

Swiftian Inspirations

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*The Legacy of Jonathan Swift
from the Enlightenment to the
Age of Post-Truth*

Edited by

Jonathan McCreedy,
Vesselin M. Budakov
and Alexandra K. Glavanakova

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INTRODUCTION

VESSELIN BUDAKOV, JONATHAN MCCREEDY AND ALEXANDRA GLAVANAKOVA

Jonathan Swift's future, long-running legacy seems to have been first predicted in a heartfelt letter from Lord John Carteret to the Dean himself in March 1734-5.¹ "As for futurity," John Carteret writes in this letter, "I know your name will be remembered, when the names of kings, lords lieutenants, archbishops, and parliament politicians, will be forgotten."² In a letter to Swift, Alexander Pope similarly predicted his future praise as a writer and assured place in posterity, writing on behalf of George Lyttelton: "He loves you though he sees you not; as all posterity will love you, who will not see you, but reverence and admire you."³ Pope's cordial remark combines both a high regard for Swift in his private and public worlds, where he seems to have been equally, warmly and highly respected. Jonathan Swift's cousin Deane Swift is comparably reassuring of Swift's immutable acclaim. In his *Essay upon the Life of the Dean*, he predicts that "we may venture to prophesy that Swift's reputation will in spite of his criticks, observators, and detractors, continue to flourish and be adored," because he is "the loud and clear trumpet of the publick voice, which exalteth the reputation of an author, and crowneth his fame with honour and immortality."⁴

A frequently quoted passage during the nineteenth century concerning Jonathan Swift's heritage testifies to all the predictions made by Swift's contemporaries. The anonymously published *Sketch of the State of Ireland* (1808)—attributed to John Wilson Croker—describes the fame and importance of Swift's writing and portrays Swift as being insightful for his contemporaries as well as divinary for the early nineteenth century. It

¹ Hammond, *Jonathan Swift: Our Dean*, 681.

² Swift, Letter 339, Lord C— to Dr. Swift. Jermyn-Street, March 6, 1734-5. *Letters, Written by Jonathan Swift*, 3: 155-6.

³ Swift, *Volume XVI. Containing Letters*, Letter 374, Mr. Pope to Dr. Swift, May 17, 1739, 141.

⁴ Deane Swift, *Essay upon the Life*, 310-11

views him as an enviable policy-maker as well as an exemplary intellectual who devoted his work to raise the reputation of Ireland, whose writing spoke for Irish sovereignty and challenged British imperial policy. It argues that:

His wisdom was practical and prophetic – remedial for the present, warning for the future: He first taught Ireland that she might become a nation, and England that she might cease to be a despot. But he was a churchman. His gown impeded his course, and entangled his efforts – guiding a senate or heading an army he had been more than Cromwell, and Ireland not less than England: As it was, he saved her by his courage – improved her by his authority – adorned her by his talents – and exalted her by his fame. His mission was but of ten years, and for ten years only, did his personal power mitigate the government; but though no longer feared by the great, he was not forgotten by the wise; his influence, like his writings, has survived a century, and the foundations of whatever prosperity we have since erected, are laid in the disinterested and magnanimous patriotism of Swift.⁵

The vigour of Swift's wisdom, the author of this *Sketch* maintains, not only endured a whole century but was basically instrumental in the growing political maturity of forthcoming generations. Walter Scott—who called Swift the “oracle of Ireland”⁶—seems to share Croker's opinion about the Dean's undiminished importance. According to Scott, it is predominantly owing to satires such as *A Tale of a Tub*, *The Battle of the Books*, and the “moral romance of Gulliver” that the Dean is owed the “permanency of his popularity as an English classic of the first rank.”⁷

Deane Swift's *Life*, which describes Jonathan Swift as an influential thinker amongst his contemporaries, also envisions that his writing would resist both unwelcome critics and expand his fame against criticism. Dr Johnson, for instance, was one of those who questioned Swift's literary esteem since he believed that Swift had “a higher reputation than he deserve[d]” and that he was inferior to his contemporaries—even doubting that the Dean was the author of *The Tale of the Tub*.⁸ Conversely, in his *Life of Doctor Swift*, Thomas Sheridan stood up to defend the undeservedly underestimated cultural heritage of Swift's works and sorrowfully speculated that, for example, posterity will look upon Dr Johnson's longer, extolling *Life of Savage* compared to the unjustifiably shorter biography of

⁵ It has been attributed to John Wilson Croker, *A Sketch of the State of Ireland*, 10.

⁶ Scott, *Memoirs of Jonathan Swift*, vol. 1 of *Works of Jonathan Swift*, 21.

⁷ *Ibid*, 436.

