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Factions' Fictions

Ideological Closure in Swift's Satire

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mark of fanaticism. Swift described the succession of heresy after heresy and faction after faction of the Interregnum by way of allusion to the capricious builders of Babel, and the curse of dispersion inherited by Simeon and Levi,[62] the men of violence: "Yet, clearly to shew what a Babel they had built, after twelve years trial, and twenty several sorts of government; the nation, grown weary of their tyranny, was forced to call in the son of him whom those reformers had sacrificed. And thus were Simeon and Levi divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel" (Sermons, *Works*, 9:226). Temporal and spatial isolationism are essentially similar; both contribute to the dissolution of the cursed Modern world.

In this chapter we began by considering party, the contemporary target for Swift's satires and polemics against faction. Examining the nature of consent has uncovered some radical elements of contractarian theory, but also an insistence that the people as a whole is the sole legitimate source of political authority. Faction is a usurpation of that public right, as well as a small-scale imitation of the institutional structure of public opinion. Swift's defense of the national culture against the ravages of faction is more comprehensible within the broad context of Swift's traditionalism and his respect for history. The next chapter moves on to examine the satiric strategies Swift brought to bear on the modern pluralistic and relativistic world that his political theory so thoroughly condemns.

5

Book-Burning, Parsimony, Private Jokes, and Antinomian Fiction

Introduction

The four previous chapters have attempted to establish a reconstruction of Swift's image of a fallen modern world, fragmented into a Babel of private languages and local orthodoxies. This chapter examines Swift's satiric responses to the ideological closure of parties and sects and to the sheer density of competing belief systems, which I have called the tyranny of the many. These responses included militant simplicity, robust philistinism, mock censorship, and deliberate travesties of justice. Swift's assumption of the role of censor has led many readers to expect responsibility and consistency in his satire. Such readers have been baffled by the unfairness of some of his judgments, by the occasions when he breaks the rules of his own comic games, and by the punitive rather than reformatory tenor of his polemic. Censorship is a revealing expression of Swift's hostile energies (*Works* 2:176, 49). In past explorations of Swift's radical satire, it has sometimes been observed that there is an explosive mixture of rigor and extravagance in his literary practice. The above analysis of Swift's idiosyncratic temperamental extremism in politics and the characteristic dynamics of his reaction to pluralism in his polemical writings might have something to contribute to this kind of reading of his satire.

Swift's simplifying imagination led him to conduct notional offensives at the level of imagery and invective that provided him with satisfying joking analogues for violent repudiation. The catalogue of known and documented species of fictitious violence wrought by Swift's righteous indignation is here supplemented by some of his less examined devices. Of special concern here are Swift's antiliterary prejudices and energies. Swift experi-

mented with the possibility of ablating whole sections of the library of human experience. Among these (largely fictional) attempts, proscriptive controls shade off into measures that are rather wholesale in their approach. Satire as radical as this tends toward the obliteration of its object.

One of the purposes of this chapter is to demonstrate how Swift's notion of parsimony, as an intellectual procedure, is reflected in his satiric strategies. Consistency as a working rule of irony, cynical reductiveness as the parsimonious principle of satire, and the special parodic mimesis that takes place in impersonation are active ingredients of Swift's satire discussed in the later sections of this chapter. Swift's use of irony as an essentially private joke creates an elite minority of "insiders," a benign version of the claustral collectives examined in earlier chapters.

"A Strict Non-Reader"

One of Samuel Beckett's heroes is shown into his new quarters in a tiny garret whose only source of light is a single candle; this was "more than enough for Murphy, a strict non-reader."[1] Murphy's conscientious objection to literature would have appealed to Swift as a parodic moral stance, but also, I think, for its iconoclasm. Swift's antiliterary prejudice manifests itself in a number of ways. Inverted hypocrite that he was, Swift periodically mimed unlettered ignorance. He prided himself on the mediocrity of some of his work: "I am always writing bad prose, or worse verses, either of rage or raillery, whereof some few escape to give offence, or mirth, and the rest are burnt" (*Correspondence*, 3:382, 21 March 1729–30). For the same self-denigratory reason he insisted on calling his satires libels rather than (as Pope preferred) epistles (*Correspondence*, 4:147, 20 April 1733, from Pope). Swift's status as a strict nonreader has received some attention in studies of the mock-lyric, mock-pastoral, and mock-heroic strains in Swift's poetry. One school of critical approach sought to demonstrate that an antipoetic aesthetic dominates Swift's work, distancing him from the literary tradition. Ironically, in the process of trying to prove Swift's independence, these researches served to demonstrate the wealth of allusion, quotation and imitation in his verse.[2] Although Swift's highly literate work is clearly not antiliterary in any crude sense, the opinion that "the World abounds with pestilent Books" (*Works*, 9:167) is certainly an intriguing aberration in a man of letters.

The range of literary source and sympathy in some of his prose works is noticeably confined. Although *A Tale of a Tub* is Swift's most densely allusive work, written when the young author's reading was fresh in his head (*A Tale of a Tub*, Apology, 4), it is corrosive rather than conservative of literary tradition: it forms a genre all of its own, and, in line with the Hack's declaration that all previous literary history is now obsolete, treats its sources (many of which have been chosen for their obscurity) with patronizing antiquarianism. As Kenner has pointed out, the book of humane letters is closed to Gulliver, the dour empiricist.[3]

These quirks of style and attitude toward literature are reinforced by traces of the prejudices of a nonreader. It is a revealing feature of Swift's literary taste that he appears to have read Butler much more appreciatively than he ever read Shakespeare.[4] Swift's official view of proper literary precedents in *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* is as narrow and limiting as his linguistic authoritarianism. The Bible and the prayer book are his approved models for prose, the safest of all possible choices (*Works*, 4:14–15). Swift values them precisely because they are commonplace, and may serve as a standard of perfection and simplicity. C. S. Lewis has pointed out that Pope and Swift are inheritors of a stolidly philistine Renaissance humanist tradition in their resistance to new knowledge outside a narrow range of approved sources and purposes: "Bentley is not forgiven for knowing more Greek than Temple, nor Theobald for knowing more English than Pope. . . . Whatever is not immediately intelligible to a man versed in the Latin and French classics appears to them to be charlatanism or barbarity. The number of things they do not want to hear about is enormous."[5] Dismissive attitudes toward literature that Swift licensed within himself are aspects of a more general negative energy.

The Deluge of Print

"I hate a crowd where I have not an easy place to see and be seen. A great Library always maketh me melancholy, where the best Author is as much squeezed, and as obscure, as a Porter at a Coronation" (*Correspondence*, 3:330, 5 April 1729). These lines (from one of Swift's letters to Pope) provide one explanation for the paucity of Swift's own library.[6] That Swift did indeed "hate a crowd" is evidenced amply by the consistently hostile form in which multitudes are portrayed in his work, as the teeming

insects of Lilliput, the terrible host of the Brobdingnag militia, the *Legion Club*, the automated multitudes of the *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, and the heterogeneous mass of pamphlets in the Modern army (*Battel of the Books*, 238). In Swift's work, mobs are gigantic and dangerous (*A Tale of a Tub*, 6:140–41). his attention, like Hobbes's, was drawn to the madness of the multitude.[7] The heterogeneity of crowds seems to carry with it attrition and confusion (*A Tale of a Tub*, 6:140–41).

The new volume of prolixity created by modern literary mass production became a common target of Scriblerian satire. Swift considered that the proliferation of printers and their awesome output of material had become overwhelming, exceeding humanly manageable proportions.[8] Martinus Scriblerus described the literary crisis as a deluge that had been sent "as a scourge for the sins of the learned."[9] Reminding Swift of Solomon's dictum, "There's no end of making Books," Pope wrote that he hoped their forthcoming miscellany would be able to distinguish itself from the mass by some salient quality, some "mark of the Elect."[10] Swift despaired of keeping up with the innumerable pamphlets published, and claimed to have given up reading them (*Correspondence*, 1:178, 26 September 1710). Why Scriblerian satire should have chosen to attack the quantity and range of literature published in modern times as well as (more obviously) its quality is a question that has not hitherto been adequately addressed. The model I have proposed in this study of a national culture fragmented into innumerable competing subcultures offers an explanation for Scriblerian hostility to pluralism.

