guilt,
The Murd'rer dreams of all the Blood he spilt."}

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Swift advises critics who want to quote Longinus, but do not know Greek, to buy Welsted's translation:

"Translated from Boileau's Translation,
And quote Quotation on Quotation." 20

The quip takes its place among the whole network of jokes about circularities or infinities of consumption in the poem, and calls to mind A Tale of a Tub's joke about nesting boxes:

"But, not to digress farther in the midst of a digression, as I have known some Authors inclose digressions in one another, like a nest of Boxes" 21

Again, Swift shows through his hero in the Ode to Sir William Temple that while moral philosophers have always agreed, natural philosophers have always quarrelled. This is the doctrine which Swift commands in this Ode, which he was to paraphrase in A Tale of a Tub', and which would remain his considered judgement throughout his life.

Swift wrote a number of essays dealing directly with corruptions of style. Some of them are A Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue; Hints towards an Essay on Conversation; A Complete Collection of Genteel Conversation;

A Letter to a Young Clergyman Lately Enter'd into Holy Orders.

"His concern with language is evident from these writings and it reminds us of similar efforts by John Dryden:

"I have endeavoured to write English, as near as I could distinguish it from the tongue of pedants, and that of affected travellers. Only I am sorry, that (speaking so noble a language as we do) we have not a more certain measure of it, as they have in France, where they have an Academy erected for the purpose, and endowed with large privileges by the present king. I wish we might at length leave to borrow words from other nations, which is now a wantonness in us, not a necessity; but so long as some affect to speak them, there will not want others, who will have the boldness to write them" 22

Swift's writings undoubtedly constitute a valuable key to the strength and purity of his own prose style. His classical loyalty to clear logical discourse, his contempt for bizarre eccentricities in idiom and vocabulary, and his impatience with 'wit' that does not make sense, are of permanent significance to any one who undertakes to write English prose.

Swift, again, as a writer of letters, is superb.

This aspect of his genius and writing has hardly been appreciated. Most of the letters are excellent models of the easy familiar style. Since they are so natural they are the most complete expression of the man. Their range, just like the range of his poetry, is magnificent, from the simple to the most eloquent. There are grand formal letters of consolation like those to Oxford when in the Tower, set pieces, but at the same time sincere, full of pride and indignation, loyalty and affection. There are touching words of condolence to people in trouble, like those to his cousin, Mrs. Whiteway, on the death of a son - Swift's concern for her is real and transparent. So was his concern for Vanessa and Stella - his letters to them express everything: awkwardness, embarrassment; apprehension, emotion in the case of the one; security, affection, relaxation, fun in the case of the other; love, his own kind of love, reasonable and under control, for both. They are really his poetry written in prose. They can stand beside his poems to Stella and others on equal footing. Again, there are letters of pure linguistic virtuosity to Sheridan; sometimes in Latin, or dog-Latin; sometimes dividing up the syllables differently, so that they look like a strange artificial language.

Most poets use verse where prose would not be good
enough for their particular purpose. Swift seems almost to have used it as a more familiar, more intimate way of communication. Just as in dealing with his enemies in political controversy he used verse for his roughest and least considered outbursts, tossing off ballads and broadsides shaped to popular tunes, so in his friendships his most familiar manner of address was always in verse. What could be more familiar — and at the same time an excellent parody on the usual complimentary Birthday-Ode, than the one starting with:

"Stella this Day is thirty four,  
(We shan't dispute a Year or more)  
However Stella, be not troubled,  
Although thy Size and Years are doubled,  
Since first I saw Thee at Sixteen  
The brightest Virgin on the Green,  
So little is thy Form declin'd  
Made up so largly in thy Mind."  

Pope was, no doubt, influenced by the familiar style of Swift when he writes in Epistle to a Lady:

"This Phoebus promis'd (I forget the year)  
When those blue eyes first open'd on the sphere"  

23 On Stella's Birth-day (Written A.D. 171, 8 19  
P.157, Ll. 1-8.  
Ll. 283-84.
If self-justification was the main aim of the poem *The Author Upon Himself*, the important prose essay that Swift was writing at the same time had just the opposite tendency. The important fact is that with the few of the marks of the 'Swiftian' style, the discourse - *Some Free Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs* - remains a shining monument of Swift's dignified prose. In general structure the essay follows no formal rhetorical pattern; but a few carefully expounded generalizations are first elaborated and then applied. After examining the characters of the chief ministers in the light of these principles, Swift similarly analyses some recent crises and then presents his own, plain recommendations.