⁸ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, on “*The Tale of a Tub*,” [A.D. 1763], 1:524.

the Dean. Sheridan sadly points out that “the works of the immortal Swift are either condemned, or slightly praised.”⁹ Like Sheridan, William Hazlitt who shared the assertion about Swift’s high standing instead paid tribute to him as a poet. According to him, Swift’s poetry was regrettably shrouded by the general acclaim of his prose. Even without his most eminent prose works, Hazlitt believed that “his name merely as a poet would have come down to us, and have gone down to posterity with well-earned honours;” and that his poetry alone is enough to laurel Swift “in the first rank of agreeable moralists in verse.”¹⁰

The predictions of Swift’s contemporaries turned out to be correct. The Dean’s voice has echoed in sequels and imitations, competing with the fame of his *bona fide* classics, and achieved a similar satirical and political effect in other times. An early critic reminds us that Swift’s reputation entered into the nineteenth century as “the Rabelais of England.”¹¹ Swift owes this praise to Alexander Pope who compared him to Cervantes and Rabelais; yet by calling him “Dean, Drapier, Bickerstaff, or Gulliver,”¹² Pope acutely noticed the political and satirical personas that were to shape the ethical parameters of Swiftian style and characteristically Swiftian ventriloquism. Today Swiftian features in satire include the words “funny, dark, cruel, unsavory, insightful, revealing, mean, biting, ironic, difficult, brilliant,”¹³ and the stockpile of these attributes inspired generations of writers and artists to achieve an equally disturbing voice in critiquing their own times through satire. Imitations, continuations, political cartoons as well as adaptations of, or, allusions to, some of Swift’s most well-known works all derive from a continual interest in Swiftian idiom as it proves to be equally topical in other places and times.

Since they were first published, Swift’s works have been in continuous appreciation, and of all the works, as Deane Swift predicted, it was the “famous Gulliver, which alone might be thought sufficient to make his reputation immortal.”¹⁴ When Rudolf Erich Raspe, for example, placed Gulliver in the main title of Baron Munchausen’s equally adventurous travels, he was certainly thinking in terms of marketing. His *Gulliver Revived; or The Singular Travels, Campaigns, Voyages, and Adventures of Baron Munikhouson* (1786) suggests, as the preface makes clear, that the veracity of the travels of Baron Munchausen should be seen in the

⁹ Sheridan, *Life of Dr. Swift in Works of the Rev. Jonathan Swift*, 1: 512.

¹⁰ Hazlitt, “Lecture VI,” *Lectures on the English Poets*, at 217–18.

¹¹ Wilson, *Swiftiana*, lxxxvi.

¹² Pope, *The Dunciad*, bk.1, lines 20–22, at 435.

¹³ Boyle, “Jonathan Swift,” 197.

¹⁴ Deane Swift, *Essay upon the Life*, 182.

same light as those made by Gulliver.¹⁵ Raspe's Munchausen is one of more than sixty parodies, sequels, and imitations to have appeared during the eighteenth century alone, which attests to Swift's continually reputed authority.¹⁶ This unrelenting interest in Swift went beyond the eighteenth century whose thought—political, allegorical, and satirical—has been an unstoppable subject of critical discussion as well as an object of inspiration for writers who have taken up the challenge to match the quality of critical thinking which Swift laid down.

Speculative works of fiction with adventurous fantastical traits akin to *Gulliver* were often met with scepticism by book reviewers. In one such review, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Monikins* (1835) was uncompromisingly censured by a reviewer who claimed that while the novel "follows the *trait* of Swift," its writer has "neither the sparking wit, the keen sarcasm, nor the polished style of the English satirist."¹⁷ A review of *The Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (1882) was even harsher in pillorying the artistic potential of the novel. The reviewer claims that such a subject "requires the pen of a Swift," while its author shows he is not "a second Dean of St. Patrick's." He has "qualities which undoubtedly Swift did not possess, such as an unlimited capacity for commonplace" in addition to being "lamentably deficient in such minor things as wit, satire, literary skill, and dialectics."¹⁸ The reputation of Swift's imaginative and speculative satires was persistently considered a model of excellence that commentators thought was impossible to reach.

As a political satire and allegory of contemporary British politics and ideology, Swift's *Gulliver* never limited its message to his contemporaries only. His work has had its own Swiftian "afterlives" and was used for political causes which Swift would doubtfully embrace. Besides parodies and imitations in prose and poetry, *Gulliver* regularly transcended generic boundaries. James Gillray's visual Gulliver in caricature, for instance, shows Napoleon the size of a Lilliputian standing in the palm of a Brobdingnagian-sized King William III. In another, a Lilliputian Napoleon is sailing in a square wooden basin, while being watched by the royal family and other people of high standing. Its aim was hilariously to ward off all possible scare-writ scenarios of a likely attack by the French. These early nineteenth-century caricatures were intended to boost morale and instil national pride by humorously belittling both Napoleon Bonaparte

¹⁵ Rudolf Erich Raspe, Advertisement to the Second Edition, *Gulliver Revived; or The Singular Travels*, viii.

¹⁶ Marshall, "Gulliver, Gulliveriana," 212.

¹⁷ Unsigned review of *The Monikins* in *New-England Magazine*, at 136.