In the fictional literary marketplace of *A Tale of a Tub*, rampant and promiscuous publication has become so natural a phenomenon that public works are in hand to canalize the flood of noxious material (*A Tale of a Tub*, Preface, 41). Rogers has shown that the physical proximity of Grub Street to Fleet Ditch provided insalubrious innuendos to contemporary satirists of every calibre.[11] The cloacal metaphor for literary production was not Swift's creation; but it was he that extended its rhetorical power when he exploited the purgative potential of lists in the "Description of a City Shower," and later in *Gulliver's Travels*. According to Locke's famous definition, language is the "common Conduit, whereby the Improvements of Knowledge are conveyed from one Man, and one Generation to another" (*Essay*, 3.xi.1, 509). The Scriblerians elevated the cloacal metaphor from simple scabrousness to a serious diagnosis of literary pollution as a cultural malady.

They did not scruple to assert that literature had been allowed to degenerate from a linguistic artery to a common sewer.

The sheer quantity of detritus conveyed in Grub Street's disemboguing stream challenged and finally defied the literary imagination. The freshness of that dismay is almost impossible to recapture now, after another three centuries of literary proliferation. Polylogy was a matter that Swift took very seriously: "If Books and Laws continue to increase as they have done for fifty Years past; I am in some Concern for future Ages, how any Man will be learned, or any Man a Lawyer" (Maxims, *Works*, 4:246). It is significant that Swift dated the associated overproduction of books and laws from the time of the Civil War, the period of the Puritans' abortive Babel.

The sheer bulk of extant books, laws, and schemes induces in Swift not so much an anxiety of influence as a fear of drowning. Even a document such as *Hints towards an Essay on Conversation*, a bullish piece of secular homily, is marked by angst regarding the plurality of sources, styles, and "refinements" on previous forms:

> Most Things, pursued by Men for the Happiness of publick or private Life, our Wit or Folly have so refined, that they seldom subsist but in Idea; a true Friend, a good Marriage, a perfect Form of Government, with some others, require so many Ingredients, so good in their several Kinds, and so much Niceness in mixing them, that for some thousands of Years Men have despaired of reducing their Schemes to Perfection. (*Works*, 4:87)

The detritus of thousands of years of abortive schemes weighs upon the present-day schemer. For this reason, in writing *A Tale of a Tub* Swift "resolved to proceed in a manner, that should be altogether new, the World having been already too long nauseated with endless Repetitions upon every Subject" (*A Tale of a Tub*, Apology, 4). While, as a declared friend of the Ancients, Swift asserted and celebrated the presence of history, as a Modern himself he could not avoid feeling himself to be "down in the hole the centuries have dug."[12] The rubble of disappointed ideals bequeathed by the past leaves the present no genuine (untried) novelty.

In the world of Swift's Grub Street Hack, all expression falls into tautology, because all possible utterance is already extant, simply as a result of the mechanical workings of permutation.[13]

"The Reader quickly finds it is all *Pork*, with a little variety of Sawce" (*A Tale of a Tub*, Preface, 50). A conviction of the redundant nature of modern literature seems to lie behind many of Swift's games with language: his analects of gruesome puns, his perverse taste for platitudes, and, of course, his collection of the flowers of *Polite Conversation*, a constant project of his over a period of thirty-six years.[14] Controversy and repetition are the two inevitable modes of modern writing: epigoni are condemned to a choice of revisionism or plagiarism.

The Scriblerian vision of rampant literary pollution is taken to its logical conclusion in Borges's story, "The Library of Babel."[15] Borges's "Library" simply presents the enormity of literary pluralism that is to be found in all copyright libraries, massively enlarged on principles maximally formal: it contains all possible combinations of the letters of the alphabet. (The Laputan literature machine would require only slight retooling to adapt it to the manufacture of this library.) Very few of the library's volumes contain even snatches of intelligibility, but, because it is "total," its nauseous infinity of permutations includes all books that can be written in all languages (using the Latin alphabet). However, the rich range of options that the library's comprehensiveness appears to promise soon disappoints, because each individual avatar of potentiality is completely inaccessible amidst the innumerable legion of contingent versions. Paradoxically, the massive structure is condemned to parochialism: every new contribution to literature is preempted by a tired cynicism that can only regard each example as a trivial variant. Each work within the literary array is unstable and relative; it exists only as a negligible fraction of an unencompassable whole.

The Hanging Judge

Swift's aesthetic is fundamentally a reductive response to the threat of relativism. It should be very clear by this stage that Swift's preoccupation with faction is much more than a suspicious conservatism about the contemporary rise of party. Although an understanding of the group ethic provided him with a political insight into the power relations operative in all social groupings, faction was to Swift more than an exclusively political issue. The power of cabals and their attendant subcultures constitutes a linguistic, intellectual, spiritual, and moral threat. Confronted by a plenum of competing alternative truth systems, propounded by

means of uncensored media and sustained through their own private languages, Swift contemplated the prospect of a moral and political universe riven into private cells. The relativism that this entails, satirized by Swift as the "*Universal Rule of Reason, or Every Man his own Carver*" (*A Tale of a Tub*, 5:130), led Swift into what has been called radical satire.

Past discussions of Swift have often stressed the negative energy that he deploys. Most notably Leavis's essay, "The Irony of Swift," stressed the intensity of Swift's repudiations; in all other respects, the essay wrote off Swift as unremarkable.[16] The unargued moralism implicit in Leavis's identification of negative and positive qualities has been rightly condemned by subsequent critics.[17] Leavis's central judgment that Swift's creative powers are merely affective and therefore in some sense beneath serious intellectual interest is highly questionable. While enthusiasts are apt to exaggerate the scope of an author's control, detractors like Leavis are very ready to identify pathology.

Revisionists have transformed Leavis's hostile but perceptive identification of negative intensities in Swift from eloquent prejudice to apposite criticism. Denis Donoghue penetrates much deeper than Leavis into the paradox of Swift's application of creative powers to negative purposes: "he builds his great work from the resources of negation, featuring as his characteristic gestures the imagery of veto, voiding, riddance, cleansing, deletion and the like. Far from wishing to enrich the world by adding his own mite to its possessions, he wants to make it poor but honest." W. B. Carnochan adds, "One of the things satire typically tries to do is to obliterate its subject. It presses towards extinction." Claude Rawson has argued that satire as radical as Swift's (radical in the sense of fundamental, rather than left-wing) "flirts ambiguously with velleities of extermination." Walter J. Ong has described Swift's ruthless dismissal of complexities and qualifications as his own version of a contemporary "myth of asepsis"; his closed images (such as boxes and cages) and isolated systems (countries immune to foreign contact) are elements of a satire devoted to purgation and sterilization rather than correction. Michael Seidel has alleged that riddance of degeneracy is in the nature of the satiric dispensation: "In satiric invective the urge to *re-* form is literally overwhelmed by the urge to annihilate."[18] Swift's negatives are powerful in their range and control; his wholesale repudiations and contemptuous generalizations are organizational rather than hysterical.

The rough justice that imbues many of Swift's attitudes (includ-

ing his feelings about literature) is hardly sober and predictable. On the contrary, it sometimes appears that grotesque disproportion of punishment to crime is essential to the intensity of Swiftian satire and to its unique decorum; his hostile energies overspill the local or moral purposes that cold logic would demand.[19] Rawson cautions against sentimentalizing Swift's gratuitous cruelties by attributing them to larger and more powerful moral purposes. This should alert us that readers such as Orwell who complain that Swift is unfair are bringing inappropriate attitudes to a body of work that develops unfairness into an art form. Johnson wrote of the appearance of *Gulliver's Travels:* "Criticism was for a while lost in wonder; no rules of judgment were applied to a book written in open defiance of truth and regularity" (*Lives*, 1:38). Johnson's phrase accurately describes the provocative way that Swift's satire regularly defies rules. It has its own internal laws, but it is at the same time antinomian. It breaks through claustrophobic bounds of predictability and restraint. Swift's burlesque version of an editorial method supplies a valuable clue to the nature of his extravagance.

A story is recorded in Sheridan's *Life of Swift* of an unfortunate poet who submitted an indifferent tragedy for the Dean to read.