Swift's last prose work *Directions to Servants*, remained unfinished. It was published incomplete in the year of his death, 1745. It is much more amusing than the *Polite Conversation*; it is a return to the lower-class, below-stairs humour of *Mrs. Harris's Petition* Swift was master of. In this connection it may be stated here that Swift's odd way of early life equipped him for it. He had always had a habit of putting up in cheap, three-penny inns and he was often on the roads. So there was nothing he did not know about low life, or, so to say, 'the facts of life'.

Thus our study of kinship between the poetry and
prose of Swift brings us to this conclusion that there is a good case for holding that the more complete Swift is the Swift of the poems. There is nothing he said in prose that he did not say in verse as well. But the reputation of the author of Gulliver's Travels and A Tale of a Tub has overshadowed the fact as the 'Age of Prose and Reason' gave more prominence to his prose than to his poetry. There is all the savagery of the last book of Gulliver's Travels in The Legion Club; and there are a good many things among the poems which are hardly paralleled in the prose. The good-humoured, below-stairs fun of the remarkable early poem Mrs. Harris's Petition, as has already been noted, is paralleled in the late prose work. The Direction to Servants. It is revealing that it was in verse only that Swift expressed the precarious clue to his relations with Vanessa or Stella; nothing like it is found in his prose. And how well that complex, poised state of mind, neither wholly one thing nor the other, is described in lines:

"But what Success Vanessa met,
Is to the World a Secret yet:
Whether the Nymph, to please her Swain,
Talks in a high Romantick Strain;
Or whether he at last descends
To like with less Seraphick Ends?
Or, to compound the Business, whether
They temper Love and Books together;
Must never to Mankind be told,
Nor shall the conscious Muse unfold." 25

or,

"And then before it grew too late,
How should I beg of gentle Fate,
(That either Nymph might have her Swain)
To split my Worship two in twain". 26

Swift's Contribution to Poetry and an Assessment of it:

Swift's contribution to English literature as a poet has long been underestimated. To some extent he himself is to blame; for it had been partly due to that pride which made him careless, whereas Pope was careful, about the publication of his poems. It was Swift's foible to care more for the reputation of a gentleman than as a poet. He never set himself up as a professional poet. He was unwilling to publish his poems under his own name. He received no money for his poems, and no collected edition appeared until he was an old man. He left his verse publications in utter confusion till Sir Harold Williams came along to bring order out of chaos as nobody had done previously.

After the half-dozen odes of the early 1690's in which he brought himself, awkwardly enough, to be grave in his verse, he shows his invention occupied with something as near creation as he ever does in prose. There is charming colloquialism of his Mrs. Harris's Petition and pleasantry in his modernization of Baucis and Philemon. While in the former the very accents of day to day speech are caught in its triumph, in the latter Jupiter and Mercury are converted into travelling saints. Philemon's metamorphosis from husbandman into a parish priest—perhaps not altogether unlike the neighbours of the Vicar of Lynces—is thus described:

"He spoke, and presently he feels
His Grazier's Coat reach down his Heels,
The Sleeves now border'd with a List
Wid'n'd and gathered at his Wrist;
But being old continued just
As threadbare, and as full of Dust" 27

The homely, matter-of-fact style of Swift's piece, before it underwent emendation at the hands of Addison, may be suitably compared with Dryden's learned description of the metamorphosis:

"Old Baucis by old Philemon seen
Sprouting with sudden Leaves of spitely Green:

Old Baucis look'd where old Philemon stood,
And was his leathern'd Arms a sprouting Wood. 27a

Swift's poetry strikes the congenial note of irony, ridiculing the pride and pretensions of men and mocking the forms - especially the mocking forms which dignified them. "Swift's ironic tendency to exaggerate praise into a paean of indirect damnation", remarks John M. Bullitt, "can be illustrated in almost every satire he wrote. How easily and naturally he adopted the indirection of ironic eulogy may be seen in his marginalia, written in a long-hand on his own copy of Dr. Gibb's translation of fifteen psalms of David; the comments were evidently intended not for publication but simply for Swift's own private amusement" 28. Swift claims to be the introducer of irony in his Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift:

"Arbuthnot is no more my Friend,
Who dares to Irony pretend;
Which I was born to introduce,
Refin'd it first, and show'd its Use" 29

The 'use' of irony lies pre-eminently in its capacity to create the appearance of the satirist's emotional detachment.

