

THE ECHOIC POETRY OF JONATHAN SWIFT:
STUDIES IN ITS MEANING

By

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FOR JUDITH

PREFACE

Even today there probably are more students of literature who know that apocryphal story according to which Dryden is supposed once to have told his young relative, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet,"¹ than there are students who can correctly quote one line of Swift's poetry. But this almost traditional neglect of Swift's poetry is giving way to a new interest and even as I write this preface there are other students in other places and in increasing numbers who are reading, and writing about Swift's verse. Happily, this dissertation is only a small part of a much larger re-examination of Swift's poetry which, begun in the early 1950's, has each year since then precipitated more--and more careful--essays that examine the force and value of Swift's poetry. Therefore, although I increasingly feel my own inadequacy as an explicator of Swift's poetry, I also grow increasingly sure that the attempt itself no longer requires any special justification.

Of the kinds of essays on Swift's verse which have been recently written, the most valuable, it has seemed to me, have been those which have been confined to the explication of particular poems. Of course, we will ultimately need to make general statements about Swift's poetic achievement and to place his work in some just context. But many students must walk before one student can run, and general statements on the nature of Swift's verse, when such statements come to be made, will necessarily depend upon

a backlog of poems understood. In the meantime, careful and thoughtful essays, such as Peter Ohlin's examination of Cadenus and Vanessa² or Marshall Waingrow's subtle reading of Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.³ have done more both to illuminate the actual nature of Swift's poetry and to dispel the charges of misanthropy and obscenity which have darkened our view of that poetry than have those more general overviews of Swift's poetry which have recently appeared.

Feeling this way, I have, of course, written the four chapters of this dissertation as individual examinations of four particular poems. Each chapter is written to stand by itself and, indeed, the four poems considered in these chapters have been chosen specifically to illustrate the variousness of Swift's poetic achievement. But, though these four poems, written at three distinct periods in Swift's life and on four quite different subjects, were chosen for their variety of manner and matter, they somehow are all tenaciously characteristic of Swift, and share some things unmistakably in common. Therefore, although there are enough unhappy examples to make one very aware of the danger in freely generalizing about Swift's verse, I offer the following very brief and very broad remarks about his verse, not, certainly, as a positive thesis, but only as tentative landmarks in a country not yet very well known.

To observe that Swift was, all of his life, an omnivorous reader is to begin with what is well enough known.⁴ What is not nearly as well known, however, is how much of what Swift read he re-directed back into his own verse. For, although too many of Swift's readers have apparently agreed with Samuel Johnson's opinion that, "the peruser of Swift wants little previous knowledge; it

will be sufficient that he is acquainted with common words and common things,"⁵ Dr. Johnson was never more wrong in his life.

Often enough, however, the almost traditional failure to see how much borrowed material Swift has re-incorporated into his own poetry is more than understandable, for Swift was frequently coy about this technique. There are many borrowed lines in Swift's verse which are so skillfully fitted to their new text that only a very strong memory or a lucky hit is likely to detect them. Thus, for example, it is not at all surprising that for years it went unnoticed that Swift's proclamation of his own originality in Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.,--

To steal a Hint was never known,
But what he writ was all his own,--
(317-318)

was itself a stolen and slightly altered version of Denham's elegiac praise of Cowley:⁶

To him no author was unknown,
But what he writ was all his own.

Knowing that these lines are borrowed must make a very great difference in the way we understand them. Appearing at first to be only a piece of pointless boasting, these lines prove, once their source is known, to be a subtle comment on the nature of originality by being themselves an illustration of the paradox that Denham describes. Here, then, as so often in Swift's poems, meaning resides precisely in the conflation of two or more texts: Swift's new one and the borrowed materials which inform it.

No technique, I think, is either more common or more crucial to Swift's poetry than is this penchant of his to pour old wine into new bottles. For Swift did not confine this technique to simply borrowing whole lines and placing them within his poems. Rather, Swift could, as we shall see, borrow only a few scattered words from Milton's Paradise Lost and yet make them suggest, in his Ode to Sancroft, the relevance of Milton's theodicy to his own ode. Or, on the other hand, Swift could borrow the entire form of the seventeenth century meditatio mortis and then build his own Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D. within that form. But in either case what we ultimately see is Swift forming through allusion, imitation and direct quotation, the very meaning of his poetry from the contrast between the materials he borrows and the uses he makes of it. Finally, that is, Swift's poetic genius--the peculiar originality he imparted to his poetry--was best defined by Swift himself when he, ingeniously re-working Denham's lines, made them "all his own."

Given, then, the subtlety of Swift's borrowing, it is unfortunate that there has been a tendency on the part of Swift's critics to huddle all the instances of Swift's borrowings that they have noticed under the simplistic title of parody. For to label Swift's poetry as parody does not explain it; it is only to assume that Swift had no better use for any of the materials he re-incorporates in his own verse than to make them look silly. The result of such criticism has been that even when Swift's borrowing has been detected it has usually been badly misunderstood. Thus, for example, generations of critics have understood Swift's On Poetry:

A Rapsody as being an attack upon the "cant" of "poetic inspiration."

Or again, Cadenus and Vanessa has been understood--apart from its biographical interest--as being only another variant of Swift's lifelong attack on romantic love and on all the silly forms of verse fools stricken with such love have begotten.

But both these poems, I hope to show, mean more richly than this. For, just because these poems--like most of Swift's poetry--are written within earshot of other men's verses and thus reflect a wide range of human values, they must mean complexly. Indeed, even when Swift's poetry comes closest to being what Swift's critics have pretty generally said it is--a kind of anti-poetry⁷ that savagely parodies the "softer" or "finer" feelings which are usually thought of as poetic--even then, I think there is embedded in Swift's very parody not only Swift's willingness to tell a harsh truth when it is needed but also his recognition, sometimes almost wistful, that the truth he is telling is harsh. Thus, even when Swift parodies the material which he borrows, the material continues to ramify and complicate his meaning. For, ultimately, Swift's parody only suggests what all the other effects of Swift's collage-like poetry suggests; that the world with which Swift's poetry grapples is not a simple one. It is, rather, a world of gain and loss, of constant and necessary adjustments, a world where quotations must be measured by other quotations, men by other men, and values by other values, in order that so much of the truth as men do know may be evoked.

In the preparation of this dissertation I have been so fortunate as to contract more debts than my work can repay and

more kindness than I can acknowledge. My fellow students, Mr. J. Douglas Canfield, Miss Gail H. Compton, Mr. Michael J. Conlon, Mr. James G. Richardson III and Mr. Lawrence P. Vonalt have all been both helpful and patient. My seniors, Mr. J. David Walker and Mr. C. Earl Ramsey have taught me much by precept and more by example. Mr. Robert H. Bowers and Mr. Ashby E. Hammond have graciously served on my doctoral committee.

Mr. Aubrey L. Williams has guided this dissertation and saved it from as many blunders as he could. He is the best teacher I know, the best I have ever heard of.

Judith always thought I was right. She has been my worst critic, and this dissertation is dedicated to her.

NOTES

All quotations of Swift's poetry in my text are to The Poems of Jonathan Swift, ed. Sir Harold Williams, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1953).

1. There is simply no evidence that this line was ever spoken. Therefore, Swift's most recent biographer, Irvin Ehrenpreis, lists it as one of a "long train of legendary Swiftiana." Swift: the man, his works, and the age, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).
2. "'Cadenus and Vanessa: Reason and Passion," SEL, IV (1964), 485-496.
3. "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," SEL, V (1965), 513-518.
4. See, for example, Swift's reading list of 1697-98 in Jonathan Swift: A Tale of a Tub, ed. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith (Oxford, 1958), pp. lvi-lvii.
5. Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1905), III, 52.
6. First noticed by Hill in the edition of Johnson cited above, III, 66, n. 3.
7. See E. San Juan, Jr., "The Anti-Poetry of Jonathan Swift," PQ, XLIV (1965), 387-396.

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CHAPTER ONE

Ode to Dr. William Sancroft

I

In 1689 Jonathan Swift, then twenty-one, began to compose that series of poems, usually called the "early odes," which are the first of his known literary productions.¹ The style of these odes has usually been condemned and, indeed, their cramped and sometimes cryptic manner does often obscure their sense. But cramped and cryptic though these early odes are, they have, I think, a wider scope and demonstrate a deeper understanding than has so far been recognized. They are the poems of a very young man, it is true, but a young man who had been cultivating, as Swift later recorded, his instincts for literature by vigorous reading.²

Early onward in Swift's youthful and apparently highly variegated course of reading he came to admire the poetry of Abraham Cowley³ and, as Swift matured into his twenties and composed his "early odes," Cowley remained his dominant model. So great, in fact, was Swift's youthful admiration for Cowley that, in a letter written to Thomas Swift in 1692, Jonathan, rather ingenuously, commented that though he could not easily please himself, yet "when I write what pleases me I am Cowley to myself and can read it an hundred times over."⁴

Whether or not the young Swift was often quite so pleased with his performances one cannot say, but modern critical estimates of the poems have certainly been far from enthusiastic. Even Irvin Ehrenpreis, whose study of the odes is both the most thorough and sympathetic so

far undertaken, nevertheless slights them with conscious generosity.

"Since," Ehrenpreis comments, Swift's

. . . themes and values are blamelessly conventional, he is, in his search for freshness of effect, flung upon ingenious hyperbole; and since his language is too weak for the extravagance of his feelings, the outcome is bathos.⁵

Many another critic has rendered the same judgment in terms which are both less graceful and less precise, and most, I suppose, would agree with Ehrenpreis' final judgment that Swift, already in his middle twenties, was rather too old to attribute to mere mortals "such incandescent perfections as Swift lent to his subjects."⁶ But, although Swift's apparently over-inflated celebrations of his subject's virtue have irritated almost every reader of his early odes, these celebrations are, I believe, the most significant element of those odes. To understand these celebrations, however, we will have to briefly examine first a characteristic of Pindar's odes, and then the development of that characteristic in the pindarique odes of Swift's model, Abraham Cowley.

Pindar's odes, written in celebration of specific victors in the Greek games, portray two related but partly opposed views of the human situation. On the one hand the odes were composed to celebrate a victor at the height of his success, at a moment when he is a type--indeed, seems almost the equal of--the gods and heroes for whose honor the Greek games existed. Cowley's translation of the first four lines of Pindar's Second Olympiad makes Pindar's celebration of the god-like potentialities of man perfectly clear.

Queen of all Harmonious things,
Dancing Words, and Speaking Strings,
 What God, what Hero wilt thou sing?
 What happy Man to equal glories bring?
 (1-4).

On the other hand, just at this most triumphant moment Pindar's typical subject faces his greatest danger, and so Pindar must warn his subject against the deadly sin of pride. That is why, in Pindar's odes, "however great men's golden triumphs may seem, thoughts of the gods' dazzling eminence intervene to put them in their place."⁷

Of this second aspect of Pindar, Cowley himself, apparently, was not always quite conscious. Thus when Pindar, in the Second Olympiad, warns its subject, Theron, against pride by reminding him of the fate of his great ancestor, Oedipus, Cowley, in the notes which he supplied to his translation, somewhat obtusely comments:

One may ask, why he [Pindar] makes mention of these tragical accidents and action of Oedipus and his Sons in an Ode dedicated to the praise of Theron and his ancestors? I answer, that they were so notorious that it was better to excuse than conceal them....⁸

But, if Cowley occasionally missed the point of Pindar's warnings he did not entirely miss seeing Pindar the moralist. Thus, when Pindar admonishes at the end of the Eighth Pythian,

We are things of a day. What are we? What are we not?
 the shadow of a dream
 is man, no more,

Cowley both hears and repeats, in a poem of his own, Pindar's warning against pride.

What's Some Body, or No Body?
 . . .
Dream of a Shadow! A Reflection made

From the false glories of the gay reflected Bow,
 Is a more solid thing than Thou.
 (Life and Fame, 3,6,7,8)

And because Cowley did respond, to a degree, to both aspects of Pindar, and because, as a Christian, Cowley had at least as profound a sense as Pindar himself both that man was formed in the image of God and yet that man was capable of falling away from God, he was able, in the last of his pindarique odes, to work an interesting and impressive variation on Pindar. What he did was to versify, in the form of the pindarique ode, sections from the Old Testament which emphasize both the potential glory and the present ruin of mankind.

Is this thy Brav'ry Man, is this thy Pride
 Rebel to God, and slave to all beside!
Captive'd by everything! and only Free
 To fly from thine own Liberty!
 All Creatures the Creator said Were Thine:
 No Creature but might since, say, Man is Mine.
 (The Plagues of Egypt, 1-6)

This contrast between man's present ruin and his possible glory was hardly a new poetic theme when Cowley employed it, of course. Cowley's contribution was simply that he recognized the theme as the natural link between Pindar's odes and the interests of his own age, thus teaching many, Swift among them, the use of a genre new to them.

Swift's odes all, following Cowley's, are made to focus on the contrast between man's potential glory, emblemized by the heroes of Swift's odes, and man's usual degradation. Therefore, while it is no doubt true that none of Swift's subjects was really

so heroic as the models Swift constructed, one might as easily make that charge against Pindar as against Swift--and it would be equally meaningless in both cases. Rather than make such charges we ought, I think, examine these odes for what they are, since in them the young Swift portrays his models of what man ought be.

For this purpose Swift's Ode to Dr. William Sancroft serves better, for two reasons, than any of the other odes. First, it alone among the odes seems to have been in a state of composition and revision from 1689 to 1693, that is, during the entire time Swift was busying himself about these odes. Second, perhaps because this ode apparently cost him more trouble than any of the others, the theological assumptions from which Swift constructed all his models of perfection and all his pictures of ruin are closer to the surface in the Ode to Sancroft than in any other of the six early odes.

II

A few years ago Joseph Horrell commented, in his edition of Swift's poems, that the entire theme of the Ode to Sancroft "is truth," and thus Horrell joined that small group of critics who have hazarded, in print, a guess at the ode's meaning which was not intended to bludgeon Swift with his own ode.⁹ True, the remark seems rather oracular, coming as it does with no further explication or justification, but it is, nevertheless, among the first which indicate that the ode may be something more than a badly over-inflated praise of Sancroft.

Irvin Ehrenpreis, despite his evident annoyance with much of the poem, carried analysis of it a step further by observing that the poem's nominal subject, Sancroft, is meant by Swift to emblemize "Truth."¹⁰ But Ehrenpreis feels that the Sancroft of the poem, laboring as the earthly, "image of eternal truth," often sunk under that unnatural load. Consequently he did not pursue further the grounds which the poem might provide for the connection of Sancroft and "Truth." Nor are the grounds of this connection explored in either of the only two other recent considerations of the ode.

Both of these remaining considerations, however, make interesting, although perhaps too constricted, observations on the poem. Ronald Paulson examined the ode in an essay which analyzed Swift's position in a classic debate: the relationship of spirit to matter. His intent is to demonstrate that Swift was, at heart, a dualist, that Swift felt that everything of true worth was "other-worldly," hence divorced from this world of matter and change. The Ode to Sancroft, Paulson argues, helps confirm this thesis, since in that ode we actually see the "good" becoming "other-worldly."

. . .Sancroft puts down the symbols of worldly power rather than compromise his ideals; and in Sancroft, who is compared to a star and to Christ, the "Good" has become other-worldly.¹¹

There is much in the poem which seemingly recommends Paulson's position. For example, Swift describes this world first as ". . .this inferior world. . .but heaven's dusky shade"(21), and later, even more forcefully as "that worthless clod"(64). Further, whether

one agrees with Paulson's particular position or not, his consideration of this poem in an essay devoted to the problem of matter and spirit in Swift's work points out a dimension of the ode which had not been noted in previous discussions.

It may be felt, however, that Paulson's own position is too daring: to suggest that Swift, even at age twenty-six, is a dualist, is perhaps to take too lightly Swift's later comment respecting a philosopher who, because he stared too constantly at the stars, "found himself seduced by his lower Parts into a Ditch."² Further, there is much in the ode itself which suggests that Paulson's emphasis, at least, is in error. The truth which, after all, Swift bluntly states is available and appropriate to man is "That Heaven's high Son was in a village born" (172), fully God and fully man, the spirit incarnated in the flesh.

Kathleen Williams' comments on the Ode to Sancroft are closer than any other criticism I have seen to my own view of the poem. She argues that, in Swift's view, the foolishness and knavery of which men are guilty, and which serve to make a world of "giddy circumstances," all derive from man's desire to be that which he is not. A creature of but feeble understanding and feebler will, man insists on spinning out the guts of his own authority presumptuously rigid systems: this poor creature, man, would, if he could, make himself the measure of all truth. That such presumption is one of the dominant themes of the Ode to Sancroft, Swift himself makes perfectly clear:

Thus fools, for being strong and num'rous known,
 Suppose the truth, like all the world, their own.
 (79-80)

But the way in which Kathleen Williams applies this theme to the Ode to Sancroft is, perhaps, open to objection:

Even in the early odes, where the old-fashioned form and the "sublime" style imply a more ambitious attempt to organize experience in the shape of eternal truth than is to be found elsewhere, Swift's real theme is the impossibility of succeeding in such an attempt. ...In the Ode to Sancroft the bishop's "secret regular sphere" is misunderstood and appears of irregular motion to the "strong and num'rous" fools, and its effect [on us, the poem's readers] is secondary to that made by such phrases as "our weak knowledge," "opinion dark and blind," "contradiction's vortex," "crazy composition," and the recurring "giddy" and "giddily." In this poem Swift makes overt use of religion comparisons, and his sense of man's intellectual, moral, and spiritual confusion is most vividly expressed.¹³

As there was much in the ode which supported Paulson's view of it, so there is much which justifies Kathleen Williams' observations. But, as Paulson's argument that, in Swift's view, the "Good" is ultimately "other-worldly" seemed shaky when posed against Swift's insistence "That Heaven's high Son was in a village born" (172), so Williams' view that the ode's real theme is the impossibility of organizing experience in the shape of eternal truth seems to falter at the same point. For, as we have noted, Swift insists that man misses the way to truth not because truth is completely unavailable to him nor because man is altogether too weak for it, but because man is perverse. Both Williams and Paulson, then, have isolated real themes in the poem; it is concerned with both man's struggle with mind and body and with man's tendency to over-reach and thus weaken himself. But both these critics have pushed these themes to the exclusion of everything else in the poem--and thus pushed the poem into a dualism which, I hope to demonstrate, Swift was specifically refuting.

To recapitulate: the poem's most recent critics have established firmly at least some of the terms in which it must be discussed. They have isolated, as its central theme, man's struggle to achieve some vision of the truth. But they have also, perhaps, shown the poem to be more complex than they themselves realized. Swift's view of man's relation to eternal truth was, I think, more sophisticated than their views of the poem. That is likely, of course, to be the fate of any reading of so complex a poem, but perhaps we can proceed more prudently, at least, by anchoring our discussion of the poem in the question, what was there in Sancroft's life and circumstances which called forth this poem from Swift?

III

William Sancroft was born on January 30, 1616-1617, the second son of Francis Sandcroft (William dropped the "d" from the name).¹⁴ He attended grammar school at Bury St. Edmunds where, on the evidence of his own manuscripts dating from that time, he demonstrated an early aptitude for learning. He went up to Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1633, received his B.A. in 1637, his M.A. in 1641 and his B.D. in 1648. He retained a fellowship there until 1651 and then, in 1657, went abroad where he remained until the restoration. On his return he received, in rapid succession, the Mastership of Emmanuel College, the Deanery of York and the Deanery of St. Paul's. The latter post he retained until 1678, during which time he was instrumental in the rebuilding of St. Paul's Cathedral.

In 1678 he was elevated to the Archbishopric of Canterbury where he, whose life had been both quiet and fruitful, was to have

but little of either peace or joy in his eminence. His attempt to avoid a direct confrontation with James II over James' interference with ecclesiastical policy was shattered in 1688 when he, along with six other bishops, refused to order his clergy to read James' Declaration of Liberty of Conscience. In a petition to the king, Sancroft defended his refusal as arising not from "any want of tenderness to dissenters," but from his own conviction that James' Declaration, being founded on nothing more than James' assumed kingly prerogative to govern as he wished, usurped such power as might "at pleasure put aside all laws ecclesiastical and civil." Therefore, Sancroft concluded, the Declaration "appeared to be illegal."

The seven bishops were placed in the tower in May of that year and brought to trial at the end of June. Their defense was conducted along the lines of the petition, and it was successful. But despite the general jubilation in London at the freeing of the seven, the die for Sancroft himself was cast. For, if he was unwilling to grant the king "such dispensing power as may at pleasure put aside all laws ecclesiastical and civil," he was yet less willing to grant it to the convention which, in 1689, bestowed the throne on William of Orange. Sancroft did not see how the convention's decision released him, who had himself annointed James II, from his oath of loyalty to that king. Consequently, in February 1690-1691, Sancroft was deprived of his position, and, because he chose to bring it to that point, was ejected by law in late June from Lambeth Castle. The remaining two years of his life were spent in seclusion but not in quiet, for he dedicated himself to securing the succession of what he considered to be England's true church, a church comprised of men who, like himself, did not swear their allegiance to William III. He was, of course, almost as

universally despised for this activity as he had been praised for his stand against James, and he was generally regarded as a turncoat.

This sketch, brief as it is, serves to point out how very little of Sancroft's actual life and character Swift chose to include in his ode. Indeed, even the very circumstances of Sancroft's deprivation, which are the occasion of the ode, are referred to only obliquely. Irvin Ehrenpreis has objected to the ode on the grounds that Swift was unreasonably attempting to praise Sancroft, who refused to acknowledge William III, while simultaneously praising William III. But, this is an objection which Ehrenpreis has had to bring from outside the poem, for there is nothing in the poem which implies that the two men were at odds. Swift has stripped Sancroft's deprivation of all the historical circumstances reviewed above in order that what Swift felt to be its real significance might appear more clearly. For us to understand that significance, however, we shall have to examine a crucial part of the circumstances of Sancroft's conduct more carefully.

The revolutionary settlement of 1689, to which Sancroft was asked to put his hand, in effect rendered the doctrine of the divine hereditary right of kings a dead letter as English political theory.¹⁵ Of course, the divine right of kings to reign, if it really exists, cannot be circumvented--it rests upon a principle which Swift himself stated years later in his sermon, Doing Good, "It is apparent from Scripture, and most agreeable to reason, that the safety and welfare of nations are under the most peculiar care of God's providence."¹⁶ Since, that is, there is either such a thing as God's providence, or there is not, and if there is, and if William is king, it must follow that he is king through God's will, no matter by what means. This,

since he held that William was king, and that providence was operative, was presumably Swift's own view. It may well have been Sancroft's view too; at least, Sancroft did nothing to actually oppose William. But that did not mean that Sancroft would second the action of a convention which had claimed--first by voting the English throne vacant, and then voting to fill it--that the power to make and unmake kings did not operate through them, but originated with them. To Sancroft, setting his hand to this work of the convention was striking at the very life of the church. For, from his point of view, the convention, in seeking to limit the authority of the king, had actually presumed to eliminate the authority of God from the civil acts of man.