> Swift returned the play carefully folded up, telling him that he had read it, and taken some pains with it; and he believed the author would not find above half the number of faults in it that it had when it came into his hands. Poor Davy, after a thousand acknowledgements to the Dean for the trouble he had taken, retired in company with the gentleman who had first introduced him, and was so impatient to see what corrections Swift had made, that he would not wait till he got home, but got under a gateway in the next street, and, to his utter astonishment and confusion, saw that the Dean had taken the pains to blot out every second line throughout the whole play, so carefully, as to render them utterly illegible.[20]

Sheridan's biography should be regarded as an important document of Swiftian mythology rather than history; Irvin Ehrenpreis warns that even its minutest anecdotes are not factual (Ehrenpreis, 3:871).[21] This passage, however, has more than bare probability to recommend it to our attention. Swift himself recounted a similar incident: "A Person reading to me a dull Poem of his own making, I prevailed on him to scratch out six Lines together: In turning over the Leaf, the Ink being wet, marked as many Lines on the other Side; whereof the Poet complaining, I bid him be easy, for it would be better if those were out too" (Maxims, *Works*, 4:253–54). Johnson once played a similar trick (although noticeably a less vengeful and irreversible stunt): after reading a long passage of Thomson, to the fervent admiration of his listener, he revealed that he had omitted every other line.[22]

The hilarious offensiveness of both these instances of Swiftian censorship lies in the randomness of Swift's attack on the manuscript. Joseph Heller's Yossarian in *Catch 22* is much more judgmental in the way he censors soldiers' letters; he launches campaigns against particular areas of the language:

> Death to all modifiers, he declared one day, and out of every letter that passed through his hands went every adverb and every adjective. The next day he made war on articles. He reached a much higher plane of creativity the following day when he blacked out everything in the letters but *a*, *an* and *the*. That erected more dynamic intralinear tensions, he felt, and in just about every case left a message far more universal.[23]

Swift's censorship is free of intrusive creative ambitions of this sort. His deletions are mechanically regular, and as such they bear a totally arbitrary relation to the literary ordering of words on the page. With Shandean serendipity (but wholly un-Shandean malevolence) the obliterations just happen to be aptly placed. Swift's impartiality is as impeccable as his mathematics is remorseless: half the manuscript will contain half the errors.

Swift implies that nicety of judgment in differentiating between shades of mediocrity would be inappropriate to what is fundamentally a waste disposal problem. The poetic justice of Swift's editorial method lies in the fact that a random remedy is applied to a problem whose source is randomness, a disproportionate response matching the "extravagancy" of its occasion (*Thoughts on Free-Thinking, Works*, 4:49). Disordered and heterogeneous work does have its place in the universe, Swift sarcastically assures the poet; and that place is hell, the void where tailors discard their off-cuts.[24] Rough justice is quite precise enough for such cases: there is no need to worry about uprooting wheat if the field contains only tares (*Remarks upon Tindall, Works*, 2:103). This cynical vision of the world as essentially homogeneous makes use of the illiberal nature of generalization. Individual exceptions to general rules are deliberately suppressed. Satire based on such assumptions willfully ignores the fact that the innocent perish along with the guilty in saturation bombing. While Swift certainly knew the liberal maxim that it is better for ten guilty men to

escape than for one innocent to suffer (*Letters to Pope*, *Works*, 9:32), his satiric dispensation is organized along very different lines.

One senses that Swift did not entirely reject Caiaphas's logic. "We read, that the high Priest said, *It was expedient that one Man should die for the People;* and this was a most wicked Proposition. But that a *whole Nation* should *die for one Man*, was never heard of before" (Drapier's Letters, *Works*, 10:41). The judgment that Caiaphas's sacrifice of the individual for the benefit of the public "was a most wicked Proposition" carries little conviction. In the context of the Drapier's controversy, token condemnation of Caiaphas's principle serves merely as the basis of an argument from minor to major: the injustice of one suffering for the many pales into insignificance beside the classic Swiftian scenario, the many held hostage by the few. In his treatment of the relative claims of William Wood and the whole people of Ireland, Swift willingly contemplates the suspension of individual rights if they conflict with the national interest (Drapier's Letters, *Works*, 10:30).

In Swift's satire legalistic principles (in particular the so-called "golden thread" of British justice, the innocence of the accused until proven guilty) are replaced by a vigilante spirit. The massive spiritual, political, and literary hygiene problem that Swift encountered provoked him to propose desperate remedies. To deal with the many redundant novelties of the Modern world, a number of editorial techniques are proposed in Swift's work, some of them rather wholesale in their approach. The pedantic Index Expurgatorius of outlawed neologisms that he suggested the *Tatler* should publish clearly proved inadequate, and Swift moved on to stronger remedies (*Works*, 2:176, 49). These range from splenetic plans for hemispheric lobotomies for party politicians (*Gulliver's Travels*, 3.6, 189), to mandatory capital sentences for commentators (*Gulliver's Travels*, 2.7, 136). To cure Ireland's economic ills he suggested stringing up roughly half-a-dozen bankers a year (*A Short View of the State of Ireland*, *Works*, 12:11). On an earlier occasion, he had proposed that private interests would be eliminated from Parliament by ruling that innovators put their schemes before the assembly at the risk of their necks (*Contests*, *Works*, 1:233–34). It is not so very clear that this hanging image is merely fictive hyperbole.[25] Swift the satirist regarded himself as a hangman *manqué*.

> Like the ever-laughing Sage,
> In a Jest I spend my Rage:
> (Tho' it must be understood,
> I would hang them if I cou'd:)
> ("Epistle to a Lady," *Poems*, 2:635)

Satire's informal methods reach those who have escaped the courts. Men are not innocent simply because the law has not pronounced them guilty (*Works*, 3:141). The satirist snorts derisively at the official judicial mechanisms, hamstrung by the officious technicality of producing adequate evidence. In the magic kingdom of satire alone, an arbitrary power is wholly vindicable. In his arbitrary fiats (his fictive creations as well as his wholesale condemnations) Swift claimed dictatorial powers. The exultation that animates "gratuitous" passages in Swift's satire results from the shedding of the cogs of moderation and judiciousness. Satire's reformatory brief is trashed and replaced by sheer vengeance.[26]

Burning Books

Swift's satiric enterprise is not always built from fair and balanced judgments, neither does he always propose redemptive positives corresponding to the evils that he attacks. His accommodations and compromises are few. Swift displayed little reluctance to simplify; on the contrary, he often showed himself to be profoundly satisfied with the straitness of heaven's gate.[27] Swift closed off various areas of inquiry altogether, abhorred philosophy as vain abstraction, was impatient of the quibbling sophistication of speculative theology, and delimited curiosity within strict bounds.

The sheer abandon of the punishment meted out to some of his satiric victims serves to reinforce the arrogant imperiousness of Swift's condemnations. Familiar examples of the fictitious violence wrought by Swift's righteous indignation are his anatomization of a beau, his reduction of the protesting Wood to a howling dog dissected alive (Drapier's Letters, *Works*, 10:54), his portrayal of oppressive landlords as cannibals supping on Irish babies, and his representation of man as a hideous Yahoo. A hitherto unrecognized member of this draconian collection is the vast imaginary pyre that Swift built from the Library of Babel.

If we ask ourselves how far Swift was willing to extend censorship, it is a disturbing reflection that the Houyhnhnms have no literature at all, only an oral tradition of panegyric poetry (*Gulliver's Travels*, 4.9, 273–74). "Letters should not be known" is a stipulation of a number of imaginary commonwealths.[28] The Houy-

hnhnms' oral rather than written culture belongs to a vigorous antiliterary tradition that is ultimately Platonic in origin. It has been demonstrated that Swift's Houyhnhnms manifest Platonic attitudes toward government, family, education, and truth-telling, and that they embody specifically Platonic models of the virtues of reason and simplicity.[29] Literature is superfluous for them, because they possess the wisdom that Socrates declared could never be reduced to the invariant and unresponsive form of writing.[30] The Houyhnhnms' lack of a literature implies that this kind of concession to human frailty would be uncalled-for in a rational world.

