

Reading Swift and Ireland, 1720–1729

**Constituencies, Contexts and Constructions of Identity in Jonathan
Swift's Occasional Writings of the 1720s**

by

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The 1720s was a decade of crisis in Ireland. Jonathan Swift's occasional writings from these years extend the country's political and economic crises into dramas of personal and national identity. Part One of this thesis investigates the material conditions of the relationship between Swift, his Irish audience, and the underlying problems of identity that such an audience simultaneously poses and occludes. Part Two is an anatomy of the literary modes through which that relationship is figured.

The first chapter offers the 1720 Declaratory Act as an important subtext for Swift's 'inaugural' work of the decade, the 1720 *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*. Challenging retrospective constructions of the author's textual and political authority, the chapter examines how Swift the 'Hibernian patriot' was largely an invention of the crisis surrounding the act. Chapter Two argues that *The Drapier's Letters* reconfigure the language that had been used in the past to depict the Catholic threat to Protestant Ireland, and use it to depict the threat emerging from England.

Part Two moves to the question of identity, which Chapter Three designates a kind of 'style', both a mode of expression and a trend in polite society. The writing of history and the social signification of language are the main concerns of this chapter, which investigates how Irish historiography becomes the focus for a range of concerns in the 1720s. Chapter Four nominates the pastoral genre as an alternative vehicle for the reading and writing of history in Swift's Ireland. It identifies a Virgilian dialectic of expropriation and protection by a patron as an important method of 'reading' oneself into history and identity. Looking at various manifestations of crisis in Ireland in 1729 – famine, fuel shortages and emigration, the final chapter argues that *A Modest Proposal* uses techniques of allegory to produce a crisis of interpretation. By promoting and perpetuating misreading, it mirrors the pervasive climate of error that produced this text.

As a whole the thesis documents three transitions. It traces the emergence of a parodic method of literary and political representation which eventually overwhelms any claims Swift's writing might once have made to positive

advocacy. Once considered the dominant and definitive voice of 1720s Ireland, Swift is re-appraised as one writer among many, and his writing as a product of his society rather than an authoritative comment on it. Finally, the Presbyterians of Ireland are shown to emerge by the end of the decade as the primary focus for the anxieties and aggressions that animate Swift's occasional writings.

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List of Abbreviations

Add. MS	Additional Manuscript
BL	British Library
<i>Correspondence</i> , ed. Williams	<i>The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift</i> , ed. by Harold Williams, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–1965)
<i>Correspondence</i> , ed. Woolley	<i>The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.</i> , ed. by David Woolley, 4 vols (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999–) [vol. IV is yet to appear]
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
Ehrenpreis	Irvin Ehrenpreis, <i>Swift: The Man, his Works, and the Age</i> , 3 vols (London: Methuen, 1962–1983)
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
Ferguson	Oliver Ferguson, <i>Jonathan Swift and Ireland</i> (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962)
NLI	National Library of Ireland
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>Poems</i>	<i>Jonathan Swift: the Complete Poems</i> , ed. by Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983; repr. 1989)
<i>Prose</i>	<i>The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift</i> , ed. by Herbert Davis and others, 14 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939–1968)
SP	State Papers
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
TCD	Trinity College Dublin

Note

Where dates are given in this thesis, they have been rationalized so that the year begins on 1 January and not 26 March. Formulations such as '17 March 1725–6' or '17 March 1725 [1726]' have thus been avoided in favour of '17 March 1726'.

Quotations from Swift's correspondence up to 15 September 1734 are taken from David Woolley's edition. As the last volume of this edition has yet to appear, quotations after this date are taken from Harold Williams's edition.

Where an anonymous publication has been attributed to a particular author by the *English Short Title Catalogue*, the author's name appears in square brackets in the footnote or bibliography entry.

If reference is made to a newspaper and no page numbers are given in the footnote, it may be assumed that the item appears on the verso of a single sheet.

Introduction

Reading Swift and Ireland

In a 1727 poem, Jonathan Swift calls Ireland ‘the land I hate’.¹ With only a little work, hatred can be made to define Swift’s relationship with the land of his birth. The fact of his nativity was misery enough – on his birthday every year he would recite a passage from the Book of Job which begins ‘Let the day perish wherein I was born’ – and such grief could only be compounded by its location.² That he had been born in Ireland was sometimes an embarrassment to be denied, sometimes a technicality to be contested and sometimes a stigma to be grudgingly borne. To English friends Swift claimed to be of English birth; when a correspondent referred to Ireland as his native country, he replied that he only ‘happened [...] by a perfect Accident’ to have been born there. This unfortunate circumstance made him a ‘Teague, [or] an Irishman, or what People please’. Nonetheless, he maintained, ‘the best Part of my Life was in England’.³ The word ‘best’ is here used with characteristic ambiguity by a writer whose famously plain style is never as transparent as it seems. Whether he meant to say that he had spent the majority of his years in England, or merely the ones that to him seemed most worthwhile, it is not difficult to construct a reading in which Swift’s hatred for Ireland comes to inflect – if not to infect – nearly everything he wrote.

Such an interpretation would naturally focus on Swift’s writings after he resumed permanent residency in Ireland in 1714. In this year, following the death

¹ ‘Holyhead. September 25 1727’, in *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983; repr. 1989), p. 330, l. 28. Unless otherwise stated all quotations from Swift’s poetry use this edition which is hereafter abbreviated to *Poems* and referred to by line and page numbers in the main text.

² David Nokes, *Jonathan Swift, A Hypocrite Reversed: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 8, p. 408. The relevant verses are Job 3.3–5.

³ J. A. Downie, *Jonathan Swift: Political Writer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 3; Jonathan Swift to Francis Grant, 23 March 1734, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, ed. by David Woolley, 4 vols (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999–) III (2003), 730 (hereafter abbreviated in the footnotes to *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley), printed as *A Letter to a Member of Parliament, concerning the Free British Fisheries* (London: R. Spavan, 1750) and reprinted in *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Herbert Davis and others, 14 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939–1968), XIII, *Directions to Servants and Miscellaneous Pieces, 1733–1742*, ed. by Herbert Davis (1959; repr. 1973), 111–13; 111. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations of Swift’s prose are from this edition, hereafter abbreviated to *Prose*. First references to individual volumes are given in full in the footnotes. Subsequent references are given by volume and page no. in parentheses in the main text.

of Queen Anne and the accession of George I, the Tory ministry that had governed England since 1710 was dismissed in disgrace. By the summer of 1715, its head, Robert Harley, the first Earl of Oxford, languished in the Tower of London awaiting trial for high treason. Meanwhile, Harley's friend and star propagandist was one year into an exile of his own, having taken up the Deanship of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. But a reading of Swift's Irish writings might not start here. Given that Swift published virtually nothing between 1714 and the appearance of *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* in May 1720, the span of such a study might further be restricted to the time between the publication of this inaugural Irish pamphlet and the appearance in the autumn of 1729 of what has been called Swift's 'last word on the state of Ireland', *A Modest Proposal*. Read initially as a satire on mercantilist economics and subsequently as a critique of English colonial policy, this late work began to be re-interpreted by twentieth-century critics as an effusion of Swift's animus against the country that was both his homeland and his place of exile. In the reading of Oliver Ferguson, author of the first full-length study of Swift and Ireland, this text vents its anger at 'the whole People of Ireland'.⁴ There was, needless to say, a heavy irony in this inclusivity as it was to the 'whole people of Ireland' that only five years earlier Swift had addressed the work that established him as a hero in that land.

In *The Drapier's Letters* (1724–5) Swift took on the persona of a Dublin merchant so that a voice from the powerless margins might be heard at the centre: 'We are at a great Distance from the *King's Court*, and have no body there to solicit for us'.⁵ By 1729, however, his determination to redress this anomaly and speak out on behalf of the disenfranchised Irish had vanished. Even the Drapier's achievement became subject to revision. Looking back over his earlier writings Swift wrote that 'the success I had in those of the Drapier was not owing to my abilities, but to a lucky juncture, when the fuel was ready for the first hand that would be at the pains of kindling it'. Writing at what he now called 'this deplorable Juncture', he began to question the worth of writing for the 'public

⁴ Oliver Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), p. 171. Subsequently abbreviated to Ferguson in the footnotes.

⁵ *A Letter to the Shop Keepers, Tradesmen, Farmers, and Common People of Ireland, Prose X, The Drapier's Letters and Other Works, 1724–25*, ed. by Herbert Davis (1941; repr. 1966), 5.

service' of Ireland. 'What will it import', he asked, 'that half a score people in a Coffee-house may happen to read this paper'?⁶ (The question remained rhetorical as this piece, like many others written in 1729, remained unpublished until after Swift's death.) By the last year with which this thesis is concerned, then, something had happened to make Swift question the validity of his writing so far as to deny it any instrumental function. In a writer whose work was almost without exception occasional in the strict sense of being 'stimulated by a specific occasion and planned in some way to change it', this was not a good sign.⁷

If we look ahead to 1731 the practice of writing has further degenerated into an abortive nightly ritual of private gratification and self-loathing. So Swift depicts his routine in a letter to Alexander Pope:

I am in my Chamber at five, there sit alone till eleven, and then to bed. I write Pamphlets and follies meerly for amusement, and when they are finished, or I grow weary in the middle, I cast them into the fire, partly out of dislike, and chiefly because I know they will signify nothing.⁸

With its melodramatic echo of *Macbeth*, this epitaph for a writerly career is at once touching and faintly absurd. 'Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry' said W. H. Auden to W. B. Yeats, adding that 'poetry makes nothing happen'.⁹ Having seen that his own efforts could make nothing happen, could it be that 'mad Ireland' had finally hurt Swift out of writing altogether?

Swift's own poetry lends fuel to such speculation. His reference to Ireland as 'the land I hate', for example, comes in a poem headed 'Holyhead. September 25, 1727'. The piece was written in a journal kept during a period of inactivity while the author, 'fastened both by wind and tide' (l. 7), waited for a ship to take him back to Dublin. To judge by the poem, however, it would seem that in one sense the tide had already turned: Swift's relationship with the land of

⁶ 'An Answer to Several Letters Sent me from Unknown Hands', *Prose XII, Irish Tracts, 1728-33*, ed. by Herbert Davis (1955; repr. 1970), 85; 'Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons', *ibid.*, 80, 81.

⁷ Edward Said, 'Swift's Tory Anarchy', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 3 (1969), 48-66, pp. 50-51; repr. in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber & Faber, 1983; repr. London: Vintage, 1991), p. 56; see also 'Swift as Intellectual', in *ibid.*, p. 78.

⁸ Swift to Alexander Pope, 15 January 1731, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 355.

⁹ W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), p. 197.

his birth had finally crystallized into ‘hate’. Some of Swift’s biographers have given the sojourn on Anglesey the character of a turning-point, and the port itself has acquired the status of a point of no return. David Nokes begins his life of Swift with the author’s arrival at Holyhead on the day before the poem was composed, describing how his subject was ‘marooned there, mid-way between England and Ireland [...], between life and death’ as he waited to leave England ‘for what he knew was the last time’.¹⁰ J. A. Downie comments on the ‘symbolic character’ that Holyhead took on for Swift at this time. The port ‘was the gateway to the life in England [Swift] had coveted so long’.¹¹ Now that the gate had swung shut behind him, Swift was forced to focus his attention, and his hatred, on Ireland. ‘Holyhead’ imagines his reception there with gloomy relish:

In Dublin they’d be glad to see
 A packet though it brings in me.
 They cannot say the winds are cross;
 Your politicians at a loss
 For want of matter swears and frets,
 Are forced to read the old gazettes. (ll. 13–18)

Hungry for gossip, Dublin’s politicians must content themselves with yesterday’s news as they wait impatiently for the mail boat laden with fresh despatches. By exempting himself from their anticipation, the poet conveys his unwillingness to return to Dublin and establishes a sense of himself as the scourge of local grandees. However, these lines also betray their author’s fear of having fallen out of currency, a suspicion that his arrival is an event of as little relevance as the ‘old gazettes’ that are suddenly cast aside as the new ones arrive. The personal grumblings of ‘Holyhead’ remained unpublished until 1882 but a poem circulated as a pamphlet in Dublin in 1730 recasts them in more grandiloquent form. ‘Horace, Book I, Ode XIV Paraphrased and Inscribed to Ireland’, written either in 1724 or 1726, meditates on the civic office of the writer and transmutes the captious self-pity of ‘Holyhead’ into an analysis of the dysfunctional relations between the poet, his public, and the powers that be:

¹⁰ Nokes, *A Hypocrite Reversed*, p. 317, p. 2.

¹¹ Downie, *Jonathan Swift*, p. 292. Such symbolism is not ascribed to the episode in Holyhead by the two other modern biographies of Swift, Irvin Ehrenpreis’s scholarly *Swift: The Man, his Works, and the Age*, 3 vols (London: Methuen, 1962–1983) and Victoria Glendinning’s popular life, *Jonathan Swift* (London: Hutchinson, 1998). Subsequent references to Ehrenpreis’s biography are given in the footnotes by the author’s surname.

As when some writer in a public cause,
 His pen to save a sinking nation draws,
 While all is calm, his arguments prevail,
 The people's voice expands his paper sail;
 Till power, discharging all her stormy bags,
 Flutters the feeble pamphlet into rags.
 The nation scared, the author doomed to death,
 Who fondly put his trust in popular breath.
 (p. 292, ll. 17–24)

Literal and metaphorical images of the destruction of printed works crop up with alarming frequency when Swift discusses his own career. Whether he employ an image of fire, as in his discussion of the *Drapier's Letters*, or, as in the Horatian ode, the fickle winds of public opinion, there is a tendency for the force that propelled an initial success to return transformed into an agent of doom. And whether buffeted by changing winds or held fast by prevailing gales at Holyhead, the figure of the writer remains at the centre, powerless in the grip of much greater forces than himself. Admittedly, images of persecution and ingratitude are not hard to find in the canon of a writer with a seemingly endless capacity for the representation of personal suffering. It is striking, therefore, to offset these elaborately wrought images of impotent victimhood with a stark, literal statement that Swift wrote for no-one but himself. In 1729 he composed (but did not publish) a piece called 'Maxims Controlled in Ireland' which sought to show that the country's condition was so desperate as to invalidate the received wisdoms of political economy. During the early stages of composition Swift jotted down a list of these tenets, but in the middle of this exercise he broke off and penned an extraordinary outburst:

Nevr love our Country
 I write this on purpose when it is too late
 Because there is no arguing with them¹²

In his writings of the 1720s Swift frequently condemns the failure of his Irish readers to show any love for their country or to manifest what he calls a

¹² 'Maxims Examind', *Prose XII*, Appendix B, p. 309.

‘public spirit’. Here, however, this refrain is suddenly abandoned, interrupted by an expression of anguished defiance. Acknowledging the situation to be hopeless, Swift nonetheless states his intention to continue to write. His works become an attempt not to push for collective action but to register individual disenchantment. He writes ‘on purpose’, producing deliberate acts of self-expression, a series of futile and repetitious outpourings that he will not stem or alter in a time when the situation is utterly irremediable, ‘when it is too late’. There is ‘no arguing with them’, he writes. If ‘they’ are readers, then this is one of the most forceful and saddening expressions of Swift’s view of his audience. But it is also the logical culmination of a process whereby the author reduces his Irish public, readers and non-readers, supporters and opponents alike, to an abstraction, an indeterminate but hostile presence that loiters about his writing in the form of a malicious pronoun. ‘They’ are already present in the Horatian ode’s juxtaposition of ‘popular breath’ with the destructive gales of power. ‘Holyhead’s reflection that ‘they’ will be glad to see the mailboat delivered of its cargo but not its passenger similarly entertains a comparison between ineffectual public adoration and persecution by powerful interests, but distinguishes between them. By the time he came to compose ‘Maxims Controlled in Ireland’, however, the distinction had evaporated and the consumers of Swift’s work had been reduced indiscriminately to ‘them’.

But what did ‘they’ have to say about Swift? Such a question demands attention as this thesis maintains that any reading which sees ‘Swift and Ireland’ as the subject of a soliloquy rather than a dialogue necessarily remains incomplete. To say that Swift wrote *A Modest Proposal* because he hated Ireland may be true but it would be equally illuminating to argue that Shakespeare wrote *Henry V* because he liked England. Similarly, it may be useful to frame Swift’s later life within a narrative of missed opportunities in England and a sense of exile in, and hatred for, Ireland. But such an approach is more limited when it comes to the literary works. ‘Ireland’ is simply too big and too heterogeneous a construct to be reduced to a single agent that reacted with Swift’s writing in a precisely calculable way so as to leave an empirically verifiable effect. When his works do indeed show traces of such an effect – as in the reduction, traced over the foregoing pages, of a heterogeneous reading and non-reading public to ‘them’

– this is the result of a deliberate process of abstraction. But this process works two ways. ‘Writing’, as Seamus Deane asserts, ‘is a system that produces audiences as well as works of literature’, but in the case of the time-honoured collocation ‘Swift and Ireland’ it should be stressed that audiences can be also productive – if not of literary works then of problems of representation and identity that those works reflect.¹³ While this thesis insists that Swift’s Irish readers can be said to represent a kind of author function, it should be stressed from the outset that this is not a study in reception history. Rather this is firstly an investigation of the material conditions under which a relationship develops between an author, his Irish audience and the underlying problem of identity that such an audience simultaneously poses and occludes. It is secondly an anatomy of the literary modes through which that relationship is figured. I have begun by showing how Swift constructed that relationship as one of hate. It may be as well to continue by asking how the objects of such hatred responded.

One way to answer that question is to look at how Dublin newspapers reported Swift’s arrival from Holyhead in the autumn of 1727. The *Dublin Intelligence* was rather reserved in its delivery of the news, noting that ‘the Revd. Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. *Patrick’s*, in this City,’ had arrived from Carlingford ‘with several other Gentlemen [...] after about 36 Hours Troublesome Sailing, from Holy-Head’.¹⁴ George Faulkner’s *Dublin Journal* was, however, more effusive. It stated not only that Swift had arrived, but that:

his late inestimable Services for his drooping Country, have not only made him dear to his own Nation, but in no small Degree added to the Caresses he received in more than ordinary Manner from the Generality of the Quality of Great Britain, during his last Residence there, so that we may justly say, that, not Party but real Merit has an influence on the Polite part of Mankind. It would be the highest Ingratitude, in us, should we omit any Opportunity of

¹³ Seamus Deane, ‘General Introduction’, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, general ed. Seamus Deane, 3 vols (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), I, p. xxi.

¹⁴ *Dublin Intelligence*, October 3–7, 1727.

doing Justice to one of Hibernia's Sons so particularly deserving.¹⁵

This write-up elevates Swift to the status of a returning ambassador from the newly-convened court of George II, continuing in a role first adopted when he had sought, and gained, an audience with Sir Robert Walpole a year earlier. Although it states that he succeeded in extracting nothing more than 'caresses' from the 'Quality' he encountered, he is presented as someone who was able to intercede at the highest level on behalf of his 'drooping Country'. As if to confirm that the warmth of this reception was not confined to the city's printers, the Society of Weavers in Dublin issued a broadside edition of a speech of thanksgiving for the safe return of one who had through his 'Wise and useful Writings, [...] secur'd [his] Country's Right, and preserv'd it from being Ruined by designing and avaritious Men'.¹⁶ Nor was this an isolated discrepancy between Swift's experience of an event and the significance attached to it by his fellow Dubliners. On his birthday in 1726, presumably while he was inside pronouncing biblical curses upon his own existence, a more elaborate ritual was taking place on the streets outside:

Several Societies of worthy Gentlemen (true Lovers of their Country) with great Solemnity and Rejoicings [...] made a handsome Procession to St. Patrick's Church, where they heard Prayers and a fine Anthem, after which they walk'd in excellent

¹⁵ *Dublin Journal*, October 3–7, 1727. The disparity between the two accounts does not arise from a lukewarm attitude to Swift on the part of the *Intelligence*, which had in its edition of 29 November–3 December 1726 reported enthusiastically on the celebrations that attended Swift's birthday in Dublin. It was at this time unusual for any of the news sheets to report on the movements of anyone other than royalty or the Lord Lieutenant, so even the fact that Swift's return merited a mention is evidence of his extraordinary public profile. The effusiveness of the *Journal's* praise may be connected with the efforts of its publisher, George Faulkner, who published a collected edition of the Drapier's letters in 1725, to secure for himself the lucrative task of publishing of Swift's collected works. He had managed to do by 10 February 1733 when he announced in the *Journal* 'his intention of publishing by subscription "all the works that are generally allowed to have been published by the said Dr. S in four volumes"' (Ehrenpreis, III, 782). Faulkner's *Journal* had covered Swift's trip to England in some detail. On 30 April it described how he had written a verse on a pane of glass in Chester (a version of which appears in *Poems*, p. 317) and in the issue for 4–8 July it reported Swift's audience at the royal court where he had 'the Honour to kiss their Majesties Hands'. Ehrenpreis (III, 528) concludes from the 'unction and irony' of the latter report that Swift was its 'ultimate source'.

¹⁶ *A Congratulatory SPEECH. Of the Loyal and Charitable Society of Woollen Broad-Cloth Weavers, in Honour to the Reverend Doctor Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's Dublin, upon his safe Arrival in this Kingdom* ([Dublin]: [n. pub.], [1727]), reproduced in Herbert Davis, ed., *The Drapier's Letters to the People of Ireland against receiving Wood's Halfpence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935) Appendix I, pp. 323–4.

Order to Vicar's Hall in St. Patrick's Clos[e], a place appointed to celebrate that truly great PA[T]RIOT'S Birth-day; a splendid entertainment being prepar'd, accompanied with a curious Set of vocal and instrumental Musick; Bells ringing, Bonfires, and other Illuminations in many Parts of the City, concluding the Day to the Satisfaction of all good Men, who wish well to IRELAND, and have just Esteem for him, who serv'd us in the utmost Danger with Zeal and Affection.¹⁷

The events described here and the language used to relate them testify that Swift had become public property. Events in his life were now civic occasions to be observed collectively according to procedures determined on a quasi-official basis; to be talked of in the highflown register traditionally reserved for the highest occasions of state. The Dublin press, like its London counterpart, had evolved set formulae for reporting occasions such as the birthdays of monarchs and the anniversaries of historical events and Swift was now being written about in such language. For example, Richard Dickson's *Dublin Intelligence* described bonfires, bells and other 'unusual Demonstrations of Joy and Gladness' in its account of the 1726 celebrations for Swift's birthday.¹⁸ Indeed, six months after its own account of the birthday celebrations, the *Dublin Journal's* report of the ceremonial surrounding the king's birthday and the anniversary of the Stuart restoration was markedly less detailed, noting merely that the occasions passed off 'with the usual Solemnity'.¹⁹

A gathering in Swift's honour had thus usurped the signifying potential of the carefully orchestrated manoeuvres through which the Hanoverian state consolidated its own authority. The celebrations can therefore be read as a spontaneous and specifically Irish alternative to state-sanctioned expressions of civic pride. The need for such an outlet suggests a parallel between Swift's crisis of faith in his own authorship and his admirers' sense of themselves as a people. Unable to validate his own existence, Swift gained iconic significance among the 'worthy Gentlemen' of Dublin for his ability to define an identity for those 'who wish well to IRELAND'. Like Swift, Georgian Ireland could be seen as unsure of itself, of the legitimacy of its own origins. In a polity that he himself described

¹⁷ *Dublin Journal*, 29 November–3 December 1726.

¹⁸ *Dublin Intelligence*, 29 November–3 December 1726; also quoted in Ferguson, p. 142.

¹⁹ *Dublin Journal*, 27–30 May 1727.

as ‘no Nation’ Swift had become a local hero standing in as a national one.²⁰ The ‘worthy Gentlemen’ parading through St Patrick’s Close stand in uneasy synecdochic relation to the concept ‘Ireland’, much as the publicly vaunted figure of the Drapier represents an incomplete approximation of the author behind the persona. ‘Swift’ and ‘Ireland’ represent two rhetorical constructs which were prone to being appropriated and offered up for public reading. The main title of this thesis indicates its concern with ‘reading’ in this broad sense. Its subtitle suggests a motivation, a method and an end product for this process of public reading. These three modalities – constituencies, contexts and constructions of identity – will be explained in turn.

Constituencies

Whom did Swift write for? It seems that in Ireland his works found their most appreciative audience among what the *Dublin Journal* calls ‘Societies of worthy Gentlemen’. This may suggest that Swift’s typical Irish reader was male, metropolitan and inclined to aggregate with like-minded peers. The fact that these gentlemen organized themselves into ‘Societies’ implies a link with organizations such as the Society of Weavers who had made the speech to welcome Swift on his return from Holyhead. The Society, which retains the distinction of having occasioned an entire tract from Swift in 1729, was formally incorporated as the Guild of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1446.²¹ Along with the other trade and craft guilds in Dublin it formed the city’s Corporation, which played an important part in municipal government and the popular life of the city, and the festivities that took place around St Patrick’s Cathedral in 1726 echoed their established rituals.

The most spectacular of these was the triennial ceremony of ‘riding the franchises’ in which the Corporation re-asserted its control over the municipality

²⁰ Swift to Charles Ford, 4 April 1720, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 327.

²¹ Jacqueline Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists: Dublin Civic Politics and Irish Protestant Patriotism, 1660–1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), Appendix A, p. 390. The tract was ‘A Letter to the Archbishop of Dublin, Concerning the Weavers’.

by patrolling its precincts. By the early eighteenth century, this had evolved into a procession in which thousands took part. Each guild had its own carriage displaying the instruments of the various trades and showing experts from each guild deploying their skills. In 1728, the carriage of the company of stationers was accompanied by a printing press, and they produced copies of a poem on printing as the procession moved through the city.²² With the exception of *Gulliver's Travels*, everything Swift wrote in the 1720s was printed by men of this company (and one woman, Sarah Harding), advertised through their newspapers and sold in their shops. Given their pervasive influence on the city's commercial life in general and its publishing industry in particular, it is not surprising that Swift's admirers organized themselves into groups which paralleled the structure of the guilds. In addition to the 'Societies of worthy Gentlemen' who paraded through Dublin to commemorate his birthday, there was even a Drapier's club which met in Truck Street to sing songs in honour of their patron.²³ But none of these gatherings was innocent of a complex, historically-determined set of divisions that no study of Ireland in the early eighteenth century can ignore. The merchant and artisan classes of Dublin congregated not merely to adulate Swift but to assert a contested religious and political identity. Their adoption of 'The Drapier' as a figurehead for such an exclusivist identity should not be seen as a unilateral appropriation. Swift's writings knowingly deploy the shibboleths of past conflicts.

The third decade of the eighteenth century was a relatively peaceful time in Ireland but these conflicts were reprised in miniature, sometimes almost literally on Swift's doorstep. In 1729, it was reported that a young man had been killed during a 'Quarrel, between the Butchers of St. *Patrick's* and the Weavers of the *Comb*, who have been at odds for some time'.²⁴ Maurice Craig suggests that the conflict between the '[e]xtravagantly Protestant' weavers and the 'mostly

²² Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges 1714–1830* (London: Harrap; Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1946), pp. 228–9; *Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin, in Possession of the Municipal Corporation of that City*, ed. by John T. and R. M. Gilbert, 19 vols (Dublin: J. Dollard, 1889–1944), VII, xiv.

²³ *Dublin Journal*, 8 January 1726. Thomas Sheridan wrote to Swift eight years later to tell him 'there is a Drapier's Club fixt in *Cavan* of about thirty good fighting fellows; from whence I remark you have the heart of *Ireland*' (25 December 1734, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–1965), IV, 282).

²⁴ *Dublin Intelligence*, 5 April 1729.

Catholic' butchers had a confessional rather than a professional basis.²⁵ While it would be foolish to implicate Swift's writing directly in such sectarian brawling it would be equally naïve to exempt it from the attempts of the ruling class of eighteenth-century Ireland to maintain the country's status as a Protestant kingdom of the British Crown, won from its 'native' inhabitants by martial conquest. There is no simple connection between this ongoing project and the fights that broke out occasionally in the Liberties of Dublin. Neither, however, can such quotidian tensions be severed from the historical and economic roots of conflict. Although a particular historical moment is contingent upon the sum of past events rather than rigidly determined by any single one of them, the fact remains that few events in eighteenth-century Ireland can be read outside the context of the interpenetration of cultures that is traditionally said to have commenced with the beginning of the Anglo-Norman presence in Ireland in 1171. The appearance in a Dublin newspaper of a report in English concerning conflict between two rival gangs of tradesmen has ultimately some connection with this event and with subsequent importations such as that of guilds as part of a system of town government and trade regulation. Neither Swift's writing nor its readers can be said to occupy a neutral position in a system of relations between Ireland and Britain and between groups of different origin and alignment in Ireland. This is one reason why the present thesis prefers the term 'constituencies' over 'readerships'.

A second reason is that Swift construed his Irish audience as more than a passive body of readers. I have already quoted Edward Said's definition of Swift as a 'precisely occasional' writer, whose works were largely 'stimulated by a specific occasion and planned in some way to change it'. With the possible exception of legal statutes writing cannot, however, change anything by itself and is reliant on human agents to implement any changes it may propose. By appealing to such agents, Swift's writing can be said to create constituencies. His manner of doing so differs in two ways from that of his contemporaries. Firstly, Swift not only acted as an intercessor for the Irish interest at the English court but appealed directly, and often irritatedly, to the Irish themselves. He did so

²⁵ Maurice Craig, *Dublin 1660–1860: A Social and Architectural History* (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1969), p. 88.

throughout his writings of the 1720s, with the notable exception of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). This thesis does not consider Swift's most famous book in detail because, as Joseph McMinn observes, it was 'written for a specific London audience' and also because it elevates topical satire to the level of an enduring statement.²⁶ Consequently, and unlike other pieces of the 1720s, *Gulliver's Travels* can be read without reference to its historical context and may in fact benefit from being read anachronistically.²⁷ The same is not true of a piece such as 'A Letter on Maculla's Project about Halfpence & a new one Proposed' (1729). Outside the context of the practical problem it addresses, this reply to a pamphlet proposal on the shortage of small change in circulation in Ireland is of little interest. It needs to be read as an instrumental piece, written towards a distinct end. By contrast, *Gulliver's Travels* caused him to remark 'the chief end I propose to my self in all my labors is to vex the world rather than divert it'.²⁸ To divert is not only to entertain but to alter something's course. Resistant to any possibility of change, *Gulliver's Travels* is not an occasional writing in the sense discussed here.

The same might also be argued, however, of Swift's pieces from the end of the decade – especially those written when their author thought it 'too late' to argue with his readers any longer. A case in point here is *A Modest Proposal*. To argue that this pamphlet was written expressly to bring about the course of action it recommends would be to commit a reading error that features in countless apocryphal tales of the *Proposal's* initial reception, whether in the eighteenth-century salon or the modern seminar room. Surely, it will be said, the *Proposal* represents an abdication from the role of spokesman: not a contribution to the interminable search for a quick fix but a wholesale dismissal of it? My final chapter contests this reading and proposes that this text, deeply implicated in the processes it would expose to ridicule, is much more a product of its society than an indictment of it. At any rate, the *Proposal* is recognizable as a production of

²⁶ *Swift's Irish Pamphlets: An Introductory Selection*, ed. by Joseph McMinn, Ulster Editions and Monographs, 2 (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 13.

²⁷ See for example George Orwell, 'Politics vs Literature: An Examination of *Gulliver's Travels*', in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, 4 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970; repr. 1971), IV, *In Front of Your Nose, 1945-50*, 241-260, or Michael Foot's introduction to Peter Dixon and John Chalker's edition of *Gulliver's Travels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967; repr. 1985), pp. 7-29.

²⁸ Swift to Pope, 29 September 1725, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 606.

Dean Swift of St Patrick's in ways that *Gulliver's Travels* is not. Printed, sold and advertised in Dublin, it is in its own words designed 'for this one individual Kingdom of IRELAND, and for no other that ever was' (XII, 116).

The *Proposal* therefore targets a specifically Irish audience and in this as in his other pamphlets, Swift addressed himself not merely to the Kingdom's political and spiritual leaders but to 'the bulk or mass of the people' of Ireland.²⁹ This is the second respect in which Swift's approach departs from his contemporaries – from Bishop Berkeley who addressed his remedy for Ireland's torpor to the country's Catholic clergy, and from innumerable other authors who penned proposals and schemes for improvement that were invariably 'humbly offered' to one or both houses of the Irish Parliament.³⁰ By contrast Swift's appeal to 'the bulk or mass of the people' was broad – in theory at least. In practice it was quite restricted. As McMinn goes on to note, the aspiration of Swift's writings to a national audience is 'largely rhetorical', and the constituency they sought to capture was in fact confined to 'the Church of Ireland "middle rank", those with enough property to come within his stern definition of responsible citizenship'.³¹ Christopher Fauske elaborates on this definition to show how Swift sought to enlist to his cause 'the Irish-born bishops, a majority of the resident landowners, most of the lower clergy, a sizeable cross-section of the electorate and guild members'.³²

That cause, as Fauske defines it, was the protection of the Church of Ireland's status within the constitutional fabric of the Kingdom of Ireland. In his own writing, however, and in the estimation of his constituents, Swift becomes the preserver not merely of the established church but of the entire nation. This introduction has already shown how Swift described himself in the Horatian ode as writing 'in a public cause [...] to save a sinking nation' and how the *Dublin Journal* attested that the rendering of such services 'made him dear to his own

²⁹ 'Doing Good: A Sermon on the Occasion of WOOD's PROJECT. Written in the Year M DCC XXIV', *Prose IX, Irish Tracts, 1720–1723 and Sermons*, ed. by Herbert Davis and Louis Landa (1948; repr. 1968), 234.

³⁰ *A Word to the Wise; or, An Exhortation to the Roman Catholic Clergy of Ireland. By a Member of the Established Church*, in A. Campbell Fraser, ed., *The Works of George Berkeley, D. D.; Formerly Bishop of Cloyne, Including his Posthumous Works*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), IV, *Miscellaneous Works, 1707–50*, 541–58.

³¹ McMinn, *Swift's Irish Pamphlets*, p. 17.

³² Christopher J. Fauske, *Jonathan Swift and the Church of Ireland 1710–1724* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), p. 74.

Nation'. In Swift's case, the gap between writing for the church and for the nation is easily bridged: being 'by law established', the Church of Ireland was an integral component of the legal entity that was the Kingdom of Ireland. To serve one was inevitably to serve the other, provided the church took precedence. For Swift, obligation to Ireland was a practical consequence of commitment to the church. As J. C. Beckett remarks, Swift felt 'no obligation to Ireland which might counter his natural self-interest [...] But he did feel committed to the church, and was ready to defend her interest at any cost to himself'.³³ Outside the purview of an Anglican clergyman, however, this version of the fit between national and ecclesiastical interests was increasingly anachronistic. Another poem from the 'Holyhead Journal' shows Swift's awareness of this ever-widening disjunction and introduces the second of the three key terms to be explained by this introduction.

Contexts

The poem 'Ireland' begins where 'Holyhead' left off, with the speaker imploring some unseen force to remove him 'from this land of slaves, / Where all are fools, and all are knaves'.³⁴ In Swiftian parlance, fools degrade themselves because they do not know any better whereas knaves debase themselves knowingly because they are corrupt. To label everyone in Ireland as both a fool and a knave might be seen as an inconsistent proposition – an example of the so-called 'Irish bull', which is discussed at more length in Chapter Three. In the poem, however, this contradiction is resolved as we are presented with a figure who knavishly prostitutes his country's good for social advancement but remains foolishly unaware that he in turn is being used. 'Ireland' stages an encounter between an Irish MP whom Swift designates a 'Whig' and the Lord Lieutenant in order to present a (notably biased) account of the workings of the Dublin Parliament.

³³ J. C. Beckett, 'Swift: The Priest in Politics' in *Confrontations: Studies in Irish History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 111–122, p. 117–8.

³⁴ 'Ireland', *Poems*, pp. 330–32, ll. 1–2.

Because programmes of legislation were dependent upon an initial vote of assent at the beginning of each session, the Westminster administration could not simply impose bills on the Irish Parliament. Instead its representatives in Dublin had to cultivate the support of Irish members. This task was becoming more complicated by the time George II's reign commenced in 1727, as the 'armies of Whigs and Tories' that had previously crowded the benches of the Irish Parliament were being 'replaced by a nest of smaller factions'.³⁵ 'Party' loyalty could no longer guarantee support, so it was instead necessary to cultivate allegiances on a personal level. 'Ireland' shows such horse-trading being conducted in the most egregious manner by the Lord Lieutenant in person. 'His Excellency' curries the favour of an Irish MP, 'spits in his mouth and strokes his chaps' to ensure that '[t]he humble whelp gives every vote' and 'strains his throat' to demand that bills be enacted. In exchange for flattering murmurs about his social circle and his pack of hunting hounds, His Excellency secures the whelp's accession to a raft of legislation. The details are enumerated in fawning tones:

Our letters say a Jesuit boasts
 Of some invasion on your coasts;
 The King is ready, when you will,
 To pass another popery bill;
 And for dissenters he intends
 To use them as his truest friends:
 [~~Yes and the church established too,~~
~~Since 'tis grown Protestant like you]~~
 I think they justly ought to share
 In all employments we can spare.
 Next for encouragement of spinning,
 A duty might be laid on linen;
 An act for laying down the plough,
 England will send you corn enough.³⁶

This list summarizes the policies that had, in Swift's opinion, reduced Ireland to a condition of terminal decline. That the country was in a desperate state was beyond dispute – by 1729 a member of the Irish Parliament was

³⁵ David Hayton, 'The Beginnings of the "Undertaker System,"' in Thomas Bartlett and D. W. Hayton, eds., *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690–1800* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1979), pp. 32–54, pp. 41–2.

³⁶ 'Ireland', ll. 41–52, with deleted lines in brackets from *Poems*, p. 773.

proposing an extraordinary motion to the committee on the state of the nation, moving simply that ‘this country was in a miserable condition’.³⁷ But to accept Swift’s account of the origins of that condition would be naïve. S. J. Connolly points out the danger of adopting ‘an uncritical reliance on Swift as a commentator on the political, social or religious conditions of [...] early eighteenth-century Ireland’. No-one, he continues, would dream of taking Swift’s pamphleteering for the Oxford ministry ‘as other than a grotesque and highly coloured depiction of the events and issues with which it was concerned’. The same should be true of his Irish writings, which are ‘equally polemical and more wilfully grotesque’.³⁸ Swift’s depiction of policymaking in the Dublin Parliament in the poem ‘Ireland’ is polemical; his tendency to conflate opposition to such policies with love of country is grotesque. Only two of the measures assented to by the ‘Whig’ MP were recognized in Swift’s day as issues of genuinely national concern.³⁹

The first of these was the regulation of trade. By laying ‘a duty on linen’ the government would have added to a set of restrictions on Irish trade that had been implemented piecemeal in the English Parliament between the middle and the end of the seventeenth century. Most of these concerned exports: the Navigation Act of 1663 required all goods bound for the English colonies to be

³⁷ Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southwell, 8 November 1729, BL Add. MS 21,122, 1, 91^r. The letter continues: ‘it was such a strange motion that it was immediately laid aside’.

³⁸ S. J. Connolly, ‘Swift and Protestant Ireland: Images and Reality’, in *Locating Swift: Essays from Dublin on the 250th Anniversary of the Death of Jonathan Swift 1667–1745*, ed. by Aileen Douglas, Patrick Kelly and Ian Campbell Ross (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), pp. 28–46, p. 45.

³⁹ Swift’s use of the term ‘Whig’ is troublesome. Successive English Whig ministries attempted to extend some form of toleration to Dissenters, or to increase the severity of penal legislation affecting Catholics in 1709, 1719 and 1731. In the poem, the member’s support for such measures may have been enough for him to earn the appellation ‘Whig’ from Swift, even though he keeps ‘a pack of hounds’, which would have been seen as the affectation of a Tory country gentleman. The fact is that the terms ‘Whig’ and ‘Tory’ are even more difficult to define for Irish politicians than they are for English ones. Archbishop King of Dublin, for example, was nominally a Whig, but like many of the Irish Bishops in the Lords, he was vehemently opposed to toleration for Dissenters. An accurate description of this member’s political orientation would be that he is inclined to vote against the interests of the Church of Ireland, and in favour of the landed interest. He does not oppose legislative restrictions on the Irish textile trade, nor does he oppose absentee landlordism and the lack of hard currency in the Irish economy that results from agricultural rents raised in Ireland being spent in England. He does not support the attempts that were being made to increase the area of farmland under cultivation and to reduce the area used for pasturage. He thus typifies the kind of political thinking that Swift’s writings of the 1720s were designed to oppose, just as ‘His Excellency’ is not so much a satirical portrait of Carteret as a caricature of the Lord Lieutenant whose management of Irish policy was directed by political considerations in Westminster, rather than by the best interests of the Irish ‘nation’, as Swift understood them.

shipped from England or Wales, while in 1667 the Cattle Act had excluded Irish cattle, sheep, beef and pork from export. In 1699, an act was passed to prohibit the export of woollen goods from Ireland. Swift held these acts directly responsible for continued economic decline in a country ‘which is capable of producing all Things necessary and most things convenient for Life, sufficient for the Support of four Times the Number of its Inhabitants’ (IX, 199). In the face of such adversity, the domestic linen trade was unusual in that it experienced some growth in the 1720s. Following an act passed by the English Parliament in 1696, linen became one of very few commodities allowed to be exported to England and Scotland duty-free. The Linen Act of 1705 went on to exempt exports to British North America from duty, and the Irish Parliament offered active encouragement with the establishment of the Linen Board in 1711.⁴⁰ ‘Ireland’, however, imagines even this industry succumbing to the Walpole ministry’s desire to run the Kingdom at a profit and to run its inhabitants into the ground. This desire provides the master narrative behind Swift’s writing on Irish affairs, but historians have adduced different explanations for Ireland’s ‘wretched condition’ in the 1720s.

Ultimately the efforts of successive London governments to administer the country cheaply and protect British trading interests had less of an effect than recurring economic depressions caused by bad harvests, fluctuations in the value of rents and ongoing difficulties resulting from the lack of a reliable European market for Irish agricultural produce.⁴¹ This combination made the 1720s as a whole a ‘decade of economic crisis’ and notable periods of hardship occurred both at the beginning and the end of the decade with which this thesis is concerned.⁴² As a result of these periodic downturns, there was a visible increase in destitution among urban labourers and rural tenant farmers during the 1720s, particularly outside Ulster where the linen trade was concentrated, with even the northerly province succumbing to the widespread depression caused by three successive bad harvests between 1727 and 1729. The resulting drive to promote

⁴⁰ L. M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (London: Batsford, 1972; 2nd edn 1987), p. 13, p. 48, p. 34; Patrick Griffin, *The People with no Name: Ireland’s Ulster Scots, America’s Scots Irish and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689–1764* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 27.

⁴¹ Connolly, ‘Swift and Protestant Ireland’, p. 39; Cullen, *Economic History of Ireland*, chapter 2.

⁴² Cullen, *Economic History of Ireland*, p. 48.

textiles of Irish manufacture met with broad support. By the end of the decade the use of home-produced fabrics was announced to be ‘Establish’d, and [...] become a *Rule*, to be generally follow’d’ and, as Chapter Five discusses, the following of this ‘rule’ had become another ritual to be observed in public and read for political significance.⁴³ A second watchword of patriotic observance that gained widespread support was the condemnation of landlords.

The mismanagement of estates by landowners, alluded to in the poem’s reference to an ‘act for laying down the plough’, attracted increasingly vocal criticism to the point where the ‘foolish Practice of Cruel Landlords’ was being openly attacked in the Dublin prints by 1728.⁴⁴ In addition to favouring pasturage over food crops, which pushed up grain prices even higher than they might have been in times of scarcity, landlords were criticized for failing to make improvements to their lands, for charging exorbitant rents, and for living abroad. Absenteeism and rackrenting (the latter is defined by the *OED* as charging a ‘very high, excessive, or extortionate rent [...] equal (or nearly equal) to the full value of the land’) have become embedded in popular understandings of Irish history as abuses perpetrated by an Anglo-Irish aristocracy upon a Catholic labouring class. It is worth emphasising, however, that the motives of Irish Anglicans like Swift for criticizing such abuses were very different from those that modern notions of social justice might suggest.

Some of the practices of landlords attracted opposition from all sectors of public life. Absenteeism was universally criticized because when rents went abroad this threatened to drain the country of specie. In 1728, Archbishop William King of Dublin remarked to a correspondent: ‘I don’t know what will become of this Kingdom for I don’t see that any money can be left in it’; while a contemporary tract calculated that if just one or two landowners were to sell their estates and the proceeds were diverted to England, then the kingdom would be left bankrupt.⁴⁵ This was a clear danger in both senses of the word, but other issues were more complicated. Whilst there were good reasons for criticizing the

⁴³ *Dublin Intelligence*, 15 November 1729.

⁴⁴ *Dublin Intelligence*, 28 December 1728.

⁴⁵ William King to Edward Southwell, 27 April 1728, TCD MS 750/9, p. 58; Thomas Prior, *A List of the Absentees of Ireland, and the yearly Value of their Estates and Incomes Spent Abroad. With Observations on the Present State and Condition of that Kingdom* (Dublin: R. Gunne, 1729), p. 20.

use of land to graze sheep or cattle rather than to grow crops, less obvious factors were also in play. It was in the interest of churchmen like Swift to promote tillage over grazing because the established church was able to levy tithes on all land under cultivation. Its ability to exact tithes on pasturage was more limited, however, and its right to do so became the subject of fierce debates in the Irish Parliament through the late 1720s and early thirties. A subtext of this controversy, and indeed of the raft of inimical legislation outlined in the poem 'Ireland', is the struggle between the Church of Ireland and the landed gentry's competing claims to stewardship. This was not just a contest to assert moral authority over the populace but also a battle for control of the land itself.

For Swift that battle was already more than half lost. In contrast with its English counterpart, the Church of Ireland had always been marginalized, an impoverished and impotent bystander in the more elemental conflict that Swift called 'the long wars between the Invaders and the Natives' (XII, 183). With the Treaty of Limerick, concluded following the Jacobite surrender in October 1691, this phase of conflict had ended, but a new one, between political and clerical power in Protestant Ireland, had begun. In 1720, the relations between various interest-groups within the post-Williamite state were still being worked out. While the intricacies of this new constitutional settlement were being debated, churchmen like Swift saw it as their duty to salvage some of their church's political authority and to guarantee the means of its physical survival. As D. George Boyce explains, Swift followed a principle laid down by Richard Hooker in the sixteenth century 'that it was essential for the church and nation to be one'. There existed a 'contractual relationship' between church and state and, as Swift saw it, that agreement had already been broken once in his own lifetime by James II and was coming under strain from successive London ministries. The maintenance of the Church's authority had become 'a question of holding ground, maintaining numbers, calculating religious and political arithmetic'.⁴⁶ It is in this context that Swift's pronouncements on Ireland must be read, a context that, in Fauske's words, 'irreducibly connects Swift's English work and his middle years

⁴⁶ D. George Boyce, 'The Road to Wood's Halfpence and Beyond: William King, Jonathan Swift and the Defence of the National Church, 1689-1724', in D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan, eds., *Political Discourse in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 81-109, pp. 82-3.

of near silence with his appeals on behalf of the Irish' – but it is worth asking in this case who 'the Irish' actually were.⁴⁷ Swift's claim to speak for the 'bulk or mass of the people' of Ireland must undergo extensive qualification when one considers how his theoretical defence of the established church translates into matters of practical policy.

In a confessional state (i.e., one where citizenship was largely conditional upon a confession of Anglican faith), even issues that seemed purely economic were political and consequently inseparable from matters of religion. Complaints about landlords charging extortionate rents, for example, were informed by the apprehension that such irresponsible profiteering would enable Catholics to gain property at the expense of Protestant tenants. Rents did indeed go up during the 1720s as landlords took advantage of the expiry of twenty-one and thirty-one year leases granted during the 1690s.⁴⁸ Many in the Church of Ireland feared that this would endanger the entire class of Protestant smallholders. Because they had little chance of legal protection from landlords, it was argued, Catholics would willingly bid for extortionate leases without any intention of complying with their terms, thus forcing Protestant tenants off their lands. In some minds, notably Archbishop King's, this took on the character of a conspiracy:

every Lease that expires is set up to Cant [auction] and a Papist will always bid more than a Protestant because they have taken up two principles, one is to under live their Protestant Neighbours, and the other is to outbid them upon all Cants[.] [N]or are they concerned that they shall ever be able to pay the rent they promise, because they reckon they shall be able to Enjoy the land two years, and then they leave the key under the door and run away with their Stock[.] I know several landlords that have been thus served and to be sure did not pity them.⁴⁹

Similar fears had been expressed by King in his correspondence from the late 1710s and early twenties, coincident with the expiry of the twenty-one year leases. And it was not merely the prospect of expropriation by Catholics that

⁴⁷ Fauske, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 147.

⁴⁸ Cullen, *Economic History of Ireland*, p. 44, notes that the total rents of Ireland were estimated at £1.2 million in 1687 and at £1.6–£2 million in the 1720s. Swift himself estimated them to be 'about a million and a half, whereof one half million at least is spent by lords and gentlemen residing in England' (Swift to the Earl of Peterborough, 28 April 1726, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 644).

⁴⁹ William King to Edward Southwell, 30 January 1729, TCD MS 750/9, p. 104.

worried him and his fellow churchmen. Although King distinguishes here only between Protestant and Catholic tenants, it should be borne in mind that after 1704 Ireland was not merely a Protestant state but an Anglican one. Before that year's Sacramental Test Act, any measure that might enhance the standing of non-Anglican Protestants was vehemently opposed. The 1699 Woollen Act, for example, was opposed by King (then Bishop of Derry) because he was 'alarmed that the prohibition would affect members of the Church of Ireland disproportionately, and would thus strengthen the growing Presbyterian interest in the north'.⁵⁰ Like King, Swift was highly suspicious of this interest. He had spent significant portions of his life in Ulster – his first parish was at Kilroot in County Antrim – and had witnessed at first hand the financial and numerical strength of Scottish-descended Presbyterians in that province. From his time in what he called 'the Scotch plantation in the north', Swift acquired a lifelong hatred of 'Dissenters' as non-Anglican Protestants were indiscriminately known, although the term tended to refer mainly to Presbyterians when used in an Irish context.⁵¹ His antipathy was strengthened by his reading of seventeenth-century history, which made him identify them with regicide and anarchy. Some felt that the Scottish Presbyterians who had colonized the northern counties during the seventeenth century had changed the area for the better. John Browne wrote that it had been 'advantagious to the Country in general, for the industrious *Scots Protestants*, who succeeded the lazy *Irish*, laid the Foundation of the Linen Manufacture, which is at this time their chiefest Wealth'.⁵² Although they would have agreed fully with Browne's estimation of the native Irish whom they had displaced, churchmen did not share his view of the colonists. Their ideological antipathy was matched by a tendency to see northern Presbyterians as the single greatest threat to the civil and ecclesiastical establishment in Ireland.

Although they had made common cause with Irish Anglicans during the conflicts of the seventeenth century, many churchmen thought that in a future absence of mutual self-interest the Dissenters would not hesitate to turn on their former allies. By admitting non-Anglican Protestants to full participation in civic,

⁵⁰ Cullen, *Economic History of Ireland*, p. 35.

⁵¹ Swift to Peterborough, 28 April 1726, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 644.

⁵² John Browne, *Seasonable Remarks on Trade*, in *A Collection of Tracts, concerning the Present State of Ireland* (London: T. Woodward and J. Peele, 1729), p. 32.

military and judicial affairs, they argued, the state would have been playing host to a Trojan horse. This argument was made with increasing urgency during the early years of George I's reign. The loss of Queen Anne's support for the Anglican clergy was keenly felt and it was feared that the newly-installed Whig ministry might reverse the 1704 Sacramental Test Act, which had 'served as a de facto exclusion from public life' for Irish Dissenters.⁵³ Anglican polemics played up the Presbyterian threat, describing how Dissenters had intimidated their Church of Ireland counterparts by using security fears sparked by the abortive Jacobite rising of 1715 as a pretext to abuse Anglican ministers and laity. William Tisdall, Vicar of Belfast and sometime friend of Swift, devoted tracts to exposing the conditional and provisional nature of Presbyterian loyalty.⁵⁴ Others sought theoretical justification for the exclusion of fellow Protestants from the franchise. In a private letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishop Edward Synge of Tuam described a scenario in which a British king might enlist an Irish 'Army of Dissenters' to assist in making him an absolute monarch, much as James II had tried to do a generation earlier 'by an Army of Papish, if God had not brought King William to our Rescue'. Synge argued that if some future errant king offered to make Presbyterianism the established church of Ireland, the Dissenters would be unable to resist such a 'Temptation [...] to join with him in his Design'.⁵⁵

As Synge's letter dramatized the situation, Anglican Ireland was caught between the retreating spectre of Catholic domination and the advancing threat of Presbyterian resurgence. Outnumbered by Dissenters as much as two to one in Ulster, Anglicans were elsewhere in a minority to Catholics, the city of Dublin excepted. Various estimates made between 1706 and 1731 placed Catholic numerical superiority over Protestants for the island as a whole at two, five, six, seven, or even ten to one.⁵⁶ Anything that might increase this disproportion or

⁵³ Griffin, *The People with no Name*, p. 24.

⁵⁴ *The Present State of Religion in Ireland* (London: Andrew Bell, [1712]); Thomas Lindesay and Edward Smith, *The Insolence of the Dissenters against the Establish'd Church* (London: J. Baker and T. Warner, 1716); William Tisdall, *A Sample of true-Blew Presbyterian Loyalty* (Dublin: John Ray, 1709); idem, *The Conduct of the Dissenters of Ireland, with respect both to Church and State* (Dublin: [n. pub], 1712).

⁵⁵ Edward Synge to William Wake, 3 February 1716, BL Add. MS 6117, fol. 111^v.

⁵⁶ S. J. Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power: The Making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 144. As Connolly suggests, in the absence of any reliable method of calculating the proportions, most estimates were influenced by the politics of whoever

augment the economic power of Catholics was to be opposed at all costs. It would seem surprising, therefore, that the Lord Lieutenant's desire to 'pass another popery bill' is among those measures singled out for criticism in Swift's poem 'Ireland'. These 'popery laws' were the penal laws passed between the Jacobite surrender and the middle of the eighteenth century. They were designed to prevent any resurgence of Catholic power within the new state. To this end individual laws were enacted to impose various limitations, restricting Catholics' ability to do such things as inherit land, hold civic office or enter various professions. The Sacramental Test Act, which placed similar restrictions on Dissenters, was in fact a clause added to an Irish 'popery bill' in 1704.⁵⁷ Dissenters still enjoyed the right to vote and to sit in Parliament, and their position within the state was subject to periodic review. But the exclusion of Catholics was meant to be absolute. One often-quoted summary of the penal laws' effect was given in a judgment of the chief baron of the Irish exchequer in 1758. He said that Irish law 'did not presume a Catholic to exist, except for the purpose of punishment'.⁵⁸ Even a generation before this remark was made, Anglican clergymen were opposing anti-Catholic legislation because they felt Catholics had already been pushed far enough outside the pale of legal protection.

Describing his opposition to a 1719 'popery bill', for example, Archbishop King explained, 'I think, we should execute some of those acts, we have already made against Popery, before we call for more'.⁵⁹ In other words, he opposed additional penal legislation not on principle but because he believed sufficient legal provision for the oppression of Catholics had already been made. Swift was of a similar mind. He supported 'limited but reasonable repression' according to Fauske, who also contends that the idea of allowing Catholics civil liberties of 'any but the meanest sort' would not have occurred to someone in

was doing the estimating. Thus the Tory zealot Sir Richard Cox put the ratio at two to one in 1706 as part of an argument that Catholics no longer constituted a serious threat; conversely, the Whig Chancellor Richard Freeman put the figure at 'at least ten to one' only two years later. Chapter Five below discusses attempts made to calculate this important ratio in the late 1720s and early thirties.

⁵⁷ Griffin, *The People with no Name*, p. 23.

⁵⁸ Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 228, and chapter 7, which gives a detailed analysis of the penal laws.

⁵⁹ William King to Edward Southwell, 12 November 1719, quoted in Patrick McNally, 'William King, Patriotism and the "National Question"', in Christopher J. Fauske, ed., *Archbishop William King and the Anglican Irish Context, 1688-1729* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 47-72, p. 55.

Swift's position.⁶⁰ Troubled by the legal subjugation of Catholics only in that they thought it poorly enforced, Swift and his co-religionists were much more exercised by those who would manipulate the Popish threat for political purposes. This is what 'Ireland' portrays the Lord Lieutenant as doing when he murmurs of 'Jesuit boasts' concerning an imminent invasion. Even after the Jacobite rising of 1715, English Whigs and their allies in Ireland were accused of inflating the threat of an insurrection led by James II's heir, 'the Pretender'. Various ulterior motives were ascribed to such insinuations and exaggerations, ranging from foreign policy considerations to a simple desire to cast their opponents as unrepentant Jacobites who would install the son of their fallen idol on the throne at the first given opportunity. For a member of the Church of Ireland, the most worrying aspect of such propagandizing was that it offered a justification for repealing the 1704 Test Act, a move hinted at in His Excellency's news that the king 'intends / to use dissenters as his truest friends'.

For their own part, Dissenters argued that their importance in safeguarding the Kingdom of Ireland was 'so obvious as to need no Illustration'. In a country where 'the *Papists* are still vastly superior in Strength and Numbers to Protestants of all Perswasions', it was a gross anomaly that 'they who had so often and successfully signaliz'd their Zeal for the Protestant and *British* Interest should be discourag'd, nay disabled to do any such Service for the future'.⁶¹ Despite such eloquent appeals all factions in the Dublin Parliament, including the Irish allies of the English Whigs, resolutely opposed any amendment to the Test well beyond the 1720s.⁶² The prospect of repeal in Ireland was ultimately more of a political rallying point than a realistic threat. In this respect it was much like the prospect of a Jacobite invasion. Nonetheless it met with such vehement opposition from Swift as to occasion his first published tract on Irish politics and his permanent alienation from the Whigs in 1708. Twenty years later, when he felt it was 'too late' to propose any workable remedy for the state of Ireland, Swift was ranking the London ministry's cultivation of Ireland's dissenters alongside policies that had contributed to the starvation of its people and the

⁶⁰ Fauske, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 80, p. 98.

⁶¹ [John Abernethy], *The Nature and Consequence of the Sacramental Test Considered with Reasons Humbly Offered for the Repeal of it* ([Dublin]: [n. pub.], 1731), p. 15.

⁶² Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, p. 80; Beckett, 'Swift: The Priest in Politics', p. 121.

crippling of its economy. It had become a symbolic betrayal, much like the litany of personal betrayals he racked up throughout his life and collated in old age.⁶³ The violence that had been done to Ireland's established church had, in Swift's reading, defiled the country as a whole beyond hope, transforming it into 'a land of slaves'. Everything Swift wrote about Ireland thus proceeds from two postulates: that the country and its established church were synonymous and that wilful neglect and abuse of the church was both symbolized and punished in the 'wretched condition' of the country.

Often these first principles remain unspoken – coherent subtexts to be discerned beneath the screed of Swift's 'savage indignation'. Their importance, but also their inherent futility, is graphically conveyed in the lines that Swift omitted from 'Ireland' even as he was composing it. By striking out the reference to 'the church established' in the manuscript of his poem, Swift may have been admitting his inability to insinuate the Anglican cause into the agenda at Dublin Castle. But the deletion also shows how his own crusade to protect the established church could be subsumed within a broader 'patriot' agenda. When he despaired that the Irish would ever love their country, Swift was referring not merely to an emotional idea but to a legal entity of which the Church of Ireland was an integral component. For an Anglican churchman, this connection may have been implicit. It may very well not have been for the newsboys who signed proclamations against William Wood's halfpence or for the weavers who presented him with a speech of welcome on his return from Holyhead. At Holyhead, Swift had written a poem criticizing the manner of conducting business in the Irish Parliament, which depended upon a relationship of clientage between the landed interest in Ireland and policymakers in England. This usurped the moral authority and legal prerogative of the Church of Ireland, and showed how it had lost out in the reworking of the Kingdom's constitutional fabric that followed the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 and the Jacobite surrender of 1691. But rather than give it a title which reflected this complex subject matter, Swift simply called his poem 'Ireland'. At once overdetermined and incomplete, 'Ireland' was a simulacrum, as Baudrillard defines it, a copy without an

⁶³ *Correspondence*, ed. Williams, v, Appendix XXX, 270, reprints 'a list in which Swift has classed his friends as ungrateful, grateful, indifferent and doubtful'.

original.⁶⁴ As such it was inevitably subject to further distortion and simplification as it was publicly disseminated. These processes introduce the third key term in my subtitle.

Constructions of Identity

Recent writing has begun to take Swift seriously as a political thinker, and one result of this has been to focus attention on his use of models and metaphors of contract.⁶⁵ Carole Fabricant discusses the ‘radical contractarian elements in Swift’s political thinking’, whilst J. A. Downie has shown how in constitutional matters, ‘Swift was not a divine right theorist but a contract theorist’.⁶⁶ Contractarianism can also be seen to underlie Swift’s theory of communication, as a fragment entitled ‘Some Thoughts on Freethinking’ reveals. This brief, unfinished piece relates a conversation with ‘a prelate of the kingdom of Ireland’ who offered the following definition of ‘the difference betwixt a mad-man and one in his wits’:

That the former spoke out whatever came into his mind, and just in the confused manner as his imagination presented the ideas. The latter only expressed such thoughts, as his judgement directed him to chuse, leaving the rest to die away in his memory. And that if the wisest man would at any time utter his thoughts, in the crude undigested manner, as they come into his head, he would be looked upon as raving mad.⁶⁷

According to this model, each of the participants in a conversation is obliged to speak in such a way as to appear sane; otherwise he will be looked

⁶⁴ Jean Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra and Simulations’, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 166–184.

⁶⁵ One indication of Swift’s increasing prominence as political theorist is the fact that in a volume dedicated to Irish political thought in the eighteenth century, Swift’s collected prose and correspondence are the only texts referred to frequently enough to be included in the initial list of abbreviations (*Political Thought in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. by S. J. Connolly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 9).

⁶⁶ Carole Fabricant, ‘Swift’s Political legacy: Re-memembering the Past in Order to Imagine the Future’, in Douglas et al., *Locating Swift*, pp. 188–200, p. 195; Downie, ‘Swift’s Politics’, in *Proceedings of the First Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Hermann J. Real and Heinz Vienken (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1985), pp. 47–58, p. 52.

⁶⁷ ‘Some Thoughts on Free-Thinking’, in *Prose IV, A Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue, Polite Conversation, Etc.* ed. by Herbert Davis, with Louis Landa (1957; repr. 1973), 49.

upon as mad. But semblance is a minimal and potentially inadequate guarantor of sanity. A suggestion of anarchy lingers in the final sentence where the author imagines ‘the wisest man’ uttering his thoughts ‘in the crude undigested manner in which they came into his head’. Inverting this image provides another more threatening possibility, where madmen fashion their words to give them the semblance of reasoned judgement, and so enable themselves to appear sane. Swift’s three great satires, *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729) explore the uncharted territory opened up by such violations of contract. The vehicle for such exploration is the author’s persona – a word that means ‘mask’, but which, as Gordon Teskey points out, ‘is literally a thing “to sound through,” *per-sonare*, indicating a sonic essence transpiercing a mask that at once represents and conceals the wearer’.⁶⁸ As a device that can both amplify and distort the wearer’s speaking voice, persona is thus more than a disguise that cancels the identity of the wearer underneath. It is a means of creating authorial identity through the partial negation of personal identity. Since this thesis is concerned with corporate as well as personal identity, it is fitting to draw attention to the uses of persona as a legal and political device as well as a literary one.

These neglected aspects of persona are illuminated in what is also a seminal work of contract theory. In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes explicates a concept of ‘Persons, Authors and Things Personated’:

The word Person is latine: instead whereof the Greeks have *πρόσωπον*, which signifies the *Face*, as *Persona* in latine signifies the *disguise*, or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Visard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to any Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters. So that a *Person*, is the same that an *Actor* is, both on the Stage and in common Conversation; and to *Personate*, is to *Act*, or *Represent* himselfe, or an other;⁶⁹

To personate was thus once to act the part of oneself or someone else, ‘as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters’. Hobbes gives a list of people who typically

⁶⁸ Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 22.

