

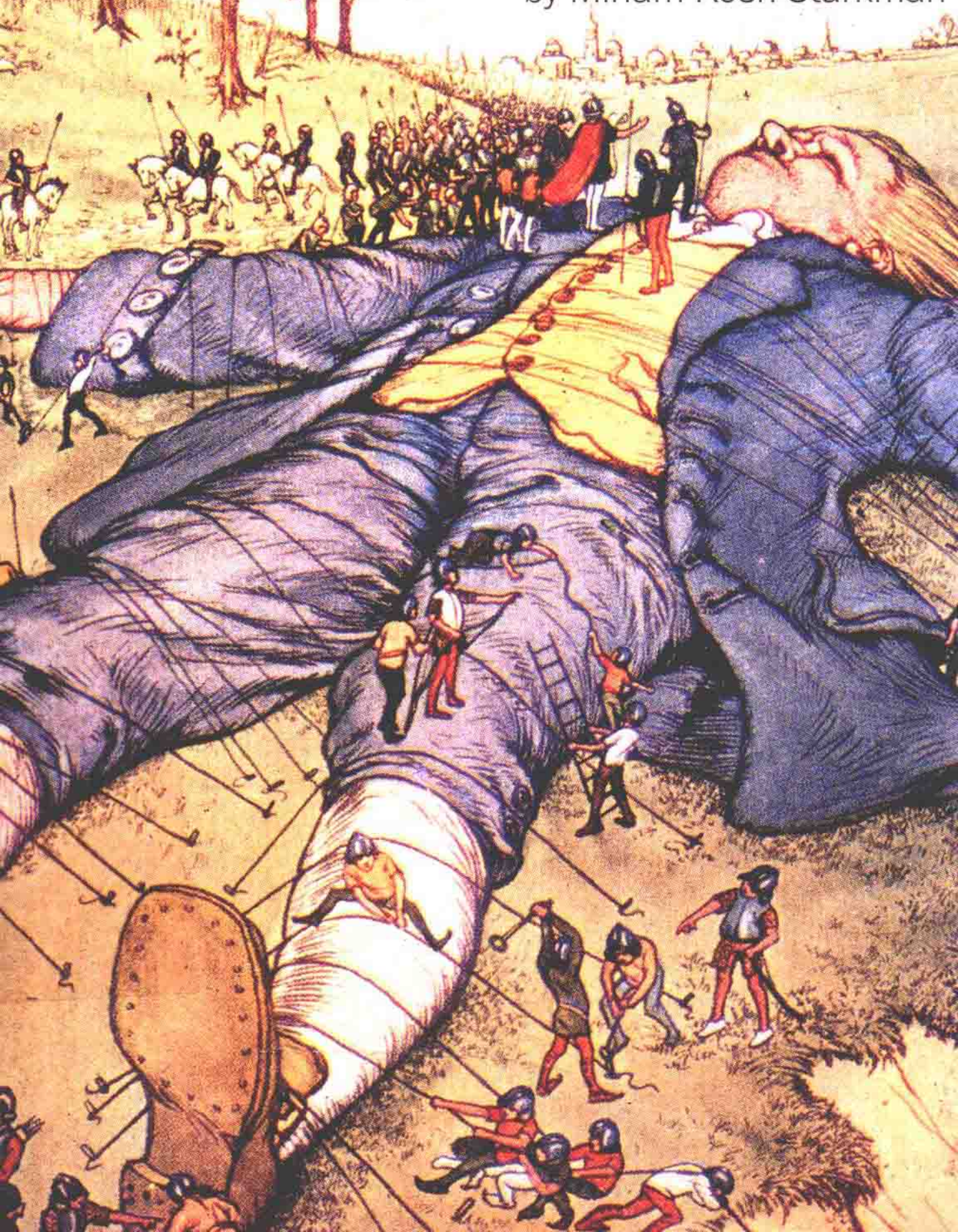
B A N T A M C L A S S I C

# Gulliver's Travels

and Other Writings

Jonathan Swift

Edited and with an Introduction  
by Miriam Kosh Starkman





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# INTRODUCTION

## I

Of satire in general and of Jonathan Swift in particular, this may safely be prognosticated—that they will endure. Satire seems to require categorically only two conditions: a subject and a satirist. Given our post-lapsarian state, frailty and fallibility are sufficient subjects, and the details abound. But of the shaping hand of the satirist, qualifications are to be made. For satire is a strict art,<sup>2</sup> despite all the difficulties we may encounter in defining that art neatly. We are all often indignant, and sometimes witty about our indignations, but we do not thereby turn satirists. For it is not only the anger and the involvement, the idealism and the wit, but the manipulations of them, how they are turned to formful, organic use that constitute the satiric art.