The freest possible proliferation of literature is advocated in *Mr Collins's Discourse of Free-Thinking,* using arguments that appeared to Swift to lead to the abyss of agnostic relativism. According to Swift's "translation" of the *Discourse,* Collins argues that because there are many holy scriptures in the world, only one of which can be right, each person must read them all (without any intrusive guidance) and choose freely between them, "for there are Twenty to One against us, that we may be in the wrong" (*Works,* 4:32). Collins apparently also holds that if ten thousand free thinkers thought differently from the received doctrine, and from each other, they would all have a right and a duty to publish their thoughts "(provided they were all sure of being in the right)" (*Works,* 4:36). Therefore, although twenty to one against the preservation of the security of church and state are already dangerously long odds, this figure proves to be a conservative estimate. To protect civilization against further spurious truth-claims (and even longer odds against the survival of Gospel truth), the *Tale* insists that there must be a limit to the number of books permitted to be published: "Health is but one Thing, and has been always the same, whereas Diseases are by thousands, besides new and daily Additions; So, all the Virtues that have been ever in Mankind, are to be counted upon a few Fingers, but his Follies and Vices are innumerable, and Time adds hourly to the Heap" (*A Tale of a Tub,* Preface, 50). The statistics vary slightly, but the basic predicament remains consistent. If the truth is single and error manifold, then number is a shibboleth of corruption. To Collins's scandalous suggestion that all ten thousand works should be read, Swift's effective reply was that they should rather be burned.

Ablation on a massive scale is Swift's reaction to the tyranny of the many. A process of elimination is required to thin out Babel's library of false theologies and obsolescent modernisms.

One provisional method, which is put through its experimental trials in *A Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver's Travels,* is the attempt to distill great vats of literature to an essence, in pill form.[31] But eating books is insufficiently radical, and Swift is no man to stop at half-measures. A far more comprehensive cull is necessary to reduce the Library of Babel to the proportion of, say, the library of Brobdingnag, which amounts to little more than a thousand volumes (*Gulliver's Travels,* 2.7, 135–36). This exiguousness is the result not of poverty but purity, and a similar brevity and discretion characterizes their univocal laws, expressed in a few clear words (*Gulliver's Travels,* 2.7, 136).

The implication is that apart from a small core of true and unambiguous works, the Library of Babel is composed entirely of private speculations and disputatious trash. The Houyhnhnms, blessed as they are with an immediate apprehension of right reason, are saved all the shelf space, which in Europe is devoted to controversial volumes:

> Controversies, Wranglings, Disputes, and Positiveness in false or dubious Propositions, are Evils unknown among the *Houyhnhnms.* In the like Manner when I used to explain to him our several Systems of *Natural Philosophy,* he would laugh that a Creature pretending to *Reason,* should value itself upon the Knowledge of other Peoples Conjectures, and in Things, where that Knowledge, if it were certain, could be of no Use. Wherein he agreed entirely with the Sentiments of *Socrates,* as *Plato* delivers them; which I mention as the highest Honour I can do that Prince of Philosophers. I have often since reflected what Destruction such a Doctrine would make in the Libraries of *Europe;* and how many Paths to Fame would be then shut up in the Learned World. (*Gulliver's Travels,* 4.8, 267)

This casual obliteration of the libraries of Europe raises to the level of universal devastation the minor incinerations of the *Tale,* where books, "sunk into waste Paper and Oblivion" "undergo the Tryal of Purgatory, in order *to ascend the Sky.*" Some books remain for ever on the Bookseller's shelf, "never to be thumb'd or greas'd by Students," others are "neither sought nor found." Some end up in "a *Jakes,* or an *Oven* . . . the Windows of a *Bawdy-house,* or . . . a sordid *Lanthorn*"; the vast majority are offered as sacrifices to Moloch (*A Tale of a Tub,* Apology, 9; [compare *Dunciad,* 1:227, 144]; 7:148; Apology, 10; Dedication, 36, 33).[32]

Gulliver wrote that he had retired from the world of the Yahoos and was waiting to receive word of their reform and the success

of his panacean volume. The beacon that he appointed to announce to him that the millennium had come was, not surprisingly, "*Smithfield* blazing with Pyramids of Law-Books" (*Gulliver's Travels,* letter to Cousin Sympson, 6). The works of the Moderns are no more than alms for oblivion; Swift recorded the various depredations that Time practices on them with dangerous relish.[33]

For Swift himself, literary creation appears to have been a process of writing, burning rejected versions, and rewriting.[34] He was adamant that any works that Gay had left which would swell the bulk of his canon without adding to the credit of his memory should be burned immediately (*Correspondence,* 4:153, 1 May 1733). Swift spent many hours playing with a burning glass, a pastime that Rogers rightly regards as not entirely innocent.[35] Examples of Swift committing books to the flames, to be pulped, or to "inferior purposes" are legion (e.g., *Correspondence,* 5:188; *Preface to Burnet, Works,* 4:62; *Wonder of Wonders, Works,* 9:283).

Is it entirely safe to conclude that Swift's incendiary animus against literature is merely a rhetorical fiction? It is clear that the trope has tactical value; but perhaps it is not entirely under control. The burning of books is a typical velleity of crabbed and vengeful reactionaries. In Swift's case, this malicious desire is neither discreetly concealed nor acknowledged to be shameful: it is, on the contrary, demonstrative and raucous. The notion that most books should be burnt rather than read is, consciously, so rancorous as to place it safely outside the realm of serious suggestion. As a remedy for bad literature, arson is a wild and comic overkill: Swift's satire pretends to adopt standards of inconceivable barbarism, as if it would indeed "cure a Scratch on the Finger by cutting off the Arm" (Drapier's Letters, *Works,* 10:16). At the same time, it can be claimed that the burning of books shows monolithic rigorousness, a pious willingness to cut off the hand and pluck out the eye that have offended. Swift's stomach was certainly strong enough to cope with vivisection of this sort, but he might have been disturbed by the air of zeal surrounding the proceedings. The following sections argue that Swift's punitive desire to ablate and veto is based on his perception of the virtuous as an embattled minority, swamped by the multifariousness of the wicked. His wholesale censorship operates on principles of parsimony, and his irony builds protected enclaves against the deluge.

Number as a Shibboleth of Corruption

The pluralism of the mass media world encountered by Swift determines the economy of scale implicit in his satire. Swift never has number on his side; number is consistently an attribute of the devil's party. The choked and claustrophobic crowd scene that opens *A Tale of a Tub* is emblematic of his satire's archetypal problem, "to get quit of *Number*" (*A Tale of a Tub,* 1:55). Swift's distrust of the mass leaves its mark on the constitutive logic of his satire in a number of ways.

An impression of density and plenitude is a common feature of satire, whose voracious maw swallows up innumerable styles and forms. Humanity's presence is often felt as a "suffocating mass," a "sheer dirty weight."[36] Hatred for crowds has already been mentioned in this chapter. A deep suspicion of the mass is to be found throughout Swift's work. In societies as in libraries, the worthless vastly outnumber the worthy: "They croud about Preferment's Gate, / And press you down with all their Weight" (*Poems,* 2:502, ll. 85, 93–94). Swift cynically concluded that whatever might be justly described as "supernumerary" (*Remarks upon Tindall, Works,* 2:74) must inevitably originate from the worst in human nature, since "Corruptions are more Naturall to Mankind than Perfections" (*Enquiry into the Last Ministry, Works,* 8:180). Jack's new deity, Babel, is almost certain to attract such a "vast number of Worshippers" according to Swift's logic, because of the perennial tendency of the masses, "in their Corrupt Notions of Divine Worship . . . to multiply their Gods" (*A Tale of a Tub,* 11:194; *Contests, Works,* 1:219–20).[37] Virtue is singular; vice is always well attended. Genius is unique; fools are legion.[38]

Massive condemnations that are shockingly callous in a judgmental context find their natural home in satire. Satire needs to offer neither apology nor tedious proof for the allegation that ninety-nine out of a hundred of the beggars starving in the streets are responsible for their own misfortune, that ninety-nine out of a hundred politicians are worthless, or that 'not one [woman] in a million can properly be said to read or write, or understand' (Sermons, *Works,* 9:191; Drapier's Letters, *Works,* 10:141; Maxims, *Works,* 12:308). It is clear that such a mode is particularly congenial to a pessimism that sees felicity as the fate of only one in a million, and is convinced that most seed is destined to fall on stony ground (*Correspondence,* 4:169, 8 July 1733; Sermons, *Works,* 9:212). When reason and virtue are consigned to a minority status, satire (though sometimes unreasonable or even

vicious) is invaluable for its capacity to keep multifarious enemies at bay.

A major resource of satire lies in its ability to reduce "odds beyond arithmetic" to manageable proportions.[39] In contrast to the precise actuarial calculations of "ninety-nine times out of a hundred" and "twenty million to one against" that are used to "analyze" the corrupt ways of the world, Swift's retributive measures allows themselves an airy discretionary vagueness. Swift's proposal for curing Ireland's economic problems is to hang roughly half-a-dozen bankers a year (*Short View of the State of Ireland, Works*, 12:11; mentioned above); the precise number is a matter of indifference (which is not perhaps the view of the seventh banker in the queue for the gallows).

