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dressed as himself; despiseth all his Acquaintance who are not of Quality; and in publick Places hath on that Account often avoided taking Notice of some among the best Speakers in the House of Commons. He raileth strenuously at both Universities before the Members of either; and is never heard to swear an Oath, or break in upon Religion and Morality, except in the Company of Divines. On the other Hand, a Man of right Sense hath all the Essentials of good Breeding, although he may be wanting in the Forms of it. *Horatio* hath spent most of his time at *Oxford*. He hath a great deal of Learning, an agreeable Wit, and as much Modesty as may serve to adorn without concealing his other good Qualities. In that retired way of living,¹⁶ he seemeth to have formed a Notion of human Nature, as he hath found it described in the Writings of the greatest Men; not as he is likely to meet with it in the common Course of Life. Hence it is, that he giveth no Offence; but converseth with great Deference, Candor, and Humanity. His Bow, I must confess, is somewhat aukward; but then he hath an extensive, universal, and unaffected Knowledge, which may perhaps a little excuse him. He would make no extraordinary Figure at a Ball; but I can assure the Ladies in his Behalf, and for their own Consolation, that he has writ better Verses on the Sex than any Man now living, and is preparing such a Poem for the Press as will transmit their Praises and his own to many Generations.

¹⁶ at *Oxford*. . . *retired way of living*: contrasting the academic life with the world of London fashion.

A PROPOSAL
FOR CORRECTING,
IMPROVING AND
ASCERTAINING THE
ENGLISH TONGUE

Headnote

Published 1712; copy text 1712a (see Textual Account). The title from the title page runs as follows: 'A PROPOSAL FOR Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining THE English Tongue; IN A LETTER To the Most Honourable ROBERT[,] Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, Lord High Treasurer OF GREAT BRITAIN.'

The view of the state of the language outlined in the *Proposal*, and the instances brought in evidence, overlap to a considerable degree with *Tatler* 230.¹ The *Proposal* is Swift's most formal public statement on contemporary language use and its relation to the national culture under Queen Anne, advocating 'a Society' to be set up under Lord Oxford's patronage to determine questions of usage.² Swift envisages an academy comparable to those that had served similar purposes in France and Italy; but although he uses the term elsewhere, it does not occur in the *Proposal* itself.³ Cf. the wider-ranging project, in the Preface to the *Tale*, for a 'large Academy . . . capable of containing nine thousand seven hundred forty and three Persons; which by modest Computation is reckoned to be pretty near the current Number of Wits in this Island', and the author's appeal in Section IV to 'the worthy Members of the several Academies abroad, especially those of France and Italy'.⁴ Cf. also the Grand Academy of Lagado.⁵ Addison had in *Spectator* 135 (4 August 1711) mentioned the need for 'something like an Academy' in an essay approving and amplifying points made by Swift in *Tatler* 230.⁶

Voltaire, who would meet Swift in 1727, fifteen years after the publication of the *Proposal*, would in his *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733) compare Swift's projected academy with the Académie Française, to the latter's disadvantage.⁷ Voltaire's account is strikingly detailed, though not necessarily accurate, as to the individuals involved, giving prominence to Bolingbroke rather than to Oxford, and writing as if Dryden, who had died in 1700, had still been alive at the time of Swift's *Proposal*:

1 See Introduction; and, for contemporary linguistic assumptions, see Bailey, 'Variation', pp. 197, 182-4.

2 For previous such schemes, see Francus, pp. 118-40; for discussion of Swift's *Proposal* and its contexts, see Kelly, *English Language*, pp. 89-103.

3 *JSt* (1948), p. 510.

4 *CWJS*, vol. I, pp. 26, 339-40, and 68, 387.

5 *GT*, part III, chs. 5-6, Davis, vol. XI, pp. 163-76.

6 *Spectator*, vol. II, p. 35.

7 For Voltaire's letters to Swift of 16 June and 17 December 1727, and of March 1728, see *Corr*, vol. III, pp. 93-7, 147-9, 173-4.

The celebrated Dean *Swift* form'd a design, in the latter End of the late Queen's Reign, to found an Academy for the *English* Tongue upon the Model of that of the *French*. This Project was promoted by the late Earl of *Oxford*, Lord High Treasurer, and much more by the Lord *Bolingbroke*, Secretary of State, who had the happy Talent of Speaking without Premeditation in the Parliament-house with as much Purity as Dean *Swift* writ in his Closet, and who would have been the Ornament and Protector of that Academy. Those only wou'd have been chosen Members of it, whose Works will last as long as the *English* Tongue, such as Dean *Swift*, Mr. *Prior* . . . , whose Fame in England is equal to that *La Fontaine* in *France*; Mr. *Pope* the English *Boileau*, Mr. *Congreve* who may be call'd their *Moliere*, and several other eminent Persons whose Names I have forgot; all these would have rais'd the Glory of that Body to a great Height even in it's Infancy. But Queen *Anne* being snatch'd suddenly from the World, the Whigs were resolv'd to ruin the Protectors of the intended Academy, a Circumstance that was of the most fatal Consequence to polite Literature. The Members of this Academy would have had a very great Advantage over those who first form'd that of the *French*, for *Swift*, *Prior*, *Congreve*, *Dryden*, *Pope*, *Addison*, &c. had fix'd the *English* Tongue by their Writings; whereas *Chapelain*, *Colletet*, *Cassaigne*, *Faret*, *Perrin*, *Cotin*, our first Academicians, were a Disgrace to their Country.⁸

At the time, however, Swift reported in detail on the writing, publication and reception of the *Proposal* in *JSt* and in letters to Archbishop King. By 9 September 1710 Swift was back in London as emissary of the Irish Church to negotiate a royal grant of the First Fruits and Twentieth Parts, reporting to King that 'all Affairs in the Treasury are governed by Mr. Harley, and that he is the Person usually applied to', and noting also that he had 'formerly made some Advances towards me'.⁹ Swift was finally introduced to him on 4 October 1710 ('I was brought privately to Mr. Harley, who received me with the greatest respect and kindness imaginable'), and soon reported flattering testimony of personal regard (he 'spoke so many things of personal kindness and esteem for me, that I am inclined half to believe what some friends have told me, That he would do every thing to bring me over'), although he was also aware of the skill with which this sense of privileged access was being fostered (he reports it as 'a great piece of refinement of Harley', that he told him not to attend his levee because 'That was not a place for friends to come to').¹⁰ As time went on, his reports to Johnson and Dingley were full of his increasing involvement with the ministry, his regular attendance at court, and

8 François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, London, 1733, pp. 235-7.

9 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 290.

10 *JSt* (1948), pp. 35, 46, 47.

a corresponding cooling in his former intimacy with Steele and Addison. He is prudently inexplicit about his new role as ministerial writer, but writes on 30 November 1710 that 'I am at present a little involved with the present ministry in some certain things (which I tell you as a secret)', adding that they 'have a difficult task, and want me', and that 'they are pursuing the true interest of the public'.¹¹

On 22 June 1711, the day after he had described the newly formed 'Society or Brothers' Club, which aimed 'to advance conversation and friendship, and to reward deserving persons with our interest and recommendation', he mentions having proposed the academy to Harley in conversation.¹² On 12 July he broke the news to King, speaking of his 'Project' for 'some kind of Society or Academy under the Patronage of the Ministers, and Protection of the Queen, for correcting, enlarging, polishing, and fixing our Language', and explaining that 'I am writing a Letter, by way of Proposals'.¹³ It was not until 24 November that he was able to report to the ladies that 'I am going to finish a letter to lord treasurer about reforming our language'; and on 21 February 1712 he explained:

I have been 6 hours to day morning writing 19 Pages of a Lettr to day to Ld Treasr, about forming a Society or Academy to correct and fix the English Language. (Is English a Speech or a Language?) it will not be above five or 6 more, I will send it him to morow, and will print it if he desires me.¹⁴

Swift went on, in this letter, to speak of having dined with 'our Society', and finally declared: 'I finished the rest of my Lettr to Ld Treasr to day; and sent it to him about one a Clock'. On 11 March he reported further on its progress, juxtaposing this most public of his linguistic interests with the private 'little language' shared with Johnson and Dingley: 'Ld Treasr has lent the long Lettr I writt him, to Prior, and I can't get Prior to return it; and I want to have it printd, and to make up this Academy for the Improvemt of our Language. Fais we nevr shall improve it as much as FW has done. Sall we? No fais, ourrichar Gangridge.'¹⁵

On 29 March 1712 he told King that Oxford and he had already 'named above twenty Persons of both Parties to be Members' of the Academy, and commented that 'Your Grace sees I am a Projector too'; and on 10 May 1712 Swift was finally able to tell the ladies: 'My Lettr to Ld Treasr about the Engl.

11 Ibid., pp. 107-8.

12 Ibid., pp. 294-6.

13 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 362.

14 *JSt* (1948), pp. 420, 493. For the implications of choosing 'Language' over 'Speech', implying the recognition of English as a unified national language, see Hickey, 'Attitudes', p. 15.

15 *JSt* (1948), p. 510.

Tongue is now printing, and I suffer my name to be put at the End of it, wch I nevr did before in my Life.¹⁶

The *Proposal*, published on 17 May 1712, was an overtly party-political statement, couched in terms of an elaborate compliment to Oxford as Lord Treasurer that grounds his claim to fame on his efforts to rescue Queen and country from a disastrous war, and gestures towards a Stuart golden age under Anne that requires only a fit and stable language for the transmission of its fame to remote posterity.¹⁷ Swift's hopes for his own role as historian of the ministry's achievements in bringing the war to an end are clearly discernible without ever being quite explicit (cf. his Memorial to the Queen of 15 April 1714, 'humbly desiring her Majesty will please to appoint him her historiographer').¹⁸ The history itself, despite the efforts which Swift had lavished upon it, was destined to prove a long-drawn-out disappointment: 'the procrastination of his friends had delayed the completion of the history beyond the political occasion for which it was written'.¹⁹ Towards the close of his stay in England he was increasingly beset by frustration in relation both to the politics of the ministry, and to his hope of receiving at their hands some preferment in England commensurate with his sense of his deserts.²⁰ Later still, the breakdown of the ministry and the Queen's death meant that a history conceived in triumph took on a very different significance in opposition, and Swift never received the support for publication that he desired: he was apparently dissuaded from publishing it by Bolingbroke on his final visit to England in 1727, and by Oxford's son, the second Earl, and others, in 1737.²¹ Only after his death, in 1758, was a version of *Four Last Years* finally published.

The political dimension of the *Proposal* was an obvious provocation to the Whigs, and Oldmixon and Maynwaring's Whig *Medley* responded later in May, calling the *Proposal* a 'very extraordinary Letter to a Great Man', and announcing two replies as soon to be printed.²² Landa indeed argues that such a response was exactly what Swift wanted, and that he had intended the *Proposal* to be so partisan that Whigs would reject it and leave all the credit to Harley and his supporters.²³ By 26 May Oldmixon had published his *Reflections*, and on 30 May appeared the anonymous *The British Academy*, a collaborative production in large part attributed to Maynwaring.²⁴ Both

16 *Corr*, vol. I, pp. 421, 532; cf. Kelly, *English Language*, pp. 97-100.

17 For Swift's concern with posterity, see Francus, p. 99; for the political implications of linguistic stability, see Davis, "Upon Mouldering Stone".

18 *Corr*, vol. I, pp. 595-6 and headnote.

19 Davis, vol. VII, p. xi.

20 *JSt* (1948), pp. xlv-xlvii.