⁶⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 112.

personate others in this sense of ‘represent officially’: ‘a *Representer*, or *Representative*, a *Lieutenant*, a *Vicar*, an *Attorney*, a *Deputy*, a *Procurator*, an *Actor*’. Of course, the verb ‘personate’ is now routinely used with the overwhelmingly negative denotation of fraudulent imitation or impersonation. Intriguingly, none other than Swift has been credited with steering the word away from its earlier, positive sense. Swift’s use of ‘personate’ is ‘unusually prolific’, asserts Richard Terry, ‘and this fact has ensured that its semantic development (and hence that of our derived concept of ‘impersonation’) is closely intertwined with his own verbal habits.’ Terry goes on to argue that in Swift’s idiolect, ‘personate’ takes on a meaning very close to ‘parody’, a term which specifically denotes ‘seizure of the words of other authors and their perversion into burlesque’.⁷⁰ It is, to say the least, an arresting coincidence that an author obsessed with betrayed or decayed relationships of trust should also be charged with subverting the very meaning of a word that once denoted such a relationship. The expressions of personal and national identity that this thesis traces in Swift’s work are products of a similarly compromised principle of representation. In Swift’s Irish tracts, Emer Nolan remarks, ‘the problems that attend “nationhood” or political community more generally, are analogous to the problems that attend “individuality” or embodied selfhood.’⁷¹ Rather than succumb to a gradual perversion or even be compromised from the outset, Swift’s method of personation can be seen as inherently parodic, in which an unstable personal identity is a burlesque substitute for a degraded communal integrity and *vice versa*. This is a process of simulation which ‘envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum’.⁷²

As shown at the beginning of this introduction, Swift had by 1727 acquired the status of a pseudo-official envoy for Irish affairs at the English court – a personator in the Hobbesian sense. The Dublin prints confirmed him in this office, which he willingly took upon himself. Swift had justified his 1727 London trip before his bishop with the explanation that ‘the occasion of my

⁷⁰ Richard Terry, ‘Swift’s use of “Personate” to indicate Parody’, *Notes and Queries*, 239 (n.s. 4), 1994, 196–198, p. 196.

⁷¹ Emer Nolan, ‘Swift: The Patriot Game’, *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 21 (1998), 39–53, p. 39.

⁷² Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra’, p. 170.

journey hither [was] partly for the advantage of that kingdom'. A year earlier he had taken on the role more comprehensively still, remarking of his audience with Walpole that 'I had no other design [...], than to represent the affairs of Ireland to him in a true light'.⁷³ How do we distinguish such claims from that of the Modest Proposer to speak '*for this one individual Kingdom of IRELAND, and for no other that ever was*' (XII, 116)? Ultimately with Swift there can be no clear separation between satiric and genuine advocacy – a point explored in detail by Claude Rawson and neatly summarized in Richard Terry's observation that Swift did not clearly differentiate between representing the views of others and their 'perversion into burlesque'.⁷⁴ One reason for this, leaving aside Swift's lexical idiosyncrasies, is that legal, political and literary representation are all to some extent dependent on fictions. In the Hobbesian commonwealth, for example, power is conferred by voluntary agreement, 'by Covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, *I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner*'.⁷⁵ This dramatization of the moment of a state's founding contains an important qualification. Rather than actually give their assent, social agents are treated *as if* they had delegated their autonomy and authority to someone else. As Nigel Smith remarks, this makes the contract itself a fiction, dependent on a collective illusion of mass volition: '[t]he making of the covenant is a forever present political unconscious – since nowhere in the *Leviathan* is the making of a covenant actually described as a historical or institutional event.'⁷⁶

By the time of Swift's maturity, the danger of unconditional reliance on such fictions had been made apparent. John Locke, premier political theorist of the 1688 revolution, was careful to stress the minimal and provisional nature of the initial agreement that binds members of a commonwealth together under a sovereign power. In *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), a work whose basic

⁷³ Swift to Archbishop King, 18 May 1727, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 88; to Peterborough, 28 April 1726, *ibid.*, II, 642.

⁷⁴ Claude Rawson, *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷⁵ *Leviathan*, p. 120.

⁷⁶ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England 1640–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 163.

tenets ‘Swift appears to have accepted, throughout his adult life,’ Locke stressed that the act of forming a community is ‘done by barely agreeing to *unite into one Political Society*’. Such bare agreement constitutes ‘*all the Compact* that is, or needs be, between the Individuals, that enter into, or make up a *Commonwealth*’.⁷⁷ Additionally, Locke conceived the members of such a commonwealth not as subjects united under a sovereign but as agents who had conditionally entrusted their power to the legislative, which retained ‘only a Fiduciary Power to act for certain ends’. There continued to be vested in the people a ‘*Supream Power* to remove or *alter the Legislative*, when they find the *Legislative* act contrary to the trust reposed in them’. Meanwhile, the executive power, when constituted as a single person, ‘has no right to Obedience, nor can claim it otherwise than as the publick Person vested with the Power of the Law’. As an essentially passive agent, the wielder of executive power is a cipher who ‘has no Will, no Power, but that of the Law’ and is to ‘be consider’d as the Image, Phantom, or Representative of the Commonwealth’.

Such terms – particularly the word ‘Phantom’ with its intimations of delusion, deception and falsity – emphasized that any relationship of personation was liable to abuse. Locke’s *Treatises* established immediate invalidation of the initial contract as the consequence of such abuse. When the wielder of executive power ‘quits this Representation and acts by his own private Will, he degrades himself and is but a single private Person without Power’.⁷⁸ Ireland became the proving ground for these stipulations. Swift’s peers there were exercised by the minutiae of contract theory as manifested in the problematic constitutional position of the Kingdom of Ireland and its ruling class. But the Dean of St Patrick’s was more possessed by the process of personal degradation activated by those who are party to a broken contract.

The site of James II’s last stand produced a host of texts exploring or influenced by the contractual reading of monarchical power. These ranged from William Molyneux’s defence of Ireland’s status as a separate kingdom, to the

⁷⁷ Downie, ‘Swift and Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*’ in Rudolf Freiburg, Arno Löffler and Wolfgang Zach, eds., with the assistance of Jan Schnitker, *Swift, The Enigmatic Dean: Festschrift for Hermann Josef Real* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1998), pp. 27–34; John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. by Peter Laslett, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967; repr. 1999), p. 333.

⁷⁸ *Two Treatises*, pp. 367–8.

radical output of Viscount Molesworth's circle, to the classic explication of the Williamite accession, Archbishop King's *The State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James's Government* (1691). Swift was not foremost among these authors. His political thinking betrayed the influence of Locke, particularly the idea that the executive and legislative powers should be kept separate.⁷⁹ But despite his ambitions to produce 'serious' political history, Swift's energies were continually diverted into imitation, parody and polemic – modes that subvert, by exposing as a fiction, the idea that a text represents the unmediated expression of its author's thoughts. Rather than uphold the Lockean contract as his contemporaries did, Swift was continually drawn to the possibilities offered by the phantoms, the empty forms, the degraded personae that were loosed upon the world when such a contract was violated.

It would be distorting to impute an overriding theme to the disparate array of sermons, letters, pamphlets and poems that makes up Swift's occasional writings. They could, however, be read as a set of variations on this abiding theme of a contractual relationship that, in spite of being fatally compromised, continues to be upheld. This impulse would accurately characterize Swift's determination to write 'on purpose when it is too late' at the end of his career, much as a striking image from its beginning reveals an enduring fascination with formal arrangements that persist long after they been rendered grotesquely bereft of function. *A Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (1710) relates the opinion that the human brain is 'only a Crowd of little Animals' who cling together to provide the illusion of a unitary whole, 'like the Picture of *Hobbes's Leviathan*, or like Bees in a perpendicular swarm upon a Tree, or like a Carrion corrupted into Vermin, still preserving the Shape and Figure of the Mother Animal'.⁸⁰ The last of these images would later come to exemplify Swift's idea of Ireland. My Conclusion will show how Swift, by the end of the 1720s, came to imagine the country as a corrupted body infested with parasites that it had itself spawned and nurtured.

The intervening pages trace the degradation of an idea in the three modes outlined in this introduction. Part One of this thesis comprises the first two

⁷⁹ Downie, *Jonathan Swift*, p. 247, 'Swift and Locke's *Two Treatises*', p. 34.

⁸⁰ *A Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit in a Letter to a Friend. A Fragment, Prose I, A Tale of a Tub with other early Works, 1696–1707* (1939), 181.

chapters. Its title, 'Constructing Constituencies', is meant to convey the idea that Swift was not only building support for his cause but *constructing* his readership according to the sense of that verb as it is commonly used in literary criticism to imply an act somewhere between interpretation and creation, where an object is transformed into an abstraction and freighted with meaning. Additionally, when it refers to Swift's constituents, this thesis implies not only that Swift constitutes his Irish readerships in certain ways, but also that those readerships play an active role in constituting and disseminating Swift's image and authority: constituents in the sense of constituent parts of a collective self-representation. Part Two, 'Construing Contexts', also invokes a double meaning in that it looks at *con-texts*, the less canonical and more ephemeral writings that emphasize how Swift's was once a voice among many. The last three chapters look at such contexts to show how Swift and his Irish contemporaries used the genres of history and pastoral, the modes of allegory and arithmetic as conceptual aids to construe their place in the world, in time, and in law. But I begin with an unwelcome statement which tried to do just that against the wishes of Swift and the nation he constructed.

Chapter One

Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water

I

I ever thought it the most uncontrolled and universally agreed Maxim, that *Freedom consists in a People being governed by Laws made with their own Consent; and Slavery in the Contrary.* (x, 86–7)

By 1727 Swift was beyond doubt that Ireland had become a ‘land of slaves’, but at the beginning of the 1720s this proposition could still be put interrogatively. ‘[T]he Question’, he wrote to Charles Ford on 4 April 1720, ‘is whether People ought to be Slaves or no’.¹ That spring, when Swift is supposed to have made his debut as an Irish pamphleteer, this was the question on everyone’s lips. In February, Archbishop King wrote that he did not value anything that he held ‘at the meer will and pleasure of another’. He felt that ‘the title of Slaves’ had been conferred on him and his countrymen by a piece of legislation that had just begun its passage through the British Parliament.² It asserted that Ireland as a Kingdom was ‘subordinate unto and dependent upon the imperial Crown of Great Britain’.³ King’s private note of defiance was also sounded in public, as part of a rhetoric of slavery that was becoming widespread in the wake of the bill. The Archbishop observed, he said, the spreading of a ‘universal disaffection of all people thro’ the whole Kingdom’.⁴ There were some who were appalled by the chorus of disapproval and the way a threat of ‘slavery’ was apparently being manipulated. They perceived a conscious effort to promote a dangerous fallacy that Ireland was suffering at the hands of the English legislature. Their very unease attests the extent of this discourse of enslavement. A

¹ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 327.

² King to Lord Southwell, 3 February 1720, TCD MS 750/6, p. 40.

³ For an account of how this act came into being, see below and Isolde Victory, ‘The Making of the Declaratory Act of 1720’, in Gerard O’Brien, ed., *Parliament, Politics and People: Essays in Eighteenth-Century Irish History* (Blackrock: Irish Academic Press, 1989), pp. 9–29.

⁴ Ferguson, p. 53, quoting King to Molesworth, 20 May, 1720.

few months before King's remark to Southwell, Bishop Nicolson of Derry warned the Archbishop of Canterbury to the effect that 'great efforts had been made to convince the population [of Ireland] that the British parliament was trying to reduce Ireland to a condition of complete vassalage and slavery'.⁵

The most arresting use of the slavery motif is found in an anonymous pamphlet of 1720 that complained of the recent '*astonishing Treatment of Ireland*' represented by the Dependency Act. The tract was published by Edward Waters, who would go on to issue Swift's *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* in May of that year. Before he did so, Waters printed a pamphlet called *Hibernia's Passive Obedience, Strain to Britannia*.⁶ It was not only the phrase 'Passive Obedience' that resurrected the political vocabulary of the recent past, since the tract was largely composed of excerpts from Swift's writings of a decade or so earlier.⁷ It reproduced some now timely phrases from three of his previous pamphlets: *A Letter [...] Concerning the Sacramental Test* (1709), *The Contests and Dissensions in Athens and Rome* (1701) and *Sentiments of a Church of England Man* (1708), including the latter's reference to 'Arbitrary Power' as 'a greater Evil than Anarchy itself; as much as a *Savage* is in a Happier State of Life, than a *Slave* at an Oar'.⁸ In the Irish House of Lords, Viscount Molesworth was also digging up the past to describe the present, likening his situation under the new law to 'being

⁵ Robert E. Burns, *Irish Parliamentary Politics in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), I, 97, paraphrasing Nicolson to Archbishop Wake, 6 October 1719, BL Add. MS 6,116, p. 174.

⁶ Ferguson (p. 54, n. 81) argues that *Hibernia's Passive Obedience* was printed before Swift's *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* because it makes no reference to the latter *Proposal* and because the printer of *Hibernia's Passive Obedience*, Edward Waters, was prosecuted when he went on to print Swift's *Proposal*. It would, writes Ferguson have been 'foolhardy' of Waters to have printed *Hibernia's Passive Obedience* under these circumstances.

⁷ 'Passive Obedience' was the phrase used to describe the policy of submitting to the 'arbitrary' rule of James II. It is discussed in a multitude of texts including William King's *The State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James's Government* (1691) and George Berkeley's *Passive Obedience, or the Christian Doctrine of not resisting the Supreme Power* (1712).

⁸ Anon., *Hibernia's Passive Obedience, Strain to Britannia* (Dublin: E. Waters, 1720), p. 6; cf. *Prose II*, 15. Ferguson notes that, with the exception of the author's introduction and some sections drawn from Thomas Burnet's *Essays Divine, Moral, and Political* (1714), this pamphlet is 'substantially a compilation of passages from three of Swift's earlier tracts, *The Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man*, *The Contests and Dissensions in Athens and Rome*, and the *Letter Concerning the Sacramental Test*' (*Swift and Ireland*, p. 53 and p. 54, n. 81).

actually chained like a galley slave to the oar and drubbed at will and pleasure'.⁹ A strange recirculation of rhetoric was at work. Not only were Swift's twenty-year old words being redeployed in a fresh context, so was the Lockean concept of liberty that underlay them, one that Molesworth had himself explored in some detail, in another context, a generation earlier. This chapter shows how the 1720 Act was felt and read by Swift and his contemporaries as a perlocutionary act as much as a legal one, performing a sudden and drastic removal of agency. It relates this question of political autonomy to the issue of authorial agency by showing how Swift's 'first' Irish tract was by no means a decisive intervention in the controversy caused by the act, being both pre-empted and effectively challenged by the productions of less celebrated authors. The last part of this chapter deals with the odd fact that the opponents of the 1720 Act also sanctioned a form of slavery, one visited upon those who, in Locke's words, had 'forfeited their Lives, and with it their Liberties, and lost their Estates'.¹⁰

II

As the earliest piece in his canon to be both written and published in Ireland for Irish readers, *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* represents Swift's debut on the Irish stage. His involvement with Irish issues is traced back to 1707 and *The Story of the Injured Lady*, and continues with the *Letter [...] Concerning the Sacramental Test* and the *Letter to a Member of Parliament in Ireland upon the Chusing a New Speaker There*.¹¹ However, by excerpting *The Contests and Dissensions in Athens and Rome*, and incorporating its content into a critique of Ireland's condition in 1720, *Hibernia's Passive Obedience* pushes the point of origin back to 1701. Swift studies is not a competitive exercise in the

⁹ Ferguson, p. 53, quoting Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections*, VIII, 283. Victory (p. 20, n. 33) writes that 'this paper [...] is undoubtedly the text of Molesworth's speech given during the debates on the Representation [of the Irish Lords to the King, October 1719], as noted by Bishop Nicolson' in his letter to Archbishop Wake of 2 October 1719.

¹⁰ *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 323.

¹¹ *Prose IX*, 3–9; *Prose II*, *Bickerstaff Papers and Pamphlets on the Church* (1939), 109–125, 127–135.

retrospective Hibernification of the author's canon. No five shilling postal order is awarded annually to the critic who can roll back furthest the date of Swift's first engagement with Ireland. The point is actually that Swift was *not* referring to Ireland when he wrote, in 1701, words similar to these:

I [...] can't forbear observing, that there is an appearance of *Fatality*; and that the Period of a State approaches, when a Concurrence of many Circumstances both Within and Without, unite to its Ruin; while the whole Body of the People are either stupidly negligent, or else giving in with all their Might to those very Practices that are working their Destruction. To see whole Bodies of Men breaking a CONSTITUTION, by the very same Errors that so many have been broke before [...] These and some others that might be Named, appear to be the most likely Symptoms in a State of *Sickness unto Death*.¹²

When they were *re-written* in 1720, however, these words did refer to Ireland. In fact, they seem uniquely fitted to Swift's work in the decade to come, with its as yet unwritten themes of a nation in a state of terminal decline, one hastened by the cynical collusion of the 'knaves' who run it and the feckless indifference of the 'fools' they govern. Generic as well as thematic considerations confirm its aptness. *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome* is, says Irvin Ehrenpreis, an example of 'parallel history', defined as 'a common method of evading censorship or of teaching by indirection'.¹³ Its original parallel had been between the nobles and commons of Rome and Greece and the two houses of the English Parliament.¹⁴ Ehrenpreis adds that the 'humblest form' of this rhetorical genre 'was merely the reprinting of a historical work in circumstances which made the affairs related seem parallel to recent events'. A relevant example is William Molyneux's *The Case of Ireland's being bound by Acts*

¹² *Hibernia's Passive Obedience*, pp. 6–8; cf. *Prose* I, 228–9.

¹³ Ehrenpreis, II, *Dr. Swift* (London: Methuen, 1967), 48.

¹⁴ The *Contests and Dissensions* opposed the English House of Commons' impeachment of four Whig Lords for arranging international treaties without keeping Parliament informed. The treaties in question were the First and Second Partition Treaties, which were concerned to divide Spanish possessions among the major European powers and to settle the question of who would succeed Charles II to the Spanish throne, thus avoiding war. They failed in this objective. (Ehrenpreis, II, 44–7).

of *Parliament in England, Stated* (1698), which was said by Bishop Nicolson to have been ‘in every bodie’s hand’ when it was reprinted in 1720.¹⁵ Waters’s cento of Swiftian maxims is also a ‘parallel history’, which takes its form from the need to evade censorship. The author writes that ‘it might not be safe, for persons under servile Tenures, to give vent to their own Sentiments’, so he resorts to the strategy of ‘quoting approved of Maxims, by the most Zealous Patriots of *Revolution Principles*’.¹⁶ The pamphlet is, however, an altogether more radical example of the genre than either the reprint of Molyneux or the *Contests and Dissensions* as it first appeared in 1701. It is a ‘parallel history’ in that it creates a parallel universe. It imagines a possible world whose history deviates from that of the actual world sufficiently for the divergence to be noted, and yet not so much that the new world becomes unrecognizable.¹⁷ *Hibernia’s Passive Obedience* creates a possible world inhabited by a dramatically altered figure of ‘Jonathan Swift’, insofar as the name between the inverted commas has the meaning it had for Irish readers in the 1720s, namely a champion of the political liberties of the Irish ‘nation’, the ‘Hibernian Patriot’ as he was being called by 1725.¹⁸ *Hibernia’s Passive Obedience* can be credited with inventing this ‘Hibernian Patriot’ and citing 1701 as the year of his birth.

It is worth repeating that *Contests and Dissensions* and the political crisis from which it emerged have nothing to do with Ireland. This fact becomes all the more striking when we return to the text of 1701, and the paragraph that follows after the one reprinted by Waters in 1720:

¹⁵ Ferguson, p. 53, quoting Dublin Public Libraries, Gilbert Collection MS 27, Nicolson to Wake, 6 October, 1719.

¹⁶ *Hibernia’s Passive Obedience*, p. 4. Admittedly, it seems strange that *Hibernia’s Passive Obedience* goes to such lengths to avoid prosecution, given that Waters would shortly go on to publish *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*, and to be prosecuted for his pains. Ehrenpreis (III, 129–30) details the lengths that Swift went to after the publication of the *Proposal* to secure a decree of *noli prosequi* from Lord Lieutenant Grafton in the resulting case.

¹⁷ For definitions of the ‘possible world’ concept, see Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 21; Gregory McCulloch, *The Game of the Name: Introducing Language, Logic, and Mind* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 112.

¹⁸ A collected edition of the Drapier’s letters was published by George Faulkner in 1725 under the title *Fraud Detected; or, the Hibernian Patriot*.

THERE are some Conjunctions wherein the Death or Dissolution of Government is more lamentable in its Consequences than it would be in others. And, I think, a State can never arrive to its Period in a more deplorable *Crisis*, than at a Time when some *Prince in the Neighbourhood*, of vast Power and Ambition, lies hovering like a Vulture to devour, or at least, dismember its dying Carcase; by which Means, it becomes only a Province or Acquisition to some mighty Monarchy, without Hopes of a Resurrection.¹⁹

The parallels in this passage with Swift's writing of the twenties are of course entirely fortuitous. The Drapier may say that William Wood 'goes about *watching* when to *devour us*' (X, 22), just as 'some Prince' hovers over this passage 'like a Vulture', waiting to do the same. The image of 'a Carcass [...] without hopes of a Resurrection' may sound similar to what Swift was saying of Ireland during the famine years of 1727–9. But these are commonplaces of political rhetoric: Ehrenpreis goes so far as to say that Swift's use of the body-politic metaphor reflects 'old, impotent thinking' in a discourse where '[c]lich  invites clich '.²⁰ That the paragraph immediately preceding this one was reprinted and applied to Ireland in 1720 is a contingent rather than a necessary truth: the 'Prince' it speaks of is Louis XIV and he waits to devour Europe, not the whole people of Ireland. The relationship between the state of Europe in 1701 and of Ireland in 1720 is an affinity engineered by the author of *Hibernia's Passive Obedience*, but it remains an affinity nonetheless. So when we return to the *Contests and Dissensions via Hibernia's Passive Obedience*, this passage cannot help but have its reference altered, transformed into something new and strange, simply because it *can* refer to Ireland in 1720. *Hibernia's Passive Obedience* infuses the entire text with a new power and relevance.

The passage deals with the way a territory becomes 'only a Province or Acquisition to some mighty Monarchy' and this is what was perceived to be happening to Ireland in 1720. Long before that date, William King observed this phenomenon when he wrote that 'the wise man tells us, *Eccl[esiastes]* 5,8: If thou seest oppression of the poor and violent perverting of judgement and Justice *in a*

¹⁹ *Prose* I, 229.

²⁰ Ehrenpreis, p. 53.

province marvell not at the matter', for this is the generally case of all provinces and particularly of Ireland'.²¹ Swift himself had, during his time as a Tory propagandist, composed an issue of the *Examiner* that took the form of a parallel history, in which Thomas Wharton, the Whig Lord Lieutenant, was compared to Verres, the Roman Governor of Sicily, a 'province' which 'had neither the Benefit of our Laws, nor their own, nor even of Common Right'.²² It was in 1720, however, that King's private observations and Swift's learned satire gave way to a popular sense of disenfranchisement in Ireland. This was the 'universal disaffection of all people thro' the whole Kingdom' that King had spoken of, and the language of slavery became the conduit for such disaffection.²³ I have shown that Swift's image of a land of slaves draws on the rhetoric of this moment, but it is equally true that the moment was in one sense formed out of Swift's language, which seems to take on an agency of its own. For the author of *Hibernia's Passive Obedience*, Swift's earlier writing became the necessary means to articulate the crisis of 1720, even before Swift had written a word about it. We could say that the 'Irish' Swift, the Hibernian Patriot, was born out of the crisis caused by the 1720 Act.

III

The Declaratory Act began its passage through the British Parliament on 1 February 1720. It cleared the Commons on what was technically the first day of the new year, 26 March. Archbishop King referred to it as 'our Enslaving Bill', and it has also been known as the Dependency Law and the sixth of George the First, as well as the Declaratory Act.²⁴ The name that the act took from its own content was

²¹ Fauske, *Jonathan Swift and the Church of Ireland 1710–1724*, p. 75, quoting King to Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, 29 January 1697. Emphasis in original.

²² Ferguson, p. 39. Swift went on to produce *A Short Character of His Excellency Thomas Earl of Wharton*, which stated that the 'People of Ireland' were distinguished from 'all her Majesty's Subjects' in that they lived under 'arbitrary Power, and Oppression', and Ireland's English governors 'valued themselves upon every Step they make, towards finishing the Slavery of that People, as if it were gaining a mighty Point to the Advantage of England' (*Prose III, The Examiner and Other Pieces Written in 1710–11* (1940; repr. 1946), 177).

²³ Ferguson, p. 53, quoting King to Molesworth, 20 May, 1720; Burns, p. 109.

²⁴ King to Francis Annesley, 28 October, 1721, TCD MS 750/7, p. 20.

‘An Act for the better securing the Dependency of the Kingdom of Ireland, on the Crown of Great Britain’. It made two provisions. The first was that ‘the [...] Kingdom of Ireland hath been, is and of right ought to be, subordinate unto and dependent upon the imperial Crown of Great Britain’; the second was an assertion that the Irish House of Lords had no right to act as the highest court of appeal for cases originating in Ireland. This power was said by the act to be vested in the British House of Lords.²⁵

The words ‘subordinate’ and ‘dependent’ are the ones that leap out at a modern reader, but to many contemporaries the more damaging clause was the one that removed the appellate jurisdiction of the Irish upper house. Although it refers to the ‘Kingdom of Ireland’ as subordinate, the terms of the Act actually applied to the country’s parliament, and in this respect it was simply articulating *de jure* what was a *de facto* constitutional position. By 1720 the Irish parliament had regained some of the ‘legislative initiative’ it had lost under the statute known as Poyning’s Law, but it remained dependent on the English legislature in important ways.²⁶ Technically speaking, the Irish Parliament could not originate any of its own laws. Either house could draw up ‘heads of bills’, documents that were transmitted to the English Privy Council for approval and then sent back as actual bills to be debated in both houses before being returned to England for royal assent. The English Privy Council had the power to amend any bill or even to reject it entirely. There were also precedents for the London Parliament’s ability to promulgate laws that were binding in Ireland. When the Declaratory Bill was being debated in England, Philip Yorke invoked the Resumption Act of 1700 as a piece of legislation ‘made in England binding Ireland that was complied with there’.²⁷ In 1698, William Molyneux had written *The Case of Ireland’s being Bound by Act of Parliament in England, Stated* because, as his title suggests, it was the case that Acts of Parliament passed in England had been binding in Ireland, even though that country possessed its own assemblies for

²⁵ The Act is reproduced in *Field Day Anthology*, I, 882.

²⁶ ‘Poyning’s law’ was a statute of Henry VII enacted in 1494. It provided that the Irish parliament could only convene when the King and council in England were satisfied that there was expedient cause for it do so. Adapted from Burns, *Irish Parliamentary Politics*, p. 5, which is also the source of the phrase ‘legislative initiative’.

²⁷ Burns, p. 103.

making laws. Molyneux even provides a list of such laws that had passed between 1641 and the time of writing.²⁸ He was trying to refute the legality of an existing procedure, rather than prevent a possible one from coming into being. The issue that had still to be resolved, and the one that prompted Molyneux to preface his book with a disclaimer, was the problem of the Irish House Lords' jurisdiction in its capacity as a court of law.

In the opening pages of his book, Molyneux makes three denials. He asserts that he has no '*Concern in Wooll, or in the Wooll-Trade*', that he is '*no wise Interested in the Forfeitures, or Grants*', and that he is '*not at all Solicitous, whether the Bishop, or Society of Derry Recover the Land they Contest about*'.²⁹ The last comment is a reference to William King. When Molyneux's book was first printed in 1698, King, then Bishop of Derry, was involved in a legal dispute with the Irish Society of London over some lands and fishery rights in his diocese.³⁰ King was defeated by his opponents in the Irish Court of Chancery, and so he appealed the case to the Irish House of Lords, where the judgement was overturned in his favour. In May 1698, however, the English House of Lords overturned the decision of the Irish peers – perhaps, suggests Victory, because Molyneux's book had 'hardened attitudes against the bishop'.³¹ A year later, the English Lords also overruled its Irish counterpart in a case between the Earl of Meath and Lord Ward. The Irish Lords delayed their response until 1704, when they 'passed a series of unanimous resolutions asserting the appellate jurisdiction of their house in strident language' and reversing the decision of the English House.³² The constitutional implications of these resolutions were not entered into at the time, and Addison would later refer to this outcome as being talked about in Ireland 'with a secret kind of triumph'.³³ In spite of the Irish Lords' victory on this score, the issue of appellate jurisdiction did

²⁸ William Molyneux, *The Case of Ireland's being bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated* (Dublin: Joseph Ray, 1698), pp. 99–111.

²⁹ Molyneux, verso of second unnumbered page following A4.

³⁰ Philip O'Regan, *Archbishop William King of Dublin (1650–1729) and the Constitution in Church and State* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 99.

³¹ Victory, 'Declaratory Act', p. 11; Burns, *Irish Parliamentary Politics*, pp. 36–7.

³² Burns, p. 41.

³³ Addison to Godolphin, 30 June 1709, quoted by Victory, p. 13.

not go away. It was settled decisively by the 1720 Declaratory Act, which represented the final word on yet another case involving lands. This time the disputants were Maurice Annesley and Hester Sherlock. Their case, which concerned lands in county Kildare, had been heard in the Court of Exchequer. The Court found for Annesley but the Irish Lords upheld Sherlock's appeal.³⁴ Once again, the decision of the Irish Lords was reversed when the case reached England, and the Irish Lords' reaction was more provocative than it had been in 1705. They imprisoned the Barons of the Court of Exchequer for upholding the English Lords' decision, and in October 1719 issued an address to the King explaining their actions.³⁵ The address complained that 'these proceedings of the lords of England have greatly embarrassed your parliament and disquieted the generality of your most loyal protestant subjects in this your kingdom'.³⁶ It added that the issue of jurisdiction had not been raised 'whilst many of the peers and commons who sat in parliament were papists' but this was no longer the case 'of late'. The Lords complained the issue had only been raised in recent times, when 'only protestants are qualified to have a share in the legislature' and that the result was 'great discouragement and weakening of the protestant interest in Ireland'.³⁷ The response of the British Lords was to formulate and pass the Declaratory Act, pausing only to make a vote of thanks to the Barons of the Exchequer for their courage.³⁸

The Act's denial of the Irish Lords' appellate jurisdiction seems more like a point pedantically scored than a killer blow, but its impact was felt to be devastating. It was perceived to be so destructive because it deprived Ireland of a supreme legislature and put its future at the mercy of the English Lords. This had worrying ramifications for the system of land tenure. As a contemporary pamphlet points out, 'Most of the Estates and Purchasers, in the common Opinion, wou'd be unsettl'd at

³⁴ Ferguson, p. 45.

³⁵ Burns, p. 96. The Barons of the Court of Exchequer were the most senior judges of the court when it sat as a court of Common Law.

³⁶ Representation of the Irish House of Lords, October 1719. Reprinted in *Irish Historical Documents 1172-1922*, ed. by Edmund Curtis and R. B. McDowell (London: Methuen, 1943), pp. 214-218, p. 217.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ferguson, p.46; Burns, p. 99.

one Stroke; and a World of Families wou'd apprehend themselves to be utterly ruin'd' if the bill should become law. In such an eventuality, the pamphlet goes on to explain, the English 'Lords will [...] come to have the Disposal of all the Property in *Ireland*'.³⁹ That eventuality did transpire, in theory at least, when the Act became law. It was not likely that the English Lords would suddenly reverse the confiscations and forfeitures of land that had come to pass when the Treaty of Limerick was finally implemented in 1697. We should bear in mind that the Irish Lords found in favour of Hester Sherlock, whose brother Christopher had forfeited his lands after the Williamite victory. Equally, one of the first assertions of post-Tudor Ireland's judicial and legislative independence had come from the Jacobite Parliament of 1689 – though this would have been for different reasons from those cited by the opponents of the Declaratory Act.⁴⁰

No one opposed the Act out of a genuine fear that the settlement of 1691 would be reversed. The point was rather that, because they now had the final say in any case originating in Ireland, the English Lords had gained authority to transform the structure of Irish society as dramatically as the Cromwellian and Williamite confiscations had done in the previous century. Equally, they had the power to ensure that the status quo remained entirely unchanged; the important thing was that the prerogative was now vested in them and not the Kingdom of Ireland. The Act amounted to a performative statement that transformed a gradual and theoretical erosion of power into a sudden and catastrophic loss of agency. It asserted that the future of Ireland no longer lay within the power of Irish governors to shape. Without a supreme legislature, Ireland was no longer a kingdom, in the sense of that term as it was understood by the opponents of the Act to denote a separate realm under the dual monarchy instituted by Henry II. This is why Archbishop King, using the

³⁹ J[ohn] T[olan]d, *An Act for the better securing the Dependency of Ireland upon the Crown of Great Britain. To which is added, J- - - -n T- - - -d, Esq; his Reasons Why the Bill for the Better Securing the Dependency of the Kingdom of Ireland, should not pass* (London: [n. pub], 1720,) p. 7, 8. This is a version, published after the act had become law, of *Reasons most humbly offer'd to the honble House of Commons why the bill sent down to them from the most honble House of Lords [...] shou'd not pass* (London: R. Franklin, 1720).

⁴⁰ Victory, p. 9, citing A. G. Donaldson, *Some Comparative Aspects of Irish Law*.

possessive pronoun to refer to himself and his fellow Irish peers, referred to the Declaratory Act as ‘the Bill to destroy our Jurisdiction and in truth the Kingdom’.⁴¹

Although figures like King had for many years murmured in private at what they saw as the transformation of their kingdom into a province, 1720 was the moment when this alteration was manifested publicly in the form of the Act. This was the moment when subjects began to re-imagine themselves as slaves. Even as he called it ‘no Nation’, Swift’s nation was faced with the legal possibility of its dissolution in the spring of 1720.⁴² Tensions ran so high at the time of the controversy that a mob attacked the house of one of the imprisoned Barons and smashed his windows.⁴³ Bishop Nicolson wrote that ‘a seditious spirit is arisen (and grown rampant) amongst us; which is daily animating the populace to assert their Irish liberties, exempt from the dominion of (what they call) foreigners’.⁴⁴ There were outpourings in print as well as on the streets. The reprint of Molyneux, and the reworking of Swift that was *Hibernia’s Passive Obedience*, were just two of many pieces expressing the political fervour that developed between the autumn of 1719 and the spring of 1720. Also among this multitude was *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*.

IV

Although it emerged from the controversies surrounding the act of 1720 and was ‘manifestly intended to keep them alive’, Swift’s *Proposal* has very little to say on the matter, other than to pose the question of ‘whether a Law to bind Men without their own Consent, be obligatory *in foro Conscientiæ*’.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, when the Declaratory Act was finally repealed in 1782, Henry Grattan knew whom to thank.

⁴¹ King to Southwell, February 13, 1720, TCD MS 750/6, p. 32.

⁴² Swift to Charles Ford, 4 April 1720, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 327.

⁴³ Burns, p. 96.

⁴⁴ Victory, p. 21, quoting Nicolson to Wake, 1 September, 1719, BL Add. MS 6,116, fol. 89.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, p. 54; *Prose IX*, 19.

The leader of the movement for legislative independence stood up in the Irish Parliament and said that he was about to 'address a free people'. He went on to salute the architects of that people's liberty: 'Spirit of Swift! spirit of Molyneux! your genius has prevailed! Ireland is now a nation!'⁴⁶

An idea, as Don Marquis said, 'isn't responsible for the people who believe in it', and the spirits of dead authors have no power of veto over the individuals that may invoke them.⁴⁷ Swift represents an unlikely patron for a polity that comes into being when 'the Presbyterians of Bangor petition for the freedom of the Catholics of Munster'.⁴⁸ Grattan's ideals are more readily assimilable to modern, pluralist, concepts of freedom than any that could be extrapolated from Swift's writing. As Downie points out, Swift entertains a negative concept of freedom as liberty 'from certain invasions of individual rights and privileges' in a time when, to quote Locke, 'Government has no other end but the preservation of Property'.⁴⁹ Grattan's version of the Irish nation was more inclusive than the one that assembled to oppose the act sixty years earlier. But this fact should not lead us into regarding the first wave of opposition as homogeneous, since the speaker of the 1720 *Proposal* kept some surprising company.

If Grattan represents an unlikely successor to Swift then John Toland was an equally improbable fellow-traveller in 1720. Both authors produced pamphlets attesting the political disquiet of that year, but twelve years earlier Swift had dismissed his latter-day ally in the most scathing terms as 'an *Irish Priest*, the Son of an *Irish Priest*'.⁵⁰ Toland, the author of *Reasons most humbly offer'd to the honorable House of Commons*, represents a mixture of forces and allegiances that is every bit

⁴⁶ Henry Grattan, 'Triumph of Irish Independence [Speech to the Irish Parliament], April 16, 1782', in *The Speeches of the Right Hon. Henry Grattan; to which is added his Letter on the Union, with a Commentary on his Career and Character by Daniel Owen Madden, Esq.* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1865), p. 70–77, p. 70. Excerpted in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, I, 918–921, 919. The *Field Day* editors note that when he prepared his addresses for publication, 'Grattan appears to have written up this speech as he would have liked to have delivered it' rather than as he actually spoke it, so 'the text, with its memorable rhetoric and sense of historical perspective, is a later fabrication' (Ibid., 918).

⁴⁷ Quoted in the *Independent*, 21 October 2002, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Grattan, *Speeches*, p. 71.

⁴⁹ 'Swift's Politics', p. 54, citing Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*.

⁵⁰ *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity*, *Prose II*, 26–39, 29.

as complex as the nation whose freedom Grattan would go on to proclaim in 1782. He was born on what one biographical study has called the ‘wild northern Irish peninsula of Inishowen’, County Donegal.⁵¹ A Catholic by birth and by his own admission the son of a priest and his concubine, Toland worked as a shepherd until his mid teens. His conversion to Protestantism was rewarded with a place at the local school by sponsors who hoped he would use his native proficiency in Irish to convert others. In 1696, after studies at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leiden and Oxford, Toland produced *Christianity not Mysterious*. The parliamentary committee on religion found this volume so offensive that both the national and the city governments were called upon to express their disapproval. The Irish Commons ordered the hangman to burn Toland’s book twice, once outside the Parliament House and an hour later outside the Tholsel. They also recommended that Toland be prosecuted, causing him to flee the country to which he had briefly returned.⁵²

Toland’s 1720 defence of the Irish Parliament’s rights is not just notable for its magnanimity towards the institution that had once hounded him. It is also striking for the subsidiary arguments it manages to interpolate into the main one. His tract begins with the assertion that ‘The Protestants [of Ireland] have, on all Occasions, [...] vigilantly asserted [...] the Rights of the Crown of *England*’, and commends their loyalty in ‘suppressing Rebellions against his present Majesty, both in *England* and *Scotland*’. Among those Irish Protestants it singles out ‘the *Dissenters*’, who, ‘notwithstanding their legal Incapacity, took Arms at their own Charge for the common Interest, to the great Joy of all good Churchmen’. It also notes pointedly that in spite of their exemplary behaviour, the Irish Dissenters still ‘stand in need of a Pardon to this Hour’.⁵³ This was a reference to another part of the legislative programme that had been brought before the Irish Parliament in the session of 1719–

⁵¹ Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 2.

⁵² Sullivan, pp. 3–9; J. G. Simms, ‘John Toland, (1670–1722), a Donegal Heretic’, in *idem.*, *War and Politics in Ireland, 1649–1730*, (London: Hambledon, 1986), pp. 31–47, p. 38; *Field Day Anthology*, 803–4, Victory, ‘Declaratory Act’, p. 26. See also the title essay in Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop and other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1998).

⁵³ [Toland], *An Act for the better securing the Dependency of Ireland upon the Crown of Great Britain*, p. 5.

20, a proposed Toleration Bill. To committed Anglicans such as Swift and King, this bill was no less objectionable than the one designed to curb the powers of the Irish Parliament – Swift’s 1720 *Proposal* censures the Irish Parliament for presuming to concern itself with ‘Regulation of *Church* Matters’ and for failing to attend to the *State of the Nation*’ (IX, 16). In his 1727 poem ‘Ireland’, as my introduction has shown, Swift held up Dublin Castle’s intention to ‘pass another popery bill’ as an emblem of Ireland’s slavish condition. For Toland, conversely, the Test Act itself was an instrument of slavery. The Parliament’s failure to repeal it, along with its refusal to pass another popery bill, represented to him a deviation from the course of liberty. He and Swift may have concurred on a basic and general conception of liberty, but in the details, and indeed in their notions of slavery, they were far from being in agreement.

Toland, as Victory notes, wrote his pamphlet at the behest of Viscount Molesworth, who had spoken out against slavery in the Irish House of Lords.⁵⁴ The Viscount may have been less of a maverick than his protégé, but his anti-clericalism was no less pronounced. His views are especially notable for the form in which they were expressed. In 1694, Molesworth produced a book based on his experiences as William III’s envoy extraordinary to the Danish court. *An Account of Denmark, as it was in the year 1692* is a remarkable work in which polemic masquerades as documentary. Molesworth relates how in 1660, the Danish Commons had surrendered absolute power to their king and made his elective monarchy into a hereditary office. ‘The Clergy’, Molesworth writes, ‘were the only Gainers in this Point’, as they enjoy the court’s favour for their services as ‘the Instruments that first promoted, and now keep the People in a due Temper of Slavery; the Passive Obedience Principle riding triumphant in this unhappy Kingdom’.⁵⁵ His account is both revelatory and cautionary. ‘*Slavery*’, remarks the preface, ‘has within these last 200 Years crept upon *Europe*’ and by the time of writing it had overtaken ‘most of

⁵⁴ Victory, p. 26 and p. 26, n. 51, citing King to Molesworth, 10 September 1720, and same to same, 29 September 1720, TCD MS 750/6, pp. 117–8, p. 124.

⁵⁵ [Robert Molesworth], *An Account of Denmark, as it was in the Year 1692* (London: Thomas Longman, 1738), p. 47. This is the fourth edition of a text first published in 1694.

the Protestant, as well as Popish countries'.⁵⁶ The refusal to distinguish between Protestant and Catholic 'arbitrary' monarchies was the part that was meant to startle. Slavery in Denmark 'seems to be more absolutely established than it is in *France*' and, as Molesworth makes clear in his conclusion:

IT has been a great Mistake among us, That the Popish Religion is the only one, of all the Christian Sects, proper to introduce and establish Slavery in a Nation, insomuch that Popery and Slavery have been thought inseparable [...] [W]hoever takes the Pains to visit the Protestant Countries abroad, who have lost their Liberty even since they changed their Religion for a better, will be convinced that it is not Popery, as such, but the Doctrine of a blind Obedience, in what Religion soever it be found, that is the Destruction of the Liberty, and consequently of all the Happiness of any Nation.⁵⁷

Such revelations of the insidious and non-denominational character of slavery caused a stir at the time the book was published, chiefly in London where it 'played a considerable part in establishing an atmosphere [...] in which the views of disaffected churchmen [...] could be heard'.⁵⁸ By 1720, Molesworth had found that it was possible to impose 'slavery' even without the cover of religion. Like Swift's *Contests and Dissensions*, Molesworth's book takes on a new and unanticipated relevance in 1720. Cast against the crisis surrounding the Declaratory Act, his *Account of Denmark* emerges as yet another 'parallel history', a prolepsis of the enslavement that had yet to engulf Ireland, which was then one of only three kingdoms in Europe, along with Poland and Great Britain, where the parliamentary tradition had not been 'lost [...] within this last Age'.⁵⁹ Together Molesworth and Toland reveal that there is a great deal of room to manoeuvre within the confines of such an 'uncontrolled and universally agreed Maxim' as the Drapier's definition of freedom. They also show that Swift was not the only controversialist to bring a blended agenda to bear upon the crisis of 1720.

⁵⁶ Molesworth, p. x.

⁵⁷ Molesworth, pp. 164–6

⁵⁸ *Field Day Anthology*, I, 870.

⁵⁹ Molesworth, p. 27.

While the radicalism of the Molesworth circle has always been recognized, Swift's equally polemical treatment of issues arising from the 1720 Act tends to be misread as an uncomplicated defence of the 'national interest'. This is true of eighteenth-century accounts of Swift as of more recent ones. In *Lives of the English Poets*, for example, Samuel Johnson argues that Swift's 1720 *Proposal* was essentially a defence of a 'natural right' of every 'man to use the productions of his own labour'. The 'outrageous resentment' expressed against the *Proposal* was explained by Johnson as originating among 'those who had an interest in the English trade'. By contrast, Johnson sees no such natural rights informing Molesworth's *Account of Denmark*. In his life of William King (the poet, not the archbishop), Johnson says that Molesworth, in his text of 1694, 'takes the opportunity of insinuating those wild principles, by which he supposes liberty to be established'.⁶⁰ In the reading of this chapter, Johnson's criticism applies equally to Swift's text, which may be short on what Johnson would recognize as 'wild principles' but could not be said to lack insinuations. Eleven of its twenty paragraphs deal with something other than the proposal named in the title. In fact, the concern with domestic manufactures could be called a pretext, but this would be to impute a coherent schema to a piece that is essentially a tapestry of subtexts. Ultimately, the *Proposal* derives its force not from what it says but from what it does.

Like Molesworth and Toland, Swift goes about his business in the 1720 *Proposal* by bringing a new inflection to the language of slavery. The text introduces an image of a people in a state of bondage, but it does so in a paragraph addressed not to them but to their masters:

I WOULD now expostulate a little with our Country Landlords; who, by unmeasurable *screwing* and *racking* their Tenants all over the Kingdom, have already reduced the miserable *People* to a *worse Condition* than the *Peasants* in *France*, or the *Vassals* in *Germany* and *Poland*; so that the whole *Species* of what we call *Substantial Farmers*, will, in a very few Years, be utterly at an End. (IX, 21)

⁶⁰ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), III, 30–31; II, 27.

Terms such as ‘*Peasants*’ and ‘*Vassals*’ are more than simple synonyms for ‘poor farmers’: in the 1720s they were an index of political malaise as much as economic distress. Although Archbishop King had in 1697 instructed his correspondent not to marvel at ‘the oppression of the poor [...] *in a province*’, he was in 1719 wondering at the scale of that oppression with an analogy that was almost identical to Swift’s. King wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury that he was ‘assured that the Peasants in France and Turkey live better than Ten[ants] in Ireland’.⁶¹ The *Proposal*’s references to European peasantry make public a sense of unease that the Archbishop had voiced in private, and Swift expressed it in such a way as to emphasise that the human tragedy had implications, and even origins, that were political. Both men were observing not simply a heart-wrenching scene but a fundamental aberration. They were bearing witness to the presence of a social class that the received narrative of recent history did not allow to exist.

Sightings of ‘peasants’ and ‘vassals’ in the Irish countryside were, from the point of view of such observers as Swift and King, a sign that something had gone seriously wrong, that the edifice built on the foundations of 1691 was beginning to subside, not just in terms of constitutional theory but in terms of the fabric, the literal constitution, of the kingdom. The Universal Proposer’s use of terms like ‘peasant’ and ‘vassal’, indicates that by 1720 the perceived failure of the country’s institutions was becoming general – and not merely confined to the highest levels of sovereign and legal agency. It conveys a sense that history had played a cruel trick. Although the spectre of James II had been banished, the accompanying threat of ‘Slavery, Misery and Ruin’, described in William King’s account of the fate narrowly averted by the advent of William III, had somehow been carried out.⁶² In observing farmers in a worse condition than the ‘*Peasants in France*’, Swift asserts the sudden disappearance of the state established and guaranteed by the principles of the Glorious Revolution.

⁶¹ King to Archbishop Wake, 2 June 1719, TCD MS 750/5, p. 167.

⁶² [William King], *The State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James’s Government* (London: Samuel Roycroft, 1691; 3rd edn with Additions, 1692), p. 255.

In Ireland some of those guarantees had the character not of permanent undertakings but of limited warranties, and in 1718 and 1719 they duly began to expire. It was in these years that the twenty-one year leases granted after the Williamite settlement began to run their course. Landlords saw an opportunity to renegotiate existing agreements and began, so Swift says, ‘*screwing and racking* their Tenants all over the Kingdom’. Rent increases were among several factors that gave rise to an economic depression whose symptoms included a sudden increase in emigration rates. Swift, in 1720, sees Ireland’s substantial farmers as an endangered ‘*Species*’ because those with enough money to leave the country were migrating to America.⁶³ Those without it were being reduced to poverty by a number of economic factors, which included, but did not solely consist in, the fact of being tied to debilitating tenancies. As my final chapter explains, this situation was mirrored at the end of the 1720s with the due expiry of the thirty-one year leases, and this time the depression was worsened by bad harvests. What appears to modern eyes as a cyclical economic downturn was perceived by contemporaries in an altogether more apocalyptic fashion. It seemed that the entire country was grinding to a halt, and, as with all apocalypses, the event had been both prefigured and foretold.

Among landowners in Denmark in 1692, Molesworth had observed that ‘There is no computing [...] by Number of Acres, but by Number of Boors, who with all that belong to them, appertain to the Proprietor of the Land’. The Danish peasant was caught in a poverty trap. Money could neither be saved nor invested in durable goods since both forms of property were liable to be seized as, or in lieu of, rent. Consequently, Molesworth writes, ‘The Peasant or Boor, as soon as he gets a *Rix-Dollar*, lays it out in Brandy with all haste, lest the landlord, whose Slave he is, should hear of it and take it from him’.⁶⁴ His account makes the point that systems of ‘arbitrary power’ do not simply remove safeguards against corruption at the level of the executive. If a citizen under such a system is a figurative ‘slave’ to the

⁶³ R. J. Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America, 1717–1775* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) pp. 19–32.

⁶⁴ Molesworth, *An Account of Denmark*, p. 55, p. 54.

political whims of the monarch, then the agricultural classes are literal helots to their landlords.

So went Molesworth's warning to English readers in 1694. In 1720, Swift prophesied to Irish readers that 'the whole *Species* of [...] *Substantial Farmers*, will, in a very few Years, be utterly at an End', with the added implication that this '*Species*' would be replaced by a peasant class like that found in France. An echo of this nostalgia for a vanishing middle rank is found in Part Three of *Gulliver's Travels*. In the Governor of Glubbubdrib's palace the hero tires of meeting an endless parade of historical dignitaries and villains and eventually expresses a desire 'that some *English Yeomen* of the old Stamp, might be summoned to appear; once so famous for the Simplicity of their Manners, Dyet and Dress; [...] for their true Spirit of Liberty'.⁶⁵ Such visions were hard to come by not only among the sorcerers but in Ireland as well. By 1729, in the eyes of the Modest Proposer at least, prediction and fantasy had coalesced. He outlines the second advantage of his scheme by proposing that 'poorer Tenants' will have 'something valuable of their own', their oven-ready children, that may help to 'pay their Landlord's Rent' in lieu of cash (XII, 114–5). The succeeding generation does not merely inherit the debt, but becomes it. Like Molesworth's Danish 'Boors', the 'poorer Tenants' of the Proposer's Ireland are literally the chattels of their landlords, except that the *Modest Proposal* takes the process of literalization beyond the point where metaphoricity should have mercifully intervened.

A Modest Proposal's failure to restrain the literal signification of its own language is itself figurative, a metaphor for a creeping loss of agency made explosively manifest. The erosion of autonomy on the constitutional scale, as discussed in this chapter, provides both a context and an analogue for that ebbing of power. In each case, a gradual and insidious process culminates and becomes real through a sudden performative utterance. The language of *A Modest Proposal* is ungovernable because its situation is ungovernable: its putative solution is merely another symptom of a pervasive loss of control that stems from any power to govern

⁶⁵ *Prose XI, Gulliver's Travels*, ed. by Herbert Davies, with an introduction by Harold Williams (1949; repr. 1965), 201.

having been removed, shirked, abdicated or simply forgotten, whether at the level of language, law, or historical destiny. It was to obviate just such a collapse into helplessness that the ‘Hibernian Patriot’ had been brought into being. His message, first articulated in the *Proposal for [...] Irish Manufacture*, was that as consumers, his readers were possessed of the power to effect change. Did the Hibernian Patriot fail?

The answer depends on what we expect him to do. As outlined in the Introduction, this thesis follows Said’s definition of Swift’s writing as ‘precisely occasional [...] stimulated by a specific occasion and planned in some way to change it’. The title of Swift’s 1720 *Proposal* may proclaim a specific mission but the body of the text frustrates any search for strategies carefully tailored to specific results, and the persona of the speaker embodies the text’s wilful throwing together of allegiances, causes and tactics. Something of that persona’s character is shown in the last paragraph, when the Proposer confesses that he ‘CANNOT forbear saying one Word upon a *Thing* they call a *Bank*’ (IX 21–2). The really significant aspect of this paragraph is that the Proposer ‘CANNOT forbear’ from introducing it. This is not the only digression that he cannot refrain from embarking upon. As well as taking sideswipes at the Declaratory Act and at the parliament’s meddling in church affairs, the Proposer manages over the course of this short pamphlet to attack a bewildering array of interests. He upbraids the ‘politick Gentlemen of *Ireland*’ for depopulating vast ‘Tracts of the best Land, for the feeding of Sheep’ (p. 15). He complains of ‘a Disposition to a contemptuous Treatment of *Ireland* in some [English] chief *Governors*’ and of the ‘high Style of several Speeches from the *Throne*’ (20). Even the ‘Shopkeepers’ of Dublin are singled out for being ‘*utterly* destitute of common Sense’ (17). Perhaps mindful of its inchoate arrangement, Swift would later dismiss his text as a ‘weak hasty Scribble’.⁶⁶ All occasional writing is to some extent deformed by the pressure of a range of concerns, but Said’s description of Swift as a ‘precisely occasional’ writer raises questions that cannot but be brushed aside with adjectives like ‘weak’ and ‘hasty’. If the *Proposal for [...] Irish Manufacture* was,

⁶⁶ Swift to Sir Thomas Hanmer, 1 October 1720, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 345, quoted in Ferguson, p. 56.

as it seems to have been, ‘stimulated by a specific occasion’ and planned ‘in some way to change it’, then we have to ask whether the text has a definite strategy for change, or whether it tries to do so more vaguely, ‘in some way’.

The problem can be illustrated through the issue of the bank. Swift actively opposed the establishment of a Bank of Ireland. A few squibs of his formed a small part of the paper war that began to be fought in earnest after the scheme was formally proposed by Lord Lieutenant Grafton in August 1721.⁶⁷ As Fauske points out, the two main combatants in the struggle were Hercules Rowley and Henry Maxwell, who opposed and favoured the scheme respectively.⁶⁸ In a pamphlet of 1721, Rowley had argued by way of an aside that ‘Lessening our Importations and encouraging our manufactures would feed the hungry, clothe the naked and relieve the oppressed’.⁶⁹ This is the kernel of Swift’s 1720 *Proposal*, which had itself been unable to refrain from taking on as a coda the essential part of Rowley’s argument. Between them the two pamphlets evince a certain confusion. Was the lessening of importations a strategy or an end in itself? Did the Bank represent a new problem to be tackled or a further encroachment by the British administration? What was the single, basic, thing that had to be changed?

The classic response to that question is posed eloquently in Swift’s 1720 *Proposal*:

Whoever travels this Country, and observes the *Face* of Nature, or the *Faces*, and Habits, and Dwellings of the *Natives*, will hardly think himself in a Land where either *Law*, *Religion*, or *common Humanity* is professed. (IX, 21)

⁶⁷ Fauske, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 112. Opposition to the bank was fierce in Ireland partly because it was to be financed by speculative investment but mainly because the scheme, in its original form at least, had been intended to ‘render the Irish parliament financially irrelevant’ by finding a way for Westminster to ‘secure sufficient monies to operate the Irish administration independently of Irish tax sources’. Deprived of its vital role in passing the money bills that provided the budget for each session of legislation, the Irish parliament could then have been ‘prorogued and placed on permanent leave’. (Fauske, pp. 114, 112-13).

⁶⁸ Fauske, p. 120.

⁶⁹ Hercules Rowley, *An Answer to a Book Entitled ‘Reasons Offered for Erecting a Bank in Ireland’* (1721), quoted in Fauske, p. 121.

This oft-quoted passage seems to lay it on the line: something had to be done because under present conditions, the inhabitants of Ireland were barely recognizable as human beings. Their presence invalidates the idea of being in a civilized country. The tableau implies that, whether by opposing the bank or by supporting domestic manufactures, the ultimate end was to ‘feed the hungry, clothe the naked and relieve the oppressed’. But to focus on the emotional appeal to ‘*common Humanity*’ is to ignore a political nuance, since this passage is designed to force a reader into contemplating the condition of the ‘*Natives*’. Christopher Fauske has used this word, and the passage just quoted, to highlight one aspect of the *Proposal* that is often overlooked. Swift’s text, he argues, ‘is a useful tract for demonstrating one linguistic distinction of the period not unique to Swift but exploited by him with perhaps a greater finesse than others managed’. This was namely ‘the distinction between the word “Irish” and the word “native”’. The latter word, when used by the Anglican Irish, could only mean “Catholic”’.⁷⁰ It thus seems that at this precise moment in the *Proposal*, Swift is using the word ‘natives’ to invoke a specific quality of the Catholic underclass: their exemplary status as homegrown slaves.

Around the year 1720, one did not have to go as far as Turkey or France to find examples of a feudal class. Describing a journey to Derry in 1718, Bishop Nicolson said that he had ‘never beheld (even in Picardy, Westphalia or Scotland) such dismal marks of hunger and want as appeared in the countenances of the poor creatures that I met with on the road.’⁷¹ His account shows notable similarities to the descriptions by King and Swift of the pseudo-vassals they had encountered in the Irish countryside, even down to the allusion to such exotically backward locales as ‘Picardy’ and ‘Westphalia’, and a reference to the poor creatures he saw as ‘sorry slaves’. It differs however, in two important respects, both of which are connected with the fact that Nicolson had been recently translated from the see of Carlisle. An

⁷⁰ Fauske, p. 97.

⁷¹ Ehrenpreis, III, 117, quoting the Correspondence of Archbishop William Wake in the Library of Christ Church Oxford, XII, fol. 275, William Nicolson to Wake, 24 June 1718.

Englishman in the geographical sense, Nicolson's experience of Ireland differed from that of native (in the classical sense) clergymen like Swift and King.

Rather than join in with it, Nicolson had been consternated by the clamour over the Declaratory Act. He saw it as a case of simple and wilful resistance to the authority of law, which made the need for such a measure self-evident. Similarly, Nicolson's description of the 'poor souls' he met on the road is doubly revealing of a perceptual gap between himself and his Irish-born peers. Firstly, there is the question of singularity. Swift would elaborate a sense that Ireland's 'singular condition' made it a country 'different from all others upon the Face of the Earth', which could only be compared to places like France and Poland on the understanding that it was worse. Nicolson, however, saw that the combination of an inhospitable or badly husbanded landscape and a subsistence economy could produce 'sorry slaves' in as domestic and as British a location as Scotland. Secondly, the poor creatures Nicolson witnessed were Catholics, or, to quote him exactly, 'bigoted Papists'.⁷² He was, in other words, lamenting the fate of an existing Catholic underclass. By contrast, his Irish-born colleagues were concerned that social change would lead to the creation of a similar class among Protestant smallholders.

A year after he received Nicolson's letter, Archbishop Wake of Canterbury would be party to a description of Ireland's rural poor courtesy of Archbishop King. This has already been cited as the source of King's comparison between Irish tenants and Turkish peasants. Ostensibly similar to the news from Derry, King's account would, however, differ in one important respect. When the Archbishop of Dublin writes to his superior that the 'Peasants in France and Turkey live better than Ten[ants] in Ireland', the comparison is revealing because he has already indicated that an alternative index of devastating poverty could be found much closer to home. The 'Papists [...] live in a miserable and sordid manner', he wrote. Unlike Nicolson's description of poor creatures, this was a moral judgement rather than a statement of dismay. The archbishop goes on to convey that the Catholics' way of life owed not to their misfortune but their guile. King's concern was that Catholics'

⁷² Ibid.

‘miserable and sordid’ manner of living enabled them to ‘out-bid a Protestant’ when lands came up for auction because they had no concern to honour the terms of their newly secured lease. ‘[T]heir Business is to out the Protestants’, King says, ‘and when this is done, they get into arrears with the Landl[or]ds a year or two and then run away’. The long-term prospect was horrifying: ‘by these means most of the farms of Ireland are got into their hands and as Leases expire it is probable the rest will go the same way’. King was certainly exaggerating, but it was this very prospect of the whole country going ‘the same way’ that led him to compare Irish tenants to European peasants:

This is that which forces Protestants of all sorts out of this Kingdom, not only Farmers but Artificers, since they can have no prospect of Living with any comfort in it, I have enquired and am assured that the Peasants in France and Turkey live much better than Ten[ant]s in Ireland.⁷³

The context of the remark makes it plain that King is referring exclusively to Protestant tenants. These he compares to French and Turkish peasants and not to their Catholic neighbours because the latter’s slavery is a lifestyle choice, a sacrifice offered to the ultimate aim of ‘out[ing] the Protestants’. The two former groups, by contrast, have their vassalage thrust upon them. Swift’s published works are of a different tenor from King’s private correspondence, but one common feature is a tendency to use the condition of rural Catholic tenants as an index of ultimate misery, worse even than that of the European peasant labouring under the yoke of arbitrary power. One tract published shortly after the 1720 *Proposal* attempts to differentiate between the conditions of tenants on ecclesiastical lands and their lay counterparts. Swift argues in *Some Arguments against Enlarging the Power of Bishops* (1723) that the immediate tenants of Irish bishops lived in comfort, whereas their undertenants became subject to exploitation by lay landlords:

[I]f they be his immediate Tenants, you may distinguish them, at first Sight, by their Habits and Horses; or if you go to their Houses, by

⁷³ King to Archbishop Wake, 2 June 1719, TCD MS 750/5, p. 166, p. 167.

their comfortable Way of living. But the Misfortune is, that such immediate Tenants, generally speaking, have others under them, and so a Third and Fourth in Subordination, till it comes to the *Welder* (as they call him) who sits at a Rack Rent, and lives as miserably as an *Irish* Farmer upon a new Lease from a lay Land-lord.⁷⁴

Fauske, who also observes that “‘Irish’ could mean just about whatever an author wished of it”, argues that the word is used here, in the phrase ‘Irish farmer’, to mean ‘Catholic’.⁷⁵ It is difficult not to attach such an interpretation to the term, especially in light of the insight provided by King’s letter into the way a ‘Papist’ acquires and lives under ‘a new Lease from a lay Land-lord’. But this passage does more than hint that in the 1720s the scale of perceived social deprivation was calibrated according to the character of the victim as well as by simple magnitude. In its picture of tenants whose ‘Habits’ and ‘Houses’ must leave the observer in no doubt as to the existence of an equitable social infrastructure, it provides an exact mirror image of the ‘*Natives*’ whose ‘Habits, and Dwellings’ force him to doubt the very existence of ‘*Law, Religion, or common Humanity*’.

This juxtaposition forces a careful rereading of the passage from the 1720 *Proposal*. When Swift compels his readers to contemplate the ‘*Faces, and Habits, and Dwellings, of the Natives*’, it now seems less like an appeal to the passions than a call to exercise a duty of stewardship, addressed through ‘the *Natives*’ to their masters. The image is maieutic rather than pathetic. It helps to deliver a question: if the natives are in such a state, what can we infer about their overlords’ fitness to govern? Thanks to the beneficence of ecclesiastical landlords, according to *Arguments against Enlarging the Power of Bishops*, it is still possible in 1723 to find a tenant farmer who enjoys ‘a comfortable way of living’, even if this be an exception to what is ‘generally’ found. The 1720 *Proposal* also presents the Church as a model of good management, in contrast to the practices of lay landlords, of whom the Proposer says:

⁷⁴ *Prose*, IX, 54, partially quoted in Fauske, p. 142.

⁷⁵ Fauske, p. 97, p. 142.

It was pleasant to observe these Gentlemen, *labouring* with all their *Might*, for preventing the *Bishops* from letting their Revenues at a moderate half Value, (whereby the whole *Order* would, in an Age, have been reduced to manifest Beggary) at the very Instant, when they were every where *canting* their own Lands upon short Leases, and sacrificing their *oldest Tenants for a Penny an Acre advance*. (IX, 21)

Although Swift refers to their behaviour as belonging to an ‘Instant’ rather than a protracted struggle, the ‘Gentlemen’ of the House of Commons had tried to prevent the Bishops from ‘letting their Revenues at a moderate half Value’ several times before 1720. They would do so again after the publication of the *Proposal*, and the most concerted attempt in 1723 would occasion Swift’s *Arguments against Enlarging the Power of Bishops*. This was the climax to what Fauske calls a ‘series of skirmishes between the controllers of the Commons and the largest landholder in Ireland, the Church’.⁷⁶ The lower House, as Fauske points out, was ‘controlled by a handful of individuals who [...] relied upon the land for a large portion of their income’.⁷⁷ These land-dependent gentlemen were particularly interested to repeal a statute of Charles I which provided that ‘see lands be leased at not less than one half their real value at the time the lease was made’.⁷⁸ Although this clause was not often observed, its erasure from the statute books would mean that the Church of Ireland would come to lack even a theoretical defence against lay landlords who were determined to rent from the church at the lowest possible rate and then sublet several times over for maximum profits.

Louis Landa’s classic account of Swift and his church, along with Fauske’s important update, have covered the struggle between the ecclesiastics and the ‘Gentlemen’ in some depth. This particular context for the 1720 *Proposal* is introduced here in order to show the coherent theme of this ostensibly disjointed text. *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* is about responsibility – not simply the general notion of being obligated, but the particular duties that

⁷⁶ Fauske, p. 132.