In the Ode to Sancroft, Swift traces, in a multitude of instances, such foolish, prideful, dangerous and yet ludicrously pitiable attempts of man to reach truth after having removed himself from ✓ the eye and will of God. In each of these instances Swift illuminates the contradictory and impossible nature of such an attempt. Sancroft, for having resisted such attempts in a crucial instance, for his insistence that a just and true government cannot be achieved by attempting to reject the source of all truth, is the ode's image of the truth which men may know.

IV

When its connections with the rest of the poem are understood, and its allusions outside of the poem are clarified, the first stanza of the Ode to Sancroft is seen to reflect in small the entire meaning of the poem. But the stanza is best examined in stages, and initially it appears to suggest that neither truth nor any other heavenly virtue

can penetrate the darkness of sublunary climes, to suggest, that is, the position which Sancroft himself had found untenable--that a complete separation exists between things heavenly and things mundane.

The very structure of the stanza seems to reflect this kind of dualism. The first six lines of the stanza salute "Truth" in a glorious heaven; lines seven and eight contrast truth's fixity with the "giddy circumstances" of "time" and "place"; the final seven lines darkly image this world and man's estate. By the interposition, then, of time and place, the realms of heaven and earth are apparently rendered entirely separate. Further, the two dominant image patterns of the stanza, light versus dark and fixity versus motion, seem to affirm this separation between heaven and earth. The description of heaven is filled with an imagery of light (bright effluence, chief lamp, light seest), while in the lines devoted to this world we meet only darkness (dark disputes, weak arguments and doubt). Similarly, while heaven is described in the first stanza as constant and fixed, the world of men which Swift pictures is rocked by random and destructive motion. Thus man, simply by being born a sublunary creature, subject to night, time, place and motion seems (though only seems, I think) condemned, in this first stanza, to a life of constant disorder. Apparently, it was just such an initial bleakly hopeless view of man's condition as pictured in this ode that lead Paulson and Williams to develop their particular readings of it.

Ultimately, however, I think we shall see that the separation of heaven and earth which seems so striking in this stanza is not nearly as absolute as it first appears. For while Swift does, in this stanza, portray man as a profoundly limited creature, nevertheless,

the evils which Swift describes as attendant on the human condition do not seem to derive directly from either man's limitations or from his sublunary status. Rather, the nature of these evils (dark disputes, dagger contests, and battles) seems to type them as being evils of man's own making. Thus, even as Swift powerfully depicts the wide disparity between heaven and earth, he suggests that this disparity is caused not by man's sublunary estate, but rather by his response to that estate.

It is precisely from man's response to his sublunary environment, from the cosmologies man has developed to understand and explain that environment, that Swift draws much of the imagery he uses to describe man's usual befuddlement. Characteristically, in this ode, human error is imaged as random and eccentric motion. Men expand their minds through infinity of space in stanza four; grow in rank profusion and disorder in stanza five; run pell mell into heresy in stanza eight. And this confused motion is reminiscent, Swift notes in the fourth stanza, of the completely inaccurate but wildly complicated startracks of such astronomers as Ptolemy and his disciples "who"

. . .like hard masters, taught the sun
Through many a needless sphere to run.
(67-68)

Cosmological confusion, that is, and particularly, as we shall see, the giddy eccentricities of the Ptolemaic and Cartesian systems, becomes, in this ode, a "type" of all human error. And what Swift's imagistic equation of human error with confused cosmologies suggests is that the giddy circumstances of time and place which, in the first stanza, seem to separate man from heaven and truth and to foredoom

him to constant error are themselves the product of human error. Put as simply as possible, I think we shall see that in this ode it is man himself who is responsible for his own benighted and giddy circumstances.

Let us take, for example, Swift's poetic explanation for the animosity with which most men regarded Sancroft's actions. It will be remembered that Sancroft was generally regarded in his own age as a turncoat, one who, having staunchly defied James II, incongruously refused to support William III. In our examination Sancroft's reasons for acting as he did seemed to be consistent, but, Swift explains, to most of his contemporaries,

. . . Holy Sancroft's motion quite irregular appears
Because 'tis opposite to theirs.

(80-81)

This (apparently obscure) explanation of the reason Sancroft's contemporaries mistakenly thought his course "irregular" follows immediately after Swift's discussion of the Ptolemaic system; and it depends upon that discussion. As we have seen above, Swift knew that the Ptolemaic system both inaccurately described the actual course of heavenly bodies and was enormously, needlessly complicated. Of course, both the inaccuracies of the Ptolemaic system and its endless complications are caused by one, single, fundamental error. "Led on" as Swift puts it, "by gross philosophy and pride"; Ptolemy, and those who followed him, assumed that the earth--their observatory--was still. From this proud error--the assumption that the earth was still while all else moved--springs all the "unthrifty motion" and "incoherent journeys" of the system.¹⁷

Among the other needless complexities of this system is the elaborate mathematical schema Ptolemy and his successors devised in order to account for the apparently irregular motion of the stars. Of course, this apparent irregularity of starpath (technically called retrograde and as observable today as it was to Ptolemy) results simply from watching one moving body from another moving body. But if, like Ptolemy, one assumes one's own position to be a still point, one will assume the observed irregularity of starpaths to be a phenomenon of the stars themselves. The point of Swift's lines on Sancroft's critics then is that those critics, like Ptolemy, erroneously assume their position to be stable and therefore wrongly attribute an irregularity to Sancroft's actions. Like Ptolemy, Sancroft's critics fall into giddy errors not because the phenomenon they are observing is either giddy or incomprehensible, but because they are proud and unstable.

Successful as the lines discussed above are in illustrating man's propensity to stumble over his own pride into giddy circumstances, nevertheless, to most of Swift's contemporaries the system which ideally illustrated that propensity was not the Ptolemaic but rather the Cartesian system.¹⁸ And it is to Descartes' vortex cosmology that Swift refers in the following lines.

And some, to be large ciphers in a state,
 Pleas'd with an empty swelling to be counted great;
 Make their minds travel o'er infinity of space,
 Rapp'd through the wide expanse of thought
 And oft in contradiction's vortex caught,
 To keep that worthless clod, the body, in one place.
 (59-64)

These lines make, I think, an observation about the results of human pride which is of considerable importance to Swift's entire

ode, but the lines are also, unfortunately, more than a little cryptic. To understand what Swift is saying here we will have to briefly glance both at Descartes' cosmology and at the criticism leveled at that cosmology by Descartes' critics.¹⁹

The primary characteristics of the universe postulated in Descartes' cosmology are three: first, the universe is a plenum, it is absolutely full of matter; second, the universe is infinite; third, the universe is arranged in a series of circular corpuscular streams, called vortices.²⁰ The mathematical basis on which Descartes raised this system is, to say the least, extremely rickety. But it was not for the flaws of its mathematical foundations that Descartes' system became an anathema to many in the seventeenth century; rather, the system was reviled for its theological implications. As was recognized by men like the very famous Cambridge platonist, Henry More (whose objections to Descartes' system were almost certainly known to Swift),²¹ to postulate a universe which was absolutely matter, absolutely full, and absolutely infinite was to effectively banish God from the universe for simple lack of room. As one of Henry More's contemporaries commented, Descartes, in this system, has outdone "even the very Atheists themselves";²² for while Descartes does not deny God's existence, he reasons Him both homeless and irrelevant. Descartes' system, that is, portrays cosmologically that separation of man's estate from God's influence which, from Sancroft's point of view, the convention that deposed James II attempted to make a political reality. That the effect of such presumptuous politics is to turn states and statesmanship into something very like the whirling, Godless, Cartesian cosmos is, I think, the point of Swift's description of such politicians

as would be "large ciphers in a state," in terms of the Cartesian system.

It should by now be rather obvious that those giddy circumstances which Swift portrays in the first stanza and throughout the poem as darkening the human estate are not the necessary effects of man's sublunary condition, but are, rather, the results of man's presumption. In fact, so far is the universe which Swift himself postulates in this poem from being the giddy, dark and Godless cosmos Descartes' describes, that Swift's universe resembles instead that universe which Henry More proposed in opposition to Descartes' system. In More's cosmology, the most important fact of the physical universe is that God "is omnipresent and occupies intimately the whole machine. . . as well as its singular particles."²³ And that God is actively present (though hidden) in His universe is exactly the point which Swift himself suggests through the two biblical echoes which, as we shall see, he has incorporated in the first four lines of the Ode to Sancroft.

Truth is eternal, and the Son of Heav'n,
Bright effluence of th' immortal ray,
Chief cherub, and chief lamp of that high sacred Seven,
Which guard the throne by night, and are its light by day.
(1-4)

The third line of the ode describes truth as the "Chief cherub, and chief lamp of that high sacred Seven" which surround the throne of God. The phrase "chief lamp of that high sacred seven" may very well refer to a historical event we have already mentioned. Sancroft, as the Archbishop of Canterbury, was the leading prelate among the seven brought to trial by James II. But the origin of the image itself is, probably, the Book of Zechariah.

The whole of the vision which is the fourth chapter of Zechariah is of relevance to this ode. It was composed in post-exilic Jerusalem when the Jews, returned from Babylonia and under King Zerubbabel, were reconstructing the Temple. The reconstruction, and all else, went slowly, and the vision of Zechariah is calculated to encourage a flagging people by assuring them that God is intimately concerned in the work undertaken.

The vision begins by Zechariah being waked by an angel, "as a man that is wakened out of his sleep," and being shown

. . . a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof. . . .

Upon his inquiring after the meaning of all this, Zechariah is told,

This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD.

Few chapters from Scripture might better refute the work of the 1689 convention, which seemed to exclude God from the civil acts of men, than this from Zechariah. For it not only states that kings are kings by the will of God, its whole import is that God is always present and actively concerned in the affairs of men. Indeed, God's active involvement with mankind is stressed most emphatically in this chapter at that point when Zechariah, inquiring about the significance of those seven lamps which are the source of Swift's image, is told that those lamps are "the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth."

The third line of the ode, then, is quite complex. It occurs in a stanza which describes that separation of heaven and earth which

men, in their presumption, apparently create. But the line affirms, both through its echo of Zechariah and, perhaps, in its reference to Sancroft's successful trial, that not by might, nor by power, but by God's spirit turn the affairs of men. Nor have we done with the line yet, for it reads in full, "Chief cherub, and chief lamp of that high sacred Seven." The vision of Zechariah does not, in fact, mention a cherub; but Milton, remembering that vision, describes the Archangel Uriel as

One of the Seven
 Who in God's presence, nearest to his throne
 Stand ready at command, and are his eyes
 That run through all the Heavens, or down to the Earth
 Bear his swift errands over moist and dry
 O'er sea and land. . . .

(P.L. III, 648-53)

While Milton does not actually mention the seven lamps of Zechariah's vision and therefore could not have been the only source for Swift's third line, from Milton's imaginative yoking of Uriel with Zechariah's vision comes, probably, Swift's "chief cherub." Swift, then, draws in this single line on both the Book of Zechariah and on Milton's theodicy and thereby suggests that there are "ways of God to man."

Indeed, images which suggest that God actively participates in this world are finally so pervasive in Swift's ode that the world he describes seems, like More's universe, permeated with God. But, often, even as these images suggest God's activity in the world, they also suggest that this divine activity is somehow hidden. One of the most striking of such images occurs in the ode's fourth line. In that line Swift describes the "high sacred Seven" as being those cherubs who "guard the throne by night and are its light by day."

The echo in this line is no longer, I think, from Zechariah. Rather, one hears in this line an echo from the Book of Exodus.

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.

(13:21)

If this text is, indeed, what Swift is echoing, then he has touched on one of the scriptural passages which are central to the Christian conception of the hidden God, the Deus Absconditus Whom even Moses could not view face to face, Who, though hidden from men, guides; but, though guiding, remains forever hidden.

It is this very traditional conception of God, I think, which permeates Swift's ode and which raises in the ode its most crucial problem. Christ himself, as Swift implies in the eighth stanza, though He was God come among men, remained still God hidden:

What could the sages gain but unbelieving scorn;
 Their faith was so uncourtly when they said
 That Heaven's high Son was in a village born;
 That the world's Savior had been
 In a vile manger laid,
 And foster'd in a wretched inn.

(170-175)

And the idea of God, hidden away in a "vile manger," is hard to answer with anything but "unbelieving scorn." It is, as Paul observed, a folly to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. But to fail to accept it, as Swift's imagery of space and motion have shown us, is to pay for deposing God by crowning Whirl.

V

Swift's Ode to Sancroft, then, is concerned with the most basic of human questions; what relationship is possible between man and God, how can man approach a hidden God? This question is made particularly difficult in this ode by Swift's constant reminders of how limited, indeed, how untrustworthy, man's faculties really are. Human reason, as we have already seen by the varieties of cosmological confusion it can engender, is subject to all the errors of pride. Human senses, too, Swift tells us in the second stanza, are weak and distorting. But if man can trust neither his mind nor his senses, then it seems that whirl alone is man's inheritance. Only Sancroft, in his "secret regular sphere," has succeeded in surmounting that inheritance; and Sancroft, in his isolated retreat, seems both unapproachable and inexplicable.

Of Sancroft's life, as we have already noted, and of the specific details of his deprivation and conduct, Swift's ode tells us very little. Further, we are seemingly told almost as little of his virtues. We are told that Sancroft possesses a mind which is, paradoxically,

. . .fix'd to combat fate
 With those two pow'rful swords, Submission and Humility,
 (47-48)

and further we know that he is "Free from our tyrant-passions, anger, scorn and fear" (116). We know that because of his equanimity, his "firm heavenly mind," Sancroft is unmoved by "Fortune in both

extremes," and that, therefore, Swift finds him worthy of comparison to the regular course of a star and, finally, to Christ Himself.

But all this seems, while highly laudatory, yet very vague. For, excepting only King William, of whom Swift tells us still less, Sancroft is the only godly man presented in this ode--he is its "brightest pattern." It is he who must be the

. . .guide from Heav'n to show
the way which ev'ry wand'ring fool below
Pretends so perfectly to know.
(156-158)

In his portrait of Sancroft, if anywhere, Swift must depict the means by which men can find their way to God.

In the two lines which immediately precede those describing Sancroft's "fix'd mind" Swift begins, I think, to supply the background which ultimately illuminates the meaning implicit in Sancroft's character. The lines actually form a proposition.

If all that our weak knowledge titles virtue, be
(High Truth) the best resemblance of exalted Thee,
(45-46)

then, Swift continues, Sancroft's conduct--his combat of fate through submission and humility--makes him

. . .the brightest pattern Earth can shew
Of heav'n-born Truth below.
(52-53)

But this is not a proposition which every philosopher nor every theologian would grant to Swift. Truth, it can properly be argued, whether sacred or profane, is the concern of the intellective

faculty, while virtue falls within the domain of the will. True, no reputable thinker has been willing to separate the realms of intellect and will completely, but not all would willingly see virtue made the human counter for truth.

Swift, however, in this ode, regularly connects virtue with truth. Throughout the poem what truth man sees, or fails to see, seems to depend upon his righteousness; knowledge is equated with virtue, and ignorance with sin. We have already seen several instances of this. Ptolemy's cosmology was a false picture of the universe because, from Swift's point of view, it sprang from pride. Much the same can be said of Descartes' cosmology.

So pervasive in this poem is Swift's insistence that man's intellectual efforts must be conjoined with a will attuned to virtuous actions that every instance which Swift presents of man's confusion is but another example of man attempting to divorce the goodness of one faculty from the goodness of the other. Thus Descartes' cosmology, an attempted work of pure reason, undertaken in great pride, ends in confusion and contradiction. Thus those religious reformers who, Swift complains, practice their reforming "arts" only to promote their own self-aggrandizement, end by killing the religion they promised to cure.

While this necessary conjunction of knowledge with virtue is not, as already pointed out, an equally acceptable premise for all thinkers; it is, to a greater or lesser degree, an earmark of those thinkers whose thought begins in a heavily Platonistic background.²⁴ "All sin is ignorance," Plato has Socrates comment, and platonically orientated thought has regularly equated ignorance with sin and truth with virtue. From this equation follows the ethical

concern inherent in all branches of platonic thought. Plotinus, in a passage so beautiful that not even centuries of quotation have worn it out, put the matter this way.

If the eye that adventures the vision be dimmed by vice, impure, or weak, and unable in its cowardly blanching to see the uttermost brightness, then it sees nothing even though another point to what lies plain to sight before it. To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen, and having some likeness to it. Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful.²⁵

This passage Swift echoes, though it may well be that he learned it through an intermediate source:

The daz'ling glory dimms their prostituted sight,
No deflower'd eye can face the naked light.
(221-222)

It is presumably then, the import of Plotinus' passage in whatever version of it that Swift knew, which informs the imagery of light and dark that is so substantial a part of this poem. That is, in the Ode to Sancroft man's world is dark to him because he does not acknowledge that before he can see his eye must be cleared. In the first lines of the ode, Swift asserts this need for divine illumination, and does so through Miltonic echo.

One possible echo from Milton's third book of Paradise Lost has already been discussed above. Another has been noted by Joseph Horrell, who observed that the second line of Swift's ode, "Bright effluence of th' immortal ray," is apparently formed from the sixth line of the invocation to light with which the third book of Paradise Lost begins. Milton's line runs, "Bright effluence of bright essence increate," and Swift not only borrows the image "bright

effluence"--Milton's figure for light--to form one line but employs the image "bright essence"--as a figure for truth--to form another: "Since the bright essence fled, where haunts the reverend ghost" (43). Nor is this all. The first line of Swift's ode announces its subject with three heavily emphasized words, "Truth is Eternal," and then connects that subject obliquely to Christ, "and the Son of Heav'n." The line seems, then, a conscious imitation of the first line of Milton's invocation, "Hail, holy light, offspring of Heaven first-born!" These are not all the echoes of the invocation to light which occur in Swift's ode, but only a sufficient number to show us that the invocation was in Swift's mind as he composed his ode.

That is, in Swift's mind, as he composed the Ode to Sancroft, is Milton's confession of blindness and supplication for that illumination without which neither Milton nor any man can truly see:

. . .celestial light
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
 Irradiate; there plant eyes; all mist from thence
 Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
 Of things invisible to mortal sight.
 (P.L. III, 51-55)

But in Swift's ode, it is not only "inward" sight, sight which sees "things invisible," that requires an illuminated mind. The very mechanics of "mortal sight," Swift reminds us, depend upon the eye being made receptive to that which it would see. The eye must "catch the living landscape in a scanty light" (30) Swift says, and his line is reminiscent, I think, of the first half of St. Paul's dictum, "Now we see as in a glass darkly, then we shall see as face to face," while it directly refers (as John Nichols, the poem's first publisher pointed out) to "the experiment of the dark chamber, to demonstrate

light to be by reception of the object and not by emission."²⁶ What the experiment to which Nichols alludes demonstrated was that the eye in seeing does not shoot out shafts of light, but receives them. Sight, then, as the experiment showed, is the result of both the activity and passivity of the eye, the task of which is to actively make itself conformable to the essentially passive role of seeing. And what Swift, then, might have gathered from the experiment is that the role of the physical eye is, as Plotinus had intuitively known, a perfect analogue for the role a man must undertake would he approach God. As Plotinus puts it at the end of that passage which Swift echoed:

Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike,
and never can the soul have vision of the First Beauty
unless itself be beautiful. Therefore, first let each become
godlike and beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty.

This injunction to man to become godlike if he would see God, is, I believe, the background for that comparison of Sancroft and Christ which Irvin Ehrenpreis feels is an impossibly over-inflated praise of Sancroft.²⁷ But, rather than being over-inflated praise, Swift's comparison is, I think, quite appropriate. For Swift's thought in this poem, as we have already observed, often reflects both the cosmological and ethical biases of Christian platonists; it is therefore appropriate that Swift's model for human conduct should be the normative model of Christian platonism--the godlike man. Recognizing the kind of model Sancroft is, we are, I think, in a position to suggest the meaning of the portrait Swift draws.

Plotinus' injunction to man to become godlike must logically be based on both the fact and the ideal of deformation; that is,

if man is to become actually godlike he must be originally made in the image of God, must be, although only in potentia, already godlike. But, on the other hand, if man must become godlike, obviously an effort of human will is called for. But towards what is that effort to be directed? Plato, in the Theaetetus may have supplied the answer:

The truth is that God is never in any way unrighteous-
He is perfect righteousness and he of us who is the most
righteous is most like him.²⁸

This is no mere tautology. It does not say that to become godlike man must become godlike; rather it says that to become godlike man must will to participate in godliness. The first step towards participating in the divine nature is to will to do so, and, because it is the essence of divinity itself to choose righteousness and goodness, to choose God is also the last step in imitating him. A certain learned doctor, one whose conception of the cosmos and of man begins in the fact and ideal of deformity, puts a fine point on all this; he is the famous Cambridge platonist, Henry More.²⁹

This therefore is the supreme Law and Will of God touching the Purity of his Worship, That we have no will nor end of our own. For as we are to have but one God, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God," so we are to have but one Will, even the Will of the God Whom we worship. Which we have not, if we have any Self-will or Self-ends un-subordinate to the Will of God.

Here, finally, we can fully answer Ehrenpreis' objection that Swift's comparison of Sancroft to Christ undermines his praise of Sancroft. Quite the opposite, the comparison is at the heart of what the portrait of Sancroft conveys. Because Sancroft "combats fate with those two Powr'ful swords, Submission and Humility" (47-48),

that is, because Sancroft actively wills God's Will, he becomes, in Plato's words, "most like him." Sancroft's portrait provides Swift's answer to the relationship of man and God because Sancroft, in setting aside his own will to accept God's will, becomes himself a type, an image of the hidden God.

Thus, primitive Sancroft moves too high
 To be observ'd by vulgar eye,
 And rolls the silent year
 On his own secret regular sphere,
 And sheds, tho' all unseen, his sacred influence here.
 (149-153)

Sancroft's deprivation at the hands of prideful men seems

. . .to discover what they would have done
 (Were his humanity on earth once more)
 To his undoubted Master, Heaven's Almighty Son,
 (132-34)

because Sancroft lives, in the most literal sense, for Christ. This portrait of a godlike Sancroft, then, whose will is so completely attuned to God's that earthly "fortune in both extremes" is "but one thing under two different names" is, when viewed against the set of ideas which give it substance, both a model for human conduct and Swift's assertion that man is, in fact, formed after the image of God.

What then, finally, is Swift's view, in this ode, of the relationship between heaven and earth, man and God? The imagery of space and motion which was examined earlier in this chapter led us, we remember, to something like Henry More's conception of the universe-- a conception in which God permeated, was hidden in, every particle of matter. The portrait of Sancroft has also led us to something very like More's conception of man, a conception in which man is imitatio

Dei, after the image of God. But neither Swift nor More are naive in their employment of the ideal of deformation. Both recognize that though the world is an image of God, it is only an image.

For this inferior world is but Heaven's dusky shade,
By dark reverted rays from its reflection made.
(21-22)

Both recognize that although man is, in potentia, godlike, he must willfully accept his birthright. After all, it was the failure of a group of men to acknowledge God's providence in the civil acts of man which gave rise to this poem.