21 Davis, vol. VII, pp. xii-xxviii.

22 Oldmixon, *Reflections*, ed. Landa, p. 4.

23 Ibid., pp. 4-5, 15-16; cf. Higgins, 'Language and Style', pp. 152-5.

24 Oldmixon, *Reflections*, ed. Landa, pp. 4-5; for discussion, see Francus, pp. 132-7.

replies, of which Oldmixon's is the more substantial, took their rise from foreign news reports in which it was assumed that the membership of the proposed academy would be based on that of the existing 'Society' or Brothers' Club, which, given its Tory bias, would have put language policy firmly in the hands of one party, sitting awkwardly with the *Proposal's* insistence that men of both parties should be eligible, a concession that Oldmixon, who favoured an academy despite the personal and political contempt for Swift that pervades his *Reflections*, specifically acknowledged as constructive.²⁵ Oldmixon ridicules Swift's address to the Lord Treasurer as '*designed only for an Opportunity to shew what a Neck he has at Panegyrick*' and retorts that '*because they have an Academy for the same Use at Paris, we forsooth must have one at London*'; he decries the Tories as lacking 'a right Notion of Letters or Language' or 'any relish of Politeness', and he reproaches Swift as a turncoat with whom the Whigs 'will have no manner of Dealings, as he very well knows'.²⁶ *The British Academy* also glances sardonically at the parallel with the Académie Française, and suggests striking a medal of the academy's protector with, on the reverse, not '*the Bill for the Protestant Succession*' but '*THE SOUTH-SEA*'.²⁷ Swift himself is denounced as the ministry's 'Top Wit... that Orthodox Divine, who it is well known was never half so witty upon any other Subject, as upon that of Religion'.

Swift himself maintained a stance of political detachment when he wrote to Johnson and Dingley on 31 May 1712: 'Have you seen my Lettr to Ld Treasr; there are 2 Answers come out to it already, thô tis no Politicks, but a harmless Proposall about the Improvemt of the Engl. Tongue. I believe if I writt an Essay upon a Straw some Fool would answer it.'²⁸ By July he was complaining that 'You never told me how my Lettr to Ld Treasr passes in Irel.', and later that month he expostulated: 'What care I whethr my Lettr to Ld Treasr be commended there or no? why does not somebody among you answer it, as 3 or 4 have done here.'²⁹ On 26 June 1712 he had assured King that 'My Lord Treasurer hath often promised he will advance my Design of an Academy, so have my Lord Keeper, and all the Ministers; but they are now too busy to think of any thing beside what they have upon the Anvil'; and on 21 October, along with news of the peace negotiations, he remarks: 'As for an Academy to correct and settle our Language; Lord Treasurer talks of it often very warmly; but, I doubt, is yet too busy until the Peace be over.'³⁰ Writing to Johnson and Dingley in the same month he again juxtaposed the Brothers' Club with the still-to-be established academy: 'Our society hath not

yet renewed their meetings. I hope we shall continue to do some good this winter; and lord treasurer promises the academy for reforming our language shall soon go forward.'³¹ He was still hoping in December: 'Our Society meets next Thursday now the Qu is in town. & Ld Treasr assures me that the Society for reforming the Language shall soon be established.'³² On 8 April 1713 Prior wrote from his mission to Paris that 'We shall have time enough to perfect our English, when We have done with other matters'; but in June, frustrated on a whole range of issues, Swift returned to Dublin to be installed as Dean of St Patrick's.³³ Although he would soon be back in London, again writing for the ministry, the friction between Oxford and Bolingbroke that he had worked so hard to allay would, in 1714, finally prove intolerable to him; and the Queen's death shortly afterwards marked the end of the public aspirations that he had voiced in the *Proposal*.³⁴

Quite apart from the provocation that the proposed academy presented to the Whigs, the *Proposal's* reliance on assumptions about the rise and fall of languages akin to the elegiac and impressionistic classicism of Temple's 'An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning' also caused indignation in the Oxford-based community of Old English scholars: cf. Johnson's later description of the *Proposal* as 'written without much knowledge of the general nature of language, and without any accurate enquiry into the history of other tongues.'³⁵ Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756), a key figure in Old English scholarship, challenged views such as Swift had set forth in the *Proposal* in *An Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities*, which was printed as preface to her *Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (1715), the first Old English grammar to be published in the vernacular.³⁶ In attacking Swift for pronouncing on a field of scholarship that he had declared it useless even to investigate, she took occasion to note that the Lord Treasurer's own library of manuscripts contained remarkable resources for such study, making honourable mention of his protégé and librarian, the distinguished Old English specialist, paleographer and codicologist Humphrey Wanley (1672–1726), and thus effectively distancing Swift's dedicatee from her criticism.³⁷ The politically conservative Elstob spoke from a position very different from that of Swift's Whig antagonists, and did not attack the *Proposal* in general terms; but her defence of her scholarly community, and her insistence that writers should familiarise themselves with the history of English before issuing pronouncements about

25 Oldmixon, *Reflections*, p. 10.

26 *Ibid.*, Preface (unpaginated); pp. 6–7, 11.

27 Maynwaring, *The British Academy*, pp. 5–13.

28 *JSt* (1948), p. 535.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 546, 549.

30 *Corr*, vol. I, pp. 428, 446.

31 *JSt* (1948), p. 570.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 580.

33 *Corr*, vol. I, p. 474.

34 *CWJS*, vol. VIII, pp. 37, 40–1.

35 Johnson, 'Swift', p. 195.

36 Cf. Percy, 'Women's Grammars', p. 39.

37 Elstob, p. ix.

it, struck a distinctively modern note.³⁸ The quotation highlighted on her title page also makes plain her perception of the relevance of gender to the controversy: 'the Language that we speak is our MOTHER-TONGUE; And who so proper to play the Criticks in this as the FEMALES'.³⁹ In contrast, Swift's *Proposal* had quickly brushed aside a partial and momentary appeal to the linguistic authority of women. Peake, while noting that we cannot be certain that Swift read Elstob, suggests that her insights into the early history of the language may possibly have softened his later attitude.⁴⁰

38 For Whig concerns about the national origins of English, see Higgins, 'Language and Style', pp. 154-5.

39 Elstob's extract from 'a Letter from a Right Reverend Prelate to the Author'.

40 Elstob, pp. iv-v.

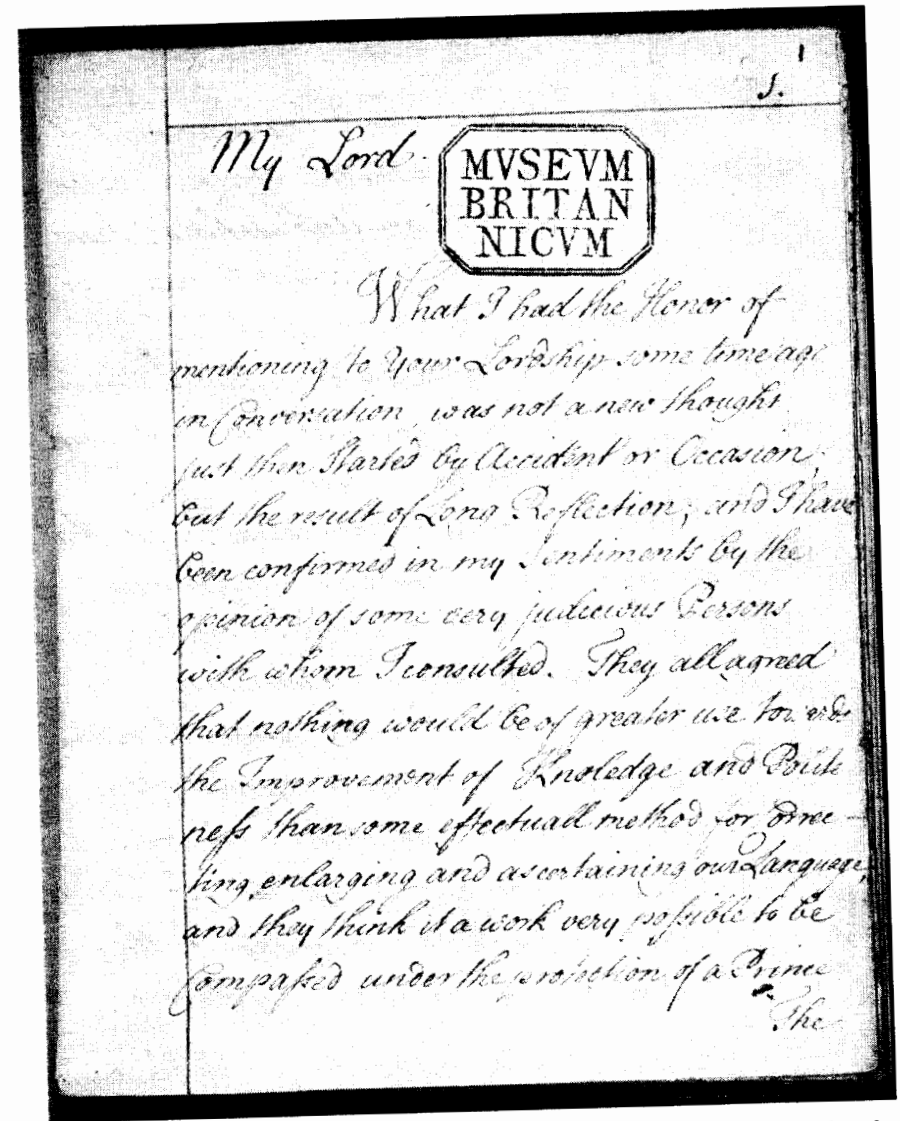


Figure 4a. Jonathan Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*. First page of Harley transcript.