In appropriating grotesque disproportion and randomness to his own purposes, Swift revenged himself on the aleatory nature of the world as he found it, "at the mercy of uncertain chance" (Sermons, *Works*, 9:246). Upon the death of Lady Ashburnham he wrote: "I hate Life, when I think it exposd to such Accidents. and to see so many thousand wretches burthening the earth while such as her dye, makes me think God did never intend Life for a Blessing" (*Journal to Stella*, 2:595, 3 January 1712–13). The cosmic injustice of her fate is irrationally attributed to the many, as if their redundant mass had somehow squeezed her out of existence: a dog, a horse, a rat, and a thousand worthless wretches have life, and she no breath at all. The fictive order imposed by satire on the world's anarchy and plenitude is Swift's only alternative to despair. Anarchy, the mob attribute that Swift abhorred, is adopted for his vengeful effects.[40]

Satire is specially qualified to fight back against the threat of being "born down by Numbers" (*Tatler, Works*, 2:176).

> Praise cannot stoop, like Satire, to the Ground;
> The Number may be hang'd, but not be crown'd.[41]

Satire accommodates itself to the fundamental asymmetry that exists not only in competitive social structures but in the very nature of comparison. Damnation can be general, whereas excellence is singular by definition. Only one can be preeminent, only the few can be extraordinary. The many are left with similarity—difference is a commodity in short supply. Unlike epic, satire does not deal with eminence or uniqueness, but with the sameness of the many, with ordinary vices. For this reason, Swift's satire often operates by insidiously undermining pretensions to uniqueness. He simplifies his world picture by denying privileged special-case status whenever possible. This form of denigration is an implicit effect of parody (discussed below). The Drapier's Letters demonstrate a special form of Swift's negation of individuality channelled into his offensive against Wood's coinage.

To destroy the authority of the individual coin, Swift discusses the stuff only in bulk. It is not worth the trouble of counting: it is weighed in a great lump. By impressing on his readership an image of the coin being lumped about in sacks, stacked in the harbor in barrels, and carted in massive, slow-moving caravans, Swift obliterated the coin's claim to an individual identity and worth anterior to its constituent material (Drapier's Letters, *Works*, 10:11, 45, 5, 6–7). By piling it up in "Huge Heaps" of "undistinguish'd Mass," Swift effectively effaced the impression from the coin, typically converting identity back to primordial substance (*Poems*, 3:922, ll. 40, 44). Exactly the same mass estimation is applied to pulp literature in the *Tale* and the conclusion of the *Travels* (*A Tale of a Tub*, 1:64; Gulliver's Travels, 4.12, 292). The salient qualities of trash are weight and bulk: Swift maliciously implies that only the prurient coprophiliac projector would look more closely into the matter. The handy-dandy of bathos is a domestic miracle that collapses form back into matter efficiently and reliably; but then, converting wine into water is not quite as extraordinary as vice versa.

Parsimony

The essence of a skeptical intelligence's typical procedure is to economize on supposition: "According to the new Philosophy, they will endeavour to solve [a problem] by some easier and shorter way" (*Importance of the Guardian, Works*, 8:21). *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit* makes use of a similar skeptical principle: "I think, it is in *Life* as in *Tragedy*, where, it is held, a Conviction of great Defect, both in Order and Invention, to interpose the Assistance of preternatural Power without an absolute and last Necessity" (275). The same method is cited to differentiate between apologetic arguments in *A Discourse on Hereditary Right:* "an opinion can hardly be worth while, when we may go on so easily, and so consistently, without it."[42] Insofar as Swift believed in the possibility of progress in the history of ideas, he understood the superiority of later theories (e.g., the advantage of the Copernican over the older geocentric cosmology)

to lie in their ability to answer previous difficulties and "to save much Time and Labour" (*Examiner, Works*, 3:34). In all of these cases, the intellectual method commended is parsimony.

Parsimony as a satiric rather than an intellectual method is rigorous in its own special way: in the satirist's hands economy of assumption takes the looser form of question-begging, applying the microscope to his blind eye, or turning a deaf ear to special pleading. In scrutinizing behavior Swift passes over the possibility of atypical virtues and mitigating circumstances because the off-the-peg explanation of self-interest fits the bill nine times out of ten. His method avoids unnecessary invocation of the preternatural. The fall-back assumption that error is the norm eliminates the need for more elaborate hypotheses.

Parsimony is the very essence of satire's elegance. Satire insists that it is unnecessary to seek far for reasons and motivations; the real resolution to mysteries is ready at hand. Difficulties are scaled down and made domestic. Satire purges waste, irrelevance, and redundancy. Generalization offers the satirist liberating mental economies: "Subtleties, niceties, and distinctions" (Maxims, *Works*, 9:262) fall away, as innumerable instances are reduced to a single rule. Special cases are disposed of as unsentimentally as the lynched banker's right to an individual hearing. Furthermore, parsimony dictates the scrupulous meanness of an ironic style, which is thrifty in its allowance of signals and of guidance.[43]

Swift's cynicism reduces plurality to a meager set of types and characters; simple patterns emerge from the morass of experience and case history (*Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, 286).In its way, the intellectual pleasure offered by cynicism is sublime, consisting in positions not limited by exceptions and in descriptions not descending to minuteness.[44] A definition of cynicism's economy of scale is offered in *Peri Bathous:* "A great Genius takes things in the Lump, without stopping at minute Considerations."[45] Uniquely among the prideful tricks of perspective that men fall into, cynicism acknowledges its own arrogance. It is certainly just as procrustean as other self-validating intellectual procedures that reduce the notions of all mankind to their proportions or force all nature to submit to their systems (*A Tale of a Tub*, 9:166–67; see also *Poems*, 2:709, ll. 722–25). However, unlike the limited perspectives created by cultures, religions, and ideologies, which are shown in Swift's satire to be as expedient as they are self-confirmatory, cynicism is nonaligned.

Cynicism is not a charge that Swift would want to repudiate: where Burnet wrote in his *History of his Own Times* of someone

that he was "as wise as a CYNICAL humour could allow," Swift noted in the margin of his copy, "How does that hinder wisdom" (*Works*, 5:266). Cynicism does not bribe the understanding with any welcome illusions, but there are covert consolations for the cynic. One of the secret positives that lie behind the cynic's habitual pessimism is that his perspective contains an element of conscious fiction: the margin of exaggeration that he allows himself also is the extent to which the world is better than he is willing to admit. Another secret affirmation of cynicism lies in its assurance of a bedrock of certitude (the inglorious truth about human nature) beneath the superficies of variegated error and delusive appearance. Analysis dissects human nature and offers the officious finding that it is "not of the same consistence quite thro" (*A Tale of a Tub*, 9:173), whereas cynicism alleges that uniformity and predictability (if only of the most disreputable kind) can indeed be found. This knowledge lends the cynic a certain privileged immunity from debilitating doubt; it allows Swift the freedom to give vent to the anarchic and profoundly disorientating energies of his satire.

Consistency

Parsimony's purifying discipline dictates that an assumption is discarded when one can "go on so easily, and so consistently, without it" (*Discourse on Hereditary Right*, 32). Swift valued consistency as an intellectual discipline. On this basis Tindal's work is rejected as "a Bundle of incoherent Maxims and Assertions, that frequently destroy one another" and Burnet's inconsistent excuses are winkled out with the satisfaction of incontrovertible discovery (*Remarks upon Tindall, Works*, 2:68; *Preface to Burnet, Works*, 4:59–60). Consistency serves Swift as a criterion of philosophical usefulness: the Babel of disagreement between pagan philosophers about the true object of happiness renders their schemes absurd (Sermons, *Works*, 9:244). Inconsistency is the essence of folly: "Who can deny that all Men are violent Lovers of Truth, when we see them so positive in their Errors; which they will maintain out of their Zeal to Truth, although they contradict themselves every Day of their Lives?" (Maxims, *Works*, 4:247–48; see also 4:245). If a madman is known by talking inconsistently (*Gulliver's Travels*, 2.8, 144) then all men are in imminent danger of revealing their candidature for Bedlam (*Thoughts on Free-Thinking, Works*, 4:49).