⁷⁷ Fauske, p. 132.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133, quoting Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 100–101.

accompany a position of power. Power, and the fact or possibility of its having been abused, is what links the disparate targets of this text. Together, the pompous chief Governors at Westminster, the politic gentlemen of the Irish Commons, the Country Landlords, the potential stakeholders of the Bank of Ireland, the shopkeepers of Dublin and their customers form a hierarchy of agents who must each exercise a certain duty of care in order to ensure the coherence and stability of the social structure they constitute. At the bottom of this pile lie the powerless 'natives', a living indictment of the failure of a constitution in which power has been shirked or misused at every level. Contiguous to them are the class of substantial farmers, who are in danger of vanishing during the period of emigration in 1720, and by 1723 are apt to collapse into identity with the '*Irish farmer[s]*'. The plight of the rural poor is brought conspicuously to the surface of the 1720 *Proposal* for the same reason that the Declaratory Act lurks ominously beneath it. Each of them represents a warning to be decoded by readers. The text is aimed at the purchasers in the middle stratum of Irish society; the 'middle and lower Sort of Mankind' whom Swift addresses in his sermons (IX, 173). It intimates that when the top and bottom stages of that structure have so suddenly and visibly crumbled, then the centre cannot hold for much longer.

This message is further evident in Swift's complaint against canting of 'Lands upon short Leases'. Like the attempt to deprive the Church of its ability to set the value of leases, this would soon come to be perceived as a habitual practice rather than something that had obtained for an 'Instant'. Archbishop King would write at the end of the decade that 'The common way of setting Lands now when the Lease expires is to advertise them in the Gazett and set them to the highest bidder'. King saw this as disloyal as well as greedy. In the letter which has already been quoted extensively in connection with the archbishop's fear of all the land in Ireland falling into Catholic hands, King explains the immorality of auctioning off a recently-expired lease. '[A]fter the revolution,' he writes, 'most of the Kingdom was wast[e], and abundance of People destroyed by the warre, the Landlords therefore were glad to get Ten[ant]s at any Rate and set their Lands at very easy Rents'. Now

that the twenty-one year leases had expired, however, rents were set at ‘Double and in many places Tribble [*sic*]’ what they had been ‘so that it is impossible for people to live or subsist on their farms’.⁷⁹

The landlords’ policies represented more than opportunism. To King it seemed that by sacrificing rural Ireland at the altar of profit, the landlords were endangering the future of the entire country.⁸⁰ It was one of a number of factors which led him to fear that Ireland would soon have to be re-conquered. He explained to the Bishop of Carlisle on 21 February 1718 that ‘most of the lands in Ireland is like soon to be in [Catholic] hands, they breed very fast and for ought I see will in a short time worm out the English, as they have often done formerly w[hich] has been the cause, that Ireland has bin to bee new conquered every 40 or 50 Years’.⁸¹ This was something of an exaggeration but its underlying mythos was both potent and widespread. Swift also envisioned the Anglican Irish as caught up in a cycle of continual displacement and re-conquest in the Drapier’s ‘Letter to Lord Chancellor Middleton’. This text, which Swift signed with his own initials, counts among common misapprehensions the ‘Tradition, that every Forty Years there must be a Rebellion in *Ireland*’ – not to mention the popular belief that ‘it were better for *England* if this whole Island were sunk into the Sea’ (x, 103). In castigating landlords who sacrifice ‘their *oldest Tenants for a Penny an Acre Advance*’, the 1720 *Proposal* exhibits further, if less dramatic, similarities with King’s vision. The *Proposal* decries this practice alongside screwing and racking, not only because it

⁷⁹ King to Edward Southwell, 8 March 1729, TCD MS 750/9, 111, *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 166. ‘Gazett’ so spelt. *OED* says that to set is ‘to let on lease’, and defines a cant as a ‘disposal of property by public competition to the highest bidder; an auction’.

⁸⁰ Cf. Fauske, p. 86, which quotes Burns’s summary of King’s view that ‘social groups depending on hypocrisy, exploitation, and cruelty for their security and prosperity have a past, a present, but no future’. An illustration of circumstances that motivated such a view is found in a letter of recommendation that King wrote on behalf of two men called Tomkins and Strong in January 1729. King wrote that ‘their Fathers and Grandfathers have been Ten[ant]s to the Irish Society for the Plantation of Londonderry they have been faithfull and good Ten[ant]s all along and stuck firmly to the Protestant Interest in that Countrey, the Society used to have great Regard for their old Ten[ant]s but of late they seem not to have been so kind as they used to be for they set up their Leases to a Cant so that the highest bidder has it without any regard to the Old Ten[ant]s this president has been followed by most of the Landlords in Ireland and has driven away great numbers of Protestants out of this Kingdom, and if this method of setting Land be not altered will leave few in it that can get away’. (King to Lord Chancellor King, 14 January 1729, TCD MS 750/9, p. 100).

⁸¹ TCD MS 2,535 (Transcript of TCD MS 750/11 by E. A. Phelps), p. 84.

represents a dishonourable and exploitative way to dispose of a lease, but most importantly because it symbolizes the breakdown of an old order of governance and the replacement of a contractual basis for power with one that is properly described as arbitrary. The collapse of the land system in a flurry of profiteering is part of a generalized and repeating pattern that underpins the seemingly random assortment of paragraphs that is the 1720 *Proposal*. It represents an insidious weakening of the infrastructure that is as real and as damaging as the Declaratory Act's sudden removal of political agency. In fact it was perceived as part of the same phenomenon.

To say, then, with any conviction that Swift began to speak on behalf of Ireland in 1720, 'Ireland' must be strictly defined. The term denotes nothing so much as a system of titles to ownership of land, and implies the established church's pre-eminence among the holders of such titles. Philip O'Regan maintains that the Church occasioned William King's first involvement in the legal struggle that would eventually lead to the Declaratory Act. He 'was not originally committed to the cause of the Irish Parliament *per se*', and would not have become involved in its defence 'had it not been for a circumstance which impinged directly upon the church', namely his case against the Irish Society of London.⁸² When that struggle reached its climax in 1720, clergymen may have defended the rights of the Irish Parliament, but, as Fauske observes, the Act came about as a direct result of the struggle between the Irish Commons and the clergy for the control of rents.⁸³ While it is important to emphasize that their motivation was complicated and even, in terms of modern conceptions of national identity, somewhat abstruse, men like Swift nonetheless identified the fate of the church as wholly and inextricably wedded to that of the nation. *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* has the effect of investing its own immediate concerns with the power of a totalizing metaphor of Ireland's condition, grounded upon the land itself. It is, as I have said, a text about power, and as Fauske points out, Swift was 'sure [...] that land and power were interchangeable'.⁸⁴ The literal content of the text consists in the attempt to get

⁸² *Archbishop William King*, p. 97.

⁸³ Fauske, p. 132, and *idem*, Chapter Six, *passim*.

⁸⁴ Fauske, p. 137.

the people of Ireland to use their own manufactures. But this literal aspect of the text is subsumed into a metaphor that grows inclusively outwards from its initial, concrete, usage in Swift's attack on landlords, and becomes an all-encompassing and recursive figure for that people's condition. It captures an essential ambivalence, one that can be expressed by contrasting Anglican Ireland's sense of its historical inheritance with an apprehension of its current predicament. J. L. McCracken says of members of this group that '[w]hile claiming all the privileges of freeborn Englishmen, they regarded themselves as Irishmen entitled to control the destinies of the country that had become theirs by right of conquest'.⁸⁵ But in Archbishop King's eyes, such control was slipping to the point where Ireland was becoming liable to be conquered once more. One might compare this disparity to the difference between an assured tenancy and a temporary lease. The 1720 *Proposal's* governing trope is thus a figure of tenure.

Informed by the idea that Anglican Ireland's position would have to be renegotiated following the shifts in tenure represented by the Declaratory Act, Swift's text acts as a warning. It is designed to make its readers keenly aware of their stewardship over the land they occupy, of their rights but also of their obligations. It seeks to compel the '*English People of Ireland*' (X, 67), as Swift would later call them, to attend to their duties as freeholders in order to avoid being exposed as tenants whose lease may shortly expire or be annulled. Admittedly, reading Swift's text in this way involves straining against its surface and manipulating peripheral material and events into forming a subtext. However, that very subtext was constructed by contemporary readers as well as by this one and it survives in the form of what might be described as an antitext. Some time after the appearance of the *Proposal*, but within the year, an answer was published, first in Dublin, then in London. This anonymous text, which gained the explanatory title *A Defence of English Commodities* upon its London republication, is strikingly similar to Swift's own text in terms of what it actually proposes:

⁸⁵ J. L. Mc Cracken, 'Protestant Ascendancy and the rise of Colonial Nationalism, 1714–60', *A New History of Ireland*, ed. by T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan, 10 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), IV, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, p. 107.

I should be very glad, that the Gentlemen of *Ireland*, out of a publick Spirit, and a Regard to the common Interest of the Kingdom, would make it their Choice to be content with their own Manufactures, tho' dearer and worse than the *English*: But what Sentiments such a Prohibition would beget in *England*, and how far it is in their Power to make Reprisals, would be worth while to consider.⁸⁶

In isolation, this passage could easily have come from one of Swift's own works. The similarities extend to an appeal to 'publick Spirit' and the 'Interest of the Kingdom', a determination to provoke 'Reprisals' rather than indifference from England, and the provocative aside that goads readers with the suggestion that Irish manufactures are 'dearer and worse' than English ones. These qualities may explain why the one critic who has attempted an attribution says that the piece was actually written by Swift as 'raillery [...] on his own work'.⁸⁷

A Defence of English Commodities exhibits structural as well as tonal similarities with its host text. Like the *Proposal*, the *Defence's* stance *vis-à-vis* Irish manufactures is something of an opening gambit from which the author moves to develop a general strategy. The two texts differ in that the speaker of the *Defence* states explicitly something that the Universal Proposer cannot openly say. He vocalizes a question raised several times in this chapter when he asks what the *Proposal* 'means by *Ireland*'. This pertinent line of enquiry develops into a calculatedly impertinent suggestion. The Defender wonders whether, when the Proposer complains of Ireland's ill treatment at English hands, 'he means by *Ireland*, the native *Irish*, his Countrymen, as I believe he does' (IX, 274). As shown earlier, Swift's *Proposal* uses the word '*Natives*' precisely to prevent such an identification.

⁸⁶ 'Dean SWIFT' [?], *A Defence of English Commodities. Being an Answer to the Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufactures, and Utterly Rejecting and Renouncing every Thing that is Wearable that comes from England* (Dublin; reprinted London: J. Roberts, 1720). Reproduced in *Prose*, IX, Appendix A, 269–277, pp. 270–1.

⁸⁷ F. Elrington-Ball, *Swift's Verse: An Essay* (London: John Murray, 1929), p. 174, n. 31, where it is also noted that the piece was advertised in the *London Evening Post* as 'Dean Swift's Defence of English Commodities'. Teerink describes the attribution as 'doubtful' (H. Teerink, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Arthur H. Scouten (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), p. 131. Rather unhelpfully, Davis (*Prose IX*) includes the title page and text of the London edition as an appendix without comment or explanation.

The Defender does not stop at ethnic slurs, however. It is when the text ceases deliberately misreading Swift's carefully chosen terms and begins to follow the *Proposal's* own distinctions that his text reveals itself as something more than a bibliographical curio:

[I]f [Swift] means the *English* settled in Ireland, who are best known by the name of *Protestants*; what Reason have they to complain? If they have they do not.

They retain one inseparable Property of *Englishmen*, which is to be *Tenacious* of their Liberties; but they are too wise to murmur at any thing they cannot help, without such Measures as would make the Hazard of losing all, much greater than the Prospect of Redress. (IX, 275)

The Defender's elliptical phrase 'If they have they do not' should perhaps be glossed as 'If they have [any reason to complain] they do not [show any evidence of having done so].' This denial comes in the year when two of the most senior Anglican clerics in Ireland respectively detected a 'universal disaffection of all people thro' the whole Kingdom' and observed that 'a seditious Spirit is arisen (& grown rampant) amongst us; which is daily animating the Populace to assert their Irish liberties'.⁸⁸ Equally significant perhaps, is the fact that the case of Edward Waters, the printer of Swift's *Proposal*, was going through the courts around the time of the *Defence's* appearance. Waters was indicted for publishing 'false, scandalous, and seditious' material. The charge was laid against him nine times while the Chief Justice struggled to obtain a conviction from a sympathetic jury, and Swift eventually succeeded in extracting a decree of *noli prosequi* from Lord Lieutenant Grafton with the help of Molesworth, Grafton's step-father Sir Thomas Hanmer, and Lord Arran, the Jacobite brother of the Duke of Ormonde. In the face of such a formidable assembly, which as Ehrenpreis says, gathers together the 'whole spectrum of British politics [...] to rescue an Irish printer', against overwhelming evidence that many were indeed complaining, the Defender simply

⁸⁸ Ferguson, p. 53, quoting Archbishop King and Bishop Nicolson.

maintains that ‘they do not’.⁸⁹ The comprehensive insouciance of his denial and its deflating effect is underlined by its concision. The Defender’s inability to hear the complaints of Anglican Ireland also bears upon Swift’s status as the voice of that group.

Perhaps the most striking single effect produced by the *Defence of English Commodities* is its uncovering of the governing metaphor and the central anxiety that hold Swift’s text together. The Defender writes that the ‘*English* settled in Ireland [...] retain one inseparable Property of Englishmen’, namely the fact of being ‘*Tenacious* of their Liberties’. Through such language, this text shows a keen sense of the values upon which a certain version of Irish Protestant identity was predicated at the beginning of the 1720s: a sharp awareness that the occupancy of land was the stock from which that identity grew. This is why the Defender refers to Ireland’s Englishness as a ‘Property’. This is a ‘Property’ Irish Protestants stand to lose, along with everything else, should they seek ‘Redress’. All these terms belong in the Court of Exchequer: the Defender’s language is that of the bailiff, laced with such suggestive adjectives as ‘*Tenacious*’. Tenacity is not far removed, either phonetically or etymologically, from tenancy.

If all this sounds like a deployment of the anagrammatic method as practised by the Tribnians in *Gulliver’s Travels*, then the Defender of English Commodities helpfully makes his insinuations explicit:

Though it is very natural for every Man to covet to have a Mill of his own, especially a Miller; yet they don’t think it unreasonable for the Head Landlord, upon a Division of the Soil into Tenancies, to reserve Suit of Mill and Court to himself; that is to say, the Manufactory and Judicature, which were usual Tenures amongst the *Saxons* (275–6)

This passage translates the fear of impending slavery as voiced by Swift and his contemporaries into an assumption of permanent indebtedness. It attests that however much Anglican Ireland saw itself as a people who had inherited a right of absolute governance, Anglican England saw its counterpart across the sea as a group

⁸⁹ Ehrenpreis, III, 129–30.

of unruly tenants who were forever forgetting to pay their dues to a landlord whose patience was becoming increasingly taxed. But Swift's own portrayal of this relationship would deploy a metaphor that was still more debasing.

V

[W]ell may we hope, through GOD's Blessing upon our faithful Endeavours, that not only *the People* of this Land, who *sit in the Darkness of Popery*, but others also, both Protestants and Papists, who sit in the worse Darkness of Sin and Wickedness, as well as Error, may *see this great Light*, Matt. 4. 16. and *Rejoyce in it*, John 5.35. and no longer remain *in the Region and Shadow of Death*.⁹⁰

Much attention has been paid in this chapter and elsewhere to reading the constitution of eighteenth-century Ireland through the twin prisms of the Lockean contract and the wars of the preceding hundred years. It must also be emphasized, however, that the dominant mode for reading the state of the nation at this time was biblical. Even commonplace phrases retained a typological resonance, the language of slavery being a case in point. Perhaps the most striking single usage comes in Swift's sermon on the 'Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland' (first published 1762), where he announces that:

THE first Cause of our Misery is the intolerable Hardships we lie under in every Branch of our Trade, by which we are become as *Hewers of Wood, and Drawers of Water*, to our rigorous Neighbours. (IX, 200)

'*Hewers of Wood, and Drawers of Water*' was by no means an unusual tag to pluck from the Bible during the eighteenth century. It had two established uses, both

⁹⁰ Archbishop Edward Synge of Tuam, *The Reward of Converting Sinners from the Error of their Ways. A Sermon Preach'd in the Parish Church of St. Bridget, Dublin: February, the 8th 1718. At the Annual Meeting of the Children Educated in the Charity-Schools in Dublin* (Dublin: John Hyde, 1719), p. 20.

figurative. The phrase was rarely called upon to denote actual slaves. Sometimes it tended to refer to the most menial labourers in a given population, to the social class they constituted, and to the function they performed. Bernard Mandeville writes in his 'Essay on Charity and Charity Schools' that 'in a free Nation where Slaves are not allow'd of, the surest Wealth consists in a multitude of laborious Poor' – without whom 'there could be no Enjoyment and no Product of any Country would be valuable'.⁹¹ Although his essay was actually an attack on the charity school system, Mandeville agreed with the advocates of that system on the basic point that all functional societies rested on a base of labour and that members of this stratum must be made industrious rather than become a burden on others. 'Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water' became a convenient synonym for this multitude of laborious poor. It was used as such in the discourse of the charity schools movement, which aimed to educate the multitude to perform with competence their allotted task by endowing and funding day schools for boys and girls where the rudiments of reading and writing, as well as more practical skills like spinning, sewing and seamanship would be taught. In a sermon of 1756, Bishop Hayter of Norwich preached to the Charity Schools Anniversary Meeting in London on this point. He said that the charity children, who were probably assembled before him along with their wards and various dignitaries, 'are born to be daily labourers, for the most part to earn their bread by the sweat of their brows'. This was because in every society, there 'must be drudges of labour (hewers of wood and drawers of water the Scriptures call them)'.⁹² When Swift preached his sermon on the causes of Ireland's wretched condition, its listeners may well have included a group of 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' in the sense employed by Mandeville and Hayter, namely the boys of the charity school of St Patrick's Cathedral. My third chapter considers Swift's involvement with the charity schools movement and its significance; the present one concludes by offering a final application for the text from which it takes its title.

⁹¹ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. by F. B. Kaye, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), I, 287.

⁹² [Thomas Hayter], *Sermon preached by the Bishop of Norwich at the Anniversary Meeting of the Charity Schools in and about London and Westminster, May 1, 1755*, quoted by M.G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Puritanism in Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 74–5).

In an Irish context, the phrase ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ had the added implication, although this entailed a slight misremembering of the biblical source, of slavery bestowed as the result of martial defeat. In 1706, Sir Richard Cox attempted to dismiss the Whig argument for repealing the Sacramental Test, which held that toleration must be extended to Irish Dissenters so as to secure their allegiance in the result of any further uprising by Irish Catholics. Cox felt such manipulations of the Catholic threat to be disingenuous and said of the Whigs:

[T]hey really [...] know that [the Catholics’] youth and gentry are destroyed in the rebellion, or gone to France; that those who are left are destitute of horses, arms and money, capacity and courage; that five in six of the Irish are poor insignificant slaves, fit for nothing but to hew wood and draw water.⁹³

Swift had also used this figure in the same context. His 1709 *Letter* [...] *concerning the Sacramental Test* refers to the Catholics as ‘the common People without Leaders, without Discipline or Natural Courage’. These deficiencies make them ‘little better than *Hewers of Wood, and Drawers of Water*’ and put them ‘out of all Capacity of doing any Mischief, if they were ever so well inclined’ (II, 120). In 1715 Archbishop King had condemned the zealotry of some recent anti-Popery legislation with the comment that ‘all the case has been to get [Catholics’] lands and make them hewers of wood and drawers of water’.⁹⁴ But King himself had justified the Glorious Revolution with similar zeal and identical language in his assessment of the Catholic threat upon the accession of James II. At this time, King wrote, ‘the Papists of *Ireland* [...] affirmed both publickly and privately, with many Oaths, That they would in a short time have our Estates and Churches; that if they had suffered us to live, they would make us *hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water*’.⁹⁵ In Swift’s analysis of the causes of Ireland’s wretched condition, however, this threat had been

⁹³ Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 251, quoting Cox to Southwell, 24 October 1706, BL Add. MS 38,154, fol. 86.

⁹⁴ King to the Bishop of Lincoln, 19 July 1715, TCD MS 2,533 pp. 24–5, quoted in Boyce, ‘The Road to Wood’s Halfpence’, p. 89.

⁹⁵ *State of the Protestants*, pp. 19–20.

carried out – not by the Catholics of Ireland, themselves now relegated to the status of bondsmen, but by ‘our [...] Neighbours’ in England.

The term ‘Neighbours’ takes on a special irony when one considers how the word denoted not merely a relationship of proximity but a bond of trust, deriving from the fact that one sees in one’s neighbour something of oneself. Swift’s contemporary Defoe shows how the word is nuanced by this idea of self-recognition. In the *Brasils*, Robinson Crusoe calls one of his fellow planters ‘my Neighbour, because his Plantation lay next to mine, because we went on very sociably together’. But there is a deeper connection between Crusoe (alias Kreutznaer, born in York to ‘a Foreigner of *Bremen*’) and his neighbour who although a ‘*Portugueze of Lisbon*’ is named Wells and has English parents.⁹⁶ The two are joined by the profound circumstance of being doubly displaced: each is something of a stranger in his homeland as well as abroad. Swift, who would often invoke another biblical text to dub himself a stranger in a strange land,⁹⁷ also described neighbourliness as a bond of trust. As this passage from another of his sermons shows, the reciprocal duty between neighbours represented a version of the social compact from which societies – whether in the form of the Pauline Christian community or the Hobbesian commonwealth – derive their legitimacy:

[B]eside this love we owe to every man in his particular capacity under the title of our neighbour, there is yet a duty of a more large, extensive nature, incumbent on us; which is, our love to our neighbour in his public capacity, as he is a member of that great body, the commonwealth, under the same government with ourselves; and this is usually called love of the public, and is a duty to which we are more strictly obliged than even that of loving ourselves; because therein ourselves are also contained, as well as all our neighbours, in one great body. (IX, 233)

By contrast with this utopian reading, relations between English and (Anglo) Irish counterparts had decayed into bondage; neighbours were no longer recognized

⁹⁶ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 2 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1927; repr. 1974), I 38, 1.

⁹⁷ See Carole Fabricant, *Swift’s Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 211–15 for a discussion of the ‘very personal and existential significance’ of this phrase for Swift.

as such. This state of affairs was more than just a farcical inversion of the settlement of 1691. By describing his constituents as ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ Swift was invoking an archetypal case of mistaken identity between neighbours. The full weight of these words in an Anglican cleric’s mouth can only be appreciated by restoring the phrase hewers of wood and drawers of water to its original context. After the battle of Jericho, the neighbouring kingdoms combined to face the resurgent nation of Israel. The Gibeonites, however, elected to make terms with the Israelites by pledging themselves as servants. Knowing that God had commanded Moses to ‘destroy all the inhabitants of the land before [him]’ the Gibeonites feared that their offer would be declined if the Israelites knew that they came from nearby. Faced with this prospect, the Gibeonites proceeded to obtain a settlement under the false pretence that they were from ‘a very far country’ when in fact they lived only three days’ journey away. To this end, the Gibeonites took mouldy bread with them on their short trek; they wore old clothes and shoes and carried torn wineskins with them. Convinced by these tokens, Joshua made a pact not to overrun the Gibeonites. When their deception was uncovered and the Gibeonites were unmasked as a neighbouring tribe Joshua punished the entire nation with permanent enslavement: ‘Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall be none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood, and drawers of water, for the house of my God’.⁹⁸

Swift subjects his constituents to a variation on Joshua’s curse. The one fate worse than being uncovered and enslaved by one’s neighbours is to endure the same punishment without even being recognized as kinsmen. This would become a recurring topos in the *Drapier’s Letters*. Recalling the story of the Gibeonites, the Drapier worries that Ireland has in English minds become ‘a far country’; that he and his reader ‘are not upon the same Foot with our Fellow-Subjects in *England*’ (X, 39). Beneath such constitutional anxieties lurks a deeper-seated fear that somehow, the Drapier and his nation had become strangers in a strange land – in England as well as in Ireland. He complains to Lord Middleton of his English neighbours:

⁹⁸ Joshua 9. 23.

I have seen the grossest Suppositions pass upon them; that the *wild Irish* were taken in Toyls; but that, in some Time, they would grow so tame, as to eat out of your Hands: I have been asked by Hundreds, and particularly by my Neighbours, your Tenants, at *Pepper-hara*; whether I had come from *Ireland* by Sea: And, upon the Arrival of an *Irish-man* to a Country Town, I have known Crouds coming about him, and wondering to see him look so much better than themselves. (X, 103)⁹⁹

As my next chapter argues in detail, the Drapier lives out the preacher's curse. His indignation at being taken by his neighbours for a tame wild Irishman could be described – in a conflation of two of the outstanding soundbites of Irish literary history – as the rage of Caliban looking in the mirror and seeing everybody's face but his own.

⁹⁹ Pepper-hara was Middleton's estate in Surrey.

Chapter Two

Brass Money and Wooden Shoes

A

L E T T E R

T O T H E

Shop-Keepers, Tradesmen, Farmers,
and Common-People of IRELAND,

Concerning the

Brass Half-Pence

Coined by

M^r. WOODS,

W I T H

A DESIGN to have them Pass in this
K I N G D O M.

Wherein is shewn the Power of the said PATENT,
the Value of the HALF-PENCE, and how far every Person
may be oblig'd to take the same in Payments, and how
to behave in Case such an Attempt shou'd be made by
WOODS or any other Person.

[Very Proper to be kept in every FAMILY.]

By M. B. Drapier.

Dublin : Printed by J. Harding in Molesworth's
Court.

I

Res durae, & regni novitas me talia cogunt moliri, said John Carteret in January 1725. He uttered the line, which means 'hard fortune, and the newness of my reign, compel me to such measures', in his defence against an accusation that he had issued 'a proclamation against a poor shop-keeper whose only crime is an honest endeavour to save his country from ruin'. Appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in April 1724, Carteret had been sent by Sir Robert Walpole to Dublin in October of that year. His orders were to quell the agitation against a patent

granted on 12 July 1722 to William Wood, a Wolverhampton merchant and ironmaster. Wood had acquired the patent from the Duchess of Kendal, the mistress of George I, at a cost of £10,000. As this hefty price tag suggests, there was significant profit to be made from the patent, which allowed him to mint copper halfpennies and farthings for circulation in Ireland. Although it had been intended to redress a genuine shortage of small change (something that Swift himself would address in a proposal five years later), it was widely believed that Wood had abused the terms of the patent and produced an inferior coinage worth much less in weight of metal than its face value. As his patent entitled to him to mint coins worth more than a quarter of Ireland's total currency, it was feared that had they been allowed to circulate, Wood's coins would have precipitated an economic crisis. Such apprehensions were 'doubtless exaggerated' but not without foundation.¹

Money was already worth less in Ireland than in Britain and anyone moving or trading between the two kingdoms could profit from this imbalance by exporting cheaply-acquired gold and silver coins. This had the effect of depleting Ireland's sterling reserves, and Wood's patent was seen as an officially-sanctioned attempt to conduct such profiteering on a grand scale. In August 1723, a Dublin metal dealer named James Maculla produced the first of many pamphlets to be published on the subject, reckoning that the net loss to Ireland arising from the patent would be two hundred thousand pounds of gold and silver.² Although he would not enter the controversy for the best part of a year after this, Swift had by 1725 become the unelected figurehead of the campaign against the coinage. Thus it was he who stormed into Carteret's levee and condemned his proclamation, which offered a three-hundred pound reward to anyone who would name the author of a pamphlet called *A Letter to the Whole People of Ireland*. This author, who styled himself M. B. Drapier of St Francis

¹ Nokes, *A Hypocrite Reversed*, p. 291, citing Thomas Sheridan, *The Life of the Reverend Dr Jonathan Swift* (1784); Carteret's entry in *DNB*; Swift, 'A Letter on Maculla's Project about Halfpence & a new one Proposed', *Prose* XII, 91–106; Herbert Davies, ed., *The Drapier's Letters to the People of Ireland against receiving Wood's Halfpence*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. xi. This separate edition is referred to throughout this chapter by the abbreviation *DL*. All quotations from the *Drapier's Letters* are, for the sake of consistency, taken from *Prose* X.

² [James Maculla], *Ireland's Consternation In the loosing of Two Hundred Thousand Pound of their Gold and Silver for Brass Money. Set forth by an Artificer in Metals And a Citizen of Dublin* ([Dublin]: [n. pub.], [1723]), cited in *DL*, p. 352.

Street, was of course Swift himself. Thomas Sheridan's version of the confrontation between Carteret and the 'shop-keeper' reads like a typical scene from colonial history. The victim confronts his oppressor with evidence of ill-treatment and is met – rebuffed – with a lordly reply. The language imputed to the two men reflects the facility with which they take up the respective roles of persecutor and victim. Carteret quotes the *Aeneid*, claiming Roman eloquence as the inheritance of imperial Britain. Swift, adopting the guise of a poor Irish tradesman, counters this grandiloquence with plain-dealing. It would be tempting to cite the scene as emblematic of the history of Anglo-Irish relations, or indeed as a suitable image of Swift's germinal contribution to a long struggle for independence. To do so, however, would be a mistake.

In spite of the fact that one of the many candidates for his first Irish tract is actually a meditation on the vanished prospect of Anglo-Irish union, mid-twentieth-century views of Swift tended to emphasise his advocacy of Irish political and economic independence – often to the exclusion of other facets of his political complexion. To a greater or lesser extent, this is true of Landa and Ferguson's pioneering studies, the introductory essays in Davis's edition of the prose works and the last production of this school, Ehrenpreis's biography, completed in 1983 but drawing on the critical and historiographic orthodoxies of an earlier time.³ Swift's image in politics at this time was also that of a champion of Irish rights against English encroachments. Eamon de Valera, the first Taoiseach, was persuaded to accept Swift into his pantheon of post-independence patriots when this otherwise suspiciously English-looking figure was identified to him as the author of an injunction to burn everything English but their coal.⁴ Shortly before the creation of the fully independent state, an author identified as an 'independent British publicist who has made a lifelong study of the Irish question' produced a pamphlet arguing for the revocation of the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 and the creation of a republic. He did so under the pen-name 'Jonathan Swift Junior'.⁵ Had he been around to see them, Swift might well have

³ The introductory essay in Douglas, Kelly and Campbell Ross, *Locating Swift*, pp. 9–27, makes this point as well as providing a comprehensive review of more recent developments in Swift criticism.

⁴ Fauske, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 164, n. 16.

⁵ 'Jonathan Swift Junior', *Ireland, a Republic by Reason* (London: The Hyde Publishing Company, [1932]), p. [5].

disowned such progeny, or at least contested their legitimacy. This is not to say that the question of Irish (in)dependence, in the narrow sense delineated by the Declaratory Act, does not feature in the *Drapier's Letters*.

Like several of the other letters, the letter to Middleton questions '[w]hat is really and truly meant by that Phrase of a *depending Kingdom*, as applied to *Ireland*; and wherein that *Dependency consisteth*?' (X, 108; cf. 84, 62). Indeed when he assures his readers that 'you ARE and OUGHT to be as FREE a People as your Brethren in *England*', Swift's speaker wilfully (or rather wishfully) reverses the terms of the Act, with its provision that the 'kingdom of Ireland hath been, is, and of right ought to be subordinate unto and dependent upon the imperial crown of *Great Britain*' (X, 63, xviii, n. 4). But as studies published since the completion of Ehrenpreis's life have increasingly shown, Anglo-Irish relations were not quite the all-consuming issue they would later become. Nor was the question of parliamentary dependence universally troublesome. Writing in the same year and on the same subject as the *Drapier's Letters*, a contemporary could nonchalantly concede that the 1720 Act had indeed permanently altered the relationship between the kingdoms. But, he stressed, the result had been to bring them closer together: 'The Dependence of *Ireland* on the Imperial Crown of *Great Britain* has linked the Interests of these two Kingdoms so together that I believe Nothing can affect the one, which the other will not feel'. The same point was made into a veiled threat by David Bindon. A Limerick merchant who would later become MP for Ennis, Bindon wrote at least two pamphlets on the halfpence. One of these maintained that the two kingdoms were now 'so united that it may always remain a Maxim in Politicks, that *Ireland* cannot be destroy'd without bringing a most sensible Damage to the Affairs of *England*'.⁶

Thus while Swift may have used the halfpence crisis to force a re-examination of what dependency actually meant, others were content to accept the issue as beyond dispute and even to enlist it in their arguments against the patent. But if they were drawing a line under this debate of the recent past, their writing was still open to the larger narrative of history. In his implication that

⁶ [George Ewing], *A Defence of the Conduct of the People of Ireland in their unanimous Refusal of Mr Wood's Copper-Money* (Dublin: George Ewing, 1724), p. 34; [David Bindon], *Some Reasons shewing the Necessity the People of Ireland are under, for continuing to refuse Mr Wood's Coinage* (Dublin: [n. pub], [1724]), p. 25.

Ireland could have been ‘destroy’d’ by the coinage, for example, David Bindon was employing a rather loaded vocabulary, one that also emerges in tradesmen’s declarations against the halfpence, inserted in the Dublin prints and published as broadsides. The Corporation of Butchers declared that ‘the uttering of the said *Wood’s Coin*, will be prejudicial to his Majesties Revenue, and the utter Ruin of this his Majesties Kingdom of *Ireland*’, while the Flying Stationers, whose declaration is reproduced below, announced their opposition to ‘William Wood’s *Design of Ruining this Kingdom*’.⁷

Inevitably such language recalled attempts that had been made to destroy the kingdom in the past, specifically what William King had called the ‘*Slavery and Destruction designed against the Kingdom and Protestants of Ireland*’ by James II, not to mention the designs partially carried out during the confederate war of the 1640s, made infamous in Protestant recollection by the massacre of 1641.⁸ Both events were subject to a process of institutional memorialization in the early eighteenth century. Robert Mahony has shown how Irish Protestants read the rebellion and massacre of 1641 as a punishment from God to be commemorated yearly with a liturgy set out in the statutes of the Church of Ireland.⁹ The revolution of fifty years later was linked in both kingdoms with earlier redemptions from the threat of Catholic tyranny, and in Ireland the memory of this narrow escape from divine wrath was kept alive by secular as well as religious authorities.¹⁰ In the town of Kinsale, site of James II’s landing in 1689, civic leaders decreed that 29 September be observed as ‘a day of public rejoicing’. On that day in 1690, ‘by the great mercy of almighty God and His Majesty’s victorious arms, the Protestants of this corporation were delivered out of the hands of their implacable enemies of the Roman Catholic persuasion’.¹¹

⁷ *The Declaration of the Corporation of the Butchers* (Dublin: Guy Needham, 1724), *The Flying Stationers Declaration* (Dublin: [n. pub.], 1724). These are reproduced in *DL*, p. xxxviii, p. xxxix.

⁸ King, *State of the Protestants*, p. 253.

⁹ Robert Mahony, ‘The Irish Colonial Experience and Swift’s Rhetoric of Perception in the 1720s’, in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century 10: Papers from the tenth David Nichol Smith Seminar*, selected and introduced by Ian Higgins and Gillian Russell (= *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 22 (1998)), pp. 63–75, pp. 66–7.

¹⁰ For example, Robert Lumley Lloyd, *A Sermon Preached at St. Paul’s Covent-Garden on the 5th of November 1711* (London: A. Baldwin, 1711), which cites the date as the anniversary not only of the ‘discovery of the powder-traitors’ but also of ‘our no less happy deliverance from the attempts of popery and arbitrary power by the blessed King William’.

¹¹ Toby Barnard, ‘The Cultures of Eighteenth-Century Irish Towns’, in Peter Borsay and Lindsay Proudfoot, eds, *Provincial Towns in Early Modern England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 (= *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 108)), pp. 195–222, p. 218.

Municipal politics retained this stance well into the next century. Trade and craft guilds, whose members made up the civic corporations, had acquired what Jacqueline Hill calls ‘a more directly Protestant flavour’ in the wake of the Williamite victory. Although there were still some Catholics among the freemen down to the early 1700s, an order excluding Catholics from freedom had been passed in 1690 and some guilds such as the tailors’ guild went to the extent of obtaining a ‘new and explicitly Protestant charter’.¹² The campaign against the halfpence was very much a civic affair, initiated by public-spirited businessmen such as James Maculla and David Bindon, orchestrated with the help of the guilds and publicized through their declarations. Unsurprisingly, then, the campaign had a distinctly Protestant cast. That William Wood’s patent was dated 12 July, now celebrated as the anniversary of William of Orange’s victory over James II at the Boyne, should be seen as a slightly contrived coincidence rather than a massive historical irony, given that the battle had actually taken place on July 1 in the Julian calendar.¹³ But it does not follow that contemporary commentators on the halfpence affair saw no connection with the events of the previous century. While it would be wrong to say that it represented a continuation by other means of longstanding sectarian conflicts, it would be equally misleading to say that Wood’s patent ushered in a new age of secular nationalism. At the very least, writers on the events of 1724 established a continuity with those of 1641 and 1691 by reading them for tropological significance.

Writing soon after Wood’s patent was revoked, a Dublin pamphleteer took advantage of Swift’s fame and the success of the four extant letters of the Drapier to produce a *Fifth and last Letter to the People of Ireland*. Although he shared in the ‘publick Joy’ at the resolution of the crisis, he also insisted that this narrow escape should be interpreted as the result of providential intervention, a ‘Deliverance’ that must be appropriately marked ‘with Prayers and Thanksgivings to almighty GOD’. Nor was he in any doubt as to the origin of the crisis. ‘[M]ost of our *national Misfortunes*’, he wrote, ‘have their Rise from Our *general Disrespect* to our *MAKER*’. This latest travail was no exception, being a

¹² Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists*, pp. 34–35, p. 37.

¹³ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The Faithful Tribe: An Intimate Portrait of the Loyal Institutions* (London: HarperCollins, 1999; repr. 2000), p. 165 n.

judgement on a nation that had ‘grown to such an inexplicable summit of *Sin* and *Blasphemy*, that, I doubt whether the once wretched People of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* were more detested than *We* in the *Sight of Heaven*’. Nonetheless, the kingdom of Ireland had been spared and its subjects remained free to enjoy ‘a perfect *Union of Brethren*, a free *Exercise of the Protestant Religion* [...], *Liberty and Property*’, an occasion which prompted thanks in the words of the psalmist: ‘For *Thou O LORD hast defeated mine Enemies and hast destroyed the Wiles of the UNGODLY*’.¹⁴

As this reading of the halfpence crisis suggests, some observers chose to interpret the event as the latest in a series of ordeals sent to test the integrity of the Protestant nation of Ireland. But the ‘Enemies’ who had been put to flight could no longer be identified with the old foe. According to one pamphlet writer, Ireland’s Catholics were to be congratulated for their efforts in resisting the coinage. ‘[Y]ou cannot’, he said to them, ‘be sufficiently Commended for the hearty Zeal and ready Concurrence you have shewn upon this Occasion, in keeping out this Ruin of *Wood’s* halfpence, which if you had suffered to enter among you must have overrun us’. But he remained perplexed on another issue:

while you make a noble and resolute stand, worthy of Men again [*sic*] this Trash of *Wood’s*, ’tis astonishing to see you at the same Time, tamely and blindly submit to be impos’d on by infinitely worse Trash of your Priest’s coining; a Submission which sinks you below the Dignity of Men, Christians, or even of Rational Creatures.¹⁵

The parallel between *Wood’s* corrupt bargain and the practices of the Catholic clergy is developed at some length. Only half of ‘*Wood’s Mettal is Dross*, but your *Doctrines* are most of them *all Dross*’, he continues. He demonstrates that ‘the damage you wou’d receive by the *Halfpence*, bears no relation to the damage you actually receive by your Obstinate adherence to Popery’ and argues ‘that you cou’d not have refused Mr *Wood* and his Coin admittance, had he come in the form of an Ambassador from the Lady of *Loreto*,

¹⁴ ‘Hibernicus’, *The Fifth and Last Letter to the People of Ireland in Reference to Wood and his Brass* (Dublin: [n. pub], 1724), p. 3, p. 5, p. 14, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Advice to the Roman Catholicks of Ireland. Concerning Woods’s Halfpence* (Dublin: [n. pub], 1724), p. 4.

to receive your contribution towards buying a *Jewel* for her *Hair* or a *Diamond Cross* for her *Neck*'. It is difficult to say for certain whether *Advice to the Roman Catholics of Ireland* was intended as earnest proselytizing or anti-Catholic satire. Indeed there is no reason why it should not be seen as a mixture of both, since the ridicule of Catholic practices was by no means inconsistent with a desire to rescue one's countrymen from what this pamphleteer calls 'monstrous and blasphemous idolatry' and admit them to 'the many advantageous Priviledges your fellow subjects enjoy'.¹⁶ The pamphleteer seems poised between his contempt for Catholics' gullibility and a desire to bring them into the fold of reformed religion, with its attendant conferral of basic civil rights. This was by no means an unusual position. Reflection on the Christian duty of conversion was a corollary of observations about the benighted condition of Catholics rather than a counterweight to them. By the 1720s, however, some Irish churchmen had begun to worry that such considerations were being neglected in favour of pragmatic acceptance of the status quo.

As Archbishop Synge remarked in 1719, 'there are too many amongst us who had rather keep the Papists as they are, in an almost slavish subjection, than have them made Protestants, and thereby entitled to the same liberties and privileges with the rest of their fellow subjects'.¹⁷ Such comments, along with the foregoing survey of the less canonical literature on Wood's patent, suggest that certain priorities and preconceptions were beginning to be revised. The halfpence crisis dramatized a moment at which England, rather than Catholic Ireland, was revealed as an agent through which the kingdom of Ireland might be 'destroy'd'. But, as the pamphlet literature of the crisis shows, the old reading of history as a series of trials sent to threaten Protestant Ireland's hard-won liberties had yet to be abandoned – even if Catholicism's perceived role in this dialectic was beginning to be adjusted.

The purpose of this chapter is to locate *The Drapier's Letters* within the historical moment just described. It shows how Swift's texts took their lead from the extant literature on the halfpence when he joined in the controversy six months into its course, constructing the persona of a Protestant tradesman and

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 14, p. 7, p. 6, p. 4, p. 7.

¹⁷ Synge to Wake, 19 November 1719. Quoted in McNally, 'William King, Patriotism and the "National Question"', p. 55, and Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 306.

civic patriot in an exaggerated and rather grotesque caricature of those who were already writing and reacting against the patent. The Drapier also makes much of the potential to read anti-Catholic rhetoric into the crisis. His manipulation of its old stand-bys shows how Swift constructed his constituents as espousing a distinctly Protestant politics and as conditioned to react more readily to the traditional threat to their liberties than the emerging one. But by their subject matter the letters are also compelled to engage with issues of value, denomination and sovereignty, and thus to address what had changed in the relationship between Ireland and England as well as between the denominations within Ireland. In addressing these issues, the radical conservatism of the *Drapier's Letters* might be described by using what Carteret is supposed to have said to Swift in the confrontation of 1725. Although the Lord Lieutenant was quoting Virgil, an alternative source for this line is Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Machiavelli quotes the same line, plus a little more, in his explanation of how a prince should manage a newly-acquired territory. Here the quotation reads (in George Bull's translation) 'harsh necessity and the newness of my reign force me to do such things *and to guard my frontiers everywhere*'.¹⁸ This chapter shows how Swift, the newly installed (or self-appointed) chief patriot, patrols the frontiers of his constituency in the *Drapier's Letters*.

¹⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. by George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1961; rev. ed. 1981), p. 95. Emphasis added.

The Flying-Stationers DECLARATION.

WE the Flying Stationers of the City of Dublin, (commonly call'd News-Boys) bearing the of the Vile Practices of William Wood's Design of Ruining this Kingdom. Do hereby give Notice to all Gentlemen, Ladies, and others, who shall have Occasion to Buy News, Poems, Songs, Letters Lampoons, &c. That we will not Receive or Offer in-Change any of William Wood's Drossy Half Pence or Farthings, because we can neither get News, Ale, Brandy, Tobacco nor Snuff for such cursed Stuff.

Patrick Fannin
James Ward
John Clifford
Thomas Phoenix
Patrick Braddy
Patrick Tracy
John Riley
P. Neale
Patrick Bryan
Arthur Matthews
Charles Carty
Frank Matthews
Bryan Kelly
John Matthews
James Newland
Lawrence Coffey
John Sheal
Pat. Donagan
Thomas Beverham
James Neale
Patrick Farrel
Dinnis Hart
John Comer
John Hawking
Lawrence Donagan
Dinnis Ryan

Michael Downey
Stephen Jones
Pat. Commons
Thomas Kerran
Frank Madin
James Harris
Thomas Fitzsimon
Edward Bryan
Philip Braddy
Phil. McKernan
Richard McGennis
Thomas Marquis
Wil. Johnston
Pat. Kelly
John Cunningham
Charles Gahogher
Thomas Frow
Philip Lyle
Martin Welsh
Walter Soales
John Hyde
Philip Fitzsimon
Philip Mathews
Tho. Adams
Tim. Kelly
William Field

Dublin Printed in the Year 1724.

II

I computed the Number of our People, by reckoning how many Millions there might be of each Religious Sect, or Political Party among us. (XI, 128)

Anyone who discusses Swift's occasional writings is compelled at some point to confront a particular crux. This is namely the title of the Drapier's fourth letter, which is addressed to the 'whole People of IRELAND' (x, 53). 'Ireland' has been shown to be a problematic term in Swift's usage; 'people' is equally complex. Did it describe a political unit, an ethnic community, or even a social

class? In his sermon on the occasion of Wood's halfpence, Swift explicates his own usage of the term: 'When I say the people, I mean the bulk or mass of the people, for I have nothing to do with those in power' (IX, 234). From his own perspective this was quite accurate. Exiled from the corridors of power and obnoxious to the Walpole administration, Swift had produced only one significant piece of writing in a decade, and this was a 'weak hasty Scribble' produced as a freelance and disseminated alongside the productions of mavericks such as John Toland. As he was fond of reminding his correspondents, Swift was indeed isolated from the world in which he had moved before Oxford's fall in 1714. But by comparison with his congregants or even his printer, Swift had quite a lot to do with those in power.

In the early stages of his stint as the Drapier, he had sent a copy of the first letter to Carteret, introducing it with studied disinterest as 'entitled to a Weaver and suited to the vulgar'. He described his encounter with Carteret, so dramatically rendered later on by Sheridan, as 'nothing but old Friendship without a word of Politicks'.¹⁹ Herbert Davis, in describing Carteret as an 'old friend' of Swift's shows that this remark was not just an attempt to understate the significance of what had happened.²⁰ The fact that the men were well acquainted suggests that their encounter was more of an elaborate game than a truly heated altercation. The 'old friendship' of Carteret and Swift also enabled more than cosy retrospection. In the run-up to their encounter, the author managed to avoid prosecution over what would have been the sixth letter through the help of another influential contact. At the height of the controversy Archbishop King had consulted Carteret over the proclamation and subsequently advised Swift not to publish the 'Letter to the Lord Chancellor Middleton', which revealed his authorship of the other letters and would have exposed him to the risk of prosecution.²¹ However, a genuine shopkeeper, John Harding, lacked such powerful intercessors and was imprisoned in November 1724 for publishing the Drapier's *Letter to the Whole People of Ireland*.²² This ordeal seems to have broken Harding's health and led to his death. Even though Swift had in his

¹⁹ Swift to Knightley Chetwoode, 18 January 1725, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 543.

²⁰ 'Introduction', *Prose X*, p. xvii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

²² Ehrenpreis, III, 277.

second letter upbraided Harding for his lack of effort, commanding him to promote his pamphlets more vigorously and noting that he had ‘got very well’ from their sale so far (X, 24), the printer remained loyal to the end and his ‘last defiant act was to have a son baptized John Draper Harding’.²³ Such dedication causes Nokes to acknowledge Harding as ‘the real martyr of the campaign against Wood.’²⁴

Swift’s connection to those in power was more comprehensive, and certainly proved more useful than his identification with ‘the bulk or mass of the people’. Outside St Patrick’s Cathedral, this phrase acquires ominous connotations. In *Gulliver’s Travels*, the composition of which was interrupted by *The Drapier’s Letters*, the narrator attempts to give an account of the politics and demography of his homeland for the benefit of the King of Brobdingnag. This leads Gulliver to adopt the novel method of computation described in the epigraph to this section. The narrator’s discourse causes the King to make an estimation of his own, one that casts ironic reflections on the sermon on ‘Doing Good’. Having heard Gulliver’s account, the King confesses that he ‘cannot but conclude the Bulk of your Natives, to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth’ (XI, 132).

Under the lengthy shadow of the King of Brobdingnag Swift’s populism becomes a darker force. Although the *Drapier’s Letters* do not make such an explosive statement of contempt, they can be shown to manipulate popular sentiment in specific directions:

How would such a Proposal sound from *France* or *Spain*, or any other Country with which we traffick, if they should offer to deal with us only upon this Condition, that we should take their Money at Ten Times higher than the intrinsick Value? (X, 19)

This rhetorical question does not seem to attach special significance to its mention of ‘*France* or *Spain*’ – the speculation could equally apply to ‘any other Country’. In the letter immediately preceding this one, however, the Drapier

²³ Robert Munter, *A Dictionary of the Print Trade in Ireland, 1550–1755* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988), pp. 127, 128.

²⁴ Nokes, *Jonathan Swift*, p. 296.

makes specific mention of one of these countries when he cites the extortion of citizens as a ‘common Practice’ of the ‘*French Government*’. Their penchant for ‘calling in all their Money after they have sunk it very low, and then coining it a-new at a much higher Value’ has made the French notorious. The Drapier extenuates this policy of devaluation, since at least in France they ‘give their Subjects *Silver for Silver*’. His point is that such practice, whilst objectionable in itself, is ‘not the Thousandth Part so wicked as this *abominable Project of Mr. Wood*’ (x, 8). The comparison is notable because of its power of insinuation. Swift allows his reader to infer that what happens now in Ireland is exponentially more unjust than what occurs regularly in France. However no direct comparison is made between the English and the French governments. Instead, the scale of abominations begins with Wood and ends with ‘the *French*’. This subtle orientation of the audience’s outrage suggests that as a people, the Drapier’s readers were more inclined to accept Paris rather than London as an exemplar of corrupt rule.

If the *Letters* sometimes determine to adopt a wider perspective on European affairs, then their concern to take a long view of Irish history is persistent. Searching for precedents for Wood’s patent, the Drapier begins in the time of ‘*Tyrone’s Rebellion*’. This conflict lasted from 1594 to 1603, when Elizabeth I and then James I’s armies attempted to suppress the resistance to English rule in Ireland led by Hugh O’Neill, the Earl of Tyrone. During this time, the Drapier notes, ‘*Queen Elizabeth ordered Money of mixt Metal to be coined in the Tower of London, and sent over hither for Payment of the Army*’ (x, 10). A subsequent letter describes this policy as a ‘pernicious Counsel, one that ‘very narrowly failed of losing the Kingdom’ (55). This is one of a series of excursions into the past through which the Drapier establishes a link in his reader’s minds between the policy of devaluation and the threat to Ireland’s status as an English ‘Kingdom’, often with reference to the wider European power struggle. In his use of the precedent from the reign of Elizabeth I, for example, the Drapier is careful to remind his readers that the policy was adopted under extreme duress in the course of a ‘*Rebellion in this Kingdom assisted from Spain*’ (10).

In light of these examples the Drapier’s reference to ‘*France or Spain*’ is revealed as more tactical than casual. The same is true of some of his insults,

which can function as subliminal messages that force his readers to recall times when their status as a loyal people has been threatened. In referring to Wood's cronies as his 'Confederates' (x, 22, 23, 42), for example, the Drapier insinuates a connection between the present crisis and the period between 1642 and 1649 when the Catholic Confederacy 'governed a unitary state, covering most of the island, and engaged in a bitter conflict with royalists, parliamentarians, and Scots covenanters'.²⁵ The Drapier's readers, like the speaker himself, looked back on this period as 'the Time of the Massacre' (40). The language surrounding these references to Wood as a 'Confederate' – a revenant from the days of Catholic Ireland's resurgence – is redolent of guerilla war. Wood, the Drapier says, 'now sees a Spirit hath been raised against him, and he only watches till it begins to flag; he goes about *watching* when to *devour us*' (22). The Drapier casts himself as the guardian of this 'Spirit' of resistance, whose religious character is underlined by the fact that this passage incorporates an unacknowledged quotation from the Anglican prayer book. As if to acknowledge his creator's vocation, the Drapier appoints himself a kind of honorary chaplain and charges himself with boosting morale, as 'it is my chief Endeavour to keep up your Spirits and Resentments' (22). The 'Spirit' of the people has to be one of eternal vigilance and it is in constant need of renewal, since in the Drapier's version of the crisis, his readers are not permitted to wake from the nightmare of recent history. Another seemingly casual caricature, the depiction of Wood as 'this little *Arbitrary Mock-Monarch*' (x, 19) also has a historical pedigree.

'Arbitrary monarchy' was the term used in the wake of the Glorious Revolution to characterize the rule of James II and to explain the necessity of installing William III in his place. The Drapier calls attention to the history behind the term when he refers to the 'late King *James*' as 'that arbitrary Prince [...]' (39). The word 'arbitrary' continued to carry political overtones after James's flight to France, and his association with that country gave the word a European context as well as a British or Irish one. By the turn of the century, Protestants in England and Ireland would have been accustomed to describing the French monarchy, as well as the late King James, as agents of 'arbitrary'

²⁵ Micheál Ó Siochrú, *Confederate Ireland, 1642–1649: A Constitutional and Political Analysis* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 11.

power. An anonymous satire of 1703, sometimes attributed to Daniel Defoe, calls itself *A Modest Vindication of the French King; In which, all the Arguments Against Arbitrary Power and that Monarch are fully Consider'd and Answer'd*.²⁶ The accusation of arbitrary government was essentially a matter of political theory and, Molesworth's *Account of Denmark* had argued, there was no necessary connection between it and Catholicism. In practice, however, 'arbitrary' power was most often exemplified by reference to Catholic Europe, and France in particular. The French state's persecution of Protestants and its status as an ally and protector of James II and, after 1701, his heir, the 'Pretender', were indices of its status as an 'arbitrary' power. As the *Modest Vindication* attests, devaluation was also cited as characteristic of French misrule. Adopting the voice of an admirer of Louis XIV of France and his grandson Philip IV of Spain, the pamphleteer adopts the ironic purpose of convincing his English readers of the virtues of arbitrary power as wielded by the two kings. He asserts that:

Now Workmens Wages [in England] are at an extravagant Rate; but it is because *Money* is so plenty; because our Trade is so great; and our Wealth so abundant; but when *Arbitrary Government* has destroy'd that Source of Pride and Trade, all things will have a Fall; and you may have a Days Work done here for Four Pence a Day as in *Wales*, and our Soldiers will then Fight for Three Halpence a Day as in *France*.²⁷

The *Modest Vindicator* goes on to argue that '*Arbitrary Power* will end all our *Divisions* in Religion' since '*High Church* and *Low Church*, *Presbyterian*, *Independant*, *Anabaptist*, *Quakers*, &c. will all unite and be One *Holy Catholick Apostolical Roman Church*'.²⁸ This pamphlet's explication of the central features of 'arbitrary monarchy', and its tendency to portray them as distinctive of Spain and France, helps to make explicit the latent ideological content of the Drapier's references to these countries and provides a context for his use of terms like 'arbitrary Prince'. Twenty years after the *Modest Vindication*, the Drapier was also keen to establish his Williamite credentials.

²⁶ 'A Williamite', *A Modest Vindication* (London [n. pub.], 1703).

²⁷ *A Modest Vindication*, pp. 15–16. 'Halpence' so spelt in original.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Speaking of himself in the third person, the Drapier asserts that his *Letter to the Whole People of Ireland* reveals its author, ‘through the whole Tenor of it, to be a *loyal Subject* to his Majesty; and devoted to the House of *Hanover*’. He also says that he ‘declares himself, in a Manner, particularly zealous against the Pretender’ (69). With its slight but slighting qualification, this remark can be read as a private joke for the benefit of those in the know about who the Drapier actually was – someone not known for his support of the Hanoverian succession and tainted by association with those who had defected to the Stuart cause after the death of Queen Anne. But to the extent that Swift was making his pamphlet ‘suited to the Vulgar’, this self-characterization also continues the Drapier’s tendency to appeal to certain political instincts of his Irish constituents. Instead of consistently manipulating anti-English sentiment in order to protest against a patent imposed by a British government on Irish subjects, the speaker chooses to locate the struggle within a European context of opposition to ‘arbitrary’ Catholic power and against a background of Ireland’s underlying and continuing struggle to maintain its status as a Protestant English kingdom.

This sense of threatened identity is established with the help of personal as well as national history, as when Swift’s speaker vows that he will not buy ‘Mr. WOOD’s Money as my Father did the Brass Money in King James’s Time’ until he is ‘just ready to starve’ (7). This bit of speculative family history notably differs from Swift’s normal tendency to emphasize that his parents were English. His use of the spectre of James II is probably designed to enrage certain readers in Westminster as much as to antagonize his constituents in Ireland, but it nonetheless enables definite conclusions about the referent of the phrase ‘the whole People of Ireland’. J. C. Beckett argues that the ‘Drapier’s appeal was distinctly and deliberately protestant’ from the ‘very beginning’. The appearance in bold type in the middle of the first letter’s title page of the words ‘Brass Half-Pence’ (reproduced at the start of this chapter) would, argues Beckett, have ‘inevitably connoted Stuart tyranny, popish persecution and French conquest’ to an Irish readership.²⁹

²⁹ J. C. Beckett, ‘Swift and the Anglo-Irish Tradition’, in *The Character of Swift’s Satire: A Revised Focus*, ed. by Claude Rawson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983), pp. 151–165, p. 158.

In making use of this phrase, Swift was actually following the lead of others. The first pamphlet against the halfpence, James Maculla's *Ireland's Consternation*, had employed the term on its title page six months before the Drapier's first letter. Nonetheless, words like 'brass' and 'brazen' connote idolatry to Christians of any kind and Swift duly exploits such typological associations, likening the copper currency to the 'Brazen Bull' in which the Christian martyr Antipas was roasted to death and to the armour of Goliath (x, 12; 48). The phrase 'brass money' also had a specific referent. In the minds of Swift's Irish readers it would have evoked the debased coinage uttered by James II in order to try and finance his attempt to recapture the English throne after his relocation to Ireland in 1689.³⁰ 'Brass money' was a distinctly Irish usage: in England the corresponding term was 'gun money', after the rumour that James had melted down his cannons to produce coins.³¹ Indeed, 'brass money' became a touchstone of Irish Protestant identity routinely linked in the oral tradition with other watchwords of subjection such as popery, slavery and arbitrary power – not to mention wooden shoes.

Swift was no stranger to such shibboleths or to the events they evoked. He was himself in 1689 a refugee from the 'Troubles' in Ireland; his earliest extant poem is an ode celebrating the victorious return of William III (*Prose*, v, 193; *Poems*, pp. 43–6), and he stuck fast to 'revolution principles' throughout his career. As Paul Richard Doran notes, Swift so often deploys formulae such as 'Popery, Slavery and Arbitrary Power', 'Popery, Slavery and the Rebellion', 'Popery, Persecution, Arbitrary Power and the Pretender' that they amount to a 'persistent throb throughout his prose corpus'.³² Such slogans also became enshrined in popular culture, adopted by groups similar to those that began to assemble in honour of Swift's birthday. The 'Aldermen of Skinner's Alley' was a club formed by senior members of the Dublin Corporation who had been expelled from office and replaced by Catholics under James II. They promoted the 'Orange toast' which cheers the 'memory of the great and good King William:

³⁰ Michael Dolley, 'The Irish Coinage, 1534–1641', in *A New History of Ireland*, III, *Early Modern Ireland, 1534–1641*, 408–419, 418.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 419.

³² Paul Richard Doran, 'Jonathan Swift and the Roman Catholics' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1971), p. 130, citing *Prose* III, 13, 69, 73, 88, 131, 142, 143, 204; IV 61, 93, 151, 166; VII, 28; VIII, 31, 39; IX, 56; XII, 155, 200, 226.

not forgetting Oliver Cromwell, who assisted in redeeming us from popery, slavery, arbitrary power, brass money and wooden shoes'.³³ The last component, which now looks somewhat incongruous and even comical, refers to the *sabots* worn by French peasants.³⁴ My previous chapter has shown how senior Anglicans regarded the transformation of the middle-ranking agricultural classes into a group resembling the peasantry of Catholic Europe as anything but a joke. Equally, the rumours of the imminent reappearance in the towns of James II's brass money may involve a degree of rhetorical play, but it was ultimately an indication that something had gone seriously wrong.

The Drapier's use of the emotional charge of 'brass money' places Swift's rhetoric at a pivotal point in the emergent discourse of militant Protestantism in Ireland. It reveals a tendency to deploy shibboleths of a specifically Irish culture of resistance, weaving the conflicts of the 1590s, the 1640s and the 1690s into a narrative of history that posits the halfpence controversy as its climax. The revolt against the patent becomes the culmination of a two-hundred-year struggle of Irish Protestants to maintain their status as an English subject people, which is brought to a somewhat frenzied pitch by the Drapier's fourth letter. Here the Drapier indulges in the unlikely fantasy that, thanks to the continued excesses of the London government, England has succumbed to a rebellion which has allowed the Pretender to assume the English throne. This is the paragraph that prompted Carteret to issue a proclamation against its author for sedition:

I *M. B. Drapier*, [...] declare, next under God, I *depend* only on the King my Sovereign, and on the Laws of my own Country, And I am so far from *depending* upon the People of *England*, that, if they should ever *rebel* against my Sovereign, (which GOD forbid) I would be ready at the first Command from his Majesty to take Arms against them; as some of *my* Countrymen did

³³ Quoted by Craig, *Dublin 1660–1860: A Social and Architectural History*, pp. 71–2 n. See also Dolley, 'Coinage', p. 419; Edwards, *The Faithful Tribe*, p. 217. The toast was taken up by the Orange Order, founded in 1795.

³⁴ In *The Fable of the Bees* (I, 317), Mandeville describes how an Englishman would 'ridicule the *French* for wearing Wooden Shoes'. In 1714 a Dublin tanner was indicted for making a remark about Catholics enlisting in the Pretender's service. He is supposed to have said, (referring presumably, to the social standing of English and Scottish colonists): 'Who would blame them for endeavouring to get estates if they could, for that fellows that came over in leathern breeches and wooden shoes now rides in their coaches?' (quoted in Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 244).

against *theirs* at *Preston*. And, if such a Rebellion should prove so successful as to fix the *Pretender* on the Throne of *England*; I would venture to transgress that *Statute* so far, as to lose every Drop of my Blood, to hinder him from being *King of Ireland*. (X, 62)

This solemn declaration brings the Drapier's historical narrative right up to date by factoring in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, when Irish troops fought in Scotland and northern England against the advancing forces of the Pretender (*DL*, p. 259). The historical tide has turned: Ireland, once the final refuge of arbitrary monarchy, has become the last bastion of revolution principles. Stirring though such declarations are, and clever though their sly refutation of Ireland's dependence upon its neighbouring kingdom might be, one might reasonably ask what any of this has to do with a patent allowing a Wolverhampton ironmonger to mint small change.

This question becomes especially compelling when one considers how Swift had dismissed the Jacobite threat shortly before the rebellion of 1715. On 23 February 1714 he published *The Publick Spirit of the Whigs* as part of a paper war with Richard Steele, with the aim of refuting claims made in Steele's pamphlet *The Crisis*. Steele had alleged that 'there was a crisis in British affairs' so long as the French threat remained uncontained and that the Protestant succession was not safe while the Oxford ministry remained in power.³⁵ *The Publick Spirit of the Whigs* determined to show that this was empty propaganda designed to unite opposition against the Tories. It did so by likening Whig scaremongering to Catholic credulity:

IN Popish Countries, when some Impostor cries out, *A Miracle! A Miracle!* it is not done with a Hope or Intention of converting Hereticks, but confirming the deluded Vulgar in their Errors; and so the Cry goes round without examining into the Cheat. Thus the Whigs among us give about the Cry, *A Pamphlet! A Pamphlet! The Crisis! The Crisis!* Not with a View of convincing their Adversaries but to raise the Spirits of their Friends, recal their Stragglers, and unite their Numbers by Sound and Impudence; as Bees assemble and cling together by the Noise of Brass.³⁶

³⁵ Downie, *Jonathan Swift*, p. 187.

³⁶ *Prose VIII, Political Tracts 1713–1719*, ed. by Herbert Davis and Irvin Ehrenpreis (1953; repr. 1973), p. 34; quoted by Downie, p. 188.

A decade after the publication of this passage, Swift would still be stimulating his audience's reflexive anti-Catholicism, still attracting government proclamations and still allowing his printer to bear the brunt of the resulting recriminations. But when it came to irresponsible manipulation of the Jacobite threat, the (wooden) shoe was now on the other foot. The simile of the assembling 'Bees' takes on a particular irony in light of the Drapier's use of the noise of 'brass money' to try and raise the public spirit of the people of Ireland. Ten years after pouring cold water on the Whigs' distortion of the threat from France, Swift was himself manipulating the prevailing mood among his Irish constituents by investing William Wood with the transmigrated spirits not only of the Pretender but of Hugh O'Neill, the Confederates, and the late King James. The transmutation of Wood's copper halfpence into clanging brass shows how comfortably Swift inhabits the persona of a Dublin tradesman, preaching his triumphalist politics with more cunning and alacrity than the Drapier's real-life counterparts. But if the reduction of the once-critical Catholic threat to a useful clarion call represented a triumph of sorts for Protestant Ireland, it also marked the beginning of a crisis in relation to England.