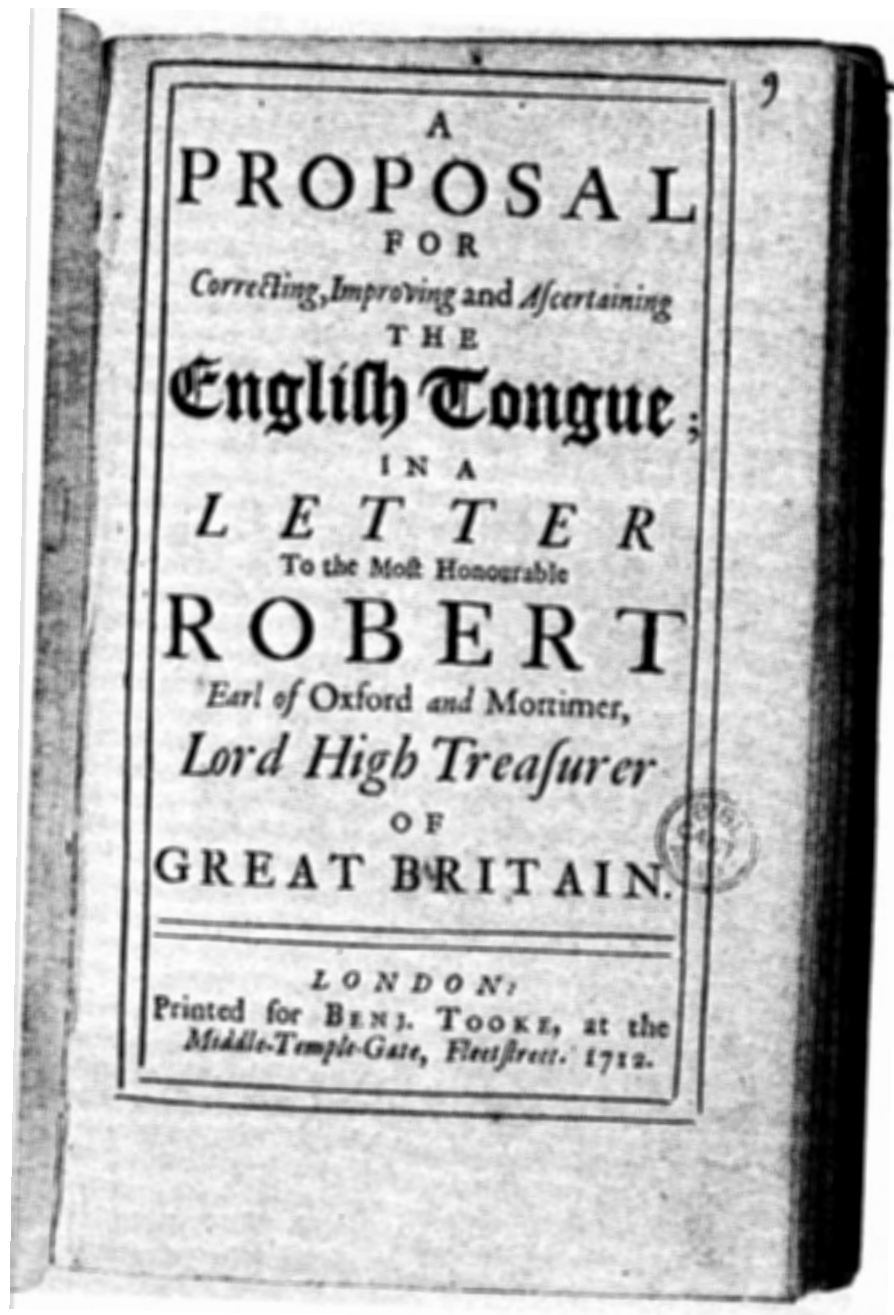


Figure 4b. Jonathan Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, 1712. Title.

To the Most Honourable
ROBERT *Earl of*
OXFORD, &c.¹

MY LORD,

What I had the Honour of mentioning to Your LORDSHIP some time ago in Conversation, was not a new Thought, just then started by Accident or Occasion, but the Result of long Reflection; and I have been confirmed in my Sentiments by the Opinion of some very judicious Persons, with whom I consulted. They all agreed, That nothing would be of greater Use towards the Improvement of Knowledge and Politeness, than some effectual Method for *Correcting, Enlarging and Ascertaining* our Language; and they think it a Work very possible to be compassed, under the Protection of a Prince,² the Countenance and Encouragement of a Ministry, and the Care of proper Persons chosen for such an Undertaking. I was glad to find Your LORDSHIP's Answer in so different a Style, from what hath been commonly made use of on the like Occasions, for some Years

1 1735 adds a headnote: 'It is well known, that if the Queen had lived a Year or two longer, the following Proposal would in all Probability have taken Effect. For the Lord Treasurer had already nominated several Persons without Distinction of Quality or Party, who were to compose a Society for the Purposes mentioned by the Author; and resolved to use his Credit with Her Majesty, that a Fund should be applied to support the Expence of a large Room, where the Society should meet, and for other Incidents. But this Scheme fell to the Ground, partly by the Dissentions among the great Men at Court; but chiefly by the lamented Death of that glorious Princess' (see Textual Introduction). For 'Ascertaining', see *OED*, sense II.8: 'To make (a thing) certain, definite, or precise, by determining exactly its limits, extent, amount, position, etc.; to decide, fix, settle, limit'. Elstob deplored the fact 'that those Persons, who talk so much, of the Honour of our Country, *of the correcting, improving and ascertaining* of our Language, shou'd dress it up in a Character so very strange and ridiculous: or to think of improving it to any degree of Honour and Advantage, by divesting it from the *Saxon* Root, whose Branches were so copious and numerous' (p. iv). Söderlind notes the 'parallel expression in the first few lines, where the word *Enlarging* is found in the place of *Improving*', suggesting 'first the correcting of the existing language, then a fixation allowing for a controlled increase of its resources (chiefly, it would seem, its vocabulary)' ('Swift and Linguistics', 138).

2 a Prince: Queen Anne.

past, *that all such Thoughts must be deferred to a Time of Peace.*³ A Topick which some have carried so far, that they would not have us, by any means, think of preserving our Civil or Religious Constitution,⁴ because we were engaged in a War abroad. It will be among the distinguishing Marks of your Ministry, My LORD, that you had a Genius above all such Regards, and that no reasonable Proposal for the Honour, the Advantage, or the Ornament of Your Country, however foreign to Your more immediate Office, was ever neglected by You. I confess, the Merit of this Candor⁵ and Condescension is very much lessened, because Your LORDSHIP hardly leaves us room to offer our good Wishes, removing all our Difficulties, and supplying our Wants, faster than the most visionary Projector⁶ can adjust his Schemes. And therefore, My LORD, the Design of this Paper is not so much to offer You *Ways and Means*, as to complain of a *Grievance*,⁷ the redressing of which is to be Your own Work, as much as that of paying the *Nation's Debts*, or opening a Trade into the *South Sea*,⁸ and though not of such immediate Benefit as either of these, or any other of Your glorious Actions, yet perhaps, in future Ages, not less to Your Honour.

My LORD; I do here, in the Name of all the Learned and Polite Persons of the Nation, complain to Your LORDSHIP, as *First Minister*,⁹ that our Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; that the Pretenders to polish

³ *to a Time of Peace*: deferring action until the conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession, which the ministry would finally succeed in bringing to an end in 1714 (cf. the precedents cited by Kelly, *English Language*, p. 90).

⁴ *preserving our Civil or Religious Constitution*: Swift stigmatises what he sees as the Whigs' readiness to undermine the privileges of the Church of England under the pretence of cultivating national unity.

⁵ *Candor*: fairness, impartiality.

⁶ *the most visionary Projector*: see n. 130 below.

⁷ *Ways and Means* . . . *Grievance*: playing on two distinct kinds of political business, the former relating to state financing, the latter to the redressing of complaints.

⁸ *paying the Nation's Debts, or opening a Trade into the South Sea*: Swift lamented in October 1710 that 'the new ministry is at a terrible loss about money' (*JSt* (1948), p. 76, and n. 40). In March 1711 he opined that 'This kingdom is certainly ruined as much as was ever any bankrupt merchant. We must have *Peace*, let it be a bad or a good one, though nobody dares talk of it' (p. 20). Later that year Harley formed the South Sea Company, which took on the accumulated national debt in return for the South Sea trade to be guaranteed in the peace to be negotiated. The character of Oxford that Swift drafted for what would become *Four Last Years* emphasises his role in confronting 'such immense Debts as this Nation is involved in' (*JSt* (1948), Appendix IV, pp. 681-3; cf. Davis, vol. VII, Appendix B, pp. 178-80).

⁹ *First Minister*: a use which predates the mid-century first dating in *OED* (cf. 'Prime Minister' below).

and refine it,¹⁰ have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar.¹¹ But lest Your LORDSHIP should think my Censure too severe, I shall take leave to be more particular.

I believe Your LORDSHIP will agree with me in the Reason, Why our Language is less Refined than those of *Italy, Spain, or France*. 'Tis plain that the *Latin* Tongue, in its Purity, was never in this Island; towards the Conquest of which few or no Attempts were made till the Time of *Claudius*,¹² neither was that Language ever so vulgar in *Britain*, as it is known to have been in *Gaul* and *Spain*. Further, we find, that the *Roman* Legions here, were at length all recalled to help their Country against the *Goths*,¹³ and other barbarous Invaders. Mean time, the *Britains*, left to shift for themselves, and daily harassed by cruel Inroads from the *Picts*, were forced to call in the *Saxons*¹⁴ for their Defence; who, consequently, reduced the greatest Part of the Island to their own Power, drove the *Britains* into the most remote and mountainous Parts, and the rest of the Country, in Customs, Religion and Language, became wholly *Saxon*. This I take to be the Reason, why there are more *Latin* Words remaining in the *British* Tongue,¹⁵ than in the old *Saxon*,¹⁶ which, excepting some few Variations

¹⁰ *the Pretenders to polish and refine it*: those who claim they are polishing and refining it.

¹¹ *Grammar*: an idealised classically derived notion of grammar was widely assumed to be universally applicable.

¹² *Claudius*: Emperor of Rome (born 10 BC, reigned AD 41-54). He invaded Britain in AD 43. (Oldmixon accuses Swift of claiming 'That *Caesar* never attempted this Island' (*Reflections*, p. 12), but Swift's view is presumably that Julius Caesar did not follow up his campaign with a full-scale conquest and colonisation.) Swift is arguing that Roman culture was only imposed long after the age of Augustus (customarily reckoned from the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC to the death of Augustus in AD 14), widely considered to be the best period of Latin language and literature.

¹³ *recalled to help their Country against the Goths*: in the late fourth and early fifth centuries AD.

¹⁴ *Picts* . . . *Saxons*: for a similar account, see Temple's *An Introduction to the History of England*, pp. 41-51. Cf. also 'On Barbarous Denominations in Ireland' below.

¹⁵ *the British Tongue*: Welsh.

¹⁶ *the old Saxon*: later known as Anglo-Saxon, and more recently as Old English. Elstob quotes the passage 'the old Saxon . . . *Northern Dialects*', attributing it to 'an ingenious Person, who hath lately made some Proposals for the Refinement of the *English* Tongue'; but she goes on to register her surprise at his later comment that 'The other Languages of *Europe* I know nothing of, neither is there any occasion to consider them', commenting that 'it must be very difficult to imagin, how a Man can judge of a thing he knoweth nothing of, whether there can be occasion or no to consider it' (pp. ix-x). She suggests, in contrast, that the proposed academy should include those who are 'knowing, not only in *Saxon*, but in the

in the Orthography, is the same, in most original Words, with our present *English* as well as with the *German*, and other *Northern* Dialects.

*Edward the Confessor*¹⁷ having lived long in *France*, appears to be the first who introduced any mixture of the *French* Tongue with the *Saxon*; the Court affecting¹⁸ what the Prince was fond of, and others taking it up for a Fashion, as it is now with us. *William the Conqueror*¹⁹ proceeded much further; bringing over with him vast numbers of that Nation; scattering them in every Monastery; giving them great Quantities of Land, directing all Pleadings to be in that Language, and endeavouring to make it universal in the Kingdom. This, at least, is the Opinion generally received: But Your LORDSHIP hath fully convinced me, that the *French* Tongue made yet a greater Progress here under *Harry the Second*, who had large Territories on that Continent, both from his Father and his Wife, made frequent Journeys and Expeditions there, and was always attended with a number of his Countrymen, Retainers at his Court.²⁰ For some Centuries after, there was a constant Intercourse between *France* and *England*, by the Dominions we possessed there, and the Conquests we made; so that our Language, between two and three hundred Years ago, seems to have had a greater mixture with *French*, than at present; many Words having been afterwards rejected, and some since the time of *Spencer*,²¹ although we have still retained not a few, which have been long antiquated in *France*. I could produce several Instances of both kinds, if it were of any Use or Entertainment.

To examine into the several Circumstances by which the Language of a Country may be altered, would force me to enter into a wide Field. I shall only observe, That the *Latin*, the *French*, and the *English*, seem to

other Languages of *Europe*, and so be capable of judging how far those Languages may be useful in such a Project.