Aristotle discusses irony in his *Rhetoric*, and notes that—

"irony is more liberal than buffoonery: the ironical man jokes on his own account; the buffoon on some one else's." 30

It is in this spirit that Swift writes in defence of his own irony—

"laughing with a few friends in a corner" 31

There is abundant evidence to cite that he could delight in comedy for its own sake, as, for example, punning mock Latin poem, *A Love Song*:

*A pud in is almides ire,
Mimis veri findit a gestis,
Alo Veri findit a gestis,
His miserie never at restis" 32

Again, Swift gives us an example of calm, detached and soothing irony in his poem *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*:

"My female Friends, whose tender Hearts
Have better learned to act their Parts,
Receive the News in doleful Dumps,


"The Dean is dead, (and what is Trumps?)
"Then Lord have Mercy on his Soul".

Whereas Pope in the Prologue to the Satires & lashes his enemies:

"Let Sporus tremble - White? that thing of silk,
Sporus, that mere white curd of Ass's milk?
So well-bred spaniels civilly delight
In mumbling of the game they dare not bite."

But on the whole Swift's general tendency of mind was to vent his deep, bitter, and disillusioned anger against the proud fraud of human effort.

That Swift earned a good reputation by his contribution to English poetry even during his life time became apparent from the opinions collected from some of his famous contemporaries. According to Goldsmith Swift was the first poet who dared to describe nature as it is with all its deformities. He also gave exact expression to a turn of

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thought alike dry sarcastic, and severe. It was for this courage that Goldsmith had placed him in the same rank as Milton, Dryden, and Pope. With it we can place William Hazlitt's observation:

"He (Swift) has gone so far as to invent a new stanza of fourteen and sixteen syllable lines for Mary the Coockmaid to vent her budget of nothings, and for Mrs. Harris to gossip with the deaf old housekeeper. Oh, when shall we have such another Rector of Laracor!" 34

This also shows that Goldsmith and Hazlitt had none of the prejudices about the nature of poetry which guided many other poets and critics in their approach to Swift's verse. "For Swift", says Martin C. Battestin, "the Augustan formulation that Art was the imitation of 'la belle Nature' seemed morally irresponsible because calculated to conceal, even indeed to deny, the truth of things as they are: the plain truth that Eden is irrecoverable and that human nature, at least is fallen":

"For fine Ideas vanish fast,
While all the gross and filthy last." 36

36 Strephon/Chloe, p. 525, ll. 234-35.
He derided the determination of his contemporaries to prefer beautiful idealisms to awkward realities.

As a result of Addison's comments he revised several of his poems, most drastically The Story of Baucis and Philemon. All of his revisions were in the interest of exquisite polish, but to gain it, he had to sacrifice the racy colloquialism of his verse which came to be recognized later as a distinct achievement of Swift. He, in his turn, came to the aid of Pope. The Dunciad had to be stimulated in both of its stages, and Swift helped in the conception of the first version, which was published in 1728. Pope recognized the fact in a letter to Swift telling him that but for his help it would never have seen the light of the day.

Swift's A Description of a City Shower was something new in coarse realism. Contributed to Steele's The Tatler, it was much appreciated:

"Now in contiguous Drops the Flood comes down,
Threat'ning with Deluge this Devoted Town.
To Shops in Crouds the dagled Females fly,
Pretend to cheapen Goods, but nothing buy.
The Templar spruce, while ev'ry Spout's a-broach,
Stays till'tis fair, yet seems to call a Coach."

The tuck'd-up Sempstress walks with hasty Strides,
While Streams run down her oil'd Umbrella's Sides.
Here various Kings by various Fortunes led,
Commence Acquaintance underneath a Shed." 38

Swift lampooned the Diehard Tory - 'Dismal' (Earl of Nottingham earned his nickname 'Dismal') in An Excellent New Song, Being the Intended Speech of a Famous Orator against Peace. He became a rewarding target:

"An Orator dismal of Nottinghamshire,
Who has forty Years let out his Conscience to hire,
Out of Zeal for his Country, and want of a Place,
Is come up, 'vi etarmis,' to break the Queen's Peace."

There follows his speech:

"Whereas, Notwithstanding, I am in great Pain,
To hear we are making a Peace without Spain."