Among the genres of literature, satire exerts a perennial fascination, the fascination of the forbidden. Often hostile, shocking, or destructive, satire tends to approach the thin end of cynicism and misanthropy, to frighten or disgust. But the positive purpose that impels the satirist neutralizes, justifies, and heals by his intention to correct and reform, by his essential moralism. Thus the nature of satire is ambivalent, complex, and elusive.

Rhetorically, satire challenges from the beginning, for, strictly speaking, it cannot be defined; it is not accurately a genre, though we often call it so; yet it seems to usurp other genres and function as though it were one. A satirical novel, a satirical sonnet, for example, become primarily satire, and the novel or sonnet characteristics more often than not become subsidiary to the satiric intention. Yet if satire is only a mode, a tone, a manner of speaking, does it thereby function as a kind

of pervasive metaphor, so crucial that it determines the characteristics of the genre within which it is operating? For satire does, within almost any genre, in all kinds of lyric poetry from epic to song, in tragedy as well as comedy, in prose as well as in poetry. But satire flourishes just as comfortably in the non-formal areas of composition in prose and poetry—in sermon, tract, broadside, in the most occasional rhymed squib.

Historically, then, any rhetorical system, whether clearly enunciated or tacit, seems to have allowed satire ample growth. Nor has satire any clearly differentiating logical imperatives of its own; any subversion of any logic, any incursion on the rule of common sense will support it. Nevertheless, however difficult the definition of satire may be in the formal terms of rhetoric or logic, the history of satire is proof of its viability, from Aristophanes to Thurber. Heroic poetry may die, indeed it may already have done so, but satire remains, a friend to man.

And the more deeply it strikes at the core of our human condition, the more effective it is. Satire is bred of dissatisfaction with vice and folly; the positive purpose, however deeply subsumed, that impels the satirist's aggressions is the amelioration of the human creature and his lot on earth. Between the status quo and ideal perfection lies the discrepancy which the satirist resolves by means of wit; and wit is the condition of satire, the primary tool of the satirist. Wit, by its nature, allows for, indeed demands, a maximum of cerebration. But the emotional tone of satire is crucial, too: a maximum involvement, though that involvement may encompass the whole spectrum of emotion from the comic to the tragic, be as controlled, contemplative, and urbane as Horace's, or as wild, open, and savage as Juvenal's, and, on occasion, Swift's.

Perhaps the most crucial of the ways in which the satirist manipulates his art is in the assumption by the writer of a role within his work, a role that has been called the persona or the mask. That role is a satirist's role, but it is not identical with the satirist who is the author of the work. Aside from biographical considerations, this differentiation between satirist and his persona or personae is important in our understanding of any par-



ticular satire in question, for the satirist-speaker, the persona, is a fictional device which helps the work to manifest itself. Now, the persona in satire is frequently angry, carping, difficult, capacious, even savage. At other times he may be comic and ingenuous to the point of simple-mindedness. But one cannot, or should not, deduce the personality of the author from his personae, any more than one should interpret the personae of a satire by the biography of its author. The author need only be capable of creating his persona. Each is both more and less than the other.

In Swift studies, the confusion of author and persona has been rampant. Swift's life has been read as identical with his works, his biography interpreted in terms of his works, and his works, in circular fashion, in terms of this often hypothesized biography. This kind of biographical fallacy is not uncommon, but the satirist is particularly susceptible to it because his fictional personae, when used most artistically, are most persuasive and thus give the illusion of historical rather than fictional truth. Certainly it is easier not to misread Achilles as Homer than it is not to misread Gulliver as Swift. Nevertheless, the obligation remains not to do either.