17 *Edward the Confessor*: reigned 1042–66.

18 *affecting*: showing an inclination towards.

19 *William the Conqueror*: reigned 1066–87.

20 *This, at least . . . Retainers at his Court*: To judge by its absence from the Harley transcript, this passage would seem to have been added, in compliment to Harley's judgement, after discussion with him. Henry II (1133–89) was the son of the Empress Matilda (1102–67), daughter of Henry I, whose title derived from her first marriage to the Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich V of Germany; but Henry II's father was her second husband, Geoffrey Plantaganet, count of Anjou. Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine (c. 1122–1204), the recently divorced wife of Louis VII of France.

21 *Spencer*: the poet Edmund Spenser (1552?–99). For Swift's ownership of his works, see *Library and Reading*, vol. III, pp. 1720–2.

have undergone the same Fortune. The first, from the Days of *Romulus* to those of *Julius Cæsar*,²² suffered perpetual Changes, and by what we meet in those Authors who occasionally speak on that Subject, as well as from certain Fragments of old Laws, it is manifest, that the *Latin*, Three hundred Years before *Tully*,²³ was as unintelligible in his Time, as the *English* and *French* of the same Period²⁴ are now; and these two have changed as much since *William the Conqueror*, (which is but little less than Seven hundred Years) as the *Latin* appears to have done in the like Term. Whether our Language or the *French* will decline as fast as the *Roman* did, is a Question that would perhaps admit more Debate than it is worth. There were many Reasons for the Corruptions of the last: As, the Change of their Government into a Tyranny, which ruined the Study of Eloquence, there being no further Use or Encouragement for popular Orators.²⁵ Their giving not only the Freedom of the City, but Capacity for Employments,²⁶ to several Towns in *Gaul*, *Spain*, and *Germany*,²⁷ and other distant Parts, as far as *Asia*; which brought a great Number of forein Pretenders into *Rome*: The slavish Disposition of the Senate and People, by which the Wit and Eloquence of the Age were wholly turned into Panegyrick,²⁸ the most barren of all Subjects: The great Corruption of Manners, and Introduction of forein Luxury,²⁹ with forein Terms to express it; with several others that

22 *from the Days of Romulus to those of Julius Cæsar*: from the mythic origins of Rome to the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC.

23 *Tully*: the name by which Cicero was generally known in the Early Modern period (Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106–43 BC). Celebrated for his legal and political oratory, his philosophical works and his familiar letters, he has been seen as exemplary of Latin prose at its most forceful and accomplished. Since his career coincided with the last years of the Roman republic, his work could be seen as demonstrating the distinctive virtues of a government rooted in public deliberation, and could be contrasted with writing under the Emperor Augustus.

24 *the English and French of the same Period*: Swift presumably means the forms of English and French that are as old in his time as the earlier forms of Latin were in Cicero's time.

25 *the Change . . . popular Orators*: see note on Tully above. Oldmixon sees this as evidence that Swift 'has been sometimes forc'd to confess the Power of Truth' (*Reflections*, p. 12).

26 *Capacity for Employments*: eligibility for careers in public service.

27 *several Towns . . . Germany*: Oldmixon discerns 'a Party Stroke in favour of the *Naturalization* Act, to shew what Inconveniences it hinders by preventing Foreigners coming among us to debauch our Stile'; and he adds, ironically, 'as can be seen by the prodigious Number of *Dutch* Words that K. *William* brought with him into *England*' (*Reflections*, p. 12).

28 *The slavish Disposition . . . into Panegyrick*: the senate and people, traditionally held to constitute the Roman state (in the formula 'senatus populusque romanus') are reduced to flattering their emperors. Oldmixon comments of Swift's *Proposal* 'that above half of his Three Sheets of Paper are of that kind of Panegyrick, which is so fatal to great Men' (*Reflections*, p. 13).

29 *forein Luxury*: a consequence of the Romans' world-wide empire.

might be assigned: Not to mention those Invasions from the *Goths* and *Vandals*, which are too obvious to insist on.

The *Roman* Language arrived at great Perfection before it began to decay: And the *French* for these last Fifty Years hath been polishing³⁰ as much as it will bear, and appears to be declining by the natural Inconstancy of that People, and the Affectation of some late Authors to introduce and multiply *Cant* Words,³¹ which is the most ruinous Corruption in any Language. *La Bruyere*,³² a late celebrated Writer among them, makes use of many hundred new Terms, which are not to be found in any of the common Dictionaries before his Time.³³ But the *English* Tongue is not arrived to such a Degree of Perfection, as to make us apprehend any Thoughts of its Decay;³⁴ and if it were once refined to a certain Standard,

30 *And the French for these last fifty Years hath been polishing*: the formal recognition by Louis XII of the Académie Française in the 1630s, with its remit of compiling an authorised dictionary and other linguistic reference works, and of commenting on new books, had focused international attention on the strength and confidence of French literary and linguistic culture. Cf. Temple's view, in 'An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning', that 'The modern French . . . seem to have refined the French language to a degree that cannot be well exceeded', and his further analysis, in 'Of Poetry', of the context for this achievement: 'The Academy set up by Cardinal Richelieu to amuse the wits of that age and country, and divert them from raking into his politics and ministry, brought it in vogue; and the French wits have for this last age been in a manner wholly turned to the refinement of their language, and indeed with such success that it can hardly be excelled, and runs equally through their verse and their prose' (Temple, *Five Essays*, pp. 65, 197–9).

31 *Cant* Words: slang terms (*OED*, 'cant', n.⁴, sense 4a, with first citation from this passage; but for specifically Irish senses, see T. P. Dolan, *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English*, 2nd edn, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2004). For the root sense, the whining tone of beggars, cf. Swift's resentment of suppliants who assume that he has unlimited influence with ministers ('the constant cant of puppies who are at a distance, and strangers to Courts and ministers': *JSt* (1948), pp. 266, 274). B. E. applies '*Canting-crew*' to 'Dissenters in Conventicles, who affect a disguised Speech . . . by a peculiar Snuffle and Tone, as the Shibboleth of their Party . . . and are known no less by their several Tones in Praying, than Beggars are by their whining Note in Begging' (Coleman, *A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries*, vol. I, p. 97). The list of 'Treatises wrote by the same Author' at the front of the *Tale* features '*A Critical Essay upon the Art of Canting, Philosophically, Physically, and Musically considered*', and 'the Art of Canting' is further satirised in Section II of *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* (*CWJS*, vol. I, pp. 4, 180, 523).

32 *La Bruyere*: Jean de la Bruyère (1645–96), French writer, best known for *Les Caractères* (1688).

33 *many hundred new Terms . . . common Dictionaries before his Time*: Oldmixon retorted, 'I should be glad to know, who are those Lexicographers, whose Knowledge in the *French* Tongue he prefers to *La Bruyere*'s; since *Richelet* and the *Academy* are not of his Aera' (*Reflections*, p. 13). The 1727–1735 reading 'many new' softens the accusation.

34 *But the English Tongue . . . its Decay*: the 1735 reading makes the logic more explicit. Swift assumes a cycle in which perfection is followed by decay.

perhaps there might be Ways found out to fix it for ever; or at least till we are invaded and made a Conquest by some other State; and even then our best Writings might probably be preserved with Care, and grow into Esteem, and the Authors have a Chance for Immortality.³⁵

But without such great Revolutions as these, (to which we are, I think, less subject than Kingdoms upon the Continent) I see no absolute Necessity why any Language should be perpetually changing; for we find many Examples to the contrary. From *Homer* to *Plutarch*³⁶ are above a Thousand Years; so long at least the Purity of the *Greek* Tongue may be allow'd to last, and we know not how far before. The *Grecians* spread their Colonies round all the Coasts of *Asia Minor*, even to the *Northern* Parts, lying towards the *Euxine*; in every Island of the *Ægean Sea*, and several others in the *Mediterranean*; where the Language was preserved entire for many Ages, after they themselves became Colonies to *Rome*, and till they were over-run by the barbarous Nations, upon the Fall of that Empire. The *Chinese* have Books in their Language above two Thousand Years old, neither have the frequent Conquests of the *Tartars* been able to alter it. The *German*, *Spanish*, and *Italian*, have admitted few or no Changes for some Ages past. The other Languages of *Europe* I know nothing of, neither is there any occasion to consider them.³⁷

Having taken this compass,³⁸ I return to those Considerations upon our own Language, which I would humbly offer Your LORDSHIP. The Period

35 *refined to a certain Standard . . . Chance for Immortality*: Swift envisages the elimination of the usages of which he disapproves, followed by the establishment of a standard written form of the language which could ensure that the authors of his own day would be understood and admired into the distant future. Oldmixon glossed 'our best Writings' as 'meaning his own and his Friends' (*Reflections*, p. 14). He also dismissed the notion of a permanent standard: 'This wou'd be doing what was never done before, what neither *Roman* nor *Greek*, which lasted the longest of any in its Purity, could pretend to . . . For every Age, as well as every Nation, has its different manner of Thinking, of which the Expression and Words will always have a Relish, and be Barbarous or Polite, according as the Times take their Turn' (*Ibid.*, pp. 26–7).

36 *Homer to Plutarch*: *Homer* was generally assumed to have been a single historical individual, whose life was variously dated. The composition of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is now generally dated to the eighth century BC. The later Greek writer *Plutarch* (c. AD 46 – c. AD 120) wrote biographies, moral discourses and compilations on the cultures of Greece and Rome that proved invaluable to Early Modern enquirers about the classical world.

37 *The other Languages of Europe . . . occasion to consider them*: northern and eastern Europe are assumed to have nothing to contribute to the discussion. Cf. Elstob's comment on 'the old Saxon', n. 16 above.

38 *compass*: survey of the area.

wherein the *English Tongue* received most Improvement, I take to commence with the beginning of Queen *Elizabeth's* Reign, and to conclude with the Great Rebellion in Forty Two.³⁹ 'Tis true, there was a very ill Taste both of Style and Wit, which prevailed under King *James* the First, but that seems to have been corrected in the first Years of his Successor, who among many other Qualifications of an excellent Prince, was a great Patron of Learning.⁴⁰ From the Civil War to this present Time, I am apt to doubt whether the Corruptions in our Language have not at least equalled the Refinements of it; and these Corruptions very few of the best Authors in our Age have wholly escaped. During the Usurpation, such an Infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon⁴¹ prevailed in every Writing, as was not shook off in many Years after. To this succeeded that Licentiousness which entered with the *Restoration*, and from infecting our Religion and Morals, fell to corrupt our Language; which last was not like to be much improved by those who at that Time made up the Court of King *Charles* the Second; either such who had followed Him in His Banishment, or who had been altogether conversant in the Dialect of those *Fanatick Times*; or young Men, who had been educated in the same Company; so that the *Court*, which used to be the Standard of Propriety and Correctness of Speech, was then, and, I think, hath ever since continued the worst School in *England* for that Accomplishment;⁴² and so will remain, till better Care be taken in the Education of our young Nobility,⁴³ that they may set out into

39 *with the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's Reign . . . Great Rebellion in Forty Two*: Elizabeth reigned 1558–1603, and the 'Great Rebellion' (i.e. Civil War) was under way by 1641. Oldmixon took exception to the reference (*Reflections*, p. 14).

40 *a very ill Taste . . . Patron of Learning*: the age of James (reigned 1603–25) is unfavourably contrasted with that of the martyr-king Charles I (acceded 1625, executed 1649), whose character Swift takes particular occasion to commend (cf. Francus, pp. 126–7). Oldmixon challenges Swift to produce 'any Author in the Reign of King *Charles* the Martyr . . . who wrote with the Purity of *Dryden*, *Otway*, and *Etheridge*, and with less Affectation' (*Reflections*, p. 15).