The hypocrisy of the speech leads to a ludicrous conclusion:

"I'll speech against Peace while Dismal's my Name
And be a true Whig, while I am Not in game." 41

40 Ibid., p. 94, ll. 11-12.
41 Ibid., p. 95, ll. 53-54.
The Progress of Marriage (1722) is written on an elderly dean, one Pratt, a contemporary of Swift at Trinity, marrying a haughty young lady not half his age. It might have been Swift's own case with Vanessa:

"Aetatis suae fifty two
A rich Divine began to woo
A handsome young imperious Girl
Nearly related to an Earl." 42

The wedding has been ludicrously described:

"The Wedding-day, you take me right,
I promise nothing for the Night:
The Bridegroom dressst, to make a Figure,
Assumes an artificiall Vigor;" 43

The mistress spends her nights in balls and masquerades while he comes home from Church:

"And meets her hasting to the Ball,
Her Chairmen push him from the Wall:
He enters in, and walks up Stairs,
And calls the Family to Prayrs,
Then goes alone to take his Rest
In bed, where he can spare her best." 44

The elderly dean dies, being cuckolded, and the daughter of an earl, now a wealthy widow, consoles herself with young lovers:

"The Widow goes through all her Forms;
New Lovers now will come in Swarms." 45

What was individual to Swift was that there was nothing he would not cover in such a poem particularly in regard to theme and style. This is what makes him such a wonderful, so universal, a writer of poetry. A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed, The Lady's Dressing Room, and Strephon and Chloe are poems of imagination. He has seen none of this, he has just induced himself to imagine it. The visionary eschatology of The Day of Judgment is as terrifying as Gloucester's "As flies to Wanton boys are we toth'gods/ They kill us for their-sport". 46

Swift's poetry has a dry, ironic force of its own, a quality more admired today than it was in earlier periods. A Description of the Morning and A Description of a City Shower achieve poetic force by calm precision of the detail -- an etching rather than a painting with a Shakespearean tag:

"The Turnkey now his Flock returning sees,  
Duly let out a Nights to Steal for Fees.  
The watchful Bailiff's take their silent Stands,  
And School-Boys lag with Satchets in their Hands."  

Or this from *A Description of a City Shower* with a triplet:

"Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts,  
and Blood,  
Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd  
in Mud,  
Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down  
the Flood."  

*A Description of the Morning* is a unique contribution  
to English poetry. In it he has shown that he can mix matters  
of moral significance with merely routine observations without distinguishing between them. All items are run serially and impartially before the moving camera - eye. Betty's secret sharing of her master's bed, and the Lord who cannot pay his bills, and the use of prisoners to steal on behalf of the law - all are interspersed without comment with the normal, if not efficient, activities of the sweepers, cleaners, small coal-man, bailiffs, and schoolboys. All are

47 *A Description of the Morning*, p. 86, Ll. 15-18.  
seen with an equal eye; none is judged. Morally significant or not, what they all have in common is their utterly, routine nature. This is how it is going on, day after day, in a typical and unique manner. They also have in common with one another the fact that no one is carrying on quite as it appears he should.

Again, Swift can be humorous and intimate, as in his poems on Stella's birth-day. But he is most impressive in his strong, ironic octosyllabic couplets, notably in The Beasts Confession to a Priest and Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift.

James Sutherland with many other critics is convinced that "Swift was not wholly at one with his age" but seems to impute eccentricity to Swift for this. We cannot impute eccentricity to Swift as Mr. Sutherland has done. For the fact is, and we must realise the fact if we want to understand Swift's position as a poet, that he was not at one with his age only because he transcended it. Swift's uniqueness in his century lay, first, in his ability to appeal to several social levels in one and the same poem. For this reason F. W. Bateson, "sets him by Chaucer and Shakespeare"

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Swift consciously disowned the aesthetics and conventions to which Pope and Gay, Fielding and Goldsmith, subscribed. His verse is an obvious case in point. Secondly, the originality of Swift as a poet consists in his having the old and the new in such just proportion that there is no conflict. It is due to this second reason more than for any other considerations that he could be a poet for the next generations without losing his inherent Augustan characteristics. A true survey of his poetry inevitably leads to this conclusion.

Swift earned the fame of a poet right from his own age. If he had not been a popular poet in his own era, Goldsmith would not have selected three of his long poems (viz. On Poetry; A Rhapsody, Baucis and Philemon, and Cadenus and Vanessa) for inclusion in an anthology of forty-odd Beauties of English Poetry (2 vols. 1767); and he also would not have named one of them (viz. On Poetry; A Rhapsody) among the 'best versified poems in our language'. Gay borrowed the theme of Swift's poem - A Description of a City Shower for his long neglected work - Trivia, or The Art of Walking the Streets of London, and owed much to his plain utterances.