Nevertheless, too, Homer must have had a considerable predisposition to the heroic ideal to have conceived his Achilles. Just so, the satirist must, by nature and training, be predisposed to the satiric mode rather than to another. To have emerged as a satirist in the first place, Swift, the man, required a sufficiently strong and balanced combination of anger and love, indignation and concern. His anger is everywhere apparent, and his life provided him with more than ample justification for anger. His concern lay in his earnest, and as it happens his Christian, belief that mankind is not only susceptible of salvation but worthy of being saved. Swift spoke very meaningfully when he claimed to "hate and detest that animal called man," but to "heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth"; for his professed hatred of the animal called man spells his dissatisfaction with mankind, and his love for the individual, his hope for mankind. The tension between the two is controlled by his wit, his ability to keep both hatred and love, dismay and hope, in



dynamic suspension—a sane and productive resolution, both biographically and artistically.

The word “sane” is a controversial word in respect to Swift, for one of the pervasive myths beclouding both Swift’s life and works is the myth of the mad, angry Dean. That myth, essentially a Romantic fabrication, is sufficiently exploded not to warrant serious attention as a biographical fact. The problem remains that modern psychological and psychoanalytical interpretations have ended up not very far from the same conclusion: “It is submitted on the basis of such a study of *Gulliver’s Travels* that Swift was a neurotic who exhibited psychosexual infantilism, with a particular showing of coprophilia, associated with misogyny, misanthropy, mysophilia and mysophobia.” [Phyllis Greenacre.] Inasmuch as our concern at the moment is not with Swift’s biography but with his art, it may be pertinent to suggest that if Swift was neurotic—and he may very well have been so—a point-by-point relationship does not necessarily exist between life and work. Indeed, if our generic approach to Swift be just, that point-by-point relationship could not exist. Within a theory of art as neurosis, satire as a type lends more support to the analyst than does the verse epistle, let us say, or the didactic couplet. Even so, it would seem more fruitful, in general, to psychoanalyze Swift’s personae rather than Jonathan Swift.

A recent approach to Swift makes such an effort to use the insights and methods of psychoanalysis on Swift’s works rather than on his life. Concentrating on Swift’s “excremental vision,” as it has been called, which has affronted and puzzled readers from Swift’s day to our own, the theory suggests that Swift’s preoccupation with anality is not so much an individual neurosis as an intuitive understanding between anality and culture, an understanding of the theory of sublimation, an attack on social neurosis. That is, Swift is describing the cultural level man has reached rather than his own neurotic development. “The thesis . . . is that if we are willing to listen to Swift we will find startling anticipations of Freudian theorems about anality, about sublimation, and about the universal neurosis of mankind. . . .

Swiftian psychoanalysis differs from the Freudian in that the vehicle for the exploration of the unconscious is not psychoanalysis but wit." [Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death*.]

Whatever the psychoanalytic implications may be, the fact is that Swift's satires fit neatly into the history of Western satire, show clear lines of relationship to Aristophanes and Juvenal, and more immediately to the satires of the sixteenth century, to the Restoration, and to the satires of Swift's own contemporaries. When Swift chose to be buried under the legend, "He has gone where savage indignation can lacerate his heart no more," so far as his works are concerned he effectively described the two components of his vision: his indignation and his heart. Any one of his contemporaries would have recognized the "savage" as traditional and Juvenalian.

## II

Biographically, Swift poses many problems to his students. Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin on November 30, 1667, the son of Abigail Errick Swift, and of Jonathan Swift the elder, who died some eight months before his son's birth, leaving his widow and two children to the support of his elder brother Godwin. In his first year the infant Jonathan was abducted to England by his nurse and was not returned for about three years. Soon after his return to Ireland, he went into the household of his uncle Godwin, where he remained until he was sent to the Kilkenny School at the age of six. He remained at Kilkenny until he was fourteen. In 1682 he proceeded to Trinity College, Dublin, where he distinguished himself in no way except by receiving his degree *speciali gratia* in 1685. He remained at Trinity studying for his M. A. until 1689, when, in the face of a threatened invasion of Ireland by the king's forces, the college was permitted to withdraw. Swift left Dublin for England, visited his mother in Leicestershire, and that same year began his career as secretary to Sir William Temple, at Moor Park.