Thus the position of both men is the more or less orthodox one that both this world and human nature are goods, but they are goods dependent upon the God that created and sustains them and to Whom they must ultimately return. That is why "apocalyptic mutterings," to use Maynard Mack's phrase, can be heard in several places in this ode--and most clearly in the following lines from the seventh stanza. The lines describe the evanescent quality of the enthusiast's zeal, but they do so in imagery drawn from the second chapter of the Book of Daniel.

The crazy composition shews,
Like that fantastic medley in the idol's toes,
Made up of iron mix't with clay,
This crumbles into dust,
That, moulders into rust,
Or melts by the first show'r away.
(137-142)

In the dream from which Swift's imagery is drawn, King Nebuchadnezzar sees an idol whose head is made of gold, the chest of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron and the feet of a composition of iron and potter's clay. As the dream continues,

Nebuchadnezzar sees a stone hewn from a mountain, though the hewing is done by no hands. This stone crushes first the feet and then the whole of the idol, and, when this is done, the stone itself grows to assume the form of a mountain.

Nebuchadnezzar, upon awakening, forgets the contents of this dream, but as he remains troubled by it, he calls upon first his wise men and, seeing them fail, then upon Daniel to relate and explicate the dream. Daniel, having asserted that his knowledge originates not with himself but with God, explains to Nebuchadnezzar that he has dreamt a prophesy for the whole world. Four empires will arise and then a fifth will be formed of the fragments of its predecessors, but, at last, God will destroy all human kingdoms and establish His own Empire on earth.

The echo implies, I believe, Swift's final answer to the pride and folly, not only of the enthusiast's zeal, but of all the men who are shown in this poem to have placed their will before God's. They shall perish, and their works shall pass away, but the Kingdom of God will be established on earth. In fact, in a sense, that Kingdom has already been long established, linking all men willing to participate in it to one another and to God.

In the final, and incomplete, twelfth stanza of the ode, Swift refers to Sancroft, presumably after his death, as "happy saint" and appeals to him to

Pity a miserable Church's tears,
That begs the pow'rful blessing of thy pray'rs.
(234-235)

The validity of this appeal to a saint to pray for the entire earthly Church depends upon a Catholic doctrine which, though it was probably

not completely acceptable to Swift as an Anglican, still apparently had for him a poetic validity--the doctrine of the Communion of Saints.

According to the doctrine, the saints are able to entertain prayers addressed to them and to intercede, in heaven, for those who have prayed because the Church on Earth is but a part of the one true Church, which encompasses also the Church in purgatory and the Church in heaven. It is this total harmony and communion of God's Kingdom which makes efficacious the appeal to the saints. But further, according to Catholic doctrine, so far does this harmony extend that even men living in the world can, in emulating Christ, dedicate their suffering to atone for the sin of other men. We have already noted that Sancroft, because he is a godly man, appears in this ode as a type of the Deus Absconditus; what Swift's prayer to Sancroft allows us to appreciate is the real quality of Sancroft's "influence." Kathleen Williams remarked, we will remember, that the bishop's "secret regular sphere" seemed overwhelmed by the calumny of the world Swift describes. But that is to miss the point, for, it is finally out of his very misfortune that Sancroft can fashion

. . .his own secret regular sphere,
And shed, tho' all unseen, his sacred influence here.
(152-153)

It is on the pervasiveness of God's spiritual kingdom that this ode ends. Disregarding the "outcasts of this outcast age," its final line asserts that "Heaven and Cato both are pleas'd." The line refers, presumably, to Cato the younger, whose life, in its devotion to virtue and truth, in its isolation and in the contempt and ridicule it elicited from his own contemporaries, bears a curious

resemblance to Sancroft's own. Cato, had not, of course, the benefit of revelation, but, Swift maintains, Cato and heaven are in accord. In accord, Swift has maintained, are heaven and all men whose will, in devotion to virtue and truth, is not "self will" and whose ends are not "self ends" but who are "subordinate to the Will of God." Brought together in one kingdom are the true men of all kingdoms and all times, all within a Church which spans earth, purgatory and heaven.

NOTES

1. That is, these are the first poems we know definitely to be Swift's. For references to possible earlier satiric verse see Herbert Davis, Jonathan Swift: essays on his satire and other studies (New York, 1964), p. 171.
2. At fourteen Swift was admitted to Trinity College, Dublin, where, according to Swift himself, "he too much neglected some parts of his academical studies, for which he had no great relish by nature and turned himself to reading history and poetry." The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Herbert Davis et al., 13 vols. (Oxford, 1957), V, 162. All quotations of Swift's prose in my text are to this edition.
3. "There is in some of Mr. Cowley's Love Verse," Swift commented when he was forty-two, "a strain that I thought extraordinary at fifteen." The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, II, 114. At forty-two, it hardly needs to be said, the Dean was less fond of Cowley than he had been at fifteen.
4. The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, ed. Sir Harold Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1963), I, 9.
5. Swift: the man, his works, and the age, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1962-), I, 109.
6. Ibid. I, 112.
7. John H. Finley, Jr., Pindar and Aeschylus (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 54.
8. The English Writings of Abraham Cowley, ed. A. R. Waller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Eng., 1905), I, 165. All quotations of Cowley's verse in my text are to this edition.
9. The Collected Poems of Jonathan Swift, ed. Joseph Horrell, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), I, 378.
10. Swift: the man, his works, and the age, I, 126 and following.
11. Ronald Paulson, "Swift, Stella, and Permanence," ELH, XXVII (1960), 298-314.
12. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, I, 189-90.
13. Kathleen Williams, Swift and the Age of Compromise (Lawrence, Kansas, 1958), p. 147.

14. The Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, 22 vols. (Oxford, 1937), XVII, 733-39.
15. G. M. Trevelyan, History of England, 2 vols. (New York, 1954), II, 210.
16. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, IX, 238.
17. Let it here be noted that Swift, using Ptolemaic cosmology as an emblem for human confusion was harder on that cosmology than the facts actually warrant. See Thomas S. Kuhn, The Copernican Revolution. . . (New York, 1959).
18. See Phillip Harth, Swift and Anglican Rationalism. . . (Chicago, 1961), pp. 92 and following.
19. For the following discussion of Descartes' cosmology and Henry More's opposition to it I am indebted to Alexander Koyré's From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe (New York, 1957). See particularly chapters five and six.
20. While this summary is accurate, it is also, it should be understood, very simplified. Descartes, for example, called his cosmos "indefinite," not "infinite." But the cosmos Descartes described is infinite.
21. Phillip Harth in Swift and Anglican Rationalism. . . makes a very convincing case for Swift's early acquaintance with and admiration for the work of Henry More.
22. Ralph Cudworth, The True Intellectual System of the Universe (London, 1678), p. 175.
23. Henry More, Collection of Several Philosophical Writings (London, 1662). Cited from Koyre, p. 111.
24. On this point see Aharon Lichtenstein, Henry More: The Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 89-90.
25. Plotinus, The Enneads, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York, 1957), 1.6.9.
26. Nichols' observation is cited from Sir Harold Williams' edition of Swift's Poems, I, 35, n. 1.
27. Swift: the man, his works, and the age, I, 130.
28. Plato, Theaetetus, cited from The Dialogues of Plato, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, 1937), 176a-b.
29. An Antidote against Idolatry (London, 1672-1673), cited from Lichtenstein, p.59.

CHAPTER TWO
Cadenus and Vanessa

I

In 1767 Oliver Goldsmith touched on what is at once the most obvious and the most remarkable aspect of Swift's Cadenus and Vanessa. "This [poem] is thought," he commented,

. . . one of Dr. Swift's correctest pieces; its chief merit, indeed, is the elegant ease with which a story, but ill conceived in itself, is told.

To put Goldsmith's point less charitably, Swift seems certainly, in this poem, to expend a prodigality of materials only to lead us finally to an apparently lame conclusion. Something of the effect may be gathered from the following synopsis.

The poem opens ambitiously, presenting to us the Court of Venus met in full session. The reason for this session is, however, a professed decline of love between the sexes, and a multitude of shepherds and nymphs are joined in debate to fix on each other the responsibility for this decline. The pleader for the nymphs opens the debate by accusing both "that false creature, man," and Cupid himself of negligence in the pursuit of love. He cites as a sad result of this negligence, a universal decline of both romantic and conjugal felicity,

Now love is dwindled to intrigue,
And marriage grown a money league.
(13-14)

The pleader for the shepherds next states his case. He acknowledges that men have, indeed, grown indifferent to love but he fixes the responsibility for this decline on the nymphs themselves. The nymphs, he maintains, have turned from that celestial flame, chaste and pure, which characterized ancient love and which alone can inspire love in virtuous men. Their fancies, instead, are engrossed by the lowest trivia, and the nymphs are therefore not worthy of love from a worthy man.

Venus, "much perplex'd in mind/To see her Empire thus declin'd" (128-129), finds her references to legal texts no help in settling this dispute. Therefore, she undertakes an experiment which she hopes will at once restore her reign and settle the merits of the case before her. Choosing out a particularly beautiful female infant, she endows the child with all the graces at her command--outward cleanliness, decency of mind, and a soft engaging air. Then, in order to make the child completely worthy of a virtuous and rational love, she deceives Pallas, goddess of wisdom, into believing the infant to be male. Thus deceived, Pallas grants the child those gifts of knowledge, judgment, wit, justice, truth, fortitude and honor which are traditionally the gifts of only the best of men. Venus' task is thus complete and, she hopes, she has only to allow the cause before her to spin itself out for sixteen years until a mature Vanessa can, by providing a model for nymphs and an object of adoration for shepherds, secure her reign.

The experiment, however, is not a success. Pallas is quickly undeceived, and while she cannot resume the gifts she has given, she correctly predicts that they will hinder, rather than further, Venus' cause. And, in fact, Vanessa's very wisdom is Venus'

undoing; for Vanessa is so unlike the beaux and dames whom she is to captivate that far from taking her as a model they unanimously find her "the dullest soul."

Then tipt their Forehead in a jeer,
As who should say--she wants it here.
(360-61)

Indeed, from Venus' point of view the experiment turns into a total disaster, since Vanessa herself has, apparently, too much sense to fall in love.

At this point Cupid, longing to vindicate his mother's wrongs, succeeds in causing Vanessa to become enamoured of a fortyish priest, her tutor, Cadenus. And now the poem becomes, in some sense, biographical, the reflection of an actual relationship between Swift himself and Esther Vanhomerigh. Vanessa, smitten, betrays all the classic marks of love-sickness--she feels pain at heart, listens to her tutor's voice but not his lectures, and contrives ways in which to touch his hand. Cadenus, misunderstanding, concludes she has grown tired of his lectures; he therefore offers to withdraw, and thereby actually forces Vanessa to confess her love. Her confession precipitates a debate between them in which Vanessa attempts to maintain the reasonableness of her love while Cadenus offers only the unsatisfactory (to her) return of "Friendship in its greatest height." (780).

At this point, with the outcome of the debate still undecided:

Whether the Nymph, to please her Swain,
Talks in a high romatick Strain;
Or whether he at last descends,
To act with less Seraphick ends,
Or, to compound the Business, whether
They temper love and books together,
(820-25)

Swift's muse, having already revealed so much, turns inexpicably coy and refuses to reveal anything more. Instead, we are rather lurchingly removed again to Venus' Court where she, having watched Vanessa's whole career, decides the case rather arbitrarily against the men and, leaving the world to Cupid's dubious discretion,

Left all below at Six and Sev'n,
 Harness'd her Doves and flew to Heaven.
 (888-889)

The lavish number of lines, nearly nine hundred, expended to arrive at so halting a conclusion would be surprising even from an author whose power of economy was less proverbial than Swift's. Swift, however, in Cadenus and Vanessa, seems unable even to tell his story without numerous inconsistencies. Thus, for example, we are first told that Cupid, hoping to procure a lover for Vanessa, shot numerous arrows "Pointed at Col'nels, Lords, and Beaux" (478). Then we are told that Cadenus warded off these same arrows by placing books in the hands of (presumably) Vanessa. What Swift is getting at is clear enough; Cupid's efforts are in vain because Vanessa, tutored by Cadenus, is both learned and aloof. But the path of Swift's metaphorical arrows is impossible to trace.

Worse still than such missteps, however, is the poem's general inconclusiveness, the air of indecision which hangs over the entire production. First, the debate between the shepherds and nymphs which opens the poem is never, by the parties themselves, brought to issue. Second, the debate between Cadenus and Vanessa not only is not concluded, it does not seem possible to conclude it since the argument springs from fundamentally unarguable circumstances:

Vanessa is in love and Cadenus is not. Lastly, while a judgment is finally rendered by Venus against the men, that judgment is not very convincing, since, although it is true that the shepherds have failed to adore Vanessa, it is equally true that the nymphs have failed to model themselves after her. Therefore, despite Venus' judgment, the end of the poem finds all things as they were at its beginning, at a state of "six and seven."

To seek, then, in Cadenus and Vanessa for a consistent and unified view of human love is to search for what, I suspect, does not exist in the poem. But that is not to say that Cadenus and Vanessa does not repay close study. On the contrary, the poem provides, first I think, as much insight as we shall ever have into what a more romantic age called "the mystery of Swift's life and loves." And secondly, while the poem is hardly an "art of love," it is, I think, taken as a whole, a single large metaphor for "the difficulties which love attend." The poem has never been read this way, but reading it so shows, I think, its apparent missteps and its hopelessly futile debates as, not flaws, but as coherent parts of Swift's precise illustration of love's difficulties.

II

Just because Cadenus and Vanessa, while full of debate, apparently proceeds to no conclusion, it has proven a treasure trove of sorts for generations of critics seeking to document one or another attitude towards Swift or about his work. Most of the speeches which in the poem are assigned to Venus, Pallas, Vanessa and Cadenus have been, at some time, taken to represent Swift's genuine view. This tendency to take a speech from Cadenus and

Vanessa and to assume, while disregarding the character to whom Swift assigned it, that it represents Swift's real view, led to particularly amusing colloquies between Swift's earliest critics.

Thus, for example, Lord Orrery first isolated for commentary the following passage.

Two maxims she could still produce,
And sad Experience taught their Use:
That Virtue, pleas'd by being shown,
knows nothing which it dare not own;
Can make us, without Fear disclose
Our inmost secrets to our Foes:
That common Forms were not designed
Directors to a noble mind.

(606-13)

In remarking on this passage, however, Orrery completely disregarded the fact that the speech is only a recapitulation by the character, Vanessa, of an opinion supposedly held by the character Cadenus. Instead, Orrery used this speech to draw a very black picture indeed of the Dean of St. Patricks.

He [Swift] taught her, that vice as soon as it defied shame, was immediately changed into virtue. That vulgar forms were not binding on certain choice spirits, to whom either the writings or persons of men of wit were acceptable.²

Then, a year after Lord Orrery's Remarks appeared, Patrick Delany, Swift's long-time friend, took up the cudgels for Swift in Observations on Lord Orrery's Remarks. In the course of defending Swift against Orrery's generally damning portrait Delany, too, falls upon Vanessa's speech. But, instead of correcting Orrery's mistake, Delany, like Orrery, assumes the passage must represent Swift's own view.

Now, pray, my Lord, what is there in all this, which the most virtuous man alive might not own with his last breath to

be his most sincere and genuine sentiments: For my own part, I can see nothing in it, but a panygyric upon purity and noble nature of virtue.³

All the difference which really exists between these two widely divergent readings is, of course, that Delany is kindly disposed towards Swift while Orrery is not.

What is surprising, though, is not that this highly subjective and personal form of criticism should have been written by men who knew Swift well, but that it should still remain, as we shall see, the dominant strain in modern criticism of Cadenus and Vanessa. The antidote for it, after all, has existed for over two hundred years. For Swift's nephew, Deane Swift, while animadverting upon Orrery's Remarks a year after Delany, added to Delany's reading of Cadenus and Vanessa the necessary fillip of critical insight. To Orrery's assumption that Cadenus and Vanessa are the exact counterparts to Swift and Esther Vanhomerigh, Deane Swift replied that, for all we know, the poem might be purely a work of Swift's imagination; and further, that even if we assume that Swift and Esther are, in some sense, Cadenus and Vanessa, the degree to which the poet's imagination has transformed them must remain hidden from us.⁴ A clear-sighted application, then, of Deane Swift's insight to Cadenus and Vanessa should produce a reading of the poem which can be validated from the text and has nothing to do with either a critic's sympathy towards or dislike of Jonathan Swift himself. But nothing can more clearly illustrate the difficulty of producing such a reading than a review of the most intensive and cogent of modern attempts on the poem.

Peter Ohlin, in his article, "Cadenus and Vanessa," Reason

and Passion,"⁵ begins by attempting to open some aesthetic distance between the poem and the relationship between Swift and Esther Vonhomerigh which inspired it. Rather than turning towards what we know of that relationship in order to understand the poem, Ohlin suggests we draw "some aid from other and less immediately personal documents from Swift's hand." These sources, Ohlin argues, "will reveal that Cadenus and Vanessa is a delicately executed dialogue between reason and passion, utilizing the conflict between these two principles as the controlling device."

The less immediately personal documents Ohlin uses are, principally, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, Swift's poems to Stella and Thoughts on Various Subjects. From these Ohlin draws documentation for what he calls Swift's "orthodox christian" view of love, a view which, though it does not find sexual passion evil, insists that this passion must be constantly directed by reason. This view of Swift's "orthodox christianity" forms the background for Ohlin's reading of the poem.

The "two principles" of "reason" and "passion" are represented, according to Ohlin, by two characters apiece. "Passion's" prime representative is, of course, Venus, whom Ohlin characterizes as "vain, sensuous and deceitful." Fearful of the loss of her empire (and therefore vain), Venus deceives Pallas (whom Ohlin considers "reason's" first representative) into helping her create Vanessa. Vanessa, until her intellect is addled by the force of Cupid's dart is, Ohlin argues, reasonable because she is a perfect blend of reason and passion. When, however, she has once been inflamed by love, her passions mount inappropriately astride her reason and her mind is darkened by vain imaginings. Gazing at

Cadenus she now,

Imaginary Charms can find,
 In eyes with Reading almost blind;
Cadenus now no more appears
 Declin'd in Health, advan'd in years.
 (526-29)

Cadenus' response to her, Ohlin therefore maintains, is a perfectly correct attempt to restore her to reason's control and, in fact, represents Swift's own real views. Cadenus offers,

. . .Friendship in its greatest Height,
 A constant rational Delight,
 (780-81)

and promises that

His want of Passion will redeem
 With Gratitude, Respect, Esteem.
 (786-87)

What Cadenus is finally offering, according to Ohlin, is Swift's conception of the highest type of love, "that christian selfless love which is a reflection of the divine love of God for mankind." Unfortunately, however, Vanessa has meanwhile become so besotted by passion as not to recognize the value of what Cadenus offers her, and the debate is, therefore, as Ohlin argues, left at a standstill. Meanwhile Venus, who, Ohlin now argues, had attempted to give men a "reasonable passion," decides that "since they [men] cannot see perfect beauty and virtue for what they are when they appear in Vanessa, men do not deserve the ability to control their passions." Therefore, Ohlin concludes, "Venus leaves all 'below at Six and Sev'n' without the order she had planned to establish."

The strong point of Ohlin's argument is, it seems to me, his

appreciation of the effects on Vanessa of her impassioned state. Swift makes it abundantly clear that, whatever our response to Vanessa might be, we are to understand that her arguments are not to be entirely trusted. She argues, Swift tells us,

. . .as Philosophers, who find
Some Fav'rite System to their Mind:
In ev'ry Point to make it fit,
Will force all Nature to submit.
(722-25)

Despite the apparent obviousness of the point, however, Ohlin is the first critic to notice it, and thus he frees himself, and us, of the need--which Delany and many another critic since has felt--to read Vanessa's lines as if they expressed Swift's own considered opinions. Vanessa's lines can therefore be read, not with an eye towards making them consistent with what we think is (or ought to be) Swift's opinion, but by the portrait Swift provides us of the character who speaks them.

But if Ohlin's strongest point is his treatment of Vanessa, his weakest point is his treatment of Cadenus. For although Ohlin treats Cadenus as the moral center of the poem and as Swift's own spokesman, Swift has, I think, compromised Cadenus quite as much as he has Vanessa. The speech, for example, in which Cadenus offers Vanessa that "gratitude, respect, and esteem," which Ohlin claims to be "christian selfless love," Swift, in fact, introduced with the remark,

So when Cadenus could not hide,
He chose to justify his Pride.
(762-63)

Ohlin is forced, by his own thesis, to touch very lightly on such

embarrassing passages, and he therefore damages the complexity of both Cadenus' character and of Cadenus' lines.

Indeed, because Ohlin takes Cadenus' point of view for Swift's own, he misses much of the complexity of Cadenus and Vanessa. He is forced to read the whole of Cadenus and Vanessa from what he conceives to be Cadenus' preference for reason over passion, and he must, therefore, rigorously pare the poem down to the scope of Cadenus' vision. Ironically, the poem takes its revenge by involving Ohlin in contradiction. Thus, for example, Ohlin begins by describing Venus as Cadenus doubtless would have seen her--vain, shamelessly sensuous, and deceitful. But by the end of his article Ohlin is forced to admit that it is, indeed, "to the World's perpetual Shame/ [that] The Queen of Beauty lost her aim." (432-33)

The moral of all this is, of course, only an extension of the point Deane Swift made over two hundred years ago--that neither Cadenus nor Vanessa nor any other of the poem's characters can be taken for Swift's own authentic voice. But, on the other hand, we ought not dismiss too quickly a critical error which has persisted for over two hundred years; for the error, I think, contains a germ of truth. For, although Orrery was certainly wrong in attacking Swift through the lines of a character whose arguments Swift himself has amply enough undermined, nevertheless, the opinions which Vanessa espouses can, as we shall see, be found in Swift's writings when he was speaking in his own person. Similarly, although Ohlin erred in drawing too tightly together Swift and the character whose flaws Swift clearly exposes, Ohlin has certainly demonstrated that Swift, at times, did offer arguments very much like those he provides Cadenus. Indeed, the complexity of the poem

lies precisely in this: although Swift exposes the flaws of each of the characters in his poem, nevertheless, all of them argue in ways which he has argued. It is small wonder, then, that critics have so often seen, and felt forced to judge, Swift within his lines; for Cadenus and Vanessa is almost a psychomachia. Almost, I say, but not quite: for it is the nature of a psychomachia to move towards a conclusion in which virtue which is clearly virtue triumphs over vice which is clearly vice. But Cadenus and Vanessa reaches no conclusion; rather, as I hope to show, it exposes and judges the contrary opinions on love held by the Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral. It is, to repeat myself, a single large metaphor for "the difficulties which love attends."