¹⁸ Unsigned review of *Dawn of the Twentieth Century* in *The Academy*, at 25.

and the fear of invasion.¹⁹ The Channel Tunnel scare of the 1880s, in addition to an ample number of fictionalized accounts of future-war and invasions from the continent, represented the current public perils in a political cartoon by Friedrich Graetz, titled *England's Nightmare* (1882). A lion epitomizing Great Britain is tied to the ground depicted as Gulliver, whilst miniscule French soldiers swarm around him and others emerge out of the Channel tunnel in the distance. The title and the subtitle underneath the cartoon published in *Puck* reads: "England's nightmare. The Great Britain Gulliver overpowered and made helpless by French pygmies while asleep."²⁰

A Swiftian voice is sometimes only allusive. Anthony Trollope's 1882 novel *The Fixed Period*—that bears a theme and plot taken from the tragicomedy *The Old Law, or A New Way to Please You*—makes a proposal for euthanizing the elderly which is also, technically speaking, close to the call for mass infanticide in Swift's *Modest Proposal*. One finds a similar gruesome picture of sardonic seriousness in Trollope's novel where he adopts a method of satire which draws upon a presumed earnestness whose effect is to enunciate a critical sardonic vision of politics. Written by a member of a utopian society in the fictive antipodean island of Britannula set in the late twentieth century, the futuristic message of Trollope's satire gives a horrific vision taken in earnest about a necessary and timely annihilation of the weak and elderly in the same cool earnestness that Swift proposes the eating of Irish babies as a solution to economic problems and poverty.²¹ In creating his own "modest proposal," Trollope embraces two other themes developed in *Gulliver's Travels*. One of them is the unenviable condition of the immortal Struldbrugs in Book III who are estranged from society and for whom immortality is a curse, and not a wish-fulfilling fantasy, fused with the utopian theme of Book IV. The sardonic effect in Trollope's *Fixed Period* is achieved by a well-meaning yet horrific sounding solution. Only such dystopian calculations can make the extermination of humans look humanitarian. The "fixed period," 67 years old, is the age when people are compelled to undergo euthanasia to sustain the prosperity of a young nation by easing their "burden" to the community. The narrator—a former President of Britannula, who methodically as well as enthusiastically vindicates the doctrine of this fixed period—advocates euthanasia in the same inhumane

¹⁹ Gillray, *The King of Brobdingnag and Gulliver*, June 26, 1803; Ibid. *The King of Brobdingnag and Gulliver* (Plate 2d.), Feb. 10, 1804.

²⁰ Graetz, *Puck*, 1882: 21 and Library of Congress.

²¹ For the analogy between the two, see Rogers, "The Fixed Period," 18–19, 22–23.

matter-of-factly reasoning of the Houyhnhnm Assembly master, who speaks so coolly of the genocide of the Yahoos.

A number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century titles resuscitated “Gulliverian” subject matter in adventure and speculative fiction. Film adaptations of Swift’s satire go back to the 1930s with Aleksandr Ptushko’s *Novyj Gulliver* [*The New Gulliver*] in 1935 and Dave Fleischer’s *Gulliver’s Travels* in 1939, although the first filmic production based on Gulliver goes even further back to 1902 with Georges Méliès’s *Le Voyage de Gulliver à Lilliput et Chez les Géants*.²² More recently, Paul Beatty’s novel *The Sellout*, which won the Man Booker Prize for 2016, was recognized by critics as essentially Swiftian in nature. In addition, commentators often refer to Swift’s *Modest Proposal* to criticize inept implementations in world or national politics. The Trump administration and the U.S. presidential election campaign of 2016 has consequently turned into a Swiftian object of criticism. It is noteworthy that since the dawn of the “golden age” of satire in eighteenth-century Britain, politics and morality have invariably been the subject matter and object of satirical assessment. In a *London Review of Books* panel discussion, Irish author Colm Tóibín suggested that a modern-day Swift would probably be a blogger, claiming, in other words, that the technological advancement in the twenty-first century have allowed the tools and strategies of political satire to move to other media, yet keeping its essential origins, which is an inherited *modus operandi* that can be traced back to Jonathan Swift.²³ Certainly in favor of such a view, Noah Charney who criticized Trump for nearly wanting to enact the absurdities of Swift’s *Modest Proposal* claims that if Jonathan Swift lived today, he would “likely feature as a grumpy pundit on CNN, slinging pithy wisecracks and moonlighting as a writer on *Saturday Night Live*.”²⁴

Susan Straight foresees a darker picture in her sardonic attack on Trump’s widely advertised plan to build a Wall to stop Mexican immigrants from coming to America. Her “A Modest, Modern Proposal” satirically proposes how to prevent “the Descendants of Immigrant and Indigenous Americans, as well as Slaves and Pioneers, Recent Refugees and Pilgrim Refugees, from being a Burden on their Politicians, Enforcement Officials or Country.” Upon its implementation every American is compelled to wear a “laminated National Identification Card” which should also contain a blood sample of its owner.²⁵ Straight’s

²² Ezra, *George Méliès*, 154.

²³ “The Author in the Age of the Internet,” *LRB* Panel Discussion.

²⁴ Charney, “Donald Trump’s Modest Proposals,” *Salon*, Nov. 20, 2016.

²⁵ Straight, “A Modest, Modern Proposal.”

Swiftian censure seems like a forewarning about the perils and challenges democracy faces in general. Her Swiftian parody has an alarming dystopian tone. It expresses the fear that such unguarded verbal hostility could likely turn into banal normativity, which could undermine the roots of American identity with its melting-pot of multiculturalism and principles of equal opportunity.