III

In his 'Letter to Lord Chancellor Middleton' the Drapier informs his correspondent that there are two types of people in Ireland:

As to the People of this Kingdom, they consist either of *Irish Papists*; who are as inconsiderable, in Point of Power, as the Women and Children; or of *English Protestants*, who love their Brethren of that Kingdom [England] (x, 104)

This assessment of the state of the Irish 'Kingdom' shows how the ability to constitute a 'People' is a function of political strength: a 'Point of Power'. Ireland's '*Papists*' are 'inconsiderable' in this respect and therefore assume the stereotypical impotence of 'Women and Children'. The use of females and infants as a gauge of frailty also affords comparison with *A Modest Proposal*.

Swift's most famous satire opens with a description of streets crowded with 'Beggars of the Female Sex' accompanied by 'helpless Infants'. These 'three, four, or six' offspring rapidly develop from mere helplessness to being active criminals, or traitors bound to 'fight for the Pretender', or destined to revert to a condition of natural slavery and 'sell themselves to the Barbadoes' (XII, 109). The Modest Proposer's vision is one of a spiralling, pernicious fecundity and unnaturally accelerated growth; a condition to which his own language falls victim as the number of infants climbs from three to four to six and they achieve adulthood within the space of a sentence. Far from being icons of powerlessness, the Proposer's women assume a dangerous status through their ability to reproduce, which nourishes the strength of the Pretender. In response to this crisis the text turns the beggars' single strength, their biology, back on itself by proposing that these infants be farmed to feed persons of quality.

Catholics in the *Drapier's Letters* are less conspicuous but equally prone to being pressed into service as a token of negotiable value, a gaming chip with which to up the stakes in a political game. It seems from such sources as the Flying Stationers' declaration, signed by newsboys with names like Braidy, Carty, Downey, Kelly, Riley and Tracy, that the resistance to the halfpence was not completely Anglo-Saxon or Anglican in character.³⁷ Indeed, Primate Boulter, recently arrived from England, remarked that 'the people of every religion, country, and party here, are alike set against Wood's halfpence and [...] their agreement in this has had a very unhappy influence on the state of this nation, by bringing on intimacies, between Papists and Jacobites, and the Whigs, who before had no correspondence with them'.³⁸ But from the Drapier's perspective the participation of those Irish who are not of English descent is of little relevance to its success. Their power to resist the coinage is not significant, since it is 'the True English People of Ireland who refuse it; although we take it for granted, that the Irish will do so too, whenever they are asked' (x, 67). The adverbial clause has a dual function. It denotes a confident ability on the part of

³⁷ I am grateful to Professor Andrew Carpenter for drawing my attention to this.

³⁸ Hugh Boulter to the Duke of Newcastle, 19 January 1725, *Letters written by His Excellency Hugh Boulter [...] to several ministers of state in England, and some others. Containing, an account of the most interesting transactions which passed in Ireland from 1724 to 1738*, 2 vols (Dublin: George Faulkner and James Williams, 1770), I, 7.

the minority to control the majority: the Irish will comply with the boycott each time it is required of them. Taken as an expression of future intent rather than habitual practice, the phrase 'whenever they are asked' may also imply that 'the *Irish*' have yet to be consulted on the matter and are distinct from the designated consumers of the texts.

Denied the status of reading subjects, or active constituents, they become the passive object of the texts' rhetorical manipulations, which magnify and diminish their stature by turns. The threat posed by Catholic Ireland in the past is made to loom large in order to heighten the urgency of the present crisis. Conversely, its inferior status as a nation of beggars in the present provides a simulacrum for the future predicament of the Drapier's readers. In being subject to such inflationary and deflationary transformations, the Catholic portion of the people of Ireland occupies a status analogous to that of the coinage itself. Establishing a contiguity between the two objects, the currency and the reified Catholic population, enables a conceptual transition: Swift trades in an existing stock of preconceptions about the Catholic population in order to regulate an exchange-mechanism. Ireland's Catholics enable the Drapier to convert established misgivings into new ones: they act as a focus for his readers' besieged sense of identity and enable him to project it onto the threat posed by England, and this is an existential menace as much as a political one.

The Drapier's intended readers, '*the True English People of Ireland*', occupy a curious hinterland between being English and Irish. Although they are presented as demonstrably different from the '*Irish*', both groups, as the letter to Middleton attests, could be referred to in combination as the 'People of this Kingdom'. Conversely, while they are united by their 'loyalty to the same Prince', the English people of Ireland are divided from their counterparts in England by more than the sea. The letter to Middleton acknowledges that Ireland's English Protestants 'may possibly sometimes complain, when they think they are hardly used' by their 'Brethren' in England. However, the Drapier does 'not see any great Consequence, how their personal Affections stand to each other, while the Sea divides them' (X, 104). As well as resentment at occasional bouts of ill-treatment, a perceptual gap separates these two different English peoples. At one point in the letter to Middleton, Swift attempts to characterize

the thinking of the ‘whole People of *England*’ by referring to their concept of the neighbouring island:

As to *Ireland*, [the English] know little more than they do of *Mexico*; further than that it is a Country subject to the King of *England*, full of Boggs, inhabited by wild *Irish Papists*; who are kept in Awe by mercenary Troops sent from thence: And their general Opinion is, that it were better for *England* if this whole Island were sunk into the Sea [...] (x, 103)

This passage alludes to the fact that many in England dismissed the opposition to the halfpence as a Catholic plot. It also confronts Swift’s Irish constituents with the derisive and despairing image that could be found in the collective psyche of the ‘Whole people of *England*’ (103). This particular letter was not published at the time of the controversy, but its suppression was motivated by the threat of prosecution rather than by the prospect of offending Irish readers’ English sensibilities. The letter was printed in George Faulkner’s edition of Swift’s works in 1735. By that time the letter’s admission that, in some minds at least, ‘*the True English People of Ireland*’ did not exist had become more, rather than less contentious. The letter’s use of objectionable tokens of Irishness is not unique to this letter. Although the ‘Letter to Middleton’ responds to these with indignation, some of the other letters use icons of inferiority in a defiant spirit, and effect a positive re-appropriation.

The fourth letter closes with a reference to a threat, imputed to Walpole, that the Drapier and his readers must ‘*either take these Half-pence or eat our Brogues*’. The word refers not to an Irish accent but to ‘that *Unpolite Covering for the Feet*’ that the term ‘brogue’ also denotes (67). Dismissing the threat as hollow, the Drapier assures his readers that he and they will soon ‘be left to possess our *Brogues and Potatoes in Peace*’ (68). The Drapier’s incorporation of an Irish loan-word into his defence of an English people perhaps reflects the fact that his readership was itself becoming infused with a sense of separate Irish identity – at least in relation to England.³⁹ This willingness to admit to the

³⁹ The English word ‘brogue’ is derived from the Irish word for shoe, *bróg*. It comes from Old Norse *brók*, ‘leg covering’ which also entered English independently where it became ‘britches’ (Loreto Todd, *Green English: Ireland’s Influence on the English Language* (Dublin: O’Brien,

possession of brogues and potatoes is a striking example of the way in which the author constructs his constituency as caught between Irish and English versions of itself. In the Drapier's adoption of brogues as a badge of resistance there may even be a suggestion of the 'wooden shoes' decried in the Orange Toast.

The picture of the whole people of Ireland that emerges from such uses of language is of a construct that was rigid in certain respects but distinctly fluid in others. In relation to the past, and to their Catholic neighbours, the Drapier's readers are militantly Protestant and violently English. Defined against English perceptions, however, his audience suffer a certain slippage into Irishness. This latter observation may help substantiate an assertion made by some historians. Connolly remarks that in the eighteenth century, Irish Protestants of all social and confessional classes began to be lumped 'into a single Hibernian stereotype' that 'reflected a new perception of them as separate and even foreign'.⁴⁰ At times the Drapier's own language anticipates this assessment. He complains that the supporters of the halfpence have, with the help of 'News-Mongers in *London*', published a slander that denies the Protestant character of the boycott, asserting instead that '*the Papists in Ireland have entered into an Association against [Wood's] Coin*' (x, 53). This prompts the speaker to remark that such resolutely Protestant institutions as the 'two Houses of Parliament, the Privy-Council' and the 'Corporations', and such individuals as the 'Lord-Mayor' and the 'principal Gentlemen of Several Counties, are stigmatized in a Lump, under the Name of *Papists*' (x, 54).

If Swift's speaker recoils violently from the political defamation of being associated with Papists, he is nonetheless content to accept the ethnic slur connoted by '*Brogues and Potatoes*' and to transform it into a statement of pride. The Drapier's ability to unite a putative people by subverting such stereotypes suggests that the means for articulating Protestant identity in Ireland had begun to diverge significantly from those used in England. It seems that in Britain, the

1999), p. 21). Potatoes at this point were not the ubiquitous foodstuff they would become in nineteenth-century Ireland and were consumed by the poor in the times between harvests. (See L. A. Clarkson and E. Margaret Crawford, *Feast and Famine: Food and Nutrition in Ireland 1590–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapters 2–3.)

⁴⁰ *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 122. See also David Hayton, 'Anglo-Irish Attitudes: Changing Perceptions of National Identity among the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, ca. 1690-1750', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 17 (1987), 145-157, pp. 147-149.

idea of Ireland as an autonomously loyal English nation was rapidly being undermined by a tendency to overlook the faithful minority and to regard the entire country as a troublesome exclave of Catholic resistance. As I have argued, the Drapier's own manipulation of the Catholic threat through his references to 'brass money' and 'arbitrary power' provides even stronger evidence of such a disjunction. The relative magnitude of the threat posed by 'popery and arbitrary power' had been the agent of bitter divisions and faction-fighting in England in 1714, and perhaps from as early as 1703, to judge by the *Modest Vindication*. In Ireland in the 1720s, however, Swift could still deploy such articles of faith metaphorically as a strategy by which to unite a 'whole People'. By the time of the *Drapier's Letters*, the English people of Ireland seem to have been both more and less English than their cousins across the sea.

If, in 1724, such a contrast was visible between the political identities of Protestants in Ireland and England, was there ever a point at which they had not yet diverged? One document that posits such a pre-fissile point is William King's *The State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James's Government* (1691). King's text arises from the need for Protestants in England and Ireland alike to accommodate a particular fact of history: that in 1690 a monarch who was believed to have succeeded to the throne by divine right was replaced by another at the invitation of the people. Although massively popular in England, going through four editions in the space of a year, the Irish context of this text is significant: it was on Irish soil that William's succession was settled, and from Ireland the justification for this turn of events would come.⁴¹

The language of King's tract provides a useful insight into some of the notions of political community that the Drapier employs thirty years later. It outlines a theoretical basis for opposing arbitrary monarchs like James. King's use of the terms 'people' and 'nation' is of particular interest as these are deployed in the context of a community united by political antipathy. The introductory section of King's book is 'an Explication of the Doctrin of Passive-Obedience'. As such, it forms a useful parallel for the Drapier's subsequent engagement with the same theme on a smaller scale. The bishop argues that 'if a King design to root out a People, or destroy one main part of his Subjects in

⁴¹ On the reception history of this text, see Hill, *Patriots to Unionists*, pp. 63–64.

favour of another whom he loves better', then that people is entitled to use force against him. Here the word 'People' seems to designate a part of the population, as distinct from its entirety. The implication is that a subject body can be a heterogeneous entity, composed of more than one people, and within this body a majority, a 'main part', can be opposed to another such people. By establishing strength of numbers as a legitimate ground for opposition, King also tacitly conveys that the embodiment of his theory, the resistance to James II, was undertaken by a Protestant people that was not subdivided into separate English and Irish parts. In Ireland, James II's Catholic supporters had the majority: for his opponents to constitute the 'main part', the Williamites of England and Ireland must be conceived as a single subjection rather than as two separate kingdoms. The nuances attached to the term 'People' become particularly refined when King begins to cite precedents for his argument, quoting Grotius' *De jure Belli & Pacis*:

If a King be carried with a malicious design to the destruction of a whole Nation, he loses his Kingdom [...]; he who professes himself an Enemy to a whole People, doth in that very act Abdicate his Kingdom [...]⁴²

What is striking is the subtext that seems to be developing around the word 'people'. The particular question raised by this passage is whether King is invoking or hinting at a distinction between a people and a nation. The implication that a polity can be made up of more than one people has already been raised; the question is whether 'nation' is used in a similarly restricted sense to indicate a part of a population. There is a clear distinction between the position of the putative monarch relative to the citizen body in the two parts of the sentence. In the first, he makes a 'Nation' the object of a theoretical 'design'. In the second, a 'People' becomes the object of a practical 'act'. Such distinctions were still troubling Irish bishops half a century later.

George Berkeley's *The Querist* (serially published 1735–37; first complete edition 1750) is a list of several hundred leading questions, each demanding answers that would provide solutions to Ireland's economic

⁴² *State of the Protestants*, p. 2.

deprivation at the time. The ninetieth of these queries asks of Ireland and England, ‘Whether it be not the true interest of both *nations* to become one *people*?’⁴³ The phraseology here reinforces the suggestion, common to Swift and King, that a given populace, can comprise two or more *peoples*. The twist that this query adds to the equation is this: Berkeley’s question carries a clear implication that, at the time of asking, Ireland and England constitute two separate *nations* and two distinct *peoples*. If the answer to Berkeley’s question is ‘yes’ and the two nations can indeed unite, they would remain separate nations but ‘become one people’. Thus while ‘nation’ seems at root to describe a group geographically separated from another, a people is constituted, as the quotation implies, not through sharing anything as concrete as a chunk of land but through a common, and abstract, ‘interest’. Berkeley’s next two queries support this interpretation:

91. Whether the upper part of this [Irish] people are not truly English, by blood, language, religion, manners, inclination, and interest?

92. Whether we are not as much Englishmen as the children of old Romans, born in Britain, were still Romans?⁴⁴

This passage discloses a striking contrast between the conception of an Irish people deployed by Berkeley in the mid-1730s and the one posited by King four decades earlier. Positioned closer to the end of the span between the two texts, Swift’s notion of the Irish people can be read at some times as a denial of the slippage that had taken place and at others as a defiant acknowledgement. In *The State of the Protestants*, the interests of the anti-Stuart peoples of Britain and Ireland are so conjoined as to make them a single people, a majority of the composite subject body that resided on both islands. The notion of their unity as a people in opposition to James II is so ingrained that it is not openly stated. In the *Querist*, however, the fact of their division becomes the implicit assumption and the prospect of their unity becomes the subject not of a statement but of a

⁴³ *The Querist Containing Several Queries Proposed to the Consideration of the Public*, in Alexander Campbell Fraser, ed., *The Works of George Berkeley D. D.; Formerly Bishop of Cloyne, Including his Posthumous Works*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), IV, *Miscellaneous Works, 1707–50*, 430.

⁴⁴ *The Querist*, p. 430.

query – a polite request. The Drapier's *Letter to the Whole People of Ireland* asserts that those readers are a 'True English People'. The querist Berkeley asks whether a similar cohort 'are not truly English', and whether either of the two peoples 'be sufficiently apprised' of the possibility.⁴⁵

The Bishop's hesitancy perhaps reveals the Dean's outspokenness as a case of protesting one's Englishness too much. The Drapier's own occasional willingness to cast his readers as distinctively Irish in reaction to English stereotyping represents an alternative strategy based on the defiant acceptance of perceived cultural difference. Berkeley's reference to the 'upper part' as the potentially English portion of the Irish people is also concerned to explore the social and cultural criteria for distinguishing between different sections of a population. It recalls Swift's use of beggars to define the status of his readers and to depict that standing as precarious, as well as his picture of an 'Irish' subject-race who will comply with their masters 'whenever they are asked'. Berkeley makes use of a similar dynamic of conqueror and subject when he asks whether his readers are not as demonstrably English as 'the children of old Romans, born in Britain, were still Romans?' The theory nascent in the question erects a distinct boundary between subjugating a people and becoming assimilated by it. The Drapier subscribes to a similar tenet when he says that his 'Ancestors' and those of his readers 'reduced this Kingdom to the Obedience of ENGLAND' (X, 55). In asserting this historic achievement Swift carries on his strategy of depicting his Irish readers as more deserving of their English birthright than their counterparts in Britain. The achievement of these 'Ancestors' is 'One great Merit' that Irish readers can claim as their own, one that 'those of *English* Birth can have no Pretence to' (ibid.).

Several possible dates for this moment of triumph emerge. A coherent narrative of history can be reassembled from the cut-up fragments that are dispersed throughout the letters. 'Tyrone's Rebellion' in the late sixteenth century, the 'Time of the Massacre' in the 1640s, and the days of the persecution of the Drapier's father by the 'Brass Money' of King James all present themselves as points at which the English people of Ireland have overcome the threat to their integrity and reduced the kingdom to 'Obedience'. However, no

⁴⁵ Ibid.

single point emerges as the instant of total conquest.⁴⁶ Admittedly the Drapier's assertion that the Irish will comply with their English masters' wishes 'whenever they are asked' constitutes an assertion that the conquest is complete. Conversely, Swift could still exploit an underlying uncertainty in 1724 by casting William Wood as a latter-day avatar of arbitrary power and his coin as a scion of James's 'Brass Money'. Five years later in the *Modest Proposal*, even children, previously as unthreatening as Papists, must be converted from their designs to 'deliver the Kingdom to the Pretender' (XII, 114) and transformed into sacrificial victims that restore the flagging vitality of Protestant Ireland. The disparity suggests that the self-image of Swift's Irish readers as a conquering people was at once the most enduring component of their identity and the most unstable: it was a longstanding certainty that had continually to be asserted for the first time.

Such paradoxes elicit the fact that Swift's writings combine two competing discourses of Irish history: one cyclical and one rectilinear. One of the sources for the circular version, for example, is the popular prejudice of English readers in Britain. In its assessment of the English view of Ireland, Swift's 'Letter to the Lord Chancellor Middleton' explains the reasoning behind the wish of English observers that the 'whole Island' of Ireland 'be sunk into the Sea'. He traces this despair to the fact that in England 'they have a Tradition, that every Forty Years there must be a Rebellion in *Ireland*' (X, 103). Swift's assertion that his readers are a 'True English People' derives from the linear view, according to which conquest is an accomplished fact. The British vision of a country locked into a perpetual cycle of rebellion exemplifies the second discourse. From an Irish perspective the different models which hold conquest as respectively a finished and a continuing process may correspond to an asymmetry between cultural and political identities.

King and Berkeley's divergent notions of what unites a people may reflect a difference of emphasis between these two versions of identity. *The State of the Protestants* constructs a unitary, trans-insular polity out of a shared opposition to a political threat, a profession by a King of his enmity to 'a whole People'. The *Querist*, on the other hand, asks that two separate 'peoples' be re-

⁴⁶ For a general appraisal of this phenomenon, see Anthony Carty, *Was Ireland Conquered?: International Law and the Irish Question* (London: Pluto, 1996).

united on the basis of a common cultural heritage, an agreement between types of 'blood', a shared 'language' and 'religion', and a collective store of 'manners'. In so doing it admits that what is basically similar is at present perceived as superficially separate. In a time of crisis, as in King's *State of the Protestants*, political expediency overrides any suspicion of cultural difference. In peacetime, however, Berkeley sets himself the more difficult task of effecting a permanent fusion of two peoples by uncovering a latent and underlying contiguity of cultures. Politics and culture are not discrete categories, however. Berkeley's last two criteria, 'inclination, and interest' could be held to belong to either or both. It is actually in his next question that Berkeley attempts to establish cultural distinctness as the guarantor of the persistence of separate identity. Like 'the children of old Romans, born in Britain', Ireland's Englishmen retain their separate identity through a cultural inheritance that differs from that of the natives. My next chapter shows how Swift's writings on language and history find this position increasingly difficult to maintain.

Chapter Three

A Dialogue in Hybernian Stile

I

Swift may be famed for his ventriloquial abilities, but what did his own voice sound like? Although the metaphorical and metaphysical applications of this question have attracted some comment, we might also attend to its literal force. This becomes especially compelling in light of what Swift has to say about the speech of second-generation immigrants to Ireland:

what we call the Irish Brogue is no sooner discovered, than it makes the deliverer, in the last degree, ridiculous and despised; and from such a mouth, an Englishman expects nothing but bulls, blunders, and follies. Neither does it avail whether the censure be reasonable or not, since the fact is always so. And, what is yet worse, it is too well known that the bad consequence of this opinion affects those among us who are not in the least liable to such reproaches, further than the misfortune of being born in Ireland, although of English parents, and whose education hath been chiefly in that kingdom.¹

For one who ‘happened [...] by a perfect Accident to be born’ in Ireland of English parents (XIII, 112), this passage carries more than a trace of autobiography. Was Swift therefore one of ‘those among us who are not in the least liable to such reproaches’ who were yet mocked for their manner of speech? Is this why ‘Swift’s first person narrators are almost always fools’ – or, to use his own words, deliverers of ‘bulls, blunders, and follies’?²

Two generations after his grandfather’s association with Swift, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was mocked at Harrow ‘for his Irish brogue’.³ In Ireland in his own time Swift paid ironic tribute to the brogues of others. A poem published during the campaign against Wood’s halfpence plays upon the vexed phrase

¹ ‘On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland’, *Prose* IV, Appendix H, 281.

² Claude Rawson, ‘Gulliver and others: Reflections on Swift’s “I” Narrators’, in *Swift: The Enigmatic Dean: Festschrift for Hermann Josef Real*, ed. by Rudolf Freiburg, Arno Löffler and Wolfgang Zach, with the assistance of Jan Schnitker (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1998), pp. 231–246, p. 244.

³ Declan Kiberd, ‘Sheridan and Subversion’, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), pp. 137–160, pp. 137–8.

‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’. The poet engineers a serendipitous error of language and attributes it to one of the locals:

I hear among scholars there is a great doubt
From what kind of tree this Wood was hewn out.
Teague made a good pun by a brogue in his speech,
And said: ‘By my shoul, he’s the son of a beech’:⁴

The first language of ‘Teague’ (a derogatory byword for ‘Irishman’, from the Anglicized spelling of the name ‘Tadhg’) is Irish, and its influence is detectable in the way he speaks English.⁵ He manages to enter into the poet’s elaborate pun on William Wood’s name, but only by dint of an accident of phonology, which causes him to raise the vowel sound of ‘bitch’. Such ‘interference’ from Irish along with ‘conservatism’, the retention of older dialectal forms, are identified by Alan Bliss as ‘the two basic peculiarities of Hiberno-English’.⁶ An additional feature of this dialect, the palatalization of the initial consonant of ‘soul’, is also rendered in the poem. Indeed, this phenomenon may account for an idiosyncrasy that is seldom remarked upon: the spelling ‘Drapier’.

This form, as A. C. Partridge points out, seems only to exist in French. Swift’s writing and a few examples from the Dublin press are the only sources to suggest that such a spelling was ever used in English. The ‘-er’ suffix in words like ‘draper’ and ‘butler’ began life in Old French as ‘-ier’, but that the extra ‘i’ had disappeared as early as the Middle English period. Langland in 1362 uses the spelling ‘draper’.⁷ In April 1724, when the first of the *Letters* was beginning to circulate, he wrote to Charles Ford that he had ‘just sent out a small Pamphlet under the Name of a Draper’, but ‘Drapier’, the form used throughout the *Letters*, appears in adverts placed by genuine drapers in the Dublin press and reappears in

⁴ ‘A Serious Poem upon William Wood’, *Poems*, pp. 273–276, p. 273, ll. 25–28.

⁵ Throughout this chapter the noun ‘Irish’ is used to denote the Irish language and the adjective ‘Gaelic’ to denote the culture associated with the language.

⁶ Alan Bliss, *Spoken English in Ireland 1600–1740: Twenty-seven Representative Texts Assembled and Analysed by Alan Bliss* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), pp. 202–3 (§29), p. 237 (§91), p. 186 (§1).

⁷ A. C. Partridge, *Language and Society in Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984), pp. 111–12; *OED*, ‘draper’ n. 1, ‘-ier’, ‘-er’.

the 'Letter to the Archbishop of Dublin concerning the Weavers' (1729).⁸ The forms 'tailyer' and 'tailyor' are extant in Ulster English and have their origins in the Northern English and Scottish dialects brought over during the Jacobean plantation and under the Cromwellian acts to encourage settlement.⁹ 'Drapier' may be cognate with these or even with forms employed by French Huguenots refugees, predominantly textile workers, who came to Ireland in large numbers towards the end of the seventeenth century. These possibilities show that the English spoken in Ireland in Swift's day was a mixture of diverse elements from England, Ireland, Scotland and further afield. But Swift reduced this multiplicity of dialects to a simple dialectic, a sort of ill-tempered dialogue, which identifies the Irish language as the sole contaminant of an otherwise 'pure' English. He christened the resulting mixture 'Hybernian Stile'.

These are two loaded terms. The first has been seen as an alternative to the problematic designation 'Irish', which had by the turn of the seventeenth century 'become a byword for anything inferior', and was beginning to be applied indiscriminately to the island's inhabitants, as David Hayton notes. He cites a burlesque from 1702 attacking Anglo-Irish squires 'as "some Irish folks" and attributing to them typically Irish bulls and blunders'. Latinity offered an alternative, less error-prone means of self-identification. As a sister to Britannia, Hibernia could provide 'Protestant Ireland with a national symbol reaching beyond association with the Gaelic past to a remote and idealized classical past'¹⁰

⁸ Swift to Charles Ford, 2 April 1724, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 494. In December 1729 and again in April 1730, a William Jones advertised himself first as a 'WOLLEN-DRAPIER', working from premises located at the 'DRAPIER's Head in *Francis Street*', Dublin, so it seems a fair certainty that at some point in the 1720s, there was an inn in Francis Street with this name and thus spelt. What cannot be ascertained is whether the pub took its name from the persona or vice versa. In February 1728, a notice was placed to announce that Mary Mc Daniel, the wife of 'William Mc Daniel [...] Lionen Drapier' had 'Elop'd from her said Husband, and has embezzl'd and wasted his Substance'. It is impossible to say whether these eccentric spellings of 'linen' and 'draper' reflect a local pronunciation, a lackadaisical compositor or simply the distracted state of Mr. Mc Daniel's mind. At the very least, however, we can say that 'drapier' was an acceptable spelling in 1720s Dublin. Without wishing to discount the notion that Swift had simply chosen the spelling on a whim, one that subsequently caught on in the city, there is at least a possibility that the spelling was a phonetic rendering of the way the word was then pronounced.

⁹ C. I. Macafee, ed., *A Concise Ulster Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 346; Mairi Robinson, ed., *The Concise Scots Dictionary* (London: Chambers, 1996), p. 698. I am grateful to Esther Asprey for supplying me with these references.

¹⁰ David Hayton, 'Anglo-Irish Attitudes: Changing Perceptions of National Identity among the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, ca. 1690–1750', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 17 (1987), 145–157, p. 150; John Trenchard, *The several Addresses of some Irish Folkes to the King and the House of Commons* ([London: [n. pub.], 1702]).

The Latin term also invokes Roman theories of colonization, which provided the pre-eminent model for Swift and his contemporaries to understand their position – or at least to provide an analogy for the position they would have liked to occupy. In 1726 Swift put this analogy at the top of his list of agenda when, on finding Waplole unreceptive to his assessment of Irish affairs, he conveyed his grievances to the Earl of Peterborough instead. He protested:

First, That all persons born in Ireland are called and treated as Irishmen, although their fathers and grand-fathers were born in England; and their predecessors having been conquerors of Ireland, it is humbly conceived they ought to be on as good a foot as any subjects of Britain, according to the practice of all other nations, and particularly of the Greeks and Romans.¹¹

As discussed in the previous chapter, Bishop Berkeley's *Querist* posed equally searching questions that simultaneously define and undermine the 'Roman' position: 'Whether the upper part of this people are not truly English, by blood, language, religion, manners, inclination, and interest [...]; Whether we are not as much Englishmen as the children of old Romans, born in Britain, were still Romans?' This chapter focuses on two of Berkeley's terms, 'language' and 'manners', on lifestyles and styles of speech. It looks at the efforts of Swift and his contemporaries – both 'native' and Anglo-Irish – to describe, regulate and prescribe the different languages used in Ireland. This task naturally entailed an investigation of the historical processes that first brought these codes and their speakers into contact, which in turn fuelled a long-contested debate about how to write Irish history. Here, polite interest in a newly fashionable field of antiquarian enquiry met the more troublesome issue of how to convert the 'natives' of Ireland and what language to use in so doing. All of these concerns can be gathered under the heading of 'style'.

Swift began the 1720s with a famous definition of this term. His *Letter to a Young Gentleman lately entered into Holy Orders* is dated 9 January 1720. It asserts that 'Proper Words in proper Places, makes the true Definition of a Stile', before conceding that the subject requires 'too ample a Disquisition to be now dwelt upon' (IX, 65). That disquisition might have turned upon the concept of

¹¹ Swift to the Earl of Peterborough, 28 April 1726, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 643.

propriety. The term connotes correctness, suitability, but above all, belonging. Although 'Proper Words in proper Places' has become almost proverbial, the remark's Irish context is often overlooked, as is the fact that the dictum is actually a call to maintain correctness not only against slipping standards but also in an alien and explicitly hostile linguistic environment. Proper words are one's own words; proper places should be those in which one feels at home. The fact that 'stile' cannot be 'dwelt upon' intimates an uneasiness about belonging; about the fact that homely language can have two very different connotations in Ireland. Swift's 'Definition of a Stile' emerges in censure of 'the Scholars of the Kingdom' of Ireland who 'seem to have not the least Conception of a Stile, but run on in a flat Kind of Phraseology, often mingled with Barbarous Terms and Expressions, peculiar to the Nation'. This fear of 'mingled' language and the insistence upon proper words in an improper place reflects the lack of a clear boundary between colonization and immigration. Colonists may come to subdue native inhabitants while immigrants seek merely to live among them, but both activities expose settlers to the risk of having their language infected by the 'Barbarous Terms and Expressions' of the host culture.

The need to mark out certain terms as barbarous asserts that what is taking place is indeed colonization by extending the Roman analogy into the realm of language. The *OED* reminds us that the Greek word *barbaros* 'had probably a primary reference to speech, and is compared with Latin *balbus*' ('stammering'). A barbarian is thus someone who does not speak Latin or Greek correctly: an uncivilized outsider. 'On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland', the source of the comments on the 'Irish brogue' quoted above, makes the latent historical narrative explicit: 'I have often lamented that Agricola, the Father-in-law of Tacitus, was not prevailed on [...] to come over and civilize us with a conquest, as his countrymen did Britain' (IV, 280). Swift uses the pronoun 'us' to denote the hypothetical subjects of a Roman conquest that never took place. In so doing he shows how perceptions in the present can transform the 'facts' of the past. The use of 'us' does more than anachronistically identify the author and his readers as descendants of those Irish whom Agricola could not be prevailed upon to 'come over and civilise'. It implicates them in this primordial falling-short of the imperial project, locating them permanently and transhistorically on the

wrong side of what Seamus Deane calls the ‘four-hundred year-old divide between barbarians and civilians’.¹² Even those with the ‘misfortune of being born in Ireland, although of English parents’ are condemned always to be perceived as the returning spirit of the stammering barbarians of the ancient past. History becomes a recursive loop, a time-warp that perpetually deposits them at the moment of the conquest’s failure, just outside the pale of civility. The wish that Agricola had crossed the Irish Sea expresses a longing for an alternative past, for an originary ‘conquest’ that would have made the peoples of the two islands into one and ensured that their histories took a parallel course. In the absence of such a redemptive re-forming of history, any given point in the past can be adduced as the juncture at which the destiny of the ‘English people of Ireland’ began to diverge from that of their counterparts in Britain. Style is offered in the *Letter to a Young Gentleman* as a palliative against this condition. Elsewhere, however, style becomes a symptom of the historical malaise.

One such place is the manuscript fragment from which this chapter takes its title. Like *Polite Conversation*, which may have been undergoing its final revisions as Swift composed it, ‘A Dialogue in Hybernian Style between A & B’ lists a series of usages that Swift considered ‘vulgar’ or ‘not acceptable’ and assembles them into a sample of a particular mode of speech ‘by bringing together a large number of its imbecilities in a small compass’.¹³ Many of these ‘imbecilities’ are due to interference from Irish, while others, like the people who utter them, originate across the Irish Sea. ‘A’ and ‘B’, the speakers of ‘Dialogue’ are members of the ‘Protestant English-speaking upper classes’ and the text shows how the speech of this social group ‘had already been strongly influenced by the Irish language’.¹⁴ Several words in the ‘Dialogue’ come directly from Irish, such as puckawn (billy goat) and frawhawns (bilberries). Others, however, are dialectal forms that originate in Britain – as for example when ‘A’ says ‘I always brew with my own Bear’. A footnote first included in George Faulkner’s

¹² Seamus Deane, ‘Civilians and Barbarians’, in Field Day Theatre Company, *Ireland’s Field Day* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), pp. 33–42, p. 42.

¹³ Bliss, *Spoken English*, p. 71–2; idem, *A Dialogue in Hybernian Stile Between A & B & Irish Eloquence*, Irish Writings from the Age of Swift, 6 (Dublin: Cadenus Press, 1977), p. 46. ‘A Dialogue in Hybernian Stile’ and ‘Irish Eloquence’, another manuscript fragment of similar content, are also in *Prose IV* Appendix G, 276–279.

¹⁴ Bliss, *Spoken English*, p. 72.

(Dublin, 1735) edition of Swift's works attests that '*Bere*' is '*A sort of Barley in Ireland*' (x, 6). What looks like a Hibernicism is in fact the original name in English for barley, which became confined to the dialects of Northern England and Scotland – and eventually to Ireland after it was transplanted there.¹⁵ The fact that the term eventually surfaces as a feature of Hibernian style reflects both the conservative character of the English spoken in Ireland and the geographical origins of some speakers. But Swift either failed to stress, or failed to recognize, that Hibernian style had a British component – that it was a style resulting from the mingling of many codes rather than the pollution of one by another. His most extensive work on the state of English in Ireland is concerned almost exclusively with the pernicious effects of the country's native language upon the English spoken there.

'On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland' was first published by in 1765 in volume VIII of the quarto *Works*, edited by the author's second cousin Deane Swift.¹⁶ Ostensibly a piece about placenames, the essay takes its occasion from a 'large list of denominations of lands, to be sold or let' which its speaker has come across whilst looking over the advertisements in 'some of your Dublin newspapers' (IV, 280). The speaker of the essay thinks that English speakers would not or should not be able to pronounce such names. He asks how landowning gentlemen are able to utter such 'words, without dislocating every muscle that is used in speaking, and without applying the same tone to all other words, in every language he understands?' (281)¹⁷ Particular criticism is reserved for gentlemen who go beyond the lingual gymnastics required to pronounce placenames to learn the language from which they derive. He does not gainsay the assertions of many 'gentlemen among us' who 'talk much of the great convenience to those who live in the country that they should speak Irish', but adds that any who do so should 'never intend to visit England, upon pain of being ridiculous' (281). Hibernian style leaves an indelible mark, which 'Barbarous Denominations' proposes to erase once and for all. Placenames are to

¹⁵ OED, 'bear', n. 2.

¹⁶ *The Works of Dr Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's*, 9 vols (1755–1779) Vol VIII Part II. Collected and Revised by Deane Swift, Esq. (London: W. Johnston, 1765), 261–5.

¹⁷ Lord Molesworth also thought the sounds of Irish to be offensive. His *Account of Denmark* (p. 62) observes that the Danish 'Language is very ungrateful, and not unlike the *Irish* in its whining, complaining tone'.

be assigned to ‘some gentlemen in the University’ who ‘might imitate the Roman way, by translating those hideous words into their English meanings’ (283). Meanwhile, the source of the ‘Irish Brogue’ ought to be eliminated altogether:

The Legislature may think what they please, and that they are above copying the Romans in all their conquests of barbarous nations; but I am deceived, if any thing hath more contributed to prevent the Irish from being tamed, than this encouragement of their language, which might easily be abolished and become a dead one in half an age, with little expence, and less trouble. (IV, 280)

This call for strict adherence to the Roman model can also be seen as a demand for the correct implementation of style. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said makes intriguing (if glancing) reference to such a use of style when he defines his titular concept as ‘a *style* of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and [...] “the Occident”’. It is, he continues, ‘a Western *style* for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient’.¹⁸ ‘Barbarous Denominations’ proposes such an ‘epistemological and ontological distinction’, which it grounds in an analogy with the conquest of ‘barbarous’ nations by the Romans. The project of this text is to dominate, restructure and exert authority over language in Ireland through the specific procedure of making the Irish language ‘a dead one’. This could be seen as a typically Swiftian endeavour. Removed from its post-colonial context, the task of making a living language into a dead one has a certain absurdist appeal, like the projects underway in the Academy of Lagado to produce a machine for writing books, or the plan ‘to shorten Discourse by cutting Polysyllables into one’ – not forgetting the ‘Scheme for entirely abolishing all Words whatsoever’ (XI, 185). The project presented in ‘Barbarous Denominations’ takes on a similarly ridiculous air with the assertion that ‘a graceful harmonious title accounts for at least forty *per cent.* in the value intrinsick of an Irish peerage’. With this fact in mind the author advises that before they award any more peerages, the powers that be should ‘call a

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985; repr. 1991), pp. 2–3. Emphasis added.

consultation of scholars, and musical gentlemen' in order ensure that the titles are suitably mellifluous. However, such whimsical detail should not be allowed to occlude the fact that the project of 'Barbarous Denominations' is taken up elsewhere in Swift's work.

Two other texts discuss the abolition of the Irish language and offer a single method to achieve it. Swift's sermon 'On the Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland' focuses the effort on education and places the burden of responsibility on the legislature. The preacher asserts that it is 'in the Power of the Lawgivers to found a School in every Parish of the Kingdom, for teaching the meaner and poorer Sort of Children to speak and read the English Tongue'. The sermon continues that the promotion of English through a nationwide system of charity schools 'would, in Time, abolish that part of Barbarity and Ignorance, for which our Natives are so despised by all Foreigners' (IX, 202). As in 'Barbarous Denominations', the abolition of Irish is necessary in order cut off the source of those idiosyncrasies that make the Irish 'ridiculous and despised', but the sermon charges only 'the Natives' with such 'Barbarity and Ignorance'. Swift's most extensive comment on the subject also stresses that to make English the sole language of Ireland would be an important step towards civilizing Ireland's 'natives':

It would be a noble achievement to abolish the Irish language in this kingdom, so far at least as to oblige all the natives to speak only English on every occasion of business, in shops, markets, fairs, and other places of dealing: Yet I am wholly deceived if this might not be effectually done in less than half an age, and at a very trifling expence, for such I look upon a tax to be, of only six thousand pounds a year, to accomplish so great a work. This would, in a great measure, civilize the most barbarous among them, reconcile them to our customs and manner of living, and reduce great numbers to the national religion, whatever kind may then happen to be established. (XII, 89)

This proposal is made in 'An Answer to Several Letters sent me from unknown Hands'. Although it was first published by Deane Swift, the piece was written in 1729 in response to 'several schemes and proposals' that had been sent or dedicated to Swift with the intent that they 'should be offered to the

parliament' (XII, 85). It is one of several pamphlets from the crisis years of the decade's end in which Swift responds (with varying degrees of impatience) to the public-spirited suggestions of his countrymen and goes on to offer suggestions of his own. In addition to the language question, this piece suggests projects for the improvement of roads, the draining of bogs, the planting of trees and the coining of halfpence, thus placing the abolition of Irish within an established repertoire of improvements that, in the eyes of Swift and many of his contemporaries, needed to be carried out in order to make the kingdom economically viable.

The sermon 'On the Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland' is similarly concerned with practical amelioration in the social sphere. It dwells at length on a scheme for making beggars wear badges to denote their parish of origin, an idea to which Swift would later devote an entire pamphlet. Equally pressing is the need to 'make Parish Charity Schools of great and universal Use' (IX, 203), and part of the impetus behind such a policy is that it could succeed in making the Irish language 'a dead one'. The sermon states that this expansion of the charity school system could be funded by a tax, and denounces the fact that such a levy has never been imposed: 'considering how small a Tax would suffice for a such a Work, it is a publick Scandal that such a Thing should never have been endeavoured, or, perhaps so much as thought on'. This remark clarifies the reference in 'Answer to Several Letters' to 'a tax [...] of only six thousand pounds a year', which in turn makes sense of the remark in 'Barbarous Denominations' that Irish 'might be abolished [...] in half an age with little expence and less trouble'. With varying degrees of directness, then, all three texts advocate the same basic policy of tax-funded charity education as a means whereby Irish could be gradually eliminated.

This aim seems to have been so central to the charity schools movement as to have gone largely unstated. Since the 1537 Act for the English Order, Habit and Language, education had been formally proposed as a means of making Ireland into a homogeneous Anglophone territory. Swift's proposals in the sermon on Ireland's wretched condition amount to little more than a call to enforce the terms of this law, which entrusted Anglican bishops with responsibility for the establishment of parochial schools and required them to 'exact an oath from every clergyman appointed to a benefice, undertaking to give

instruction in the English tongue, and to “keep or cause to be kept ... *a school for to learn English*”.¹⁹ A renewed and more direct statement of this policy was made in 1711 when the charity schools had been named in the Irish House of Commons as a means whereby eventually ‘the *Irish* Language may be utterly abolished’.²⁰ According to their historian Kenneth Milne, such gradual abolition was also the ‘implicit policy’ of the Charter schools when they got underway twenty years later. He cites a sermon preached by the Bishop of Dromore in 1733 as an early statement of the schools’ success in this aim. Just before the formal incorporation of the Society in Dublin for Promoting English Protestant Schools, Bishop Maule was pleased to announce that:

The poorer sort of Irish most cheerfully send their children to the English Protestant Schools, provided they are taught gratis: the Irish language, as to the reading of it, is now in a manner become a dead letter to the natives, and the characters of it as little understood [as] the Danish or Runic. It is not now read, or made use of by the Irish themselves, who are all desirous to read, write, and to speak the English tongue.²¹

Such confidence may have been overstated, but the remark shows how the eradication of Irish was considered an important function of the schools. Swift was a willing advocate of this aim and a charter member of the Incorporated Society. The idea of raising a tax to pay for a school in every parish was not unique to Swift, and the use of education to achieve the gradual elimination of Irish was neither controversial nor new. Swift’s propositions for the Irish language do not constitute a novel proposal so much as policy that was subscribed to widely, if not generally, among the Anglophone elite following the abandonment of an earlier policy of converting the Catholic population through Irish-language evangelism. The latter course of action retained a few zealous proponents down into the 1720s but by this time, many in the religious and

¹⁹ Norman Atkinson, *Irish Education: A History of Educational Institutions* (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1969), p. 18.

²⁰ Resolution of the Irish House of Commons, Thursday 25 October 1711, quoted in John Richardson, *A Short History of the Attempts that have been made to convert the Popish Natives of Ireland to the Establish’d Religion: with a Proposal for their Conversion* (London: Joseph Downing, 1712), p. 60.

²¹ Kenneth Milne, *The Irish Charter Schools, 1730–1830* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), p. 133; p. 131, quoting Henry Maule, *A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Dublin ... on Tuesday the Twenty-third day of October 1733 ... being the Anniversary of the Irish Rebellion*.

political establishment, including Swift, had thrown their lot behind the charity schools as means both of converting the natives not only to Protestantism but to the exclusive use of English.²²

The Christian duty of the clergy and the wider public was seen to include the inculcation of civilized values by making Ireland an English-speaking country. Despite the overwhelming evidence from historians that this was the case, very few commentators on the subject have taken Swift's scattered comments on the abolition of Irish seriously. Carole Fabricant detects an 'unmistakable note of irony' in the 'Answer to Several Letters' while Anne Cline Kelly goes so far as to say that Swift 'modestly proposes' the abolition of Irish in 'his ironical "On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland"'. Similarly, Alan Harrison suggests that in the 'Answer to Several Letters', Swift is 'speaking through a persona that he often uses in his pamphlets, that of a strongly-opinionated ignoramus'. Noting that the tract was written in the same year that Swift composed *A Modest Proposal*, he goes on to ask '[c]ould the same irony be present in his proposal for abolishing the Irish language?'²³

The answer to that question must be negative when we consider the personal and institutional context of Swift's remarks on the Irish language generally and about its abolition in particular. Additionally, we must consider the audience these remarks might once have had – namely the boys of the charity school of St Patrick's Cathedral as they sat in the clothes that had been paid for out of a collection taken up at a sermon preached by Swift in 1716.²⁴ Swift

²² Connolly, *Religion Law and Power*, pp. 294–307, referring to Swift on p. 301; David Hayton, 'Did Protestantism fail in early eighteenth-century Ireland? Charity Schools and the Enterprise of Religious Reformation, c. 1690–1730', in Alan Ford, James McGuire and Kenneth Milne, eds, *As by Law Established: The Church of Ireland since the Reformation* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995), pp. 166–186; T. C. Barnard, 'Protestants and the Irish language, c. 1675–1725', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), 243–272; idem, *A New Anatomy of Ireland: The Irish Protestants, 1649–1770* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 94, p. 97.

²³ Carole Fabricant, *Swift's Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986), p. 246; Anne Cline Kelly, *Swift and the English Language* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1988), p. 10; Alan Harrison, *The Dean's Friend: Anthony Raymond 1675–1726, Jonathan Swift and the Irish Language* (Dublin: de Burca, 1999), p. 153.

²⁴ Edward Synge, *Methods of Erecting, Supporting and Governing Charity-Schools: with an Account of the Charity-Schools in Ireland; and some Observations thereon. To which is added, an Appendix, Containing certain Forms, &c. relating thereto* (Dublin: J. Hyde, 1719), p. 24. This second edition of the text was printed together with Synge's charity sermon quoted in my first chapter. *Methods of Erecting [...] Charity Schools* gives a comprehensive list of the schools that could then be found in Ireland, including 'A CHARITY-SCHOOL of Boys, belonging to the CATHEDRAL, hitherto clothed out of a Collection at a CHARITY-SERMON, preached in 1716, by

probably preached many such sermons, although none of them have survived. It is perhaps because no single text conveniently documents it that ‘Swift’s part in the most striking manifestation of institutional and organized charity in the period [...] has been almost wholly ignored’ – just as his open support of that movement’s aim of making English the sole spoken language of Ireland has been misinterpreted.²⁵ Swift’s involvement with the charity schools went beyond the perfunctory. As Ehrenpreis notes, Swift sat on the board of the King’s Hospital (known as the Blue Coat School from the colour of the boys’ donated robes) and was active in recommending pupils to its student body.²⁶ For Landa, Swift’s involvement in these concerns shows that Swift ‘did not stand aside when this vigorous humanitarian spirit was manifesting itself in Ireland’.²⁷

In the context of this chapter’s discussion of language as both a symptom of and a corrective for social malaise, however, Swift’s involvement with the charity schools raises rather different questions – especially if we focus on the beneficiaries as opposed to the benefactors of charity. As David Fairer writes, such a shift in emphasis will compel a consideration of ‘the extent to which charity school children were caught up in a system, how they were controlled, exhibited and interpreted’. Fairer says of the experience of reading the material associated with the English charity schools movement that one is left with the impression of a nation projecting onto the charity children ‘its worries about social cohesion, working-class poverty and ignorance, and whether or how much to alleviate it’. What also emerges is the notion that ‘from the beginning, the charity school movement was perceived to be an experiment in social engineering – an experiment that worked to some extent against the natural grain’.²⁸ The only adjustment that needs to be made to this statement regarding the charity children of Ireland, is to emphasise how much more numerous societal fears were and how much more intensely they were focussed on a young population who often spoke a different language from the observer.

the *Dean of St. Patrick’s*. See also Louis A. Landa, ‘Swift and Charity’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 44 (1945), 337–350, p. 342.

²⁵ Landa, ‘Swift and Charity’, p. 342.

²⁶ Ehrenpreis, III, p. 817, referring to his source, Landa, p. 342.

²⁷ Landa, p. 337.

²⁸ David Fairer, ‘Experience Reading Innocence: Contextualizing Blake’s *Holy Thursday*’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35 (2002), 535–562, p. 539.

The one positive factor by comparison with the situation in England was that in Ireland, the country and its population were sufficiently small for a nationwide system of schools and inspections to be put in place without being prohibitively expensive. In 1724, one pamphleteer had computed the total annual cost of such a system at £17,712. This figure was intended to cover the entire cost of educating six thousand boys and four thousand girls, to provide clothes and buildings to accommodate them, to endow scholarships and a fellowship at Trinity College Dublin for Irish language teaching, and to install five peripatetic commissioners to conduct inspections.²⁹ Although he goes into less detail, Swift similarly encourages such a programme in his sermon on the ‘Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland’ and also proposes that it be funded by a one-off tax. But even as Swift and his peers sought to abolish the language, others were being forced into the unfamiliar medium of English to try and preserve it.

II

In the preface to his *Elements of the Irish Language* (1728), the soldier, poet and lexicographer Aodh Buí Mac Cruitín explains that the ensuing text is designed to rescue his native language from oblivion and preserve it for posterity. He says that he is:

hereby moved to use al [*sic*] my Endeavours and Industry, to publish a more full and correct Grammar of the said Language, now in its decay, and almost in Darkness, even to the Natives themselves.³⁰

Mac Cruitín, who published this and other English-language texts under the anglicized name Hugh Mac Curtin,³¹ is embarking on a project motivated by

²⁹ Anon., *A Proposal for Bringing over the Natives of Ireland, who are Papists, to the Establish'd Religion and Manners of the English* (London: [n. pub.], 1724), p. 7.

³⁰ H. Mac Curtin, ‘To the Ingenious and Generous Reader’, *The Elements of the Irish Language, Grammatically Explained in English* (Louvain: Martin van Overbeke, 1728), first collation [p. ix].

³¹ Where two different forms of authors’ names are in common use I have, throughout this chapter, given both the Irish and the anglicized forms in the first instance. In most cases I have used the anglicized forms in subsequent instances because I am discussing the dissemination of these authors’ works within an English-speaking culture. Footnotes cite author’s names as they appear on title pages.

an emotional sense of loss. Although he had in an earlier work confessed himself ‘not sufficient to write correctly in the *English Language*’,³² he is here moved to produce a systematic account of his native language in that unfamiliar tongue because his own is ‘almost in Darkness’. Six years earlier Bishop Francis Hutchinson of Down and Connor found himself in a mirror-image of Mac Curtin’s position. In the preface to his bilingual version of the catechism he writes ‘tho’ a little *Irish* is mingled’ in the succeeding text, ‘it is English that is intended to be taught’ to his readers.³³ His aim, undertaken as earnestly as Mac Curtin’s mission to rescue his language from obscurity, is to rescue the Irish natives from the darkness of ignorance, ‘opening their Eyes, and forming them to the right Knowledge of their Duty towards GOD and Man’. If accomplished this work ‘will do more good than all Laws that have been made for abolishing Distinctions, and Incorporating them into one Peep[le] [sic] with us’.³⁴ Though their authors may not have been on speaking terms, these texts are clearly in dialogue. Swift’s writing can also be shown to engage in this colloquy.

His most famous work on the fortunes of English, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712), reveals a familiarity with the theory of linguistic development that underpins Mac Curtin’s account of the decay of Irish. The *Proposal* (which, as Anne Cline Kelly remarks, is ‘the only document [Swift] ever signed’³⁵), asserts that the ‘*Roman Language* arrived at a great Perfection before it began to decay’, adding that French has just begun its decline. English, however, is at a different stage on this trajectory:

The English tongue is not arrived to such a Degree of Perfection, as [...] to make us apprehend any Thoughts of its Decay: And if it were once refined to a certain Standard, perhaps there might be Ways to fix it for ever, or at least until we are invaded and made a Conquest by some other State: And even then, our best Writings might probably be preserved with Care, and grow into Esteem, and the Authors have a chance for Immortality. (IV, 8–9)

³² Mac Curtin, *A Brief Discourse in Vindication of the Antiquity of Ireland* (Dublin, S. Powell, 1717), [p. ix].

³³ [Francis Hutchinson], *The Church Catechism in Irish, with the English placed over against it in the same Karakter* (Belfast, James Blow: 1722), sig. B3^r, sig. B2^v.

³⁴ *The Church Catechism in Irish*, sig. B2^v, B3^r.

³⁵ *Swift and the English Language*, p. 4.

As well as providing an insight into the fears that moved Hugh Mac Curtin to produce his grammar, this passage offers a context for Swift's remark in 'Barbarous Denominations' that the Irish language could be made 'a dead one in half an age'. The *Proposal for Correcting [...] the English Tongue* suggests that part of the work of conquest is the elimination of a native language in its spoken form. Swift looks on this prospect with equanimity when it comes to English. He seems even to welcome the eventuality as providing writers with 'a chance for Immortality' in the event of the spoken language's death, a natural occurrence that Swift sees as the corollary of being 'invaded and made a Conquest by some other State'. Mac Curtin's preface finds Irish undergoing a version of this fate. Having reached a state of perfection, it has entered its decay and is threatened by encroaching darkness: 'most of our Nobility and Gentry have abandoned [Irish], and disdain'd to Learn or speake the same this 200. years past'. Against such indifference he announces his aim to be the 'promotion of our language, and preservation of our Ancient Monuments'.³⁶ But for whose benefit were such works of promotion and preservation to be undertaken?

Mac Curtin's grammar was published at Louvain, possibly under the auspices of St Anthony's Franciscan College.³⁷ It was dedicated to John James Devenish, a Major-General in the service of Louis XV. The nobility he refers to is therefore the exiled Catholic aristocracy, but his work may also have had a wider appeal. In his preface Mac Curtin states that his work is aimed at 'the studious and other ingenious Gentlemen, lovers of Antiquity', adding that he craved 'the favour and acceptance of the curious seekers of Antiquity and of all generous learned students, to whom these my Endeavours may prove any way serviceable'.³⁸ Increasingly such 'curious seekers of antiquity' could be found among the Protestant elite in Ireland as much as among the exiled Catholic aristocracy in Europe. And in Ireland mobility between the orders produced booklovers such as Cornelius O'Callaghan. In the 1720s, O'Callaghan, MP for

³⁶ Mac Curtin, *Elements*, [p. xii], [p. xv].

³⁷ Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Cultures* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), pp. 60–61. See also Nicholas Canny, 'The Formation of the Irish Mind: Religion, Politics and Gaelic Irish Literature, 1580–1750', in C. H. E. Philpin, ed., *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), chapter 2, pp. 50–79, pp. 55–56; Brian Ó Cuív, 'Irish Language and Literature, 1691–1845', *A New History of Ireland*, IV, 374–423, 378–9.

³⁸ Mac Curtin, *Elements*, [p. ix], [p. xv].

Fethard and a convert from Catholicism, had in his library an eclectic range of volumes including a copy of Mac Curtin's *Brief Discourse in Vindication of the Antiquities of Ireland*.³⁹ O'Callaghan's preference for works in English does not indicate that he had no Irish, but a story told about him can be read as symbolizing the upheaval involved in changing identities. While he was attempting to secure a wife for himself, O'Callaghan was asked where his estates lay. In reply he 'was alleged to have stuck out his tongue and pointed to it'.⁴⁰ This gesture could be taken to refer to what O'Callaghan had left behind as well as what he stood to gain from his assimilation to the new order.

As Barnard points out, reformers in eighteenth-century Ireland 'wished to intensify and accelerate' such 'assimilation to the dominant protestant order'.⁴¹ Swift was among them. Thinking of the lower orders, he speculated about ways to 'oblige all the natives to speak only English on every occasion of business, in shops, markets, fairs, and other places of dealing' (XII, 89). But even without the imposition of such measures an upheaval was underway during this, the 'first period of rapid language change in Ireland whereby Irish was inexorably being replaced by English as the predominant vernacular'.⁴² In the 1720s the vernacular remained relatively strong but more prestigious forms of Irish were falling into decay.⁴³ The author of the bilingual catechism used this fact to argue that matter to be distributed for evangelical purposes should be printed using modern Roman type rather than the Gaelic characters traditionally used to write and print the language.⁴⁴ He anticipated the argument against such a move by pointing out that the old script was already in decline:

³⁹ Toby Barnard, 'The Languages of Politeness and Sociability in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan eds., *Political Discourse in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 198.

⁴⁰ Edith Mary Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament 1692–1800: Commons, Constituencies and Statutes*, 6 vols (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2002), v, 377.

⁴¹ Barnard, 'Languages of Politeness', p. 198.

⁴² Harrison, *The Dean's Friend*, p. 150.

⁴³ Ó Cuív writes that 'as late as 1731, two thirds of the whole community used Irish as their ordinary language, thus giving a total of about 1,340,000 out of an estimated population of about 2,011,000'. ('Irish Language and Literature', p. 383, quoting *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 1st. ser., 5 (1857), p. 243.)

⁴⁴ As Cronin (*Translating Ireland*, pp. 52–3), points out, the first Irish-language text ever printed was in fact a translation of the *Book of Common Order*, produced in Edinburgh in 1567, and among the first to order the manufacture of types capable of reproducing the Irish character were Queen Elizabeth I and Richard Boyle, the Earl of Cork.

[I]t is said by some, that the Natives are fond of their old Character, and therefore we must keep it, that we may please them.

But I wish, that they who make this Objection, wou'd show, how it appaers [*sic*], that the Natives, have realy [*sic*] any Fondness for it. There is not One in twenty thousand of 'em that can read it, or knows any thing of it. There is not one Popish School in all *Ireland* that teaches it.⁴⁵

This confirms Mac Curtin's gloomy diagnosis of an endemic ignorance that extends 'even to the Natives themselves'. The catechist's observations may be of a more pseudo-statistical bent than those of Mac Curtin's preface, but the underlying argument is similar: written Irish is becoming confined to a small sector of the population, one that does not include 'the Natives'. Naturally, Mac Curtin argues for retention of the old alphabet, arguing that a change of character or orthography would make extant Irish texts unintelligible to later readers and lead to a collective forgetting of the literature of the past. If such an 'Alteration' were to be implemented, he argues, 'al our Ancient Histories and Poëtry would soon grow useless and altogether unknown to Posterity'.⁴⁶ It is the idiom of such histories and poetry that Mac Curtin would seek to preserve and to disseminate. This literary language is the primary referent intended by Mac Curtin when he speaks of the Irish language, 'our language' as he says. Needless to say, his priorities are quite different from the catechist, but both were in agreement that Irish was becoming a dead letter to 'the natives'.

To Mac Curtin, 'our language' is the preserve of the learned and noble classes, a coterie who seem quite distinct from the 'Natives'. This last designation is particularly interesting because it is used metaphorically in a manner common to those of both Swift and the catechist, as well as recalling the uses of that word discussed in my first chapter. By a 'native', none of these writers actually means someone who had been born in Ireland, since that category would have included themselves. Rather, the word is used as a marker of difference, and ultimately of linguistic inferiority, and its denotation thus seems to be slipping towards that of 'barbarian'. For Swift, 'Barbarity' and 'Ignorance' are the distinguishing features of 'our Natives'. Similarly, the

⁴⁵ *Church Catechism*, sig. B1^v.

⁴⁶ *Elements*, [p. xiv].

catechist refers to the ‘poor Natives’ who have lain outside the reformers’ power, much as noble- and gentlemen are the target of Mac Curtin’s attempt to revive ‘our language’, rather than the ignorant ‘Natives’. The word metonymically invokes the denotation of ‘barbarian’ in the sense of one who lies outside the pale of linguistic respectability – as much for Mac Curtin as his Anglican counterparts. The underlying distinction between the civilized and the barbarous was not entirely alien to Gaelic culture. As Sean Connolly notes, the ‘Gaelic literati’ were an intellectual elite whose manuscript-based culture was wholly separate from ‘the despised oral traditions of the lower classes’ – or, as Mac Curtin calls these lower classes, ‘the Natives’.⁴⁷ But in his view, the barbarism of linguistic ignorance was not confined to these classes.

He may have published his grammar at Louvain but it was, as Brian Ó Cuiv notes, probably composed in an Irish prison.⁴⁸ One of two pieces of writing by Mac Curtin had landed him in jail, and both were directed against a book written a generation earlier by Sir Richard Cox.⁴⁹ Like Mac Curtin, Cox was a veteran of the Williamite war, and he would go on to become chief justice of Ireland. Between 1689 and 1690, Cox published the two volumes of his *Hibernia Anglicana*, a work that has some affinities with William King’s *The State of the Protestants of Ireland*, discussed in the previous two chapters. Cox’s work, like King’s, was concerned with the necessity of William’s intervening in Ireland. As Andrew Carpenter and his fellow editors note, Cox’s account argued from the premise that it was ‘the pious duty of a protestant prince’ such as William ‘to deliver the Irish from [...] themselves’. But where King marshalled legal precedents in support of his case, Cox sought to prove this argument from a historical perspective. In his reading, the beginning of the English presence in Ireland marked the first arrival of a crucially civilizing cultural influence and his account showed Ireland ‘to have been totally uncivilized before the arrival of the

⁴⁷ S. J. Connolly, ‘“Ag Déanamh Commanding”: Elite Responses to Popular Culture, 1650–1850’, in J. S. Donnelly, Jr., and K. A. Miller eds., *Irish Popular Culture 1650–1850* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), pp. 1–29, p. 16.

⁴⁸ ‘Irish language and Literature’, p. 394.

⁴⁹ Katharine Simms, ‘Charles Lynegar, the Ó Luinín Family and the Study of Seanchas’, in Toby Barnard, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín and Katharine Simms, eds., *A Miracle of Learning: Studies in Manuscripts and Irish Learning. Essays in Honour of William O’Sullivan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 266–283, p. 276; Harrison, *The Dean’s Friend*, pp. 39–40.

English, and the Irish to have been barbarous savages'.⁵⁰ Mac Curtin's refutation of this view takes two forms. Firstly his history deals with Ireland from the time of its first, mythical, settlements to the year 1171, 'when the English first got footing therein', in contrast with that of Cox which runs from 'the Conquest [...] by the English to this present Time'. Secondly, in addition to dealing with Ireland before its ordinary contact with England, Mac Curtin emphasises that Cox deals with popular rather than aristocratic culture and is led to do so by his poor literacy. As Mac Curtin argues, authors like Cox 'cannot distinguish the true Histories which are Authentick, from the School Books and other Romances that were written for Pastime'. He argues that 'they cannot read the old Parchment Books of Antiquity, nay if [these books] were read before them, they can't understand them'. The inability of 'Foreign Authors' to decode the authentic histories of Ireland has, he says, led them to ignore 'the Nobility almost in general' and to write:

only of the Customs and Manners of the Common People [...] collecting several Pages full of Stuff never found in History, but either invented by themselves, or had from others ignorant in the true Antiquity of the Nation, and setting the same to the Press, under the Title of *The History of IRELAND*.⁵¹

It was not the first time such criticisms had been made. Around 1634 Seathrún Céitinn, whose name is anglicized to Geoffrey Keating, produced a work designed partly to refute the Anglocentric historiographical narrative inaugurated by Giraldus Cambrensis at the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1171 and promoted in Keating's time by 'New English' writers such as Edmund Spenser, Richard Stanihurst and Fynes Morison.⁵² His work, entitled *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, made a point echoed by Mac Curtin, that such foreign historians concentrate on the lower orders to the exclusion of the civilized classes. '[T]hey take notice of the ways of inferiors and wretched little hags, ignoring the

⁵⁰ *Field Day*, p. 867.

⁵¹ *Vindication*, [p. ix].

⁵² 'New English' translates the Irish phrase 'Nua Gall' (new foreigners), used of post reformation colonists to distinguish them from the 'Old English' families, mostly of Norman descent, who had adopted the Irish language and retained the Catholic religion.

worthy actions of the gentry', he asserted, developing a cutting simile to describe their scholarly habits:

[T]he testimony given by Cambrensis, Spenser, Stanihurst, Hanmer, Camden, Barckly, Moryson, Davies, Campion, and every other new foreigner who has written on Ireland from that time, may bear witness; inasmuch as it is almost according to the fashion of the beetle they act, when writing concerning the Irish. For it is the fashion of the beetle, when it lifts its head in the summertime, to go about fluttering, and not to stoop towards any delicate flower that may be in the field, or any blossom in the garden, though they be all roses or lilies, but it keeps bustling about until it meets with dung of horse or cow, and proceeds to roll itself therein.⁵³

This passage also asserts the crucial distinction between civilians and barbarians, a dichotomy that obtained in Keating's culture between *gael* and *gall*. In Irish the simile of the beetle was disseminated only in manuscript until the twentieth century. But the figure, and the blend of ethnic acrimony and scholarly disdain that inspired it, would enjoy a new lease of life in print and in English as part of a controversy that blew up in 1723.