Although Swift regarded consistency as an essential ingredient in any set of beliefs worthy of respect, he was not the monolith of consistency that he liked to appear. A number of inconsistencies that can be detected in Swift's attitudes have posed critical difficulties. Swift's change of political alignment, or, say, his contradictory attitudes toward censorship (which have been shown to be dependent upon whether Whig or Tory works were the objects of ministerial control), have provoked confusion and hostility.[46] To readers who regard the satirist as having the prerogatives and responsibilities of a judge, inconsistency is profoundly disabling. "The writer who is not constant to his subject quickly sinks into contempt, his satire loses its force, and his panegyric its value, and he is only considered at one time as a flatterer, and as a calumniator at another" (Johnson, *Lives*, 2:359–60). Johnson's strict demand for consistency does not admit that internal contradiction might not necessarily result from fraud or intellectual laziness.

In Swift's work, consistency is itself a tactical, sometimes a fantastical, resource. Swift does not sustain a strict philosophical rigor.[47] It is important to recognize that inconsistency also has its uses. As Orwell suggested in his commentary on Swift's atypical words of praise for Lilliputian institutions: "to be occasionally inconsistent is almost a mark of vitality in Utopia books."[48] Pocock suggests that Swift's (and Defoe's) changes of political alignment "are best explained not by attempting to assess questions of commitment and consistency, venality and ambition, but by recognizing that they were employing a highly ambivalent rhetoric, replete with alternatives, conflicts, and confusions, of which they were very well aware and in which they were to some extent entrapped.[49]

Swift's attitude toward ambivalence is far from simple. His use of relativ*ity* in *Gulliver's Travels* and the contradictions of his politics are examples of Swift's strong awareness of multiple perspectives and possibilities. At the same time, his contempt for spiritual and ethical relativ*ism*, his resistance to cosmopolitan variety within the nation, and his destructive attitude toward literary pluralism suggest that he felt a claustrophobic sense of entrapment in anarchic multiplicity. Because of these contradictions, irony is Swift's typical mode: while irony can accommodate a variety of different (sometimes incompatible) attitudes, it does not by any means endorse them all.

Inconsistency is profoundly disquieting to readers who sense in Swift's prose the presence of a powerfully tendentious intelligence, while they are unable to detect the exact source of the attack. The Mask trope, developed into an elaborate persona

model, has served readers of Swift as a means of describing the consistency within inconsistency that his satire often manifests. Although the *Modest Proposal* may be crazy (goes the familiar argument), it fits the character of the Proposer. According to his value system (and, by implication, ours), the scheme is both logical and humane.

Persona criticism runs the risk of imposing a spurious neatness on Swiftian irony.[50] It readily resolves conflicting elements by splitting the prose into characters, ascribing to each meaning its own point of view and decorum personae. This introduces distortions because it assumes that the creator has a tolerant interest in variety, and generously cultivates a number of independent lives, which subsist in their own fictional rights within the world of work—assumptions more appropriate to George Eliot than to Jonathan Swift.[51] Satiric characterization obeys laws very different from those that operate within novels, a point missed by readers who are offended that Gulliver does not learn from his experiences.[52] "Satiric characters (it is the commonplace about how satire differs from the novel) have nowhere to go but where they are, and seem by the same token never to have been anywhere else."[53] Characters in satire generally do not develop, they simply are themselves; neither do they necessarily have that continuity and wholeness that the novelist constructs.

Persona criticism does not deliver quite the resolution that it promises, because the puppets sometimes behave unpredictably. That Swift should occasionally contravene the internal logic of his satires is less remarkable than the high degree of consistency that is otherwise so scrupulously maintained. As a working assumption, it is generally useful to think of Swift's satires as procedures that follow rules, with the proviso that he periodically violates his own rules in an opportunistic way. As if to make assurance double sure that there is no trusting in appearances, Swift's fools, knaves, Grubean sages, projectors, freethinkers, and polite conversationalists occasionally speak truth and shame the devil. In the presence of a speaker we have learned to distrust, "truth often steals most tellingly upon us from an unsuspected direction."[54] Swift is a polemicist and an imaginative entrepreneur;[55] if he has to intrude on his own consistency and place a sensible idea in the mouth of a fool like Wagstaff (*Polite Conversation, Works*, 4:105 and passim), he will do so. The repudiation of strict coherence in his use of personae makes for ironic mobility (see Ehrenpreis, 1:197).

Attempts have been made to dispose entirely of the persona

trope. Donoghue has argued that an essential effect of the *Tale* lies in the isolation of the words printed on the page from any source or speaker, whose putative biography is really beside the point: "the 'author' of the *Tale* is anonymous: if we insist upon giving him a character, a role, or a name, he is not the Grub Street Hack, he is Anon."[56] Donoghue's approach has not been generally accepted, because he goes rather too far in his rejection of the modelling approach: it is surely part of Swift's intention that we should continually try to resolve the words into a voice.[57] But his criticism shows that it is also part of the same purpose that we should continually fail to humanize and personalize the words on the page. This failure challenges our assumption that personality is a coherent entity; we are forced to recognize the wayward and arbitrary nature of human behavior and of man-made institutions (books in particular).

In *Gulliver's Travels* consistency, one of the integral unities of satire, is essential to the verisimilitude that makes the work so perennially fascinating.[58] Leavis describes the *Travels* as "a very limiting task—directed and confined by a scheme uniting a certain consistency in analogical elaboration with verisimilitude" ("The Irony of Swift," 78). What is most wrong with this verdict is its attitude toward consistency as a task, wearily undertaken for the sake of the encoded message that is its tenor. In fact, the absence of a simple underlying truth to which the circumstantiality of the *Travels* serves as mere "analogical elaboration" is more than adequately proved by the controversies that the work has attracted. But further, Leavis does not understand that the trouble that is taken to elaborate consistently on a few basis rules is the essence of the undertaking and its triumph. Whereas Leavis thought that Swift "certainly does not impress us as a mind in possession of its experience" ("The Irony of Swift," 87), it can be argued that Swift's satire provides particularly powerful ways of possessing and controlling experience.

Elaboration in *Gulliver's Travels* has the same quality of necessity as detail within an allegory; even the minutiae direct attention back to the general formula that is the overall determinant (the ratios of scale in the first two books, the relative status of man and beast in the fourth). Consistency is essential to the plot of satiric fiction. The power of this kind of consistency is demonstrated by Gulliver's experiences: the circumstantiality of his account is the means by which he manages to vindicate his veracity when it is challenged. It is notable that this form of proof is promiscuous; it serves its turn just as effectively when Gulliver

passes off a plausible lie in Luggnagg as when he recounts his "true" story after being rescued (*Gulliver's Travels*, 3.9, 203; 2.8, 146; 4.11, 287).

Detail in the *Travels* operates in a similar way to the rhetoric veiled as impartial description in Swift's political arguments. It is precisely because of its reputation as neutral and tedious that bare factual observation is such an insidious persuader. Objectivity is a myth, Swift realized; all statements are purposive and are marked by the motives of the speaker or by the cultural assumptions of the language spoken. A tale, or a polemical case, may be dense with matter without being (strictly speaking) material. Consistency is a diversionary display that draws attention away from relevance. Absorbed with Gulliver's meticulous gathering of information, we forget to ask ourselves about the purpose and status of the data provided.

Parody

The fictive ingredients in Swift's satire are grotesque rather than mimetic. Allowed distortion is endemic to Swift's satire. Certainly it is unfair to reduce all courts to Lilliput's or to pretend that the Academy of Lagado properly represents modern science. But satire throws over mimetic adequacy and offers in the place of equivalence a conversion factor. While the proportions of scale in Lilliput and Brobdingnag are important, the relationship between the ironist's ostensible and hidden meanings is even more scrupulously maintained. The ratio between the explicit and implicit converts scandalous misinformation into a truth-telling code.

Extravagance is an essential ingredient in his satire's magical transubstantiations: "Satire always operates by turning the literal into the metaphorical, the ironical into the literal . . . transforming the specific into the general, the organic into the mechanical, the symbolic into the physical, the cerebral into the abdominal, the genital and excretory, converting multivalent individuals into single-character freaks, L'Avare Marlborough, Will Bigamy Cowper, Sid Hamet Godolphin, Defecator Wharton."[59] Burlesque of this kind is much closer to the theoretical laws of parody than to novelistic naturalism. The reader of satire is less likely to complain that something is farfetched than that it has not been fetched far enough. Discussion of the comic effects of parody is particularly relevant to the place of detail within the satirist's larger purposes.