The problems in interpreting these facts begin immediately with the question of his paternity, with either Sir William Temple or his father John Temple being chief contenders for the honor of having been Swift's illegitimate father. There is in fact little evidence to support either claim, or to question his legitimacy in the first place, except that either supposed father serves to provide an answer, however tenuous, to solve the problem of Swift's anomalous relationship with Esther Johnson, his Stella; for if Stella was illegitimately a Temple, too—also a highly suppositious assumption—then one or another degree of consanguinity prevented the marriage of Swift and Stella. What seems more pertinent to our understanding of Swift's complex personality is the fact that Swift was fatherless from the beginning of his life, and motherless for some of the most crucial years of his life. It would have been odd indeed had not these deprivations markedly influenced his growing personality. Swift's ingratitude, even hostility, toward his uncle teases one's understanding. Swift's special degree, too, is anomalous, though it may be interpreted as an administrative rather than a disciplinary action. The fact is that no amount of sensationalism can possibly make Swift any more interesting than he already is by reason of his works, nor can any amount of biographical conventionality detract from the complex fascination of the mind and art of Jonathan Swift.

The next decade in Swift's life, from 1689 to 1699, centers around his service to Sir William Temple and his life in the household at Moor Park. It was during this period that Swift expected to establish a career through political preferment, but when Sir William died in 1699, Swift was left disappointed in his hopes and faced with the necessity of carving out a career at the relatively advanced age of thirty-two. For when Swift came to Moor Park it was as to a temporary refuge, and, indeed, when he left after about six months, it was with a letter of recommendation to Sir Robert Southwell, the Secretary for Ireland, which, however, had no practical results. Back again at Moor Park, Swift continued as secretary to Sir William until 1694, when, growing impatient with Temple's dilatoriness in helping him secure a prebendary and follow a career in the



Church, Swift returned to Ireland. He was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church in 1695 and through the efforts of his Irish kinsmen was appointed to the obscure parish of Kilroot near Belfast. In 1696 Swift was back with Temple again, but upon Temple's death he was left disappointed of his legitimate hopes and expectations: political place or preferment in the Church.

But the period at Moor Park had been more than a series of frustrations for Swift. It was a period of self-education, the fixing of his talent and his temperament. The physical milieu could scarcely have been more felicitous, nor could the social. In addition to Sir William Temple, an urbane, cultivated, experienced statesman and philosopher, two notable ladies, Lady Temple and Lady Gifford, graced the household. And Swift's Stella, Esther Johnson, lived at Moor Park, eight years old when Swift arrived and eighteen when he left; Swift was to be closely associated with her for the rest of her life. But most important, Moor Park was the milieu in which Swift began to write poetry and in which he conceived and wrote the first of his great satires, *Tale of a Tub* and the *Battle of the Books*. Though almost a quarter of a century elapsed between these works and *Gulliver's Travels*, there is the closest relationship among them. For by the time Swift left Moor Park he had already assumed his characteristic stance; his genius as a satirist was fixed. Much was to be added to his depth and to his range, but he had already found his métier. If Moor Park was a disappointment from a practical point of view, Swift left it already embarked upon a great career—as a satirist.

But that career was not the one Swift sought. Indeed his major satires, by reason of which he enters the realm of belles-lettres, were the incidental by-products of his life as churchman, political journalist, and wit. For the latter half of his life Swift achieved considerable fame as a public, political writer, but always in the service of others. Never deeply committed to the Whig position, he spent twelve years as a Whig pamphleteer. With the accession of the Harley ministry, he began a stint as a Tory journalist, and again was in no way commensurately rewarded for his efforts. As a churchman, his rewards were too

little and too late; when he was finally awarded a clerical post somewhat commensurate with his status and services, it was in Ireland, where he felt himself in exile, with the Deanery of St. Patrick's. With the fall of Robert Harley, head of the Tory ministry, he returned to Ireland, whence he emerged only twice again for any length of time. He became the great champion of the Irish people, and even as he raged against England for her exploitation of the Irish, he reviled the Irish for submitting to the exploitation. Never was love expressed with more rage. Thus the outward circumstances of Swift's life were not felicitous, and for all his fame he was repeatedly frustrated in his hopes. In his end Swift was as unfortunate as in his beginning. Afflicted by the degenerative diseases of old age, Swift was declared incompetent in 1742 and died, in darkness and in sorrow, on October 19, 1745.