Six years earlier, Mac Curtin had already put Keating's dichotomy between learned native and ignorant foreign historians to work. He and Cox were reprising the roles taken up by Geoffrey Keating and the New English historians respectively, where Anglophone historians were portrayed as arrivistes, fooled into reading an alien culture as barbarous because they lacked access to the productions of its elite. For their own part, such historians saw their Gaelic competitors not as rival scholars but as compilers of tales and superstitions. To Cox, Keating's *Foras Feasa* was an 'ill digested Heap of very silly fictions'; Mac Curtin's reply on Keating's behalf may be seen as a continuation of what was, by 1717, a very old conversation. But the terms of the debate had begun to change. As the first history by a scholar working in the Gaelic tradition to have been originally written in English rather than translated from Irish, Mac Curtin's *Vindication* marked the end of an era, and, as Michael Cronin points out, the

⁵³ *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn / The History of Ireland*, ed. by David Comyn and Patrick Dineen, 4 vols. (London: Irish Texts Society, 1902–1914), 1, 7, 3–5.

beginning of a new one where the ‘language of the public domain, of power and intellectual influence was English’.⁵⁴

Although it did not replicate this profound shift, the Anglocentric perspective was also changing as evidenced even in so xenophobic a work as Cox’s *Hibernia Anglicana* (1690–90). This text, the one Mac Curtin attacked in his *Vindication*, imagines that William and Mary will ‘influence that degenerate Nation to such a degree of Reformation and Religion, as will restore that Kingdom to its ancient Appellation, and *Ireland* will again be called, *Insula Sacra*’.⁵⁵ In the late 1580s, Edmund Spenser equivocated on the same phrase, referring to Ireland as ‘*Banno or sacra Insula* takinge *sacra* for accursed’.⁵⁶ Whereas Spenser dismisses the notion of ancient Ireland as a seat of piety and learning, Cox is prepared to concede a nominal approval of that idea. Ireland’s scholarly and pious ancient past could be seen as a cultural inheritance complementing the material assets that would revert by right of conquest to the new Protestant order.

As the conflicts of the seventeenth century receded, this idea became more acceptable and attention focussed on the concrete legacy of the past in the form of historical manuscripts. Gaelic scholars’ position as the custodians of a depredated cultural heritage also began to receive some acknowledgement. As Alan Harrison observes, ‘it was a natural reaction of the defeated Gaelic Irish to attempt to prove and affirm the nobility, sanctity and civility of their race from [manuscript] sources’. Anglophone society’s pursuit of polite learning led to an allegiance of sorts as the native literati found that ‘their interest in history was in keeping with the antiquarian activities of Protestant scholars and that the latter would be happy to pay for manuscripts, and for the copying, translation and interpretation of historical texts in Irish’.⁵⁷ Some of this scholarly interest spilled over into popular taste.

⁵⁴ *Translating Ireland*, p. 93.

⁵⁵ Richard Cox, *Hibernia Anglicana; or, the History of Ireland from the Conquest thereof by the English to this Present Time* (London: H. Clark, 1692), fol. A4^v; excerpted in *Field Day Anthology*, I, 868.

⁵⁶ Edmund Spenser, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, in *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, ed. by Edwin Greenlaw and others, 11 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932–1949), X, *Spenser’s Prose Works*, ed. by Rudolf Gottfried, p. 145.

⁵⁷ Cronin, pp. 126–7, n. 12, citing Alan Harrison, *Ag Cruinniú Meala*; cf Harrison, *The Dean’s Friend*, pp. 50–51.

By the 1730s, as Ireland began to reflect fashions and developments in England, houses for the first time featured dedicated studies and libraries where books were displayed in glass fronted cases rather than locked away in trunks.⁵⁸ Antiquarian texts, products of the collaboration between native and Anglophone scholars, were among the works to be mounted on the shelves. As well as Mac Curtin's *Vindication* and eight volumes of the *Spectator*, for example, Cornelius O'Callaghan also owned a translation of Keating's *Foras Feasa*.⁵⁹ But the correlation between the Hibernian and the stylish should not be overemphasised. Although a new sort of dialogue was being established it would be wrong to portray it as overly convivial. Nor was it qualitatively different from the fractious dispute between Keating and the New English or the more recent exchange between Cox and Mac Curtin. The same accusations of linguistic incompetence and forced concentration on the habits and lore of the vulgar were being still levelled by one side, just as the other was refusing to acknowledge rival historians as anything other than compilers of chronicles and pedigrees. But even if the insults that they exchanged had a familiar ring, the participants did not always fall in with traditional allegiances.

Charles Lynegar was one of those insulted. He was a *seanchaidh* or hereditary historian whose family was linked with the Mág Uidhir chieftains of Fermanagh. Between 1708 and 1729 he worked as a lecturer at Trinity College, teaching Irish to divinity students.⁶⁰ Whilst there, he 'supplemented his starvation wages [...] by drawing up pedigrees for patrons of Irish or Anglo-Irish ancestry', as Katharine Simms records. On this score, Lynegar was accused by one of his peers of concocting false genealogies to satisfy the vanities of the rich, irrespective of their actual descent and of whether they were native or foreign to Ireland. As Simms also points out, such charges, although made by a native poet in a verse satire in Irish, repeat the accusations made in the previous two

⁵⁸ Toby Barnard, 'Learning, the Learned and Literacy in Ireland c. 1660–1760', *A Miracle of Learning*, pp. 209–225, pp. 214–216.

⁵⁹ Barnard, 'The Languages of Polieness', p. 198.

⁶⁰ A policy of appointing Irish speakers to teach the language for evangelical purposes was pursued by successive provosts of Trinity, but Lynegar's was the last such appointment. Irish was not taught again until the creation of a professorship in the subject in 1888. (Vivian Mercier, 'Swift and the Gaelic Tradition', in *Fair Liberty was all his Cry: A Tercentenary Tribute to Jonathan Swift 1667–1745*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 279–89, p. 282; Ó Cuiv, p. 375).

centuries by New English historians and ethnographers.⁶¹ Meanwhile the work of another author was being dismissed, in terms very similar to those once used by Richard Cox of Geoffrey Keating, as ‘an heap of insipid, ill-digested Fables’. Conversely, this author’s credentials as an antiquarian were disparaged, and the linguistic skills of his whole generation condemned as ‘reaching no farther than to comprehend and write the common Dialect’, echoing the criticisms that Keating had made of Spenser and Stanihurst, later to be taken up by Mac Curtin and directed at Cox.⁶² To complete this transformation of a once dichotomous dialogue into a confusion of shifting voices, the book that occasioned such censure was not an original work. It was in fact an English translation of Keating’s *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*.

The translation, by a Limerick writer named Diarmaid Ó Conchubhair was published in 1723. For some time Dermot O’Connor, as he was mostly known, had collaborated with Anthony Raymond, an Anglican clergyman and sometime fellow of Trinity College who was also a friend of Swift’s and a neighbour of his at Laracor. Raymond was an enthusiastic amateur scholar of the Irish language and worked for many years on ‘the dual tasks of translating Keating’s history and developing it by his own work with Irish manuscripts’.⁶³ When O’Connor pre-empted him and published his own version of Keating under the title *The General History of Ireland*, Raymond was furious.⁶⁴ The book began to sell well both in England and Ireland; O’Connor was even reported to have presented a copy to the Prince of Wales.⁶⁵ Raymond pursued a campaign to discredit O’Connor through pamphlets, letters and notices printed in the Dublin press.⁶⁶ Raymond’s attacks on O’Connor are noteworthy for their

⁶¹ ‘Charles Lynegar’, pp. 25–6; Harrison, *The Dean’s Friend*, p. 31–33.

⁶² *Memoirs of the Right Honourable the Marquis of Clanricarde, Lord Deputy General of Ireland ... to which is Prefix’d a Dissertation, wherein some Passages of these memoirs are illustrated. With a Digression containing several curious Observations concerning the Antiquities of Ireland* (London: James Woodman, 1722), p. cxviii. The digression was written by Thomas O’Sullevane, an Irish scholar living in London (Harrison, *The Dean’s Friend*, pp. 106–7).

⁶³ Andrew Carpenter, ‘Irish and Anglo-Irish Scholars in the Time of Swift: The Case of Anthony Raymond’, in Heinz Kosoch and Wolfgang Zach, eds, *Literary Interrelations: Ireland, England and the World*, 3 vols (Tübingen: Narr, 1987), I, 11–20, 18.

⁶⁴ *The General History of Ireland [...] Collectedly the learned Jeoffrey Keating, D. D. Faithfully translated from the original Irish Language [...] by Dermo’d O Connor* (London: J. Bettenham, 1723). Carpenter (‘Irish and Anglo-Irish Scholars’, p. 18) notes that the book attracted the enormous number of 445 subscribers in Ireland.

⁶⁵ Harrison, *The Dean’s Friend*, p. 118; *Dublin Intelligence*, 12 January 1723.

⁶⁶ A thorough account of the controversy is given in Harrison, *The Dean’s Friend*, chapter four.

offended sense of propriety – in the dual sense of that word developed earlier in this chapter. This is most evident in a pamphlet issued by Raymond in 1725, where he somewhat belatedly announces his own intention to publish a work of history:

[B]ecause I intend soon to publish the History of *Ireland*, from the first peopling of that Kingdom, to the latter End of the Reign of *James* the First, I thought it might be proper to say something beforehand, by way of a preliminary Discourse, and to take Notice in general, that several *English* and *Irish* Writers have [...] misrepresented both the ancient Natives, and the old *English* who settled among them, [...] Insomuch, that in their manner of writing of *Ireland*, they seem, as one of our Authors says, to resemble the *Beetle* (*Primpiollan*) which raised by the Heat of Summer, flies abroad, passing over the pleasant Fields and Gardens, without stooping to the Blossoms or Flowers that lie in his Way, and alights upon the Dung of some Beast, to which alone his Taste leads him.⁶⁷

Intention quickly merges with action here as Raymond moves from discussing the content of his forthcoming publication to incorporating it with in his text. Like O'Connor, Raymond underplays the fact that his forthcoming work is largely a translation as opposed to an original work. In his subscriber list the book was referred to as 'Anthony Raymond's History of Ireland', with no mention of Keating.⁶⁸ He is fleetingly cited in the passage above as 'one of our Authors', an act that is both appropriative and assimilative. Not only the simile of the beetle but also the surrounding material belongs to Keating's preface, as quoted above. Raymond hives off Keating's simile by attributing it to 'one of our Authors' so that that this passage performs a function somewhere between translation, quotation and adaptation. By allowing it to break through the surface of his English prose at a strategic point, Raymond provides an indication that the source material has been translated correctly and reworks Keating's lofty dismissal of the New English to reflect Raymond's experience at O'Connor's hands. However, the *priompallán* or dung beetle is only allowed to poke its head between Raymond's restraining parentheses, which act as if to prevent the insect

⁶⁷ *A Short Preliminary Discourse to the History of Ireland to be published by Anthony Raymond, D.D., and sometime Fellow of Trinity College near Dublin* (London: [n. pub.], 1725), pp. 3–4.

⁶⁸ Harrison, *The Dean's Friend*, Appendix II, p. 168.

from running free and bespattering the rest of the page. Thus, whereas the first function of the citation is to emphasise the proximity between original and translation, the second is to underscore the distance between Raymond's text and that of Keating. The fact that he cites the source language only at this point makes the relationship between the two a loaded one.

Raymond seems at pains to emphasise that the simile is something that scholarly conscience, rather than literary preference, forces his text to incorporate. The word is cited in the original to satisfy the antiquarian's hunger for accuracy but that same sense of propriety is also insisted upon in order to excuse an evident lapse in decorum. But Raymond's insistence upon rendering this passage accurately, and on documenting its close relationship to the original, does not extend to the overall design of the work he intended to publish. Keating's history covered the period between the ordinary settlement of Ireland and the Anglo-Norman invasion of the twelfth century; Raymond's version (which was never published) determines to bring it up to date as far as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Additionally, Keating's original, as my earlier quotation of it shows, had specifically attacked the New English or 'new foreigner' writers by comparing them to the dung beetle. By contrast Raymond applies this comparison to several '*English and Irish Writers*' – a modification that allows him to include Dermot O'Connor. So while native writers were still being disparaged by rival historians of English descent, the latter were appropriating the language of once derided histories to do so. O'Connor had been assigned the role of the ignorant and linguistically-inept incomer, a barbarian in the literal sense, while Raymond established himself as the faithful custodian of the native tradition. With such feats of ventriloquism, the speakers in this dialogue could have rivalled Swift.

III

History is unfinished in this island; long since it has come to a stop in Surrey.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ William Trevor, 'Beyond the Pale', *Collected Stories* (London: Viking, [1992]), p. 763.

As the hubbub sparked off a century earlier by Geoffrey Keating continued to replay itself with increasing complexity, the one sentiment to be voiced consistently throughout the 1720s was that a systematic account of the history of Ireland still needed to be set down in writing. The lack of one was keenly felt, and not only by native scholars who sought to prevent their traditions from dying out in the new state. Those whose duty it was to consolidate the kingdom's Protestant, Anglophone character also envisioned that the starting point for this new enterprise must be a record of all that had gone before. The future could not begin in earnest until the past had literally been consigned to history. But this would be no easy undertaking. '[A]s to the History of Ireland I am very sensible there is one wanting', Archbishop King of Dublin wrote to Henry Maule, the champion of the charity schools, whose sermon announcing the schools' success and the concomitant decay of Irish was quoted at the beginning of this chapter. As if to confirm that the successful eradication of the old order would have to be documented, Maule seems to have been keen to undertake the project of compiling a history and to enlist the Archbishop's help. But King warned him that it would be a 'more Difficult work than you imagine'. He asserted that to write such a work impartially 'would be a virulent libel, both on the Conquerors and conquered' but 'to do it partially is unworthy of an honest man'.⁷⁰

King was maintaining in effect that Ireland's history could not be written while history itself remained unfinished. 'I remember no example of a Countrey above 500 years in the possession of a people, without settling it in a prospect of peace or bringing the conquered into the interest of the conquereor but Ireland'.⁷¹ His pessimistic assessment of the colonial project's failure to instil civility in the natives echoes Swift's wistful regret that 'Agricola [...] was not prevailed on [...] to come over and civilise us with a conquest, as his countrymen did Britain'. Indeed, and again in keeping with Swift's reading, it seemed to King that 'barbarous' mores were in fact spreading to those who should have been propagating civility. Just before he wrote to Henry Maule to advise him on his projected history, King warned another acquaintance that 'it is much observed

⁷⁰ William King to Henry Maule, 8 May 1722, 26 May 1722, TCD MS 750/7, p. 104, p. 117. Spelling in this and the following two quotations has been slightly rationalized.

⁷¹ Ibid.

that your family is altogether Papists, and that you live as much after the old Irish manner, as the merest Irish man in the Kingdom'.⁷² Such comments resemble Swift's assertions that not enough had been done to 'civilize the most barbarous' among those he called natives, or to 'reconcile them to our customs and manner of living' (XII, 89). But by contrast with Swift, whose scholarly ambitions focussed on English history, King was interested in contributing his own expertise to the Irish historiographical project. He wrote to Henry Maule that if the work of history under discussion should come to fruition, then:

for my own part, I shall be ready to contribute my mite, of which I have given a specimen in my discussion of the Loughs and Bogs of Ireland, and likewise of manuring land by shells, and it would go a great way in the naturall history. I would likewise contribute plentyfully to anyone that would undertake the worke. [I]t can never be done without imploying two or three purposely to travel the several Countys and make their several observations[.] The mountains the Quarrys, the mines, the rivers, the Harbours, the fishings, the plants, the Animals, the works, such as the barring out of the sea from a great Tract of Land in the Harbour of Dublin and attempting to make the Liffey navigable would furnish Materials for a great Volume.⁷³

This great volume, which King probably envisioned as part of a compendious and authoritative multi-volume history, never appeared. Four years after he wrote this letter, his treatise on loughs and bogs appeared as part of a work entitled *A Natural History of Ireland*. But this was far from the definitive opus King had described. It was more of a themed anthology than a coherent work, consisting of a reprint of Gerard Boate's 1652 geographical description alongside assorted papers presented to the London Royal Society on Irish subjects and Thomas Molyneux's essay on Viking fortifications in Ireland.⁷⁴ The fact that most of these works had been written in the previous century illustrates what Barnard calls the 'incurious and repetitive nature of most of what was printed about Ireland between the 1650s and 1760s'.⁷⁵ But incurious repetition

⁷² King to Lord Kingston, 9 January 1722, *ibid.*, p. 128.

⁷³ King to Maule, 26 May 1722, p. 118.

⁷⁴ *A Natural History of Ireland in three Parts. By several Hands* (Dublin: George Ewing, 1726).

⁷⁵ *New Anatomy*, p. 3.

might also be read as an inability on the part of natives and newcomers alike to put the past behind them.

The most decisive move towards this end was made by an English-born writer, Bishop William Nicolson of Derry, in his 1724 survey of Ireland's holdings of historical material in print and manuscript. This work shows how inclusive the category of history was at this time since it encompasses biography, hagiography and works of 'natural history' like King's treatise on loughs and bogs as well as polemics like his *State of the Protestants* and William Molyneux's *Case of Ireland*. In refusing to trade insults with native historians Nicolson also broke a pattern long upheld by English newcomers. Instead he acted as umpire in the disputes documented in this chapter's second section, awarding consolation prizes to all the participants in the debate about how to write and read the history of Ireland. As discussed in my first chapter, Nicolson was sceptical about the controversy surrounding the Declaratory Act; with a similar impatience for local squabbles he sought magnanimously to resolve the recent battle of the books, give the participants their dues and move on. An evident lack of polish in Cox's *Hibernia Anglicana* is attributed to an overhasty desire to publish so as to help the war effort; Keating's *Foras Feasa* is praised as a '*most complete and methodical History*'; Mac Curtin's *Vindication*, which emulates the form of Keating's *Foras Feasa*, is praised for its author's close adherence to 'the Matter and Method of his Master *Jeoffry*'. On the same note, Dermot O'Connor is also described as 'a Person well able to do right by his author and himself: Notwithstanding the many hard Censures that have pass'd, and are daily passing, upon both'. In spite of his irenical stance, Nicolson's work, like his companion volumes for England and Scotland, presupposes that all the texts he examines may not be considered as works of history in themselves. Instead they have become historical documents – not works of reference but source material or, at most, useful preliminaries to the compilers of a yet unwritten and truly objective work. This tome, for which Nicolson's survey had cleared the ground, would be *A General History of Ireland*.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ William Nicolson, *The Irish Historical Library. Pointing at most of the Authors and Records in Print or Manuscript, which may be serviceable to the Compilers of a General History of Ireland* (Dublin: Aaron Rhames, 1724), p. 52, p. 45, p. 49, p. 46.

In this context it may be significant that O'Connor published his translation of Keating under the title *A General History of Ireland*, thus placing it within a historiographic genre would have been the most accessible and desirable of the many types available to Anglophone readers and publishers.⁷⁷ Karen O'Brien notes an increasing demand in England 'for works of polite literature' and especially 'a steady growth in the readership for demanding lengthy histories' often 'in expensive multi-volume folio formats' such as James Tyrell's *General History of England* (1696–1704).⁷⁸ As both native and Anglo-Irish observers demonstrated, the possibilities afforded by the translation of this reading and publishing context to Ireland were extensive. But although his name appears on the list of subscribers for Anthony Raymond's 'History of Ireland', Swift was a notable absentee from this dialogic exchange.

IV

As even a cursory survey of his career will show, Swift was by no means uninterested in history. At one point he even began work on an ambitious scholarly work in this discipline and progressed as far as the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland. But even if some significance could be read into the cut-off point, it was a history of England that he began, abandoned and subsequently forgot about. When he rediscovered it in 1719 Swift did not attempt to finish the work, frustrated as he was by 'a long melancholy prospect [...], in a most obscure disagreeable country, and among a most profligate and abandoned people' (v, 11). History to Swift meant English history, although as Carole Fabricant contends there are ways in which his writing functions as a series of 'interventions in the combined historical and historiographic enterprise as it had

⁷⁷ Keating's title is translated literally as *The Basis for a Knowledge of Ireland* (Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 23.)

⁷⁸ Karen O'Brien, 'The History Market in Eighteenth-Century England' in Isabel Rivers ed., *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* (London: Continuum, 2001; repr. 2003), pp. 105–6.

come to be defined by the English and their representatives in Ireland'.⁷⁹ My next chapter discusses one mode through which Swift's writing was compelled to accommodate this historical narrative. But one notable feature of this chapter has been the relative absence of Swift's normally overpowering voice from overt dialogue on how to write history in 1720s Ireland.

Even though this question exercised many of his peers, colleagues and friends, Swift remained silent. On the language question, Swift was content to follow the official policy of gradual abolition; when it came to culture it seems he was simply not interested. Many attempts have been made to demonstrate connections between Swift's writing and literature in the Irish language and the Gaelic tradition, but most of these affinities, as Harrison demonstrates, are destined to remain elective because 'even if Swift was able to speak Irish reasonably well, he would not have been able to read simple contemporary texts let alone complex poems and stories'.⁸⁰ The dialogue between Swift's texts and those in the Gaelic tradition was not initiated by him. After his death Swift became part of the popular culture of Gaelic as well as Anglophone Ireland. Works by or relating to Swift such as his life, letters and *Gulliver's Travels* would become popular teaching texts in the hedge schools; folktales also began detailing encounters between Swift and poets such as Aodhagán Ó Rathaille (d. c. 1729), but these were retrospective fictions.⁸¹ Swift's interest and ability in the language probably did not go beyond 'kitchen Irish'— enough 'to order himself food and lodging in a predominantly Irish-speaking country',⁸² and his engagement with literary and historical aspects of Gaelic culture was equally perfunctory.

⁷⁹ Carole Fabricant, 'Swift as Irish Historian', in Christopher Fox and Brenda Tooley, eds, *Walking Naboth's Vineyard: New Studies of Swift* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 40–72, p. 43.

⁸⁰ *The Dean's Friend*, p. 156, and chapter five, *passim*.

⁸¹ Dáithí Ó hOgáin, 'Folklore and Literature: 1700–1850', in Mary Daly and David Dickson, eds, *The Origins of Popular Literacy in Ireland: Language Change and Educational Development 1700–1920* (Dublin: Department of Modern History, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Modern Irish History, University College Dublin, 1990), pp. 1–14, p. 11, n. 29; Ó hOgáin, *The Irish Hero in Folk History* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), pp. 86–99, Patrick Rafroidi, 'Swift et le dilemme anglo-irlandais', *Études anglaises*, 42 (1989), pp. 3–12, p. 10.

⁸² Andrew Carpenter and Alan Harrison, 'Swift's "O'Rourke's Feast" and Sheridan's Letter: Early Transcripts by Anthony Raymond', in Hermann J. Real and Heinz Vienken, eds, *Proceedings of the First Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift* (Munich: Fink, 1985), pp. 27–46, p. 29.

According to a poem by Tadhg Ó Neachtain, twenty-six scholars and poets in the Irish language lived and worked in Dublin in the years Swift lived there.⁸³ But the only contact Swift might have had with any of them was indirect and came through the medium of a poem called ‘The Description of an Irish Feast’. It opens with these lines:

O'Rourk's noble fare
 Will ne'er be forgot,
 By those who were there,
 And those who were not. (*Poems*, p. 221, ll. 1–4)

As Paul Muldoon notes, this sentence is ‘of course, an example of the so-called Irish bull’. He defines that figure as a ‘self-contradictory proposition [...] an expression containing a manifest contradiction in terms or involving a ludicrous inconsistency unperceived by the speaker’.⁸⁴ The poem is an adaptation of a piece in Irish, ‘Pléarácá na Ruracach’ by Hugh Magauran, one of the twenty-six writers named in Ó Neachtain’s poem. Swift’s version is not a translation but a versification of a literal English rendering produced on his behalf, most likely by Anthony Raymond. Although ‘Swift’s version sticks closely to the Irish text’ one feature could be credited as the adaptor’s innovation.⁸⁵ Ironically, in light of Swift’s own belief that the Irish language was the source of such blunders in English, the feature that Swift brought to his source text was the ‘Irish bull’ of the opening lines. ‘The revelry of the O’Rourkes is in the memory of everyone that would ever come, that saw or would hear’, runs Harrison and Carpenter’s literal translation. In contemporary versifications of the original, the contradiction is similarly absent, latent rather than manifest.⁸⁶ In taking this particular bull by the horns, Swift’s insistence that the dialogue between English and Irish must produce ‘nothing but bulls, blunders, and follies’ had become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

⁸³ Harrison, *The Dean’s Friend*, Appendix I.

⁸⁴ Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I: The Clarendon Lectures in English Literature, 1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 115.

⁸⁵ Carpenter and Harrison, p. 29.

⁸⁶ Carpenter and Harrison, p. 38, who also cite the following verse translations: ‘O’ROURKE’s revel rout / Let no person forget / Who have been, who will be, / Or never was yet’; ‘The Crismus Feasting the noble o Ruairk / Such peace and Such plenty sure never was seen’.

Chapter Four Pastoral is Political

I

‘[Swift’s] conception of pastoral care [...] widened out to embrace the nation. If Ireland irritated and displeased him in many respects, it also gratefully received his warm commiseration, as of a pastor to his flock’.¹ So ends Louis Landa’s definitive study of Swift and his church. In contrast with this reading, I have emphasized the extent to which membership of the Irish nation and the established church were, in the eyes of clergymen like Swift, mutually dependent. Allowing for this adjustment, it is still true that contemporaries promoted the image of Swift ministering to his constituents as a pastor to his flock, much as Swift did for his superior in the church. He did so in a poem called ‘An Excellent New Song upon His Grace Our Good Lord Archbishop of Dublin’, published at the height of the Drapier’s fame in 1724. The poem is narrated ‘By Honest Jo, One of His Grace’s Farmers in Fingal’. In this country parish North of Dublin, the speaker depicts a politicized rural idyll. He describes the local community obeying the Drapier’s command to read his work ‘with the utmost Attention, or get it read to you by others’ (X, 3). In a tableau that anticipates the earnest swains of Goldsmith’s *Deserted Village*, workers lay down their plough to attend to Swift’s words:

To every farmer twice a week all round about the yoke,
Our parsons read the Drapier’s books, and make us honest
folk. (*Poems*, pp. 279–80, ll. 39–40)

The Drapier, via the parsons, instructs the farmers in such a way as to perform an act of self-definition on their behalf: books make them ‘honest folk’, and the narrator names himself ‘Honest Jo’. This picture of the dissemination of Swift’s writings among the illiterate is matched for idealism by the poem’s portrait of its dedicatee.

In private the Dean’s relationship with his Bishop was not always even-tempered. Swift nurtured a grudge against King which, not surprisingly, centred

¹ *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 195.

on the cursory fulfilment of obligations. '[F]rom the very moment of the Queen's death, your Grace hath thought fit to take every opportunity of giving me all sorts of uneasiness, without ever giving me, in my whole life, one single mark of your favour beyond common civilities', he complained. 'And, if it were not below a man of spirit to make complaints', he continued somewhat disingenuously, 'I could date them from six and twenty years past'. This quarter-century of uneasiness may have helped earn King the designation *u.* (for ungrateful) when Swift compiled a graded list of friends and colleagues.² The fact that Swift had only praise for King's record of public service makes his private assessment all the more damning.

In representing him to Irish constituents, Swift made the Archbishop into an exemplary steward of the land as well as the people in his cure. After his death, Swift reminded the public of the lengths King had gone to in encouraging the inferior clergy to live within their parishes:

When a Lease had run out seven Years or more, he stipulated with the Tenant to resign up twenty or thirty Acres to the Minister of the Parish where it lay convenient, without lessening his former Rent; and with no great Abatement of the Fine; and this he did in the Parts near *Dublin*, where Land is at the highest Rates [...] and I am sorry that the good Example of such a *Prelate* hath not been followed.³

Despite the financial penalties involved, the Archbishop strove to create the necessary conditions for pastors to retain close relations with those in their charge. In emphasizing the care the Archbishop took to discharge such pastoral duties, and allow others to fulfil theirs, Swift was also highlighting that as 'displaced public servants', the established clergy's obligation to their flock was political and economic as well as spiritual.⁴ In the 'Excellent New Song', Jo maintains that only through the Archbishop's benevolence is he able to maintain his status as an under-tenant. The speaker explains that he sub-rents 'a little piece of ground' from King, who holds a lease on land that is owned by a 'squire' of

² Swift to Archbishop King, 18 May 1727, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 87; *Correspondence*, ed. Williams, v, Appendix XXX, 270.

³ 'Considerations upon two Bills sent down from the Right Honourable the House of Lords to the Honourable House of Commons Relating to the Clergy of Ireland (1732), *Prose* XII, 191–202, 201.

⁴ Fauske *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 14.

the local gentry. He adds that the secular landlord's demands on his finances are such that only the cleric's generosity enables him to survive. Jo says of his squire that 'the land I from him hold is so stretched on the rack / That only for the Bishop's lease 'twould quickly break my back' (ll. 45–6). The poem thus revisits the contention of 1720's *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* that the Anglican Church plays a vital role in allowing a shrinking class of smallholders to survive in the face of rack-renting by predatory landlords. As my first chapter suggested, this point is contentious. It became more so as the 1720s progressed.

From 1726 bad harvests and a slump in the linen industry caused an economic depression more severe than the one experienced at the beginning of the twenties. In these newly straitened circumstances, tenant farmers began to protest that the extraction of tithes by the Church constituted a drain on their resources that was comparable to, if not worse than, having to pay extortionate rents. Presbyterian ministers issued a public statement that the alarming increase in emigration to America at this time came as a result of farmers' inability to pay the tithe.⁵ Three years earlier, one of the Dublin newspapers advertised a book for sale that would prove 'most useful for the Country Inhabitants of this kingdom Generally oppress'd by the Lawless Insolence of Tythers'.⁶ The book promises to guide its readers through the intricacies of the law on this matter and to help them defend themselves in the ecclesiastical courts where the Church's claim was enforced. By omitting this context, the 'Excellent New Song' oversimplifies the struggle between the church and the gentry, recasting it as an intervention by churchmen to protect their flocks from grasping landlords.

Such partisanship reveals the poem as a particular kind of pastoral, one which exemplifies the sort discussed in this chapter. Firstly, the piece is overtly topical, but its references to contemporary issues are subject to the simplifying impulse that is typical of the genre. In documenting complex political realities, the poem abstracts from ongoing conflicts, establishing a struggle between an archetype of justice and a rival who embodies greed. This template is laid down in what is both a founding text of the pastoral genre and one of the most widely

⁵ Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 155.

⁶ *Dublin Intelligence*, 16 August 1726.

imitated texts in the Anglophone poetry of eighteenth-century Ireland, Virgil's first eclogue. 'Honest Jo' resembles Virgil's Tityrus who eulogizes the emperor Octavian in the first eclogue for restoring his confiscated lands.⁷ The Latin poem, however, takes the form of a dialogue between the jubilant Tityrus and the less fortunate Meliboeus, who has not enjoyed influential favour and must vacate his lands for the city. Clearly, the 'Excellent New Song' calls out for a supplement to restore the suppressed portion of the dialogue, which Annabel Patterson characterizes as a 'dialectic of opposed fortunes'.⁸ Jo's missing counterpart is supplied by the victims of the historical events in which Swift's own writing was to become embroiled in the late 1720s and early thirties. My next chapter looks at this immediate context in detail, but the present one adopts a broader perspective. It shows how Swift and his Irish contemporaries used pastoral conventions to represent the conflict between the church and the landed interest but it also explores how the pastoral dialectic could accommodate much larger (but equally controversial) narratives of history and identity. Inevitably Swift's versions of these narratives fixate on violations of trust.

II

Much as anonymous or little-known authors and printers were instrumental in creating the conditions out of which the 1720 *Proposal* and the *Drapier's Letters* emerged, the work of extending the Hibernian Patriot's role to accommodate the position of spiritual guardian was undertaken largely by Swift's less celebrated contemporaries. Swift tended to cast himself in the role of an exasperated intercessor, caught between an unheeding government and a feckless public. But some of the Dean's more poetically-inclined constituents would later anoint him as their pastor, just as Swift had conferred the status of a benevolent guardian on Archbishop King. The way they did so provides an intriguing parallel to what David Hayton calls 'a shift in the self-image of the

⁷ On the historical background to these events, see Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 2–3.

⁸ Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, p. 216.

Ascendancy [...] towards an affirmation of Irishness'.⁹ On the fringes of the ascendancy, pastoral conventions were being put to work to affirm identities that trouble some received notions of Irishness. 'A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of Jonathan Swift, D.D., late D.S.P.D.' provides an early and significant indication that Swift's public cast him in the role of pastor. It applies suitable epithets but in an unexpected register:

He was the blythest shepherd e'er was seen;
The king o' mirth, the wonder of the green. [...]
Our swains may now sink drumly in despair,
For now their guardian shepherd is na mair.¹⁰

In his essay on this poem, Andrew Carpenter reproduces and discusses the text, which was first published, 'probably in Dublin', in 1752.¹¹ It takes the form of a dialogue between two members of Swift's Irish circle, the churchman and poet Patrick Delany and John Boyle, the fifth Earl of Orrery. The elegy, as Carpenter notes, is a piece remarkable for being written entirely in the Ulster Scots dialect and for portraying the characters as close friends, even though they fought bitterly after Swift's death, when Orrery's biography of the Dean prompted an antagonistic reply from Delany. Equally striking is its reading of the pastor's role as a trusteeship to which a chosen figure must succeed. The Orrery-figure, who is simply called Johnny in the poem, nominates Delany to the vacant office:

Dear *Patrick* [...] ye maun be
A *Jonathan* to us, his place supply.
Ye ha'e already an extensive gift,
And heav'n will double what it gi' to SWIFT.
Be ye *Elisha*, in *Elijah's* stead,
And still we'll say our guardian is na dead. (ll. 107–12)

⁹ 'Anglo-Irish Attitudes', p. 146.

¹⁰ Anon., 'A Pastoral Elegy on the Death of Jonathan Swift, D.D., late D.S.P.D.' (1752), ll. 29–30; ll. 65–66, reproduced in Andrew Carpenter, 'Peculiar Pastorals: Swift, Delany and Orrery in *The Ulster Miscellany*', in Freiburg, Löffler and Zach, *Swift, The Enigmatic Dean*, pp. 15–25, pp. 19–23.

¹¹ Carpenter 'Peculiar Pastorals', p. 16.

This speech shows how one versifier conceived the role of the writer in Ireland as embodied by Swift. The Delany-figure is put forward as a candidate for more than just literary pre-eminence. Over and beyond the dubious prophecy that Delany will become twice as talented as the Dean, his companion pronounces that he must become a new Swift, ‘A *Jonathan* to us’. Patrick must not only imitate Swift’s writings, he must occupy ‘his place’ in society and become a ‘guardian’, a leader and protector. The poet uses typology to express the qualities he envisions, naming Delany as the successor to Swift, just as God named Elisha as Elijah’s successor.¹² The Biblical prophet adds a new dimension to the archetype of the pastor, imbuing him with the qualities of a political champion as well as a moral guide. Through his reference to Elijah, the elegist casts the pastor as one who speaks out for the rule of law and acts as a voice for the oppressed against corrupt institutions – much like the Archbishop in the ‘Excellent New Song’. In the first Book of Kings, Elijah curses the tyrant King Ahab for killing Naboth and for taking unlawful possession of his land. He swears that the king will suffer a more ignominious death than his humble victim.¹³ Similarly, the elegy describes Swift as having stood firm against ‘great authority’ at a time when the common people ‘durst na speak’, confronting ‘*Willy Wood*’ and his supporters with the assertion that ‘their project was against the law’ (ll. 57–61). The analogy drawn between the poet and the prophet is both celebratory and prescriptive: it commemorates Swift whilst also imposing a burden of responsibility on his successor.

The ‘Pastoral Elegy’ thus holds up Swift as the type of a politically committed writer, employing a perspective and a dialect that place its author at some distance from the Anglican, Dublin-centred élite that stood in for the Irish political nation at the time. While the mysterious origins of the Elegy prevent any firm identification with Ulster Presbyterians, its use of dialect suggests an affinity with, if not an origin in, a community normally excluded from consideration as part of the ‘Irish interest’, routinely marginalized as the Scottish or ‘British interest’ by Swift’s contemporaries and by the author himself as ‘the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 22, n. 11, citing II Kings 2. 19

¹³ I Kings 21.19: ‘Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.’

Scotch plantation in the north'.¹⁴ Another voice from the margins is heard in an alternative exploration of the pastor's role published in 1726.

It comes from an individual whose full title is given as 'Morrough Mc.Teig, Mc.Mahonliegh, Mc.Murrough O'Conner of Augh he ne Graun, in the County of Kerry'.¹⁵ This was the persona used by the author of five poems published in Dublin between 1719 and 1740, three of which were collected in a volume called *Poems, Pastorals and Dialogues*, printed in the city in 1726. The first piece in the collection, 'A Pastoral in Imitation of the First Eclogue of Virgil', is dedicated to the Provost and Fellows of Trinity College, Dublin, and suggests that the author himself had some connection with the University.¹⁶ In the 'Imitation of the First Eclogue', the poet adapts his classical source to an English poetic tradition, but many of the details belong in an Irish context. The Meliboeus figure in O'Connor's poem, Owen Sullivan, has lost his farm to a greedy landlord. Murrough, who corresponds to Tityrus, has approached Trinity College, the tenant of the land sublet to him, and had his tenancy restored: here an institution fulfils the protector's role in a fashion similar to the depiction of the Church in the 'Excellent New Song'. The topicality of the poem's stance against landlordism raises a parallel with Swift's agrarian patriotism. Another poem in the collection of 1726 attests an affinity for the consumer politics that Swift espoused in the service of this cause. 'A Description of the County of Kerry' has this to say of the county's residents:

No foreign Customs do their Lands invade,
Nor will their ancient Customs ever fade;
No *Tea* or *Coffee* is among them us'd,
And stranded *Claret* is for *Ale* refus'd;
Their cleanly Dishes are of wooden Ware,
Best suited to their strong and homely Fare;

¹⁴ Hayton, 'Anglo-Irish Attitudes', p. 151, notes the use of the term 'British interest' to refer to the Ulster Scots.

¹⁵ 'Morgan O'Conner', *Poems, Pastorals and Dialogues* (Dublin: J. Thompson, 1726), p. 1. Subsequent references given in the footnotes by the abbreviation *Poems* and page no. Some of this poet's work is reproduced in Andrew Carpenter, ed., *Verse in English from Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), pp. 83–89, and in *The Field Day Anthology*, I, pp. 442–444. Although the main text refers to the poet as 'Murrough O'Connor', references in footnotes will use the form 'Morgan O'Conner' as it appears on the 1726 title-page.

¹⁶ O'Conner, *Poems*, p. 1. *The Field Day Anthology* (I, p. 438) notes that the two names used within the poems, Murrough O'Connor and Owen Sullivan both occur on numerous occasions within the records' of Trinity College.

Here ev'ry Man's a Monarch in his Mind,
 And ev'ry Traveller will Admittance find;
 Their constant Dress is made of home-spun Frize,
 No more they covet than will just suffice.¹⁷

Students of the pastoral genre will recognize this passage as a rather slavish reconstruction of an ideal of rustic frugality. The insistence upon 'homely Fare' and the eschewal of 'foreign Customs' seems like an attempt to confirm Pope's observation that in pastoral 'the fable, manners, thoughts, and expressions, are full of the greatest simplicity in nature', and to append a slightly xenophobic twist.¹⁸ Readers of Swift's Irish tracts however, are more likely to argue that these lines invoke quite a different set of principles. The rejection of 'Foreign Customs' applies not only to mores but to commerce, custom. Hence, the insistence upon a 'constant Dress [...] of home-spun Frize' – a word that now refers especially to cloth of Irish manufacture – can be read as a pledge of support for Irish textile workers.¹⁹ Similarly, 'homely Fare' is not simply food that is plain or bland: the phrase denotes produce made at home. But Swift's espousal of domestic consumption was provisional and subject to qualifications, and Owen Sullivan and Murrough O'Connor's adoption of the same cause does not constitute reliable evidence that the interests of dispossessed tenants in Kerry had meshed with those of the classically-educated reading public of Dublin.²⁰

We can only speculate whether Owen and Murrough's casual deployment of phrases in Irish reflects a genuinely bilingual author or someone who had picked up a few words in the inns or from college servants; whether Murrough's account of his Milesian descent shows a genuine fascination for the history of Gaelic Ireland or an awareness of recent trends among gentleman scholars. But

¹⁷ *Poems*, p. 18.

¹⁸ 'A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry' (1717), in *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, general ed. John Butt, 11 vols (London: Methuen, 1961–68), I, *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*, ed. by E. Audra and Aubrey Williams, p. 25.

¹⁹ *OED* frieze, n. 1.

²⁰ Swift exempted French and Spanish wines from his list of proscribed commodities on the grounds that he was fond of them. Ferguson (p. 156) calls this the 'one glaring inconsistency in [Swift's] attack on needless foreign imports'. When he heard, in November 1729, that the Irish Parliament 'was considering laying an additional duty on imported wine' he wrote 'A Proposal that all the Ladies and Women of Ireland Appear Constantly in Irish Manufactures' (*Prose* XII, 121–127). The rationale behind this piece of voodoo economics was that if enough women could be persuaded to modify their dress, the exchequer's gain would counterbalance the loss incurred by the consumption of imported wines.

this imitation of Virgil, like the Ulster-Scots elegy, shows how pastoral conventions served to record voices (or, more likely, appropriations and approximations of voices) that otherwise left little trace. One reason for this may be that pastoral tends to draw attention to writing as a politically and socially-engaged act. It offers a vehicle to explore the privileges and the social responsibilities that attend authorship and compels consideration of the fact that appropriation inheres in acts of representation. Pastoral is, in short, implicated in a society's construction of justice. And because it employs a dialectic, the pastoral mode shows how the roles of victim and persecutor are endlessly interchangeable.

In 1724 for example, Swift had portrayed Archbishop King as the saviour of honest farmers from rackrenting landlords. In 1727, Swift was the sufferer at his supposed protector's hands, and by 1729, the terms in the dialectic had changed again. In May 1729, two farmers from Lisburn wrote to the *Dublin Weekly Journal* to complain that 'some of the Reverend Clergy' had 'put their Tyths into the Hands of very ill-men'. These agents, the two complain, 'often threaten us with Law suits for the Tythes of the little Gardens of Flax and Potatoes, and Christning, and Burial Money, by which Means the poorest people are the greatest Sufferers'. Swift received a copy of this letter and Ferguson asserts that its authors were 'without question' the ones he had in mind when he wrote 'An Answer to Several Letters Sent me from Unknown Persons' (1729; first printed 1765).²¹ This letter insists that in attempting to lay any blame for current hardships at the feet of the Church, these unknown persons 'entirely mistake the Fact'. He issues not an apology but a challenge:

I defy the wickedest and most powerfull Clergy-men in the kingdom to oppress the meanest Farmer in the Parish; and I likewise defy the same Clergy-man to prevent himself from being cheated by the same Farmer, whenever that Farmer shall be disposed to be knavish or peevish. (XII, 78)

The archetypically honest farmer of the 'Excellent New Song' has become knavish and peevish, liable to cheat his patron out of his lawful

²¹ Ferguson, Appendix C, p. 193. Discussed more fully in Chapter Five below.

entitlement whenever he should feel so disposed. Battle lines are being drawn, and against these coming developments, Honest Jo's veneration for his clerical landlord savours of dramatic irony. Soon clergymen would cast themselves as Meliboeus, dispossessed by an unholy alliance between landlords and tenants. This version of events was rendered allegorically in a poem dedicated to Swift and published in 1736, the year in which landowners brought a petition before the House of Commons against the clergy for its attempt to claim tithes on cattle. In a riddling narrative the poem depicts the widespread conversion of cultivated land to pasturage that so alarmed Swift and his fellow Anglican patriots. It presents the move as a concerted policy worked out between tenants and landlords by rendering it as a fable. Looking for a way to maximize his profits, the landlord of a particular farm calls together all his tenants, plies them with food and wine and persuades them to turn the entire estate over to the growth of asparagus. Only one tenant dissents. By drawing attention to the absence of the local parson from the feast he figures the sidelining of the church in national affairs and the usurpation by landowners of its mentorship:

[...] if I right aread the Matter,
 You know not what about you Chatter.
 Landlord, Sorry I am to say
 Our Parson is not here to Day
 For he a good Man is, and Wise,
 And might afford right Advice²²

The suggestion here is that rural mismanagement is essentially a matter of misreading in the senses implied by the word 'aread' – a failure to take advice, to interpret omens correctly, and to speak out. As if to underline this failure, the poet challenges Swift to interpret his moral correctly: 'Now tell me, ken you Master Dean / What 'tis thy Meagre Bard doth mean?'²³ An answer to this question is found in an adaptation of Virgil's first eclogue entitled *The Dean and the Country Parson*.

This parallel translation, which places Virgil's text alongside its updated version, stars Swift himself as Tityrus. Protected by his patron Oxford, the

²² *The Old Woman and her Goose. A Tale Devised on Account of a Certain Late Project. Inscib'd to the Revd. Jonathan Swift, D.D. D.S.P.D. Pa. Pat.* (Dublin: [n. pub], 1736), p. 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Dean's fortunes are contrasted with those of the country parson whom he meets on the road. As in Virgil's original, the fortunate pastor offers his dispossessed friend food and lodging. But their coming together represents only a temporary suspension of the conflict in which they are both caught up. The Dean may accommodate the country parson for one night and even allow him to preach in place of his absent curate in the next day, but as morning draws near (and 'Beaux to Dress them for a Castle rise / and Barber's-boys, with Powder blind our Eyes') so does the reality of the country parson's predicament. When they first meet, the country parson contrasts his plight with the Dean's happy station:

I envy not the Blesings you possess,
 But wonder *Malice* cannot make Them less;
 How in such ticklish Times you'r suffer'd Ink,
 And let to speak ev'n part of what you Think;
 While we with fruitless Efforts, strive to claim
 Raiment for Pow'r and Food instead of Fame:
 Our Flock, alas! on Grounds unfit to Till,
 Best part were ravag'd by the Herbage Bill;
 Our Corn the surly Fanaticks refuse,
 Taught by that Bench, which grumbles at our DUES;
 Blest as we are to catch a dropping Crown,
 To pay for Pipes or mend a tater'd Gown [...]²⁴

As Swift lives comfortably off the proceeds of his writing, the minor clergy struggle to make ends meet. Deprived of income by parliamentary edict in the form of the Herbage Bill (which promoted the grazing of cattle over the growing of tithable crops), they are further impoverished by a conspiracy between Dissenters ('Fanaticks') and magistrates (the 'Bench', drawn from the landed gentry) to deprive them of the tithes that are their rightful dues. Ticklish times indeed. Swift is here cast in the role of one who has escaped the privations to which the inferior clergy are subject, but who nonetheless speaks out on behalf of his oppressed brethren – so forcefully as to make the parson wonder he is allowed to 'speak ev'n part of what you Think'. But this is not the role Swift chose for himself. As I shall argue below, the major difference of Swift's self-presentations in the pastoral mode from those of his lesser known contemporaries

²⁴ Edward Lonegran, *The Dean and the Country Parson. An Imitation of the First Eclogue of Virgil* (Dublin: E. Waters, 1739), p. 3.

is that his works depict a series of figures even more isolated from the centre of power than Murrough O'Connor, the Ulster Scots Elegist or the country parson. Initially, though, some space must be devoted to the question of whether Swift can meaningfully be called a pastor, or whether his works can be viewed as pastorals in any traditional sense of that word.

III

So far this chapter has cited pastoral, with its dialectic of opposed fortunes, as an important literary mode in the hands of Swift and his contemporaries. But the secondary literature has tended to characterize Swift's writings as 'anti-pastoral'. They represent 'the very antithesis', Fabricant writes, 'of the traditional, idyllic [...] pastoral realm, marked by harmonious and joyful coexistence and [...] a primitive but equitable economy'.²⁵ Swift's work does seem to deal in such antitypes and even to employ formal reversals in presenting them. Swains become filthy coalmen and nymphs adulterous chambermaids, as in 'A Description of the Morning'.²⁶ Alternatively, genuine rural scenes are represented as so barren and degraded as to explode any notion of rustic charm. The second method is the one most often employed in Swift's Irish writings. Its scope ranges from risqué comedy to grotesque tragedy. At one extreme is 'A Pastoral Dialogue', in which Dermot and Sheelah, two servants on Sir Arthur Acheson's estate, cement their love by vowing to pick the lice from one another's hair. At the other is the dystopian landscape encountered in Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Several critics have noted the affinities between Houyhnhnm-land's physical and social geography and those of Ireland.²⁷ Others have drawn more

²⁵ *Swift's Landscape*, p. 74.

²⁶ *Poems*, pp. 107–8.

²⁷ D. J. Torchiana, 'Jonathan Swift, the Irish, and the Yahoos: The Case Reconsidered', *Philological Quarterly*, 54 (1975), 195–212, p. 195; see also Margaret Anne Doody, 'Insects, Vermin, and Horses: *Gulliver's Travels* and Virgil's *Georgics*', in Douglas Lane Patey and Timothy Kagan, eds, *Augustan Studies: Essays in Honour of Irvin Ehrenpreis* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 145–74.

exact parallels between the topography of the fantasy and the landscape described in the tracts, such as *A Short View of the State of Ireland*, which Swift produced in the time of famine between 1727 and 1729.²⁸ Both territories are portrayed in such a way as to subvert the pastoral ideal, and the descriptions give the initial impression of some vast and recently abandoned agricultural experiment. At the beginning of his last voyage, Gulliver finds ‘Tracks of human Feet’ (XI, 223), but no people. Instead he encounters only Yahoos, strange ‘Animals in a Field’, which he initially perceives to be the cattle of the island’s missing human Inhabitants. Similarly, the speaker of *An Answer to a Paper called A Memorial* (1728) describes how, on his first arrival in Ireland, he was ‘amazed for a Week or two’, to see such ‘a prodigious Plenty of *Cattle*, and Dearth of *Human Creatures*’ (XII, 19). In ‘A Letter to the Archbishop of Dublin Concerning the Weavers’ (1729), another tract of the famine years, the narrator stumbles on a terrain populated by beings ‘with two legs and human faces, clad and erect’. He is forced to ask himself whether these ‘animals [...] be of the same species with what I have encountered in England’ (XII, 65). His reaction is a mirror image of the ‘Horror and Astonishment’ felt by Gulliver upon discovering that close examination of the Yahoo ‘Cattle’ reveals each one to be possessed of ‘a perfect human Figure’ (XI, 230). If two Martian critics were given the novel and the famine tracts to study, they would probably argue over which of them had been working on a set of fact-driven writings and which had been dissecting a misanthropic fantasy. The most potent such blend of reality and phantasmagoria is of course *A Modest Proposal*. That grotesque handbook of human-cattle husbandry is only the most extreme expression of a coherent vision. It provides a further version of Ireland as a gigantic depopulated cattle-ranch, an idea envisioned semi-seriously in William Petty’s *Anatomy of Ireland* and sarcastically in Swift’s own *Answer to the Craftsman* (1731).²⁹

Such comparisons suggest that to deem Swift a pastor, or to call his works pastorals, would be a serious misjudgement. Nonetheless, Joseph McMinn has argued that ‘We do not misrepresent Swift, or deny his intelligence, if we

²⁸ Fabricant, *Landscape*, pp. 34–6, 62–3, 82, 227; Claude Rawson, ‘The Injured Lady and the Drapier: A Reading of Swift’s Irish Tracts’, *Prose Studies*, 3 (1980), 15–43, pp. 21–3.

²⁹ See Clive T. Probyn, *Jonathan Swift: The Contemporary Background* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), pp. 123–134.

think of him as a pastoralist'.³⁰ The validity of the judgement depends on the kind of writing one chooses to exemplify the ideals that Swift negates or subverts to produce his countergenre. Certainly, in comparison with the pastorals of his peers and inheritors in the Anglo-Irish tradition, Swift's work stands out. In their pastoral effusions, poets like Matthew and Laetitia Pilkington, Constantia Grierson and Patrick Delany, often give a misleadingly pretty impression of life in early eighteenth-century Ireland. They imply that the nation's only pastime consisted in strolling through parkland or countryside, and that its sole industry was the construction of large country houses with elaborate garden features. Andrew Carpenter sums up this tradition as one in which 'gently cultured (and mostly moneyed) Anglo-Irish poets write in pastoral or Augustan style of the Phyllises in their groves'.³¹ Swift's refusal to deal in ready-made tableaux of rural bliss sets his works apart from theirs.

Judged against such productions, Swift's writing in the pastoral mode does indeed deserve the prefix 'anti'. But this chapter's discussion of certain other pastoralists has shown that rather than provide a diversion from the debates of the present or erase the problem of the past, the form could encompass political controversy and provide a means to affirm or question identities. These properties are also found in Swift's works and pastoral conventions help to animate them. Claude Rawson has noted the tendency of the Irish tracts to invoke a theme of grotesque 'anti-nature', and points out that it constitutes a '*systematic elaboration*' of his own notion that Ireland's 'wretched condition' invalidates normal processes of reason and nature.³² This topos occurs most frequently and in its most concentrated form in the tracts of 1727–9. As Rawson notes, pieces like *A Short View of the State of Ireland*, the 'Letter to the Archbishop of Dublin Concerning the Weavers' and 'Maxims Controlled in Ireland' depict a world in which the natural order has been turned upside-down, where four-legged beasts are privileged above brutish humans.

One of the most powerful elaborations on the 'anti-nature' theme occurs in the *Short View*. It restates Swift's diagnosis of Ireland's wretched condition in

³⁰ Joseph McMinn, 'Pastoral Properties: Swift and Gardens', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 22 (1999), 15–34, p. 34.

³¹ *Verse in English*, p. 5.

³² Rawson, 'The Injured Lady and the Drapier', p. 20; p. 21. Emphasis in original.

a simile that dramatizes the country's tendency to invalidate the normal processes of reasoning. 'If we do flourish', this piece argues, then 'it must be against every Law of Nature and Reason; like the Thorn at *Glassenbury*, that blossoms in the Midst of Winter' (XII, 10). The image of a tree bursting into flower out of season is an aberration, unless it be a miraculous blossoming, like that of the Glastonbury thorn. The simile is obviously rooted in a number of prevailing Swifitan themes. It connects not only with the 'wretched condition of Ireland' but also, as Rawson notes, with a consistent search for images of disorder and universal madness that stretches back to *A Tale of a Tub*.³³ One less obvious analogue, however, can be found in the 'Autumn' Eclogue of Pope's *Pastorals*:

Curs'd be the Fields that cause my *Delia*'s Stay:
 Fade ev'ry Blossom, wither ev'ry Tree,
 Dye ev'ry Flow'r, and perish All, but She.
 What have I said? – where-e'er my *Delia* flies,
 Let Spring attend, and sudden Flow'rs arise;
 Let opening Roses knotted Oaks adorn,
 And liquid Amber drop from ev'ry Thorn.³⁴

Whereas Swift imagines a thorn bursting into flower in the depths of winter, Pope's shepherd-poet forces every thorn to drip with springtime sap in the middle of autumn. In both the poem and the prose text, the upsetting of the natural cycle is essentially an act of will, a distortion of external reality by the forceful irruption of an inner pain. The heartbreak of Pope's speaker over *Delia* is the obvious motivation of the string of phrases in the subjunctive mood that commands nature first to 'Fade' and 'Dye', and then to burst forth in new life. Swift's image may be motivated by political rather than romantic distress, but it is no less personal. Rawson contends that the image of the thorn is one of two successive passages in the *Short View* that are 'as painful and directly personal as anything we are likely to find in Swift outside some of the last writings about *Stella*'.³⁵ Swift makes an unusually plaintive renunciation of his own ironic mode, breaking his sarcastic inversion of the natural order with an unexpected

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁴ Pope, *Pastoral Poetry*, pp. 82–3, ll. 32–38.

³⁵ 'Injured Lady', p. 20.

expression of heartfelt grief: ‘my Heart is too heavy to continue this Irony longer’ (XII, 10). The ‘Irony’ that the author suddenly foreswears is the sarcasm that has driven a long description of a flourishing Ireland:

LET the worthy *Commissioners* who come from *England*, ride round the Kingdom, and observe the Face of Nature, or the Faces of the Natives; the Improvement of the Land; the thriving numerous Plantations; the noble Woods; the Abundance and Vicinity of Country-Seats; the commodious Farmers Houses and Barns; the Towns and Villages, where every Body is busy, and thriving with all Kind of Manufactures (XII, 10)

This passage reads like an inversion of the Drapier’s flight of fantasy which imagines every rank of Irish society living ‘together as merry and sociable as Beggars’ with neither ‘*Meat* to feed, nor *Manufactures* to Cloath’ themselves (X, 58–9). In Swift’s vision of 1725, a thriving economy was a distant goal, and penury became a threat to be exaggerated in the service of that aim. Just two years later, the very idea of a prosperous or well-ordered economy becomes the subject of a bitterly meticulous idyll laced with self-proclaimed ‘Irony’. As in Pope’s ‘Autumn’ the speaker demands that his reader contemplate a series of bizarre phenomena. The difference is that the poet’s up-ending of the natural state of things produces strange spectacles like oak trees adorned with roses. By contrast, in the *Short View*, it is necessary to turn the world upside down in order to arrive at a picture that approaches normality.

Although the results differ spectacularly, both speakers deploy the same strategy of reversal. E. R. Curtius identifies a ‘basic formal principle’ that seems relevant to both pieces. The figure of *adynata*, which means ‘stringing together impossibilities’, is a pastoral convention that dates back to the sixth century BC. Curtius paraphrases the tradition as one that depicts a ‘shepherd foresaken by his beloved’, who as a consequence becomes ‘ready to compound for the reversal of the entire order of nature’.³⁶ Pope’s lines echo the famous *adynata* of Virgil’s eighth eclogue. Swift’s reference to the Glastonbury thorn and his phantom image of a thriving economy represent a more complex take on the same

³⁶ E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), p. 95.

convention. However, the two basic elements are still to be found – the concatenation of impossible occurrences and the intense personal grief that both sets the chain in motion and brings it to a halt. In Swift’s refusal to ‘continue this Irony longer’ there is also an echo of the tradition in which the shepherd-poet breaks his pipe and insists that he will not sing again. Swift’s verse may be directed to ‘subverting Pope’s conception of a pastoral poem’, but his prose displays unexpected affinities.³⁷

It would be foolish to try and argue for a direct connection between the *Short View* and Virgilian pastoral. In pointing out such reverberations, the aim is not to suggest that Swift’s Irish readers pored over his pamphlets with copies of Virgil at their elbows, diligently searching for minute correspondences of mood and rhetorical stance. The point is rather that the echo, heard in the wider context of his career, provides a metaphorical comment on Swift’s developing relationship with his Irish constituents. The transition can be understood in terms of the contrasting pastoral conventions that inform the despair of the *Short View* on the one hand and the confident security of the ‘Excellent New Song upon His Grace Our Good Lord Archbishop of Dublin’ on the other. The transition is figured not through a defiant anti-pastoralism but through a melodramatic appropriation of victim status as figured by the dispossessed inhabitants of pastoral’s not-always-idyllic terrain. Often such personal suffering is mapped onto the land itself. Two of its most legible sites are Naboth’s Vineyard and Drapier’s Hill.

IV

Near Markethill in County Armagh an upmarket housing development bears the name Dean Swift’s Mews. Swift’s association with the place was built over the course of several summers spent on the estate of Lord and Lady Acheson. As well as composing *A Modest Proposal* there, Swift produced a

³⁷ Fabricant, *Landscape*, p. 55.

series of poems set in this place of retreat and dealing with his relations with his hosts, which became rather fraught, as Judith C. Mueller demonstrates.³⁸ One of the poems alludes to an earlier piece of stock-taking produced at a pivotal moment in Swift's career. Its opening lines contain an echo of Swift's imitation of one of Horace's satires, written around the time of Swift's permanent relocation to Ireland following the death of Queen Anne and the collapse of the Harley ministry in 1714. 'Horace, Lib. 2, Sat. 6, Part of it Imitated' begins with a wistful yearning for a place of secure retreat: 'I often wished that I had clear / For life, six hundred pounds a year'. With this income, the speaker would construct a 'handsome house to lodge a friend'.³⁹ 'Drapier's Hill', which dates from the late summer of 1729 (*Poems*, p. 795), builds on this confessional yearning for privacy by issuing a public statement of intent. The poem was first printed in *Fog's Weekly Journal* and reprinted in the Dublin prints under the title 'Drapier's Hall'.⁴⁰ In keeping with its origin in the press, it opens in the manner of a proclamation:

We give the world to understand,
Our thriving Dean has purchased land;
A purchase which will bring him clear,
Above his rent four pounds a year; (p. 378, ll. 1–4)

The verses go on to explain the author's intention to improve the ground on his new estate and to build a house there at a cost of five hundred pounds (p. 378, l. 5, l. 8). The site, currently called Drumlack, is to be renamed 'Drapier's Hill' in honour of its new owner. As in the preceding poem in the sequence, 'To Dean Swift, by Sir Arthur Acheson', the concern is to establish the site as a permanent memorial to Swift's achievement in politics and letters. An earlier poem on the same subject, 'To Dean Swift by Sir Arthur Acheson' (said by Rogers to have been written by Swift in spite of its attribution) establishes

³⁸ Judith C. Mueller, 'Imperfect Enjoyment at Market Hill: Impotence, Desire, and Reform in Swift's Poems to Lady Acheson', *ELH*, 66 (1999), 51–70, also Joseph McMinn, *Jonathan's Travels: Swift and Ireland* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1994), chapter 7.

³⁹ *Poems*, p. 167, ll. 1–2; l. 3. Subsequent references to this and the other poems by page and line no. in main text.

⁴⁰ *Poems*, p. 794, citing *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 13 Sept 1729; also in *Dublin Journal*, 6–9 September 1729.

Drapier's Hill as a rival to Penshurst, the country house celebrated in Ben Jonson's poem. Apostrophising 'Market Hill', the poet announces that its new 'name with Penshurst vies, / And winged with fame shall reach the skies' (p. 378, ll. 33–4). Similarly, the second poem concludes with a flourish that juxtaposes Swift's projected 'mansion' with the celebrated retreat of Sir John Denham: the new site will 'vie with Cooper's Hill' (p. 379, l. 20). In these comparisons with the great English country-house poems, the Drapier's Hill sequence betrays a contrast with Swift's own Horatian pastiche.

In 'Horace, Lib. 2, Sat. 6', the poet asserts that he has in fact achieved his wish of a steady income and a country retreat. 'I have all this and more' (p. 167, l. 7), but he still craves the contentment that such stability should bring. Rather than settle permanently in his new home, the speaker is forced to divide his time between England and Ireland. He must 'cross the Channel twice a year, / To spend six months with statesmen here' in London (11–12). At this point in his career, or at least in this persona, Swift cannot imagine Ireland as a centre of political activity. It is a quiet backwater, unlike Westminster, where 'A hundred other men's affairs / Like bees are humming in my ears' (49–50). The poet longs for his 'handsome house' in Ireland where he can 'in sweet oblivion drown / Those cares that haunt a court and town' (111–12). The Drapier's Hill poems also invoke the pastoral plight of removal from those centres of power, 'court and town', but they combine the motif of retreat from the world with an awareness that Ireland has itself become an alternative site of political action.

The country's once marginal status needs to be revised in light of Swift's presence. 'Lives such a bard on British plains?' the first poem in the sequence asks. It answers its own question with the assertion that such a figure cannot be found 'in all the British court; / For none but witlings there resort' (p. 378, l. 6, ll. 7–8). In the Horatian satire, the poet feels drawn in spite of himself to the 'cares that haunt a court': in the later poem, the court is itself denounced as an inferior milieu, and a 'British' one. The verses derogate Britishness and transform Ireland's insularity into a mark of distinction that emphasises the country's physical and moral integrity. Anglophone Ireland attempts to set itself up as a rival to its newly 'British' neighbour. It becomes an alternative England that corrects the excesses of the hybrid state created out of the union between

England and Scotland in 1707 – a match that Swift described allegorically as a union between an inconstant beau and a lousy, sluttish, beggarly woman with ‘bad Features, and a worse Complexion’ who was, moreover, ‘a Presbyterian of the most rank and virulent Kind’ (IX, 3, 4).

Buoyed by a more enticing union between poetry and politics, Swift invests a certain degree of confidence in a project that was only in its infancy. The purchase of Drapier’s Hill has yet to be completed; the house has yet to be built.⁴¹ Nonetheless the poem projects a vision of the site as an enduring monument, one that will survive when the Drapier’s ‘famous *Letters*’ are ‘made waste paper’ (p. 379, l. 17). Giving the lie to the Horatian dictum that the poet’s writings are his own memorial, more lasting than bronze, ‘Drapier’s Hill’ seeks to construct a more solid edifice. The poem’s investment is both literal and metaphorical. Swift’s purchase of land is styled as an attempt to secure a permanent place in the collective memory, one that will survive ‘when the nation long enslaved, / Forgets by whom it once was saved’ (p. 379, 11–12). The first two poems in the Drapier’s Hill sequence assume the importance of the aetiological fables that are often found in the Bible, explaining how a particular place came by its name. The difference is that the explanation comes as a pre-emptive attempt to define the site’s significance for posterity, at a time when the original meaning is very much alive. This fable of origin takes the form of a post-dated cheque. In the case of Drapier’s Hill, the cheque was cancelled.

Swift’s retraction takes the form of a palinode, ‘The Dean’s Reasons for Not Building at Drapier’s Hill’. It suggests initially that Swift’s failure to build the promised mansion derives from an inability to meet the financial outlay. Such a supposition may help explain the fiscal puns of the first stanza: the Dean ‘will not build on yonder mount’, even if his detractors (or his creditors) should ‘call me to *account*’ (p. 427, ll. 1–2, emphasis added). Nor, he says, can these individuals ‘*tax* me as unsteady, / I have a hundred causes ready’ (ll. 7–8; emphasis added). However, these figures of indebtedness recur as the poem develops in such a way as to reveal that the speaker believes himself to be the victim of another party’s financial irregularities:

⁴¹ Rogers, *Poems*, p. 794 n., notes that the purchase had fallen through by the end of October 1729.