41 *During the Usurpation . . . Enthusiastick Jargon*: a characteristic denunciation of the Commonwealth and of its admission of the language of the Protestant sects into public discourse.

42 *the Court . . . that Accomplishment*: cf. Wagstaff's praise of courtly usage throughout his introduction to *Polite Conversation*.

43 *the Education of our young Nobility*: cf. Swift's maxim that 'Education is always the worse in Proportion to the Wealth and Grandeur of the Parents' (Woolley, *Intelligencer*, no. 9, p. 117; cf. 'Of the Education of Ladies' below). In *GT* the Lilliputians hold 'that Parents are the last of all others to be trusted with the Education of their own Children', and 'Males of Noble or Eminent Birth' are brought up to be strong and virtuous; but Gulliver tells his Houyhnhnm master that 'our young *Noblemen* are bred from their Childhood in Idleness and Luxury', so

the World with some Foundation of Literature, in order to qualify them for Patterns of Politeness.⁴⁴ The Consequence of this Defect, upon our Language, may appear from the Plays, and other Compositions, written for Entertainment within Fifty Years past;⁴⁵ filled with a Succession of affected Phrases, and new, conceited Words,⁴⁶ either borrowed from the current Style of the Court, or from those who, under the Character of Men of Wit and Pleasure, pretended to give the Law.⁴⁷ Many of these Refinements have already been long antiquated, and are now hardly intelligible; which is no wonder, when they were the Product only of Ignorance and Caprice.

I have never known this great Town without one or more *Dunces* of Figure,⁴⁸ who had Credit enough to give Rise to some new Word, and propagate it in most Conversations, though it had neither Humor, nor Significancy. If it struck the present Taste, it was soon transferred into the Plays and current Scribbles of the Week, and became an Addition to our Language; while the Men of Wit and Learning, instead of early obviating⁴⁹ such Corruptions, were too often seduced to imitate and comply with them.

There is another Sett of Men who have contributed very much to the spoiling of the *English Tongue*; I mean the Poets, from the Time of the *Restoration*. These Gentlemen, although they could not be insensible how much our Language was already overstocked with Monosyllables;⁵⁰ yet, to

that 'Imperfections of his Mind run parallel with those of his Body' (part I, ch. VI, Davis, vol. XI, pp. 44–5; part IV, ch. VI, pp. 256–7).

44 *some Foundation of Literature . . . Patterns of Politeness*: Swift insists that true politeness comes from internalising values derived from classical literature.

45 *the Plays . . . Fifty Years past*: many of the expressions disapproved by Swift, notably in *Polite Conversation*, do indeed seem to have reached print in the plays of the late seventeenth century.

46 *conceited Words*: fanciful or ingenious, said with disapproval.

47 *pretended to give the Law*: claimed authority to prescribe fashionable usage.

48 *Dunces of Figure*: men who are fashionable or prominent despite their lack of sound understanding. 'Dunce', implying perverse stupidity, is derived from the name of the thirteenth-century philosopher Duns Scotus, reflecting conventional post-medieval ridicule of the scholastic tradition.

49 *early obviating*: opposing or blocking their progress before they can become established.

50 *overstocked with Monosyllables*: the centrality of monosyllables to the English word-stock is here seen as a defect, in implied comparison with the polysyllables of the romance languages. Addison had declared in *Spectator* 135 that this 'takes off from the Elegance of our Tongue, but at the same time expresses our Ideas in the readiest Manner' (*Spectator*, vol. II, p. 33). Elstob would mount an extensive defence of monosyllables, citing numerous examples from poems of different periods and in different languages (pp. x–xxviii). For related issues in

save Time and Pains, introduced that barbarous Custom of abbreviating Words, to fit them to the Measure of their Verses;⁵¹ and this they have frequently done, so very injudiciously, as to form such harsh unharmonious Sounds, that none but a *Northern Ear*⁵² could endure: They have joined the most obdurate Consonants without one intervening Vowel, only to shorten a Syllable: And their Taste in time became so depraved, that what was at first a Poetical Licence not to be justified, they made their Choice, alledging, that the Words pronounced at length, sounded faint and languid. This was a Pretence to take up the same Custom in Prose; so that most of the Books we see now a-days, are full of those Manglings and Abbreviations.⁵³ Instances of this Abuse are innumerable: What does

late seventeenth-century poetry, cf. Eric Griffiths, 'Dryden's Past', Chatterton Lecture on Poetry, 1993 Lectures and Memoirs, *PBA* 84 (1994), 113–49 (114–25).

- 51 *to save Time . . . their Verses*: the examples given later in the paragraph show that Swift has principally in mind the question of whether or not the '-ed' inflection of the past tense is to be pronounced as a separate syllable. Cf. Addison in *Spectator* 135 (vol. II, pp. 33–4); see also Swift's 'George Nim-Nam-Dean, Esq; to Mr. Sheridan', ostensibly praising a far wider range of instances of 'that Circumcision, / By modern Poets, call'd *Elision*' (Williams, *Poems*, vol. III, p. 1021, lines 11–12). Strang, making the point that the change in pronunciation 'was not a new development, and it had nothing whatever to do with poetic licence', relates Swift's views to his care for the stability of the written language, and summarises evidence of his later revisions to the longer forms: see notes to his previous comments on contractions in *Tatler* 230 (pp. 1950–1). For contractions in drama from the later sixteenth century, and for early seventeenth-century recognition of their potential for avoiding 'a gaping in our verse', see Salmon, 'Orthography and Punctuation', p. 18. Oldmixon cites 'The Humble Petition of Frances Harris' to demonstrate that 'the Clamour he raises about the Poets of King *Charles* the Second's Reign, the only Age of Poetry in *England*, is for their Contractions and leaving out the *Eds* and *Eths*, wherein he offends intollerably in this very Dogrel of his', going on to cite earlier authority for the practice (*Reflections*, pp. 16–20). Elstob would be careful to exclude from her defence of monosyllables 'any of our *Moderns* who contract Words into *Monosyllables* to botch up their Verses, much less such as do it out of Affectation', while pointing out the flexibility that monosyllables afford in verse (p. xiv).
- 52 *none but a Northern ear*: implying that English, and its speakers, ought to identify linguistically with the romance languages of southern Europe, rather than with the Germanic or Scandinavian elements in their heritage.
- 53 *This was a Pretence . . . Manglings and Abbreviations*: Swift does not clearly distinguish the loss of syllables in pronunciation from the representation of their absence in print, typically effected by replacing the 'e' in the ending of affected past tenses with an apostrophe, as in the examples cited below (see Introduction and cf. *Tatler* 230 above). Comparable procedures were often adopted with regard to words whose spelling represented other elements no longer pronounced. Ironically, a few examples slipped through into the first edition of the *Proposal for Correcting*: 'tho' in particular was so useful to printers seeking to fit an extra word into the line as to give them a vested interest in the contracted form (cf. Strang, pp. 1950–1). The SwJ 466 reading 'stuffed with those kinds of' suggests that Swift had originally expressed himself in the less elegant but more forceful English monosyllables whose prominence in the

YOUR LORDSHIP think of the Words, *Drudg'd, Disturb'd, Rebuk't, Fledg'd*, and a thousand others, every where to be met in Prose as well as Verse? Where, by leaving out a Vowel to save a Syllable, we form so jarring a Sound, and so difficult to utter,⁵⁴ that I have often wondred how it could ever obtain.

Another Cause (and perhaps borrowed from the former) which hath contributed not a little to the maiming of our Language, is a foolish Opinion, advanced of late Years, that we ought to spell exactly as we speak,⁵⁵ which beside the obvious Inconvenience of utterly destroying our Etymology, would be a thing we should never see an End of. Not only the several Towns and Countries⁵⁶ of *England*, have a different way of Pronouncing, but even here in *London*, they clip⁵⁷ their Words after one Manner about the Court, another in the City, and a third in the Suburbs; and in a few Years, it is probable, will all differ from themselves, as Fancy or Fashion shall direct: All which reduced to Writing would entirely confound Orthography.⁵⁸ Yet many People are so fond of this Conceit, that it is sometimes a difficult matter to read modern Books and Pamphlets; where the Words are so curtailed, and varied from their original Spelling, that whoever hath been used to plain *English*, will hardly know them by sight.⁵⁹

word-stock he has just been deploring: cf. Blake, 'Jonathan Swift and the English Language', 108.

- 54 *so difficult to utter*: for the phonetic implications of Swift's examples, see Söderlind, suggesting the relative novelty of some of these combinations ('Swift and Linguistics', 138–9). All became standard pronunciations, suggesting that Swift's argument from difficulty of articulation is to some extent a rationalisation of a disapproval in principle.
- 55 *we ought to spell exactly as we speak*: although at first Swift seems to attack, via an appeal to regional and chronological variation in pronunciation, the schemes proposed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries for bringing spelling into line with current pronunciation (see Salmon, 'Orthography and Punctuation', pp. 44–6; Kelly, *English Language*, pp. 94–6), what is apparently uppermost in his mind is the relatively trivial adaptations by which printed texts denoted the fact that some elements were no longer pronounced. For adjustment of spelling to pronunciation, cf. Addison in *Spectator* 135 (*Spectator*, p. 35).
- 56 *Countries*: despite the modernising readings of SwJ 466 and 1735 (possibly anticipated by a correction in SwJ 465), the copy text is fully intelligible in terms of the older sense in which 'country' denotes district or county (*OED*, sense 2a).
- 57 *clip*: for connections with the crime of clipping precious metal from coins, and wider analogies between the circulation of words and of money in Swift and Pope, see Nokes, "'Hack at Tom Poley's'", pp. 48–55.
- 58 *entirely confound Orthography*: again, the comparison with SwJ 466 shows Swift eliminating forceful if inelegant English monosyllables (see Historical Collation). An analogy with clothes and bodies was also removed.
- 59 *a difficult matter . . . hardly know them by sight*: like the appeal to difficulty of pronunciation above, this claim for the unintelligibility of the abbreviations, contractions and spellings

Several young Men at the Universities, terribly possessed with the fear of Pedantry, run into a worse Extream, and think all Politeness to consist in reading the daily Trash sent down to them from hence:⁶⁰ This they call *knowing the World*, and *reading Men and Manners*.⁶¹ Thus furnished they come up to Town, reckon all their Errors for Accomplishments, borrow the newest Sett of Phrases, and if they take a Pen into their Hands, all the odd Words they have picked up in a Coffee-House, or a Gaming Ordinary,⁶² are produced as Flowers of Style; and the Orthography refined⁶³ to the utmost. To this we owe those monstrous Productions, which under the Names of *Trips*, *Spies*, *Amusements*, and other conceited Appellations,⁶⁴ have over-run us for some Years past. To this we owe that strange Race of Wits, who tell us, they Write to the *Humour of the Age*: And I wish I could say, these quaint Fopperies were wholly absent from graver Subjects. In short, I would undertake to shew Your LORDSHIP several Pieces, where the Beauties of this kind are so predominant, that with all your Skill in Languages, you could never be able either to read or understand them.