The poetry of Swift is almost entirely confined

to those speeds which may be called the 'humorous' and 'familiar'. In these he had attained a degree of perfection, of which English rhyme, before the appearance of his productions had not been thought susceptible. It is poetry in which the subject-matter is peculiarly important, and to which a lucid, pointed-style is especially appropriate. And there are not many who have written in English who are envied so much as he is today. The quality in him which is most distinctive and remarkable is that conciseness which gave such concentrated force and perfect clarity to his style. He seems to be stripping his words of every shred of sentiment. By virtue of that 'Simplicity without which no human performance can arrive to any great perfection', Swift may not only be greatly useful to his own age but by dint of it he may continue to be immensely useful at other times and in other places, whenever men may still be asked to probe into the causes and cure of those same diseases which are common to the whole race of mankind.

It is said that Byron, whenever he felt his own springs running dry, would come to the bubbling wells of felicitous syllable-jiggling provided by Swift. The excellent


riddles in verse form like 'Verses made for Women who cry
Apples, & C', and the cheerful pursuits of ingenious rhymes
attracted Byron's attention. "Swift beats us all hollow when
it comes to rhymes" Byron, really, carried the game to
its highest perfection in Don Juan:

"I say no more than that hath been said in Danté's
Verse, and by Solomon and by Cervantes;

By Swift, by Machiavel, by Rochefoucault,
By Fénelon, by Luther, and by Plato;
By Tilletson, and Weley, and Rousseau;
Who knew this life was not worth a potato. 55

But the master was not far behind his pupil:

"But, as for me, who ne'er could clamber high,
To understand Malebranche or Cambray;
Who send my mind (as I believe) less
Than others do, on errands sleeveless" 55a

It is not right to think that deep feelings are
not aroused by poetry which limits itself to what is gene-
really understood or rationally perceived. Poetry that takes

54 Cf. Nigel Dennis: Jonathan Swift (a short character).
55a The Dean's Reason For not building at Drapier's Hill.
p. 464, Ll. 54-54.
its vision from the inward eye does not re-create experience in the light of imagination. It records and broods over whatever is already accepted, leaving the facts in their original state, with all their fundamental appeal to the deepest and often the least sophisticated human instincts. On the other hand, the way in which morality and the nature of things impress upon the mind is the subject of much poetry which does not use the language of passion or of the imagination in Coleridge's sense. The eighteenth-century poetry is rich in moral wisdom and the emotion is expressed in memorable verse. Swift's poetry is one of the best examples of this.

Now we can turn to other sides of his poetry. We have already noted that Swift denied that poetry has a language or a phraseology peculiar to itself. His language both in prose and in poetry was very much like Wordsworth's "a selection of language really used by men". Here, we may say, Swift transcended his age.

Again, when Wordsworth invites us to "come forth into the light of things" 57, he is not speaking vaguely, but with


an excellent sense of things as objects of palpable reality. Things are still the source for Wordsworth when he begins the poem *The Tintern Abbey* or in such lines as —

"The cattle are grazing, Their heads never raising, There are forty feeding like one." 58

but they are not the end. He does not move into myth or image to express the meaning. He seldom, even, has recourse to metaphor. Like his predecessor, he respects the defining power of the word and keeps to that. Direct description and direct statement are the staple elements of the Wordsworthian style at its greatest, and these are, to some extent, an inheritance from Swiftian legacy to truth and language. Swift's poetry deviates only when it lacks any sense of vision or wonder of a Romanticist.

The poem *The Legion Club* gains much of its energy from Swift's own fearful sense of the impending disorder, not only in his personal life but also in society as a whole, lying just below the surface of the world's conventional

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patterns of behaviour. "There is the black wit of the language", asserts David Word, "which in its vivid pictorial quality, reminds one forcibly of Hogarth, and anticipates Shelly's Mask of Anarchy and Peter Bell the Third in its emphatic terseness". We are at once reminded of the lines:

"I met Murder on the way -
Had a mask like Castle-reagh -
Very smooth he looked; yet grim;
Seven blood hounds followed him" 60

of Shelley's The Mask of Anarchy in such a passage of Swift as:

"Who is that Hell-featur'd - Brawler,
Is it Satan? No, its Waller,
In what Figure can a Barddress Jack, the Grandson of Sir Hardress?
Honest keeper, drive him further,
In his looks are Hell and Murther;
See the scowling visage drop
Just as when he murther'd Thorp" 61

61 A Character, Panegyric, and Desenpmy of the Legion Club, p.605, Ll. 137-44.
while the style of Swift's line

"Still to lash, and lashing Smile" 61a

prepares us for the Romantic poet's hilarious line:

"And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest" 61b

With Jonathan Swift Modern English had developed and his influence on it was considerable. In his transition from his early decorative verse to the brilliant and audacious bareness of his later poems in the twentieth century, W.B. Yeats turned once again to study Swift as a guide to 'proper words in proper places'. 62 It is worthwhile to take into account what Denis Donoghue writes on this score:

"In 1934 Yeats told Oliver Edwards that in poetry he took his later manners from Swift: and, for proof and illustration, he read the third stanza of the Ode to the Honourable Sir William Temple:

61a Epistle to a Lady, p.365, L.141.
"But what does our proud Ignorance Learning call,  
We oddly Plato's Paradox make good,  
Our Knowledge is but mere Remembrance all,  
Remembrance is our Treasure and our Food;  
Nature's fair Table-book our tender Souls  
We scrawl all o'er with old and empty Rules,  
Stale Memorandums of the Schools;  
For Learning's mighty Treasures look  
In that deep Grave a Book,  
Think she there does all her Treasures hide,  
And that her troubled Ghost still haunts there since she dy'd;  
Confine her Walks to Colleges and Schools,  
Her Priests, her Train and Followers show  
As if they all were Spectres too;  
They purchase Knowledge at the Expense  
Of common Breeding, common Sense,  
And at once grow Scholars and Fools;  
Affect ill-manner'd Pedantry,  
Rudeness, Ill-nature, Incivility,  
And sick with Dregs of Knowledge grown,  
Which greedily they swallow down,  
Still cast it up and nauseate Company" (p.19, ll.28-49)

This comes from one of the earliest poems. We are accustomed to think of it as mere prentice work. But if we read the Ode again
with Yeats in mind, we see that Swift is not shamed by that relation. There are many rough patches, but there are other places in which the poem has something of that vigour, that directness, which we admire in Yeats's later work. Yeats did not say what he admired in the Ode. When he quoted the same stanza again, in On the Boiler, he gave it without comment. But we may guess that what he admired was a certain tone; we hear it in the juxtaposition of 'common Breeding, Common Sense'; before that, in the invocation to learning's 'troubled Ghost'; further back Still, in the scrawling of Nature's table-book. If we think of this as a Yeatsian tone, we mark the strength of the tradition Yeats invoked: to a large extent it is Swift's tradition, turned for a new context. The values to which Swift appeals in the Ode are Yeatsian values; Nature, civility, courtesy, a certain independence of spirit. The poem implies that they are still valuable, though they are increasingly under attack....

We think of the Yeats of Blood and the Moon, who charged the image with a direct and passionate self-commitment, and with splendour and miseries which Swift would shrink from as too grandiloquent:

"I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare
This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair
is my ancestral stair;
That Goldsmith and the Dean,
Berkeley and Burke have travelled there.
Swift beating on his breast in
sibylline frenzy blind
Because the heart in his blood-sadden
breast had dragged him
down into mankind" 64

But his inclusion of Swift shows part of Yeats's strangely inward insight into Swift. Swift's influence on Yeats can also be manifested by considering the fact that Yeats included Swift, Stella, and Vanessa in his play - The Words upon the Window-Pane (1930).

A.L. Rowse rightly acknowledges Yeats's debt to Swift and attributes this "partly owing to their common Irish background, Swift's living tradition there and the cult of him in Dublin" 65. But his observation that apart from Yeats, nobody shows any sign of Swift's influence - is to be taken with reservation. For in a number of later writers of prose and poetry the marks of his influence are clearly discernible.