The history of Swift's life from the time he returned to Ireland from Moor Park until his death is, in a sense, the history of his political journalism. These tracts, written on the behalf first of the Whigs, then of the Tories, and then of the Irish people, constitute a long and honorable chapter in eighteenth-century political thought and repay the closest attention not only from a historical point of view, but from the point of view of Swift's own mind, art, and personality. A detailed study of Swift must necessarily include them. But for a brief survey of Jonathan Swift, satirist, it will perhaps suffice to indicate how, on occasion, Swift's journalism achieved such a high pitch of virtuosity that topical journalism became universal satire. A protest against the wretched state of Ireland, a land of "beggars, thieves, oppressors, fools, and knaves," "nation of slaves, who sell themselves for nothing," *A Modest Proposal for preventing the children of poor people in Ireland from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public*, is only one of many of Swift's Irish protests, and only one of many modest proposals for the amelioration of social ills. But in its brilliant satire—its parody of the new science of political arithmetic, of current differentiations between the deserving and the undeserving poor, in its ironic reversal of the tenet that the wealth of a nation lay in its

population, in its ironic conclusion that cannibalism is the only humane alternative to Ireland's exploitation—*A Modest Proposal* reaches a moral indignation that has seldom been equaled in satire. Thus economics became belles-lettres.

In another sense, the history of Swift's life may be traced through his social relationships, among which his relationships with women are complex and susceptible of the most sensational interpretations. In 1696, in Kilroot, Swift met Jane Waring, Varina as he called her, whom he wooed and by whom he was rejected. For four years thereafter, correspondence ensued between them, until Varina, now the pursuer, was rejected by Swift in a letter which has all the reasonable, cruel arrogance of someone whose feelings have been seriously wounded. To some critics Varina's original rejection has appeared to mark a traumatic turning away from women on Swift's part from which he never recovered. The long relationship with Stella, dating from 1689 until her death in 1728, and the fact that Stella came to live near Swift in Ireland in 1700 and remained thereafter, is indeed anomalous. Even in Swift's lifetime there were rumors that Swift and Mistress Esther Johnson were secretly married, but that it was a marriage in name only. Whether there was a marriage, why there was none if there was none, what the nature of the relationship was, are all unresolved questions. What is clear is the fact that Stella was the recipient, source, or inspiration of many of Swift's poems, letters, and particularly of his *Journal to Stella*, the last a remarkable account, written in a coded private language, of Swift's activities in England from 1710 to 1713 when he was at the height of his political effectiveness. And the relationship with Stella is often obscured by the facts of Swift's relationship with Vanessa, Esther Vanhomrigh, whom Swift met in 1707 and with whom he was closely involved until her death in 1723. There is reason to suppose that Swift, twice Vanessa's age, was somewhat uncomfortably caught in conflicting loyalties between Vanessa and Stella.

Among the men who figure in Swift's life are numbered some of the greatest names of his day: Congreve, Addison,



Steele, Bolingbroke, Oxford, Pope, Gay, Prior, Arbuthnot. These relationships are significant not only in that they depict a highly social and urbane Swift, but in that they also indicate another large area of Swift's writings (aside from his journalistic pamphlets), the so-called *jeux d'esprits*, composed for the private delectation of his friends. Among these witty, occasional writings may be numbered Swift's poems. When John Dryden prognosticated that Cousin Swift would never be a poet, in a sense he spoke truly. For Swift lacks the authentic voice of the poet, the sensibility and the vision—except on some few occasions when he surpasses himself as in "Cadenus and Vanessa." For though Swift is more personality than poet, he is a remarkably skillful versifier. His verse is accomplished *vers de société*—parodic, moralistic, complimentary, always anti-romantic and sometimes outrageous.