The delight of impersonation lies in its determination of the inner logic of its subject, and its extrapolation of qualities consistent with those standards. The pleasure of parody lies in its economy: everything is intentional, there are no accidents. Incidentals, idiosyncrasies, and quirks of style are brought up to a rare level of significance in an account that claims to master an entire manner of thought or school of behavior. Every datum is taken as typical, every detail is incriminating, every slip, insignificant in itself, falls into place within a large coherent critique. Two disparagements are thus at work in tandem: the internal sameness of the parodied object is stressed, as well as its discontinuity from the shared world of the parodic artist and his audience. The former effect diminishes the victim by reducing his dynamics to a formula; the latter sets the specimen at a disdainful distance. In *A Tale of a Tub*, the eccentricity of the modern world from the common forms of history and tradition inspires repudiation, while virtuoso display of the Modern's own orthodoxy produces delight.

Nature is reduced to artifice in powerful parody. Qualities of character (Margaret Thatcher's voice, for example) are revealed to be a specific product of synthesis, because they can be reproduced by a purely mechanical operation. It is demonstrated that attribute is adventitious rather than necessary. Individuals and institutions that project (and sentimentally regard) their own characteristics as natural and inevitable are shown to be image-makers whose artifice is accessible to challenge. The victim's essence is reduced to accident; uniqueness is undermined by the existence of a double.

Parody is a triumph not so much of curiosity as of knowingness. Parody thrives on predictability; it offers its reader highly concentrated comic prophecy, knowledge before experience. Without confessing to an interest in its object, it displays an insouciant acquaintanceship that surprises in its thoroughness. The parodist's power over his parodee lies in his penetrative knowledge of his victim's nature.[60] Swift developed parody's offensive close reading of its subject into the sarcastic familiarity of his polemic and the pseudo-mimetic plenitude of *Gulliver's Travels*, and the late satiric fictions.

Irrelevance

While Swift's fictive work creates expectations appropriate to a parodic scheme in which details are consistent, typical, and

significant, Swift deliberately subverts such expectations by allowing the wealth of detail to spill over into riotous irrelevance. "O, if the World had but a dozen Arbuthnetts in it I would burn my Travells but however he is not without Fault . . . Our Doctor has every Quality and virtue that can make a man amiable or usefull, but alas he hath a sort of Slouch in his Walk" (*Correspondence*, 3:104, 29 September 1725). The characteristic Swiftian slump from a consideration of virtue to a critique of gait has a splendidly festive quality to it, a licensed release from the strictures of principle. Negligible details in the countries in *Gulliver's Travels*, the drawing rooms in *Polite Conversation*, and the servants' halls in *Directions to Servants* are scrupulously recorded. Circumstantiality is one of the most fascinating areas of expedient inconsistency practiced by Swift. Fiction is the key to the aberrations and extravagancies that violate the consistency that Swift creates within his satires.

Just as an impersonator frequently chooses to pick on seemingly insignificant details to travesty, Swift fills out his case with circumstantial evidence.[61] There would be no delight of discovery created in the reader if all the work of determining relevance had been done by the satirist. In riddles, irrelevant and diversionary details, although contingent to the solution, are essential to the puzzle. Swift's work often has a riddling quality to it. The contents of Gulliver's pockets and the post that is kissed or thrown into the fire are recognizable local instances of Swift's playful satiric trick of compounding significant and irrelevant indications.[62] The slightness of his materials is quite deliberate: it emphasizes the satirist's casual mastery of experience. When one is as thoroughly acquainted with the world as is the satirist (and, by complimentary implication, his audience), recognition is instantly produced by a few tokens.

The copiousness and luxuriance of Swift's satire is one of its greatest delights. Nestor describes Thersites as "A slave whose gall coins slanders like a mint"; similarly, the fullness of Swift's libels and the richness of his invention are celebratory.[63] In one of the political projects of Lagado, not one but six methods of wakening the drowsy memory of a favorite are suggested; the operative responsible is instructed to give the Minister "a Tweak by the Nose, or a Kick in the Belly, or tread on his Corns, or lug him thrice by both Ears, or run a Pin into his Breech, or pinch his Arm black and blue" (*Gulliver's Travels*, 3.6, 188). Leavis's "analogical elaboration" principle would be hard pressed to explain why the minister is lugged precisely three times, and

specifically by both ears. The sheer extravagance of this humor (not at all unconnected with its sadism[64]) is enhanced rather than checked by the sobriety with which it is recorded. In the terms of Swift's distinction between wit and humor ("That [i.e. wit] gives Surprise, and this Delight"[65]), this thoroughness belongs to the realm of humor, whose very unsurprisingness is admirable. The comedy of pedantry, whose forms range from Sterne's ludicrously elaborate cock-and-bull story to the pontificating circumlocutions of Dickens's characters ("I have brought you, Mum, a bottle of sherry wine—and I have brought you, Mum, a bottle of port wine," etc.), is closely related to Swift's ludicrous "ant-like" accuracy.

The self-delighting exhaustiveness of inventory results from its businesslike seriousness about play.[66] One possible reading of this departure from quasi-parodic criteria of relevance is that Swift's catalogues form the prolegomenon to a comprehensive listing of things that ought not to be.[67] In the late satires on the other hand, details appear increasingly to be nonrepresentative: they are present as elements of pure play.[68] Swift, who denied officially that variety and multiplicity were qualities to be valued or preserved (*Sentiments*, Works, 2:11), seems in spite of himself to have taken delight in the recalcitrance of the materials within his reductive schemes. He tried as hard as he could to be a philosopher, but somehow cheerfulness was always breaking in.

In Swift's unfinished *Directions to Servants* (a work that has been aptly described as "a handbook for domestic guerrilla warfare"[69]), a revealing manuscript note is preserved: "When a Servant is turned off, all his Faults must be told . . . and all Mischiefs done by others, charged to him. [Instance them.]" (*Works*, 13:12). Swift reminded himself with this note to fill out the passage with specific instances. The two encyclopedic satires that Swift collected for more than three decades are as minute, specific, comprehensive, and tedious as possible (*Correspondence*, 4:31–32, 12 June 1732). All the anarchic energy and inspiration of servants is anticipated in this work: it clearly aims at exhaustiveness. Each individual roguery is preempted by documenting it among known and extant tricks, thus voiding it of the creative ingenuity that the servants clearly invest in their library of ad hoc techniques.

In some respects *Directions to Servants* displays the kind of pervasive continuity of damaging assumption that inspires early satires such as *Against Abolishing Christianity*. To take an incidental example: "When you step but a few Doors off to tattle with a Wench, or take a running Pot of Ale, or to see a Brother Footman

going to be hanged, leave the Street Door open . . ." (*Works*, 13:40). The casual concatenation of these familiar street activities implies that the usual fate of footmen is to be hanged. Guilt-by-implication is simply incorporated more casually than in the earlier work. But there are purposes in this encyclopedic undertaking of a very different kind:

> The Servants Candlesticks are generally broken, for nothing can last for ever: But, you may find out many Expedients: You may conveniently stick your Candle in a Bottle, or with a Lump of Butter against the Wainscot, in a Powder-horn, or in an old Shoe, or in a cleft Stick, or in the Barrel of a Pistol, or upon its own Grease on a Table, in a Coffee Cup or a Drinking Glass, a Horn Can, a Tea Pot, a twisted Napkin, a Mustard Pot, an Ink-horn, a Marrowbone, a Piece of Dough, or you may cut a Hole in a Loaf, and stick it there. (*Works*, 13:14)

This typical passage documents the range and variousness of the expedients adopted by servants in line with their anarchic habits and feckless inclinations. The materials of their world (which pack *Directions to Servants* very densely)[70] undergo surreal transformations as a result of their totally independent and unofficial versions of economy, justice, expediency, and propriety. While there are some attempts to use the old weapons of generalization against the servants' world (for example, the attempt to formulate a law of nature to explain why servants' chairs never have more than three legs; *Works*, 13:10), the challenge that the servants pose the satirist is that their behavior follows no rules, even of the perversest kind. Only the hand-to-hand combat of local attention and individual instance can engage their friable nature.