Olga Hofmann's painting *Gulliver Trump in the Divided Land of Lillipublicans and Blefuscians* (2016) combines the political critique of *Gulliver's Travels* with the political division in American society during the U.S. presidential election in 2016.²⁶ It pictures Donald Trump in the center dressed as Gulliver in eighteenth-century attire. He is portrayed as a gigantic figure, remindful of the iconic nineteenth-century illustrations of Gulliver who resembles the Colossus of Rhodes with his legs far apart, while the Lilliputian army marches underneath him.²⁷ Hofmann's Gulliver stands astride a cleft, divided ground, which appears to be the American Constitution, and "We the People" from its preamble is the only visible part. A multitude of people are positioned behind "Gulliver Trump," comprising both his supporters and opponents. The two political parties, and their voters, who occupy the opposing sides of the severed ground are represented by the two portmanteau words, Lillipublicans and Blefuscians. They represent the Republicans and Democrats respectively, inspired by the continual war between Lilliputians and Blefuscians in *Gulliver's Travels*. A banner on the right-hand side reads "Make Lillipublic Great Again" to ridicule the right-wing nationalist aspirations expressed by the Trump campaign's slogan "Make America Great Again." Even more comical is another banner that flies from an ascending balloon. It reads "In Gulliver We Trump"—an allusion to "In God We Trust"—which conjures up the presidential candidate's real estate business background and humorously implies a trumpeting of political ideas which do little to discriminate between verity and deception. Gulliver Trump's gullibility is stressed by one more image. A man with a hose in his hands ablutes Gulliver Trump with water pumped up from an adjacent pond that bears the sign "Fake News Swamp," in which a big Jabba-the-Hutt-like frog is happily nested. Hofmann comically represents the whole war of accusations that was thrust upon the media as distributors of fake-news. In the background, above and behind this 2016 Gulliver, a flying saucer soars high in the clouded darkening sky, reminiscent of the flying island of Laputa. While in Swift's satire it has an imperial terrorizing role, in

²⁶ Hofmann, *Gulliver Trump in the Divided Land* at Saatchi Art.

²⁷ Swift, *Gulliver*, Part I, 38.

Hofmann's painting this Laputa lookalike is monitoring and surveilling the scene below. The flying saucer has the flag of the Russian Federation painted on its underside, which alludes to Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. elections as well as the controversial, genial diplomatic relationship between President Vladimir Putin and Trump.

Hofmann emulates a long tradition of political cartooning that goes back to eighteenth-century Britain—for example, within James Gillray's political caricatures—and late-nineteenth century America, with Thomas Nast's political cartoons. Nast has been renowned for the “symbolic forms” in his cartoons, two of which have had a long-standing reputation: “the donkey representing the Democratic party” and “the elephant representing the Republican party.”²⁸ In the painting's foreground, in front of Gulliver Trump, are two Roman racing chariots, both of which carry an enormous egg in proportionately big egg cups. The chariot driven by a donkey on the left-hand side embodies the worldview of American Democrats, whereas the right-hand side, a chariot driven by an elephant, conversely, symbolizes the Republicans political perspective. It is a parody of the theological disputes between the Big-Endians and Little-Endians in *Gulliver's Travels*—i.e., the satirized proponents of Catholicism and Protestantism who are humorously depicted as having a bloody war over which end an egg should be cracked open. Inspired by Swift's satire, the painting translates this irresolvable antagonism into the context of the modern-day American presidential campaign with its two main actors, the Democrats and the Republicans, and ridicules their rivalry as being equally trivial. Hofmann's pictorial satire is as much a critique of contemporary American politics as it is an attestation of the universality of Swift's political satire. It shows, in other words, that Swiftian satire defies time and space as it allows for the bridging over of historical periods as well as the application of its critical focus globally.

Swiftian Inspirations takes its discursive interest in the context of the creative rehashing and revisions of the multifarious Swiftian voices over time. It looks upon inspirations, appropriations, and re-readings of Swift as instances of dialogic reception of Swiftian thought from the age of Enlightenment to the age of post-truth. It aims in particular to illustrate the posterity of prestigious moments and their effects throughout the reception and cultural legacy of Swift the intellectual and thinker. The first section is

²⁸ Vinson, *Thomas Nast*, 10.

devoted to eighteenth-century visions of Jonathan Swift. Marc Martinez chooses to unravel the ethical parameters of truth and lies within Swiftian satire within the contemporary political discourse that our postmodern age is still in need of both problematizing and resolving. He describes Swift as a hoaxer spreading fake news under the guise of Isaac Bickerstaff. As a political commentator, Martinez claims, Swift assertively advertised the truth of his political criticism and accused his opponents of falsehood, whilst as a satirist he brought the expression of untruth to pure validity. Martinez ultimately draws parallels between the satirical foci and methods in postmodernity with those that are similar to the age and time of Swift. From the fabrication of identity and the fabrication of truth, James Ward turns his attention to the meaning of madness in the eighteenth century and looks into the contemporary connotations of “insanity” with which Swift creatively played. Ward claims that since 1742, when a commission of lunacy found Dean Swift to be of “unsound mind and memory,” the myth of Swift’s madness and insanity in general have been approached both through “the way we think about Swift and the way that Swift makes us think about mental health.” Evgenia Pancheva focuses her reading on Swift’s poetic and fictional personas, the multiple identities of a critical and clandestine self-construed political voice. She comments upon the self-alienating technique in Swift’s later poems and in *Gulliver’s Travels* with the attempt to recontextualize the author’s various poetic and political disguises. She argues that Swift’s poetry reveals a distinctive form of self-distancing, different from how previous authors had expressed poetic self-reflections. According to her, “distances and masks are typical of Swiftian self-reflexivity” and she explores how he inscribed himself in a poetic rupture “between speaker and fictional persona,” while oscillating “between speaker and mask.”