III

On the basis of their surviving correspondence, the relationship between Swift and Esther Vonhomerigh seems peculiarly tailored to illuminate, for Swift, love's difficulties. Yet, for all that, the relationship began normally enough. Swift first met Esther in 1708 and was doubtless taken by her combination of youth (she was not, however, so young as Swift thought), good looks, good character and good sense. Further, to all these qualities Esther apparently added two more which Swift found certainly not charming but, nevertheless, compelling: these were a streak of laziness and, subsequently, a lady-like ignorance. These qualities were, for Swift, probably compelling, since, as is well enough known, Swift's penchant for reforming female manners amounted to something very like a life-long avocation. Therefore, as Irvin Ehrenpreis has put it, "We may assume that

he began the friendship as usual, by suggesting books for the young woman to read and acquaintances for her to drop."⁶

How long this relatively simple friendship continued and when, and in what way, it deepened into both something more and something different it is not possible to say. If we could fix a date for the completion of Cadenus and Vanessa, we should know, at least, the latest date by which Esther had declared her love to Swift; but the date by which Swift completed that poem is as uncertain as anything else in the history of Swift and Esther.⁷ What we do know is that by 1711 Swift felt it necessary to suppress, in his correspondence to Esther Johnson, his previously numerous references to the Vonhomerigh establishment in general and Vanessa in particular. And we know too, that about this same time Swift and Esther held a series of secret meetings at the house of Swift's entirely trustworthy friend though not entirely reputable printer, John Barber.⁸ Clearly then, by the end of 1711 their friendship had complicated, Swift was deeply involved, and Vanessa, presumably, had conceived what she was later to call her "inexpressible passion" for Swift. Because Cadenus and Vanessa is, in some way, Swift's response to Esther's passion for him, it is worthwhile to see what her correspondence tells us of her and her passion.

A surprising amount has been written about Esther, and most of it portrays her as a poor, weak-willed girl overpowered by both Swift and her own sentiments. This portrait is not confirmed, however, by either the quality of style or argumentation which one finds in her correspondence with Swift. To be sure, Esther could, and often did, address Swift in the most passionate of terms.

Put my passion under the utmost restraint, send me as distant from you as the earth will allow, yet you cannot banish those charming ideas, which will ever stick by me whilst I have the use of memory. Nor is the love I bear you only seated in my soul, for there is not an atom of my frame that is not blended with it. Therefore don't flatter yourself that separation will ever change my sentiments, for I find myself unquiet in the midst of silence, and my heart is at once pierced with sorrow and love.⁹

But passion so well worded as this argues for a cool head as well as for a warm heart, and particularly the carefully constructed final sentence of this passage persuades me that Esther understood the use of the blunt as well as the sharp end of her stylus. Further, passionate as she was, Esther could, on occasion, invert the whole form of passionate address by the delicate application of satire-- and she could perform such mischief almost as well as Swift himself, who was the master of it.

Now, because I love frankness extremely, I here tell you that I have determined to try all manner of human arts to reclaim you, and if all those fail I am resolved to have recourse to the black one, which, it is said, never does. Now see what inconveniences you will bring both me and yourself into. Pray think calmly of it. Is it not much better to come of yourself than to be brought by force. . . ?¹⁰

Indeed, so stylistically sophisticated are Esther's letters that, it seems to me, they possess an interest even independent of their biographical significance.¹¹

If, however, the style of Esther's letters is consistently good--and Swift thought it was--her mode of argumentation is often positively striking. For Esther's arguments are founded on elements of Swift's own principles and use those principles in such way that, as Esther might have put it, his thought "made for her."

The aim of all her letters is, of course, to draw Swift closer to her, and her whole means for accomplishing this aim is her attractiveness to him. Her task, then, was to place Swift's emotional and subjective responses to her, his pity, friendship, admiration and love, within a frame of reference which would weigh those responses most heavily. Her art, practiced over a period of nearly a dozen years, consisted in the skill with which she culled, from Swift's own thought, those elements which honor subjective and individualistic response.

Such elements really exist in Swift's thought, but because critics have found more striking Swift's alternative view--his rigorous demand for objective judgment--the subjective nature of many of Swift's maxims and much of his advice has often been overlooked. Thus, for example, the extreme objectivism of Swift's following advice to Stella (Esther Johnson) has been often pointed out:

In Points of Honour to be try'd,
 All Passions must be laid aside;
 How shall I act? is not the Case;
 But how would Brutus in my Place?
 Drive all objections from your Mind,
 Else you relapse to human Kind.

(To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness)

But, on the other hand, Swift's recognition, in other poems to Stella, that a subjective point of view is sometimes not only more charitable but, in some fundamental way, more true, has been rarely mentioned.

But, Stella say, what evil Tongue
 Reports you are no longer young?
 That half your Locks are turned to grey:
 I'll ne'er believe a Word they say.
 Tis true, but let it not be known,
 My Eyes are somewhat dimmish grown:
 For Nature, always in the Right,
 To your Decays adapts my Sight,

And till I see them with these Eyes,
Whoever says you have them, lyes.

(Stella's Birthday, 1724-25)

Similarly, numbers of critics have reminded us of the rigorously objective viewpoint which Swift proposed to a young lady as a guide for her married life. Often cited, for example, has been this advice.

I will add one Thing, although it be a little out of Place, which is to desire that you will learn to value and esteem your Husband, for those good Qualities which he really possesseth; and not to fancy others in him, which he certainly hath not. For, although this latter be generally understood for a Mark of Love, yet it is indeed nothing but affectation, or ill judgment.¹²

But rarely cited, though from the same letter, is that passage in which Swift advised the young woman to pursue learning, not only because it would increase her husband's regard for her judgment and opinion, but also because, Swift tells her,

The Endowments of your Mind will even make your Person more agreeable to him; and when you are alone, your Time will not lie heavy upon your Hands, for want of some trifling amusement.¹³

What I think is clear from these "matched sets" of examples--and they might easily be multiplied--is that though Swift honored the man who saw clearly and objectively, he also recognized the validity of certain kinds of subjective truths. He knew, that is, that beauty and, perhaps, truth is often in the eye of the beholder.

Indeed, even aspects of Swift's thought which do not immediately appear subjective can often bear very subjective applications. Thus, as Orrery perceived, Swift's often repeated maxim, "Act what is right and do not mind what the world says," might itself be dangerously subjective, since it can make not only the

responsibility for individual conduct, but ultimately the actual determination of values a matter of individual interpretation. But Orrery perceived this possible application of Swift's maxim much later than Esther, to whom Swift had taught it. "You had once a maxim," Esther remarked to Swift when she would encourage his attention and diminish his reticence, "to do what was right and not mind what the world said. I wish you would stick to it now."¹⁴

It was, of course, Esther's misfortune to be unsuccessful, and Swift proved reticent for a host of reasons, some of which we know, some, probably, not. Yet there can be, I think, no doubt that Swift loved her: indeed, he was even willing, on occasion, to spin out love's logic for her; to evaluate her by the only standard she wished to be judged by, the subjective truth of his affection for her. "What beasts in pettycoats," he tells her in a famous passage,

are the most excellent of these women whom I daily see when I compare them to you. When I am in their company I cannot but observe that they fall miserably short of you in every way. Are they, I must ask myself, even of the same sex or species as yourself.¹⁵

Presumably, when Swift wrote this passage, and others like it, he felt he was telling the truth. But he knew, too, that he was telling only one kind of truth, and a very special kind at that. And he knew that a coldly objective view of his relationship with Esther must include the disparity of their ages, stations and temperaments, just as coldly objective view of Vanessa herself must include her impatient, splenetic temperament and her often total lack of discretion.

Of course, there is something horribly unfair in first

telling a young woman to "do what was right and not mind what the world said," and then to berate her with, "You once bragged you were very discrete. Where is it gone?"¹⁶ But that is exactly Swift's dilemma. On the one hand he found, and recorded, his responsiveness to Esther; on the other hand he could not keep from seeing, and recording, an exact state of her qualities. Because the two accounts did not correspond, Swift's letters to Esther vary, as has long been recognized, from warm affection and abundant praise to something very like disdain and stern reprimand. Esther, of course, had no such double account and was, therefore, the much more perfect lover. Indeed, Esther seems in all her humors to judge Swift in all of his by exactly that subjective standard by which she passionately wished to be judged.

I firmly believe, could I know your thoughts, I should find that you have often in a rage wished me religious, hoping then I should have paid my devotions to Heaven. But that would not spare you, for was I an enthusiast, still you'd be the deity I should worship. What marks are there of a deity but what you are to be known by? You are present everywhere; your dear image is always before [my] eyes; sometimes you strike me with that prodigious awe, I tremble with fear; at other times a charming compassion shines through your countenance, which revives my soul.¹⁷

But though Esther's love for Swift is so perfect as to remind us (and Esther, too, perhaps) of Heloise's love for Abalard, nevertheless, Swift, with his heats and chills, his double accounts, his affections and reticence, seems the more human. That is why Cadenus and Vanessa, in its painfully amusing account of the incompatibility of love with wisdom, has a universal validity.

IV

When Swift, in the opening lines of Candenus and Vanessa, causes the nymphs' advocate to complain before Venus' court,

That, Cupid now has lost his Art,
Or blunts the point of every Dart:
His altar now no longer smokes,
His Mother's Aid no youth invokes,
(7-10)

he is simply recording the enfeebled condition of Venus' kingdom, in England, after practically a century and a half of constant attack. "Free thinkers," as the advocate goes on to charge, had indeed been at work on the principles of love's religion, with the result that, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the most prominent fact about Venus' kingdom, with its religion, laws, courts and mythology, is that it no longer could provide a possible metaphor for the reality of human love. That is why, to stress the obvious, we are amused by the high flying legalese which characterizes the opening speech of the nymphs' advocate. It is not the complaint he brings which is funny; "Now love," he tells us

. . . is dwindled to Intrigue,
And Marriage grown a Money-league,
(13-14)

and that is serious enough; but it is rather the idea that such a complaint is susceptible to the language of legal arbitration which amuses us. Just because we find such a combination of law and love amusingly irrelevant, Swift can count on our grinning

when he drops his advocate, with a bathetic plump, from the heights of legal posturing.

Which Crimes aforesaid, (with her leave)
 Were (as he humbly did conceive)
 Against our Sov'reign Lady's Peace,
 Against the Statute in that Case,
 Against her Dignity and Crown:
 Then Prayed an Answer and sat down.
 (15-20)

There is, however, nothing inherently funny in the mixture of law and love which characterizes the courts and kingdom of Venus. A glance at the sixteenth century composition, The Court of Venus, and at its sources, makes clear that men of the sixteenth century and, of course, of earlier centuries, could take very seriously exactly the mixture of law and love which Swift, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, found a natural target for parody. That Swift intended us to be amused and that we are amused points rather to a radical shift of sensibility which occurred in the seventeenth century.¹⁸ This shift, which is first fully recorded in the lyric verse of the Stuart poets, operated to dissolve any possible connection between law and love. For the Stuart poets are the first to fully affirm that the phenomenon of love has absolutely nothing to do with external reality but rather is a function of only internal reality, of the highly subjective needs of the lover himself. "Why slightest thou," asks Henry King, in significantly legal language,

. . .what I approve?
 Thou art no Peer to try my love,
 Nor canst discern where her form lies,
 Unless thou saw'st her with my eyes.¹⁹

And if this be true, all courts of love, even that court of Venus herself, must be irrevocably useless.

Of course, this sort of observation was not unheard of before the seventeenth century. Presumably, so long as men have loved at all they have noticed that sexual love does not often smoothly follow the path of rational choice. Thus, for example, Horace notes that Barine's patent unfaithfulness does not diminish her attractiveness either for himself or for any man who desires her.

Had ever any penalty for violated vows visited thee,
 Barine; didst thou ever grow uglier by a single blackened
 tooth or spotted nail, I'd trust thee now. But with
 thee, no sooner hast thou bound thy perfidious head
 by promises than thou shinest forth much fairer and art
 the cynosure of all eyes when thou appearest.

(II, 8, 1-8, trans. C.E. Bennett)

Horace understands, then, something of the fundamental irrationality of love and desire, but he does not like it. He would much rather that he might love the she whom he should, or better still, that the she whom he loved would be as she ought. And it is this perfectly human desire for a rational love, a love founded on tested merit, which is given metaphoric form, in so many medieval and renaissance poems, by the proofs, trials, laws, rules, in short, by the whole framework of Venus' courts and kingdom.

In turn, it is the psychological validity of precisely this sort of love which, in the late sixteenth century and through the seventeenth century, came increasingly to be questioned. "Tell me where the beauty lies," one anonymous poet, remembering Shakespeare, asks,

In my mistress? Or in my eyes?
 Is she fair, I made her so
 Beauty doth from liking grow.²⁰

And that this highly subjective point of view became a common place of restoration lyricism can be confirmed by an examination of almost any restoration song-book. Suckling, for example, not only observed on one occasion that,

'Tis not the meat, but 'tis the appetite,
 Makes eating a delight,
 And If I like one dish
 More than another, that a pheasant is,²¹

but he was willing to extend his subjectivity far enough to set, in truly amazing detail, the following dilemma:

Each man his humour hath, and, faith, 'tis mine,
 To love that woman which I now define.
 Her nose I'd have a foot long, not above,
 With pimples embroider'd for those I love;
 And at the end a comely pearl of snot,
 Considering whether it should fall or not:
 . . .
 I have my utmost wish; and having so,
 Judge whether I am happy, yea or no?²²

And here, I think, Suckling sets for us, though in brutal terms, that dilemma which, as we shall see, is also the central problem in Swift's Cadenus and Vanessa. Our answer to the question posed by the final line of Suckling's poem, "Judge whether I am happy, yea or no?" must be "yea": the narrator of this poem has, after all, the woman he wants (his "utmost wish") and therefore must be happy. Yet, even as we say that the narrator is a happy man we cannot, I suspect, help thinking that since the woman the narrator has is a perfect horror when judged by any standard but his own, he ought not be happy. That is, we finally don't want to think that love is so subjective, so arbitrary, that a

man might be happy with the awful hag described in Suckling's poem. We want love to be more objective, more rational than Suckling's lines suggest it is; and our own discomfort at love's arbitrariness thus becomes Suckling's joke on us.

Swift, certainly, understood as well as Suckling that sexual love is fundamentally unreasonable and has nothing to do with absolute standards. "No wise man," Swift once noted, "ever married from the dictates of reason,"²³ and several of Swift's epigrams insist on this same point.

The glass, by lovers nonsense blurr'd
Dims and obscures our sight:
So when our Passions Love hath stirr'd
It darkens Reason's light.

But Swift is no Suckling. Suckling, as we have seen above, coolly forces us to see that, though we wish love were rational and objective, it is arbitrary, standardless and subjective. And having made his point, Suckling leaves us with the discomfoting dilemma that love's arbitrariness raises in our own minds. Swift, on the other hand, incorporating this same dilemma within Cadenus and Vanessa, does not so much offer us a dilemma as struggle with one himself, and it is Swift's own struggles which give an order and coherence to a story which is otherwise, as Goldsmith remarked, apparently, "ill conceived in itself."

Thus, although the debate between the shepherds and nymphs arrives at no conclusion, it is not, therefore, barren of meaning. Rather, it is an excellent demonstration that love is not susceptible to rules, laws, and legal arbitration. Or again, although the debate between Cadenus and Vanessa ends at stalemate, that is itself Swift's

best demonstration that love is intransigently subjective and completely unamenable to arbitration. What makes these demonstrations so terribly convincing is precisely that they stem from failures. The narrative of the poem itself, that is, struggles to affect a reconciliation between love and wisdom; and we cannot therefore help but feel Swift's sympathies are engaged on behalf of this reconciliation. That it is not, therefore, effected, must impress us far more deeply with love's subjective nature than does even Suckling's poem The Deformed Mistress, examined briefly above. For we cannot forget, I think, that Swift's desire to effect this reconciliation, and his failure to do so, have a deeply personal aspect. Finally, that is, Cadenus and Vanessa is Swift's very honest, yet most tactful explanation to Esther Vonhomerigh that he fails to wholly love her as she wished him to love her not because he does not desire to do so, and not because she is unworthy of him, but because, simply and sadly, he does not so love her. This failure, by the very nature of love, he cannot help.

V

Something of Swift's struggle to establish a mean between, on the one hand, Suckling's extreme statement of love's subjectivity and, on the other hand, the highly idealistic, self-deceiving and psychologically naive assumption that love ought follow absolute and rational standards, can be seen in the shepherd's retort to the nymphs' accusations.

To the nymphs' accusation that shepherds have ceased from loving, the shepherds' advocate, we remember, replies by admitting

the charge but laying "all the fault on t'other sex." This strategy is dictated by the shepherd's demand that their nymphs be goddess-like, a demand which in turn is rooted in their highly idealistic view of love--

A Fire celestial, chaste, refin'd,
 Conceived and kindled in the Mind;
 Which having found an equal flame,
 Unites, and both become the same;
 In different Breasts together burn,
 Together both to ashes turn.

(29-34)

Swift is, of course, aware that the shepherds, by placing such lofty requirements on the nature of love, imagine a passion which has no existence. Therefore, their advocates' description of this passion, as one which infallibly reduces its devotees to ashes, is both apt and laughable. Such passion, as the shepherds' advocate goes on to tell us, is nowhere discoverable in the world but was once sung by ancient poets. And this description makes it a near relative, I suspect, of what Swift, in his own person called, "that ridiculous passion which hath no being but in Play-books and romances,"²⁴ and which he prudently advised a recently married young woman against believing in.

But, although Swift holds up to ridicule the psychologically naive view of love presented in the shepherds' complaint, the entire complaint is not made ridiculous. Rather, that part of the complaint which is directed against the nymphs has a very convincing ring since the frivolities which the shepherds accuse the nymphs of following to the exclusion of everything else are exactly those for which Swift, in his own person, often berated that "tribe of bold,

swaggering, rattling ladies"²⁵ whom all his life he despised. Thus the condemnation of women spoken by the shepherds' advocate:

Hence we conclude no women's Hearts
 Are won by Virtue, Wits, and Parts:
 Nor are the Men of Sense to blame,
 For Breasts incapable of Flame:
 The Fault must on the Nymphs be placed,
 Grown so corrupted in their Taste,
 (61-67)

is sympathetically echoed by Swift himself in his epistle to Lord Harley on his Marriage:

For such is all the sex's flight,
 They fly from learning, wit and light:
 They fly, and none can overtake
 But some gay coxcomb, or a rake.
 (19-23)

What emerges, then, even in the opening speeches of Cadenus and Vanessa, is Swift's attempt to honor two standards of love. On the one hand Swift, in good restoration fashion, is parodying Venus' Court and the high-handed methods with which both advocates apply rules to love. On the other hand, Swift is in sympathy with the shepherds' plea that love ought to respond only to an actual good and that, therefore, women ought to be truly worthy of the love of a good man. Indeed, Venus' experiment is nothing other than an attempt to adjust these two standards to each other. For Venus, by endowing Vanessa with the perfection of every virtue, creates a woman whom, she hopes, all men needs must love, but whom it will be perfectly reasonable to love.

Of course, Venus' experiment is, we remember, a total failure. For, although Vanessa is endowed with every virtue which, if virtue

could command love, ought to have made her universally adored, still, as Venus sadly complains, Vanessa, "Never could one lover find."

(867). And the moral of this is obvious: no matter what the shepherds claim, no matter how much men wish to love reasonably, sexual love is not reasonable. Rather, love has nothing to do with the true value of the one loved and everything to do with the values of the lover. And, in fact, this outcome has been predictable from the beginning of the poem, for, from the beginning of the poem, Venus and Pallas are professed foes and no possible reconciliation is ever offered between these goddesses of love and of wisdom.

But if this outcome is obvious, we must not therefore miss its pathos in Cadenus and Vanessa. Raised on lyrics like, "I don't know why I love you like I do, I don't know why, I just do," and assuming naturally that love is subjective, it is possible, I suspect, for us to miss Swift's implied regret in lines like, "thus, to the world's eternal shame,/The Queen of Beauty lost her aim." (431-432). But for us not to credit the regret in these lines would be a mistake, I think; for our understanding of the poem depends upon our recognizing that Swift's sympathies are clearly engaged by Venus and her experiment. For although only by deceit is Venus able to enlist Wisdom's aid towards endowing Vanessa and although Pallas proves to be perfectly right in asking her scornfully rhetorical question,

. . . how can heav'nly wisdom prove
An instrument to earthly love,
(295-96)

nevertheless, Pallas' scorn only makes more affecting the truth she tells. And we are, therefore, against all wisdom, made to participate in Venus' sorrow when,

Too late with grief she understood
Pallas had done more harm than good.

(435-436)

And indeed, in the defeat of Venus' experiment are involved a goodly number of cherished assumptions. Thus, for example, while it is true that Swift, by couching in trivial terms Venus' naive assumption that Vanessa's virtue must inspire universal love and imitation, made that assumption appear just as naive as it is; nevertheless, for all its simple-mindedness, there is something appealing about Venus' expectation that,

Offending Daughters oft would hear
Vanessa's Praise rung in their Ear:
 Miss Betty, when she does a Fault,
 Lets fall her knife, or spills the Salt,
 Will thus be by her Mother chid;
 'Tis what Vanessa never did.

(240-245)

Of course, love does not prove to be, in Cadenus and Vanessa, what it is assumed to be in so many romances both past and present--an instrument capable of reforming men's manners and morals. Those degraded shepherds and nymphs whom Venus hoped to reform through Vanessa's great example ironically find Vanessa lacking in knowledge, wit and judgment.

Their judgment was, upon the Whole,
 --That lady is the dullest Soul--
 Then tipt their Forehead in a jeer,
 As who should say--she wants it here.
 (358-361)

And again, the moral of this is perfectly clear. Love cannot be an effective instrument of reformation because love has

nothing to do with a reasonable appreciation of actual value, but is dependent solely on the nature of the lover. "Great examples," as Swift observes, "are but vain, / Where ignorance begets disdain" (436-437). But, because Swift has put Venus' expectations in such a homely and appealing strain, there is something distinctly disappointing in discovering that Venus has, as Pallas prophesied to her, deceived herself, instead of Pallas. Pallas, is perfectly right, of course, and as she goes on to claim, "love" and "sense" have never had anything to do with one another; but there is, nevertheless, a pathos in that truth which Pallas seems incapable of appreciating but which Swift, I think, has made perfectly plain.

The source of this pathos, is, of course, most fully explored in the relationship of Vanessa and Cadenus. To be sure, everywhere in the narration of their relationship love's subjectivity and fundamental irrationality are insisted on. Vanessa, for example, falls in love not because of the reasonable appreciation which she might have for Cadenus' gifts but rather through the violent and distressing efforts of Cupid. And once she is in love, Vanessa's reason is palpably affected, for, as we have already noted above, she comes badly to overestimate Cadenus' gifts while unmistakably blurring his failings.