But I am very much mistaken, if many of these false Refinements among us, do not arise from a Principle which would quite destroy their Credit, if it were well understood and considered. For I am afraid, My LORD, that with all the real good Qualities of our Country, we are naturally not very Polite. This perpetual Disposition to shorten our Words, by retrenching the Vowels, is nothing else but a tendency to lapse into the Barbarity of those *Northern* Nations from whom we are descended, and whose Languages labour all under the same Defect. For it is worthy our Observation, that the *Spaniards*, the *French*, and the *Italians*, although derived from the same *Northern* Ancestors with our selves, are, with the utmost Difficulty, taught to pronounce our Words, which the *Suedes* and *Danes*, as well as the

current in print at this time seems an exaggerated rationalisation of a dislike conceived on other grounds.

60 *sent down to them from hence*: sent from London to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

61 *knowing the World, and reading Men and Manners*: cf. *Tatler* 230.

62 *a Gaming Ordinary*: a public house where gambling is carried on.

63 *refined*: in an ironic sense. Cf. 'the false Refinements in our Style' in *Tatler* 230.

64 *Trips, Spies, Amusements, and other conceited Appellations*: an attack on popular publications by writers such as Edward Ward (1667–1731), who 'hit on the word "trip" for the folio feuilletons in which he (and, promptly, his imitators) choose odd locations as a situation of writing', and 'derived both the title and conceit of *The London Spy* from *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*' (Ormsby-Lennon, "'Trips, Spies, Amusements'", p. 194). 'Trip' and 'spy' seem to have been much more prevalent in current titles than 'amusement'.

Germans and the *Dutch*, attain to with Ease, because our Syllables resemble theirs in the Roughness and Frequency of Consonants.⁶⁵ Now, as we struggle with an ill Climate to improve the nobler kinds of Fruit, are at the Expence of Walls to receive and reverberate the faint Rays of the Sun, and fence against the *Northern* Blasts; we sometimes by the help of a good Soil equal the Productions of warmer Countries, who have no need to be at so much Cost or Care.⁶⁶ It is the same thing with respect to the politer Arts among us; and the same Defect of Heat which gives a Fierceness to our Natures, may contribute to that Roughness of our Language, which bears some Analogy to the harsh Fruit of colder Countries. For I do not reckon that we want a *Genius* more than the rest of our Neighbours: But Your LORDSHIP will be of my Opinion, that we ought to struggle with these natural Disadvantages as much as we can, and be careful whom we employ, whenever we design to correct them, which is a Work that has hitherto been assumed by the least qualified Hands.⁶⁷ So that if the Choice had been left to me, I would rather have trusted the Refinement of our Language, as far as it relates to Sound,⁶⁸ to the Judgment of the Women, than

65 *This perpetual Disposition . . . the Roughness and Frequency of Consonants*: Swift assumes that all European nations share a common descent from northern ancestors, and argues that the English should aspire to politeness by renouncing, as their southern neighbours have done, a barbarous linguistic inheritance marked by excessive congestion of consonants.

66 *Now, as we struggle . . . Cost or Care*: Swift's early patron Sir William Temple, a keen fruit-grower, speculated on the relationship between the state of gardening and the wider culture of past empires ('Upon the Gardens of Epicurus', in Temple, *Five Essays*, pp. 1–36: for the challenges of ripening fruit in the English climate, see pp. 21–7; and for Swift's statement that 'Our chilling Climate hardly bears / A Sprig of Bays in Fifty Years', see *On Poetry: A Rhapsody*, Williams, *Poems*, vol. II, p. 640, lines 7–8). Swift himself was deeply interested in the quality and availability of fruit, despite his belief that gorging on apples had caused his deafness and giddiness (since identified as Mènière's disease: see Mayhew, *Rage or Raillery*, pp. 115–20). His sensitivity to weather likely to affect the setting and ripening of the fruit at Laracor is abundantly testified in *JSt* and in his account books (*JSt* (1948), e.g. pp. 283, 295, 299, 338, 349, 356, 459, 537, 543, 565; *The Account Books of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Paul V. Thompson and Dorothy J. Thompson, Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Scolar Press, 1984, p. lxxxiii).

67 *the least qualified Hands*: the writers and trend-setters whose alleged innovations Swift has already criticised.

68 *as far as it relates to Sound*: articulating a surprising twist by which Swift momentarily appeals to female authority against male, deploying the conventional mapping of the sound/sense distinction onto the hierarchy of gender to paradoxical effect. Oldmixon retorts: 'because they are softer mouth'd, and are more for *Liquids* than the Men, as he try'd himself in a very notable Experiment' (*Reflections*, p. 2). Elstob takes occasion from this passage to play upon the supposed problem of monosyllables and accumulated consonants in gendered terms, concluding that 'the worst that can be said on this occasion of our Forefathers is,

of illiterate Court-Fops, half-witted-Poets, and University-Boys. For, it is plain that Women in their manner of corrupting Words,⁶⁹ do naturally discard the Consonants, as we do the Vowels. What I am going to tell Your LORDSHIP, appears very trifling; that more than once, where some of both Sexes were in Company, I have persuaded two or three of each, to take a Pen, and write down a number of Letters joyned together, just as it came into their Heads, and upon reading this Gibberish we have found that which the Men had writ, by the frequent encountering of rough Consonants, to sound like *High-Dutch*;⁷⁰ and the other by the Women, like *Italian*, abounding in Vowels and Liquids. Now, though I would by no means give Ladies the Trouble of advising us⁷¹ in the Reformation of our Language; yet I cannot help thinking, that since they have been left out of all Meetings, except Parties at Play, or where worse Designs are carried on, our Conversation hath very much degenerated.⁷²

In order to reform our Language, I conceive, My LORD, that a free judicious Choice should be made of such Persons, as are generally allowed to be best qualified for such a Work,⁷³ without any regard to Quality, Party,

that they spoke as they fought, like Men'; and she goes on to concede that 'The Author of the *Proposal*, may think this but an ill Return, for the soft things he has said of the Ladies', while expressing an amused scepticism about 'the ingenious Experiment of his vocal Ladies' (pp. x-xi).

- 69 *their manner of corrupting Words*: Swift characteristically ascribes corruption to all users of language, regardless of gender, though women's corruption is in this particular respect represented as lending itself to polite euphony (cf. Sheridan's *Ars Pun-ica* (pp. 24-5)). He goes on to deploy conventional contrasts between the manly (if barbaric) north and the effeminate (if polite) south, with analogous contrasts between the harsh monosyllables and accumulated consonants of northern languages, and the 'Vowels and Liquids' of the romance languages.
- 70 *High-Dutch*: the language of southern Germany (as opposed to the 'low Dutch' of northern Germany and the Netherlands).
- 71 *I would by no means give Ladies the Trouble of advising us*: at this point Swift deftly restores language to masculine custodianship by a turn of ostensible gallantry. Cf. the view of the French academician Claude Favre de Vaugelas that female courtiers could provide authority for usage (*Remarques sur la langue française*, 'Preface'; for Swift's ownership of a later edition, see *Library and Reading*, vol. I, pp. 602-4). Cf. also Orrery: 'He communicated every composition as soon as finished, to his female senate, who . . . passed their judgement on the performance' (Orrery, *Remarks*, p. 168).
- 72 *yet I cannot help thinking . . . very much degenerated*: Swift laments that masculine society admits women only to play cards or other games, or, he hints balefully, when loose women are required for 'worse Designs' than gambling. For his advocacy of mixed conversation, see Introduction above.
- 73 *In order to reform . . . qualified for such a Work*: reports picked up by Maynwaring and Oldmixon assumed that the new group would be based on one to which Swift already belonged. He had

or Profession.⁷⁴ These, to a certain Number at least,⁷⁵ should assemble at some appointed Time and Place, and fix on Rules by which they design to proceed. What Methods they will take, is not for me to prescribe. Your LORDSHIP, and other Persons in great Employment, might please to be of the Number; and I am afraid, such a Society would want Your Instruction and Example, as much as Your Protection: For, I have, not without a little Envy, observed of late, the Style of some great Ministers⁷⁶ very much to exceed that of any other Productions.

The Persons who are to undertake this Work, will have the Example of the *French*⁷⁷ before them, to imitate where these have proceeded right, and to avoid their Mistakes. Beside the Grammar-part, wherein we are allowed to be very defective,⁷⁸ they will observe many gross Improperities, which however authorised by Practice,⁷⁹ and grown familiar, ought to be discarded. They will find many Words that deserve to be utterly thrown out of our Language, many more to be corrected; and perhaps not a few,

reported on 21 June 1711 that the associates with whom he habitually dined had 'erected a Club, and made me one', explaining that 'The end of our Club is to advance conversation and friendship, and to reward deserving persons with our interest and recommendation', and that its membership was restricted to 'men of wit or men of interest [i.e. influence, power]' (*JSt* (1948), pp. 294, 505: it was also known as the Society, and Swift called his fellow-members 'brother'). It was on the next day, 22 June, that he explained to Johnson and Dingley his project regarding the language: 'I am proposing to my lord to erect a society or academy for correcting and settling our language, that we may not perpetually be changing as we do', and reported that Oxford 'enters mightily into it' (p. 295). (The word 'academy' is not in fact used in the *Proposal for Correcting*.) Oldmixon admitted that the design 'must be own'd to be very good in it self', but pointed out that it was not a new idea (*Reflections*, p. 10).

- 74 *without any Regard to Quality, Party, or Profession*: ignoring social status, political connections and affiliation to clerical, legal or other professional interests. Oldmixon assumed that the Tories would take the majority of places: 'tho' he is so generous as to promise the Whigs that they shall come in if they will, he must look 'em out better Company, or his Academy will have the Glory of this great Work to themselves' (*Reflections*, p. 10).
- 75 *to a certain Number at least*: Swift seems to envisage a quorum necessary to constitute a meeting.
- 76 *the Style of some great Ministers*: a compliment most obviously aimed at Oxford and Bolingbroke, predictably ridiculed by Oldmixon (*Reflections*, p. 21).
- 77 *the Example of the French*: i.e. the Académie Française. Swift is careful in what follows not to imply that this institution of an enemy state offers an unambiguous model for England to imitate. Oldmixon dismisses those who 'ape their good Friends the *French*, who for these three or fourscore Years have been attempting to make their Tongue as Imperious as their Power' (*Reflections*, p. 2).
- 78 *the Grammar-part . . . very defective*: because not consistent with the idealised grammar derived from study of the classics.
- 79 *however authorised by Practice*: the authority of usage is countenanced only where it does not conflict with Swift's conviction of what constitute 'gross Improperities'.

long since antiquated, which ought to be restored, on account of their Energy and Sound.⁸⁰

But what I have most at Heart is, that some Method should be thought on for *ascertaining* and *fixing* our Language for ever, after such Alterations are made in it as shall be thought requisite. For I am of Opinion, that it is better a Language should not be wholly perfect, than that it should be perpetually changing; and we must give over at one Time, or at length infallibly change for the worse.⁸¹ As the *Romans* did, when they began to quit their *Simplicity* of Style for affected Refinements; such as we meet in *Tacitus* and other Authors,⁸² which ended by degrees in many Barbarities, even before the *Goths* had invaded *Italy*.

The Fame of our Writers is usually confined to these two Islands,⁸³ and it is hard it should be limited in *Time*, as much as *Place*, by the perpetual Variations of our Speech.⁸⁴ It is Your LORDSHIP's Observation, that if it were not for the *Bible*⁸⁵ and *Common Prayer Book* in the vulgar Tongue, we should hardly be able to understand any Thing that was written among us an hundred Years ago: Which is certainly true: For those Books being perpetually read in Churches, have proved a kind of Standard for

80 *not a few... Energy and Sound*: cf. Elstob's hope that 'many useful and significant Words... might be revived and recalled... which wou'd be the more beautiful... by confessing a *Saxon* Original for their native Stock, or an Affinity with those Branches of the other *Northern Tongues*, which own the same Original' (p. x). Swift's appeal to 'Energy' is somewhat at variance with his previous commendation of the euphony of southern European 'Vowels and Liquids'.