The second section deals with the imitations, adaptations and revisions of Swift’s satirical works in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Vesselin M. Budakov, for instance, studies a mid-nineteenth-century science-fiction fantastic voyage which was inspired by Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*: Elbert Perce’s *Gulliver Joi: His Three Voyages* (1851). As noted by previous scholarship, Swift’s political satire played a vital role in the formation of science fiction in the nineteenth century. Budakov discusses Perce’s *Gulliver Joi* as an early example from the genre’s formative years. He further points out that it is characteristic of early science fiction to combine mechanical, research-based reasoning with fabulous visions, whereby the rational proves to be rather an instrument of the fantastical. He examines how Perce’s imitation of *Gulliver* integrates interplanetary journeys, adventures in a lost world, and utopia in his novel.

Budakov concludes that the polyphony of genres and themes—a pattern inherited from Swift’s imaginary travels—anticipated the generic format of the scientific romance later in the nineteenth century. Mariya Dogan offers a reading of Aleksandr Ptushko’s *Novyj Gulliver* [*The New Gulliver*] (1935), the first film adaptation of Swift’s satire in the Soviet Union and the first full-length animated movie as a whole. Dogan makes clear that Ptushko’s movie only loosely resembles the original *Gulliver* since it is ideologically burdened with 1930s Soviet propaganda making Gulliver a revolutionary liberator fighting against a Lilliputian monarchy. Alongside discussing the adaption techniques in Ptushko’s movie, Dogan explores this film adaptation as a form of *agitprop* education which “satirized Western capitalism and promoted the enlightenment of the working class.” Alexandra Glavanakova explores Swift’s political pamphlet *A Modest Proposal* in a diachronic perspective, in the context of contrasted opinions in U.S. politics about race, class, and social inequalities. In her social criticism of the political attitudes towards integration and discrimination in *post-racial* American society, she questions the validity of this concept and critically examines whether democracy can “function effectively without enlightenment in relation to the founding ideals of the United States” in the contemporary political situation. Drawing parallels between the eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries, she expounds on the meaning of “a very knowing American” in the darkly satirical proposition of the *Modest Proposal* and moves on to find intertextual allusions between Swift’s satire and American literary and non-literary texts that bear the tone and import of absurdities with regard to slavery and racism. In her reading of American “modest proposals,” she analyzes two entirely different texts: Benjamin Franklin’s *Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade* (1790) and Paul Beatty’s novel *The Sellout* (2015)—a bitter satire on contemporary race relations—which takes up the bizarre proposition of restoring slavery in post-racial America by a black man. Finally, Mélissa Richard focuses on Charles Sturridge’s 1996 film adaptation of *Gulliver’s Travels*. She examines moments in the movie which are intensely satirical and considers passages which were liberally omitted or intentionally altered. Richard’s claim is that while Sturridge’s *Gulliver’s Travels* remains fairly faithful to the story, it offers a new version in the interpretation of Swift’s satire.

The third section of the book looks into Swiftian legacies concerning the politics of language. Emilia Slavova makes a case for the inception of “polite learning” and “polite society” in early modernity, which thematically subscribes to the ethical and lingual prescriptions in Jonathan Swift’s *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*

(1712). In her claim, a parallel can be drawn between the debates over language in the early eighteenth century and the disputes about the appropriacy of the use of language in the twenty-first century with regards to a politically correct, democratic method of avoiding discriminatory sexist, class, or racial usages. She argues that the American presidential election campaign of 2016 was particularly antagonistic towards marginalized social groups. Against this context of politics and language, Tatyana Stoicheva focuses her discussion on the Bulgarian translation of Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, which was first published in the literary weekly *Literaturen Vestnik* in December 2013. According to her, the publication of the pamphlet is exceptionally political in a new political context as it appeared in an issue of the literary newspaper, which was thematically devoted to anti-government protests and the clash between the police and students earlier in November 2013. She argues that the editor strategically introduced Swift's satirical understatements to Bulgarian readers, by including explanatory paratextual notes along with visuals from the protests attached to the translation. The third section closes with Teodora Tzankova's comments on the slippery and rather demanding territory of translating satire and parody. While Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* may be viewed as a parody of contemporary travel and exploratory fiction, which was used as a tool to challenge contemporary politics, Tzankova raises the question of what happens to the original Swiftian characteristics when they are translated into another language and, additionally, what happens when the cultural and political features of the original change in terms of time and context.