Cadenus now no more appears
 Declin'd in Health, advanc'd in Years
 She fancies Musick in his Tongue,
 Nor further looks, but thinks him young.
 (527-530)

Now, plainly, to fancy thus is not reasonable: it is to make of Cadenus what Vanessa wants him to be, and even Vanessa herself must admit that the real cause of her love is not, ultimately, Cadenus,

but herself. "Self love," she says,

. . .in Nature rooted fast,
 Attends us first, and leaves us last:
 Why she likes him, admire not at her,
 She loves herself, and that's the matter.
 (684-687)

Yet, Vanessa's attempts to reconcile her love for Cadenus with reason are enormously appealing. Because, she argues, those virtues which Cadenus taught and she, by the dictates of reason, accepted, have now become her character, she, in loving herself, must infallibly love him. Reason is thus, she may conclude, "her guide in love." Vanessa's arguments are as ingenious as they are attractive, and certainly we must admit about them what even Cadenus admits, that we "at least could hardly wish them wrong." And yet they are wrong, and Vanessa herself indicates the point at which they err. For, seeking to turn everything to her argument, Vanessa compares her love for Cadenus to his reverence for the authors of "ancient days,"

(Those authors he so oft' had nam'd
 For learning, wit and wisdom famed.)
 (690-691)

But not even Vanessa can completely equate her passion for Cadenus to his for ancient authors. A scholar's feelings for such authors were, she knew, esteem, respect, devotion, and that sort of love which she rightly characterizes in remarking that were such an author now alive, "How all would for his friendship strive." (701)

These are indeed the marks of esteem which reason can grant to apparent virtue, and were these love, love were reasonable. But

Const'ring the Passion she had shown,
 Much to her praise, more to his own,
 (764-765)

concludes that,

Nature in him had merit placed,
 In her, a most judicious taste.
 (766-767)

But neither must we judge Cadenus more harshly than does the poem itself. True, the mask of reason with which Cadenus attempts to cover his own self-interest is somehow always awry. Thus he, having offered to a woman whom he does not love what he claims is a higher good, "friendship. . . a constant rational delight," continues on, with splendid inconsistency to offer her,

. . . that Devotion we bestow,
 When Goddesses appear below.
 (788-789)

But, even though this offer is both inconsistent and just what Vanessa does not want, there is something touching and generously redeeming in it. For finally, Cadenus is really not much different from anyone else in the cast of this poem: all the cast are engaged in the same funny, pitiable and human attempt to make truth submit to their own subjective needs and views. The shepherds and nymphs, reasonably blaming each other while holding themselves utterly blameless; Venus, by reason, defending her kingdom; Pallas, uncharitably but by reason defending hers; Vanessa reasonably defending her love and Cadenus reasonably defending his failure to love: each is a miniature proof that man is, at best, but dimly conscious of, and capable of controlling, his own nature. And yet they all,

somehow, demand compassion from us because we are all, I suspect, a good deal like them. And so, apparently was Swift, who compassionately made them and thus formed this, the gentlest of satires.

NOTES

1. The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Arthur Friedman, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1966), V, 329.
2. John Boyle, Earl of Corke and Orrery, Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift (London, 1752), p. 73.
3. Patrick Delany (London, 1754), p. 113.
4. Deane Swift, An Essay Upon the Life, Writings and Character of Dr. Jonathan Swift (London, 1755), p. 244.
5. SEL, IV (1964), 485-496.
6. Irvin Ehrenpreis, Swift: the man, his works, and the age, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1662-), II, 312.
7. Dates from 1713 to 1719 have been proposed for the completion of Cadenus and Vanessa. For a recent review of the problems involved see The Collected Poems of Jonathan Swift, ed. Joseph Horrell, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), I, 388.
8. Swift: the man, his works, and the age, II, 641-644.
9. Vanessa and her correspondence with Jonathan Swift, ed. A. Martin Freeman (Boston and New York, 1921), p. 128.
10. Ibid., p. 110-111.
11. For an example of just how sophisticated a writer Esther was, one might note that in the quotation just cited in my text Esther, probably consciously, is echoing Theocritus' Second Idyl. That is pretty good for "a brat who," Swift said, "never read."
12. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Herbert Davis et al., 13 vols. (Oxford, 1957), IX, 94.
13. Ibid., p. 90.
14. Vanessa and her correspondence with Jonathan Swift, p. 103.
15. Ibid., p. 109.

16. Ibid., p. 99.
17. Ibid., pp. 139-140.
18. I am here and through the remainder of my chapter deeply indebted to H. M. Richmond's The School of Love: The Evolution of the Stuart Love Lyric (Princeton, New Jersey, 1964).
19. Cited from Richmond, p. 185.
20. Cited from Richmond, p. 189.
21. The Works of Sir John Suckling, ed. A. Hamilton Thomson, M. A. (London, 1910), p. 15.
22. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
23. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, IX, 263.
24. Ibid., p. 89.
25. Ibid., p. 93.

CHAPTER THREE
On Poetry: A Rapsody

I

None of Swift's poems has been so consistently praised as has On Poetry: A Rapsody. Certain sections, at least, of the poem have been abundantly anthologized, and the poem has been traditionally characterized as "one of Swift's chief claims to the title of poet."¹ Indeed, one passage from the poem has been so often cited as to have transcended both Swift and his Rapsody; the passage, Swift's famous comparison of fleas and poets, has achieved through frequent quotation an independent state of famous anonymity as an example of eighteenth century verse.

The vermin only teaze and pinch
Their Foes superiour by an Inch.
So, Nat'ralists observe, a Flea
Hath smaller Fleas that on him prey,
And these have smaller yet to bite'em,
And so proceed ad infinitum:
Thus ev'ry poet in his Kind,
Is bit by him that comes behind.

(335-42)

Curiously enough, however, although the poem has remained popular since the time of Goldsmith's praise of it as "one of the best versified poems in our language and the most masterly production of its author,"² it has not, to the best of my knowledge, ever been made the subject of much close study. Rather, the observations which critics have usually flung in passing praise of the Rapsody are at once impressionistic and in surprising con-

tradition with each other. Thus, to choose two fairly recent examples, Ricardo Quintana has praised the poem by claiming that "of such high voltage is the satire, that the level of intensity, instead of declining as the piece continues, rises steadily from couplet to couplet,"³ while on the other hand, Maurice Johnson has maintained of the same poem that its "tone is so constantly level and chilly that it seemed unbearably insulting to Walpole and the others it named."⁴

Such vague and confused contrariness in praise of Swift's Rapsody has served only, I suspect, to blunt the force, subtlety and point of the poem, just as frequent quotation, in usually insipid contexts, of the famous lines cited above has elevated them to a bad, because vacuous, eminence. What has been missed in such criticism can be indicated by simply noting that these famous lines, though almost tamed by mere quotation, are really the center of Swift's description of a society so vicious that in it each man's hand is lifted against each man's hand, that in it

Each Poet of inferiour Size
On you shall rail and criticize;
And try to tear you Limb from Limb,
While others do as much for him.
(331-34)

This vicious society, I will argue, is the subject of the Rapsody and is one of Swift's most powerful depictions of the catastrophic results he thought to be implicit in the style of life he saw about him, a style he thought corruptive enough to reduce human life, as he tells us (beginning at line 319), to Hobbes' state of nature--to a situation where the life of man is but one long combat.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of this combative world is that in it all notion of vocation has apparently been lost. Swift begins the Rapsody with the observation that all men have run mad after the office of poet,

All Human Race would fain be Wits,
 And Millions miss, for one that hits,
 (1-2)

and he goes on to depict a world in which all other offices as well have fallen into either abuse or desuetude. It is a world where prelates thrive "who no God believe," public ministers minister not, and no king rules. And because it is a world where all sense of office has been lost it is also a world where the very order of society, degree itself, has disappeared. Thus, "statesmen" grow indistinguishable from "south sea jobbers," "pick-purses" from judges, and "duchesses" from common whores. Ultimately, it is a world where even the most fundamental of all human distinctions and degrees, those which spring from family, from the relationship of parent to child and husband to wife, are perverted and overwhelmed.

A vivid insight into the subject and method of the Rapsody can be gleaned by simply watching Swift build into the poem, by allusion to familial relationship, a sense of the way the society he depicts has grown corrupt. For in the world which Swift portrays in the Rapsody, neither a loving relationship of husband to wife, nor legitimate parentage and the ties implied by it, are to be found. Promiscuity and bastardy, rather, introduced very early into the poem by wandering men whose infants are

. . .dropt, the spurious Pledges,
Of Gipsies litt'ring under hedges,
(37-38)

provide the defining metaphors for most of the relationships and activities described in the Rapsody. Like the actual hordes of beggars and gypsies who are so often anxiously mentioned by seventeenth and early eighteenth century preachers and whose masterless and wandering condition was thought to be an evil portent for society and a corruptive example to responsible men,⁵ the metaphor of familial disintegration infects every strata of society and level of endeavor described in this poem. Yet, always in this background of bastardy and disinheritance there are reminders, in the very terms Swift uses to create this background, that in well ordered societies it is the family, in its naturalness and mutual loving responsibilities, which has always been the supreme example for the conduct of even the highest offices of society.

Thus, to cite the most obvious example of the use of this metaphor, the writing of bad poetry is repeatedly imaged in the Rapsody as a type of misbegetting and unnatural parentage. And the perversions implicit in this comparison are especially pointed since, in the eighteenth century the writing of not bad, but good, poetry was often described in terms which suggest procreation. Thus, for example, Pope defines the operation of true wit as "a justness of thought and a faculty of expression; or (in the mid-wife's phrase) a perfect conception with an easy delivery."⁶ In the Rapsody, Pope's basic comparison of writing to begetting is maintained but, since Swift is describing the generation of false

wit, the terms are changed, and thus the import of the comparison is reversed. The poets Swift describes "prostitute" their muses and the result, of course, is bastardy.

The Product of your Toil and Sweating;
A Bastard of your own begetting.
(115-16)

As Swift develops this metaphoric comparison of bad poets and bad poetry with promiscuity, bastardy, and parental and filial ungratefulness, the moral ugliness which he thought was involved in writing bad poetry becomes increasingly clear. Thus, he points out through this metaphor that the writer of bad verses not only commits an unnatural act in first writing but is then, all too often, forced to compound his first sin with another act even more unnatural: he is forced, in order to prevent discovery, to commit the metaphorical equivalent of child abandonment. "If you find," the bad poet is warned,

. . .the general Vogue
Pronounces you a stupid Rogue;
. . .praise the Judgment of the Town,
And help your self to run it [your poem] down.
Give up your fond paternal pride,
Nor argue on the weaker side. . . .
(121,122,126-29)

Thus, the writing of bad poetry comes, in the Rapsody, to involve more than just writing bad poetry, it becomes a way of prostituting one's moral sense as well. As Swift indicates early in the poem, maintaining still a metaphor based upon a perversion of familial relationship, the condition of poetry in the England this poem describes is like the condition of a disinherited family line,

and a line not only disinherited but whose portion has been
attainted--lost through the sin of its progenitors. The poet's
"portion," that is, inheritance, was never more than "one annual
hundred pounds" (the laureate's grant) and now, Swift remarks,
there is

. . .not so much as in Remainder,
Since Cibber brought in an Attainder;
Forever fixt by Right Divine
(A Monarch's Right) on Grubstreet Line.
(56-59)

Swift's point, of course, is that the unhappy appointment of so
unworthy a man as Cibber to the laureatship, though the appointment
is approved by royalty, disaccredits the whole race of poets.

But promiscuity, bastardy and disinheritance are not, as
I have already indicated, reserved in this poem to the office of
poetry. Rather, Swift insists, these perversions reach to the
highest of England's political offices, and much of the irony
which permeates that praise of George II and his family, with which
Swift concludes the Rapsody, turns upon the contrast between the
familial harmony which ought to characterize England's ruling
family and the scandalously public disharmony which actually
characterized both that family and its rule. For Swift's first
readers, then, much of Swift's mock praise of George II served
only as a reminder that George was as corrupt a natural husband
and father as he was a kingly father. Thus, for example, the
praise of Queen Caroline as

The Consort of his Throne and Bed
A perfect Goddess born and bred,
(425-426)

must have reminded those readers only that George was often unfaithful to that bed. And the praise of George's eldest son, Fredrick Louis, Prince of Wales, as manly,

What Early Manhood has he shown,
Before his downy Beard was grown,

must have seemed a very thinly veiled allusion to that prince's undistinguished and undistinguishing promiscuity. Thus, much of the irony of this whole closing passage works to locate in the royal family that corruption of familial harmony which was first introduced into the poem through society's pariahs. Swift, in so closing the poem, completes a metaphor of disorder which runs from alien gypsies to England's sovereign power.

But even as it minutely records this disorder, the Rapsody itself is a poem of affirmation. For, as I shall argue throughout this essay, the perversely inharmonious world of foolish men which the Rapsody describes is judged in the very terms of its description. Thus, to cite an example we have already seen, the whole efficaciousness of Swift's description of the Rapsody's world in terms of promiscuity, bastardy and disinheritance depends upon our seeing, in the midst of Swift's irony, his insistence that the great pattern of well ordered states has traditionally been proper familial relationship. Our mode of reading the Rapsody, then, must be something like the method Edward Young commended in reading Scripture; it must be read by measuring its descriptions of men against what is requires of man in order that its "Satire on the weakness and iniquity of man"⁷ may be of profit.

II

Like Pope's Dunciad, which Swift conspicuously footnotes (at line 393) in his poem, the Rapsody was written in an age when "Paper. . . became so cheap and printers so numerous, that a deluge of authors cover'd the land."⁸ As "for poets," as Swift puts it,

. . . (you can never want them,
Spread thro' Augusta Trinobantum)
Computing by their Pecks of Coals,
Amount to just Nine Thousand Souls.
(279-282)

And like the very beggars and gypsies, to whose fortunes Swift unfavorably compares the fate of poets, the ever-swelling hordes of bad rhymers emblemized, to Augustans like Swift and Pope, an entire society strayed loose from its traditional moorings, a race of men wandered from their simplest self-interest.

Indeed, the first seventy lines of the Rapsody are permeated with Swift's astonishment at such men as have run mad after the name of poet, since, as Swift assures us, the office of poet has never worked to the apparent worldly good of any man so unfortunate to be called to serve in it. Not beggars' brats, nor shoe blacks, nor sons of whores, Swift insists, are

. . .so disqualify'd by Fate
To Rise in Church, or Law, or State,
As he, whom Phoebus in his Ire
Hath blasted with Poetic Fire.
(39-42)

Swift demonstrates this thesis throughout the poem by listing a multitude of misfortunes which attend upon the poet's station. Of these miseries the most probable, of course, was the brand of blockhead--but it was not, by far, the worst. For, as Swift's mock lament should remind us,

Poor Starvling Bard, how small thy Gains,
How unproportion'd to thy Pains,
(59-60)

grinding poverty was often enough in eighteenth century London the lot of those who pretended to letters. Indeed, even prominence in the world of letters, Swift makes clear, was no assurance of either political or financial security. Pope, Swift notes, being Catholic, could not approach the court from which Gay was ultimately banished and in which Edward Young could eke out a living only so long as he could continue to

. . .torture his Invention,
To flatter Knaves or lose his Pension.
(309-310)

Given, then, these conditions we must share Swift's puzzlement when, in the Rapsody's first stanza, he wonders why men, even against the grain of their abilities, attempt to be poets and asks,

What Reason can there be assign'd,
For this Perverseness in the Mind?
(11-12)

Curiously, however, Swift has already formally answered this question within the first four lines of the Rapsody. "Pride," he has remarked, "was never known to spread so wide." And it is

indicative of how far removed is the conduct of the race of would-be wits from Swift's own vision of man's proper role that, having once answered it, he raises the same question all over again. Here, that is, as throughout the Rapsody, we can sense not only Swift's anger, but also his astonishment, at that man who, having a choice, would

. . .where his Genious least inclines,
Absurdly bend his whole designs.
(23-24)

Thus, although it has been lamented that in the Rapsody there are no clear norms to judge those men whom Swift satirizes,⁹ in fact, Swift's own conviction that each man is so peculiarly endowed for his proper role that it takes an astoundingly energetic act of willful perversity to avoid that role is made clear enough even in the first paragraph of the poem. In that paragraph Swift compares man's chronic failure to follow his own natural bent with the ease with which "Brutes find out where their talents lie." The comparison was a popular one through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries;¹⁰ Swift might have found it in several places in both Montaigne and Pascal and, of course, he uses it in several places himself. But in the Rapsody Swift works an illuminating variation on the standard use of this comparison. Customarily, in both Montaigne and Pascal, for example, the comparison is used to remind proud man that in some ways, at least, the condition of brutes is preferable to the condition of man, to remind men that, though they consider themselves lords of the universe, in some ways nature has been a kinder mother to brutes (by making them

instinctively aware of their abilities) than to mankind. Swift's use of this comparison is, of course, like those of Montaigne and Pascal, directed against man's pride, but his emphasis is different from theirs; for Swift's point is not that nature has been a kinder mother to brutes than to man but that man is simply the most perverse of nature's children, the only creature, as Swift observes,

Who, led by Folly, combats Nature;
 Who, when She loudly cries Forbear,
 With Obstinacy fixes there.
 (20-22)

Fully informed by nature, man, in Swift's view, insists on going wrong. And therefore, unlike the dog which, Swift tells us, knows to "turn aside" when it "sees the ditch too deep and wide," man not only leaps into the ditch, but, as we shall see later in the poem, even attempts to invert the whole world in order to make a ridiculous virtue out of his bemiring failure,

With Heads to Points the Gulph they enter,
 Link't perpendic'lar to the Centre:
 And as their Heels elated rise,
 Their Heads attempt the nether Skies.
 (401-404)

There is, however, both in Swift's certainty that each man has a particular role to play and in his condemnation of those would-be poets who undertake a vocation to which they are not called, something quite alien to a culture which, like ours, is secular. Generally, in twentieth century European and American literature, a choice of careers has been considered as a very complex process, since it has been understood to depend upon a

large number of personal variables--what will make a particular man happiest, most intellectually stimulated or most prosperous. One must simply observe that Swift had not this way of thinking; rather, as he makes abundantly clear in several of his sermons, and particularly in that sermon titled, The Duty of Mutual Subjection, a man's personal happiness was not and, from his view of the matter, simply could not be the primary consideration in the finding of a vocation. For Swift, a man's personal happiness was itself dependent upon another consideration, how useful a man might make his own advantages of wisdom, power or wealth to his neighbor. "If a man doth not use those advantages to the Good of the Publick," Swift observed,

or to the Benefit of his Neighbour, it is certain he doth not deserve them; and consequently, that God never intended them for a Blessing to him; and on the other side, whoever doth employ his Talents as he ought, will find by his own Experience, that they were chiefly lent him for the Service of others: for to the Service of others he will certainly employ them.¹¹

Indeed, Swift is willing to argue the proposition that each man's talent is a blessing to him only insofar as he is willing to devote it to the service of others even with respect to the gift of wisdom--a talent so often considered a good of itself. For Swift comments,

Even great Wisdom is in the opinion of Solomon not a Blessing in itself: for in much Wisdom is much Sorrow; and Men of common understandings, if they serve God and mind their Callings, make fewer mistakes in the Conduct of Life than those who have better Heads. And yet, Wisdom is a mighty Blessing when it is applied to good Purposes, to instruct the Ignorant, to be a faithful Counsellor either in Publick or Private, to be a Director to Youth, and to many other Ends needless here to mention.¹²

By his potential usefulness, then, not by a vision of his potential happiness, must a man find his proper calling. As Swift argues, this world is providentially so ordered that the good of each particular man, and of society as a whole, is dependent upon the willingness of each particular man to serve his neighbor; as each man is dependent upon his neighbor's skills, so each man must bend his talents in subjection to his neighbor's good. Thus, Swift sums the matter up,

As God hath contrived all the works of Nature to be useful, and in some manner a support to each other, by which the whole frame of the World under his Providence is preserved and kept up: so among Mankind, our particular Stations are appointed to each of us by God Almighty, wherein we are obliged to act, as far as our Power reacheth, towards the Good of the whole community. And he who doth not perform that Part Assigned to him towards advancing the Benefit of the Whole, in proportion to his Opportunities and Abilities, is not only a useless, but a very mischievous Member of the Publick; Because he taketh his Share of the Profit, and yet leaveth his Share of the Burden to be borne by others, which is the true principal cause of most Miseries and Misfortunes in Life.¹³

Measured, then, against Swift's view of a man's social responsibility, it should be obvious that the man who "absurdly bends his whole designs" against the inclinations of his own genius errs profoundly against both himself and his fellow man. He errs against himself because his own happiness, whether he acknowledges it or not, depends upon the serviceable utilization of his talents. And he errs against others since each abuse of one's own talents represents a choice, no matter how mistaken, of one's own good before the good of one's neighbor, and each such choice must weaken those bonds of mutual responsibility which are the very makings of a society. Thus, the "uncalled" poets Swift

describes in the Rapsody are capable of working far worse than their own individual ill; they are, rather, at once active in and emblematic of a general social disaster. And their culpability extends beyond their having abandoned those offices and responsibilities to which their God-given talents gave them a natural and legitimate claim; for the office which they subsequently overrun simply by force of their numbers is exactly that office which traditionally has been considered primarily responsible for teaching what they, in even attempting poetry, have forgotten--the art, as Horace put it, to "bring all things to their proper native use."¹⁴

III

For Swift, then, what made doubly dangerous this headlong rush of men from their proper spheres to a vocation for which they had no calling is that it involved not only the abandonment of their several stations, but it meant also the adulteration by unfit men of an office of particular significance; an office for which, Swift assures us early in the Rapsody, many may feel called, but few are chosen.

Not Empire to the Rising-Sun,
 By Valour, Conduct, Fortune won;
 Nor highest Wisdom in Debates
 For framing Laws to govern States;
 Nor Skill in Sciences profound,
 So large to graspe the Circle round;
 Such Heav'nly Influence require,
 As how to strike the Muses Lyre.
 (25-32)

Unfortunately, critics seeing the scorn which Swift later in the Rapsody pours down upon the pretentions and pretentiousness of a

city-full of bad poets, have been generally inclined to read that scorn back into the lines just cited; that is, Swift's critics have understood these lines to signify just the opposite of what they say.¹⁵ There is, however, no real reason to so interpret these lines, and there are good reasons, I think, why one should not do so.