[...] what advantage comes
 To me from all a usurer's plums;
 Though I should see him twice a day,
 And am his neighbour cross the way;
 If all my rhetoric must fail
 To strike him for a pot of ale? (p. 428, ll. 27–32)

Holding out for a free 'pot of ale', Swift seems here to portray himself in a manner comparable to that of Dermot in 'A Pastoral Dialogue'. The earlier poem is set at the 'court of the Gosford Knight', the estate of Sir Arthur Acheson, Viscount Gosford. In the 'Pastoral Dialogue', Swift makes a brief cameo appearance as a leisurely gentleman strolling on his friend's grounds and indulgently cosseting the servants. Dermot shares a 'plug' of chewing tobacco with Sheelah, which 'the Dean threw' to him. Re-invented as Acheson's new 'neighbour', with all that word's implications of profound trust and intimations of betrayal, Swift becomes a poor swain by comparison, one who tests his patron's munificence and finds it wanting. Acheson is 'a usurer' not only because of Swift's financial obligation to him over the purchased lands, but also because he devalues their friendship by making Swift's contributions to their exchanges seem worthless. The speaker complains that when he talks to the Knight 'as talk I must, / It is but prating to a bust' (ll. 67–8). Acheson also defaults on the obligation he owes to the community, in contrast with Swift's benevolent patronage of Dermot and Sheelah: he rarely entertains visitors and can hardly ever be seen on his own estate (l. 81, l. 91). In response to this perceived slight, the speaker sides with Acheson's neglected servants and neighbours. He encourages them to repay the squire's ingratitude in kind with an exhortations to 'milk his cows', and to 'cut his hedges down for fire' (p. 430, l. 104, l. 106). These closing lines may read like a fairly jolly depiction of rural rebellion, fitting the kind of light verse that this poem represents, a suitable companion piece for 'The Revolution at Market Hill', or the *Directions to Servants*. However, the final couplet contains more of a sting:

For, why should I continue still
 To serve a friend against his will? (ll. 113–14).

The punchline seems innocuous enough: Acheson is still the speaker's 'friend' by the end of the poem. However, as McMinn points out, 'Swift's personal disenchantment with Sir Arthur in the summer of 1729 coincides with a more impersonal and much more savage rejection'.⁴² In asking why he should continue to 'serve', Swift poses a question that recurs incessantly in works that were written in 1729. Swift serves Acheson in a sense other than that of the act of mock-debasement through which he portrays himself as a humble Dermot tapping his master for a pot of ale. In the poem written in the Viscount's persona, 'To Dean Swift', the speaker says that the Dean 'condescends to be my farmer, / And grace my villa with his strains' (p. 377, ll. 4–5). The lines amount to a recognition of Swift's importance as an unassuming speaker of truths, in contrast to those 'witlings' that throng the British court. By styling himself Acheson's 'farmer', Swift portrays himself in a manner similar to that of Honest Jo in the poem on Archbishop King, and equally importantly, he accords the Viscount the status of patron, making him into a pastor-figure similar to that represented by the Archbishop in the earlier poem. In the palinode, however, Swift breaks this relationship of patronage by refusing to serve his knight. His *non serviam* is significant in the context of the author's career, since it shows the situation encountered fifteen years previously in the imitation of Horace to have come full circle. The earlier poem describes London as a place where Swift is beset constantly by false friends who make excessive demands of his time and status:

I get a whisper, and withdraw,
When twenty fools I never saw
Come with petitions fairly penned,
Desiring I would stand their friend. (p. 168, ll. 43–6)

Fifteen years later, 'The Dean's Reasons' deploys an equally cynical notion of friendship as an exchange of favours that terminates when one party fails to pay its due. The difference between the two poems, however, is the geographical site of the speaker's disillusionment. In the Horatian satire, Swift attempts to 'withdraw' in Westminster but cannot find any privacy because he is

⁴² *Jonathan's Travels*, p. 128.

beset by flatterers. His home in Ireland becomes a comparatively safe haven to which he is 'always wishing to retreat'. By 1729, however, the prospect of a country retreat in Ireland compounds rather than assuages the speaker's sense of being trapped among undeserving company, a feeling that would be expanded and projected onto the entire nation in 'Verses on the Death of Doctor Swift, D.S.P.D.'. The self-penned elegy closes with a couplet that reuses the metaphorical connection between financial debt and the ingratitude of friends, proclaiming that the Dean has left Ireland 'his debtor' (*Poems*, p. 498, l. 487). Lacking the self-deprecatory aspect of the 'Verses on the Death', 'The Dean's Reasons' simply asserts that the speaker's creditor, the 'usurer' Acheson is himself defaulting on his debts and cites this fact as reason to break the contract that exists between the two. There is an obvious application of this reading to the more general issue of Swift's contract with his Irish public. Unable to withdraw to safety, to find refuge from his self-created ubiquity, Swift instead withdraws his voice and his presence, cutting the ties that bind him to his constituents.

If Swift eschews aristocratic patronage in 'The Dean's Reasons', then another poem from the summer of 1729 finds him severing the links that maintain his own relationship of protection over the wider population. This is a genuinely occasional piece in that it was written in response to a particular event. It is not, however, 'precisely occasional' in Said's sense because rather than try to change a situation it reads circumstances as evidence of an irreversible and anciently determined historical process. The event in question was also recorded in the official organ of Dublin Castle, the *Dublin Gazette*:

It is remarkable, that ever since St. Patrick's Day last the Well, which is called by his name in the Suburbs of this City has been dry: It had for many Ages before afforded a continual Supply of the very best Water in this Kingdom for its Clearness, good Taste and quenching of Thirst, and the Publick receiving so much Satisfaction, and Benefit from it, they are now greatly disappointed for Want of it. The cause of the Well being dry is attributed by some to the digging of a Shore lately too near to it, and also by others to the ill use that has been made of St. Patrick's Day for some Years past; but be that as it will, it could be wished every body would take care so to behave for the future, as to prevent a worse evil happening unto them.⁴³

⁴³ *Dublin Gazette*, Tuesday March 25–Saturday March 29 1729, p. 3.

The admonition about ‘the ill use that has been made of St Patrick’s Day’ may refer to brawling that attended significant dates in the calendar such as the Pretender’s birthday or the anniversary of William III’s victory. The *Gazette* may interpret the drying up of the well as a warning designed to prevent a worse evil, but in Swift’s own reading it became a sign that previous ill omens had long gone unheeded. ‘Verses Occasioned by the Sudden Drying Up of St. Patrick’s Well’ is spoken in the persona of St. Patrick, ‘our Tutelar Guardian’ in the words of the *Dublin Intelligence*’s account of the well’s failure.⁴⁴ Others of his calling appropriated Ireland’s patron saint as an icon of the primitive pre-Roman church, adopting him and St Columcille as ‘progenitors of Hibernian Protestantism’;⁴⁵ but in Swift’s hands the saint became yet another phantom persona condemned to haunt the violators of a trust.

The well’s failure enacts the patron’s withdrawal of his status as spiritual godfather. Apostrophizing Ireland as a whole, he proclaims his intention to ‘scorn thy spurious and degenerate line, / And from this hour my patronage resign’ (p. 377, ll. 101–2). Whereas Swift renounces the fellowship of the patronising gentry in ‘The Dean’s Reasons’, he here withdraws his own patronage of the landless as well as the landed classes, leaving them to their fate. Just before the final couplet, the poem expressly criticizes landowners who tolerate absentee landlordism and ‘turn leasers to that mongrel breed, / Who from thee sprung, yet on thy vitals feed’ (p. 377, ll. 95–6). The metaphor of cannibalistic devourment, introduces a persistent theme, developed at length in *A Modest Proposal* (also written in the summer of 1729) and featuring in the last *Intelligencer* of 1728.⁴⁶ Landlords are not foreign intruders, but the bastard offspring of an anciently compromised people, the last and most deformed issue of a ‘spurious and degenerate line’. The poem invests the cannibal instinct with the character of a historical inevitability – a longstanding aberration to be unmasked by Swift when it is too late to alter the situation. This piece also finds Swift shirking his role as pastor to the masses in such a way as to force the image

⁴⁴ *Dublin Intelligence*, 1 April 1729.

⁴⁵ Barnard, *New Anatomy*, p. 90.

⁴⁶ See Rawson, *God Gulliver and Genocide*, pp. 69–91; also Fabricant, *Swift’s Landscape*, pp. 77–9.

of a writer refusing to take up his pen, or determining only to wield it destructively when it is too late.

In 'St. Patrick's Well' Swift also develops the figure of the island as a metaphor for his self-imposed isolation. Ireland is a 'once favourite isle', Britain an 'ungrateful' one (ll. 2, 25). Contact between the two has resulted in mutual contamination and a grotesque collaboration between an exploiter and a cravenly willing victim. Ireland has succumbed to slavish dependency on the neighbouring island, becoming a land full of 'Discouraged youths' who 'wait upon the tide' (l. 73; 78). The connection between insularity and integrity, violated in Ireland's case, is restored in each of these poems from 1729. They seem to indicate that Swift, discouraged and not so youthful, refuses any longer to 'wait upon the tide', given that the tide of events is destined never to turn; that the tidal erosion of Ireland's status as a Kingdom has no foreseeable end. In order to offset his country's inability to renounce its own enslavement, Swift issues a defiant series of refusals to serve: he makes an island of himself. There survives a remnant of a physical emblem of this process of deliberate insulation. Its original could be found in Dublin between St. Patrick's Cathedral and Francis Street, a neutral space between the homes of those two icons, the Dean and the Drapier. The name of this private no-man's-land was Naboth's Vineyard.

IV

'I am not provoked by any personal Interest, being not the Owner of one Spot of Ground in the whole *Island*', remarks the *Short View of the State of Ireland* (XII, 5). Given the extent of his personal and real estate at the time of his death, Swift's protestation of landlessness looks somewhat disingenuous. A charitable reading might contend that the Dean was distinguishing ownership from the holding of property in trust; nonetheless Swift's will informs us that he was indeed the owner of a 'Spot of Ground'. The final clause of the will stakes out a corner of Dublin and stamps it with the author's image. It creates a space rather than an edifice, a monument that was more private than the ill-fated house on 'Drapier's Hill' and less permanent than St. Patrick's Hospital, the 'house for

fools and mad' that was also instituted in the will and is today 'still flourishing as one of the leading psychiatric institutions in the British Isles'.⁴⁷ The clause deals with 'the Lease of a Field [...], commonly called the *Vineyard*'.⁴⁸ Swift makes it known that he has 'built a strong Wall round the said Piece of Ground' and leaves instructions for its future care:

My Will is, that the Ground inclosed by the great Wall, may be sold for the Remainder of the Lease, at the highest Price my Executors can get for it, in Belief and Hopes, that the said Price will exceed Three Hundred Pounds at the lowest Value: For which my Successor in the Deanry shall have the first Refusal: and it is my earnest Desire, that the succeeding Deans and Chapters may preserve the said *Vineyard* [...] so as to be always in the Hands of the succeeding Deans during their Office (XIII, 156-7)

This complicated set of instructions is especially noteworthy because of a sudden shift in its language. As the clause progress, it slips from dispensing demands in accordance with Swift's 'Will' and begins instead to express his 'Belief and Hopes' and his 'earnest Desire'. As well as indicating a more personal tone, the change in register also conveys a dilution of the document's precise and authoritative tone. Swift is not adamant that the piece of land is as valuable as he thinks it is, nor does he insist that his successors must continue to preserve Decanal jurisdiction over this ground: he merely wishes that these things should happen. The uncertainty may reflect an attachment that was as much emotional as financial.

Swift certainly went to considerable lengths to make the vineyard a place of his own. As well as securing it with a wall which he forced the labourers to rebuild several times when their initial efforts were not satisfactory, Swift seems to have devoted some effort to bringing the piece of land within the jurisdiction of the Deanery. He obtained it in 1721 from the neighbouring estate in exchange

⁴⁷ Website of the National Cathedral and Collegiate Church of St. Patrick, Dublin: <<http://www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/st.htm>> [accessed 4 July 2002].

⁴⁸ 'The Last Will and Testament of Jonathan Swift, D. D.' (1745; published Dublin, 1765). Reproduced in *Prose* XIII, 149–157, 156.

for some land at the west side of the Deanery garden.⁴⁹ The time of the acquisition, when Swift was famous in Dublin not as the Drapier but only as the Dean, suggests that he was in the early 1720s beginning to recognize the need for a place to lodge his private concerns as well as his public image. David Nokes sees 1720 as the year in which Swift ceased to conceive of England as the ground for any public activity and to view Ireland as an exilic site of enforced idleness. Up to this year, Nokes writes, 'all Swift's political concerns, since his return to Ireland [in 1714], had been bound up with the last Tory ministry. Now for the first time he turned his attention to current political issues, and did so from a specifically Irish viewpoint'.⁵⁰ If the centre of power had shifted westward, then the place of retreat had also better be close at hand. In Naboth's Vineyard Swift establishes yet another secure refuge, more homely and private than his official residence, like the one he longs for in the imitation of Horace. Given the degree of investment during his lifetime, Swift's provisions for what happened to the vineyard after his death were suitably elaborate but also strangely precarious.

At the time of his death, as the will states, the lease of the field was being held 'in Trust' for him (XIII, 156). Presumably, then, if Swift wanted the field to remain Decanal property as earnestly as he claims to have done, he could simply have bequeathed the lease to his successor. If Swift could sell the lease then he should also have been free to make a gift of it, as he does in an earlier clause of the will which bequeaths the leases of certain houses and a piece of land called Goodman's Holding to Martha Whiteway (p. 153). Rather than make such a bequest, however, the will stipulates that the lease on the vineyard be sold for the 'highest Price'. If Swift's 'earnest Desire' is fulfilled, the tract will indeed pass into the 'Hands of the succeeding Deans during their Office', but only by a circuitous method. The arrangement depends on the next Dean after Swift buying back the land from the estate of his dead predecessor, not cheaply but at the 'highest Price my Executors can get', and on the further condition that this next holder of the office initiate a procedure for passing on the field to subsequent incumbents. If this arrangement were taken up, then every time the office is

⁴⁹ J. H. Bernard, *The Cathedral Church of St. Patrick: A History & Description of the Building, with a Short Account of the Deans*, p. 28. As Bernard notes, the original lease, witnessed by Esther Johnson, is preserved in the cathedral archive.

⁵⁰ *A Hypocrite Reversed*, pp. 265–6.

vacated, the land would be sold on to the new holder, with the added proviso that 'each Dean lessen One Fourth of the Purchase Money to each succeeding Dean, and for no more than the present Rent', thus obtaining a negative return on his investment. Bearing these obstacles in mind, it is certainly a technical possibility that the vineyard would have been preserved for the use of each succeeding Dean, but also a remote one. The feasibility of the scheme depends on the willingness of Swift's successors to enter into a perversely complicated and unprofitable arrangement, a contract which offers ample scope to be broken from the outset by offering 'first Refusal'. There are surely easier and more efficient ways of fulfilling one's 'earnest Desire'.

Swift may have professed to 'hate the tribe of Lawyers', but he seems to have been competently versed in the procedures of bequeathing land and leases to ensure that they would remain in the desired hands.⁵¹ St. Patrick's Hospital is a testament to this fact. Unfamiliarity with due process does not explain the eccentricity of the provisions made concerning the vineyard. Instead, by relying on the goodwill of his successors to fulfil his 'earnest Desire', Swift seems to be emphasising the precious and personal character of an inherited trust. The vineyard has become a protectorate with an accompanying duty of care. This is conceived as both a privilege and a responsibility, one that had to be taken up voluntarily by a member of the succeeding generation. Swift was issuing a challenge to subsequent Deans, an invitation to maintain his private, hidden legacy in tandem with the visible, public one. Within a brief time, not surprisingly, the challenge had been declined.

Somewhere along the line of Swift's posterity, the chain of succession was indeed broken. The plot remained in the hands of Swift's successors for a few years: a plan of the vineyard dating from 1749 describes it as 'belonging to the Dean and Chapter of St. Patrick's Dublin' and being 'in lease to Mr. John Rose'.⁵² By the end of the century, however, the site had been acquired for the Meath Hospital. Unlike the hospital he founded, Swift's vineyard was not incorporated into the Dublin cityscape as a permanent token of his guardianship. During the time he maintained it, the garden retained a personal character. It was

⁵¹ Swift to Alexander Pope, 29 September 1725, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 606.

⁵² Reproduced in Edward Malins and The Knight of Glin, *Lost Demenses: Irish Landscape Gardening, 1660-1845* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1976), p. 35.

for him a private retreat, a 'secure "island"', in Michael De Porte's words, where the Dean and his horses could exercise.⁵³ As his death approached, Swift consigned the vineyard to posterity in such a way that, although it could potentially remain unchanged, its purpose and ownership would most probably change with time. In one sense the continued survival of this pastoral retreat was jeopardized even by its connection with a more public place of asylum, St. Patrick's Hospital. By instructing his executors to sell the lease on the garden for at least three hundred pounds, Swift may have hoped to raise extra funds for the projected institution. The 'satiric touch' achieved in the construction of this building was also perhaps a step towards obliterating the personal touch through which Swift made this corner of Dublin his own.

One further incongruity sets this transient and quirky memorial apart from Swift's more enduring legacies. Although the will states that it was 'commonly called the *Vineyard*', this field was not used for the cultivation of vines. The climate would probably not have permitted the growth of grapes, even though the south-facing wall had been faced with bricks to trap the sun's heat.⁵⁴ It did produce 'excellent crops of peaches, nectarines, pears and paradise apples'.⁵⁵ 'Vineyard' was plainly a poetical rather than a descriptive title, and also an incomplete one. Although the will insists upon a more anonymous designation, the garden's full name, as used by Swift in his correspondence and on the plan of 1749, was 'Naboth's Vineyard'. The name invokes one more peculiar feature of this monument. Unlike Drapier's Hill or St. Patrick's Hospital, this piece of ground was not named for Swift, either directly or by substitution. Instead, it bears Naboth's name.

In the first Book of Kings, Naboth is asked by Ahab to exchange his vineyard either for money or for a better one. When an echo of the same request was put to one of Swift's successors, it was obviously accepted. Naboth, however, refuses because God has forbidden him to part from the inheritance of his fathers. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, then conspires to cheat Naboth out of his

⁵³ Michael De Porte, 'Avenging Naboth: Swift and Monarchy', *Philological Quarterly*, 69 (1990), 419-433, p. 427.

⁵⁴ *Memoirs of Mrs. Laetitia Pilkington*, 2 vols (Dublin: repr. London: R. Griffiths and G. Woodfall, 1748-9), I, p. 77.

⁵⁵ *Malins and The Knight of Glin*, p. 33.

inheritance. With the help of two corrupt witnesses, Naboth is found guilty of blaspheming and of cursing the king. He is stoned to death for his alleged crimes, after which Ahab takes possession of his vineyard.⁵⁶ Various commentators have unravelled the allegorical resonance of Swift's act of naming, and have applied the meaning of the Biblical tale in diverse ways. Michael De Porte reads Swift's choice of name as an oblique comment on the greed and thoughtlessness of kings, and connects it to a more general anti-monarchical tendency in his work.⁵⁷

Joseph McMinn argues that the spirit of Naboth helped Swift to 'dramatize his own sense of trusteeship' in the time of a 'new colonial settlement dedicated to the "improvement" of confiscated territories'.⁵⁸ McMinn also contends that Swift was attracted to the tale of Naboth because of the victim's refusal 'to negotiate or compromise with tyranny'. He finds a further assertion of that defiant spirit in Swift's subsequent, poetic, refusal to build at Drapier's Hill. The piece, he argues, reveals Swift's 'strong belief that the landscape is there to be shaped' by its 'custodians, whose responsibilities include the cultivation of friendship as well as the fruits of the earth'. Acheson's reneging upon his duties as bitterly portrayed in Swift's poem 'may be seen as part of a pattern of disapproval of wealthy landowners, often friends of Swift, who abused their inheritance'. Swift, as 'a self-made man' would have been sensitive to such 'complacency of privilege'.⁵⁹ Both critics seem to conceive of Swift as a pastor in the same way as the Ulster Scots elegist does: the author becomes a vociferous Elijah, declaiming against various Ahabs on Naboth's behalf. However, Carole Fabricant provides an alternative reading, taking a cue from Swift's own assessment as recorded by Laetitia Pilkington. In her *Memoirs* (1748–9), Pilkington recalls how Swift took her into his vineyard, which he described to her as 'a Garden – I cheated one of my Neighbours out of'.⁶⁰ The comment would imply that Swift is portraying himself as the usurper rather than the victim. As Fabricant comments, it is '*Ahab's* role (though often combined with Naboth's)

⁵⁶ I Kings 21.1–16.

⁵⁷ 'Avenging Naboth', p. 422.

⁵⁸ Joseph McMinn, 'The Gardener in the Deanery', in *Swift: The Enigmatic Dean*, pp. 127–135, p. 129.

⁵⁹ Idem, 'Pastoral Properties', p. 22; p. 31; p. 32.

⁶⁰ *Memoirs*, I, p. 77; referred to by Fabricant, *Swift's Landscape*, p. 71; idem, 'The Garden as City: Swift's Landscape of Alienation', *ELH*, 42 (1975), 531–555, p. 533.

which Swift is symbolically acting out'.⁶¹ A further comment on the significance of Naboth's story comes from Renato Poggioli, who does not mention Swift's use of the tale. Poggioli does, however, argue that the story exemplifies certain themes of pastoral examined in this chapter, namely questions of just ownership and of expropriation. He comments that the tale of Naboth reads like 'a scriptural variant of [Virgil's] First Eclogue. The gist of both tales is that the wicked and the mighty covet the property of the meek and that by fair means or foul succeed in satisfying their evil greed.'⁶² This observation enables the inference that as well as combining the roles of Ahab and Naboth, Swift was also presenting his garden as a site where two further versions of himself encounter each other. In Naboth's vineyard, a jubilant Tityrus encounters a despondent and dispossessed Meliboeus. And though the vineyard is now so well trodden as to have given the title to a book, there is still something to be said about Naboth's status as a martyr to his own unwillingness to violate a contract.

At the beginning of this chapter, it was shown that the narrator of the 'Excellent New Song' resembled Virgil's Tityrus, and that Archbishop King's role in the piece echoed the one ascribed to his protector Octavian. Swift's appropriation of the figure of Naboth represents an attempt to restore the missing term to a dialectic that sets the fortunes of the Church, not against the misfortunes of the rural poor, but against the 'evil greed' of the gentry. The vineyard sat outside the jurisdiction of the cathedral until Swift annexed it in 1721, when it became an island of ecclesiastical authority enclosed by the neighbouring estate. Since Swift claims to have cheated 'one of [his] Neighbours', presumably the owner of the estate or his agents, out of the piece of land in question, there is a potential to read the expropriation in terms of the antagonism between the Church and the landed interest. In the shrunken arena of Swift's garden, the Anglican establishment takes on the role of the dispossessed victim. Swift becomes a suitably bathetic and belated Elijah, speaking up for Naboth after his death. He performs an unconvincing and unconvicted exorcism of the Church's historical possession by the spirit of the dispossessed Meliboeus;

⁶¹ 'Garden as City', p. 533. Emphasis in original.

⁶² Renato Poggioli, 'Naboth's Vineyard; or, The Pastoral View of the Social Order', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24 (1963), 3–24, p. 7.

a tentative reversal of traditional roles in the competition between the ecclesiastical and secular establishments for dominion over the land.

One Swiftian version of that Conflict consists in the notion that the church was by tenants and landlords alike being cheated out of the tithes that were its rightful title, a viewpoint hinted at in the 'Excellent New Song' and developed more fully in the polemical pastorals that emerged from the tithe agistment controversy of the 1730s. Swift seems to maintain a similar view in respect of the actual ownership of land. In his essay 'On the Bill for the Clergy's residing on their Livings' (1731; published 1789), Swift traces the decline in the extent of ecclesiastical estates to confiscations in the time of Henry VIII. The piece argues that the Bill's proposal is unworkable because 'at this day there is hardly any remainder left of Dean and chapter lands in Ireland; that delicious morsel so greedily swallowed in England under the fanatick usurpations' (XII, 185-6). Although it casts him in the role of Ahab the usurper, according to a longer historical view Swift's annexation of the vineyard is actually a symbolic recapturing of 'Dean and chapter lands' that were expropriated in the past. The mechanism established in the will for passing the vineyard on to his successors reads as a challenge that defies subsequent Deans to retain the inheritance recovered for them by Swift, self-appointed Octavian to their Tityrus. The complexity of that mechanism may be construed as a tacit acknowledgement of the project's inherent bathos and the probability of its failure, as may the insistence that subsequent Deans assert their birthright at a cost, and the construction of such a baroque biblical and legal framework around one small piece of ground. The scheme's propensity to collapse is more than an oblique reflection on the unlikelihood of the Church's ever regaining its former economic pre-eminence; it may also be read against the fact that in Ireland as opposed to England, the Anglican Church never enjoyed such status. A direct statement of such a situation is made in Swift's essay on the clergy bill. The tract reveals as fallacious the notion that the Church is or ever was economically powerful in Ireland and shows that view to lack historical foundation. It paints a more accurate picture in which the land constantly has changed hands 'in the long wars between the Invaders and the Natives' and ecclesiastical estates were quickly 'lost in the confusion'. The tract argues that this state of affairs is endemic and

unlikely ever to end: 'Thus it went on for several hundred years and in some degree even to our own memories. And thus it will probably go on, although not in a Martial way, until the end of the World' (XII, p. 183).

Swift's appropriation of the vineyard can be seen as a deliberately ineffectual sally on behalf of the Church in the land war it has already lost; a struggle in which it was only ever a marginal participant in comparison with those epic combatants 'the Invaders and the Natives'. The site itself is thus revealed as a topographical-textual joke with serious undertones. Naboth's Vineyard typifies the pastoral vein of Swift's work, establishing a mood that is at once poignant, embittered and absurd; obsessed with lost titles and missed opportunities, ruined friendships and shirked responsibilities. The pieces examined in this chapter reveal the role of the pastor in Ireland to be at best an unworkable ideal and at worst a dangerous falsehood. Even the fierce confrontations of the past, the wars between natives and invaders described in the essay on the clergy bill, have sunk into a ritual of reciprocal abuse that apes some half-remembered ceremony. The conflict continues 'not in a Martial way', but parodically. In the verses on St. Patrick's Well, the natives, who once brought 'human knowledge and divine' to Britain, have become callow 'captives in their native land', having 'drowned' themselves 'in Vice and Slavery'. The erstwhile 'Invaders' have turned into cynical absentees, who siphon off the country's wealth 'to yon ravenous isle' (l. 28, l. 90, l. 38, l. 97). As Fabricant writes, this piece 'underscores Swift's simultaneous rage against the English for their oppressions and his disgust with the Irish for their cowardly acquiescence in their own enslavement'.⁶³

Most importantly of all, rather than ameliorate it, the presence of the pastor compounds this perverse situation. In a land that ever grows 'more degenerate and base', according to the verses on St. Patrick's Well, even the 'pastors' are implicated. The poem rejects the ideal of the Anglican church as a benevolent, civilizing source of pastoral care in Ireland. Instead, the saint curses both Britain and 'the pastors of thy ravenous breed / Who come to fleece the flocks, and not to feed' (ll. 31-2). The word 'pastors' is used here in the literal sense of 'clergymen' rather than according to the metaphorical connotation

⁶³ *Swift's Landscape*, p. 80.

developed in this chapter. Nonetheless, the couplet carries a strong insinuation that the supposed guardians of Ireland's flocks have from the outset contributed to, rather than mitigated, a culture of ravenous exploitation.

The poem's notion of the clergy as fleecers of their own flocks forms part of a total vision of the connection between England and Ireland as a historical catastrophe that derives from the first arrival of Britain's 'base invaders'. The second stanza contrasts the peopling of Scotland by the ancient Irish with the first, medieval attempts of England to colonize Ireland. Whereas in the first case, 'The mother-kingdom left her children free' (l. 20), the later act of expropriation has produced an ineluctable slide into 'Vice and Slavery' (l. 38). This conception of the relationship between native and transplanted cultures differs sharply from those employed in the pastoral productions of Swift's contemporaries. The Ulster-Scots elegist celebrates Swift as a 'guardian shepherd' exerting a guiding influence over a flock that includes Dublin *litterateurs*, wealthy Anglo-Irish landowners and Scots-speaking farmers alike. Similarly, Murrough O'Connor envisions his relationship with Trinity College as an extension of the now moribund system of bardic patronage. Both poets are able to conceive of the role of the pastor as an inherited trust, and to establish genealogies that link Swift to Elijah, or Brian Boru to the Provost and Fellows of Trinity College. These poems present the formation of noble lineages by the coming together of diverse cultures. By contrast, the verses on St. Patrick's Well depict the initial contact between Ireland and Britain as a disastrous piece of miscegenation that gives rise to a 'spurious and degenerate line'. Unlike the Drapier's confident assertion that his 'Ancestors' and those of his readers 'reduced this Kingdom to the Obedience of ENGLAND' (X, 55), the poem sees natives and invaders coalescing into a single 'line'. If they are not united by descent then they are made as one by their collusion with each other in a grotesque ritual of devourment. Rather than inherit a blessing, this mongrel race becomes the subject of a curse whose disastrous intensity worsens with each succeeding generation. No one may 'fondly hope for some reverse' (l. 85) of the anathema since the time of altering a pre-determined 'fate' has long since expired:

Virtue herself would now return too late.

Not half thy course of misery is run,
 Thy greatest evils yet are scarce begun. (ll. 86–8)

As with Swift's futile attempt to restore lost 'Dean and Chapter lands', any remedial course of action would be hopelessly belated. The initial moment of contact between Britain's 'base invaders' (l. 22) and Ireland's servile 'swains' (l. 43) sets in motion a series of 'fatal changes' (l. 34). It establishes a spiral of exploitation and craven compliance, one that has more than half of its course left to run. As a result of a hopelessly botched experiment in cultural cross-sterilization, social and political life have become a free-for-all in which everyone attempts to secure a portion of the remaining wealth against an imminent and total collapse. Ireland, says the poem of that name, has become 'a land of slaves', 'Where every knave and fool is bought, / Yet kindly sells himself for naught' (p. 330, l. 1, ll. 3–4). This vision of Ireland as a free marketplace of souls where the only restraint is the cynicism of the buyer is not unique to the poetry. A central and underreported purpose of *A Modest Proposal* is to assert the pastor's right to participate in, and to exploit, this mercenary struggle for self-preservation. Unable to function as a moral guide in an amoral climate, the *Proposal* insists – as the next chapter argues – that the Church may as well have its pound of flesh.

Chapter Five

A Modest Proposal: Allegory and Arithmetic

I

In 1729 Swift wrote prolifically, published sparingly, and complained bitterly. ‘What will it import’, he asked even as he wrote one text, ‘that half a score people in a Coffee-house may happen to read this paper’ (XII, 81)? The prospect that drove Swift’s despair excited Joseph Addison, whose *Spectator* famously sought to bring ‘Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries’ and into ‘Clubs and Assemblies’; to ‘Tea-Tables’ and ‘Coffee-Houses’. The leisurely coffee break proposed by Mr. Spectator was more business-minded than it sounds. As David Fairer remarks, Addison’s ‘Philosophy’ refers not to ‘abstruse topics’, but ‘Socrates’ practical emphasis on *how to live*.¹ But it would not have been enough for Swift, who tried to make the consumption of his texts a matter of bodily subsistence, as in the Drapier’s first letter: ‘WHAT I intend now to say to you, is, [...] of the greatest Concern to your selves, and your Children; your *Bread* and *Cloathing*, and every common Necessary of Life entirely depend upon it’ (X, 3).

Swift’s writing seems here to be doing something more calculating but less calculated than Edward Said’s conception of a ‘precisely occasional’ writing would allow. By threatening them with the loss of their ‘*Bread* and *Clothing*’, the sentence operates on its readers rather than its occasion and it works in them to produce not change but panic. As well as responding to an event, the Drapier is trying to precipitate one. He is trying to occasion a crisis. As critics are fond of pointing out, the critical moment consists not in panic but in judgement. This chapter juxtaposes the historical crisis from which *A Modest Proposal* emerged with the crisis of readerly judgement that the text itself produces. It begins by looking at the crisis of faith that *A Modest Proposal* has produced among its critics.

¹ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700–1789* (London: Longman, 2003), p. 23.

Whether we call it Swift's 'last word on the state of Ireland' or 'his greatest Irish tract', *A Modest Proposal* articulates a disturbing truth.² Ireland's 'wretched condition' and its victims represent a resource to be exploited as much as a problem to be solved. The trouble with this revelation is that once identified as a premise of Swift's irony, it begins to infect our reading of his other, less obviously ironic, texts and even what has been called his 'non-ironic' writing. These texts begin to resemble weakened strains of the *Proposal*'s premise rather than antidotes to it. A modern reader who turns to Swift's sermons and pre- or post-*Proposal* Irish tracts as a source for the compassionate impulse that the *Proposal* inverts and perverts will be disappointed. Instead of a solving moral simplicity one finds further complexities; readers are confronted with alienation rather than straightforward advocacy. These may be less explosive than those of *A Modest Proposal*, but they are all the more disturbing in the absence of satire's absolving grace.

David Nokes was one of the first critics to articulate this realization when he wrote that '[n]one of his Irish tracts reveals any sense of identification between Swift and those he claimed to represent'.³ In this comment, the denotation of the word 'represent' is beginning to slide from a positive concept of speaking on someone's behalf to a more sinister idea of subjecting someone to representation within a discourse that subordinates rather than empowers. Carole Fabricant's essay on Swift and the 'Problems of Colonial Representation' picks up this word close to the bottom of its trajectory, but restores it to a medial position by maintaining that 'we can talk fruitfully about Swift's "representation" of Ireland without falling into the trap of letting his enormous symbolic presence silence, or render invisible, the rest of his aggrieved countrymen'.⁴ Fabricant's essay offers a useful alternative to Nokes's bleak diagnosis of a complete absence of any

² Herbert Davis, *Prose* XII, p. xxi; Ferguson, p. 181.

³ David Nokes, 'Swift and the Beggars', *Essays in Criticism*, 26 (1976), 218–235, p. 232.

⁴ Carole Fabricant, 'Speaking for the Irish Nation: The Drapier, the Bishop and the Problems of Colonial Representation', *ELH*, 66 (1999), 337–372, p. 349. This problematic of representation is also addressed in Rick G. Canning, "'Ignorant Illiterate Creatures": Colonial Justification in Swift's *The Injured Lady* and *The Answer to the Injured Lady*', *ELH*, 64 (1997), 77–97.

identification between Swift and his Irish readers. She proposes that we bypass Swift's 'enormous symbolic presence' and make our own identification with his 'aggrieved countrymen', since these people and their grievances cannot help but be represented in the texts, and it is within our power as readers to make that representation meaningful. What Fabricant's essay cannot do, however, is suppress a realization to which her optimism and Nokes's pessimism represent two alternative responses. This emerges as part of a gradual re-appraisal of *A Modest Proposal* that has taken place since the 1960s. John Richardson charts this process of re-reading. He traces the replacement of an 'old idea' of the *Proposal* as 'trenchant social criticism' by a set of newer readings that portray the text's indignation as more savage than righteous, and allow the *Proposal* to be characterized as 'a deeply personal, deeply alienated joke'.⁵ One punch-line to that joke encapsulates the realization that enables and motivates the project of re-reading Swift's late masterpiece. This is the possibility that *A Modest Proposal* might mean what it says.

The uncertainty generated by this prospect is best described with reference to Claude Rawson's repeated comment that *A Modest Proposal* entertains 'extermination velleities'.⁶ A velleity is 'a mere wish, desire, or inclination without accompanying action or effort', and is therefore distinct from a policy of extermination, which is perhaps what the text would propose if it could be made to mean what it seems to say.⁷ Rawson's concept of velleity allows for a reformulation of the impulse which has

⁵ John Richardson, 'Swift, *A Modest Proposal* and Slavery', *Essays in Criticism*, 51 (2001), 404–423, p. 404. 'Old idea' is Richardson's own phrase; 'trenchant social criticism' is his quotation from William Bragg Ewald, *The Masks of Jonathan Swift* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954), p. 169; 'deeply personal, deeply alienated joke' is from Thomas Lockwood, 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*: An Interpretation' (*Papers on Language and Literature*, 10 (1974), 254–267, p. 257). Richardson also quotes Louis Landa as a proponent of the 'old idea' of *A Modest Proposal*, but it should be pointed out that Landa's articles of the 1940s ('Swift and Charity', '*A Modest Proposal* and Populousness', 'Swift's Economic Views and Mercantilism') and his 1954 book *Swift and the Church of Ireland* provide a wealth of historical detail that acts, alongside Oliver Ferguson's *Jonathan Swift and Ireland*, as a necessary foundation for the new readings of Swift that began to emerge following the publication of Ferguson's book in 1962.

⁶ Claude Rawson, "'Indians' and Irish: Montaigne, Swift, and the Cannibal Question', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 53 (1992), 299–363, p. 310; 'A Reading of *A Modest Proposal*', in *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 121–144, p. 139.

⁷ *OED*, 'velleity' 2.

motivated critics to discard the old, 'compassionate', reading of Swift's text. We leave behind the compassionate *Proposal* of fond memory because we are troubled by the possibility that the text might mean something other than the opposite of what it says.

In other words, we are troubled by a possible failure of irony. One of the *OED*'s definitions for this word is a 'figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used'. If *A Modest Proposal* disturbs modern criticism by threatening to mean something other than the opposite of what it says, then its irony has somehow malfunctioned. The dictionary gives a second, figurative, meaning of irony as a 'condition of affairs or events of a character opposite to what was, or might naturally be, expected'. In pervasively ironic times, the one text that should be ironic is disturbing us because we have lost faith in its irony. This is what the dictionary would call 'a contradictory outcome of events as if in mockery of the promise and fitness of things'. There are two responses to this contradictory outcome. The first is to throw more irony at the problem and read Swift's text through embedded layers of irony; to assert, in effect that the *Proposal*'s irony is itself somehow ironic.

Faced by this prospect it is tempting to dispense with the concept of irony altogether. But part of the problem may be over-reliance on the satire as the only form of ironic discourse. There is another mode which has been traditionally identified with irony. The name of this mode emerges almost by itself from a consideration of the predicament that *A Modest Proposal* imposes on its readers. If the text means neither what it says nor the opposite of what it says, then the text can only be honestly and accurately characterized as meaning something other than what it says. The name for this figure of speech is allegory, which literally means 'speaking otherwise'. Allegory has also been used to mean 'speaking the other' – that is, a way of articulating otherness, and a way of subjecting the other to representation within a discourse of power. Whether we like it or not, these notions of allegory have more relevance to the way we read *A Modest Proposal* today than does the concept of irony. For this reason, but also because the

allegorical meaning is as relevant to Irish readerships in the 1720s as it is to current criticism, this chapter chooses to read Swift's text as allegory.

The *Proposal* conforms to the most basic concept of allegory as given in one contemporary account of the form: 'that *in which one thing is related, and another thing is understood*'.⁸ This is Plutarch's definition as paraphrased in John Hughes's discussion of allegorical poetry in the preface to his 1715 edition of Spenser's works. The problem with such a definition is that it could be applied to just about any literary mode or figure of speech – one of the many proposed definitions of literature, in fact, holds that its language is 'characterized by being "distinctly above the norm in ratio of implicit [...] to explicit meaning"'.⁹ In his essay, Hughes is aware of the danger of an over-inclusive definition. He concedes that 'the word *Allegory* has sometimes been us'd in a larger Sense [...] and has been apply'd indifferently to any Poem which contains a cover'd Moral, tho the Story or Fable contains nothing in it that appears visionary or romantick'. For Hughes, then, the allegorical mode is more than formal: an allegory is defined in part by what it 'contains', and that content should tend towards the 'visionary or romantick'. Many texts take the form of a sustained comparison, but those that work through correspondences between 'real or historical Persons, and probable or possible Actions' should be differentiated from another type that operates 'without the Bounds of Probability or Nature'. According to Hughes, the first type of text 'should [...] rather be call'd a Parallel than an Allegory' because 'the literal Sense is sufficient to satisfy the Reader'.¹⁰

No reader has ever been satisfied with the literal sense of *A Modest Proposal*, and this is why the literal meaning of the text has, from its first publication, continually been replaced by an ever-growing corpus of interpretations. In each of these readings, the moral or political subtext that

⁸ John Hughes, 'An Essay on Allegorical Poetry with Remarks on the Writings of Mr. Edmund Spenser', in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, 6 vols (London: Jacob Tonson, 1715), I, pp. xxv–lvii, p. xxviii–xxix.

⁹ Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 10, quoting Monroe Beardsley, 'The Concept of Literature'.

¹⁰ Hughes, 'Allegorical Poetry', p. xxxiv, xxxv, xxxvi.

a reader brings to, or excavates from, Swift's text becomes its primary meaning. The *Proposal* is not about eating babies but whatever it is that the eating of babies might symbolize. Because literary writing is generally perceived to be about something other than its ostensible subject, that statement runs the risk of sounding banal. Only in allegory, however, does the latent meaning, the 'mystical Sense' that is only arrived at by a process of interpretation, usurp the primacy of the literal sense to attain the status of truth. Interestingly, this reprioritization of implicit over explicit denotation does not necessarily apply to a text, such as *Gulliver's Travels*, that has been traditionally labelled as allegorical, which has been marketed on the strength of its literal meaning alone as a children's book. It does, however, apply in Hughes's reading of allegory. 'Every Allegory has therefore two Senses, the Literal and the Mystical', Hughes writes: 'the literal Sense is like a Dream or Vision, of which the mystical Sense is the true Meaning or Interpretation'. He also offers a reason for this reversal, an explanation of why the less accessible 'mystical Sense' should attain the status of truth and why the obvious 'literal Sense' becomes transient like 'a Dream or Vision'. A reader is driven to the mystical sense not by a sense of higher purpose but out of simple discomfort: 'it is impossible for the Reader to rest in the literal Sense, but he is of necessity driven to seek for another Meaning under these wild Types and Shadows'.¹¹ This sense of restlessness, of an inability to feel at ease with the literal meaning of the text, accurately characterizes the experience of reading *A Modest Proposal*. It is because we cannot rest in the literal sense of Swift's text that we must read it allegorically.

II

I HAVE been assured by a very knowing *American* of my Acquaintance in *London*; that a young healthy Child, well nursed, is, at a Year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food; whether *Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled*; and, I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a *Fricasie, or Ragoust*. (111)

¹¹ Hughes, p. xxix, xxxvi

Hughes's preface to Spenser contends that 'an Allegory is a kind of continu'd Simile, or an Assemblage of Similitudes drawn out at full length'. He defines a simile as 'a more extended Metaphor'.¹² In most readings of the term, however, simile is held to be cognitively distinct from metaphor and the latter figure is said to be the basic unit of allegory. Theresa M. Kelley writes of the 'synecdochic relation' between metaphor and allegory and locates it within a tradition that stretches from Quintilian to modern literary theory, summing up this tradition with the statement that 'Allegory is to thought what metaphor is to the single word'.¹³ *A Modest Proposal's* governing metaphor is one of devourment. The first time the text introduces it in the famous sentence quoted above, however, the devourment is literal and it is not the subject of comparison, explicit or implicit. To say as much is not to impute a neutral tone to this sentence, or to pretend that we do not know that the Proposer will go on to discuss other, less literal, forms of devourment that will cast his scheme in a favourable light. The idea of eating children is horrid in its own right, and there is at least one indication that the Proposer is as uneasy about it as his reader ought to be.

He has not done any of the eating, nor does it seem that he will. Rather than speak from experience, the Proposer has *been assured* that a year-old child makes a good meal when '*Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled*', and he suggests that the reader explore the possibilities further by trying a '*Fricasie, or Ragoust*'. It would seem here that the text has become possessed of a typically Swiftian fascination with copiousness; that it succumbs to 'the irresistible excess of a list that grinds on, long after we have accepted that it should never have been started', in the words of Robert Phiddian. The 'enumeration of culinary methods', Phiddian suggests, is what makes this sentence funny: it 'would be merely repellent if it stopped at the semicolon after "Food"'.¹⁴ Equally, however, the Modest Proposer's list of serving suggestions, like the laughter it generates, is something of a

¹² Ibid., p. xxix.

¹³ Theresa M. Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 22, quoting Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der Literarischen Rhetorik* (1960).

¹⁴ Robert Phiddian, 'Have You Eaten Yet? The Reader in *A Modest Proposal*', *Studies in English Literature 1500—1900*, 36 (1996), 603–621, p. 603–4.

decoy. By presenting readers with an enticingly disgusting spread of dishes, Swift's speaker distracts from the fact that he will not be present at the party. We have to read this authorial abdication in two ways, and if we are to speak of the text as allegory then this dual reading applies to the whole of the *Proposal*.

One of the ways in which Swift's text works as allegory is in its construction of a possible world where one fundamental ethical norm is slightly different from its equivalent in the 'actual' world. The Proposer's universe is a moral one: it is wrong ('horrid' in fact), to murder an illegitimate child, given his suspicion that the practice is carried out 'more to avoid the Expence than the Shame' (110).¹⁵ Not to love one's country is a deeply pernicious vice, wherein Irish people differ even from such quintessential savages as 'LAPLANDERS, and the Inhabitants of TOPINAMBOO' (116). Although the Proposer defers to the 'censure' of 'scrupulous People' by conceding that it may border 'a little [...] upon Cruelty' (113) to eat adolescent boys or girls, he seems to think that to kill and eat one-year old children, whether legitimate or not, could be morally acceptable. The problem is that the Proposer, as is his wont, merely proposes: he both puts the idea forward and pushes it away from himself, offering only hints that he is trying in some way to avoid participating in his own scheme. One way of understanding the Proposer's reticence is to try and distinguish between his voice and that of Swift. Alternatively, one can say that in order to understand this text it has to be read twice and in different ways. There is a level at which the moral prohibition on cannibalism has to be suspended and there is another on which it has to be restored.

One place where these two planes of meaning coincide is in the Proposer's insistence that his idea came from someone else, 'a very

¹⁵ This is a calculatedly ambiguous usage of 'horrid'. Under meanings which include 'abominable' and 'detestable', *OED* cites an Act of 1751 'for better preventing the *horrid* Crime of Murder', but the word could also be used 'in a weakened sense' which merely denoted something objectionable, as in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749): 'Neither can any one give the names of sad stuff, horrid nonsense, &c. to a book, without calling the author a blockhead' (*OED*). On the topicality of the Proposer's remarks on infanticide, see Ian Campbell Ross, "'More to avoid the Expence than the Shame': Infanticide in the Modest Proposer's Ireland', *Swift Studies*, 1 (1988), pp. 75-6.

knowing *American*' of his 'Acquaintance in *London*'. This is on one level a fairly conventional disclaimer, a recognized component of the genre that Swift's text has most often been said to cannibalize. A great many texts proposing one thing or another acknowledge someone else as the inspiration of the thing proposed. This form of the 'modesty topos' is not unique to this proposal or to the large body of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts, those 'modest proposals' and 'humble petitions' that have been cited as supplying the form for this text.¹⁶ Swift's *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*, for example, suggests that a law be made 'for burning every Thing that came from England, except their People and their Coals'. The Universal Proposer is citing this idea at third hand, as 'a pleasant Observation of some Body's' that was mentioned to him by 'the late Archbishop of *Tuam*' (IX, 17).¹⁷ Christopher Fauske suggests that Swift's awareness of the sedition laws in Ireland was what forced him to place this observation at so many removes.¹⁸ Equally, however, the act of referring one's basic idea to someone else is a common feature of pamphlets that propose solutions to economic, political or legal problems. As a generic feature its counterpart is a second disclaimer where the author insists that he will not benefit from the scheme he proposes. This second type provides the sting in the *Proposal*'s tail when the Proposer asserts that he has no children by which he can 'propose to get a single Penny' (118).

Both sorts of disclaimer enable projectors to put some distance between themselves and their scheme. An idea seems more like a good one when it can be shown that someone else has already had it and if selfishness can be discounted as a motivation for propounding it. In invoking such validation procedures, the Proposer superficially resembles other worthy

¹⁶ Rawson, 'A Reading of *A Modest Proposal*', citing George Wittkowsky, 'Swift's *A Modest Proposal*: The Biography of an Early Georgian Pamphlet', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 4 (1948), 75–104.

¹⁷ Christopher Fauske, *Jonathan Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 78, identifies the late Archbishop as John Vesey, 'a senior cleric of impeccable royalist credentials and a recent lord justice'. He goes on to say that 'reference to the archdiocese of Tuam also intimates a continuation of thought from [...] Vesey to his successor [...] Edward Synge'.

¹⁸ Ibid. Fauske additionally suggests that 'the third-hand nature of the report reinforces not only the historical aspects of the problem, but also hints at an emerging currency of such sentiments that would help consolidate a political grouping which the mid-century parliamentary leader, Henry Flood, would christen the Protestant Patriot Party'.

pamphleteers, including Swift. Not many such public-spirited types, would, however, tend to invoke a Native American as the authority for, and the originator of, their plan. This, however, is what the Proposer seems to be doing, given that *OED*'s first recorded usage of the noun 'American' to mean a 'native of America of European descent' comes from 1765. Swift had used the word elsewhere to denote an Amerindian: in *Gulliver's Travels*, the narrator refers to the conquests of 'Ferdinando Cortez over the naked Americans'(XI, 293).

If the 'knowing *American*' is indeed a Native American, then a further reading of this sentence must be added to the existing repertoire. The presence of the 'knowing *American*' means that in addition to the modesty topos, this sentence is invoking and subverting a different literary convention, far removed from the corpus of earnest propositions and schemes for the public good. It is engaging with the literature of cannibalism, and in particular, a paradox of which the most famous example is found in Michel de Montaigne's essay 'Des cannibales'. Claude Rawson has explored some of the links between this essay and Swift's *Proposal*, both of which texts he refers to as 'cannibal allegories'.¹⁹ Montaigne's essay speculates on a visit to France by some of the Tupinamba of Brazil, the most notorious supposed cannibals of the early modern period, who have 'come down to us today as man-eaters *par excellence*'.²⁰ They appear in *A Modest Proposal* as 'the Inhabitants of TOPINAMBOO'.²¹ 'Des cannibales' subsumes the imputed practices of the Tupinamba within a dialectic that is central to many subsequent accounts of the 'noble savage'. Montaigne accepts that the Tupinamba are literal cannibals, eaters of human flesh, but rejects the additional connotation of 'cannibal' to mean a bloodthirsty primitive. On the grounds that it is less barbarous to cook and eat a dead man than to roast a living one in the name of piety – as the French had done during the recent religious wars and as the Spanish had in Mexico and Peru – Montaigne finds

¹⁹ "'Indians' and Irish', p. 362.

²⁰ W. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 22.

²¹ *OED* gives 'topinambou' as a name for the Jerusalem Artichoke, native to tropical America, and says that it derives from the name of a people of Brazil.

his cannibals more civilized than the Europeans who label them as barbarians.²² This trope also finds its way into Anglophone writing of the eighteenth century. In Joseph Warton's poem, 'The Dying Indian' (1755), the eponymous speaker imagines a heaven where his 'forefathers feast / Daily on hearts of Spaniards!' He vindicates himself to his absent wife from the charge that he has 'worship'd / With those that eat their God.'²³

In the mind of Warton's Indian, the good, honest, literal cannibalism of his forefathers is contrasted with the bad metaphysical cannibalism of the Catholic Spaniards. A propos of this paradox, Rawson comments that 'writers of broadly "primitivist" sympathies, from Montaigne to Mailer, often affect to favor a literal cannibalism [...] provided it is done by "savages," and to reserve their opprobrium for the metaphorical kind'.²⁴ There are one or two hints that the Modest Proposer employs a similar hierarchy of values. For example, there is a subtle differentiation between the culinary practices of his American acquaintance and those that he recommends to his readers: the former are ultimately more civilized because they are less sophisticated. The American has only indulged in the simple pleasures of stewing, roasting, baking and boiling, whereas the Proposer panders to a readerly predilection for the more fashionable '*Fricasie* or *Ragoust*'. By deploying what Nokes calls 'posh terms from the new French cookery', more accurately characterized by Ian Higgins as 'elite dishes upon which [English] Whig ministers notoriously fed' courtesy of Walpole's French chef, the Proposer envisages that his readers will also engage in frying and stewing but with an added garnish of polite self-delusion.²⁵ The Proposer explicitly accuses his Irish readers of being less civilized than cannibals when he contrasts them unfavourably with the people of 'TOPINAMBOO'. Only once in the text, however, does the Proposer privilege

²² Ibid., p. 299, quoting Montaigne, 'Des cannibales'; p. 310, quoting 'Des coches'.

²³ Joseph Warton, 'The Dying Indian', in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 366, ll. 7-8, ll. 21-2.

²⁴ "'Indians" and Irish', p. 356.

²⁵ Nokes, *Raillery and Rage: A Study of Eighteenth Century Satire* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 183, Ian Higgins, 'The Politics of *A Modest Proposal*', paper given at 'Dean Swift: The Politics of Satire – A Symposium on Jonathan Swift and the Politics in his Age', October 2003: <<http://www.iol.ie/~rjtechne/swift/2003/higgins.htm>> [accessed 11 August 2004].

literal cannibalism over its metaphorical counterpart. When he does so, he deploys his own variation on the Montaignean paradox. This is grounded in a relativism that is primarily moral rather than cultural. Unlike Warton or Montaigne, the Proposer does not correlate literal cannibalism with ‘savage’ cultures and the metaphorical version with self-proclaimed ‘civilized’ societies. Instead, literal cannibalism is to take place within a ‘civilized’ society, where it will obtain its moral licence from the fact that it cannot be worse than a metaphorical cannibalism that has already taken place. In Swift’s version of the paradox, those most fit to undertake the literal cannibal scheme are those who have already participated in the metaphorical devourment:

I GRANT this Food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very *proper for Landlords*; who, as they have already devoured most of the Parents, seem to have the best Title to the Children. (112)

The contention that landlords have been devouring parents cannot be taken literally. Readers, to paraphrase Hughes’s comment on Spenserian allegory, cannot rest in the literal sense of this sentence, where they would be forced to contemplate a landscape strewn with the remnants of half-eaten adults. Instead, one is ‘driven of necessity to seek for another meaning’. In most cases that other meaning is based on the apprehension that the consumption of human flesh is less obscene than the treatment of tenant farmers by their landlords. This metaphorical ‘devourment’ represents a greater excess than his proposal, which remains a modest one by comparison. The governing metaphor of Swift’s text, then, is the figurative devourment of tenants by landlords, and not the least index of its power is the fact that this trope was used to sell the pamphlet to readers in 1729.

III

If you happened to be in Dublin in November 1729 and you went into Richard Dickson’s printing shop in Silver Court, you might have come

out with some interesting purchases. Dickson's father Francis had built up something of a business empire in the city, since as well as producing the *Dublin Intelligence* he owned coffee houses and was involved in 'the marketing of everything from water jugs to patent medicines'.²⁶ When Dickson junior became sole proprietor of the business he began to promote the sideline in drugs by calling his shop the 'Elixir Ware-House'.²⁷ He used his news-sheet to bruit the availability of his goods, and among the local news, announcements and advertisements on the *Dublin Intelligence's* verso, there often appears a 'CATALOGUE of Choice Safe and Effectual REMEDIES for several *Cureable Diseases* &c. very common in this Kingdom'. Dickson's list offers such nostrums as 'The *Balsam* for the Piles', 'THE Famous Original Inestimable *London Electuary*, invented by the Celebrated Dr. *Radcliffe*, First Physician to her Late Majesty Queen ANNE', 'The Princely Lotion for the Itch', 'The Royal *Beautifying Fluid*' and, not least, 'Dr Hancock's *Universal Cordial*'. In the issue of 8 November 1729, at the top of the column that contains his list of remedies, Dickson announced that another sort of panacea could be found on his shelves:

The late Apparent Spirit of *Patriotism*, or *Love to Our Country*, so abounding of Late, has produced a New *Scheme*, said in Publick to be written by D—— S——, wherein the *Author* as an *Effectual Means* for preventing the *Children of Poor People*, from being a *Burthen* to their *Parents* or *Country*, and for making them *Beneficial* to the Publick, and save Expences to the Nation, ingenuously Advises that one Fourth Part of the Infants under Two Years Old, be forthwith Fatten'd, brought to Market and Sold for Food, Reasoning That they will be *Dainty Bits* for *Land Lords*, who as they have already Devoured most of the *Parents*, seem to have best Right to *Eat up the Children*.

N.B. This Excellent Treatise may be had at the Printers hereof.²⁸

²⁶ Robert Munter, *A Dictionary of the Print Trade in Ireland 1550–1775* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988), p. 77.

²⁷ Ibid.; pamphlet advertising the *Elixir-Ware-House*, at Dickson's Printing-Office in Silver Court in Castle Street opposite to the Rose Tavern ([Dublin], [R. Dickson], [?1730]). A 1744 advertisement from *The Meddler* shows that the 'Elixir-Ware-House' was still going strong fifteen years later. (Reproduced in Robert Munter, *The History of the Irish Newspaper 1685–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), plate 13 between pp. 208–9).

²⁸ *Dublin Intelligence*, 8 November 1729. Partially quoted in *Prose* XII, pp. xix-xx.

This write-up of the *Proposal* follows on from an item about a rioter being committed to Newgate and a piece commending the recent trend for replacing silk with Irish linen in funerary scarves – a ‘*Project* which must be of the utmost Advantage to this Kingdom’. By opening with a reference to the ‘late Apparent Spirit of *Patriotism*’ as manifested at recent funerals, the item on the *Proposal* begins as news. Having flirted with the idea of becoming a review or exegesis, the piece ends as advertisement by directing the readers to Dickson’s shop, ‘the Printers hereof’. The article is followed by a list of the latest commodity prices and a bill of mortality for the city and suburbs of Dublin – a summary of the numbers and causes of deaths in the city for the previous week. This roll call of the dead is succeeded by an announcement concerning the forthcoming auction of the effects of the recently deceased Arthur French, after which the *Intelligence* runs out of news and falls back on the catalogue of ‘Choice Safe and Effectual REMEDIES’ to be had at Dickson’s shop. Having digested the fact that eight people had died of consumption the previous week, one each of the ague and the ‘Caugh’, and seventeen of fever, contemporary readers might have been tempted over to the Elixir Ware-House to replenish supplies of the ‘Famous *Ague Plaister*’ or ‘*Dr. Hancock’s Universal Cordial*’ – and perhaps to pick up a copy of *A Modest Proposal* as well.

To find the *Proposal* in this context, as part of an imbricated pattern of patriot consumer politics, commodification, and death, is to realize that Swift’s text is comprehensively a product of his society, not just a comment on it. On its first publication it was sold, by Richard Dickson at least, as both a nostrum and a curiosity, and just as it might once have sat physically between them in the stationer-druggist’s window, D—— S——’s patent remedy is located, taxonomically speaking, between ‘*Dr. Hancock’s Universal Cordial*’ and the ‘*Petrify’d-Body, in all Appearance a Fresh-Bak’d-Cake, of Puft-Paste*’, which Dickson was offering to sell the following Tuesday to ‘any Curious Person, at a lower Rate than is usually given for such Rarities’.²⁹ As its situation attests, the *Proposal* both

²⁹ *Dublin Intelligence*, Tuesday 11 November 1729.

harnesses and succumbs to a radical and pervasive ethos of consumption – in fact it posits consumption not as a form of agency but as a substitute for it, and thus represents both the culmination and abandonment of the project begun in *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*. The difference between the two Proposals that bookend Swift's output of the 1720s is as follows: in a strategy that Robert Mahony identifies as 'countering the consumptionist rhetoric of colonial ideology', the 1720 *Proposal* exhorts Irish readers to consume or be consumed;³⁰ its 1729 successor, on the other hand, refuses to intervene as those readers consume and are consumed. Although pieces like 'Maxims Controlled in Ireland' and the 'Letter [...] Concerning the Weavers' come close to doing so, the 1729 *Proposal* is the one text in Swift's 'Irish' canon that succumbs to the condition of its readers rather than attempting to alter it, and it does so through an allegory of consumption.

Insofar as that human subject is embodied by the implied reader of the *Dublin Intelligence*, consumption – whether in the form of reading, buying, or being consumed by disease (or something more abstract and sinister) – represents the default activity of the contemporary subject. It is the fate of that subject to be caught up in a number of interlocking systems. This thesis has been concerned to show how some of these systems operate within and upon Swift's texts. As preceding chapters have shown, these systems include: a rhetoric that equates freedom from exploitation with freedom from Catholic tyranny; an aesthetic of nationhood founded upon an appropriation and a denial of Ireland's pre-conquest culture and history; a politics of tenure and custodianship, and a pastoral dialectic of usurper and victim. This chapter seeks to put in place a final system, namely a logic and an ethics of consumption, and to correlate it to the allegorical system that is actuated by the governing metaphor of *A Modest Proposal*. Some of this work has already been done by the journalist of the *Dublin Intelligence*.

The 8 November newspaper item isolates the metaphor of devourment. By altering the wording of Swift's text it also removes one of

³⁰ Robert Mahony, 'The Irish Colonial Experience and Swift's Rhetoric of Perception in the 1720s', p. 70.

that metaphor's complexities, foregrounding the theme of consumption to the exclusion of another, more ambiguous, set of connotations. Whereas the Modest Proposer speaks of his food as being very '*proper for Land Lords*', the journalist commends it to them as '*Dainty Bits*'. The difference between the two phrases is that by using an appropriate terminology in either case, each version locates landlords and their transgressions within a different system. As well as draw attention to its central violation of culinary propriety, the word 'proper' in Swift's text invokes concepts of ownership and, in particular, the idea of a legal entitlement to a piece of property as opposed to a moral claim over it. This is also why the *Proposal* also speaks of landlords having a 'Title' to the children, where the advertisement says that they have 'best Right'. In law, a 'title' is the legal fact that creates a right, usually one of ownership. Rights, which have effect in the world, are the consequences of titles, which have effect in law.³¹ As I shall later show, Swift's text uses legal terminology at this juncture because this canonical passage in the *Proposal* indicts a legal shortcoming as well as a moral one.

When paraphrased in the *Dublin Intelligence*, however, the metaphor of devourment loses this juristic nuance. The register of the passage is shifted out of a complicated legalistic discourse and into a more straightforwardly moralistic tone. Children become '*Dainty Bits*' for landlords, who become fairytale ogres, devouring those dainty bits with relish. As Fabricant writes, 'Swift [...] presents the landlord as a general type, an emblem of society's corruption'.³² Without even having read the *Proposal*, a reader of the *Dublin Intelligence* must realize that Swift proposes literal cannibalism only as a heuristic strategy to expose the metaphorical cannibalism of landlords. Dickson has effectively read the *Proposal* for us and his reading does more than excise a legal nicety in Swift's original passage: it neutralizes the shock of Swift's satire by instructing us to read it as such. It would seem, then, that another effect of the *Dublin Intelligence* advertisement is to spoil the *Proposal*'s efficacy as a

³¹ George Whitecross Paton, *A Textbook of Jurisprudence*, 4th edn, ed. by G. W. Paton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946; 4th edn, 1972), p. 305, p. 308.

³² *Swift's Landscape*, p. 102

hoax by diffusing any potential for the text to be taken literally or its proposal seriously. Within Swift's text, however, such potential is negligible.

Rather than subvert the premise of Swift's text, Dickson's appropriation of the *Proposal's* meaning merely makes freely available an interpretation that the text itself offers up with only slightly less alacrity. Swift's text is in fact desperately impatient to renounce any claim it might have over an informed reader's faith in the cannibal scheme. The Proposer appoints two individuals to foreswear this claim on his behalf. One of these, the native American, has already been encountered. The second is 'the famous *Salmanaazor*' (113). This is a reference to a notorious literary hoax, George Psalmanazar's *A Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa* (1704). The Proposer names '*Salmanaazor*, a Native of the Island of *Formosa* who came from thence to *London*' as the original source for a suggestion, made to him by a friend, that the flesh of adolescent boys and girls could serve as a venison substitute. His subsequent account of how the body of 'a plump Girl of fifteen' was jointed and sold by the executioner to various Formosan dignitaries is borrowed, as Daniel Eilon has shown, from a passage in the second edition of Psalmanazar's *Description*. This text had been famously uncovered as a fabrication, and its author unmasked as a Frenchman, within a few years of its publication and was being referred to mockingly in the *Spectator* by 1711.³³ Within the *Proposal* itself, Psalmanazar's credibility is also undermined, although indirectly: the idea of eating teenage boys is disparaged by the Proposer's '*American Acquaintance*' because 'their Flesh was generally tough and lean [...] and their Taste disagreeable'. Although it maintains a straight-faced pretence to be investigating the limitations of the cannibal proposition, this part of the text is also negotiating the limits of its own credibility. When a supposedly genuine 'savage' like the American questions the experience of an admittedly false one like Psalmanazar, the central issue becomes subject to

³³ Daniel Eilon, 'Gulliver's Fellow Traveller Psalmanaazaar', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 8 (1985), 173–8; Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars 1660–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 95, referring to *Spectator* No. 14, 16 March 1711. Of the many extant spellings of this author's name (see Eilon, p. 177, n. 1) I have used the most common, 'Psalmanazar'.

multiple displacement. The cannibal act is referred away from the Proposer onto a series of 'friends' and frauds, whose veracity is compromised by the fact that either their cannibalism or their existence is a thinly-veiled fiction. The overall effect of such displacement strategies is to set up the Proposer as only the nearest of an endlessly receding parade of pseudo-cannibals and stage savages. In the *Dublin Intelligence* advertisement, landlords seem to be about to join these ranks by being shown hunched over dainty bits of flesh. The *Proposal* seems to invite readings that nudge it away from satire and towards low burlesque.