The fourth section focuses on Swiftian visions in a more global context involving satire and politics and the search for analogies between the early Enlightenment and the age of post-truth. Filipina Filipova explores the concept of post-truth in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* from the point of view that readers are expected to interpret what is true and what is false. She claims that in addition to questioning authorial veracity, the Swiftian narrator places readers in an oscillating position to choose between alternatives. She starts by analyzing in detail the narrator's veracity—both asserted and invalidated in Captain Gulliver's letter to his cousin Sympson—and the publisher's preface to the reader. She makes clear that the "narrator who insists on his veracity throughout the whole text of the *Travels* has actually made it impossible to be trusted and has thus subverted the capacity of claims on truth to be believed at face value." In his reading of Swift's *The Drapier's Letters* (1724-25), Jonathan McCreedy searches for an analogy between the 1720s dispute about the devaluation of the Irish coin patented to William Wood—a reason why it

was derisively referred to as “Wood’s halfpence”—and Ireland’s future economic vulnerability in the aftermath of Brexit. In order to support his argument, McCreedy makes a comprehensive reading of the historical context of *The Drapier’s Letters*. He discusses Swift’s viewpoint on the disastrous effect the issuing of copper money could have had on the local economy and comments upon the contemporary anxieties about the future of Ireland. He argues that “post-Brexit Ireland has similarities with Swift’s grim ‘post-halfpence’ predictions.” McCreedy further speculates that a “harder Brexit” may result in the establishment of a hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is a potential danger, both economically and politically, to the region as a whole.

Swiftian Inspirations: The Legacy of Jonathan Swift from the Enlightenment to the Age of Post-Truth aims at outlining the literary and critical heritage that Swift left for writers and thinkers from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century. It examines Swift’s authorial inscription in his writings and looks into how Swiftian ventriloquism has allowed for the public problematization of current political issues. Arguably, most of the problems today which Swift bitterly satirized in the eighteenth century are problems of modernity in general. The present book, therefore, begins by providing the eighteenth-century context of the ethical and political parameters of Swift’s critical stature, and continues with a discussion of the imitations and adaptations of Swiftian voices in literary works and in other media, then extends its focus to the linguistic approach to Swift. Finally, it highlights the legacy of the author in the political context of contemporary post-truth society. In *Swiftian Inspirations*, therefore, we hope to historicize Swiftian satiric legacies that inspired the literary and critical approaches of the posterity, and, on that account, our book also comes to give substance to the belief of Jonathan Swift’s contemporaries concerning his future reputation.

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PART I

JONATHAN SWIFT AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

CHAPTER ONE

SATIRE, TRUTH AND THE ART OF LYING IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

MARC MARTINEZ

Before writing *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift had indulged, on various occasions, his propensity for facetiously playing with truth and falsehood. In one of his most celebrated literary pranks, he predicted, under the mask of Isaac Bickerstaff, the death of John Partridge, a best-selling almanac writer and Whig propagandist (1644-1715). The interplay of truth and lies, on which hoaxes are based, resonates with the preponderance and amplification of fake news in our present time and seems to suffuse Swift's satire, *Gulliver's Travels*. In his political writings, Swift had a fairly binary conception of truth and falsehood and was intent on drawing a strict boundary between the two notions: he forcefully asserted the truth of his partisan propaganda and pilloried his opponents as liars.¹ In his satires, however, he did not conform to the traditional image of the satirist as operating in a world of clear standards since his attitude evinced ambivalence toward the handling of moral opposites. This fascination for lies tends to obfuscate the lines of demarcation between falsehood and truth, and underlies the politics and poetics of *Gulliver's Travels*—a work which bears some resemblance with his most famous literary hoax, the collection of publications known as the Bickerstaff papers²—and which

¹ See his contribution "The Art of Political Lying," *The Examiner*, November 9, 1710. See also Lesley Gilbert Crocker, "The Problem of Truth and Falsehood in the Age of Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14, no. 4 (October 4, 1953): 557-603.

² It includes three main publications by Swift: *Predictions for the Year 1708*, *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr Bickerstaff's Predictions*, and an account of Partridge's death by a third party in the form of a letter, *The Vindication of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.*, (1709) in which he solemnly defends his prediction. These are published in *Parodies, Hoaxes, Mock Treatises*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (Cambridge:

stems from the same partiality for a popular tradition: the practical jokes played on All Fools' Day.

Gulliver's Travels seem to illustrate the dynamics of the hoax form and bring to light Swift's decided penchant for April foolery associated with it. David Womersley remarks that the "Letter... to his Cousin Sympson," added to the 1735 edition, is dated the day after All Fools' Day, April 2:³ this prefatory text, which occupies the position and fulfils the programmatic function of the satirical *apologia*, initiates the intricate game of truth and lie, typical of literary hoaxes, which underpins the whole work. The satirist, however, is traditionally supposed to revile the falsifications and manipulations of his targets and to extol, indirectly, moral integrity and rectitude. Accordingly, the major theorists of the form in the 1950s and 1960s have argued that satire rests on fairly clear moral standards against which the vices and foibles of satirical figures can be assessed.⁴ Besides, some critics have pointed out Swift's tendency to expose lying in politics and other fields of social interaction: two articles in particular have dealt with the subject.⁵ Richard Terry starts from the assumption that Swift, according to Dr Johnson's phrase, is a "hypocrite renversé," since he shows a grim face in order to hide his inward moral qualities. He then focuses on Swift's interest in the "conundrum of fiction

Cambridge University Press, 2013). Two more pamphlets are sometimes added, *Squire Bickerstaff detected* (1710), not by Swift, and *An Answer to Bickerstaff*, probably by Swift, but printed posthumously in 1765, *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davies (Oxford: Blackwell, 1940), vol. 2.