81 *we must give over at one Time... change for the worse*: according to the model previously invoked, by which languages progressively improve towards a perfection that is inevitably followed by decay. The challenge for English is to make the necessary improvements without passing the tipping-point.

82 *Tacitus and other Authors*: for Swift's admiration of the Roman historian Tacitus (*b.* AD 56 or 57, *d.* after 117), and his frequent references to him, see *Library and Reading*, vol. III, pp. 1784–90; for Swift's manuscript notes on his reading of Tacitus, see Irvin Ehrenpreis and James L. Clifford, 'Swiftiana in Rylands English MS.659 and Related Documents', *BJRL* 37 (1955), 368–92 (385). While Swift connected the stylistic features that he disliked in Tacitus with the corruption of the later Roman Empire under which he lived, he admired his analysis of tyranny: 'he shared with the great historian of the decline of the Roman empire the view of the decline of his own times'. Oldmixon contradicted the judgement that Swift here expresses (*Reflections*, p. 22).

83 *these two Islands*: Britain and Ireland.

84 *hard it should... Variations of our Speech*: i.e. it is particularly unfortunate that this further limitation should restrict English writers' fame. Cf. the 1709 Apology for the *Tale*: 'Therefore, since the Book seems calculated to live at least as long as our Language, and our Tast admit no great Alterations, I am content to convey some Apology along with it' (*CWJS*, vol. I, p. 5).

85 *the Bible*: in the so-called Authorised or King James translation, first published in 1611.

Language, especially to the common People.⁸⁶ And I doubt whether the Alterations since introduced,⁸⁷ have added much to the Beauty or Strength of the *English* Tongue, though they have taken off a great deal from that *Simplicity*, which is one of the greatest Perfections in any Language.⁸⁸ You, My LORD, who are so conversant in the Sacred Writings, and so great a Judge of them in their Originals,⁸⁹ will agree, that no Translation our Country ever yet produced, hath come up to that of the *Old* and *New Testament*: And by the many beautiful Passages, which I have often had the Honor to hear Your LORDSHIP cite from thence,⁹⁰ I am persuaded that the Translators of the Bible were Masters of an *English* Style much fitter for that Work, than any we see in our present Writings, which I take to be owing to the *Simplicity* that runs through the whole. Then, as to the greatest part of our *Liturgy*, compiled long before the Translation of the *Bible* now in use, and little altered since;⁹¹ there seem to be in it as great strains of true sublime Eloquence, as are any where to be found in our Language; which every Man of good Taste will observe in the *Communion-Service*, that of *Burial*, and other Parts.

But where I say, that I would have our Language, after it is duly correct, always to last; I do not mean that it should never be enlarged: Provided, that no Word which a Society⁹² shall give a Sanction to, be afterwards

86 *especially to the common People*: who, not being able to read, or reading little beyond the Bible and BCP, would take deeply to heart the weekly reading aloud of these texts in church.

87 *the Alterations since introduced*: into the English language (not the King James Bible or BCP, which would retain their archaic forms indefinitely). Oldmixon claims that 'our Tongue is not so variable in the best Authors as the Doctor represents it, and the difference between the present *English* and the *English* a Hundred Years ago, is not so great as between the Old and Modern *French* in that Term': *Reflections*, p. 22). He goes on to ridicule Swift's implied appeal to 'Parts of Learning' reliant on 'Old Musty Manuscripts' and 'Tongues which have not one Polite Book to recommend them' (p. 23).

88 *that Simplicity, which is one of the greatest Perfections in any Language*: cf. Friendly's comment on modern conversation in *Tatler* 12: 'That Simplicity of Behaviour, which is the Perfection of good Breeding and good Sense, is utterly lost in the World; and in the Room of it, there are started a Thousand little Inventions, which Men, barren of better Things, take up in the Place of it' (vol. I, p. 106).

89 *so great a Judge of them in their Originals*: complimenting Oxford on his ability to read and appreciate the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek.

90 *the many beautiful Passages... cite from thence*: a striking commendation of Oxford's taste and piety as demonstrated in familiar conversation.

91 *the greatest part of our Liturgy... little altered since*: Swift notes that the BCP is only slightly altered from the Tudor prayerbooks, 'compiled long before' the King James Bible that is 'now in use'.

92 *a Society*: i.e. a society set up as envisaged in the *Proposal*.

Subjects Hearts; but these are too perishable to preserve their Memories, which can only be done by the Pens of able and faithful Historians. And I take it to be Your LORDSHIP's Duty, as *Prime Minister*,¹⁰² to give order for inspecting our Language, and rendring it fit to record the History of so great and good a Princess.¹⁰³ Besides, My LORD, as disinterested as You appear to the World, I am convinced, that no Man is more in the Power of a prevailing favorite Passion than Your Self;¹⁰⁴ I mean that Desire of true and lasting Honor, which you have born along with You through every Stage of Your Life. To this You have often sacrificed Your Interest, Your Ease and Your Health: For preserving and encreasing this, you have exposed Your Person to secret Treachery, and open Violence.¹⁰⁵ There is not perhaps an Example in History of any Minister, who in so short a time hath performed so many great Things, and overcome so many great Difficulties. Now, tho' I am fully convinced, that You fear God, honor Your QUEEN, and love Your Country, as much as any of Your Fellow-Subjects; yet I must believe that the Desire of Fame hath been no inconsiderable Motive to quicken You in the Pursuit of those Actions which will best deserve it. But at the same time, I must be so plain as to tell Your LORDSHIP, that if You will not take some Care to settle our Language, and put it into a state of Continuance, I cannot promise that Your Memory shall be preserved above an hundred Years, further than by imperfect Tradition.

102 *Prime Minister*: cf. 'first Minister' above. *OED* shows the term initially applied to foreign rather than British politicians: cf. Oldmixon's denunciation of the term as emblematic of the French-styled absolutism that he takes to be implicit in Swift's scheme (*Reflections*, p. 30).

103 *Princess*: Queen Anne. Although Swift attended court regularly, he was never presented to the Queen (cf. his letter to King of 28 November 1710, reporting earlier hopes that 'in a few days, Mr. Harley tells me, he will introduce me': *Corr*, vol. I, p. 316). He joked to Johnson and Dingley that 'The queen made me a curtsy, and said, in a sort of familiar way to Presto, How does MD? I considered she was a queen, and so excused her' (*JSt* (1948), p. 85).

104 *no Man is more . . . than Your Self*: Swift embarks on an elaborate instance of his favourite device of raillery (see 'Hints towards an Essay' below). He appears to be condemning Oxford for being dominated by a ruling passion – but goes on to explain that this passion is the commendable one of 'Desire of true and lasting Honor'. Cf. Loveman, *Reading Fictions*, pp. 156–7.

105 *exposed Your Person to secret Treachery, and open Violence*: in addition to the metaphorical back-stabbing of political life (cf. Swift's accusations against the Whigs in *Examiner* 33: Davis, vol. III, p. 116), Oxford had in March 1711 been literally stabbed by the French spy Guiscard. For Swift's private grief and alarm, see *JSt* (1948), pp. 210–14; for his public account, see *Examiner* 32 (Davis, vol. III, pp. 106–10).

As barbarous and ignorant as we were in former Centuries, there was more effectual Care taken by our Ancestors, to preserve the Memory of Times and Persons, than we find in this Age of Learning and Politeness, as we are pleased to call it. The rude *Latin* of the *Monks* is still very intelligible; whereas, had their Records been delivered down only in the vulgar Tongue, so barren and so barbarous, so subject to continual succeeding Changes,¹⁰⁶ they could not now be understood, unless by Antiquaries¹⁰⁷ who made it their Study to expound them. And we must at this Day have been content with such poor Abstracts of our *English* Story, as laborious Men of low Genius would think fit to give us; And even these in the next Age would be likewise swallowed up in succeeding Collections. If Things go on at this rate, all I can promise Your LORDSHIP is, that about two hundred Years hence, some painful Compiler, who will be at the Trouble of studying Old Language, may inform the World, that in the Reign of QUEEN ANNE, ROBERT Earl of OXFORD, a very wise and excellent Man,¹⁰⁸ was made *High Treasurer*, and saved his Country, which in those Days was almost ruined by a *Foreign War*, and a *Domestick Faction*.¹⁰⁹ Thus much he may be able to pick out, and willing to transfer into his new History; but the rest of Your Character, which I or any other Writer may now value our selves by drawing, and the particular Account of the great Things done under Your Ministry, for which You are already so celebrated in most Parts of *Europe*,

106 *the vulgar Tongue . . . succeeding Changes*: cf. the development of Middle English represented in the Peterborough Chronicle, where 'Monks' had indeed recorded history 'in the vulgar Tongue' over a period of marked linguistic change.

107 *unless by Antiquaries*: cf. Swift's dismissal of such scholars below as 'laborious Men of low Genius', typified by 'some painful Compiler'. His concern is not with specialist exploration of older forms of the language, but with easy access to the literary heritage for a general educated readership. In relation to historiography, a major concern of his programme, he assumes that antiquarians will 'think fit to give us' only 'poor Abstracts' mechanically compiled into 'Collections'. Elstob commences a vigorous riposte by arguing that 'it is very hard, that those who labour and take so much pains to furnish others with Materials, either for Writing, or for Discourse, who have not Leisure, or Skill, or Industry enough to serve themselves, shou'd be allow'd no other Instances of Gratitude, than the reproachful Title of Men of *low Genius*', noting that such scholars at least 'carry some Ballast', in contrast with the 'light and fluttering Wits' of their critics (pp. xxix–xxxv).

108 *a very wise and excellent Man*: Maynwaring noted sardonically that 'the *great Things* done by that *very Wise and Excellent Man*, will not so easily be forgotten; nor the *rest* of his Character be *dropt*, for which he is already *so celebrated in most Parts of Europe*' (*The British Academy*, p. 7).

109 *a Foreign War, and a Domestick Faction*: a tendentiously balanced pairing, neatly implying that the war was none of England's business, and that the Whigs and Dissenters who opposed the peace advocated by the Queen's ministers were no more than a 'Faction'.

will probably be dropt, on account of the antiquated Style, and Manner they are delivered in.

How then shall any Man who hath a Genius for History, equal to the best of the Antients,¹¹⁰ be able to undertake such a Work with Spirit and Cheerfulness, when he considers, that he will be read with Pleasure but a very few Years, and in an Age or two shall hardly be understood without an Interpreter? This is like employing an excellent Statuary to work upon mouldring Stone.¹¹¹ Those who apply their Studies to preserve the Memory of others,¹¹² will always have some Concern for their own. And I believe it is for this Reason, that so few Writers among us, of any Distinction, have turned their Thoughts to such a discouraging Employment:¹¹³ For the best *English* Historian must lie under this Mortification,¹¹⁴ that when his Style grows antiquated, he will be only considered as a tedious Relator of Facts; and perhaps consulted in his turn, among other neglected Authors, to furnish Materials for some future Collector.