To begin with, Swift, in claiming that the office of poet required a special grace and therefore, implicitly, served a special function, does no more than state an intellectual commonplace which presumably he, as well as his contemporaries, inherited from the ages which preceded his. Horace had claimed that the particular function of poetry was Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare and, as Thomas Maresca has recently argued,¹⁶ Horace's maxim was repeated, with special emphasis on and expansion of its first alternative, throughout the seventeenth century. "I could never," Ben Jonson asserted at the beginning of the century,

. . .think the study of wisdom confined only to the philosopher or of piety to the divine, or of state to the politicke. But he that can fain a Commonwealth (which is the poet) can gowne it with counsels, strengthen it with laws, correct it with judgments, inform it with religion and morals, is all of these. Wee do not require in him mere elocution, or an excellent faculty in verse, but the exact knowledge of all virtues, and their contraries, with the ability to render one Love'd and the other hated. . . .¹⁷

At the end of the century, Dryden, speaking of tragedy, makes for it exactly the same claim which Jonson had made more generally for all poetry--and does so almost in Jonson's words. The work of tragedy, Dryden claims, is to "reform manners by the delightful representation of human life," and it can only do this by teaching

"love to virtue and hatred to vice; by shewing the rewards of one, and punishments of the other. . . [or, at least by] rendering virtue always amiable and vice detestable."¹⁸

This vision of poetry, as at once the repository of the particular truths of divinity, philosophy and politics and the ideal fountainhead for these truths is, in fact, the common denominator not only of one, but of more than two centuries of English critical thought and unifies tracts so disparate in time and diverse in spirit as Sidney's joyous Defense of Poesy and Sir William Temple's almost phlegmatic Of Poetry. As long as Horace's statement of the efficacy of poetry in teaching virtues and civility continued to command respect, it provided a common basis for critical thought. It was, therefore, as true for Dryden as for Sidney, for Pope as for Jonson, that poetry, because it illuminates the universal through the particular by teaching morality through clearly praiseworthy and blameworthy examples, is the ideal vehicle to render virtues love and their contraries hated. Indeed, just because poetry was considered to be at once so efficacious and so necessary in "insensibly influencing" a people to virtuous action, many a seventeenth century critic, like Sir William Davenant, felt he could confidently maintain that without the "help of the muses" no Divine or Leader of Armies, no Statesman or Judge could reasonably expect "a long or quiet satisfaction in government."¹⁹

This whole background of ideas defining the nature of poetry and, more importantly, the ends poetry is to serve is, both by the title Swift chose to give his poem and by the way he chose to narrate most of it, made almost constantly available as a standard of judgment against which the activities imaged in the

poem can be measured. The significance of the first half of the title is rather obvious; "On Poetry" refers back to that group of similarly titled works which, as they reflected Horace's moral view of poetry's function, reflected also the popular title of his fullest exposition of his view, the Ars Poetica. The significance of the second half of the title, however, may be somewhat obscured for a twentieth century reader since both the connotation and denotation of the word "rhapsody" have changed considerably since Swift used it. To the twentieth century reader the word normally denotes a specific type of music which is agreeable because of its charming lyrical freedom. In the eighteenth century, however, the word was often used to refer to any work which was distinguished by an unhappy disorder. Thus Pope, writing to Swift in 1729, defined by the word "rhapsody" the opposite of true wit's creative and orderly process: "This letter. . . will by a rhapsody, it is many years since I wrote as a wit."²⁰ As Swift, then, would have understood the words of his title, that title delineates the process his poem describes; a debasing and disordering of that very art which traditionally taught "the proper native use" of things and men."

In the Rapsody, in fact, this disordering process is not only described, its very workings are, as we shall see, demonstrated. Up to line seventy, as we have already noted, the astonished narrator of the Rapsody seems to be Swift himself, and the mode of narration is a reasonably straight-forward description of disorder. After line seventy, however, the narration of the Rapsody becomes a subtler matter. We are introduced to a narrator who himself illustrates the actual force of disorder as it corrupts

now poetry and now mankind, and the narration of the poem becomes, in fact, a perverse Ars Poetica, echoing, in its variegated subjects, oscillating style and in the very wording of its advice, that Horatian collection of practical advice, historical review, and social commentary which served as the foundation of that traditional view of poetry which we have discussed above.

"How shall a new Attempter learn," Swift asks, moving into this new section,

Of diff'rent Spirits to discern,
And how distinguish, which is which,
The Poet's Vein, or scribbling Itch?
Then hear an old experienc'd Sinner
Instructing thus a young Beginner.
(72-76)

Thus Swift introduces what is probably some of the subtlest and most compact poetry he ever wrote by prefacing it with lines which are themselves perplexing. The narrator of the coming lines, Swift tells us here, is an "old experienc'd sinner." But, although Swift calls this narrator a sinner, it is not very clear why he does so, since he also tells us that the instructions which this sinner will offer are instructions in that art which is most necessary to all potential poets--and generalized, to all good men--the art of distinguishing between true poetic calling and a mere scribbling itch, between true vocation and mere whimsy.

But, despite the initially confusing character of this introduction, it does provide us with at least one very strong indication of our new narrator's sinful and corruptive nature. In telling us that this old sinner will teach the skill, precisely, "of diff'rent Spirits to discern," Swift echoes a text, I Corinthians 12,

which, given his general concern in the Rhapsody for vocation, was very justly on his mind. The text is that particularly famous one in which Paul urges each man to be satisfied with his own particular spiritual gifts since, "while there are diversity of gifts. . . it is the same God which worketh all in all." Illustrating this thesis Paul asserts that while

to one is given by the Spirit the working of miracles; to another prophesy, to another the discerning of spirits. . . [nevertheless] in all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to each man severally, as He will.

Thus, in Paul's context, the gift "of different spirits to discern" is a gift which, since it rests in God's hands to give or to withhold, it would be presumptuous to attempt to learn and almost worse than presumptuous to offer to teach. That an "old sinner" would impiously attempt to teach this gift, then, seems perfectly reasonable.

But knowing the source and probable import of this allusion seemingly does more to confound than to clarify the lines in which it occurs. We are now faced with a sinner-instructor who apparently will at once attempt to teach what is not only unteachable but an impious violation of God's prerogative even to attempt to teach and yet who will at the same time teach the art to know vocation, to distinguish between the poet's vein and the scribbling itch. Yet, as confusing as these lines apparently are, they do define, by the very paradox they present, the character of the sinner-instructor's admonitions. For, on the one hand, these admonitions

regularly echo just that moral view of poetry in which, as Horace makes clear in the first fifty lines of the Ars Poetica, the first thing needful for a poet is a sure sense of vocation and of the limits and strengths of his poetic gifts. But, on the other hand, the sinner-instructor misapplies the Horatian advice which he appropriates by promoting with that advice a kind of selfishness inimicably opposed to Horace's own social and moral views.

This unhappy abuse of Horatian instruction is apparent in the first lines of the sinner-instructor's advice. Because this abuse is easiest to see if this first advice is read all at once I cite it here in full.

Consult yourself; and if you find
 A Powerful Impulse, urge your Mind,
 Impartial judge within your Breast
 What subject you can manage best;
 Whether your Genius most inclines
 To Satire, Praise or hum'rous lines;
 To Elegies in mournful Tone,
 Or Prologue sent from hand unknown.
 Then rising with Aurora's light
 The Muse invok'd, sit down to write,
 Blot out, correct, insert, refine,
 Enlarge, diminish, interline:
 Be mindful, when Invention fails,
 To scratch your Head, and bite your Nails.
 (77-90)

To a reader familiar with Horace's Ars Poetica much of this advice must seem very familiar. The first eight lines, for example, very closely parallel the import of the following Horatian advice.

Let poets match their subject to their strength,
 And often try what weight they can support,
 And what their shoulders are too weak to bear.
 [For] After a serious and judicious choice,
 Method and eloquence will never fail.

And again the sinner-instructor's exhortation to his pupil to "blot out, correct, insert, refine" is, in its very wording, reminiscent of Horace's admonition, in the Ars Poetica, not to praise any poem which has not been through many days and many blots, multa dies et multa litura.

But, of course, it is our very familiarity with this traditional advice and with the reverence with which it is usually given that makes the final, jingling, meaningless couplet of this first speech so surprising. For while the sinner-instructor's sudden collapse into trivia does not in any way detract from the validity of the Horatian advice he has just offered, it does indicate that he has not really understood but simply mouthed that advice. Unconcernedly unaware of the view of poetry's nature and function which this advice both inculcates and assumes, the sinner-instructor has appropriated it and, mixing in his own nonsense, attempted to make it serve him as an impressive opening. And this method of first appropriating the terms of that moral and traditional poetic discussed above and then turning them to serve the interests of his own vanity and avarice is the whole foundation of the sinner-instructor's own method of instruction and the whole point of the craft he teaches.

For the sinner-instructor, as he makes explicitly clear in several places, the entire end of the art of poetry is to enhance the reputation and enrich the purses of its practitioners. By its success or failure to accomplish this end, he judges the worth of all poetry, and towards the accomplishing of this end he bends the terms of traditional poetics. Thus, for the sinner-instructor

as well as for Dryden or Jonson, the ability of poets to praise and blame is an essential element of their craft. But for Dryden and for Jonson, as we have seen above, the poetic function of particular praise and blame is subservient to the teaching of moral universals, to the teaching of what is virtuous by making it appear amiable and what is vicious by making clear its detestability. On the other hand, for the sinner-instructor there apparently are no moral universals. Rather, for him, good and evil, true and false, virtue and vice are only so many names. These names, as he makes clear, have no referral value at all for him; they are simply terms of vague approbation or disapprobation to be assigned in accord with the selfish interest of a particular poet. Thus, for him, a prince is not called virtuous because he participates in virtue. Rather "a prince," he instructs his pupils, "the moment he is crown'd, [is said to] Inherit ev'ry Virtue round" (191-192), because to say so is one of the ways to thrive.

Because, that is, the sinner-instructor's advice is founded in mean self-interest, his advice inculcates an ethical relativism which sweepingly dismisses all notion of absolute good and evil. Good and evil, for the sinner-instructor, refer only to things or acts which do, or do not, constitute ways to thrive. It is good, the sinner-instructor maintains, to praise bad kings, to defend corrupt statesmen, to plagerize^{ic} from Horace and Longinus, because all these are ways to thrive. And thus the sinner-instructor's advice is the absolutely corrupt reversal of the traditional purpose of poetry: traditionally, as we have seen above, poetry encouraged men to do the good by showing them that to do the good

was ultimately profitable or, at least, admirable; the sinner-instructor, on the other hand, encourages his pupils to determine the good by its immediate profitability.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the philosophic system of one man, Thomas Hobbes, was consistently reviled for promoting precisely the kind of ethical relativism which characterizes the sinner-instructor's advice.²¹ "Good, evil, and contemptible," Hobbes maintained, "are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply or absolutely so."²² Naturally enough then, it is to Hobbes' description of nature as fundamentally lawless and subsequently savage that the sinner-instructor refers in order to provide a general and authoritative statement of his own view of the human situation. "Hobbes clearly proves," he states,

. . .that ev'ry Creature
Lives in a State of War by Nature.
The Greater for the Smallest watch,
But meddle seldom with their Match.
(319-322)

And because the sinner-instructor's prescriptions for human conduct, though recognizably corrupt, are also recognizable descriptions of the way most men do act (men do, after all, praise bad kings, defend bad ministers, plagerize, and get bastards), the sinner-instructor's identification of Hobbes' view of man's condition as the basis of his own advice brings home, I think, the real sting of Swift's satire. Men do, that is, live as if Hobbes is right, and they suffer for it: men live as if there is no "common rule of good and evil to be taken

from the nature of things themselves," and, seeking, therefore, to produce their own personal good, they manufacture their own evil.

Thus, the selfishness and subsequent ethical relativism which is the foundation of the sinner-instructor's advice can be seen finally as an explanation for the vicious world the Rapsody describes. That world is, as we have already seen, one characterized by the imagery of familial disharmony. What we can see now is how completely appropriate this imagery is; for the world of the Rapsody is one in which the very principles of natural relationship and legitimacy have been replaced by a relativism at once so thoroughgoing and so debilitating that it has obliterated not only the distinctions of natural and unnatural, and good and bad, but of up and down as well. Thus, the poets described in the Rapsody, disdaining the heights of poetry, pervert even the natural metaphor arising from the action of gravity, "And with rebellious Arms pretend/
An equal Priv'lege to descend" (381-382). Unwilling to acknowledge any rule but the rule of self, disclaiming that either they themselves or anything else has a "proper native use," the princes and prelates and especially the poets of the Rapsody's world live in a constant state of rebellion against both the facts of nature--gravity for example--and against each other. Thus, it is for their own foolish presumption that they suffer. "Teazing, pinching and biting" each other, the men of this poem are shown punishing each other while all conspire to corrupt, through selfish manipulation, the goods of Church, State and poetry; the traditional sources of

that "knowledge of virtues and their contraries," so desperately, painfully lacking in their world.

IV

Swift's Rapsody, then, to recapitulate for a moment, is a kind of full length, poetic demonstration of Swift's thesis, cited in full above, that "most of the miseries and misfortunes in Life" are attendant simply upon the abuse and selfish misapplication of one's own goods and talents. Indeed, it is emblematic of the self-inflicted nature of misfortune that the instructions of our sinner-instructor follow a significantly descending path, that this guide in blind selfishness only manages to proffer his disciples ever less noble stations for ever more base reasons. Thus, the protégés whom he had encouraged, as the Rapsody began, in a mistaken aspiration to poetry, are gradually brought to seek their very bread through party writing and then paid panegyrics and finally empty criticism.

But, further, as one reads through the Rapsody one senses, also, that its tone involves something even more than Swift's ire with man's propensity to wound himself on his own selfishness. One hears, too, running through the whole of the Rapsody, Swift's moral indignation and his insistence that a man's neglect of proper vocation is an act against God as well as an act against himself, a sin, that is, as well as a folly. And this deeper moral condemnation is, given Swift's view of vocation, exactly what we might expect to find; for, as Swift explained to his own congregation, "our particular stations are appointed to us by God Almighty," and

therefore to fly that station is to refuse service at once to oneself, to one's fellow and to God.

At the risk, then, of explaining the obvious, one must observe that the "old experienc'd sinner," to whose corruptive measures so much of the Rapsody's world seems to dance, is a very sinner indeed. Snatching a bit of Horace here, commending a passage of Longinus there, he is actively engaged in recruiting men from their assigned callings to service amongst his band. Like the very devil himself, to whom it does not seem inappropriate to compare him, he tempts men through their pride to disobedience of God. And in the Rapsody's England his followers are legion and they are all damned.

Thus, as is made very clear early in the poem by the ease with which kings, at death, re-establish their courts in hell to ply in "the scenes of endless woe...their former arts below" (209-210); between the world of the Rapsody and hell itself, there is finally very little difference. Indeed, throughout the dark and divided world of the Rapsody, with its futile activity, dark intestine wars, Godless priests and pecks of coal, there constantly shimmers, I believe, Swift's suggestion that England has been transformed by its proud denizens to a very type of hell.

It is not, however, until the last lines of the poem that we can see fully the blasphemous nature of the rapsodic world which Swift has portrayed. But in his final condemnation Swift is as ironically explicit as one could wish: "For many a year," Swift sums up, Christ "never intermeddl'd here,"

Nor, tho' his Priests be duly paid,
 Did ever we desire his Aid:
 We now can better do without him,
 Since Woolston gave us Arms to rout him.
 (490-494)

The Woolston to whom the final line of the poem refers is, I think, the Thomas Woolston who, in 1713-14, published the most famous of his numerous tracts--those six discourses which he together titled, On the Miracles of Our Saviour.²³ These tracts were thought dangerous enough in their time to have drawn numerous rebuttals; and dangerous, in fact, they were. For in them Woolston, with an ingenuousness which is even today disarming, attempted to argue that since he found the miracles of Christ, as described by Scripture, unamenable to his own reason, they therefore absolutely could not have occurred. Rather, Woolston argued, each of Christ's miracles, indeed, the New Testament itself, is literally untrue. But, Woolston continued, the New Testament does allegorically figure forth the truth. And that truth, as refined by Woolston's own reason, is that Christ has not been but is coming, and the miracles attributed to him in the New Testament but figure forth the greater and (Woolston trusted) more reasonable miracles which he will perform.

History has, of course, relegated Woolston and his tracts to obscurity but, nevertheless, because of his enormous presumption, because of his willingness to deny Christ's intercession for man simply because the mode of it did not please him, because, in short, of his pride, there is much that is ludicrous and yet something that is darkly awesome about Woolston. He is a fitting last figure

in Swift's rhapsodic world where men, to please themselves, neglect the proper use of all things and neglect especially God's particular calling to them. Indeed, after Woolston's comically tiny, yet damningly real, denial of God, the sudden end of the poem seems, to me at least, entirely appropriate. For the resultant hiatus seems somehow to echo in its sudden emptiness the world the poem has described. And in the words with which Swift both announces that hiatus and closes his poem there is something ominously apocalyptic--"Caetera desiderantur," Swift notes, the rest is wanting.

Yet, just because Swift's final portrait of a rapsodized England, lapsing into Godlessness, is so very dark, it would be, I think, a particularly unhappy oversight to close this study without reminding ourselves of that powerful commitment to his own calling and to true justice which inform the extent and nature of Swift's gloom. For if, in the Rapsody, Swift's condemnation of his generation and of its works reaches almost a prophet's dark scorn, it has something too, of the prophet's moral certitude. At the very real risk that the publication of the Rapsody might precipitate his own arrest,²⁴ Swift nevertheless quietly praised Pope and Gay and ironically exposed King and Ministers and thus made of his own verse a sharp and moral instrument and an affirmation that justice had yet a powerful presence in the world.

NOTES

1. Maurice Johnson, The Sin of Wit: Jonathan Swift as a Poet (Syracuse, N. Y., 1950), p. 15.
2. The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Arthur Friedman, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1966), V, 323.
3. Ricardo Quintana, The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift (New York, 1936), p. 18.
4. The Sin of Wit, p. 18.
5. See Michael Waltzer, The Revolution of the Saints. . . (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), particularly pp. 216-218.
6. The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1956), I, 2.
7. The Poetical Works of Edward Young, ed. Rev. J. Mitford (Boston and New York, n. d.), p. 59. The quotation is from Young's preface to Love of Fame, The Universal Passion.
8. The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt et al., 6 vols. (London and New Haven, 1939-61), V, 49.
9. See, for example, J. Middleton Murry, Jonathan Swift: A Critical Biography (London, 1954), pp. 460-462.
10. See George Boas, The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century (New York, 1966). I am deeply indebted for my summary of theriophily in Montaigne and Pascal to this book.
11. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Herbert Davis et al., 13 vols. (Oxford, 1957), IX, 146.
12. Ibid., pp. 148-149.
13. Ibid., p. 142.
14. Citations, like this one, from the Ars Poetica are from the translation done by the Earl of Roscommon in The Complete Works of Horace, ed. Dr. John Marshall (New York, 1923).
15. See, for example, Herbert Davis, Jonathan Swift: essays on his satire and other studies (New York, 1964), pp. 168-171.

16. Pope's Horatian Poems (Columbus, Ohio, 1966), pp. 7-12.
17. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed. J. E. Spingarn, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1957), I, 28.
18. Of Dramatic Poesy and other Critical Essays, ed. George Watson, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1962), I, 213.
19. Spingarn, II, 38.
20. The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, ed. Sir Harold Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1963), III, 362.
21. See Samuel Mintz, The Hunting of Leviathan. . . (London, 1962), p. 23.
22. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford, 1946), p. 32.
23. The Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Sir Leslie Stephens and Sir Sidney Lee, 22 vols. (Oxford, 1937), XXI, 908-910.
24. As is well enough known, the publication of the poem did lead to the arrest of several of Swift's friends. Further, Walpole forbore prosecuting Swift himself only because he was convinced that it would require ten thousand men to take Swift prisoner in Dublin.

CHAPTER FOUR
Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.

I

Even the briefest outline of the Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D. must highlight the great, single problem which the poem has always presented to those who have read it with care. That problem is to discover the relationship between the panegyric with which Swift's poem ends and that maxim of La Rochefoucauld which, Swift tells us in his headnote, occasioned the entire poem.†

Dans l'adversité de nos meilleurs amis nous trouvons
quelque chose, qui ne nous deplaist pas.

In the Adversity of our best Friends, we find something
that doth not displease us. [Swift's translation]

In the first section of the Verses (1-72)--that section which Swift himself calls a "proem"--Swift undertakes to prove, through "reason" and his own "experience," the universal scope and applicability of the maxim; to prove that even with the best of us,

The strongest Friendship yields to Pride,
Unless the Odds be on our Side.

(37-38)

The second section of the poem (73-298) is an application of the maxim to a specific and extreme case: in this section Swift imagines the niggling comforts and ignoble sentiments which his death will stimulate in most of his friends. But the final, panegyric section of the poem--which Swift imagines spoken a year after his death and by "one quite indifferent in the cause"--seems to exist in flat contradiction both to the maxim and to the first two sections of the poem. For in the final

section of the poem Swift offers himself as that man to whose actions La Rochefoucauld's maxim is not applicable, as that man who, far from finding his private ends in his friends' misfortunes,

Without regarding private Ends,
Spent all his Credit for his Friends.
(331-332)

This apparent contradiction in the logic of the poem obviously troubled Swift's contemporaries quite as much as it has his modern readers. When, in 1738, Swift entrusted the first and London publication of the Verses to William King, King excised almost the whole of the panegyric, substituting for the cancelled sections lines from the Life and Genuine Character of Dr. Swift.² This King did, almost certainly, with the advice of Alexander Pope, whose opinion of the original poem was that "the latter part. . . is inferior to the beginning, the character too dry as well as too Vain in some respects, and in one or two particulars, not true."³

Certainly Swift, when he saw King's edition, could not have failed to understand the reasons behind his friends' emendations--their fear that "the poem might be thought by the public a little vain, if so much were said by himself of himself."⁴ But, although Swift was usually very willing to submit his work to the correction of his friends, he was not willing to do so in this case. Rather, as soon as King's edition reached Swift in Ireland, he expressed his dissatisfaction with it and caused the poem to be printed by his Dublin printer, Faulkner, in its original form. Clearly, Swift, despite his friends' responses, thought his own poem sufficiently consistent and thought its panegyric justifiable.

Since Swift's contemporaries wrestled with the poem there have been numerous attempts made to understand it. Of these

attempts two articles, both very recent, seem to be particularly illuminating. The first of these, titled "The Ironic Intention of Swift's Verses on his own death," was argued by Barry Slepian in 1963.⁵ In this article Professor Slepian maintains that in the panegyric which ends the Verses Swift consciously completes his thesis that all mankind is "egotistical, selfish and proud" by showing himself to be so. While finally, I think, we shall see that Professor Slepian's insistence that the whole of the panegyric is ironic pushes a good insight too far, nevertheless his assumption that Swift would hardly have written a panegyric upon himself without some leavening irony seems very sane. Certainly some of the examples Slepian uses to illustrate this irony are very convincing; he reminds us, for example, that the lines in which Swift, apparently ingenuously, praises his own originality carry an ironic burden:

To Steal a Hint was never known,
 But what he writ was all his own;
 (317-318)

for these lines themselves were stolen from Denham's elegy on Cowley:

To him [Cowley] no author was unknown
 Yet what he wrote was all his own.

Nevertheless, to show that these lines, or even many lines of the panegyric, have an ironic value is not to prove that all the lines are ironic or that the whole design of the panegyric is ironic. Slepian's thesis, however, leads him to find irony everywhere and to assert its presence where he cannot demonstrate it. Thus, when he suggests that the following lines are obviously ironic

because they are obviously overinflated he is arguing in a circle and telling us more about his own taste than about Swift's lines.

Fair LIBERTY was all his Cry;
 For her he stood prepar'd to die;
 For her he boldly stood alone;
 For her he oft expos'd his own.
 (347-350)

The language of these lines is dramatic, it is true, but they are written on a subject about which Swift is usually dramatic. In his own epitaph Swift defines his commitment to liberty even more dramatically than he has defined it in these lines, but I do not think that even Slepian would suggest this epitaph is intentionally ironic.

Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral. He has gone where fierce indignation can no longer lacerate his heart. You who pass by, imitate if you can, this fierce protector of Liberty.⁶

In the context of Swift's normal practices, therefore, it is insufficient simply to assert that the line "Fair LIBERTY was all his cry" is obviously ironic.

There is, too, a more serious objection to be raised to Slepian's treatment of the Verses, and this objection is raised in an article written by Marshall Waingrow and published in 1964.⁷ As Waingrow understands, the effect of reading the final part of the poem (as Slepian does) as a perfect piece of irony is to destroy any possibility of discovering a moral norm in the poem. And to despair of finding a moral norm in Swift's Verses is, as Waingrow feels, a particularly perverse way of dealing with a poem in which Swift has always seemed to his critics entirely too "willing

to offer himself as a model of moral perception and behavior. . . ."

Waingrow, therefore, attempts to deal with Swift's praise of himself as a straight-forward yet very useful praise. Swift, Waingrow argues, generously takes the occasion of his own death not only to demonstrate the selfish responses of most men to their fellows' suffering, adversity and death, but also to provide men a model (which apparently is desperately needed) of truly selfless conduct. Swift's panegyric, therefore, is not a demonstration of Swift's selfishness, but is rather, Waingrow maintains, a proof of Swift's utter selflessness and a complete rebuttal of La Rochefoucauld's maxim. Swift's conduct in penning his panegyric is, Waingrow continues, in sharp contrast to the conduct of even Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot, who have been, like almost all the world, so "corrupted" by the fact that they must die that they cannot forget themselves long enough to mourn Swift's passing. Swift, however, is not thus "corrupted;" he remains "superiour to his fate" and triumphs over even "the one absolutely inescapable physical condition of human existence, the necessity of dying" by making that "necessity" but another occasion to teach what Waingrow calls "the code of the moralist"--"public uses, not private ends" should be the concern of the good man. Thus, as Waingrow concludes his essay, "the ironic understatement of the [Verses'] early couplet,

Tho' it is hardly understood,
Which way my Death can do them good:

vanishes before the force of the poem's expanding moral. That private end which is death can indeed have its public uses.

Waingrow's article is, it seems to me, the deepest penetration into the Verses to have appeared so far and is therefore the natural starting point for further thought on Swift's poem. Nevertheless, there are several objections which must, I think, be raised both about particular points in the article and finally about its entire thesis. To begin with, Waingrow's refutation of Slepian's article seems a bit too thorough. Some of the irony Slepian argues for in the panegyric seems to be legitimately there. Therefore, a complete and completely acceptable reading of the Verses must account for the presence of this irony in terms which relate it to the import of the entire poem. Further, Waingrow seems to strain some of the lines of the poem in order to accommodate them to his total thesis--his view of Swift as a model of selfless conduct. Thus, for example, when he argues that Swift seriously intends, in the Verses, to chastise Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot "for their poor capacity for mourning," he neglects, I think, both the tone of Swift's lines and Swift's lifelong habit of penning what may appear to be "a satyr where he most commends." The lines which characterize the mourning of Swift's three friends run,

Here shift the Scene, to represent
 How those I love, my Death lament,
 Poor Pope will grieve a Month; and Gay
 A Week; and Arbuthnot a Day. . . .
 (205-208)

While Swift in these lines recognizes that "no Passion burns forever in so frail a lamp as man," his clear-eyed knowledge of human limits also makes the compliment he pays his friends all the more valuable. To be thought capable, by Swift, of truly

grieving a month, a week, a day, is to be highly complimented, a fact we will recognize more clearly if, as Charles Williams' suggests, we honestly ask ourselves "for which of our friends we should come anywhere near anything that could be called grieving for anything like a month? And which of them for us?"⁸

Finally, Waingrow's neglect of the ironic undertone which Slepian detected in Swift's final panegyric and Waingrow's failure to see, in the midst of Swift's satire, the real commendation Swift presents to those he loves, both stem from a more serious problem in Waingrow's reading. In his desire for us to see that the panegyric is a moral exemplum Waingrow, I think, has discriminated far too sharply between the unselfish goodness of Swift and the corruption of all the world besides. The distinction is not, I think, nearly so sharply made in the poem: Swift sometimes, particularly at the beginning of the poem, is made a less than noble figure, while Pope, for example, so affected by the death of Swift as to mourn a full month, is himself exemplary. To neglect these facts is to overlook the strategy of the poem. Indeed, to push too far the difference between Swift and the rest of the world is to create a sophisticated version of the problem its early readers had with it. King found the final section of the Verses a self-praise which was vain; Waingrow, I think, finally makes the panegyric a model which is inimitable. To see Swift finally as a man of only public ends--and to identify no way by which he became so--is to place him beyond the grasp of us poor mortals whom Swift is trying to teach. Rather, I think, the panegyric is qualified--and qualified not only by the ironic undertones which run through it but by the entire progress of the

poem which has led up to it. It seems to me that before the Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift is a justification of the satirist, or a model for us, or anything else, the poem is a deeply personal, and, at the same time, very traditional consideration by Swift of the implications of his own death. If Swift warrants the panegyric at the end of the poem, and if we can learn from it, it is because, I think, he has followed the command--momento mori--and has drawn from his meditation that truth which is the traditional end of such meditations: "Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God."⁹

II

That Swift thought often on his own death--not only in old age but through the course of his entire life--we know both by inference and by direct statement. "When I was your age," Swift wrote to Pope, when Pope was forty-five, "I thought every day of Death, but now [when Swift was sixty-six] every minute."¹⁰ Even the briefest examination of Swift's correspondence makes clear that this apparently hyperbolic statement lacks very little of being absolute truth. From a surprisingly early period of his life, and to all manner of correspondents, Swift observed that he was one who

. . . must expect to decline every month, like one who lives upon his principal sum which must lessen every day.¹¹

Further, themes of his own mortality and of the generally transitory character of this world color not only Swift's correspondence but are early and often repeated themes in his poetry. Exiled--

from his point of view--from England, Swift arrived in Dublin in 1714 to assume his deanship both sick and lonely. His sickness was not, his correspondence would indicate, unto death; but, characteristically, he projected his sickness and loneliness into the deathbed poem, In Sickness, which, though it was composed thirty years before his death, ends with this final request.

Ye formal Weepers for the Sick,
 In your last Offices by quick,
 And spare my absent Friends the Grief,
 To hear, and give me no Relief;
 Expir'd To-day, emtomb'd To-morrow,
 When known, will save a double sorrow.
 (23-28)

Swift's tendency to make his own illnesses, the illnesses and deaths of his friends, indeed, even the wearing out of his old cassocks, occasions for reflections on his own end is partly attributable, perhaps, to his own particular affliction. He was, the whole of his adult life, the victim of Ménière's disease.¹² Since this disease of the inner ear was completely unknown to the physicians of Swift's age, its victim only knew that he could expect to be suddenly overcome, at irregular intervals, by severe and protracted attacks of deafness, extreme giddiness and nausea. To be subject at any moment to such dark and debilitating attacks might well influence a man to think often on the frailty of his own flesh.

But, surprisingly, Swift's reflections on death have nothing of the horror one would naturally expect in thoughts of death which rose out of personal disabilities. Neither did Swift's imagination dwell upon vivid deathbed scenes or upon the circumstances

of final corruption, although, as we shall see, he knew very well the tradition in which such description was commonplace. Rather, his serious reflections on death seem to focus finally, and easily, on its providentially benevolent nature. "It is impossible," he concludes in more than one place,

that anything so natural, so necessary and so universal as death, should ever have been designed by providence as an evil to mankind.¹³

And this conclusion is natural for Swift because, I think, his tendency to reflect often on death owes at least as much to the seventeenth century traditional meditatio mortis as it does to his own afflictions.

Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to clearly delineate the precise form of traditional meditations on death because a survey of meditations on death which were available in seventeenth century England yields a bewildering variety of texts. As Louis Martz points out in his study, The Poetry of Meditation,¹⁴ of all the forms of meditation spawned by the counter-reformation in England the meditation on death was certainly "the most widely and intensely cultivated." And, naturally, because the form itself was so popular, the meditation on death came, in the seventeenth century, to serve many purposes. Some of these meditations were obviously undertaken as truly mystic exercises, attempts to pierce now, through death, so as to see, now, as "face to face." Most meditations, however, were something less exalted; they were exercises, as Robert G. Collmer puts it,¹⁵ in "hard, close thought" about death; they were intended to extract wisdom from the grave "where,"

Fray Luis de Granada assured his readers throughout the seventeenth century, "almighty God is wont to teach those that be his."¹⁶ Of these latter, less exalted meditations, there are also a wide variety of types: those which are intended first to cure the natural fear of death, those which most encourage a true repentance of sin, and those which emphasize a true contempt of the world and a desire for Godliness.

But though there is no "typical" meditation on death, there are certain themes which most such meditations share, more or less, in common. First, although each meditation has its own particular emphasis, most do at least touch on three related moral topics: they encourage a repentance of sin; they insist that the concerns of this world are transitory; and they teach men to put their trust in God. Second, many of these meditations share, particularly in their description of the corruption to which man's flesh is heir, a kind of wry irony. This irony or "grim humor," which is fully documented with examples in Louis Martz' study, can be illustrated with a quotation from what is perhaps the best known group of seventeenth century meditations on death, John Donne's Devotions upon Emergent Occasions and Several Steps in my Sickness. Donne, describing the dissolution of the body, often turns to jest a topic which might equally well inspire horror.

Now all the parts built up, and knit by a lovely soule, now but a statue of clay, and now, these limbs melted off, as if that clay were but snow; and now the whole house is but a handful of sand, so much dust, and but a pecke of rubbidge, so much bone. If he who, as this Bell tells mee is gone now, were some excellent Artificer, who comes to

him for a clocke, or for a garment now? or for counsaile, if hee were a lawyer? If a Magistrate for Justice?¹⁷

Finally, of course, these meditations share in common, as already mentioned, an enormous popularity. Nor was it a popularity which ended with the seventeenth century. Well into the eighteenth century discourses on death which strongly reflect the meditative tradition were being composed, and sixteenth and seventeenth century meditations were being translated and, in many cases, retranslated. As an indication of the continuing vitality of the tradition in the eighteenth century one may note that not only did the playwright Nicolas Rowe aid, in 1709, in the translation of an edition of meditations, but that in 1711 Rowe used a book of formal meditations as an important prop in the death scene of his The Fair Penitent.¹⁸ Presumably, then, Rowe could count on his eighteenth century audience being familiar with the formal meditation on death.

It would be strange, therefore, if Swift, who as a relatively young man "thought every day of death" and, as an older man, "every minute," were unaware that in so reflecting on his own death he was participating in that great meditative tradition according to which precisely those persons are blessed "that ever have the houre of death before their eyes, and that everie day dispose themselves to die."¹⁹ Further, there are lines within the Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift which indicate, I think, that Swift was fully conversant with both the grim situations which possessed the imagination of the seventeenth century meditator on death and with the wryly ironical quality so characteristic of that imagination. Thus, Swift in

vividly imagining, first, the scene of his death and then, in the following lines, the hypocritical responses of his friends, seems to be following almost exactly the directions for a meditation on death imaginatively presented by Thomas Persons in his Christian Directory. Here is Persons:

Imagine then (my friend) even thou I saye, . . . that thou were even at this present, stretched out upon a bed; wearied and worn with dolour and paine; thy carnal friendes about thee weeping and wailing and desiring thy goodes. . . .²⁰

And here is Swift:

"Behold the fatal Day arrive!
 "How is the Dean? He's just alive.
 "Now the departing Prayer is read:
 "He hardly breathes. The Dean is dead.
 "Before the Passing-Bell begun,
 "The News thro' half the Town has run.
 "O, may we all for Death prepare!
 "What has he left? And who's his Heir?
 (146-154)

Or again, Swift, in conjecturing what must become of his writings, of his literary remains, seems exactly attuned to the writer of meditations on death whose imagination traced, in unbelievable variety of ways, "the noble dust of Alexander till he found it stopping a bunghole."²¹ Here, for example, is Fray Luis de Granada:

A time maie happen, when some buildinge maie be made neare unto thy grave, (be it never so gaie, and sumptous,) and that they maie digge for some earthe out of the same to make mortar for a walle, and so shall thy seelie bodie (beinge now changed to earthe) become afterwardes an earthen walle. . . .²²

And here is Swift's highly ironic version of the same theme:

Now Curl his shop from Rubbish drains:
 Three genuine Tomes of Swift's Remains.
 And then to made them pass the glibber,
 Revis'd by Tibbalds, Moore and Cibber.
 (197-200)

There are, I think we shall see, more than enough such instances to indicate that Swift did have a general familiarity with both the topics of the formal meditation on death and with the ironic humor with which the writers of these meditations portrayed "all the follies of the world" mouldering into dust. But, more importantly, it seems to me, there is a connection between Swift's Verses and those meditations which goes beyond Swift's scattered echoes of them; finally, I think, Swift's poem is written for the same purpose as are these meditations and, therefore, in something like the same form. Swift's Verses, that is, like the seventeenth century meditation on death, is involved in the paradoxical and precarious attempt to draw from death--that ineradicable mark of man's first fall and sinful nature--a positive good.

"Memoraria novissima et in aeternum non peccabis," (Remember the last things [death, judgment, heaven, hell] and you will never sin).²³ This text from Ecclesiastes was the touchstone for the whole tradition of meditation on death: in the very fact that man must, soon or late, die to the world lay, for the Christian meditator, the answer how to live well in it. And this same paradoxical vision, it seems to me, informs Swift's poem. Swift's Verses, which begin with La Rochefoucault's observation that in the adversity of our friends there is that

which does not displease us, end by asserting what is both the most extreme form of that maxim and the central tenet of all meditations on death--in the sickness and death of our friends (and of ourselves) is our strongest moral instruction.

Further, the progress of the Verses to this truth--the poem's three part structure--is controlled, though unobtrusively and with great delicacy, by the three traditional topics of the meditation on death: a recognition and repentance of sin, a true contempt for that which is purely worldly, and, finally, that reliance on God which makes possible charity towards man. Beginning with a painfully clear vision of that sinful and worldly nature he shares with every man, Swift ends with a demonstration of what can be made of it. Swift demonstrates, that is, through the contemplation of his own death, those lessons which he prays Stella may learn in her last illness:

Almighty and most gracious Lord God, extend, we beseech Thee, Thy pity and compassion towards this Thy languishing servant: teach her to place her hope and confidence entirely in Thee; give her a true sense of the emptyness and vanity of all Worldly things; make her truly sensible of all the infirmities of her life past, and grant to her such a true sincere repentance, as is not to be repented of.²⁴

III

In the fall of 1725 there passed between Swift and Pope one of those bagatelles which great men seem occasionally to contrive only to tease out of thought men yet unborn. The exchange was begun by Pope who, knowing, apparently very well,

the Dean's admiration for the maxims of La Rochefoucauld, sent the Dean a proposal to write "a set of Maxims in opposition to all Rochefoucault's principles." The Dean, in turn, vigorously replied.

I tell you after all that I do not hate Mankind, it is vous autres, who hate them because you would have them reasonable animals, and are angry for being disappointed. I have always rejected that Definition and make another of my own. [Swift's famous definition is, of course, animal rationis capax, man is an animal capable of reason.] I am no more angry with Walpole than I was with the Kite that last week flew away with one of my Chickens and yet I was pleas'd when one of my servants shot him two days after. This I say, because you are so hardy as to tell me of your Intentions to write Maxims in Opposition to Rochefoucault who is my Favorite because I found my whole character in him....²⁵

Certainly, as Kathleen Williams, to whose insights I am frequently indebted in this chapter, has observed, "Pope's sweeping announcement...has the challenging sound of a piece of deliberate baiting and Swift's reply is similarly exaggerated...."²⁶ But, as Williams goes on to point out, Swift's reply, exaggerated as it is, seems also to be "a defense of his [Swift's] own view of man, which has, certainly, something in common with that of La Rochefoucault."²⁷ At all events, however seriously we weigh Swift's reply, it is obvious that in 1725 he seemed unwilling to see Pope undertake a rebuttal of La Rochefoucauld's maxims. Therefore it hardly seems likely that, in 1731, he himself should pen such a rebuttal. Thus, although Marshall Waingrow's conclusion that the panegyric close of Swift's Verses constitutes "a direct rebuttal of La Rochefoucauld's maxim"²⁸ is a tempting conclusion

(it obviates the necessity of reconciling Swift's apparent selflessness with La Rochefoucauld's claim that all human action is self-interested), it seems improbable. Rather, I think we must believe that Swift is being perfectly truthful when, in the first paragraph of his poem, he tells us that,

As Rochefoucault his Maxims drew
From Nature, I believe 'em true:
They argue no corrupted Mind
In him; the Fault is in Mankind.
(1-4)

In fact, in these lines, Swift is stating an assumption about mankind which, as we shall see, early and late controls the development of this poem.

This assumption that mankind is essentially selfish and profoundly faulted is not, we should begin by remarking, a view which is incompatible with the traditional Christian view of human nature. La Rochefoucauld himself (although it has been remarked of his maxims that "so far as God affects his meditations, he might have been an athiest"²⁹), when he sought an explanation for the abuse of self-love he observed in men, couched that explanation in traditionally Christian terms.

To punish man for original sin, God has let him
deify his love of self, that he may be tortured
by it at every stage of his life.³⁰

But, traditional as it is, this view of man as selfish and faulted, indeed the Christian terms in which this view was normally couched, was under severe attack even as Swift asserted it as his own. Through the last quarter of the seventeenth century

and into the eighteenth century, the doctrine of original sin--with its insistence on man's faulted condition--met tremendous philosophical resistance. To men like Shaftesbury, Burnet and Bolingbroke, this doctrine which insisted that man is born, though essentially good, yet with a powerful inclination to evil, was untenable. To oppose this doctrine Shaftesbury and others proposed one exactly contrary: man is born possessed of instinctive benevolence. And from this doctrine the benevolentists drew, naturally, consequences contrary to La Rochefoucauld's conclusion that all human acts, good or evil, spring from his own self-love. Thus Richard Cumberland comments, in an exact contradiction of the maxim of La Rochefoucauld which begins Swift's Verses, that "there are in mankind, considered as animal beings only, propensities of benevolence towards each other."³¹ And indeed, for Shaftesbury, to be motivated to a good act by principles of self-interest--of honor or of glory, say--was to be vicious.

Whatsoever therefore is done which happens to be advantageous to the species through an affection merely towards self-good, does not imply any more goodness in the creature than as the affection itself is good. Let him, in any particular, act ever so well, if at the bottom it be that selfish affection alone which moves him, he is in himself, still vicious.³²

Thus, in choosing to begin the Verses with a defense of La Rochefoucauld's maxims, a defense, that is, of a view of mankind in which man is imaged as a distinctly selfish and faulted creature, Swift has automatically involved himself and his poem in a very lively argument. Further, Swift does nothing to make his view more palatable to a benevolentist when he insists not only on the

truth of La Rochefoucauld's maxim but on the truth of its corollary as well--not only, Swift argues, are men not displeased at the misery of friends, but so self-interested are they that they are themselves made miserable by their friend's successes.

What Poet would not grieve to see,
 His Brethren write as well as he?
 But rather than they should excel,
 He'd wish his Rivals all in Hell.
 (31-34)

And while Swift argues very gently, in the first paragraphs of the Verses, for the validity of that view of man he is defending--he begins whimsically by asking "Who would not at a crowded show/ Stand high himself, keep others low?"(15-16)--ultimately his initial gentleness only serves to make his final conclusion all the more crushing. Self-love, Swift asserts, conditions all human relationships, even the strongest friendships, by both making them possible and by limiting their strength.

If this conclusion seems as unacceptable to us as it was to many of Swift's contemporaries that is partly because we are, in some vague way, the intellectual inheritors of the benevolentists. But we must nevertheless remember that within the traditionally Christian ethic from which Swift was working, it is possible, without contradiction, to both grant the possibility of real friendship and yet understand the strongest of friendships to be limited. This is true because the Christian conception of even the strongest friendship is linked indivisibly to self-love: "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is both the beginning and end of the Christian counsel of friendship. And Swift drew

out bluntly enough the consequences of this commandment at the beginning of his sermon, Doing Good.

Nature directs every one of us, and God permits us to consult our own private Good before the private Good of any other person whatsoever. We are, indeed, commanded to love our Neighbor as ourselves, but not as well as ourselves. The love we have for ourselves is to be the pattern of that love we ought to have towards our neighbor; But, as the copy doth not equal the original, so my neighbor cannot think it hard, if I prefer myself, who am the original, before him, who is only the copy.³³

Given then Swift's traditional view that the love we have for our friend is founded in our own self-love, it follows that "the strongest friendship [must] yield to pride,/ Unless the odds be on our side."

But as Swift moves towards this conclusion he is moving, we must realize, in the realm of paradox. To begin with, if as we have already seen, self-love ultimately limits for Swift the strength of the strongest friendship, yet self-love is not, for Swift, as it is for Shaftesbury, a viciously anti-social force; for self-love also provides the pattern and the reason which makes "strong friendship" a possibility. Further, for Swift, even the meanest effects of self-love--envy, say, or avarice--bear a perverted testimony to our felt communion with other human beings. Thus, although in the first forty lines of the Verses Swift insists on showing us that we glory in the misery and are miserable in the glory of other men, he simultaneously shows us that, as Marshall Waingrow observes, "Ironically, what appear to be the most self-regarding of emotions are in fact utterly dependent

upon the condition of others."³⁴ This paradoxically social quality of selfishness is amply demonstrated in Swift's mock protest,

Give others Riches, Power, and Station,
'Tis all on me an Usurpation.
(43-44)

The man who makes this stingy observation (and that man is, at some time, all of us, as Swift, who himself confesses having made this observation, knows) is not, of course, being very sociable, but he is being social; he does recognize, though in a clearly perverse way, that his lot is somehow related to that of his fellows.

Envy and magnanimity then, while very different in their effects, come to seem, in the proem, not so very different in their generation; they are both self-interested responses to the condition of other human beings. Indeed, Swift demonstrates how close they are by actually translating, before our eyes, his own envy into magnanimity. "In Pope," he says,

. . .I cannot read a Line
But with a Sigh, I wish it mine:
When he can in one Couplet fix
More Sense than I can do in Six. . . .
(47-50)

Obviously, these lines on Pope (as well as Swift's similar lines on Gay, Arbuthnot and Pultney) are a confession of Swift's envy. Just as obviously these lines are handsome praise and an act of true magnanimity. With this capacity to transform his meanest selfishness into praise Swift did not need Shaftesbury's assumption that men possessed a "benevolent impulse" in order to propose a standard of moral conduct for men. In fact, for Swift, Shaftesbury's benevolence

only obscured man's real moral task, to draw from his potentially dark and selfish nature a truly generous conduct.

But to recognize that Swift's willingness to confess his envy transforms that envy into a generous praise is to raise another question--how can one account for Swift's willingness to work this transformation? The beginnings of an answer to this question can be found, I think, in the two ironic lines which conclude Swift's oblique praise of his friends.

If with such Talents Heav'n hath blest 'em
Have I not Reason to detest 'em?