³ *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. David Womersley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14. Further references to Swift's works appear parenthetically in the text.

⁴ These are the main scholars who endorsed this view: Mack Maynard, "The Muse of Satire," *Yale Review* 40 (1951): 80-93; Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Alvin B. Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1959); Edward W. Rosenheim, *Swift and the Satirist's Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Alvin B. Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); John M. Bullitt, *Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1966); Ronald Paulson, *The Fictions of Satire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1967); Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Matthew Hodgart, *Satire: Origins and Principles* (1969) (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁵ See in particular Richard Terry "Swift and Lying," *Philological Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1994): 243-265 and Brean Hammond and Gregory Currie, "Lying, Language and Intention: Reflections on Swift," *European Journal of English Studies* 19, no. 2 (2015): 220-233.

vs. lie”: in the context of the emerging novel, the *Travels* explore the “contiguity of fiction-making and lying,” a concern shared by early eighteenth-century writers.⁶ Brean Hammond, on the other hand, examines the political conditions which produced Swift’s anxiety over a society pervaded with lies. I wish to explore the tension between mendacity and veracity, which originates in Swift’s partiality to hoaxes. It underlies the types of discourse, fictional, historical and paratextual, developed through the work and the satirical intention. Swift follows in the Lucianic tradition of Menippean satire, which emphasizes truthful lies, and tries to solve satirically this paradox through the intricate interplay of the various voices that seem to obfuscate any fixed interpretive perspective.

In the Bickerstaff papers, Swift focused his satirical strategy on the tension between truth and falsehood constitutive of the hoax. In his *Predictions for the Year 1708*, published in late March, Swift announced that Partridge would die on the 29th and went a step further in the next pamphlet, *The Accomplishment of the First of Mr Bickerstaff's Predictions*, which advertised the actual death of the astrologist. The jest of a death foretold, pulled off with such verve, develops into satirical fake news and rests on a satirical ploy related to another literary form: the satirical epitaph. This type of epigram, which claims to be written on some imaginary tombstone, performatively executes the enemy. A spoof epitaph by Alexander Pope illustrates the way the satirist strives to effectuate his victim’s symbolic elimination by burying him before he actually dies. His target is James Moore-Smythe who borrowed some of his lines for his comedy *The Rival Modes* (1727):

Here lyes what had nor *Birth*, nor *Shape*, nor *Fame*;
No *Gentleman*! no *Man*! no-*thing*! no *name*!
For *Jammie* ne’er grew *James*; and what they call
More, shrunk to *Smith*—and *Smith*’s no name at all.
Yet dye thou can’st not, *Phantom*, oddly fated:
For how can no-thing be annihilated?
*Ex nihilo nihil fit.*⁷

After consigning James Smythe to the grave, Pope proceeds to obliterate his enemy by ruthlessly and relentlessly objectifying him and deconstructing his name. As Matthew Hodgart puts it in his book on satire, with the satirical epitaph: “The satirist mimes the killing of his victim, and

⁶ Terry, “Swift and Lying,” 243, 244.

⁷ Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope; a One Volume Edition of the Twickenham Text*, 811.

then fixes him in the rigidity of death like a butterfly hunter.”⁸ This type of epigram harks back to the original and archaic function of satire whose performative power was supposed to kill with words.⁹ In the Bickerstaff papers, just as in Pope’s mock-epitaph, the satirical assault consists in wiping out the enemy symbolically by putting him to death figuratively. But whereas Pope’s poem, and others of the kind, is obviously fictional and does not aim at deceiving the reader, Swift’s anonymous prediction played with the assumption that some people could be taken in by what is, in actual fact, satirical fake news. In his effort to sustain ambiguity and consequently to baffle and confuse the reader, Swift, under the mask of Isaac Bickerstaff, constructs his satirical *persona* as a defender of truth and as an honest gentleman, while at the same time he undermines the social and literary status of the almanac-maker, who appears as the exponent of plebeian culture (“a common Maker of Almanacks”), and is implicitly accused of being a lie-monger:

I lay the whole Credit of my Art upon the Truth of these Predictions; And I will be content, that *Partridge*, and the Rest of his Clan, may hoot me for a Cheat and Impostor if I fail in any single Particular of Moment. I believe, any Man who reads this Paper will look upon me to be at least a Person of as much Honesty and Understanding, as a common Maker of Almanacks. I do not lurk in the Dark; I am not wholly unknown in the World.¹⁰

Besides, the satirical import of the Bickerstaff papers is further increased by the predictions about the ongoing War of Spanish Succession and the disparagement of Partridge’s Whig views on the Church and the State.¹¹ Therefore, they show how the bite,¹² or eighteenth-century fake news, can display a political agenda and can be imbued with satirical implications.¹³ More pointedly, the hoax occupies a strange borderline

⁸ Hodgart, *Satire*, 82.

⁹ Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*.