In its own time, Swift's text attracted such readings from friends and strangers alike. Thomas Lockwood observes that the implied author of *A Modest Proposal* was less likely to be perceived by contemporaries as 'the relentless critic of society, the "serious" or "committed" satirist'. Instead, they 'tended to appreciate him most for the vein of ludicrous humour that he had mastered'.³⁴ Such contemporaries were, however, equally likely to denigrate him for this feat. The Earl of Orrery's critical biography of Swift took a rather disapproving view of Swift's Irish writings as a whole, and he prefaced his thoughts on the fourth volume of Faulkner's *Works* with the observation that Swift's 'humorous disposition tempted him to actions inconsistent with the dignity of a clergyman'. Orrery clearly thought *A Modest Proposal* to be *infra dig.* and also beneath interpretation. His comments on it do not go beyond a précis, which states that the 'proposal is to fatten beggars [*sic*] children, and sell them for food to rich landlords and persons of quality', with a remark that the text is 'written with SWIFT's usual peculiarity of humour.'³⁵

Others revelled in the peculiar humour that embarrassed Orrery and sought to adapt it to their own ends. Lord Bathurst wrote to Swift in February 1730 that the cannibal plan 'ought by no means to be confin'd to Ireland'. He believed 'we shall carry it further, & not confine our luxury only to the eating of Children, for I happened to peep the other day into a

³⁴ 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*', p. 256.

³⁵ *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin; In a Series of Letters from John Earl of Orrery to his Son, the Honourable Hamilton Boyle*, second edition (London: A. Millar, 1752), p. 122, p. 128.

large assembly not far from Westminster Hall, & I found them roasting a great fat fellow'.³⁶ Four years later, a French translation of the *Proposal* features in a miscellany collected by one Albert Radicati and published in Rotterdam. This *Projet facile, équitable et modeste*, as this volume calls it, is sandwiched between a long polemic on the Papacy and a true confession by a Muslim of the cannibal practices of his culture.³⁷

Each of these readings disconnects the projected literal cannibalism of the *Proposal* from its metaphorical counterpart. Their authors have the luxury of doing so because they are not caught up in the historical moment that conditions Swift's text. Orrery's summary of the text's content is telling in this respect. As with the account given in the *Dublin Intelligence*, he reads the text as a sarcastic proposition directed at or against 'rich landlords and persons of quality'. Orrery, however, neglects to mention that the proposition only becomes viable (or modest) when contrasted with the horrendous act of devourment that has already happened. In his reading, the *Proposal* has lost its moral force and its moral ambiguity to become a simple exercise in tasteless humour. Lord Bathurst and the translator in turn sever the connection that binds the literal proposition to the figurative act, but they go on to reconnect it to alternative metaphorical cannibalisms of their own choosing.

Bathurst resembles Orrery in looking on the *Proposal* as a rumbustious lark; but rather than de-politicize Swift's text, he re-politicizes it with opposition principles. He supplies his own, yet more tasteless, version of Montaigne's paradox by suggesting that eating children is morally acceptable because it is almost as much fun as roasting a 'great fat fellow' such as Walpole in the debating chamber at Westminster. The French translation also revisits the dialectic of *Des cannibales* in a form that was too politically sensitive for Montaigne to address overtly, but which became incorporated into a juxtaposition represented in this chapter by

³⁶ Lord Bathurst to Swift, 12 February 1730, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 282–3.

³⁷ *Projet facile, équitable et modeste, pour rendre utile à notre nation une très grand nombre de pauvres enfants, qui lui sont maintenant fort à chargé*, in Albert Radicati, *Recueil de pièces curieuses sur les matières les plus intéressantes* (Rotterdam: Thomas Johnson et fils, 1736), pp. [369]–84.

Joseph Warton's poem. *Projet facile* places the *Proposal* in such a context as to suggest that the metaphysical rites of religious pseudo-cannibals are at least as objectionable as the barbarous rituals of literal man-eaters.

Both Bathurst and Radicati offer a new meaning to Swift's text by placing it in a fresh context, but these meanings have latterly been identified as latent within the *Proposal*. In the course of his argument that Swift's texts of the 1720s 'treat colonial habits of consumption', Robert Mahony has shown how *A Modest Proposal* inverts a 'political metaphor' that traditionally ascribed 'cannibalistic tendencies to the native Catholic majority'.³⁸ Frank Lestringant goes further, offering what he calls a 'Eucharistic reading' of *A Modest Proposal* and I will return to his reading later in the chapter.³⁹ In retrospective support of Bathurst's reading, David Nokes has written that what Swift actually gained from his assumption of the role of Irish patriot was a 'platform' to confront his old enemies in the Whig establishment in England.⁴⁰ Indeed, it cannot be wholly coincidental that the Modest Proposer's second and only subsequent appearance in print, the 'Answer to the Craftsman' (1730), appears to have been intended not for publication in Ireland but for circulation among the important figures of the opposition that had regrouped around Pulteney and Bolingbroke in 1726. A defining feature of Swift's personae, like the Drapier as discussed in Chapter Two, is their ability simultaneously to speak to Irish readers and to use them as a sounding board to amplify those parts of their discourse meant for audiences across the Irish Sea. This applies to the Modest Proposer as well. His acknowledgement of English readers and English politics, and his nod towards a tradition of religious controversialism, are subtexts that were originally identified by contemporary readers and rediscovered by their modern successors.

³⁸ Mahony, 'Swift's Rhetoric of Perception', pp. 63–4.

³⁹ Frank Lestringant, 'Travels in Eucharistia: Formosa and Ireland from George Psalmanaazaar to Jonathan Swift', trans. by Noah Guynn, in *Corps Mystique, Corps Sacre: Textual Transfigurations of the Body from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by Françoise Jaouën and Benjamin Semple (= *Yale French Studies*, 86 (1994)), pp. 109–125, p. 124.

⁴⁰ Nokes, 'Swift and the Beggars', p. 232. In his biography of Swift, Nokes restates this point less forcefully, writing that 'in spite of his genuine concern for the plight of the Irish poor', Swift's 'desire to vex the Whig establishment was not at odds with his wish to end the ruinous exploitation of Ireland's natural resources' (*A Hypocrite Reversed*, p. 350).

The *Proposal*'s most important subtext, however, is its context – the work's location in time and space, named in the text's opening paragraph as the *Streets, the Roads, and Cabbin-doors*' of 'this great Town' and the surrounding 'Country' (109). As the foregoing account of contemporary readings has shown, the further we move from what was happening (or rather what had happened) on those streets and roads, the more easily the *Proposal* shrinks into a farce or a bigoted polemic or a tasteless joke – or, as in later readings, an exemplary outburst of compassion and rage. It is therefore necessary to return to what was happening in Dublin in 1729.

IV

A Modest Proposal is both extremely vocal and rather vague about what it calls 'the present Situation of Affairs' (110). Its speaker attaches some importance to immediate circumstances, referring to '*the present Distresses of the Kingdom*' and to its '*present deplorable State*' (110, 109), but without going into the details of what is happening in the present of the text to bring the Kingdom to such a pass. He is unwilling or unable to state outright that the country is in the grip of famine, a crisis that began with grain shortages in 1726 and only abated with the gathering of a plentiful harvest as *A Modest Proposal* was rolling off Sarah Harding's press three years later.⁴¹ Where history has famine, the *Proposal* has '*present Distresses*'.

Famine is not entirely absent from Swift's text, however. The Proposer cheerfully concedes that people are 'every Day *dying, and rotting, by Cold and Famine, and Filth, and Vermin*'. He is referring here not to the healthy parents and children, those 'laborious poor' who will be subject to

⁴¹ L. A. Clarkson writes that 'although 'knowledge of this episode is sparse', the likelihood as suggested by 'sharply rising wheat prices in Dublin, and reports of distress and mortality in England and Scotland' is that rather than suffer exclusively, 'Ireland shared in a famine of widespread proportions' ('Conclusion: Famine and Irish History', in *Famine: The Irish Experience 900–1900: Subsistence Crises and Famines in Ireland*, ed. by E. Margaret Crawford (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989), pp. 220–236, p. 224). See also David Dickson, 'The Gap in Famines A Useful Myth', *ibid.*, pp. 96–111.

the proposal, but to the 'vast Number of poor People, who are Aged, Diseased or Maimed'. These 'impotent poor', as they are known in the pamphlets and proposals that give Swift's text its form, are dying 'as fast as can be reasonably expected' (114), and merit no further attention. From such a fleeting glimpse of the daily run of mortality one can infer that the proposal is being made at a time of chronic distress, but Swift's text gains much of its charge from its lack of overt reference to the acute crisis during which it is set. Its single use of the word '*Famine*' figures this crucial dislocation. The term is made to denote not an acute, pandemic, outbreak of starvation but a chronic condition affecting a marginalized and economically unproductive few. In this way, the Proposer contains the notion of famine, corralling it within the bodies of the impotent poor and fencing off that group from the ambit of the proposal. In other words, the *Proposal* takes the concept of famine out of circulation. In the same way that the 'impotent poor' have a nugatory net effect on the economy because they are dying off so frequently, famine has little currency in the economy of this text. Its value is all but negated by being subsumed under the vague heading of '*present Distresses*'.

The effect of such circumlocutions alters with how the *Proposal* is read. As stated earlier, the *Proposal* is a text that asks to be read twice in two different ways, and in the first type of reading, these euphemisms for famine are part of its polite style and its tendency towards genteel understatement. As he does not wish to distress his readers unduly by referring to the crisis by its name, the Proposer leaves that name unspoken. He assumes that readers are able to correlate his general statements of '*present Distresses*' with the specific crisis alluded to under the cover of such euphemisms. Given the scale of that crisis, his assumption would seem entirely justified. Like their historically-minded successors in the modern day, contemporary readers need no introduction to the crisis against which the *Proposal* is set. It forms an unignorable background to any utterance made in 1729, and contemporary accounts bring it to the foreground in vivid detail. In March, Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* reported 'Riots and Tumults in several Places of the Province of Munster'. Closer to Dublin, the

'Tradesmen, Workmen and other Labourers of Drogheda', upon 'finding the Poor [...] likely to Famish' had 'seiz'd all the Store Houses in the Town' and prevented corn from being loaded onto the ships at the quay. By the summer, it was being reported from Cork that the 'poor are starving for want'; the people of one parish had subscribed a hundred pounds to relieve poor 'House Keepers', and the Bishop of Cork had matched their contribution personally.⁴² Similar attempts at organized charity elsewhere did not, however, succeed in keeping the victims of the crisis within their own parishes, and this aspect of the situation caused concern that was expressed both popularly and privately.

In the summer of 1728, Archbishop Boulter observed that for the second year in a row, hungry people were beginning to move across the country in search of food. After the harvest failed in 1726, the price of corn had been such by the following summer that 'thousands of families' had 'quitted their habitations to seek bread elsewhere, and many hundreds perished', and at the time of writing, 'the poor [...] are already beginning to quit their habitations'.⁴³ By 1729, the *Dublin Intelligence* was echoing his anxiety, reporting that victims of the crisis were converging in large numbers upon Dublin and were being 'seen in Publick more than has been known for some time'. '[T]he poor throng in Crowds to this City', it was reported in June, 'Notwithstanding the large Charities, which have been distributed thro' several Parts of this Country particularly in the North'.⁴⁴ By this time not only was Dublin beginning to fill up with displaced persons, but permanent residents of the capital were themselves beginning to bow beneath the weight of '*present Distresses*'. This combination led to what Robert Munter calls 'an important development in the periodical press'.⁴⁵

In his study of the early Irish newspaper, Munter notes that in 1729, Dublin's 'newspapers were filled with accounts of suffering farmers and the city poor'. This had not happened during earlier crises when 'the capital's

⁴² *Dublin Journal*, 11–15 March, 4–8 March, 19–22 July 1729.

⁴³ Boulter to the Duke of Newcastle, 7 March 1728, quoted in 'William Wilde's Table of Irish Famines, 900–1850', ed. by E. Margaret Crawford, in *Famine: The Irish Experience*, pp. 1–30, p. 11.

⁴⁴ *Dublin Intelligence*, 3 June 1729.

⁴⁵ Munter, *History of the Irish Newspaper*, p. 152.

great diversity of occupations had acted, to some degree, as a cushion against the increasing economic hardships felt throughout provincial Ireland'.⁴⁶ By the year of the *Proposal*, however, it seems that the capital had also begun to starve. In March, for example, George Faulkner's *Dublin Journal* reported that 'a Gentleman' had ordered 400 sixpenny loaves to be distributed among the distressed weavers of the Coombe, 'being so sensibly touch'd with the great Poverty of vast Numbers of these unhappy Creatures for want of being employ'd'.⁴⁷ Although the plight of the weavers, 'perennially destitute' according to Munter, did not in itself constitute a dramatic change in the status quo, shortages of grain and coal meant that destitution, and death, had gone above acceptable levels to reach such a worrying peak that they may have begun to affect 'even the middle classes'.⁴⁸

Among those coming to the aid of the victims was Archbishop King. He wrote in January that 'the Kingdom [...] is in a most wretched condition[.] [W]e generally want bread, and in Dublin fire by means whereof many perish'.⁴⁹ A month later, King was writing to the dowager Lady Southwell to ask her to repay a loan of one hundred pounds. He wrote that he needed the money 'for some reliefe for the Numerous Poor that are starving' and was forced to call in the debt because, he says, 'I have stretch'd my own Charity as far as I can well bear'.⁵⁰ What drove the Archbishop to call in his debts was also driving the popular prints into frenzied prose. In a lurid account to the *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 'Timothy Meanwell' wrote from Coleraine, amid rumours that the capital 'swarms with poor', that he had seen 'infinite Numbers starving in every Ditch in the midst of Raggs, Dirt and Nakedness'.⁵¹ According to Mr. Meanwell, there

⁴⁶ Munter, p. 151.

⁴⁷ *Dublin Journal*, 22–25 March 1729.

⁴⁸ Munter, p. 151. Ferguson (p. 170) cites *The Monthly Chronicle, Dublin Intelligence* 29 April 1729 and *A Letter to the People of Ireland* by 'M. B. Draper' (Dublin: Thomas Hume, 1729) in support of his argument that the crisis in Dublin 'now affected even the middle classes'.

⁴⁹ King to Lord Southwell, 30 January 1729, TCD MS 750/9, p. 103; cited in Ehrenpreis, III, 572.

⁵⁰ King to Lady Dowager Southwell, 4 February 1729, TCD MS 750/9, p. 106.

⁵¹ *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 12 July 1729, p. 94; 5 July 1729, p. 89. The article takes the form of a letter, spread across two consecutive issues, dated 'Colrain, June 26th. 1729.' A cover letter to the printer includes the observation 'I suppose your Letter from the *North Country*

was ‘a Famine raging in every part of the Kingdom’ – everywhere, that is, except in the pages of *A Modest Proposal*.

Rather than speak of the crisis outright, the *Proposal* fixates upon its pre-eminent sign. This is the image of ‘the *Streets*, the *Roads*, and *Cabbin-doors*’ of Dublin and the surrounding countryside ‘crowded with *Beggars* of the Female Sex, followed by three, four, or six Children, *all in Rags*, and importuning every Passenger for an Alms’ (p. 109). Such tableaux of suffering are not uncommon either in Swift’s writing or elsewhere, in 1729 or earlier. Swift’s sermon ‘On the Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland’ opens with a strikingly similar image of ‘Streets crouded with Beggars’ (IX, 199), as David Nokes observes.⁵² As mentioned in Chapter One, Swift’s 1720 proposal on *Irish Manufactures* deploys a similar rhetorical strategy, inviting anyone who ‘travels this Country’, to observe ‘the *Face* of Nature, or the *Faces*, and Habits, and Dwellings, of the *Natives*’ (IX, 21). In these examples, taken from a text published a decade before the *Modest Proposal* and from one that cannot be dated more accurately than ‘probably after 1720’, an arresting and pathetic image is not merely illustrative but deictic. Both texts use the visible sign of a crisis to gesture towards an underlying cause.

The *Modest Proposal* does something different. Although the Proposer sees female ‘*Beggars*’ and their children’s ‘*rags*’ as clearly as ‘Timothy Meanwell’, he does not read this as a sign of the acute crisis of famine, as the newspapers were doing in 1729. Nor does he connect it with a more chronic economic malaise as Swift’s other texts had done throughout the 1720s. In fact the *Proposal* refuses to assert any connection between the rise in the number of beggars and anything else that might be happening. The ‘prodigious Number of Children’ is not part of a wider problem but ‘*in the present deplorable State of the Kingdom*, a very great additional

Farmers, wherein they Remonstrate [*sic*] their Reasons for Transporting themselves into the *English Plantations* in America gave birth to the following letter’. The letter referred to was published in the *Journal* on 7 June and came from two Lisburn farmers named Andrew Trueman and Patrick Layfield. Swift’s *Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons* was also written in response to this letter as Ferguson (*Swift and Ireland*, Appendix B., pp. 191–5) has shown.

⁵² Nokes, ‘Swift and the Beggars’, p. 218.

Grievance' (p. 109). There is a famine, if that is what is meant by the reference to the Kingdom's '*present deplorable State*', and, as if that were not enough, the streets are also crowded with beggars. Unlike the other texts mentioned, the opening of the *Proposal* does not use these beggars to point to an underlying theme that will be made explicit as the text unfolds. The beggars are clearly symptomatic of a crisis, but that crisis is never named in the text. This image, then, is like the metaphor of devourment by landlords: while both are ultimately symbolic, it is left to the reader to supply a referent for the symbol.

Both figures are thus functionally identical with allegorical emblems. Theresa M. Kelley has described allegory as 'a narrative figure whose subject is technically absent'.⁵³ According to one strand of theory, the reader of allegory is given a task of making that subject present and is assisted in that work by what Paul de Man calls 'lurid figures'. Hughes's theory offers an equivalent when it refers to allegory as the '*Fairy Land of Poetry*', populated by 'Apparitions', by 'fictitious Persons or Beings, Creatures of the Poet's Brain'.⁵⁴ Classical theories of rhetoric placed such figures within a category labelled *phantasia*. Longinus says that this word has come to be used of 'passages where, inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience', and I would argue that the opening sentence of the *Proposal* represents such a passage.⁵⁵ Hughes's essay on Spenserian allegory describes what happens when readers encounter such passages and the disturbing phantasms that populate them. When presented with such 'lurid figures' a reader is 'of necessity driven to seek for another Meaning under these wild Types and Shadows'. Spenser's allegory tends to aid the reader in that necessary search for 'another Meaning' by giving helpful names like 'Error' to such figures. The reader of the *Proposal*, however, is left without such hints. As shown by this chapter's exploration of extant readings of the metaphor of devourment by landlords, the *Proposal* actually encourages its

⁵³ Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Hughes, p. xxxiv, p. xxxvi.

⁵⁵ Kelley, p. 19, quoting Longinus, *On the Sublime*.

audience to misread its figures and, by extension, the crisis to which they refer.

Swift's text, then, is a kind of booby-trap, engineered to be misread. One can only ever misread the *Proposal*: Swift's text forces a misreading of its own historical situation which one arrives at by misreading the text itself. The act of reading the *Proposal* leads to a consideration of the massive and collaborative error that is its context, and the misprision of textual meaning is a figure that serves to indict those implicated in it. In the *Proposal*'s time, a perceived misreading of the situation was produced by John Browne, and he was indicted for his error by that formidable exegete, the journalist of the *Dublin Intelligence*. The confrontation between the two is remarkable for being symptomatic of the climate of reading error within which this chapter locates *A Modest Proposal* and for the fact that Swift's text serves as an intermediary in the encounter. It will be related in detail.

November 1729 seems to have been a difficult month for Richard Dickson. On Saturday the fifteenth he was almost killed when 'several Officers at Mace, attended by a Gang of their Followers, assembled themselves in an unlawful Manner' at his house. There they 'declar'd, with the most horrible oaths and Imprecations, an Intention to Murder the said Dickson, which, 'tis believ'd they would have attempted but for the concourse of honest People, who gather'd to know the reason of such uncommon Proceedings'.⁵⁶ As if all this were not enough, it seems that Dickson still had plenty of unsold copies of *A Modest Proposal* to shift and a grudge against John Browne to discharge. On the same day that his life was threatened he attempted to do both. One week after *A Modest Proposal* was first advertised in Dickson's paper, the *Dublin Intelligence* carried this item:

What further Worthy that we have to communicate at Present, is, That since the Publication of the Modest Proposal for Eating up our Children, for fear they should want, said to be written by D—— S——, a worthy gentleman (John Browne, Esq;) has now found out a much better Provision both for them and their anguishing Parents,

⁵⁶ *Dublin Intelligence*, 18 November 1729.

in *shewing*, in an Excellent, Accurate Treatise, Dedicated to the Lord Bishop of Elphin, *The Benefits which arise to a Trading People from Navigable Rivers, &c.*⁵⁷

While the journalist pays Swift formal tribute by preserving the fiction of D—— S——’s long-lost anonymity, John Browne receives the snub of being named in parentheses after an initial and ostensibly honourable mention as a ‘worthy gentleman’. If this is meant as a slight it is not a very effective one, since Browne had published the treatise on navigable rivers under his own name. It does seem, however, that Dickson meant to insult Browne and his tract, which he does incorporating it into a reading of Swift’s pamphlet that differs from the one he had offered the previous week. Together, the *Intelligence*’s two consecutive readings form a template for much of the subsequent interpretation of Swift’s text. In the *Intelligence* item for 8 November, as I have shown, Swift’s *Proposal* becomes a rather crude burlesque on landlords. The following week his text is pressed into service as a satire on contemporary schemes of poor relief, or at least a particular project offered to the public by John Browne. The journalist places Browne’s plan in ironic relation to the genocidal designs of *A Modest Proposal*, lauding it as ‘a much better Provision’ – perhaps a case of damning with inflated praise.

The newspaper item goes on to list the other attributes of Browne’s text with increasing sarcasm. Not only does the pamphleteer account ‘ingeniously [...] for the Origin of Loughs and Bogs’, he also outlines a modest proposal of his own. This is a ‘Method whereby the Kingdom may reap the most abundant Advantage in the Inhabitants, (who Deal in Staple Commodities) being enabled to Gain 46l. per Cent’.⁵⁸ Browne’s ‘Method’

⁵⁷ *Dublin Intelligence*, 15 November 1729. Although he is often referred to as Sir John Browne in the secondary literature, he is called ‘John Browne Esq.’ in contemporary sources, including the title page of the treatise on navigable rivers. Brigid Clesham explains the reason for this: ‘He was not called Sir John Browne during his lifetime because although the baronetcy was created in 1636, it was not assumed by the Browne family until 1777, when John Browne’s second son, another John, formally became the 7th baronet’. (Brigid Clesham, ‘The Browne–Miller Duel of 1748’, *Journal of the South Mayo Family Research Society*, 6 (1993), 19–21, p. 19. This article can also be found at <<http://www.mayoalive.com/Mag0696/TheDuel.htm>> [accessed 24 June 2003]). I am grateful to Gerard M. Delaney of the South Mayo Family Research Association for supplying me with a copy of this article.

⁵⁸ *Dublin Intelligence*, 15 November 1729.

proposed the construction of a canal connecting the Liffey with the Shannon, and a scheme of improvements to make both rivers navigable by barge. This would represent the beginnings of an effective transport infrastructure, and schemes similar to Browne's had been widely promoted since the beginning of the century as being more feasible than building an extensive network of roads in a country that was 'over-run with Bogs'.⁵⁹ The House of Commons had been petitioned about improving the navigation of the Shannon in 1709 and had received a report recommending the construction of a canal between Newry and Lough Neagh in 1703.⁶⁰ Another advantage of such projects was that the construction of waterways would provide employment for the poor, as recommended by a pamphlet of 1723.⁶¹ Such public works could even be used as a quasi-official form of poor relief in a country where no equivalent to England's Elizabethan poor laws had ever been instituted, and where, during the famine of 1727–9, poor relief 'almost completely depended on private and local charity'.⁶² In the absence of any discernible progress on either of these fronts, however, people like Browne began to lay their own plans.

His treatise suggests that a company be incorporated to oversee the project and stipulates that books should be opened, one at '*Daniel Kennedy's House in Athlone*, and another, at the *Old Globe Coffee-House*' in Dublin, for taking subscriptions until the necessary sum of £11,000 had been raised.⁶³ Now that Joseph Addison had brought practical philosophy into the coffee houses of London, John Browne was attempting to establish the economics of the private finance initiative among the chattering classes of Dublin. Such bourgeois practicality was matched by a genteel loftiness of tone and ambition. This combination – perhaps as much as the factors

⁵⁹ John Browne, *The Benefits which arise to a Trading People from Navigable Rivers. To which are added, some Considerations on the Origins of Loughs and Bogs; and a Scheme, for the establishment of a Company, to make the River Shannon navigable, humbly offered to the Publick* (Dublin: S. Powell, 1729), p. 26.

⁶⁰ Edith Mary Johnston Liik, ed., *History of the Irish Parliament 1692–1800: Commons, Constituencies and Statutes*, 6 vols (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2002), I, 228.

⁶¹ Anon, *A Letter to a Member of Parliament, Concerning the Implying and Providing for the Poor* (Dublin: Aaron Rhames, 1723). This tract has been attributed to Francis Hutchinson, Bishop of Down and Connor.

⁶² Dickson, 'The Gap in Famines', p. 104.

⁶³ Browne, *Navigable Rivers*, pp. 35–6.

usually identified in the secondary literature – may have earned Browne the scorn of his peers. His high-mindedness is shown in another of his tracts, dedicated to Swift, where he argues for a comprehensive infusion of Addisonian principles into Dublin café society. Browne points out ‘the Advantage which might arise to the Common-wealth from making the proper Use of these publick Meeting-places’ and wishes that his fellow citizens would leave off ‘their Family affairs to their private Interviews’ and discuss instead ‘the State of the nation, or of *Europe* in general, War and Peace [...] History, Polite Learning, Trade and Commerce’. If this practice were adopted, the coffee-houses of Dublin would be ‘as so many Academies for our Youth’.⁶⁴ Judging by the immediate reception of the one tract he put his name to, Browne’s plans for improvement, whether in the form of civil or social engineering, were not received with enthusiasm. Dickson’s *Dublin Intelligence* was so scathing about his proposal to connect the Liffey with the Shannon as to foresee that ‘it will not only support Thousands in Want, but Enable many to live in Grandeur, who now Dream of little else than being settled but at a Degree above Poverty’ – a case of damning with outrageously inflated praise.⁶⁵

Whether Browne received such notice because he had done something to upset Dickson personally we shall never know, but the likelihood is that the bookseller was making an opportunistic sally at an easy target. In July 1724, Browne had testified to the English Privy Council on behalf of William Wood’s copper farthings and halfpence, and the fact that he was subsequently attacked by Swift was probably enough to make him fair game for the Dublin print trade.⁶⁶ Swift’s sermon ‘On Doing Good’ attacks him indirectly, and the Drapier’s third letter names him outright. Although the Drapier’s supporters never forgave Browne, it seems that Swift did. Browne wrote to him in April 1728 to ask that his name be removed from subsequent editions of the text. In the same letter, which

⁶⁴ [John Browne], ‘Dedication – To the Reverend *DEAN SWIFT*’, *A Reply to the Observer on Seasonable Remarks* (Dublin: S. Powell, 1728), [A4^v], B1.

⁶⁵ *Dublin Intelligence*, 15 November 1729.

⁶⁶ *The Drapier’s Letters*, ed. Davis, pp. 226–8 gives the fullest available account of Browne; subsequent references to him are adapted from this source.

seems to have secured Swift's compliance, Browne also asks for his cooperation in another matter of more recent concern. He begs not to be exposed as the author of certain 'little books' he had sent to Swift not long ago.⁶⁷ The little books were *Seasonable Remarks on Trade* and *An Essay on Trade in General, and that of Ireland in Particular*, which Browne had had bound in Russian leather and sent to Swift with a gilt inscription on the cover.⁶⁸ Swift seems to have honoured this second request, as Browne's anonymity remained intact in 1729 when he published his *Remarks*, his *Essay on Trade* and three other pieces as *A Collection of Tracts concerning the present State of Ireland*.

This acquiescence may seem surprising, given the hatred that Swift is supposed to have professed for Browne. According to Clayton D. Lein, Swift 'publicly condemned' him 'as a signal example of Englishmen who glutted Ireland for petty advancements'. Browne's family had actually been in Ireland longer than that of Swift, who consequently did not condemn him for being an Englishman. It seems however that at least one of his tracts forms part of a campaign against Browne, whereby 'Swift and his friends [...] actively countered almost everything Browne published.'⁶⁹ As Ferguson discovered, Swift had already written *A Short View of the State of Ireland* in answer to Browne's *Seasonable Remarks* by the time Browne wrote to him asking to keep his authorship of that tract a secret.⁷⁰ And, as Lein went on to demonstrate, the *Short View* is only one of several extant replies to, and refutations of, Browne's writings on Irish trade and coinage.⁷¹

As diagnosed by contemporaries and restated by Swift scholars, the problem that caused Browne to attract so many counterblasts was his

⁶⁷ John Browne to Swift, 4 April 1728, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 174–77, 174. The text of the third letter in Faulkner's 1735 *Works* emends 'Brown' to 'B—'. Browne seems to have venerated Swift. He left an endowment to fund an annual celebration of his birthday, and erected a monument to him in his home town of the Neale in Co. Mayo (Davis, *Drapier's Letters*, p. 226 and p. 36 n.).

⁶⁸ Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, p. 146, n. 24, who also points out that Browne published a version of this letter in pamphlet form, *A Letter to the Author of A Short View of the State of Ireland* (Dublin: S. Powell, 1728); Herbert Davis, *Prose* V, p. xxxiv, gives details of the presentation copy, which is now in the University Library, Cambridge.

⁶⁹ Clayton D. Lein, 'Jonathan Swift and the Population of Ireland', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 8 (1975), 431–453, p. 439.

⁷⁰ Ferguson, Appendix B, p. 189.

⁷¹ Lein, 'Swift and the Population of Ireland', pp. 439–43 gives a summary of the dispute between Browne and his opponents and the texts through which it was waged.

optimism. In *Seasonable Remarks on Trade*, Ehrenpreis says, Browne ‘emphasized the potential wealth of the kingdom in such a way as to overshadow his admission of her present poverty’.⁷² Such misplaced emphasis may explain the *Short View*’s condemnation of any ‘Native’ or ‘Inhabitant’ who claimed Ireland as ‘a rich and flourishing Kingdom’ as ‘either ignorant to Stupidity; or a Man-pleaser’ (XII, 12). Browne may well have been regarded as such a man-pleaser, but Swift’s opposition to his politics may have been overstated. Lein argues that Swift and his allies found Browne ‘odious’, and identifies as a major source of disagreement between the two parties Browne’s tendency to overstate the actual as well as the potential wealth of the kingdom, in human as well as monetary resources. Browne’s estimate of the population of Ireland at around two million was a major bone of contention between Browne on one side, and, on the other, Swift, his friend Arthur Dobbs, and some other anonymous refuters of Browne’s figures. The Modest Proposer picks over this bone when he calculates the ‘Number of Souls in *Ireland*’ to be ‘one million and a half’. The higher figure, as Lein points out, was ‘probably more representative of the general opinion’, but Swift and his allies seem to have apprehended that recent drastic increases in emigration must have lowered the figure by almost half a million.⁷³

Neither this demographic dispute nor Browne himself, however, was as much a target for Swift’s odium as they have been made out to be. Browne’s reputation had already been ruined once by Swift in the Drapier’s third letter. He could easily have done so again by naming him as the author of *Seasonable Remarks on Trade*. Rather than do this, however, Swift’s attitude towards Browne seems to have become benevolent, even after he learned that Browne was the author of the tract that had driven him to the ‘Indignation’ (XII, 12) of the *Short View*. In addition to his compliance with the requests made of him in Browne’s letter, some additional evidence of Swift’s benign attitude survives in annotations he made in his presentation copy of Browne’s two essays. Under the title of *Seasonable Remarks*, a

⁷² Ehrenpreis, III, 573.

⁷³ Lein, p. 431, p. 439 p. 443.

hand that may or may not be Swift's has written 'an excellent pamphlet'. The annotations that are definitely by Swift can be scathing, but his bitterness is directed less often at Browne than at England: to a list of commodities exempt from trade restrictions, Swift pencils in such additions as 'Oranges, Lemons, Tea, Coffee &c. of Irish growth'; he marks another point as 'disputed' and of another he asks 'whom will you persuade? / no Englishman'. Next to Browne's suggestion that the dead be buried in 'home-spun Linnen', however, Swift has written that 'This hint, happily started by Mr. Brown, hath since been successfully put into execution' (V, 256, 257). So it seems that rather than despise Browne, Swift actually credited him as the author of a good idea that had been put into practice.

What Swift means by his comment that Browne's proposal has 'been put into execution' is puzzling – especially given the evidence that the use of Irish linens at funerals was an idea that first took hold in Dublin no earlier than June 1729. Sarah Foster writes that it was Thomas Prior who 'transformed the wearing of Irish linen scarves into a political statement'. Prior, whose *List of the Absentees of Ireland* is published 'as taken in the months of May and June 1729', in turn attributed the 'laudable Practice of using Linen Scarfs and Crapes at Funerals' to 'the Inhabitants of *Belfast*'⁷⁴ News reports from November 1729 confirm that the proposal for using Irish linen at funerals was indeed being put into execution in Dublin and that the trend had started only recently. William Conolly, long-time speaker of the Irish Commons and the 'wealthiest man in Ireland', was buried on what the *Dublin Gazette* for Tuesday 4 –Saturday 8 November calls Tuesday last.⁷⁵ A week later the *Dublin Gazette* reported that all the mourners' scarves were of 'fine *Linnen of Irish Manufacture*', a gesture that was intended as 'a *Publick Benefit to the Kingdom*'.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Sarah Foster, 'Buying Irish: Consumer Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Dublin', *History Today*, 47 (1997), 44–51, p. 46; Thomas Prior, *A List of the Absentees of Ireland, and the yearly Value of their Estates and Incomes Spent Abroad. With Observations on the Present State and Condition of that Kingdom* (Dublin: R. Gunne, 1729), p. 77.

⁷⁵ Fabricant, *Swift's Landscape*, p. 103. This and the following page give an account of Conolly's life and Swift's animosity towards him.

⁷⁶ *Dublin Gazette*, 4–8 November 1729.

The *Dublin Intelligence* would laud the same practice on 8 November as a ‘*Project* which must be of the utmost Advantage to this Kingdom’. It cites the example of a Miss Fitzpatrick whose funeral had taken place on ‘Tuesday Night last’ and names hers as the fourth corpse to have been interred in this patriotic manner.⁷⁷ As mentioned above, the *Intelligence* makes this point just before launching into an appraisal of ‘the late Apparent Spirit of *Patriotism*’ that had produced *A Modest Proposal*, and one week before returning to Swift’s text to highlight the ludicrousness of Browne’s proposal about canals. It seems then that *A Modest Proposal* comes into being at a moment when certain gestures are being offered for public reading but when they are also being misread in confusing but creative ways. Being an allegory designed to be misread as a satire, the *Proposal* suits this climate of misprision.

When read as satire, Swift’s text is not only adept at producing scapegoats; it enables its readers to produce scapegoats of their own. The project of reading the *Proposal* in modern criticism amounts to a progressive narrowing of the target of blame: first England, then the ‘wretched condition of Ireland’, then ‘the Irish themselves’ were made to bear the burden of sin. Most recently, Robert Phiddian has identified the *Proposal*’s contemporary readership as the scapegoat. The *Proposal*, he says, was aimed at ‘Dublin merchants, Cork clergymen, Limerick gentry, being vexed both by a hard look at their own condition and at the condition of those who depend on them’.⁷⁸ My reading of the *Proposal* via the *Dublin Intelligence*, however, has shown that one Dublin merchant chose not to accept the burden of blame but to pass it on to a member of the Mayo gentry. Rather than end with Swift’s contemporaries, his Irish readers, the search for a suitable scapegoat continues among them. Rawson has remarked that ‘cannibalism is what other people do’ and the culpability figured in the *Proposal* by the cannibal act is always being referred to others – as much

⁷⁷ *Dublin Intelligence*, 8 November 1729. Of the three other corpses, one belonged to William Conolly and the other two were ‘Col. Groves, [...] and Mrs. Masson, Wife to Mr. Masson, an Eminent Clothier in Essex Street’.

⁷⁸ Phiddian, ‘Have You Eaten Yet?’, p. 621.

within the historical crisis that produced Swift's text as within the *Proposal* itself.

That crisis produced individual and collective scapegoats. John Browne, sent out to bear the sins of Richard Dickson, is an example of the former, but landlords have proved the most enduring candidates for the latter office. This process of buck-passing is an object lesson in the uses of satire. That writers use satire to expose vice or folly is such an anciently established premise as to have become a truism. It is less frequently observed, however, that readers also have a use for satire. Readers habitually utilize satire to exonerate themselves from any charge of collusion in the foolish or vicious behaviour that the writer has exposed. Long before *A Modest Proposal* Swift's writing exhibits an awareness of, and a resistance to, being used by readers as such an instrument of self-exculpation – or to put it more concretely, as '*a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own*' (I, 140). When it functions as such a magic mirror, satire offers readers a kind of alibi. It is thus ultimately a comforting way of reading, and not many of Swift's texts, certainly not *A Modest Proposal*, tend to get labelled as cosy reads. This chapter is only following the lead of several other studies of Swift's text when it notes that the experience of reading the *Proposal* is in fact intensely uncomfortable and even discomfiting. Indeed, it is on the definition of Swift's text as satire that such critical discomfort has tended to focus. Rawson maintains that the *Proposal* 'exceeds or transcends the boundaries of satiric or hortatory discourse', just as Lockwood locates the text within 'that peculiarly Swiftian kind of satire that is constantly seeking to go beyond the conventions of the genre "satire" into some undefined but more richly expressive, more genuinely affective form'.⁷⁹ This chapter suggests that allegory represents such a form. It is by relinquishing the exculpatory function of satire that the *Proposal* becomes more genuinely affective.

⁷⁹ Rawson, 'Killing the Poor', p. 112; Lockwood, 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*', p. 265.

V

In spite of the *Dublin Intelligence*'s sarcastic effusions, John Browne's pamphlet on navigable rivers does not promise to enable the poor to 'live in Grandeur'. Although it does not linger over what the Modest Proposer calls '*present Distresses*' Browne does cite the 'late Scarcity of Corn' as proving the need to improve transport links between the coast and the interior. He was not the only one to turn his thoughts to canals during the lean months of 1729. There seems in fact to have been an explosion of texts concerning the transportation of coals to Dublin by water. One of these is dated 24 September 1729; another bears the dateline 13 November 1729, placing it within two days the *Dublin Intelligence*'s attack on the canal scheme of John Browne.⁸⁰ A further canal proposal claims to have been written by the Drapier.⁸¹ One reason for this sudden profusion lies in Archbishop King's observation that over the winter of 1728–9 many had begun to 'perish' in the capital for want of 'fire'. An equally strong motivation, however, can be inferred from the fact that in 1730 the Irish Parliament, itself driven 'by the need to provide the rapidly growing capital with a cheap and reliable supply of food, and particularly fuel' would begin 'a policy of canal-building by appointing Commissioners of Navigation'.⁸²

⁸⁰ Francis Seymour, *Remarks on the Scheme for Supplying the City of Dublin with Coals from the County of Tyrone: In a Letter to Thomas Burgh Esq; His Majesty's Engineer and Surveyor-General* ([n. place or pub, but dated 'Belfast Septem 24th 1729 on p. 7]); 'Patriophilus', *Considerations on the Act for Encouraging In-Land Navigation in Ireland* (Dublin: William Smith, 1729).

⁸¹ *The Case of many Thousand poor Inhabitants of the City of Dublin: In a Letter to a Worthy Member of Parliament, concerning the extravagant Rates and Price of Coal in this City, with a Recommendation for the importing Kilkenny-Coals here, from Ross and Waterford, and other Ports of this Kingdom* (Dublin: Christopher Dickson, 1729). Davis (*Drapier's Letters*, Appendix IV, pp. 384–5) points out that this was a reprint of two letters from the *Dublin Weekly Journal*. All the pamphlets on the coal controversy mentioned here are collected in volume 87 of the Halliday Collection in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.

⁸² Johnston Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament*, I, 228. The account given here notes that 'Schemes for improving nearly every potentially navigable river in Ireland received enthusiastic support from the local gentry, but destructive competition for scarce public and private resources ensured that projects were underfunded and that they either proceeded very slowly or were never finished. The system was still incomplete in 1800 when the British and Irish Parliaments were subsumed into the Parliament of the United Kingdom'.

Word of this policy must have been in the air over the summer and autumn of 1729. In May, John Knightley announced his intention to determine ‘whether it is practicable or no to supply the City of Dublin with Coals from within this Kingdom’ at or below the rate of fourteen shillings per ton. To help him in this task he received subscriptions from such influential figures as Archbishop Boulter, William Conolly and Marmaduke Coghill.⁸³ So it seems that John Browne, who had an ironworks in County Mayo, was not the only proposer to make a suggestion with one eye on the public good and another on private benefits.

Over the summer, a separate argument was being conducted in the pages of Faulkner’s *Dublin Journal*. On 19 July, *Pue’s Occurrences* published a proposal to construct a navigable passage between Newry and Lough Neagh for the purpose of transporting coal, and to collect a subscription of £20,000 with which to fund the project. The following Saturday, Faulkner’s *Journal* published a set of queries relating to this scheme. They pointed out that subscribers stood to make ‘upwards of 50l. per Cent Profit’ from the enterprise and asked whether ‘the Proposer has not so much the publick as private Interest in View?’⁸⁴ This was a question that Browne had sought to anticipate in his own canal-building proposal, announcing it to be ‘a Business in which I am far from designing any particular advantage to my self, excepting only, the Honour of being instrumental in bringing about an Undertaking so advantageous to my country’.⁸⁵ It hardly needs to be pointed out how redolent of the Modest Proposer such denials of self-interest are.

In spite of such intriguing resemblances, Swift’s text should not be labelled as a satire of proposals like those of Browne. *A Modest Proposal* is in fact part of a sudden proliferation of texts produced by a single problem, best described as a chronic failure of circulation. This stimulated a debate on

⁸³ BL Add. MS 21,134 Papers relating to the import and export trade of Ireland, 1670–1751 (vol. II), fol 35^r.

⁸⁴ *Dublin Journal*, 26–29 July 1729. In the issue for 23–26 August, three men, Hercules Rowley, Richard Wingfield and Eyre Evans, came forward as the authors of the proposal and defended it against the anonymous querist. As mentioned in Chapter Three above, Rowley was one of the chief opponents of the proposal for establishing a national bank.

⁸⁵ Browne, *Navigable Rivers*, p. 35.

how to achieve a desirable circulation of goods, of money or of people through the country. One proposal published in 1729 tries to stimulate the flow of cash around the kingdom by establishing a chain of ‘Lombards’. At these state-run pawnbrokers, ‘Jewels, Plate, Household-goods, Manufactures and suchlike unperishable Goods’ would be exchanged for cash with the aim of increasing the amount of money in circulation.⁸⁶ The canal proposals of Browne and others are preoccupied with the circulation of goods, for the very good reason that the movement of food and especially fuel into Dublin seems to have come to an almost total halt in the summer of 1729. The Modest Proposer, by contrast, focuses on the circulation of people. His contribution to the debate is his promise to ‘greatly lessen the *Number of Papists*’ among his readers (114).

One interesting fact about this promise is that the Proposer makes it twice – once in connection with Rabelais’s observation about ‘*Fish being a prolific Dyet*’ (112) and once when he names Catholics as ‘the principal Breeders of the Nation, as well as our most dangerous Enemies’ (114). Other key elements of the *Proposal* are doubled, and this tendency is rooted in the text’s allegorical method. The Proposer speaks otherwise, meaning that his utterances have more than one meaning and that they must be read in other ways. He assists his readers in this task, forcing them to read certain statements twice by the simple expedient of saying them twice. The Proposer also speaks through others, and what is routinely called a ventriloquial technique might profitably be reconsidered as an allegorical one.

⁸⁶ David Bindon, *A Scheme for Supplying Industrious Men with Money to carry on their Trades, and for better Providing the Poor of Ireland* (Dublin: Thomas Hume, 1729), p. 13. No author’s name is given on the title page, but the dedication is signed by Bindon. Herbert Davis (*The Drapier’s Letters*, 1935, Appendix II, p. 364) points out that Bindon wrote two pamphlets against Wood’s halfpence: *Some Considerations on the Attempts made to Pass Mr Wood’s Brass Money in Ireland* (Dublin: Pressick Rider and Thomas Harbin, 1724) and *Some Reasons shewing the Necessity the People of Ireland are under, for continuing to refuse Mr. Wood’s Coinage* (Dublin: [n. pub], 1724) (discussed in Chapter Two above). The first of these is reproduced by Davis in full, pp. 240–247. In May 1729, Bindon spoke at a public hearing on the issue of currency and argued for the establishment of a mint in Ireland, and he made sure that his comments were publicised by having a summary printed in Faulkner’s *Dublin Journal*, May 13–17 and reprinted in the *Dublin Gazette*, 20–24 May. Bindon also appears on the subscriber list for Faulkner’s 1735 *Works*. In 1738, as Christopher Fauske points out, Bindon published a pamphlet on the need to promote the British and Irish linen industries (*Jonathan Swift and the Church of Ireland*, pp. 85–6).

Preferring not to eat, the Proposer appoints not one but two surrogate cannibals, the Formosan and the Native American. He clarifies the extent of his scheme twice, insisting that it is not aimed only at the children of ‘*professed Beggars*’ or, as he later calls them ‘those, who are Beggars by Profession’ (109, 117). The proposal is in fact designed to accommodate all such children whose parents ‘are Beggars in Effect’, or, as he says earlier, ‘the whole Number of Infants [...] who are born of Parents, in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our Charity in the Streets’ (117, 110). There is nothing accidental about these doublings. The two comic cannibal grotesques would, as I have suggested, provide two good reasons for contemporary readers to conceive of the *Proposal*’s humour as loudly outrageous as well quietly outraged. Similarly, the Proposer reiterates his determination to deal with ‘Beggars in Effect’ as well as ‘*professed Beggars*’ in order to draw attention to a detail that takes his scheme into the realm of the absurd. By repeating his criterion of effective poverty, the Proposer emphasises a key point, one that is surprisingly easy to overlook, and this is the sheer extent of his design.

Two thirds of the population of Ireland will fall within the ambit of the cannibal scheme. The Proposer calculates that there are ‘a round Million of Creatures in human Figure, throughout this Kingdom’ who are maintained at a cost of two million pounds to the public (117). The one hundred thousand children to be sold and eaten annually will be drawn from the ranks of this ‘round Million’. The *Proposal* does not encompass hopeless cases, who are ‘every Day *dying* [...] as fast as can be reasonably expected’ (113). Its estimate of the proportion of the population that is not ‘Beneficial to the Publick’, as the title has it, is therefore an astoundingly liberal one, which can be shown by comparison with a contemporary equivalent. In his 1729 proposal for the establishment of Lombards, David Bindon computed that ‘of the 1,500,000 Souls in *Ireland*, at least One in Twenty, are in several Degrees of little or no Benefit to the Publick, for want of Employment’.⁸⁷ The Proposer revises this estimate up from one in twenty to two in three. He makes no bones about his generosity, cheerfully

⁸⁷ *A Scheme for Supplying Industrious Men with Money*, p. 9.

admitting that ‘the Bulk of Farmers, Cottagers and Labourers’ will be eligible to sell their children. Often when one of Swift’s speakers refers to ‘the Bulk’ of a given population, then the word carries with it a certain amount of baggage, as the second chapter of this thesis has shown. In dismissing the ‘Bulk’ of Gulliver’s ‘Natives’ as ‘the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin’, the King of Brobdingnag is made to act as a vessel for a certain disgusted impulse against crowds and majorities. The sermon on Wood’s halfpence manages to talk about ‘the bulk or mass’ of the Irish people whilst excluding the majority of the population from its frame of reference. Ironically, it is the Modest Proposer who refers to ‘the Bulk’ in a fairly neutral way to mean the numerical majority. This fact has interesting ramifications regarding the fringe benefits of the Proposer’s plan, especially his announcement that a reduction in the number of Catholics in Ireland will be ‘one other Collateral Advantage’. This promise cannot be read literally with any degree of comfort, and Swift’s text offers several escape routes from the idea that the Proposer might mean what he says. It is important that both statements of this benefit come after the *Proposal* unveils its central metaphor. Unlike the 1735 printing of a Swiftian proposal from 1732, *A Modest Proposal* does not include an editorial decree that ‘*The Reader will perceive the following Treatise to be altogether Ironical*’.⁸⁸ The 1729 *Proposal* does, however, include the trope of devourment of tenants by landlords, and in most readings of Swift’s text this acts like an instruction to interpret figuratively whatever ramifications follow on from the initial act. Another way to say this would be that by forcing readers to apprehend two coherent levels of signification, the metaphor initiates the process of allegorical reading.

As well as a point of entry the metaphor of devourment acts as a safety-valve in the text, providing release from the utterance’s literal

⁸⁸ *A Proposal for an Act of Parliament to pay of the Debt of the Nation, without taxing the Subject, by which the Number of landed Gentry, and Substantial Farmers will be considerably increased, and no one Person will be the poorer, or contribute one Farthing to the Charge*, *Prose* XII, 207–212, p. 207. This instruction seems to have been added either by Swift or Faulkner to the fourth volume of the 1735 *Works*. One reason for this might be that the proposal, which involves selling off church lands to pay the national debt, lacks the *Modest Proposal*’s inbuilt warnings not to be taken at face value and could conceivably have been read as a straightforward proposal.

meaning. Ultimately, however, that release must be provided not by the text but by its reader. Like all the other collateral advantages it offers, this one cannot be enjoyed until the proposal itself has been implemented – and this is the task that the Proposer leaves up to his readers. And unless we can provide straw men to do the reading for us, the figurative meaning of the Proposer's remarks about reducing the number of Catholics tends to compound the literal meaning rather than relieve it. Thomas Lockwood chooses the former option in asserting that the Proposer's 'unfeeling manner' is a 'function' of his readers' 'universal moral indifference'. He characterizes the *Proposal's* readers as 'an audience who have evidently lost all capacity to register ordinary human responses' and adds that '[w]hat is monstrous about the *Modest Proposal* [...] is not the putative author but his putative audience'.⁸⁹ In attempting to move from a putative audience to a profile of the *Proposal's* actual reading context this chapter has shown that moral concern, not indifference, was the universal quality among Swift's contemporaries. They were in fact deeply moved by the poverty they witnessed and the *Modest Proposal* is, among other things, a mockery of the schemes they proposed to alleviate the suffering that intensified between the harvests of 1727 and 1729. It is also a mockery of the determined efforts that had been made to reduce the number of Catholics in Ireland since the Williamite settlement.

In 1731–2 the perceived failure of those efforts was summarized in a series of reports commissioned by the Irish House of Lords, known collectively as the Report on the State of Popery.⁹⁰ An initial report covering counties Galway and Mayo was taken into consideration on 6 December. It was followed by a more general report, compiled by 'magistrates and Anglican clergy throughout the country', containing figures of the number of Catholic priests and churches to be found in each

⁸⁹ 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*: An Interpretation', p. 258.

⁹⁰ 'Report on the State of Popery, Ireland, 1731', *Archivum Hibernicum*, 1 (1912), 10–27, continued in *ibid.*, 2 (1913), 108–156; 3 (1914) 124–159 and 4 (1915), 131–177; also in *Journals of the House of Lords*, 8 vols (Dublin: William Sleater, 1779–1800), III, 167, 169–171, 207–211. Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, pp. 150–152 summarizes and interprets the findings of these reports.

diocese.⁹¹ When Lord Primate Boulter summarized the general report to the House on 8 March 1732, he announced a ‘Disproportion between Mass-Houses and Churches, *Romish* Ecclesiasticks and Protestant Ministers, and *Popish* and *Protestant* Schools’. He and his fellow commissioners were ‘humbly of Opinion’ that this disparity was ‘so great as to give your Lordships the most just and reasonable Apprehensions of the Continuance and Increase of the Popish Interest in Ireland’.⁹² At this time, the Lords were not the only ones to turn their minds to this problem of ‘Disproportion’. Within the first three months of 1732, for example, an anonymous Dublin-printed pamphlet commented that ‘*Popery* is of late become the subject of most Conversations’. The sentiment, if not the tone, is similar to that of a pamphleteer who professed himself during the coal crisis of 1729 to be ‘delighted of late, to find that the Supplying of our selves with our own Coals is become the Subject of most Conversations’.⁹³

By indicating that something was to be done at the level of government, the Lords’ Reports had undoubtedly helped to make the growth of Popery a ubiquitous talking-point, just as the Commons had done for canals by proposing to appoint Commissioners of Navigation in 1729. Successively, the popular imagination was exercised by a dearth of coals and an excess of Catholics. The 1732 pamphlet acknowledges that the Report on the State of Popery had succeeded both in setting an agenda and creating a crisis. It refers to the first set of reports, the ‘Accounts given of *Popery* in *Galway* and *Mayo*’, and their tendency to alarm ‘many Gentlemen’ who had been ‘inclin’d to form their Judgements of the whole Kingdom’ from those accounts.⁹⁴ Rather than occasion the preoccupation or act as the sole cause for the gentlemen’s alarm, however, the Report on the

⁹¹ *Journals of the House of Lords*, III, 169; Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 150.

⁹² *Journals of the House of Lords*, III, 200.

⁹³ [Anon.], *Animadversions on several proposals now under consideration, for supplying the City of Dublin with Coals from within the Kingdom of Ireland: In a Letter address’d to all Orders and Degrees of the Inhabitants thereof* ([Dublin]: [n. pub], [1729]), p. 1.

⁹⁴ [Anon.], *Scheme of the Proportions which the Protestants of Ireland may probably bear to the Papists; humbly offer’d to the Publick* ([Dublin]: [n. pub], 1732), p. 2; p. 7. The year of publication is given on the title page as ‘1731–2’, which indicates that the pamphlet was published sometime between 1 January and 25 March 1732. This means that its author may have been aware of the second, general report which was discussed on 8 March, although he seems more concerned to address worries created by the first one.

State of Popery was itself responding to a pre-existing anxiety, one that the Modest Proposer plays upon with his promise to ‘lessen the *Number of Papists*’. While it appeared to confirm a suspicion that the Proposer takes for granted – that the number in question was unacceptably high – the Report failed to resolve another demographic debate. This controversy was connected with the one entered into by the Modest Proposer when he estimates the total population of Ireland to be one and a half million. In addition to this overall figure, another disputed statistic impinges upon the Proposer’s calculations.

The question left unanswered by the Modest Proposer in 1729 and by the Lords’ Committees in 1731 concerned the total ratio of Catholics to Protestants in Ireland. The Lords had succeeded in compiling an overview of the institutional strength of Catholicism in the kingdom but they did not address the crucial question of numbers. By offering a *Scheme of the Proportions which the Protestants of Ireland may probably bear to the Papists*, an anonymous pamphlet of 1732 attempted to supply the defect with a reasonably accurate estimate; a ratio that ‘may probably’ obtain, that would suffice ‘until more accurate can be had’.⁹⁵ Such concern with ratios, although it came to the fore at the beginning of the 1730s, was not of course a recent preoccupation. The relative proportion of Catholics to Protestants had been the subject of speculative estimates for two generations. As S. J. Connolly remarks, the ratio had been set as high as twenty to one by Oliver Plunkett in 1670 and as low as two to one by Sir Richard Cox in 1706. Writing in the midst of renewed concern in 1731, Boulter sets the figure at five to one although he conceded that others put it at seven to one.⁹⁶ Perhaps the most influential estimate, however, had been made by Sir William Petty in his *Political Anatomy of Ireland* in 1672, when he settled on a ratio of eight to three.

The author of the 1732 *Scheme of the Proportions* uses Petty’s figure as a benchmark. It is a starting-point from which to measure demographic change and a statistical foundation from which to challenge certain

⁹⁵ *Scheme of the Proportions*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 144.

exaggerated estimates of Catholic numerical strength that were being made in the wake of the 1731 Report. He confesses himself ‘Sensible, that there are many who think the *Papists* 10 to 1’. His pamphlet demonstrates that such pessimistic estimates, being extrapolated from the figures for Galway and Mayo, are ‘Erroneous to a great Degree’. Such erroneous results do not only reveal a poor statistical method, however. They also run counter to demographic trends suggested by the course of recent history. If the figure of ten to one were true, it would mean that ‘the *Protestants* after all our Industry, are at this Time less in Number, by almost one half, than they were in 1672, when Sir *William Petty* made his Calculations’.

To counteract this unlikely scenario, the pamphleteer offers a more plausible scheme for the country as a whole, which he bases on the number of households in the country as recorded by hearth-tax collectors in 1718 and 1725. He produces a projected figure for 1732 and devises formulae to determine the number of individuals in a household, to account for people like soldiers, students and paupers who do not belong to households, and to account for the religion of all these households and individuals. The resulting calculations produce a best-case scenario where ‘the *Papists* are not 2 to 1’ – a respectable improvement upon Petty’s figure of eight to three. Even allowing for a generous margin of error, this writer sets the maximum ratio whereby Catholics can outnumber Protestants at nine to four. And although the pamphleteer grants the possibility of such an outcome, he rapidly withdraws it. His reasoning is that since Petty’s time, the Catholic population has been reduced by war, famine, emigration, and the popery laws, while the Protestant population has increased by ‘the many Thousands of *English, Scotch, French, Palatines*, and other *Protestants* that came over’. These losses and gains mean that there must have been a sizeable shift since Petty’s estimate; it is in fact ‘impossible the Proportion should have varied so little in Favour of the *Protestant* Interest as from 8 to 3, to 9 to 4’.⁹⁷ His text thus offers several different narratives of population change since 1672 and establishes a criterion of minimum plausibility that must be observed

⁹⁷ *Scheme of the Proportions*, p. 16.

when reading them. A given account can only be believed if it produces a ratio of Catholics to Protestants that is lower than the one estimated by Petty.

This pamphleteer's essay in statistical theory was soon put into practice. The one attempt at a national religious census in the period up to 1760, Connolly writes, 'was in 1732–3, when collectors of the hearth tax were required to state the number of Catholic and Protestant families in their districts'.⁹⁸ The figures returned by the collectors may not have been anticipated as eagerly as the results of the 2001 census of Northern Ireland, but one similarity is that both sets of results were published and interpreted after a suitable pause. The collectors' returns were abstracted 'with Observations' in a pamphlet of 1736. It has been attributed to David Bindon, author of the 1729 proposal concerning Lombards, which had by then been turned into the heads of a bill by his brother Samuel and submitted to the House of Commons, where it was 'favourably received [...] and taken to the Lord Lieutenant'.⁹⁹ Bindon's *Abstract of the Number of Protestant and Popish Families in Ireland* proposes a method of reading the tax collectors' returns that is almost as elaborate as his scheme of seven years earlier for a national network of pawnbrokers.

Like the author of the 1732 *Scheme of the Proportions*, Bindon is concerned to trace the fortunes of Ireland's population imbalance since Petty's estimate of 800,000 Catholics to 300,000 Protestants in 1672. He is similarly concerned to show that this figure must have altered for the better, although his work is based not on projected data but on the actual figures 'Return'd by the *Hearthmoney* Collectors' in 1732–3. As in the earlier anonymous scheme, history yields an axiom to which the tax collectors' returns must be accommodated:

Sir *William Petty*, in his *Political Survey of Ireland*, Page 8, publish'd in 1672, computed that there were then in *Ireland* Three *Protestants* to Eight *Papists*; it does not appear upon what Grounds he made this Computation; but this is certain; that whatever was the Disproportion in Number between *Protestants* and *Papists* in 1672, the present Disproportion

⁹⁸ *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 144.

⁹⁹ Johnston Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament*, III, 182, which adds 'what happened to it thereafter is uncertain'.

must be much less, considering the great Numbers of *Protestants*, who soon after the Revolution, and ever since have come over from *Great Brittain* into *Ireland*, and settled among us.¹⁰⁰

The notion of how many of a particular sect were ‘among us’ was an important one to Bindon and his readers, just as it had been for the Modest Proposer. But where Swift’s Proposer is keen to lessen the number of papists, Bindon’s concern is to emphasize the ‘great Numbers of *Protestants*’ that had ‘settled among us’ since 1690. The figures abstracted by Bindon offer a total of 386 902 families in Ireland, of which 105 501 are Protestant and 281 401 are Catholic. Connolly expresses this as a percentage ratio of 73 to 27.¹⁰¹ But the figure could also be expressed as a simple ratio, as Bindon prefers: ‘supposing the whole to be divided into 11 Parts, the *Protestants* make 3 of them, the *Papists* 8’. This may bear a suspicious resemblance to Petty’s 1672 estimate, but Bindon will not allow such a suspicion to take root. As he says, ‘the present Disproportion must be much less’ than the one calculated by Petty sixty years earlier. In response to this imperative, Bindon suggests that ‘we take into Account the 12000 Soldiers and their Families, and all those who live in Colleges, Hospitals and Poor-Houses, and many Servants from *Great-Brittain*, who have settled among us’. This adjustment will yield ‘7060 Families’, which, added to the tax collectors’ tally, will bring the total number of Protestant families up to 112 561. The net result of these additions is that Protestant families will now be ‘in Proportion to the *Popish* Families exactly as One to two and a half’.¹⁰²

Bindon offers this ratio as an ideal one that can be arrived at if the reader chooses to follow his method. Other methods will yield other results, as Bindon allows, but his own procedure (which, he proudly announces, ‘may serve as a Rule in *Political Arithmetick*’) enables one to calculate the total population of a country from the number of families in it. Allowing for

¹⁰⁰ [David Bindon], *An Abstract of the Number of Protestant and Popish Families in Ireland, taken from the Returns made by the Hearthmoney Collectors, to the Hearthmoney Office in Dublin, in the Years 1732 and 1733* (Dublin: M. Rhames for R. Gunne, 1736), p. 12. ‘Brittain’ so spelt.

¹⁰¹ Connolly, p. 144, fig. 5.1 on p. 146.

¹⁰² Bindon, *Abstract*, p. 9.

the assumption that the members of either sect 'are equal Breeders', it will then be possible to calculate the relative proportions of two religious groups within the total population.¹⁰³ And it is not just in its use of words like 'Breeders' that Bindon's text echoes *A Modest Proposal*. Like Swift, Bindon provides an escape route from Ireland's wretched condition, one that a reader opens by colluding in the production of a likely fiction. To apply a loaded metaphor, both writers offer demographic change, natural or engineered, as a magic bullet and proceed to place the gun in the reader's hands.

Swift's text holds that the shortest way to lessen the number of Papists in Ireland is to eat them, while Bindon suggests that Protestants be imported from Great Britain. A further similarity is that proposing tends to merge into the act of observing. Both Swift and Bindon propose not that something be done, but that something has already happened, and ask readers to adjust their outlook accordingly. When the Modest Proposer suggests that landlords eat children 'as they have already devoured most of the Parents', he allows himself the luxury of an assumption. He assumes that his interpretation enjoys sufficient consensus to license his reading of how things stand at present and what may be done in future. More hesitantly and less dramatically, Bindon's *Abstract of the Number of Protestant and Popish Families* does the same thing. Since the reign of James II, says Bindon, 'it must be allowed, that many Protestants come yearly into *Ireland* from *England*, *Scotland* and *Wales*, but no *Papists* come into *Ireland* but such as before went from thence'. Bindon concedes that many '*Protestants* have of late Years left the Kingdom to settle in *America*', but argues that this loss is balanced by a corresponding observation: 'many *Papists* do yearly go abroad, either to enter into foreign Service or to make their Fortunes, who never return again'. As long as the two cancel each other out, this 'Diminution in the Stock of the People in the Nation [...] will make little or no variation in the Proportions between *Protestants* and *Papists*'.