(65-66)

These lines are ironic, of course, since the answer to the question which they pose is necessarily "no." But the reason why it must be "no" informs Swift's magnanimity. Swift himself discusses this reason in numerous places, most notably in his sermon On Mutual Subjection.³⁵ In that sermon Swift states clearly the doctrine, only ironically implied by the lines above, that the division of not only talents, power and riches among mankind, but the entire condition of each man--his health, wits and all--is granted not by chance but by Divine dispensation. From this doctrine Swift, in this sermon, draws several conclusions with respect to envy. First, to envy a man who is possessed of apparently greater gifts than oneself is, in effect, a blasphemous act because it is ultimately to challenge the wisdom of Heaven. Second, and most important with respect to the lines we are considering, to envy another man is to contradict one's own best self-interest; for if the man envied uses his gifts as he ought (as Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot and Pultney clearly have done), then these gifts will manifest themselves as social

good. To envy such men then is pure folly, since, Swift comments, "you cannot envy [with any reason] your neighbor's strength if he maketh use of it to defend your life, or carry your burden." And further if the man envied abuses his talents and uses them viciously then to envy him is obviously a greater folly still, for you envy him only his own viciousness.

Therefore what Swift's ironic question--"Have I not reason to detest 'em?"--evokes by implication is an understandable and unmysterious reason for his willingness to transform his own envy into magnanimous praise. In the light of his ironic question Swift's envy appears as a blindly self-interested and hence unprofitable response, while his magnanimity appears as a response which is not necessarily less self-interested but which is much more finally attuned to conditions fixed by divine dispensation. In fact, it is precisely Swift's ability to see that all the conditions of life and death are by divine dispensation and ought to serve his own true good which, as we shall see, makes him so fitting a model for panegyric.

IV

The import of the proem can be summarized as follows: first, it is an argument to demonstrate that the motivation for all our actions and relationships is always self-interest; second, it shows us that, though we are by nature selfish, we are by our very selfishness involved in the condition of others; lastly, it obliquely reminds us that our condition as well as the condition of everyone else is granted by divine dispensation--a fact which, if we are to

follow our true self-interest, must affect our response to those conditions. The proem, then, is not directly prescriptive, but the sum of its arguments do lead to a moral position. That position is that it is not only permissible (indeed, inevitable) to seek one's own self-interest in one's dealings in this world, but it is important to succeed. That one succeed, however, depends upon remembering first one's communion with other men, and secondly that all things in this world are of God.

The irony of the second section of Swift's Verses is not, then, that his friends are willing to seek their own self-interest in Swift's illness and death; that, as Swift himself has told us, is in accord with nature and permitted by God. The irony is that they are unable to find their self-interest. For, if in the prosperity of our friends our own self-interest leads us to assert our commonality with them then the same lesson should be, if anything, more clear in our friends' adversities. Donne in his Devotions makes this point in a way which illuminates the misguided responses of Swift's friends.

We scarce hear of any man preferred, but we think of ourselves that we might very well have been that man; why might not I have been that man that is carried to his grave now? Could I fit myself to stand or sit in any man's place, and not to lie in any man's grave: I may lack much of the good parts of the meanest, but I lack nothing of the mortality of the weakest; they may have acquired better abilities than I, but I was born to as many infirmities as they.³⁶

It is precisely this extremely self-interested wisdom which Swift's friends (trying, for the most part, to escape the fact of their own mortality) ironically fail to discover in Swift's death. The irony of the situation is established from the first lines of the second section.

The Time is not remote, when I
 Must by the Course of Nature dye:
 When I foresee my special Friends,
 Will try to find their private Ends.
 (73-76)

It is, of course, precisely their own ends which Swift's friends ought to be able, but seem unwilling, to foresee in Swift's own. Rather, most of them view Swift's decline and

. . . hug themselves, and reason thus;
 "It is not yet so bad with us."
 (115-116)

In this failure Swift's friends seem, one must say, remarkably obtuse, for Swift has imagined his own death in such way as to make its universally fatal implications extremely clear. When the Dean's knell is tolled it immediately involves whole communities. The news runs through Dublin, begets a race of elegies, spreads to London, invades the court, is told at Chartres, inspires activity at Curl's, reaches out to Twickenham, and lastly filters through a female card party. The spreading of the news itself becomes emblematic: no human scene, it is clear, is completely exempt from a passing-bell. Further, the commonality of death is what Swift emphasizes in the way he imagines his own, for the Dean dies of no unique disease; his death is, rather, in accord with "the course of nature" to which all men must submit. Therefore, and here Swift puts a very fine point on the commonality of death, a neighbor can be readily imagined who might "feel a Pain,/Just in the Parts, where I complain." (135-36).

But, as clearly as Swift paints the moral of his death (that any man may lie down in the grave prepared for Swift himself,

since every man is destined for his own), nevertheless, he imagines this moral to be almost universally disregarded. Even that very neighbor whose pains presage his approaching end is pictured inquiring, not after the "way to die," but frantically after ways to live,

. . .what Regimen I kept;
What gave me Ease, and how I slept,
(139-140)

while the rest,

. . .give a Shrug and cry,
I'm sorry; but we all must dye,
(211-212)

and pass over with that shrug both the seriousness and moral implications of the truth they have uttered.

Repelled, then, as Swift's companions are by the thought of their own deaths, it is hardly surprising that they prove almost aggressively indifferent to the news of their friend's, mingling that news with cards and politics and talk of heirs. But it is not really for their indifference to his own death that Swift is satirizing them; that indifference is only symptomatic of their greater failing. Swift's satire of them is based upon their failure to grasp the significance of that admonition which follows immediately upon the imagined advent of Swift's death--"O, may we all for death prepare!"(153). That warning is, within the Christian scheme, the great moral of Swift's and every man's death. It is the moral stressed in that Departing Prayer which, as it was traditionally read at every Christian's death, Swift imagined read

at his: "teach us who survive," says that prayer,

to see in this and other like spectacles of mortality,
how frail and uncertain our own condition is; and so
to number our days that we may seriously apply our
hearts to that holy and heavenly wisdom while we live
here, which may in the end bring life everlasting. . . .³⁷

It is in their failure to avail themselves of Swift's death as a reminder of their own, and thus as a warning to be mindful of ultimate values, that most of Swift's friends desert, not Swift, but their own self-interest and thus become part of that group which has always been the object of satire--the group of men who, not not knowing themselves, do not know their own good.

This is not to say that Swift does not distinguish between his friends' varied responses to his death. Between those who amuse themselves by predicting the day of Swift's death and, say, Pope, who truly mourns Swift for a full month, there is a world of difference. The former fail both in compassion and comprehension. They fail to numbering the days remaining to Swift's life when, in fact, the event of Swift's death should teach them to number their own days. That is why they are subject to Swift's satire. There is, on the other hand, as we have already seen, a high compliment for Pope in Swift's compassionate recognition that "Poor Pope will mourn a month. . . ." But, as different as are these two imagined responses to Swift's death, they share one thing in common: they both can remind Swift (and us) of that which most of his friends have forgotten, "how transitory are all things below."³⁸ Thus, even while Swift, in imagining that Pope will mourn a full month is obliquely complimenting him, his compliment itself only more strongly

reinforces the moral which has been evident through all the imagined responses to Swift's death:

Where's now this Fav'rite of Apollo?
Departed; and his Works must follow.
(249-250)

Indeed, the transience of men and things is, it seems to me, the whole burden of lines 243-289, the concluding lines of the second section. Earlier in this section, we will remember, Swift imagines that his literary remains will pass through the soiling grasp of Tibbalds, Moore, and Cibber. But it is only in the last fifty lines of this section that we learn how extensive Swift imagines their triumph to be. It is the works of these men, who stand for so much Swift hated, that he imagines filling the bookshops. Indeed, as Swift imagines it, a short year after his death will see Walpole find a vindication, and Henley an audience, and Woolston, who showed "That Jesus was a grand Imposter," a pension and perhaps a mitre.

No seventeenth century meditator, caught up in the theme of contemptus mundi, and demonstrating through the wormy circumstances of death the absolute corruptibility of all worldly things, could put the point more clearly than Swift has put it here. Swift's imagined description of the hypocritical mourning of some of his friends, the limited mourning of the best of his friends, and the apparently unlimited triumph of his enemies at his death, verges, it seems to me, almost on despair for his world and everything in it. How anything of lasting value can be done or gotten in such a world is almost impossible to conceive. And yet, it is precisely at this point that Swift chooses to pen a panegyric the basis of which is the good that he has accomplished in this world.

This transition, though it is accomplished by the introduction of an "indifferent" narrator, is in one sense, very abrupt. In another sense, however, the transition has been prepared for by the whole logic of the poem. The great fictional device of this poem has been, from its title on, that Swift is first dying and then dead. It is written throughout from the point of view of a man who has nothing either to hope or fear from the world; it is written, that is, from the "indifferent" point of view of Swift's panegyrist. Swift has been able to freely assure us that the single motivation of his life has been self-interest, and he has confessed easily enough instances in his life where that self-interest was excessive. But he has also arrived at that point where he can hardly confound his true self-interest with any worldly good--rather, from the dissolution of his own flesh, as any seventeenth century meditation on death would tell him, he may judge the transience of friends and fame and fortune. He has arrived at that point of philosophy where the traditional meditation on death pressed home its strongest truth--that the only true good of man is trust in God. And that, I will argue, is the whole lesson of Swift's complex and subtle panegyric.

Yet Swift's panegyric is neither overtly an adjuration to us to trust in God nor an overt profession of Swift's own faith. On the face of it the panegyric is simply a list of the good Swift has done his fellow man (i.e., defeated Wood's half pence, left money to build an asylum) and of the adversities under which he did this good (i.e., he was exiled to Ireland and a price was put on his head). But the language Swift uses to describe both the good he has done and the adversities he has faced is a very highly allusive language--and its allusions are mostly to Scripture. Thus,

when he tells us that his defense of Ireland brought him into conflict with a judge "who long all justice had discarded/ Nor feared he GOD, nor man regarded," he has done more than simply indicate that this judge was a very wicked fellow; he has indicated too that his own cause was, in some way, regardful of both man and God. By this process of allusion, often repeated, Swift, without ever openly saying so, sutures his good works to his faith.

Swift's allusive method does obviously complicate the job of rendering a creditable explication of his panegyric, but it is, certainly, a method entirely in keeping with his own life. For although we, having Swift's private writings and his correspondence, have no reason to doubt the Dean's faith, yet in his life so strictly did Swift adhere to Christ's adjuration to be privately pious (lest through public piety one fall into pride) that many of his contemporaries, while praising the Dean's work, doubted his faith. His panegyric, therefore, in submerging its references to his faith within its descriptions of his works, more exactly mirrors the life it describes.

Further, we have been prepared earlier in the poem to find that in the panegyric Swift's good works both reflect and are dependent upon his trust in God. His graceful transformation of envy to magnanimity (which we examined in the proem) was rendered rationally explicable, we will remember, by those lines in which he obliquely reminded us that the gifts of his friends had been assigned them by heaven. In a very similar way, both before the panegyric and in it, his allusions to portions of Scripture which commend with particular force a trust in God and/or discommend

an over-attachment to the things of this world make more instructive, more meaningful, the good Swift does.

Thus, for example, we may examine the matter of Swift's will. In the second section of the poem we learn, not that Swift has endowed an insane asylum, but only that he has left his money to public uses, and, as Waingrow has pointed out, we can see Swift's real charity by contrasting his gift to the response of the public.

"To Publick Use! A perfect Whim
 "What had the Publick done for him!
 ...
 "And had the Dean, in all the Nation,
 "No worthy Friend, no poor Relation?
 "So ready to do Strangers good,
 "Forgetting his own Flesh and Blood?
 (157-158, 161-164)

Swift, that is, unlike the anonymous public speaker of these lines, makes clear by his willingness to do strangers good that he recognizes an obligation which extends beyond friends and kin, recognizes that, to employ again Donne's phrases, "all mankind is of one author, and is one volume,"³⁹ and that, therefore, he is involved in it and has obligations to it. But here we must be extremely careful not to translate Swift's willingness to do strangers good into an act motivated by a soft-headed "benevolence towards the species," for to do that would be to undermine the whole import of Swift's poem. Nor is it at all necessary to do that, because to discover Swift's motive one need look no further than the Book of Psalms. The Psalter affirms in a variety of ways and places that "both the rich and the poor shall die and leave their money unto strangers,"⁴⁰ a point the logic of which, given

a generation or two, is indisputable. Swift then, in willingly leaving his money to strangers, has done no more than what he must. But the key word here, of course, is willingly. Swift, recognizing that the way of this world is such that he must leave his money to strangers, acquiesces; choosing to align his will (in both senses) with the way of this world and presumably with Him Whose will controls this world, he acts charitably.

It is just this sort of clear-sightedness about what things are transitory, what permanent, which distinguishes those good works of Swift which are praised in the panegyric. The panegyric begins with a brief defense of Swift's satire, to which topic we will return at the close of this study. Immediately after this defense we are plunged into those lines of the panegyric which are so often cited as exemplary of Swift's overweening pride. Swift begins them by claiming that,

He never thought an Honour done him
Because a Duke was proud to own him:
Would rather slip aside and chuse
To talk with Wits in dirty shoes,
(319-322)

and Swift's expressed preference has been taken as his own variety of inverse snobbery. It is true, there is a sort of pride in these lines, but it is a very specialized pride--the pride of a man who knows to a surety the source of ultimate value. "He never courted men in Station," Swift goes on to claim, "Nor persons had in admiration." And our understanding of this last line, and of the whole passage in which it occurs, depends upon our recognizing

that Swift has taken this line directly from the close of the Book of Jude. Jude, having charged an unidentified group of heretics with inverting all religious values, ends his charge with the assertion that while these heretics disregarded God, they "persons had in admiration."⁴¹ Swift's claim, therefore, that he was such a man as did not have "persons in admiration" at least suggests, by reference to Jude, what Swift did have "in admiration." As he goes on to claim, he

Of no Man's Greatness was afraid,
Because he sought for no Man's Aid.
(327-238)

He was, therefore, at perfect liberty to honor merit in whatever station he found it--which is exactly the virtue he claims for himself.

Further, Swift in the panegyric does not only imply what he has "in admiration" by telling us what he does not have "in admiration;" occasionally he does, by allusion, tell us what he trusts. Let us examine, for example, Swift's claim that,

Fair LIBERTY was all his Cry;
For her he stood prepared to die;
For her he boldly stood alone;
For her he oft expos'd his own.
(347-350)

Barry Slepian, we will remember, took this claim to be a piece of self-satire, but, I think we shall see, this claim Swift made in absolute earnest. In order to understand this claim we must first understand Swift's use of the word "liberty." And that use, in turn depends, I believe, on the lines which begin the verse

paragraph in which this claim appears. In those lines Swift tells us he

With Princes kept a due Decorum,
 But never stood in Awe before 'em.
 He follow'd David's Lesson just,
In Princes never put thy trust.
 (339-342)

The lesson to which Swift refers is to be found in psalm 146:

Put not your trust in princes, Nor in the son of
 man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth
 forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day
 his thoughts perish. Happy is he that hath the
 God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the
 Lord his God.⁴²

And with this lesson as his moral guide it is small wonder that Swift was provoked at the sight of a "slave in power." Trust in God, not subjugation to princes "in whom there is no help," is Swift's ideal of liberty. Therefore, Swift could truly claim of himself, not out of bravado, but from the center of his own moral values, that

. . . Power was never in his Thought;
 And Wealth he valu'd not a groat.
 (357-358)

Understanding, as he did, the transience of power and fame and worldly station Swift could, as he claimed, afford to lose them. Indeed, in losing them, he gains no less than everything.

Neither the panegyric, then, nor the whole of the Verses should be understood as a praise of Swift's stoic fortitude in the face of adversities, but rather as a praise of Swift's ability, through trust in God, to translate these adversities to positive

goods. Take, for example, the adversity on which Swift dwells so often in this poem, the limitations and vagueries of human friendship. The coldness of most of Swift's friends at his death plays a prominent part in the second section of the Verses and Swift returns to the ultimately undependable nature of human friendship in the panegyric, remarking that he knew a time when,

. . . ev'n his own familiar Friends
Intent upon their private ends
 Like Renegadoes now he feels,
Against him lifting up their Heels.
 (403-406)

No doubt this sort of betrayal pained Swift deeply, more deeply perhaps, than it might most men, but, nevertheless, the terms in which he expresses this betrayal indicate that he knew how to find his own true self-interest even in this most painful form of adversity. For the italicized sections of this quotation are drawn from Psalm 41,

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted,
 which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his
 heel against me,

and the whole argument of this psalm is relevant, I think, to Swift's poem.

The psalm begins with a statement of faith: the Lord will show mercy to the charitable man. Then the psalm becomes a highly personal narration which, something like Swift's Verses, begins with a confession:

I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul;
 for I have sinned against thee.

Quickly we learn that the narrator is sick both in soul and body and that his friends have chosen this moment of his adversity "to speak evil of" him and to plot against him:

All that hate me whisper together against me:
 against me do they devise my hurt. An evil
 thing, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and
 now that he lieth he shall rise no more.

The similarity between these friends of the narrator (who actually "devise his hurt") and Swift's friends who, if they do not actually devise his hurt, anticipate his death with unseemly indifference is, I think, obvious. Swift himself acknowledges the similarity by forming, as we have seen above, his own complaint out of the words of the psalm. But the relevance, for us, of the intersection of Swift's Verses with Psalm 41, lies in the conclusion of that psalm, a conclusion which both is, and is not, like the conclusion of Swift's poem. 7

But thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise
 me up, that I may requite them. [my unfaithful
 friends]. By this I know that thou favourest me,
 because mine enemy doth not triumph over me.

The narrator of this psalm knows that in his adversities his only refuge is the Lord. But the narrator--who is an Old Testament narrator--can conceive of God's graciousness manifesting itself towards him only by permitting him to recover his full earthly power. Swift, on the other hand, recognizes that it may also be a mark of grace to die in charity with those who have sinned against one. It is this good which he draws from those who have 7

betrayed him.

Ingratitude he often found,
 And pity'd those who meant the Wound:
 But, kept the Tenor of his Mind,
 To merit well of human Kind.

(359-362)

Over and over the lesson is repeated as Swift, in the panegyric, draws from all the adversities of his life--the political jars of his friends, his exile to Ireland, Wood's half-pence, the list goes on and on--his own true good. And that good is a good, not only for him, but, because it is founded on his trust in God's way with man, a good for all the members of God's community. Even out of the flaws of his own character Swift can draw good. The Dean, he admits, "Had too much Satyr in his Vein" (456) and, others might add, too much vanity as well. But from his overabundance of satire he built

. . . a House for Fools and Mad:
 And shew'd by one satyric Touch,
 No Nation wanted it so much.

(480-482)

And from a combination of satire and vanity he drew no less a piece of charity than the Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift itself, which, as much as any seventeenth century meditation on death, can instruct one how to find in the greatest earthly adversity, death itself, that true Good "which may in the end bring life everlasting."⁴³

NOTES

1. "This maxim was XCIX in the first edition of Refléxions ou sentences et maximes morales, and, together with a number of others, was suppressed by La Rochefoucault in later editions. It will be found in modern editions among the "Refléxions Supprimées." Sir Harold Williams, The Poems of Jonathan Swift, II, 553, n. 7.
2. This version first appeared in April, 1733 with the imprint of J. Roberts. Swift always denied authorship of the version, but it is, nevertheless, generally considered his work.
3. The Correspondence of Alexander Pope, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1956), IV, 130.
4. The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, ed. Sir Harold Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1965), V, 139.
5. Review of English Studies, N. S. XIV (1963), 249-256.
6. The epitaph is, of course, in Latin. HIC DEPOSITUM EST CORPUS JONATHAN SWIFT, S.T.D. HUIUS ECCLESIAE CATHEDRALIS DECANI. UBI SAEVA INDIGNATIO ULTERIUS COR LACERARE NEQUIT. ABI VIATOR, ET IMITARE, SI POTERIS, STRENUM PRO VIRILI LIBERTATIS VINDICATOREM.
7. "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," SEL, V, 513-518.
8. For both this view of these lines and for the supporting quotation from Charles Williams I am indebted to Maynard Mack's discussion in Major British Writers, ed. G. B. Harrison et al., 2 vols. (New York, 1954), I, 237.
9. Psalm 146:5.
10. Correspondence of Swift, IV, 152.
11. Ibid. IV, 476.
12. Irvin Ehrenpreis, Swift, the man, his works, and the age, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1962-), I, 106.
13. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, ed. Herbert Davis et al. 13 vols. (Oxford, 1957), IX, 263.
14. (New Haven, 1954), p. 135.
15. "The Meditation on Death and its Appearance in Metaphysical Poetry," Neophilologus, XLV (1961), p. 325.
16. Of Prayer, and Meditation. Cited from Martz, p. 135.

17. Devotions. . . (Ann Arbor, 1959), p. 116. "Meditation XVIII."
18. L. A. Wyman, "The Tradition of the Formal Meditation in Rowe's The Fair Penitent," PQ, XLII (1963), 412-416.
19. The Imitation of Christ. Cited from Martz, p. 136.
20. Robert Persons, A Christian Directorie. Cited from Martz, p. 136.
21. Hamlet, V, i.
22. Of Prayer, and Meditation. Cited from Martz, p. 137.
23. Ecclesiastes 7.
24. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, IX, 256.
25. Correspondence of Swift, III, 118.
26. Swift and the Age of Compromise (Lawrence, Kansas, 1958), p. 66.
27. Ibid., p. 66.
28. SEL, p. 517.
29. The Maxims of La Rochefoucauld, ed. Louis Kronenberger, (New York, 1959), p. xvi.
30. Ibid., p. 129. "Maxim 509."
31. A Philosophical Enquiry into the Laws of Nature, [first published 1672], trans. John Towers (Dublin, 1750), p. 211.
32. Characteristics. . ., ed. John M. Robertson, 2 vols. (Gloucester, Mass., 1963), I, 249.
33. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, IX, p. 232.
34. SEL, p. 514.
35. The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, IX, p. 139.
36. Devotions. . ., p. 103. "Meditation XVI."
37. The Book of Common Prayer, "Communion of the Sick."
38. The line is from Swift's poem, The Journal.
39. Devotions. . ., p. 103. "Meditation XVI."
40. Psalm 49:10.

41. Jude, 16.
42. Psalm 146:3, 4, 5.
43. The Book of Common Prayer, "Communion of the Sick."

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Irwin Fischer was born May 26, 1940, in Chicago, Illinois. In June, 1958, he graduated from Bexley High School in Columbus, Ohio. From 1958 to 1962 he attended The Ohio State University, where in June, 1962, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts (in English). From September, 1962, until the present time he has pursued work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the University of Florida. In 1962 Mr. Fischer held an honorary Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. From 1962 to 1965 he held an NDEA title IV Fellowship, and in 1966 a Graduate Fellowship from the University of Florida. Since 1966, he has been a Graduate Assistant at the University of Florida.

John Irwin Fischer is married to the former Judith Lee Stirling. He is a member of the Modern Language Association.

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