¹⁰ Rumbold, “Burying the Fanatic Partridge: Swift’s Holy Week Hoax,” 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹² The term “hoax” first appeared shortly before 1800 according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹³ For the Bickerstaff papers as a political and literary hoax, Mayhew, “Swift’s Bickerstaff Hoax as an April Fools’ Joke,” 270-280; Loveman, *Reading Fictions, 1660-1740: Deception in English Literary and Political Culture*, 153-164; Rumbold, “Burying the Fanatic Partridge: Swift’s Holy Week Hoax,” ed. by Rawson, *Politics and Literature*; McTague, “There is No Such Thing as Isaack Bickerstaff: Partridge, Pittis, and Jonathan Swift,” *Eighteenth Century Life*, 83-101.

between truth and falsehood. It is precisely this ambivalent poise which is so characteristic of Swift's major satire.

From a satiric perspective, Swift establishes a polarized moral pattern by setting these opposites off against each other in his *Travels*. As satirist, Gulliver, who is cast in the various roles of character, narrator and author, advertises himself as a staunch advocate of truth and adopts a commonplace attitude by exposing the duplicity of ministers and exalting, indirectly, political truth or integrity. In the various accounts of Europe given by Gulliver, truth—sincerity, faithfulness—is sharply contrasted with lies—duplicity, political, social or sexual treason. Gulliver seems on the surface to move in a world governed by rigid boundaries between these two antonymous notions. Accordingly, truth is presented as a cardinal virtue incarnated by the horses in the last part: the land of the Houyhnhnms ostensibly displays a utopian ideal, much to be desired, because they are ignorant of and seemingly impervious to lies, as indicated by the periphrasis they use to refer to falsehood, “*the thing which was not*.”¹⁴

As a consequence, the horses' language is not polysemous and is necessarily truthful while, among Europeans, the various cants—political, medical and legal—are so impenetrable that they function as masks, concealing the truth: “this Society hath a peculiar Cant and Jargon of their own, that no other Mortal can understand, and wherein all their Laws are written, which they take special Care to multiply; whereby they have wholly confounded the very Essence of Truth and Falsehood, of Right and Wrong.”¹⁵ The crafty, insidious use of jargon can even invert apparently fixed binaries: they are “bred up from their Youth in the Art of proving by Words multiplied for the Purpose, that *White* is *Black*, and *Black* is *White*, according as they are paid” (369).

In the prefatory “Letter ... to his Cousin Sympson,” Gulliver, who is back in England when he writes it, is deeply disturbed by his experience in the land of the Houyhnhnms and endorses their value system. As narrator and author of his journal, he accuses the editor of making him “say the thing that was not” (9) and expresses his indignation at the falsifications his text has been subjected to. He deplores the omissions and additions, which have been inserted in his text by the editor, and even points out errors in the chronology of events (12) and in the name of Brobdingnag, which should be Brobdingrag (13). He concludes the letter with a

¹⁴ First introduced in the third chapter of the last voyage in the 1726 edition (Wormersley, ed., 349) and in the “Letter... to his Cousin Sympson” in the 1735 version (9).

¹⁵ Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 371. All further references to this edition are cited parenthetically in the text.

rhetorical question, which is tantamount to a vindication of his truthfulness, as he berates his critics: “Do these miserable Animals presume to think that I am so far degenerated as to defend my Veracity;” (14). Gulliver, who, at the end of his voyages, has become an outraged and ranting satirist, implies that truth is the original state of man and that lying is a sign of his fallen nature.

Refusing to stoop to prove his veracity is not just a way of condemning lies as a symptom of man’s degeneracy. It also ironically suggests that Gulliver’s obsessive search for self-aggrandizement, which is one of the butts of Swift’s satire on human perversion, is tainted with falsehood. Gulliver’s pride is targeted by Swift, the real satirist, who ironically undermines his claim that he has pulled off a formidable feat in washing himself clean of several vices, including lying, in only two years: “it is well known through all *Houyhnhnmland*, that by the Instructions and Example of my illustrious Master, I was able in the Compass of two Years (although I confess with the utmost Difficulty) to remove that infernal Habit of Lying, Shuffling, Deceiving, and Equivocating, so deeply rooted in the very Souls of all my Species” (14). The assertion is further undercut by the ironical parenthesis “(although I confess with the utmost Difficulty)” (*ibid.*).

The possible relationship between lying and pride is highlighted in the episode of the court Lady in Lilliput, which combines a satire on court scandal and fake news. Gulliver who has started incurring the disfavor of the court is now accused of having had an affair with “an excellent Lady” (94), the wife of the Treasurer, his sworn enemy. He consequently tries to vindicate her reputation and to refute the charges with circumstantial evidence. The satirical aim of this passage is to give a negative image of court society, which revels in “Court-Scandal,” in fake news and the destroying of reputations. Gulliver, as a victim, is at pains to clear himself of the charges made against him and tries to prove the lady’s and his own innocence through mock-judicial rhetoric. Ironically, though, he fails to make the obvious point: it is patently a biological absurdity to suspect him of sleeping with a woman, six inches tall. Since Gulliver does not rule out the possibility of such an affair, the reader is invited to imagine the unimaginable and is encouraged by the narrator’s silences to picture to himself aberrant sexual fantasies. Besides, Gulliver’s forceful protestations through phrases such as “I solemnly declare” (94) betray his real intention and his sexual bragging since he suggests that he would not just entertain one lady:

I own she came often to my House, but always publicly, nor ever without three more in the Coach, who were usually her Sister, and young Daughter,