This is a numerical equivalent to the Proposer's equation between an initial devourment of tenants by landlord and the subsequent consumption

¹⁰³ *Abstract*, p. 11.

of poor children by the generality of *'Persons of Quality and Fortune'*. Both texts stage an arithmetical balancing act which depends upon the reader's participation to look convincing. Whether one chooses to stew the children or to cook the books the goal would seem to be the same in either case: 'to lessen the *Number of Papists*'. To this end, both writers deploy a technique that is ostensibly actuarial but fundamentally allegorical. Both Swift and Bindon's allegories are grounded in the familiar analogy of the body politic. This observation has often been made of Swift's text, most eloquently by Frank Lestringant. He places *A Modest Proposal* within a 'hybrid literary genre' where the 'mystical body' of the state is 'devalorized as a fleshly body, devouring and excreting, yet is simultaneously expanded to the legendary dimensions of a Moloch or a Leviathan'.¹⁰⁴

In suggesting that the Irish body politic sustain itself by absorbing Protestant immigrants and sloughing off Catholics, Bindon's *Abstract* works in the same way. Its statistical minutiae, however, also reveal a problem in the way *A Modest Proposal* deploys this central metaphor. It is sometimes assumed that Swift's text, (like Bindon's) proposes to revitalize a Protestant body politic through the sacrificial devourment of bodies Catholic. Mahony, for example, writes of the *Proposal*'s 'satiric advocacy of cannibalism, to be practiced by the Irish Protestant audience originally intended for the pamphlet'; reflecting in a later piece that the *Proposal* 'literalizes Protestant consumption of the Catholic poor'. Lestringant is blunter when he says that 'the Protestants are meant to eat the Catholics'.¹⁰⁵ Simple arithmetic allows this unilateral devourment to happen: two thirds of the population, or one million out of an estimated total of one and a half million will be subject to the Proposer's scheme, and even the most optimistic of contemporary estimates allowed the Catholics a majority of at least two to one. But this majority was not distributed uniformly. A more complex mathematics, such as that practised by David Bindon, will show that certain areas deviated from the statistical norm in such a way as to challenge the notion that the

¹⁰⁴ 'Travels in Eucharistia', p. 109.

¹⁰⁵ Mahony, p. 63; idem, 'Protestant Dependence and Consumption in Swift's Irish Writings', *Political Thought in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. by S. J. Connolly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 83–104, p. 101; Lestringant, p.124.

division between eaters and eaten must always coincide with the line between Protestant and Catholic. Two such places are the province of Ulster, where *A Modest Proposal* was written, and the city of Dublin, where it is set.¹⁰⁶

VI

FOR, *First*, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the *Number of Papists*, with whom we are yearly over-run; being the principal Breeders of the Nation as well as our most dangerous Enemies; and who stay at home on Purpose, with a Design to *deliver the Kingdom to the Pretender*; hoping to take the Advantage by the Absence of *so many good Protestants*, who have chosen rather to leave their Country, than stay at home, and pay Tithes against their Conscience, to an idolatrous *Episcopal Curate*. (114)

Despite appearances to the contrary the need to reduce the number of Catholics in Ireland was not a discrete policy issue. What made it appear separate was the fact that for historical reasons it had acquired a rhetoric of its own. The Modest Proposer presses some of its readymade formulae into service when he refers to the Catholics as his readers' 'most dangerous Enemies' with whom they are 'yearly over-run'. This is close in tone to the words with which Archbishop Boulter introduced the 1731 report to the House of Lords. He says that the report was commissioned 'the better to enable your Lordships to judge of the Danger that may arise to the *Protestant Religion*, to his Majesty's Government, or to the publick Peace from the Number and Influence of these their Inveterate Enemies among us'.¹⁰⁷

Such martial overtones aside, the Catholic problem was not simply or even primarily an issue of national security. It was in fact part of a question that posed itself under various guises throughout the 1720s. This was the question of stewardship, a matter of balancing the nation's resources, human, material, and financial. As I have shown by looking at

¹⁰⁶ Barnard, *New Anatomy*, map on p. xvii.

¹⁰⁷ *Journals of the House of Lords*, III, 199.

some later attempts to address this problem, the crisis did not reach an apocalyptic climax with the publication of *A Modest Proposal* in November 1729. Instead the business of diagnosing and treating the crisis continued as normal into the new decade. Nonetheless, in certain accounts, the crisis of the late twenties did seem to represent a final catastrophe. The correspondence of Archbishop King, who died on 8 May 1729, is one such account.

During the famine of 1727–9, King, as I have shown, was one of those who attempted to alleviate the suffering of the Dublin poor with his own money, whether taken from his own pocket or recovered from the purse of Lady Southwell. But his correspondence from the same months also abounds in assertions that anti-Catholic legislation had failed so badly as to allow Catholics to attain a dangerous and unprecedented strength that went beyond mere numerical superiority. In April 1728, for example, King writes to on this subject to Edward Southwell (son of his debtor), prefacing his remarks with the insistence ‘I remember something of Ireland for sixty years and made some observations on the state of it’. Drawing on his long experience, King asserts that he ‘cannot call to mind, that the Papists seem’d to be so much indulg’d and favoured as at present Excepting in King James’s time’. In August, King makes much the same comments to Robert Howard, Bishop of Killala and Achonry. This letter also repeats the insinuation that the Catholics’ surreptitious ascent has been sponsored at some high level and for some secret reason. ‘I am not so farre let into the management of affairs as to find out the policy of it,’ he says, having just asserted that although he has ‘known Ireland for three score years with observation’, he can ‘never remember popery so rampant or so much encouraged as at present, except in King James’s time’. King’s tone suggests an exasperated mystification rather than a genuine sense of conspiracy. Nonetheless, he is articulating a perception that would receive official attention in the 1731 Report on the State of Popery. This is the sense that the attempts to address the Catholic problem had only succeeded in exacerbating it. Another letter of King’s from 1728 anticipates the statistical picture presented to the House of Lords three years later. In July he writes to

Francis Annesley that Catholics 'have their Bishops and ArchBishops their Vicar Generals, their Monasterys, and Nunnerys'. 'I don't believe there is so few as two thousand of their Clergy in Ireland', he concludes.¹⁰⁸

King was by this point 'an old man, a critic of the anti-Catholic policies of an earlier age' and his figures do not tally with those of the report. Nonetheless the enquiry into the state of popery would confirm what Connolly calls 'the essential truth of his observations'.¹⁰⁹ A pamphlet published anonymously and without imprint in Dublin in 1731 makes a bald statement of this truth: 'the penal Laws and Statutes now in being against *Papists*, have been found ineffectual'.¹¹⁰ A year later, another anonymous tract attests that such inefficacy was widely felt. It quotes a sermon preached by the Bishop of Clonfert on 23 October the previous year. Preaching on the anniversary of the massacre of 1641, in accordance with the Church of Ireland statute to commemorate that date, the Bishop contended that:

if a full and impartial Inquiry be now made into the present State of *Popery in Ireland*, 'twill too plainly appear that all the Laws which have from time to time for above forty Years been made to that end, have neither lessen'd the Number, nor broken the Power of the *Papists* among us: but both continue to this Day so great, that if at any time since the Revolution, they were dangerous to the Protestant Settlement, they are so at this Day.¹¹¹

Shortly after the preaching of this sermon, the 'Inquiry' it envisions was completed and its findings were presented to the bishop and his fellow lords spiritual and temporal. Both before and after the Report conferred official sanction upon apprehensions about the growth of popery, the

¹⁰⁸ King to Edward Southwell, 27 April 1729, TCD MS 750/9, p. 59; to Lord Bishop Killala [= Robert Howard], 6 August 1729, *ibid.*, p. 89; to Francis Annesley, 25 July 1728, *ibid.*, p. 85. In a letter to the Duke of Newcastle, Archbishop Boulter set the figure at 'near three thousand Popish Priests'.

¹⁰⁹ Connolly, p. 288.

¹¹⁰ *A Proposal Humbly offer'd to the P-----T For the more effectual preventing the further growth of Popery* (Dublin [S. Powell]; repr. London, J. Roberts, 1731), p. 4.

¹¹¹ *The Nature and Consequence of the Sacramental Test Considered with Reasons Humbly Offered for the Repeal of it* ([Dublin]: [n. pub.], 1731), 12, quoting Edward Synge, *A sermon preach'd at Christ-Church, Dublin. On Saturday, the 23d. of October, 1731. Being the anniversary of the Irish Rebellion*. The relevant statute of the Church of Ireland and the rubric for the service to be conducted on 23 October are quoted and discussed by Mahony, 'Swift's Rhetorics of Perception', pp. 66–7.

phenomenon was the subject of observations and proposals. Archbishop King also turned his mind to the problem, although he did not propose to do anything other than confess his inability to ‘find out the policy of it’. Others, however, were more proactive, if less practical. *A Modest Proposal* may offer an escape into allegory but those who sought to effect a more convincing change usually had recourse to the law. The anonymous pamphlet just quoted, for example, uses the Bishop’s sermon in a way that would probably have horrified him – to argue that the sacramental test be repealed. As well as quoting the Bishop out of context, this 1731 pamphlet on the *Nature and Consequences of the Sacramental Test* appeals to recently-confirmed fears that its readers were living in ‘a Country where the *Papists* are still vastly superior in Strength and Numbers to Protestants of all Perswasions’.¹¹²

Repealing the test may have seemed drastic, but it was not the most radical of the measures to have been proposed at this time. A more extreme suggestion comes in another 1731 pamphlet, which is the source of the observation, quoted earlier, that ‘the penal Laws and Stautes against *Papists*, have been found ineffectual’. Not content with pointing out their inefficacy, this particular *Proposal* [...] *For the more effectual preventing the further Growth of Popery* suggests that the penal laws ‘be repeal’d, abrogated, annull’d, destroy’d, and obliterated’. Alternative legislation will then be passed to make Catholicism the established religion of Ireland so that ‘all Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction be taken from out of the Hands of the Clergy of the establish’d Church, and the same be vested in the several *Popish* Arch-Bishops, Bishops, Deans and Arch-deacons’. Under the new dispensation, ‘a *Popish* Priest shall be settled by Law in each and every Parish in *Ireland*’ and each priest will be ‘entitled to a tenth Part or Tithe of all Things tithable in *Ireland*, belonging to the *Papists*’. This entitlement will produce ‘Law-suits and Wrangles’ as each Catholic priest begins to ‘consider himself a legal Incumbent, and behave accordingly, and apply himself more to fleecing than feeding his flock’. Such harassment from the newly-established clergy will incite Catholics to convert en masse to Protestant

¹¹² *Nature and Consequence of the Sacramental Test*, p. 15.

churches, thus preventing the further growth of popery. As the pamphleteer says, 'erecting a Spiritual Jurisdiction amongst them, wou'd *in all probability* drive as many out of that [Catholic] Communion, as a *due Execution* of such Jurisdiction hath hitherto drove from amongst ourselves'.¹¹³

This anti-popery proposal may use the perceived failure of the penal laws as its occasion but its target is the predatory and litigious habits of the Church of Ireland clergy, as this aside shows. The text thus resembles Swift's proposal in its use of satiric fantasy as a cover for partisan political allegory. The anticlerical subtext of the 1731 *Proposal [...] For [...] preventing the further growth of Popery* is notable for being imperfectly concealed within a nominally anti-Catholic satire. *A Modest Proposal*, another piece keen to display its anti-Catholic credentials and to portray the 'Papists' as 'our most dangerous enemies', 'with whom we are yearly overrun' (114), similarly offers the reduction of the Catholic threat as the premier advantage of its outlandish scheme. But neither pamphlet is concerned to address this problem so much as to exploit it as evidence of an underlying failure. The persistence of the Catholic threat becomes a sign of wilful neglect and mismanagement. And although both pamphlets agree that years of abuse have climaxed in a crippling social malaise, they differ over the issue of responsibility.

A Modest Proposal allows its readers to blame the gentry, and landlords in particular, for the subsistence crisis against which it is set, or at least for '*the present deplorable state of the Kingdom*'. The anti-popery proposal, however, identifies an alternative culprit. In adjusting the metaphor of devourment to one of the fleecing of flocks, the 1731 proposal lays the blame for the situation at the established Church's door. It insinuates that the Catholic Church has been allowed to grow so powerful that it may as well lay claim to legal protection; that the Anglican Church, by abusing its spiritual jurisdiction, has achieved a level of corruption befitting its Romish counterpart. Such accusations were not new in 1731,

¹¹³ *Proposal [...] For the more effectual preventing the further growth of Popery*, p. 4, p. 5, p. 8, p. 9. Emphasis in original.

however. Similar claims made in 1729 may have helped produce *A Modest Proposal*.

In March 1729, William Flower of County Kilkenny wrote to Swift, whom he called his 'old acquaintance', to congratulate him on a number of the *Intelligencer* and to suggest a suitable topic for his pen. Flower comments that the 'miserics of the North, as represented, demand the utmost compassion and must soften the malice of the most bitter enemy'. He expresses his hope that 'they, whose interest it is, if they rightly considered it, to relieve those miserable wretches, will redress so publick a calamity' and that those responsible would be 'censured by the *Intelligencer*'.¹¹⁴ To assist in this act of censure, Flower recommends some verses from Jeremiah for Swift to 'expatiate upon'. This could almost be a commission for *A Modest Proposal*, in which Oliver Ferguson detected 'an anger of the kind one finds in Jeremiah', directed systematically at 'the landlords, the idle rich of both sexes, the Irish poor, Protestant dissenters, Papists, absentees, shopkeepers – in short, "the whole People of Ireland"'.¹¹⁵

Ferguson's use of this last phrase from the title of the Drapier's fourth letter is particularly apt, since it has become notable over the course of this thesis as a marker of omission. This usage is no exception. Missing from Ferguson's list is the group singled out by both William Flower and the author of the 1731 anti-popery proposal: the Anglican clergy. Flower identifies 'some of the clergy' as a target for the Jeremiad he wants Swift to write: 'Bad men, to be sure, have crept in, and are of that sacred and learned order', he writes; 'the blackest of crimes, forgery, treason and blasphemy recently prove this'. Having 'contributed' to the 'calamity' by the 'exacting of tithes' they now deserve to be 'punished according to their demerit with severe justice'. Flower encourages Swift to mete out this punishment, and even vouchsafes a 'piece of gold' to Sarah Harding for the troubles she has encountered in publishing the *Intelligencer*.¹¹⁶ In his attempt to negotiate what amounts to an informal publishing contract Flower was doubly

¹¹⁴ William Flower to Swift, 18 March 1729, *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 218.

¹¹⁵ *Swift and Ireland*, p. 171.

¹¹⁶ *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 218. Flower's gold was not given freely, as he adds: 'in return I expect the *Drapier's Works* entire'.

deluded. The issue of the *Intelligencer* which attracts his praise and occasions his letter was a spurious production and had been censured as such in the capital months before he sent his letter.¹¹⁷ Judging by the extant response to a more urgent communication, Flower's suggestion that Swift condemn the Anglican clergy in print would seem equally ill-advised.

In late April or early May 1729, Swift wrote a reply to a letter sent to him by two Lisburn farmers using the names 'Andrew Trueman' and 'Patrick Layfield'. 'Answer to Several Letters from Unknwon Persons', to give it the title bestowed on it by Deane Swift, finds the author in no mood to entertain their allegation that the tithe had added to the difficulties faced by tenant farmers in Ulster. The farmers' letter, which Swift must have received before 8 May, was printed in the *Dublin Weekly Journal* of 7 June as *A Letter from some Farmers in the Country to a Gentleman in Dublin, shewing their Reasons for removing to the British Plantations in America*.¹¹⁸

The tithe is prominent among the pressures they cite as leading to emigration, and in dealing with this subject their letter clarifies the claim made by William Flower that 'Bad men' have 'crept in' among the northern clergy. 'Trueman' and 'Layfield' confirm that 'Some of the Reverend Clergy have been so far imposed upon, as to put their Tyths into the Hands of very ill Men'. Such middlemen or 'tithe-farmers', they say, 'proceed to threaten us with Law Suits for the Tyths of the little Gardens of Flax and Potatoes, and Christning, and burial Money, by which Means the Poorest

¹¹⁷ *Dublin Intelligence*, 31 December 1728: 'We hear Complaints have been made to some of our Magistrates against one *Goolden*, a Romish Printer in this City, for Publishing a Vile and Flagitious paper last Week, under the Title of D—n Sw—ts *Intelligencer*, No: XX. For which 'tis expected he will, if possible, be Punish'd'. Flower's letter mentions '*Intelligencer* [...] number 20', which was, as Williams points out, 'not the *Intelligencer*, no. XX, [...] but a disreputable production for which the editor was about to be prosecuted' (*Correspondence*, ed. Williams, III, 318; 319n; cf. ed. Woolley, III, 219, n. 3.)

¹¹⁸ Ferguson, p. 161, who adds: *Intelligencer* 19 was 'published as an appropriate answer to a letter to the editor by "Andrew Dealer" and "Patrick Penniless"'. This letter has not survived, but this *Intelligencer* makes it clear that "Andrew" and "Patrick" were concerned with the shortage of money and the Ulster emigration. A year later – in late April or early May 1729 – "Andrew" and "Patrick" sent Swift a second letter (*The Intelligencer* was by now defunct). This one dealt exclusively with emigration. Although "Andrew Dealer" and "Patrick Penniless" had changed their pseudonyms to "Andrew Trueman" and "Patrick Layfield," Swift recognized them (more probably *him*) as his correspondent of the previous summer. He wrote an answer immediately but put it aside unpublished [...] Deane Swift gave it the title *Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Persons* and added a note, "To Messrs. Trueman and Layfield."

People are great Sufferers'. The farmers cite several other factors, notably the Oppression of [...] Tenants' by landlords and the gentry's taste for 'costly Apparel' and 'luxurious Dainties'. At the end of their letter, however, they reiterate their claim:

if the Clergy will be more moderate in their Dues, and not give them into the Hands of Racking Farmers, they may well be assured, we will not for the short Space that remains of our Lives, leave our Relations, our Friends, and our Native Soil in search of distant Lands.¹¹⁹

In his reply, Swift is 'glad' to hear the authors 'speak with decency of the Clergy' and acknowledges that they 'impute the exactions [...] to the Managers or Farmers of the Tythes' rather than to the owners of such spiritual titles (XII, 78). Nonetheless, Swift assures his correspondents that they 'entirely mistake the Fact'. In a sentence that seems to address itself not just to these two readers, but to all of those, including William Flower, who have been complaining of the clergy's actions, Swift issues a challenge: 'I defy the wickedest and most powerfull Clergy-men in the Kingdom to oppress the meanest Farmer in the Parish' (ibid.). This challenge was never made public, however. In spite of Swift's assertion that he had ordered the farmers' letter to be printed along with his reply (XII, 75), the 'Answer to Several Letters' was one of six papers written by Swift in 1729 that were 'apparently put aside', remaining unpublished until Deane Swift edited them from the author's manuscripts for the quarto *Works*.

As Davis concedes, accounting for the non-publication of a piece evidently 'written for the public' is a 'real problem' which he explains by speculating that in his 'mood of despondency' Swift 'decided to do nothing'.¹²⁰ Even before opting to abandon the piece, however, Swift seems to have wavered over some of its content, deleting a passage that offer his

¹¹⁹ *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 7 June 1729, reproduced in Ferguson, *Swift and Ireland*, Appendix C, p. 193, 192, 194, 195. Ferguson dates this letter from before 8 May because Swift's reply refers to Archbishop King, who died on that date.

¹²⁰ *Prose XII*, p. xvi. The other texts are 'A Letter on Maculla's Project about Halfpence', 'A Letter to the Archbishop of Dublin, concerning the Weavers', 'An Answer to Several Letters from Unknown Hands', 'A Proposal that all the Ladies and Women of Ireland should appear constantly in Irish Manufactures' and 'Maxims Controlled in Ireland'.

own explanation for the recent surge in emigration. Swift accepts ‘the oppression of Landlords, the utter ruin of Trade [...] the continued Dearth of three years, and the strong delusion in your People by false Allurements from America’ as incitements, but goes on to identify another factor that ‘Trueman’ and ‘Layfield’ omit:

~~but, there is likewise another temptation, which is not of inconsiderable weight; which is their itch of living in a Country where their Sect is predominant, and where their eyes and consciences will not be offended by the stumbling-block of Ceremonies, habits and spiritual Titles. (XII, 78–9)~~

It seems that Swift himself went on to omit this reason, crossing through these ten lines in his manuscript. As Davis points out, such deletions may not indicate ‘deliberate alterations’ to a manuscript that Swift may simply have been transcribing from a foul copy (XII, 331 n.). Such changes do, however, represent ‘at least his second thoughts’, and this passage would seem to be a significant retraction. At some stage in the process of composition and revision, Swift must have thought twice about including it, even though he claims that it ‘is not of inconsiderable weight’.

One reason for the deletion might be a reluctance to offend. The opening of the letter makes it clear that Swift does not wish to attack his correspondents, whom he greets with qualified approval, commending ‘your good intentions and in a great measure your manner of declaring them’ (XII, 75). Having acknowledged the farmers’ ‘good intentions’ and accepted that some of their explanations for the rise in emigration might be valid Swift goes on in this passage to offer a further reason that effectively invalidates his earlier concessions. A few lines before the deleted passage, Swift remarks to ‘Trueman’ and ‘Layfield’ that ‘your People bent for America [...] are so far wise as not to make the Payment of Tythes a Scruple of Conscience, which is too gross for any protestant Dissenter except a Quaker to pretend’ (78). But this is exactly what the deleted passage alleges.

The passage implies that ‘your People’, as he calls Trueman and Layfield’s Presbyterian co-religionists, are not so much driven to emigrate

as attracted to the colonies by the prospect of escaping the ‘stumbling-block of Cermonyes, habits and spiritual Titles’. Swift thus seems to be contending that the farmers’ people emigrate out of choice; that economic necessity is not a factor in their decision. The passage suggests that economic explanations for the surge in emigration must be matched by an alternative reading which stresses the emigrants’ indulgence in majoritarian fantasies; their ‘itch of living in a Country where their Sect is predominant’. Perhaps this was too violent a rejection of the Lisburn farmers’ account of the rise in emigration. At any rate the fact that Swift censored this passage – even before suppressing the text that contains it – would suggest that it makes an unusually sensitive point. This receives further support from the fact that the point resurfaces as an aside in Swift’s own majoritarian fantasy, *A Modest Proposal*. Although he underplays it, the Proposer’s allegation that ‘good Protestants’ have chosen to leave the country rather than ‘pay Tithes against their Conscience’ is itself ‘not of inconsiderable weight’.

Emigration by Northern Protestants, which reached a peak over the spring and summer of 1729, was certainly a worrying issue and in Swift’s reading of affairs it became a contentious one. For some, it was a joking matter. A letter in the Orrery correspondence explains the recent ‘humour amongst the People of Ireland to remove in Shoals to New York and Pensilvania’ by saying ‘they have caught this Frenzy from Doctor Berkley, who has removed himself to Barmudus upon a very chimerical Errand, that of converting the Indians’.¹²¹ Others, however, found it harder to account for the problem.

By the third year of famine, emigration had reached such levels as to warrant an official enquiry. The Lords Justices commissioned the circuit judges of Ulster to conduct the investigation and on 11 June they forwarded the reports to Carteret. Their covering letter remarks that a good harvest in the autumn might put an end to the exodus, although if it should continue, then ‘an adequate Remedy cannot be had from the Laws now in being, to

¹²¹ Mr. Byrd to John, Lord Boyle, 20 May 1729, *The Orrery Correspondence: Letters upon various occasions to and from John the Earl of Orrery, his Family and his Friends*; microfilm copy in NLI of Harvard University Library MS Eng. 218.2, p. 121.

put a stop to this Evil'.¹²² One of the judges' reports finds its authors 'not able to frame any opinion of the causes which have carried away so many of his Majesty's Subjects'. It reports from 'Conversations [...] with Gentlemen in the several parts of the Circuit' that the 'two last bad harvests' have been cited as an aggravation. At the same time, however, the judges report the allegation that 'several are gone, who are in no needy Circumstances', that others had sold their farms for considerable sums of money, and that others still had taken 'this Opportunity to run away from their Creditors'. However, the report suggests that the most important reason, the one that 'is most insisted on in all Conversation,' is 'the great encouragement the people are supposed to have received from the English Colonies in the West Indies'. Having dealt with this inducement, the judges add, as a closing remark, that '[t]here is also some Complaint, but with what foundation we know not, of the Farmers of Tythes, on account of some hard Compositions which they are supposed to force the people into'. They decline to pass judgement on the validity of this complaint, remarking, 'we cannot take it upon us to say how far this Evil may be owing to these causes'.¹²³

The report from the judges on the North West circuit, compiled after 'Enquiry & Conversation among the Gentleman & people', is more forthcoming. It confirms that 'most of those who leave the Kingdom are Protestant Dissenters'. In addition to commenting on distress attendant upon recent bad harvests, the judges report two main findings from their enquiry into the 'hardships and Discouragements' that impel prospective emigrants. The first is a complaint about tenancy conditions. Rack-renting has 'lately' become a problem especially on estates where absentee landlords leave their affairs to their agents. These middlemen 'make merit of raising Rents as high as possible, setting them by Cant to the highest bidder, without regard to the value of the Lands, or the goodness of the Tenants'. Farmers also complain about the insecurity of their leases, and that 'many Landlords turn them out of their Farms and give them to Papists for the sake of a little

¹²² Hugh Boulter, Thomas Wyndham and William Conolly to Carteret, State Papers Ireland, SP 63/391, Letters and Papers 1729, 75^r.

¹²³ James Reynolds and George Gore to the Lords Justices of Ireland, 10 May 1729, SPI 63/391, 81^r—82^r.

Increase of Rent'. A further complaint made to the judges concerns the tithe, and this closely resembles 'Trueman' and 'Layfield's comments to Swift:

They also complain of rigorous methods in payments of their Tythes, the Clergy generally setting their Parishes to Lay Farmers, who they alledge demand more than the value of the Tythes; which if the Tenants refuse, they are harrassed into a compliance by suits in the Bishop's court & elsewhere, they also alledge that of late Years they are obliged to pay Tythes of Potatoes which they never before payed¹²⁴

This echoes the Lisburn famers' complaint that tithe collectors 'threaten us with Law Suits for the Tyths of the little Gardens of Flax and Potatoes, [...] by which Means the Poorest People are great Sufferers'. And Swift was not the only one to have such grievances addressed directly to him. By the time the Judges' reports reached him, one of the Lords Justices had already been notified at first hand of the problems faced by Ulster tenants from tithe farmers. In January 1729, a petition was sent to William Conolly from three of his tenants in Ballymore concerning the activities of John Boyle in Newtown Limavady, farmer of the tithe of the parish of Ballykelly. Boyle had bought lands from the petitioners' neighbours who had left for the plantations in America. In order to assert his control over the tenants that remained, Boyle was threatening, as the petitioners said, to 'Ruine us with the Tythes that he has farmed'.¹²⁵ There seems little doubt, then, that the abuse of tithes by third parties had become a cause for complaint during the emigration crisis and that these complaints had, by the summer of 1729, reached the attention of the kingdom's more eminent figures, including Swift. The question that remains to be answered concerns the function of *A Modest Proposal* as a response to these claims.

When the Modest Proposer says that many good Protestants 'have chosen rather to leave their Country, than stay at home, and pay Tithes against their Conscience', this is Swift's reply to accusations that the tithe

¹²⁴ John St. Leger and Michael Ward to the Lords Justices, [?May 1729], SPI 63/391, 77^r—79^r.

¹²⁵ Petition addressed to Lord Justice Conolly, 6 January 1729; Microfilm copy in NLI of Conolly Papers in the Possession of the Hon. Desmond Guinness, Leixlip Castle, County Kildare.

had some part to play in the emigration crisis. The Proposer is able to articulate the flat denial that had proved so troublesome in the spring as to warrant suppression from a text that would itself remain unpublished. There are thus two more ways in which *A Modest Proposal* exploits the allegorical mode. Firstly, Swift's text speaks otherwise by appointing a proxy to restore a suppressed assertion, one that can go unnoticed in a text that makes itself amenable to being misread as an attack on landlords. The second sense in which Swift's text functions as allegory returns us to the rather basic definition offered by John Hughes. Swift's text is one '*in which one thing is related, and another thing is understood*', although not in a straightforward way where the consumption of fattened infants by '*Persons of Quality and Fortune*' stands for a metaphorical devourment of the poor by the rich, or the Protestants by the Catholics, of Ireland by England, or any such easily assimilable, cathartic, reading.

Of special relevance here is a comment made by John Hughes about obviousness in the context of allegorical reading. Hughes notes that Sir William Temple criticizes Spenser's allegorical poetry for rendering up its meaning too readily. Temple says, according to Hughes's paraphrase that Spenser's '*Moral lay so bare, that it lost its Effect*'. Hughes confesses that he does '*not understand this*', reasoning that '*A Moral which is not clear, is in my Apprehension next to no Moral at all*'.¹²⁶ *A Modest Proposal* has proved a problematic and eminently interpretable text because it contrives to lay its moral bare and yet have it remain obscure. The text offers the formal gratification of satire to those willing to accept it, but readers continue to discern behind the conventions of the genre '*some undefined but more richly expressive, more genuinely affective form*'. This chapter concludes by exploring a previously underreported aspect of the *Proposal's* moral, which is the way it functions as an attack on those '*good Protestants, who have chosen [...] to leave their Country*'.

¹²⁶ 'Essay on Allegorical Poetry', p. liii.

VII

In 1715, the vicar of Belfast published one of his many attacks on the Presbyterians of Ulster. William Tisdall, a sometime friend of Swift's who would later act as witness to his will, was the author in question and his tract quotes with scorn a memorial issued and signed by 'six *Dissenting Teachers*' in which the authors threaten to transplant themselves to America, 'that we may there, in a *Wilderness*, Enjoy, (by the blessing of God), that ease and Quiet to our Consciences, Persons and Familys, which is deny'd us in our Native Country'.¹²⁷ Fifteen years later, the threat had become a reality. In March 1729, as Archbishop Boulter reports, another memorial was issued by the dissenting ministers of Ireland 'representing the grievances their brethren have assigned as the causes in their apprehension of the great desertion in the north'. Boulter, who with his fellow Lords Justices commissioned the circuit judges' enquiry on 12 March, expressed his concern the following day about the memorial's potential to be used as a political lever. He worries that 'the *Irish* gentlemen at *London* are for throwing the whole occasion of this desertion on the severity of tythes', and he imagines that 'the landlords in *England* might with great ease raise a cry amongst their tenants of the great oppression they lie under by paying tythes'.¹²⁸

The latter remark is made in a letter to the Bishop of London, whom Boulter speaks of having instructed 'to wait on the ministry and discourse with them' on the subject of allegations against the tithe. Boulter evidently took seriously the possibility that complaints arising out of the emigration crisis might be used to try and influence government policy in London. Similar fears were expressed by Marmaduke Coghill in a letter to Edward Southwell in August, which speaks of a recent attempt to exert such influence. Coghill says that a 'dissenting teacher' has been in London, where he 'represented that the uneasiness of the people of the North is

¹²⁷ William Tisdall, *The Nature and Tendency of popular Phrases in General* (Dublin: Daniel Thompson, [?1715]).

¹²⁸ Boulter to the Duke of Newcastle, 13 March, 1729; to the Bishop of London, 13 March 1729, *Letters*, I, 231, 232.

occasioned by the continuance of the sacramental test, and the not allowing the legality of their marriages'. This makes him worry that attempts will be made to change the relevant laws. Although Coghill believes that no such measures will ever be carried through the Commons, he nonetheless remarks to Southwell: 'if you think it proper you may talk to my Lord Lieutenant for his sake as well as ours'. Boulter also mentions the sacramental test and the marriage issue as concerns raised in the dissenting ministers' memorial. Coghill goes on to say that any attempt to address these complaints will 'give great offence, and create factions and disturbances' in the House of Commons.¹²⁹

Such disturbances duly arose in the 1730s in debates over the sacramental test and the tithe of agistment, although the marriage issue proved less troublesome and was resolved quietly in 1737.¹³⁰ For his own part, Swift energetically countered the Presbyterians' claim to parity with their Anglican brethren in tracts such as *The Presbyterian's Pleas of Merit, Advantages Propos'd by Repealing the Test*, and in poems like 'On the Words Brother Protestants and Fellow Christians' – but also in more unexpected places, as the conclusion to this thesis shows. Robert Mahony has recently remarked on the anti-Presbyterian turn taken by Swift's writings after a renewed effort to repeal the test began in earnest in 1731. The virulence in Swift's writings after this date is hardly surprising for one in whose career 'loathing of Presbyterians was a constant', as Mahony comments.¹³¹ What has not been remarked on previously is that *A Modest Proposal* offers a solution to the political problem that was beginning to exercise Ireland's Establishment at the time of its publication. In this respect Swift's text is not so much his 'last word on the state of Ireland' as the first word in a campaign against the Presbyterians and their allies in the Irish Commons. Within the allegory, Swift's text offers nothing less than a shortest way with the Dissenters of Ireland, as we see from the *Proposal's* second advantage:

¹²⁹ Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southwell, 27 August 1729, BL Add MS 21,122, I, 77'.

¹³⁰ J. C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687–1780* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 122.

¹³¹ Mahony, 'Protestant Dependence and Consumption in Swift's Irish Writings', p. 95.

SECONDLY, The poorer Tenants will have something valuable of their own, which, by Law, may be made liable to Distress, and help to pay their Landlord's Rent; their Corn and Cattle being already seized, and *Money a Thing unknown*. (114–5)

Distress, or distraint, is a legal recourse which allows a creditor to confiscate goods from a debtor as payment in kind. The 'something valuable' which becomes liable to distress is of course the child of the 'poorer Tenant'. This paragraph therefore gives an important indication of the demographic scope of the proposal. It confirms a suggestion made in the early part of the pamphlet where the Proposer outlines his general intention:

[M]y Intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the Children of *professed Beggars*: It is of a much greater Extent, and shall take in the whole Number of Infants at a certain Age, who are born of Parents, in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our Charity in the Streets. (109–10)

The Proposer is establishing a specific criterion for admission into his scheme and this is in the nature of a means test. His proposal will be applied not only to beggars but to all parents who are '*in Effect*' as unable to support their children as 'those who demand our Charity'. The Proposer's remarks on distress reveal how this criterion of effective poverty operates. Although money is '*a Thing Unknown*' amongst them, tenant farmers could conceivably be excluded from functional equivalence with beggars on the grounds that their produce enables them to support themselves. This would prevent them from becoming a drain upon the economy as a whole. However, as the Proposer points out, this produce is seized by landlords to make up the rent.

What the Proposer admits only by implication is that if the claims like those made in 'Trueman' and 'Layfield's letter are true, then existing lack of monetary wealth, and the loss of material assets by distress, reduces tenant farmers to the status of dependants. This brings them within the ambit of his scheme, being as bereft of resources to nourish their children as

beggars are. If one connects the first and second of his advantages, it becomes apparent that the Proposer intends to call the bluff of those who cite the tithe as a spur to transatlantic emigration. The introduction of hard currency into circulation has one further advantage: it makes it much easier for the church to collect the tithe. Landlords may now demand monetary payment, allowing the church to obtain its dues by distraining the tenants of their newly-liberated goods. This very course of action had been proposed by Archbishop Boulter during his conference with the dissenting ministers. 'I told them,' he says to the Bishop of London, that 'raising the value of tythes did not prove any oppression, except it were proved that the value was greater than they were really worth; and that even then the farmer had his remedy by letting the clergy take it in kind'.¹³² Even the Proposer's claim that his scheme would be 'a great Inducement to Marriage' (115) can be read as a swipe at complaints regarding the legal status of Presbyterian marriage – especially given the Proposer's remark that wedlock is '*a Circumstance not much regarded by our Savages*' (111).

A Modest Proposal is thus not so much Swift's 'last word on the state of Ireland' as an attempt to have the final say on a controversy that had erupted over the spring and summer of 1729. In this aim the Swift's text was not successful. The debate on the tithe as a cause of emigration, would continue well into the next decade, with increasing ferocity. On Thursday 18 March 1736, the Commons heard the results of an enquiry into the latest round of allegations that the Church of Ireland clergy had been abusing its temporal powers. The charges were made in a petition brought by Samuel Low and others on behalf of 'the rest of the Gentlemen Land-holders in this Kingdom'. The petitioners complained that 'many of the Clergy in the several Parts of this Kingdom' had begun to contest their legal right for what the petition calls 'a new Kind of Tythe, under the Name of Agistment for dry and Barren Cattle'. They alleged that 'Suits in Equity for such Tythes multiply very fast' as a result of 'the Clergy taking Example from one another'. The gentlemen landholders' petition closes with the apprehension that:

¹³² *Letters*, I, 233.

the Proceedings of the Clergy in such Demands [...] will greatly increase the present prevailing Disposition, which the Petitioners with Concern observe in the Protestants of Ireland withdrawing themselves and their Effects to America, and will, in Consequence, greatly impoverish the Petitioners, and many others of his Majesty's faithful Subjects, and impair the Protestant Interest and Strength of this Kingdom.¹³³

Over the course of their enquiry into the petitioners' allegations, the Commons Committee heard several witnesses testify that the new tithe was a direct cause of increased emigration. They heard that 'many of the Protestants in the County of Meath have gone, and others are preparing to go to America, on Account of the Tithe of Agistment for dry and barren cattle'. James Ruddock, a gentleman of the King's County reported that 'several of his Neighbours declare they will go to the West-Indies, if there be any Addition to the Tythes already paid'.¹³⁴

Faced with such testimonies, the Committee concluded that the clergy's demands were indeed likely to 'prejudice and endanger the Protestant Religion, Interest, and Strength of this Kingdom'. They also found in favour of the allegation that as well as being unreasonable, the clergy's demand was without suitable precedent. Upon 'the strictest Inquiry' it emerged that the first attempt to establish the Church's legal right to this tithe had been made as recently as 1722, when Archdeacon Benjamin Neale filed a suit in the Court of Exchequer against Edward Stratford. The next such bill was filed in 1726 and the first ever demand for the tithe, the Committee found, had been made by Neale in 1707.¹³⁵ While the report shows that the controversy stretched back over thirty years, its tone of the report does not quite do justice to the temper of the proceedings in the Commons. According to one account these were 'Conducted and carryed on

¹³³ 'Report from the Committee appointed to take into Consideration the Petition of SAMUEL LOW, and others', *Journals of the House of Commons of Ireland*, IV, part 2 (1731–1748), Appendix, p. lxxv. Published separately under the same title (Dublin: Samuel Fairbrother, 1736).

¹³⁴ Report on the petition of Samuel Low, p. lxxvii.

¹³⁵ Report, p. lxxv, lxxvi; Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, p. 136.

with great Heat'; the 'most virulent Resolutions' were proposed and the Judges of the Exchequer were 'abused in almost every Speech'.¹³⁶

Swift responded to events in the Commons with his own torrent of abuse, *A Character, Panegyric and Description of the Legion Club*. And he continued to have his say elsewhere. The fourth volume of Faulkner's 1735 Works reprints a slightly altered version of *A Modest Proposal*, where for the first time the word 'idolatrous' is inserted into the Proposer's description of those good Protestants who have 'chosen rather to leave their Country, than stay at home, and pay Tithes against their Conscience, to an idolatrous *Episcopal Curate*'. It seems that even Swift's last word was subject to revisions as its topicality increased.

¹³⁶ 'Some Considerations upon the Late Proceedings in Ireland, in opposition to the Clergy's Demand of Tythe, Herbage, or Agistment for the Pasture of Dry and barren Cattle', BL Add. MS 21,132, Papers relating to ecclesiastical affairs in Ireland, fols 49^r–53^r; repeated on fols 54^r–58^r and 60^r–63^v.

Conclusion

On 16 January 1730, the City of Dublin unanimously elected to honour its most famous son. At ‘a General Assembly of our Citizens’, reported the *Dublin Intelligence*, ‘it was agreed to present the Revd. Dr. Jonathan Swift, (the most deserving and worthy of our patriots) His Freedom of the City, in a Gold Box, made for the purpose’.¹ An occasional piece, specially constructed to mark the event, the box offers itself as an emblem of Swift’s achievement in the 1720s and a fitting token with which to conclude this thesis. However, as attested in ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room’, one of Swift’s more famous works of the 1730s, a box is a device that permits closure only for as long as no-one chooses to re-open it. Despite the formal satisfaction it offers, there are several reasons why the sense of an ending offered by the presentation of 1730 must be declined. Technically speaking the award was superfluous. As a clergyman Swift already enjoyed the privileges of citizenship, while as chief inhabitant of the Liberty of the Deanery of St. Patrick’s he was presumably exempt from any of the more archaic strictures imposed upon those who were not free of the city. Rather than confer a practical benefit the award recognized an achievement. Before looking forward to what Swift’s writing went on to do in the 1730s, it is therefore necessary to examine how the foregoing pages have interpreted his achievement during the 1720s.

Swift’s own response to being granted his freedom militates against investing the ceremony with a crowning finality. On first being presented with the box containing the instrument of his freedom, he gave it back. ‘[T]he Dean gently put it back’, comments an account of the ceremony printed by Deane Swift in 1765, ‘and desired first to be heard’. Swift went on to complain that ‘the honour was mingled with a little mortification, by the delay which attended it’. The delay between the decision to grant the honour and its being conferred on 27 May had been occasioned by Lord Allen, a Privy Councillor whom Swift had recently libelled in verse and who had retaliated by bringing a prosecution against Swift’s printer. In his acceptance speech Swift took time to attack Allen

¹ *Dublin Intelligence*, 24 January 1730; also *Dublin Journal*, 20 January 1730 (quoted in *Prose* XII, xxiv).

and anyone else who would ‘charge him with the character of a Jacobite, an enemy to King George, or a libeller of the government’. He also took a swipe at the memory of Lord Whitshed, renewing his grudge against the now deceased judge who had prosecuted Edmund Waters for printing the *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* in 1720. Swift finally confessed to the authorship of the *Drapier’s Letters* before concluding with the observation that:

an inscription might have been graven on the box, shewing some reason why the city saw fit to do him that honour, which was much out of the common forms to a person in private station; those distinctions being usually made only to chief governors, or persons in very high employments.²

The speech was thus characterized by three rhetorical gestures that this thesis has cited as typical of Swift’s writings between 1720 and 1729. It renewed old enmities by aligning them with new ones. It elevated the pamphleteer to the level of statesman, functionally equivalent and morally superior to ‘chief governors’. And by calling for a written statement that would adequately summarize this conception of the writer’s public role it shows how Swift regarded the constituency he had created for himself. Without his guidance it remained fundamentally disorganized and inarticulate – a complaint that Swift went on to level at the Corporation of Cork in 1737 when it too awarded him freedom without sufficiently expatiating upon its reasons.³ Swift’s authorship, whether of poems, pamphlets or the missing inscription he supplied for the box, gave a coherent voice to a civic body that was otherwise incapable of speaking for itself. As *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* would have it, he ‘Taught fools their interest to know; / And gave them arms to ward the blow’ (*Poems* p. 496, l. 410). But these ‘fools’ had a plurality of interests to pursue and were quite prepared to exploit Swift’s name and image in furthering these lesser causes.

² ‘The Substance of what was said by the Dean of St. Patrick’s to the Lord Mayor and some of the Aldermen, when his Lordship came to present the said Dean with his Freedom in a Gold Box’, *Prose* XII, 145, 146.

³ Swift wrote to the mayor, aldermen, sheriffs and common council of the City of Cork on 15 August 1737, returning the silver box they had awarded him and asking them to amend the instrument of his freedom and place an inscription on the box (*Correspondence*, ed. Williams, V, 67–8; *Prose* XIII, Appendix F, 190–1). He subsequently willed the box to John Grattan with instructions to keep in it ‘the Tobacco he usually cheweth, called Pigtail’ (*Prose* XIII, 155).

Unanimous though it had been, the decision to confer the award reflected divisions within the civic sphere. As Jacqueline Hill remarks, it was made during a 'period of cool relations between the aldermen and the privy council [...] and during the mayoralty of a merchant who had been disappointed of a seat in parliament at a recent by-election'.⁴ She might have added that the victorious candidate, alderman Somervill, had attracted support by publishing a spurious letter of recommendation in the Dublin press supposedly written by Swift. The result was that 'the Weavers, who all justly idolize the Drapier [...] came in such Numbers as to get in the Majority above 60 for Mr. SOMERVILL', much to the annoyance of the Lord Mayor.⁵ Rather than achieve his freedom Swift had it thrust upon him as part of at least two continuing feuds, and the ceremony thus takes its place in a series of parodic repetitions and appropriations. Swift's achievement in his occasional writings of the 1720s was not to initiate nor even to orchestrate such a sequence but to supply forms for imitation and to imitate forms supplied by others. This thesis has tried to establish this reciprocal process of production as the context that defines the relationship between Swift and his constituency. This relationship may be understood as being governed by a contract in the Hobbesian sense of an agreement to surrender individual agency and vest it within a corporate identity that is yet subject to control and manipulation by individuals, thereby becoming a commodity to be used, abused and reused. To determine the literary modes of that process of constructing and controlling identities has been the project of the foregoing pages.

Chapter One exemplified the process, showing how the creation of the 'Hibernian Patriot' by Edmund Waters was a work of collage, taken up by Swift in his 'inaugural' work of the twenties, the *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*. Much as *Hibernia's Passive Obedience* was both a beginning and a return, so was the larger political climate that produced Swift's first proposal. At a time when the rhetoric of slavery was being redeployed in the context of Anglo-Irish relations, Swift began recycling the text of Parliamentary resolutions and the tenets of civic duty into a language of patriotism first made current by the man who would become his printer. This ethos of recirculation and

⁴ Hill, *Patriots to Unionists*, p. 81.

⁵ *Dublin Intelligence*, 13 October 1729, 1 November 1729.

reuse continued in *The Drapier's Letters*, as the rallying cries of the Williamite conflict were new minted in the campaign against 'brass money'. Chapters Three and Four discussed some linguistic and literary modalities of this rhetorical economy. They identified Ireland's languages and history on one hand, and on the other, the pastoral genre as, respectively, the site of a dialectic and the pre-eminent mode of representing it: a struggle between competing discourses of propriety and proprietorship, belonging and ownership, expropriation and appropriation. My reading of the charity schools movement described an experiment designed to break the recurring cycle of Ireland's 'wretched condition' by transforming the habits of the lower orders. The last chapter identified *A Modest Proposal* as an extension of this policy into the realms of fantasy, an allegory which speaks otherwise by simultaneously making an eloquent statement of a problem and offering an unspeakable solution.

Two observations can be added by way of conclusion. The first is that it makes more sense to speak of Swift's idea of Ireland in a civic context rather than a national one. Abstractly speaking, he defended institutions – Parliament, the municipality and, above all, the Church – within a state where citizenship was largely conditional upon membership of such institutions. In a more concrete sense, Swift's writing can be seen as contributions to and comments on a debate that was conducted among eminent citizens of Dublin and other municipalities. He was one of many burghers who issued proposals for the improvement of public life in general and the particular problem of the poor, always with an eye on private benefits. Equally he was one of many high- and middle-ranking members of the Church of Ireland clergy who sought to maintain an eroded Establishment against further encroachments from the private landed interest and the threats of Popery and Dissent. What differentiates Swift from businessmen-patriots like David Bindon, John Browne and Thomas Prior, and from churchmen-activists like Archbishop King, Bishop Synge and William Tisdall, is that none of these men wrote *A Modest Proposal*. But even this text is more immersed in local concerns than its canonical status, with its guarantee of universal themes, implies.

My last chapter repositioned the *Proposal* among writings on the topics of famine relief and canal construction, patent medicines and the demographic

balance, emigration from Ulster and Presbyterian resistance to the tithe. It is the last of these that must be emphasised in any assessment of Swift's writings of the 1730s. I have shown that the *Proposal* represents not Swift's last word on the state of Ireland but the first word in a series of attacks on Presbyterians for their opposition to the tithe and their attempts to repeal the Sacramental Test Act. Both of these gathered pace in the new decade, the latter especially between 1732 and the end of 1733 when government plans to repeal the Test were dropped following a defeat in the Irish Parliament.⁶ This occasioned that rare thing, a word of praise from Swift for 'the present House of Commons [...] who [...] defeated the Arts and Endeavours of the Schismatics to repeal the *Sacramental Test*'.⁷

Like many of his fellow churchmen, Swift was troubled by these 'Arts and Endeavours' because he perceived them to be orchestrated by Ireland's Presbyterians, whose unity of purpose made them a concerted threat to a confessional state that was already highly unstable. Because they were concentrated in the North – where their numerical superiority allowed them to pose a clear 'challenge to the Anglican establishment in church and state' – Swift could conceive them as a rival polity, 'the Scotch plantation' as he called it, that had already begun to endanger the exclusively Anglican character of Ireland's civic structure.⁸ William Tisdall remarked that the corporations of most of the northern towns had been in their hands prior to the Test Act.⁹ In Swift's view, northern Presbyterians would not be satisfied until they had extended a hold over the religious as well as the civic arm of government in the manner of Scotland. In replying to the farmers of Lisburn, he asserts that their complaints against the tithe would, if upheld, result in the establishment of a 'Scotch spiritual Oeconomy' where the Church has lost its temporal jurisdiction and landlord has become 'Lord of the Soyl and the Tyth together' (XII, 78).

⁶ Indeed, as J. C. Beckett remarks, 'The great majority of the Irish house of commons showed itself so hostile to [the plans for repeal] that the government dared not even bring the question in any formal way.' ('Swift: The Priest in Politics', p. 121).

⁷ 'Some Reasons against the Bill for settling the Tyth of Hemp, Flax, &c. by a Modus', *Prose* XII, 97.

⁸ Connolly, *Religion, Law, and Power*, p. 162.

⁹ [William Tisdall], *The Conduct of the Dissenters of Ireland, with Respect to Both Church and State* (Dublin: [n. pub], 1712), pp. 18–19.

It was to obviate such an outcome that Swift took up his pen. *A Modest Proposal*, as my last chapter argued, is as much an attack on those ‘good Protestants who have chosen rather to leave their Country, than stay at home, and pay Tithes against their Conscience’ as it is on ‘the principal Breeders of the Nation, as well as our most dangerous Enemies’, the Catholics. The *Proposal* may offer the female Catholic body as a biological weapon that must at all costs be put out of commission, but in reality this is a decoy. The *Proposal* is more concerned with the place of certain ‘good Protestants’ in the Irish body politic. Unlike political arithmeticians such as David Bindon, Swift did not automatically welcome any addition to the total number of Protestants in Ireland; nor must any loss necessarily be counted a misfortune. Texts dealing with the emigration crisis of 1729 remark that the author is ‘not in the least sorry to hear of the great numbers going to America’ because ‘the uncontrolled [i.e. unchallenged] Maxim that People are the Riches of a Nation is no Maxim here under our Circumstances’ (XII, 66; cf XII, 135). Such statements are interpreted as bitterly ironic, but they are also imbued with the volatile combination of ‘meaning it and not meaning it’ that Claude Rawson has shown to characterize Swiftian irony. The maxim that ‘people are the riches of a nation’ is often held to be the satiric target of *A Modest Proposal*, but Swift was not attacking its reduction to people of objects so much as its denial of the possibility that people could constitute a positive drain on a country’s resources.

Long before he wrote the *Proposal*, however, Swift was contending that an influx of Protestants could represent a burden to the human economy rather than a boon. *The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen* makes this point in detail. Among the points of policy analyzed in the *History* is the 1711 Act for Naturalizing Foreign Protestants. Unlike many of his peers, Swift was critical of this move, which seems to have been undertaken as a way of accommodating refugees from the German Palatinate. His detailed refutation of the Act’s underlying philosophy shows how *A Modest Proposal* represents a variation on a persistent theme:

[T]o invite helpless Families by Thousands into a Kingdom inhabited like Ours, [...] is a wrong Application of the Maxim [that people are the riches of a nation]; and the same thing in great,

as Infants dropped at the Doors, which are only a Burthen and Charge to the Parish [...] Whether bringing over the *Palatines* were a mere Consequence of this Law for a General Naturalization; or whether, as many surmised, it has some other Meaning; it appeared manifestly by the Issue, that the Publick was a Loser by every Individual among them: And, that a Kingdom can no more be the Richer by such an Importation, than a man can be fatter by a Wen; which is unsightly and troublesome at best, and intercepts that Nourishment which would otherwise diffuse itself through the whole Body. (VII, 95)

In the 1730s, Swift's energies would increasingly be consumed by the need to demonstrate that the Presbyterians of Ulster represented a comparable parasite infesting the Irish body politic. Tracts like *The Advantages Proposed by Repealing the Test* (1732), *The Presbyterians Plea of Merit* (1733) and *Reasons Humbly offered to the Parliament for Repealing the Sacramental Test, in Favour of the Catholicks* (1733; published 1738) show that Swift did not stint in his opposition to any alteration of the state's confessional bias against Presbyterians. What they do not show, however, is that such opposition was as central a component of Swift's civic patriotism as his opposition to the Declaratory Act or to William Wood's patent. In his own time Swift's anti-Presbyterianism was not merely a point of honour with old Tory friends, Opposition confreres and defenders of the Establishment in the Irish Parliament. It was publicly upheld as exemplary by his ardent followers in the Liberties and survived the initial stages of apotheosis as an eminent patriot author.

That process begins with volume four of George Faulkner's 1735 edition of Swift's *Works*, which contains 'His papers relating to Ireland'. The first of these papers is not Swift's 1707 allegory of Anglo-Irish relations, *The Story of the Injured Lady*, which Faulkner did not publish until the 1746 *Works*, shortly after it had been published in pamphlet form in London. Pride of place is instead taken by an anti-Dissenting polemic, *A Letter from a Member of the House of Commons in Ireland to a Member of the House of Commons in England, concerning the Sacramental Test*. As Faulkner explains in his Advertisement this letter was written 'in the Year 1708 at a Juncture when the *Dissenters* were endeavouring to repeal the *Sacramental Test*', but the piece is not included out of historical interest or in the furtherance of bibliographical completeness. Faulkner

not only reprints the piece but re-edits it, ‘omitting certain Passages, which relate to certain Persons’, but retaining the original argument because ‘the Author’s Way of Reasoning seems at present to have more Weight, than it had in those Times when the Discourse first appeared’.¹⁰ For Faulkner – as presumably for Swift who oversaw this edition and added his own notes – this was not a period piece but a vitally topical one. Nor was this the first time that the 1708 letter had been re-topicalized: it may be remembered from Chapter One that fragments of it were used by Edmund Waters in 1720 to help make up *Hibernia’s Passive Obedience*.

Swift’s printers were not alone in their enthusiasm for his anti-Dissenting polemic as an incident from 1734 shows. On 8 January that year, the inhabitants of the Liberty of the Dean and Chapter of St. Patrick’s issued a printed statement of support for their ‘Neighbour, Benefactor and Head of the Liberty’. They announced that they would ‘endeavour to defend the Life and Limbs’ of the Dean against ‘a certain Man of this City’ who had ‘openly threatened and sworn, before many hundred People, as well Persons of Quality as others [...] by the help of several Ruffians, to murder or maim the said Dean’. The man was Richard Bettesworth, a lawyer and MP who, as Pat Rogers remarks, became one of the most regular targets for Swift’s satire in the 1730s (*Poems*, 909). He had announced his intention to attack Swift ‘upon a frivolous unproved Suspicion, of the said Dean’s having written some lines in Verse’.¹¹ The lines in question attack Bettesworth for presuming such an unearned professional seniority as to address his superior, Henry Singleton, as an equal:

Thus at the bar that booby Bettesworth,
Though half a crown o’erpays his sweat’s worth;
Who knows in law, nor text, nor margent,
Calls Singleton his brother serjeant.
(*Poems*, 538, ll. 25–28)

¹⁰ ‘The Publisher’s Advertisement to the Reader’, *The Works of J. S., D.D., D. S. P. D. in Four Volumes*, IV, ii.

¹¹ ‘A Copy of the Paper with which several Persons of the Liberty of St. Patrick’s attended the Rev. Dr. J. Swift, Dean of St. Patrick’s Dublin, in the Name of all the Inhabitants of the said Liberty, as well as the Neighbourhood, on Tuesday, the 8th of this Instant January, 1734–5’, *Prose* V, Appendix D, p. 341.

Despite his violent reaction to these lines, Bettesworth was not the main target of this poem's invective. The above lines take a sideswipe at him as part of a series of exempla where individuals use inappropriately familiar language, specifically the word 'brother', to address their superiors. A quack surgeon hails John Radcliffe as his brother doctor; a curate signs himself 'your brother' in a letter to his dean. These illustrations all parallel the actual case that occasions the poet's anger, which is expended, as the title makes clear, 'On the Words "Brother Protestants and Fellow Christians"'. These terms a subtitle explains, were 'so familiarly used by the advocates for the repeal of the Test Act' in 1733. In his account of the scuffle, Swift says that his neighbours were prepared to set upon Bettesworth 'to the manifest danger of his life'.¹² The question is whether they sought to defend Swift's principles or merely his person. They were stirred into action by Bettesworth's threats against Swift, but were they equally outraged by the presumptuous use of the words 'Brother Protestants'?

Swift's follow-up to the poem of that name assumes that they were. 'The Yahoo's Overthrow' is a ballad where the men of the Liberty recount 'How Bettesworth, that booby and scoundrel in grain / Hath insulted us all by insulting the Dean' (*Poems*, p. 539, ll. 3–4). The poet depicts the mob characterizing the Bettesworth's religious affiliation as so debased that he does not discriminate among the red hat of a cardinal, the true-blue Presbyterian's bonnet and the infidel's turban:

Of all sizes and sorts, the fanatical crew
 Are his brother Protestants, good men and true;
 Red hat and blue bonnet, and turban's the same,
 What the devil is't to him whence the devil they came?
 (p. 540, ll. 21–4)

Whether or not such exclamations were indeed made in the environs of St Patrick's Cathedral around the beginning of 1734 Swift certainly imagined his audience to be at one with him in zealous condemnation of the 'fanatical crew'. His printer also thought fit to emphasise the importance of Swift's anti-Dissenting polemic the following year and to assert that it had 'more Weight' in

¹² Swift to the Duke of Dorset, [no day specified] January 1734, *Correspondence*, ed. Williams, IV, 221.

its republished for than it had when it first appeared thirty years earlier. The final assertion of this thesis is that Swift's antipathy towards Presbyterians carries more weight in his canon than is often allowed.

As Robert Mahony asserts, such antipathy is not highly visible in Swift's Irish writings before the 1730s as there was 'little occasion' to articulate it before the Presbyterian campaign for repeal of the Test in 1731.¹³ However, the concerns that animate Swift's response to this campaign do impinge on his works before and after 1731. Nor is their influence confined to works that proclaim themselves to be about Presbyterians or the Test and thereby also condemn themselves to be thought of as 'minor' works. This claim can be substantiated with reference to some similarities between the poem 'On the Words "Brother Protestants and Fellow Christians"' and two works that enjoy more central status in the Swiftian canon.

Appealing to the argument that the hierarchy of social privilege is rooted in nature, 'Brother Protestants' begins by invoking Æsop's fable of the flooded barn. It imagines various bits of detritus speaking to each other as they are swept away:

The generous wheat forgot its pride,
And sailed with litter side by side;
Uniting all, to show their amity,
As in a general clamity.
A ball of new-dropped horse's dung,
Mingling with apples in the throng,
Said to the pippin, plump, and prim,
'See, brother, how we apples swim.'
(p. 538, 7–14)

In addressing the apple as 'brother', the ball of dung is guilty of a social *faux pas*. A Presbyterian who salutes an Anglican as a fellow Protestant, runs the implied argument, is a turd and an unmannerly one at that. To be labelled as a dungball might seem punishment enough, but elsewhere in Swift's writing, a misuse of the words 'Protestant' and 'Brother Christian' occasions a much graver penalty, one that is, according to its victim, 'worse [...] than Death it self'. The victim in question is Gulliver, who is captured by Japanese pirates in Part Three

¹³ 'Protestant Dependence', p. 95

of his *Travels*. Among his captors, Gulliver spots a Dutchman and appeals to his compassion as a fellow Protestant:

I [...] begged him in Consideration of our being Christians and Protestants, of neighbouring Countries, in strict Alliance, that he would move the Captains to take some Pity on us. This inflamed his Rage; he repeated his Threatnings; and turning to his Companions, spoke with great Vehemence, in the *Japanese* Language, as I suppose; often using the Word *Christianos*. (XI, 154–5)

Gulliver, who never knows when to shut his mouth, replies that he was ‘sorry to find more Mercy in a Heathen, than in a Brother Christian’. Gulliver soon finds that he has ‘Reason to repent those foolish Words’ as he is separated from his crewmates and cast adrift on the open seas in a small canoe. As well as paying the price for his outspokenness, Gulliver, who is himself of Puritan stock, is suffering a symbolic punishment here for his too free assumption of a fraternal bond between the reformed sects.¹⁴ At the very least there is a teasing coincidence of imagery between Gulliver cast adrift in his canoe and the Presbyterian dungball swept along in the flood, each of them haplessly mouthing words like ‘Brother Protestant’.

The idea of natural kinship is thoroughly demolished in ‘Brother Protestants’. Anglican and Presbyterians are related, says the poem, ‘in no other sense, than nature / Has made a rat a fellow creature’. Fellow creatures are not necessarily fellow Christians:

Lice from your body suck their food;
But is a louse your flesh and blood?
Though born of human filth and sweat, it
May well be said man did beget it. (ll. 35–38)

The interesting words here are ‘born’ and ‘beget’. Swift is invoking theories of spontaneous generation, where parasites such as lice do not hatch from eggs but are ‘born’ out of the ‘filth and sweat’ exuded by their human hosts.

¹⁴ In his edition of *Gulliver's Travels* (pp. 291–2), Paul Turner notes that the Gullivers originate from Banbury, ‘a town famous for its Puritanism’ and that Swift’s hero is sent by his father to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, ‘also noted for its Puritanism’.

This forms the basis for a monstrous fantasy of male parthenogenesis, where the man may be said to act as father, or indeed mother, to the louse. Such a fantasy quickly proves abortive and is discarded as an ultra-nominalist absurdity. It may be said that ‘man did beget’ the louse that infests his person but this is patently ridiculous, as the argument goes on to assert. If a man can be said to give birth to a louse then ‘maggots in your nose and chin, / As well may claim you for their kin’, in which case a Presbyterian may as well call an Anglican ‘brother’. But even as Swift is denying the legitimacy of this particular birth, he assists at another one. Not only does this poem hatch a series of arguments to refute the idea of natural kinship between Protestant sects, it is also acting as midwife to a particular idea, namely that Presbyterians represent a kind of parasite infesting the Irish body politic. This may be an obvious subtext of this poem, but the same analogy also manages to worm its way into poems, and onto bodies, where we might be more surprised to find it.

One of those bodies belongs to Celia – the Lady referred to in the title of Swift’s 1732 poem ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room’. Contemporaneous with the resurgence of Swift’s anti-Presbyterian animus, this poem shows some striking lexical affinities with ‘Brother Protestants’. We have seen how in the latter poem, the ‘generous wheat forgot its pride, / And sailed with litter side by side’. The word ‘litter’ means a not just mess of straw used for animals’ bedding but also the straw and dung together as the *OED* points out, citing these very lines. The word is also, however, sliding towards its modern denotation of ‘rubbish’, and according to the dictionary, ‘The Lady’s Dressing Room’ is the first English language text to deploy the word in this meaning. In this poem, Strephon famously creeps into Celia’s recently vacated chamber where he takes a ‘strict survey, / Of all the litter as it lay’ (p. 448; ll. 7–8). The contents of that survey afford a striking comparison with the verminous vocabulary of ‘Brother Protestants’:

The virtues we must not let pass
Of Celia’s magnifying glass; [...]
A glass that can to sight disclose
The smallest worm in Celia’s nose,
And faithfully direct her nail
To squeeze it out from head to tail;

For catch it nicely by the head,
 It must come out alive or dead.
 (p. 450, ll. 59–60; 63–8)

This stanza offers the magnifying glass as a token of clear-sightedness, brandished by Swift as he fearlessly holds the mirror up to nature, uncovering the startling truths of the female toilet. The glass is also, however, an obstetric instrument which the poet uses to induce a parodic birth, thus adding another connotation of the word 'litter'.¹⁵ The last three lines of this quotation enact a ritual of grotesque midwifery as we find Celia being delivered of a worm with the poet's assistance. The authorial voice superintends Celia's confinement with level-headed efficiency, instructing her to 'squeeze it out' to 'catch it nicely by the head', adding with suitable professional detachment that 'it must come out alive or dead'. Under cover of the more innocent rite of her cosmetic routine, Celia is being co-opted into a ritual of birth as purgation.

It is particularly significant that whereas the poet labours to disassociate the Irish body politic from any such lice or maggots as it may inadvertently spawn, in Celia's case we find him standing by with words of encouragement. It is as though a feminized body exuding filth and parasites is offered up in expiation for a political body suffering much the same fate. Laura Brown has written that in Swift's misogynist verses 'the figure of the woman is made to take responsibility for the cultural crisis of mercantile capitalism and imperial expansion'.¹⁶ To this list should be added the crisis of the Irish Establishment. 'The Lady's Dressing Room' may not be about Presbyterians but perhaps they are about it, or about Celia's person in the form of the worm that she squeezes from her nose. It is connections such as these that prevent any easy separation between Swift's 'Irish' writings and his more canonical works.

¹⁵ See also 'The Fable of the Bitches' (*Poems* 166–7), written during an earlier attempt to repeal the Test in 1715. This poem narrates, with obvious allegorical reference, the story of a pregnant bitch, 'Her litter teeming from her womb' searching for a place to give birth. She is eventually welcomed in Music's house where she is well fed ('For well she knew her numerous brood, / For want of milk, would suck her blood'). When Music returns to reclaim her house, the cubs set upon her and cast her out.

¹⁶ Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 181.

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