I doubt,¹¹⁵ Your LORDSHIP is but ill entertained with a few scattered Thoughts, upon a Subject that deserves to be treated with Ability and Care: However, I must beg leave to add a few Words more, perhaps not

110 *the best of the Antients*: Swift aspires to see English historians rank alongside the great historians of Greece and Rome. In what follows he has in mind his own history of recent political events, and his hopes of appointment as Historiographer Royal. He later wrote of his 'Memorials of the four last years of the Queen's reign' in connection with 'an employment then design'd me', but comments that 'as it was at the disposal of a person, who had not the smallest share of steddiness or sincerity, I disdained to accept it' (*Corr*, vol. I, pp. 355, 363, n. 5: letter dated 10 January 1721, but see headnote). Faulkner identified the 'employment' as 'Historiographer', but wrongly identified the 'person' as the Duke of Kent, rather than as Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury, who had succeeded Kent as Lord Chamberlain.

111 *to work upon mouldring Stone*: cf. Waller's 'On English Verse': 'Time, if we use ill-chosen stone, / Soon brings a well-built palace down. // Poets that lasting marble seek, / Must carve in Latin, or in Greek' (Edmund Waller, *The Poems of Edmund Waller*, ed. G. Thorn Drury, 2 vols., London: Routledge, n.d., vol. II, p. 70). Oldmixon suggested that 'the Doctor need not be afraid of People's forgetting his Patron a Hundred Years hence, if he can write as good *English* upon him now, as Mr. Waller did' (*Reflections*, p. 25).

112 *Those who . . . Memory of others*: historians.

113 *so few Writers . . . such a discouraging Employment*: a slur that Oldmixon may have taken particularly to heart, since he would during his career produce a substantial body of historical works in the Whig interest.

114 *the best English Historian must lie under this Mortification*: however excellent such a historian might be, he would still face this disappointing prospect.

115 *I doubt*: Swift draws together in his peroration his compliments to his patron and his larger hope that the age of Anne will prove both glorious in the present and famous to posterity, a programme in which, as Oldmixon was quick to note, his own writerly aspirations have an obvious role.

altogether foreign to the same Matter. I know not whether that which I am going to say, may pass for Caution, Advice, or Reproach, any of which will be justly thought very improper from one in my Station, to one in Yours. However, I must venture to affirm, that if Genius and Learning be not encouraged under Your LORDSHIP's Administration, you are the most inexcusable Person alive.¹¹⁶ All Your other Virtues,¹¹⁷ My LORD, will be defective without this; Your Affability, Candor, and good Nature; that perpetual agreeableness of Conversation, so disengaged in the midst of such a Weight of Business and Opposition;¹¹⁸ Even Your Justice, Prudence, and Magnanimity, will shine less bright without it. Your LORDSHIP is universally allowed to possess a very large Portion in most Parts of Literature;¹¹⁹ and to this You owe the cultivating those many Virtues, which otherwise would have been less adorned, or in lower Perfection.¹²⁰ Neither can You acquit your self of these Obligations, without letting the Arts, in their turn, share Your Influence and Protection: Besides, who knows, but some *true Genius* may happen to arise under Your Ministry, *exortus ut aetherius*

116 *I must venture to affirm . . . the most inexcusable Person alive*: another stroke of raillery, in which an apparent (if conditional) insult works to arrest attention, only to be resolved into a reminder of the 'many Virtues' that Oxford has refined though his knowledge of 'most Parts of Literature', conferring upon him 'Obligations' to return the benefit by founding the society for which Swift has been arguing.

117 *Your other Virtues*: in a rhetorical flourish, Swift takes occasion to praise virtues not directly relevant to the argument at hand. Cf. his reflection in May 1711 on Harley's being ennobled as Earl of Oxford: 'I should believe he will be the same man still, bating the necessary forms of grandeur he must keep up' (*JSt* (1948), p. 275). Cf. also Swift's praise of Oxford to King, and the character drafted by Swift for *Four Last Years*: Oxford took the opportunity that Swift offered 'of correcting it with his Pencil' (*Corr*, vol. I, p. 361 (12 July 1711), 372 (26 August 1711); *JSt* (1948), pp. 613–14, Appendix IV, pp. 681–3).

118 *so disengaged in the midst of such a Weight of Business and Opposition*: cf. Swift's private description of Oxford as 'the greatest procrastinator in the world', a trait that filled him with apprehension that events would be allowed to drift out of control (*JSt* (1948), p. 400). In the character drafted for *Four Last Years*, 'His Love of Procrastination' provides a marked instance of Swift's plain speaking (however artfully softened in what follows) that bears out his description of the character's being 'drawn pretty freely' (pp. 613–24, 638). Swift notes that he calls 'his day when all the Ministers dine with him . . . whipping day . . . and we do indeed usually railly him about his Faults on that day' (p. 599).

119 *a very large Portion in most Parts of Literature*: Oxford's library, the Harleian collection, was particularly remarkable for its huge range of medieval and later manuscripts, now incorporated into the British Library. Cf. Swift's character of Oxford: 'I believe there are few Examples to be produced in any Age of the World, of a Person who hath passed through so many Employments in the State, endowed with so great a Share both of divine and human Learning' (*JSt* (1948), p. 683).

120 *to this You owe . . . in lower Perfection*: in accordance with humanist pedagogy, Swift grants a large role to the study of literature in fostering moral development.

Sol.¹²¹ Every Age might perhaps produce one or two of these to adorn it, if they were not sunk under the Censure and Obloquy of plodding, servile, imitating Pedants.¹²² I do not mean by a true Genius, any bold Writer who breaks through the Rules of Decency to distinguish himself by the singularity of Opinions; but one, who upon a deserving Subject, is able to open new Scenes, and discover a Vein of true and noble thinking, which never entered into any Imagination before: Every Stroke of whose Pen, is worth all the Paper blotted by Hundreds of others in the compass of their Lives.¹²³ I know, My LORD, Your Friends will offer in Your Defence, that in Your private Capacity, You never refus'd Your Purse and Credit to the Service and Support of learned or ingenious Men; and that ever since You have been in publick Employment, You have constantly bestowed Your Favours to the most deserving Persons.¹²⁴ But I desire Your LORDSHIP not to be deceived: We never will admit of these Excuses, nor will allow Your private Liberality, as great as it is, to atone for Your excessive publick Thrift.¹²⁵ But here again, I am afraid most good Subjects will interpose in Your Defence, by alledging the desperate Condition You found the Nation in, and the Necessity there was for so able and faithful a Steward, to retrieve it, if possible, by the utmost Frugality. We grant all this, My LORD; but then, it ought likewise to be considered, that You have already saved several Millions to the Publick, and that what we ask, is too inconsiderable to break into any Rules of the strictest good Husbandry. The *French King* bestows about half a dozen Pensions to learned Men in several Parts of *Europe*, and perhaps a dozen in his own Kingdom; which, in the whole, do probably

121 *exortus ut ætherius Sol*: 'risen like the sun into the heavens', from Lucretius's praise of his master Epicurus (*De Rerum natura*, III.1045).

122 *if they were not sunk . . . Pedants*: a new line of argument, ascribing the difficulties of writing not to the language, but to pedantic criticism. Cf. Temple's tirade against pedantry in 'An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning' (Temple, *Five Essays*, pp. 69–70).

123 *I do not mean . . . compass of their Lives*: the kind of genius that Swift repudiates is very much what many readers of the *Tale* would have supposed the writer himself to be, while the ideal he sets out for 'true and noble thinking' seems to point to his hopes for what became *Four Last Years*.

124 *I know . . . most deserving Persons*: in a further rhetorical turn, Swift suggests a defence that might be offered if Oxford declined to take up his proposal, citing his generosity as a patron.

125 *But I desire . . . excessive publick Thrift*: starting another line of raillery, on cuts in public expenditure (notably by ending an expensive war) that are first represented as meanness, but are then shown, in the view of 'most good Subjects' (as opposed to Whigs intent on continuing the war), to have been approved as necessary.

not amount to half the Income of many a private Commoner in *England*; yet have more contributed to the Glory of that Prince, than any Million he hath otherwise employed.¹²⁶ For Learning, like all true Merit, is easily satisfied, whilst the False and Counterfeit is perpetually craving, and never thinks it hath enough. The smallest Favour given by a Great PRINCE, as a Mark of Esteem, to reward the Endowments of the Mind, never fails to be returned with Praise and Gratitude, and loudly celebrated to the World.¹²⁷ I have known some Years ago, several Pensions given to particular Persons, (how deservedly I shall not enquire)¹²⁸ any one of which, if divided into smaller Parcels, and distributed by the Crown, to those who might, upon occasion, distinguish themselves by some extraordinary Production of Wit or Learning, would be amply sufficient to answer the End. Or if any such Persons were above Money,¹²⁹ (as every great *Genius* certainly is, with very moderate Conveniencies of Life) a Medal, or some Mark of Distinction, would do full as well.

But I forget my Province, and find my self turning Projector before I am aware;¹³⁰ although it be one of the last Characters under which I

126 *The French King . . . otherwise employed*: Oldmixon argues at some length that the scope and expense were far greater (*Reflections*, pp. 31–2). Swift would have known that Vaugelas had received a pension to support his work on the French dictionary (*Library and Reading*, vol. I, p. 602).

127 *The smallest Favour . . . celebrated to the World*: Swift asserts the value to a regime of judicious patronage, a doctrine notoriously despised by Walpole, whose long regime would oppose Swift's ideals on this point as on many others.

128 *several Pensions . . . I shall not enquire*: Swift brings into question the justice of pensions paid to individuals by previous administrations.

129 *above Money*: 'I shall be heartily glad to see some of those Productions from Men above Money, that shall deserve the Laurel he has prepar'd for them', Oldmixon declares, adding that 'the Society will take care of themselves, and if there's any thing to be got have the Forestalling of the Market' (*Reflections*, p. 33).

130 *But I forget . . . before I am aware*: Swift refocuses on compliment and deference, repudiating the role of projector implicit in his proposal. Oldmixon comments ironically that 'The last Pages of the Doctor's Book are incomparable, full of most delicate Eulogy', and closes by citing Rochester, who had in the 1670s taken on the fictitious character of Alexander Bendo, supposedly a physician. Oldmixon reflects on Swift's scheme and its political implications by citing Bendo's comparison between the mountebank's appeal to his victims by 'undertaking strange Things which can never be effected' and the politician's distraction of the nation from 'a present Evil' with 'the Expectation of a future Good, which shall never befall them', so that his dupes remain 'in Subjection, Peace and Obedience, and he in Greatness, Wealth, and Power' (*Reflections*, pp. 32–3; cf. Wilmot, *Works*, pp. 112–17, 437–40, 612–15).

should desire to appear before Your LORDSHIP, especially when I have the Ambition of aspiring to that of being, with the greatest Respect and Truth,

My LORD,
Your LORDSHIP'S
*most Obedient, most Obliged,
and most Humble Servant,*

London,
Feb. 22.
1711, 12.

J. SWIFT.¹³¹

131 *J. SWIFT*: Swift told Johnson and Dingley that 'I suffer my name to be put at the End of it, wch I nevr did before in my Life' (*JSt* (1948), p. 532). Oldmixon commented that Swift 'has so great a Value for his own Judgment in Matters of Stile, that he has put his Name to his Letter, and a Name greater than his own, as if he meant to Bully us into his Methods for pinning down our Language' (*Reflections*, p. 2). For the *Proposal for Correcting* as a bid to raise Swift's literary and political status, see Kelly, *English Language*, pp. 97-100.

A MODEST DEFENCE OF PUNNING