The range of Swift's prose *jeux* is greater. Some are serious moralistic and didactic pieces, like the *Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, or the literary *Tatler* papers, or the *Thoughts on Various Subjects*. But the great majority are satirical pieces in which Swift seems to be whetting his pen, carefully practicing his rhetorical art and working out his medium, prose satire. They range from the early *Meditation on a Broomstick*, a parody on Robert Boyle's serious meditations which completely fooled Lady Berkeley for whom the joke was perpetrated, to the heady spoofing of astrology of the *Bickerstaff Papers*, to the animus of *Mr. Collins's Discourse of Freethinking; put into plain English by way of Abstract, for the Use of the Poor*, to the brilliant effrontery of the *Argument against Abolishing Christianity*. Even the least promising of them, like the lengthy *Polite Conversation*, shows in its preface a technique and intention that are seriously mindful of the artistic exigencies of satire. There is indeed some cause for question whether Swift as a wit, the writer of prose and verse *jeux*, was merely practicing his art with his left hand in preparation for his great work, or whether on two occasions, in his *Tale of a Tub* volume and in *Gulliver's Travels*, the *jeux* reached such a height of excel-

lence that they stole, through the back door, into the realm of English belles-lettres.

### III

The *Tale of a Tub* volume, which contained also the *Battle of the Books* and the *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, and was published in 1704, has something of the quality of an Athena sprung full blown. It is astonishing that so young a man—Swift was in his twenties when he wrote it—should have been capable of such virtuosity of matter and method, of such broad and encompassing knowledge, and of such inventiveness of satiric techniques. Of the three pieces, the greatest is *Tale of a Tub*; it is perhaps also the most difficult of Swift's works, and certainly it makes the most taxing demands upon the reader. Its complexity is immediately heralded in Swift's double theme: a satire on the corruptions in religion *and* learning. Taken together and interwoven in complicated and contrapuntal pattern, each theme manifests and supports the other. Of the two themes, the satire on the abuses in religion is given about one-third of the space in the work. Alternating these sections of the religious allegory, and announced by a series of six prefatory items, is the satire on the abuses in learning, in which category Swift, taking all knowledge to be his province, proceeds to satirize abuses in criticism, science, and philosophy. The whole forms what seems to be a chaotic and formless, sprawling work, the very formlessness of which, however, is an elaborate parody of seventeenth-century writing.

The satire on abuses in religion is carried brilliantly by the allegory of the three brothers, Peter, Martin, and Jack, standing respectively for Catholicism, Established Protestantism, and Dissent, as they rent the cloaks of original Christianity given to them by the father. The brothers' exploits constitute a satiric history of Christianity up to Swift's time; and the satire is inventive and telling, with Peter emerging as knave, Jack as madman, and Martin as a temperate but by no means perfect fool.

For Swift's devotion to his satiric pattern never obliterates his sense of reality; though he sets up satiric norms, he never succumbs to them.

Considerably more complex is Swift's satire on contemporary abuses in learning, a welter of prefatory sections, footnotes, digressions and conclusions, the whole immediately parodic of the chaos Swift finds modern learning to be. Of the ideas controlling *Tale of a Tub*, the basic one revolves around the war between Ancients and Moderns, which turns on the simple question of whether the old learning is superior to the new. Though that war is a perennial one, it is more sharply articulated in some periods than in others; and in the seventeenth century, particularly with the growth of the new science, it was especially virulent. That war was more than a theoretical one, and upon one's position in it lay one's direction in belles-lettres, criticism, science, and philosophy. Each of these subjects constituted a separate battle in the war; the battle of the books in which the whole question of imitation and the rules was involved, the battle over the new experimental science, the battle over the old Aristotelian versus the new mechanistic philosophy were all at stake. In a sense, even the religious allegory in *Tale of a Tub* is related to the war between the Ancients and Moderns, the choice being between Martin and Jack. Except for the *Battle of the Books*, *Tale of a Tub* encompasses the whole of the Ancients-Moderns controversy, and Swift's position is uncompromisingly Ancient. The fact is that Swift was by temperament and belief, here as elsewhere, consistently conservative. And there is perhaps some cause for rejoicing that he was so, for the Ancient position is always more comfortable for the satirist; the new, the amorphous, the incomplete always provide better grist for the satiric mill than the old, the tried, the proven.

A moralist of a conservative, pessimistic, and angry temper, seriously devoted to the Christian ideal, Jonathan Swift looked about him, and everywhere he found vice and folly, madness and depravity. Meanwhile the Moderns were busy promulgating an intoxicating faith in the Idea of Progress, a consuming belief in the utility of knowledge, a confidence in