A jeweller's window in *Ulysses* - by James Joyce reminds us of a Swiftian vision of men struggling for precious stones - "Muddy swinesnouts, hands root and root, grip and wrest them" - and the yahoo reference is sustained in the image of the old jeweller, like grandfather ape gloating on a stolen hoard."66 Again, Stephen's phrase, 'a conscious rational animal', reminds us of Swift's dismissal of man's claim to be called 'animal rationale'.67 He is, in fact placing himself, as he placed Swift earlier, among the rational animal, the Houyhn-hnms, living in a world of Yahoos, 'the hundred headed robble'. Sommerset Maugham's observation that the finest compliment he ever received was a letter saying: 'I read your novel without having to look up a single word in the dictionary' might have been inspired by Swift's practice in reading his works to the servants and the vulgar in preference to the learned.68

Wilfred Owen, after passing through a period of hesitancy, had emerged finally into a poetry of direct statement with its vigour, freshness and tenacity - the qualities

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that are sine qua non of Swift's poetry. And the realism of Swift's poetry can be traced in the poems of Rudyard Kipling.

Swift's use

In the field of versification, not of octosyllabics in couples call up at once into mind another modern poet, namely Robert Frost of New England. With admirable versatility he modulates the metre - the example of which is to be found in abundance in his A Lone Striker:

"If - if he stood! Enough of ifs!
He knew a path that wanted walking;
He knew a spring that wanted drinking;
A thought that wanted further thinking;
A love that wanted re-renewing." 69

Or we may consider the concise neatness of verse in A Blue Ribbon at Amesbury:

"The lowly pen is yet a hold
Against the dark and wind and cold
To give a prospect to a plan
And warrant prudence in a man" 70

Frost's couplets are revolutionary and if they have any affinity with earlier couplet-styles, it is with the verse of

social talk in Swift. In Swift's *A Description of a City*
Shower the Frostian turns are unmistakable:

"Brisk Susan whips her Linen from the Rope,
While the first drizzling Show'r is born aslope,
Such is that Sprinkling which some careless Queen
First on you from her Mop, but not so clean.
You fly, invoke the Gods; then turning, stop
To rail; she singing, still wheels on her Mop" 71

The last couplet of the sonnet *Design*:

"What but design of darkness to appeal?
If design govern in a thing so small" 72

suggests the dreadful jester of Swift's *The Day of Judgement*:

"I to such Blockheads set my wit!
I damn such Fools' - Go, go, you're bit" 73

Moreover, like Swift, Frost shares with his readers his fun
and jokes in the form of verse-letters, fables, epigrams and
inscriptions.

The predecessor to whom W.H. Auden seems most indebted
in the handling of the couplet is Swift again --, as model of

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dignity and restraint. There is not to be found crude humour or playing with the form in the manner of Butler. Martin Price has recently elucidated the pattern in Swift's poetry -

"a concern which men have shown in all times - how to wed the timeless and the temporal" 74

He has shown Swift's concern with time running through his works in his constant appeals to pasterity as the eventual restoration of reason in his praise of Stella's endurance of spirit while time ravages her face:

"So little is thy Form declin'd
Made up &largely in thy Mind" 75

The same thought persists in the lines:

"No Length of Time can make you quit
Honour and Virtue, Sense and Wit,
Thus you may still be young to me,
While I can better hear than see" 76

This concern with time and the eagerness to wed the timeless and the temporal are to be found in Auden's lines:

76 Stella's Birth-day (1727), p.292, Ll. 49-52.
"We do not
Know the connection between
The Clock we are bound to obey
And the miracle we must not despair of."  

The march of Swift's influence on English poetry has not stopped. With the Romantic range removed, words concretely used, metaphors that are coherent and not vague or luxurious, have, as it were, surged forward, passed through the undisciplined lines and joined hands with present-day poetry. Marvell, Dryden, Swift, and Pope have become accessible to us in a way that perhaps they were not to Victorian readers. The poetry in the age of Swift rarely got off the ground. It is so in our times also. If truth will serve as a Muse, if humanity, humour, originality and perspicuity are still honoured Swift's poetry has undoubtedly a future. The wholeness, the many sidedness of the man revealed in Swift's poetry has not yet been fully explored and appreciated.

Goldsmith had placed Swift in the same rank as Milton, Dryden, and Pope. Maurice Johnson has given him the appellation of a poet for his wit. To this we add the truthfulness

of a poet which gave him clarity in vision and expression. In fact, there is much in his poetry which should appeal to this age. Its realism and ruthlessness, its glaring exposure of human condition, its stripping away of all pretences, its very nudity, its terse force, concentration and clarity can serve as beacon for modern poetry. And a study of Jonathan Swift's poetry in its true perspective will reveal how, in spite of its 'occasional' character—this is poetry of permanent value and importance.