Familiarity and Satire

Ostensive display of familiarity with "things as they are" is an important determinant of tone and structure in Swift's satire. Many of Swift's satires use, abuse, and investigate the power of familiarity. It is familiarity that sets the tone of supercilious disdain that Swift so often strikes. The combination of intimacy and contempt that is created reveals a singularly independent moral will, and is one reason why Swift's powerful intellect and his potential (if not always actual) impartiality have always been respected. He knows his victim well, better than the victim ever

knew himself, yet he is not drawn into allegiance. Paradoxically, Swift's pose of blasé seen-it-all-before indifference lends freshness to his indignation. While folly is outrageous, in another sense it is all too commonplace. The process whereby we become inured to the strangeness of a particular set of givens, whereby our idea of what is fit fits to what is usual, is the very essence of naturalization that takes place within every ideological system. Familiarity of this sort is tellingly exploited by Swift in the play of expectation and surprise that takes place in his irony.

In its most economical form the advertisement of the satirist's weary familiarity with the ways of the world is incorporated into his tone of understatement. In the *Argument Against Abolishing Christianity*, it is reported that two ingenious young men, who generously communicated their discovery of the nonexistence of God, were prosecuted *"only* for *Blasphemy"* (*Works*, 2:28). This parenthetical form of incidental admission of the appalling is an effect that Swift uses widely. For example, exactly the same use of "only" occurs in Book 3: the excrement of someone planning to kill the king is found to be quite different "when he thought only of raising an Insurrection, or burning the Metropolis" (*Gulliver's Travels*, 3.6, 190). The *Journal to Stella* records a similar use of the familiar "only" that Swift addressed to Harley on the occasion of a particular crisis in the Ministry's fortunes: "I told lord treasurer, I should have the advantage of him; for he would lose his head, and I should only be hanged, and so carry my body entire to the grave" (*Journal to Stella*, 2:435, 8 December 1711). Where Burnet coyly described Titus Oates's crime as "unnatural practices, not to be named," Swift's marginal comment typically explodes the euphemism with a similar mock understatement: "Only sodomy" (*Works*, 5:278).[71]

Although familiarity is certainly not a quality of mind about which Swift is complacent (as we have seen in the last chapter's analysis of the distinction between legitimate consensus and mere conformity), it is a valuable demeanor to maintain when challenging other people's assumptions. The satirist's cool immunity to surprise serves as an indicator that he himself is not hidebound by parochial preconceptions. Others may be drawn into easy belief, but he is fortified against delusory conviction. Swift took upon himself the "old Precept of Wisdom to admire at nothing in human Life" (*Enquiry into the Last Ministry*, *Works*, 8:133), and regarded himself as "a suspicious fellow" who could not, on that account, be easily over-reached (*Journal to Stella*, 2:463, 13 January 1711–12). A character in a Stoppard play aptly describes this hard-boiled response to novelty: "sheer disbelief hardly registers on the face before the head is nodding with all the wisdom of instant hindsight."[72] Gaping amazement is beneath the dignity of a philosopher (*Correspondence*, 2:183, 2 August 1715); it is merely the mirror-image of gullibility. Swift's cynicism preempts credulity by believing the worst earlier rather than later. This particular kind of prepossession protects the practitioner against the pratfalls of experience.

Sly dexterity within foreign value-systems and idioms serves to make fantasy plausible in *Gulliver's Travels*. Gulliver's outlook, like his notion of size, becomes naturalized to his surroundings. When Glumdalclitch is described as "not above forty Foot high, being little for her Age," or when he claims to be able to tell which of a number of Struldbruggs is the eldest, "although there were not above a Century or two between them," in his off-hand manner with fantastically large numbers he deftly shows off his familiarity with local expectations (*Gulliver's Travels*, 2:2, 95; 3.10, 214). His naive receptivity makes him a perfect traveler and linguist, a man without qualities. But Gulliver's ability to accommodate himself to any ambient conditions also has its sinister side.

That which is familiar is also generally unexamined, as the King of Brobdingnag discovers in the course of debates with Gulliver about western civilization. Gulliver's airy panegyric on gunpowder derives from intellectual pride: he knows (and believes that he understands) something of which the King is ignorant. The King's unexpected response lays particular stress on the fact that Gulliver "could entertain such inhuman Ideas, and in so familiar a Manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the Scenes of Blood and Desolation, which I had painted" (*Gulliver's Travels*, 2.7, 134–35). The Houyhnhnm master, in the same situation, swiftly apprehends the dangers of familiarity, a miasma that causes him "a Disturbance in his Mind, to which he was wholly a Stranger before. He thought his Ears being used to such abominable Words, might by Degrees admit them with less Detestation" (*Gulliver's Travels*, 4.5, 248). In commanding Gulliver to silence, the Houyhnhnm rightly resists acquaintanceship with the detestable: after such knowledge, what forgiveness? He recognizes that knowledge of this sort is very different from abstract curiosity; its acquisition will damage his integrity. He eludes the inveigling tentacles of Gulliver's neutral and accustomed description, a mode of discourse that travesties his standards of what is unspeakable, and threatens to draw his understanding down to meet its own terms.

Irony and Private Jokes

The scene in which Gulliver acquaints the Houyhnhnm master with human warfare is paradigmatic of Swiftian irony. "I could not forbear shaking my Head and smiling a little at his Ignorance. And being no Stranger to the Art of War, I gave him a Description of Cannons, Culverins, Muskets, Carabines . . ." (*Gulliver's Travels*, 4.5, 247). The inside knowledge enjoyed by adept readers of Swiftian irony is represented in this scene by Gulliver's supercilious smile. Insiders to the game of de-familiarizing the familiar, we know what is going on; we understand the local omission that can transform a crucifix into a post, and transubstantiate transubstantiation into a quibble about "the Juice of a certain *Berry*" (*Gulliver's Travels*, 4.5, 246). Those in the know cannot forbear shaking their heads and smiling at the ignorance of those without the knowledge—at the Irish Bishop reported by Swift to have said of *Gulliver's Travels* "that Book was full of improbable lies, and for his part, he hardly believed a word of it" (*Correspondence*, 3:189), at the old man who looked up Lilliput in his atlas, or, more recently, at the film-goers who walked out of Woody Allen's *Zelig* because it was "just a boring old documentary."[73]

In Luggnagg, Gulliver is on the receiving end of the patronizing, self-congratulatory knowingness that is the uglier side of irony. After hearing about the immortality of the Struldbruggs, he expatiates rapturously on the blessing of immortality and the uses to which he would put it. His outburst inspires a good deal of laughter at his expense (*Gulliver's Travels*, 3.10, 210). The psychology that lies behind this laughter may be deduced from the reaction of the interpreter, who listens to Gulliver "with a Sort of a Smile, which usually ariseth from Pity to the Ignorant" (*Gulliver's Travels*, 3.10, 208).

For all its sophistication, Swiftian irony never strays very far from the "bite," the linguistic practical joke that deliberately manufactures the kind of embarrassing situation into which Gulliver has strayed in this incident. The bite is a simple trick of tonal control: the reader or hearer is seduced into a belief in the impossible by the biter's strict maintenance of sobriety.[74] According to the *Tatler*'s kill-joy definition, a biter is "a dull fellow, that tells you a lie with a grave face, and laughs at you for knowing him no better than to believe him."[75]

An uncharitable "pity to the ignorant" is essential to the internal economy of the bite: it is implied that the embarrassment precipitated by the victim's ignorance is due punishment for his credulousness. A bite is an exultant celebration of the practitioner's self-possession, his (temporary) immunity from human suggestibility, based on the knowledge of which he is a sharer while the victim is not. Like the bite, irony defines two communities: those who fall for it and those who are in on it.[76] The perception of irony is a sudden glory[77] that proceeds from a sensation of eminence in the perceiver, as well as a welcome sense of belonging among the perceptive rather than the deceived. Irony is a conspiracy of the elite and as such is for snobs or would-be snobs: "irony is a trope whose rhetorical effect depends upon the audience's desire to ally themselves with the elite speaker, lest they be counted among the vulgar."[78]

Irony creates a private collective whose form corresponds to the corrupt claustral groupings that have been shown to preoccupy Swift, but, as Traugott points out "the ironist worth his attic salt turns the impulse of snobbery into a philosophical separation of being from non-being, consciousness from echo."[79] There is a fundamental difference between the private-spirited clubs that Swift attacked and the group of "insiders" that his irony creates. The difference centers on the criteria for membership of the respective groups. Irony is certainly a private joke, but unlike the in-jokery of coteries, the privacy involved in irony is not a matter of common circumstances that reinforce the exclusiveness of the peer group. The clubs, cabals, sects, "families" (in the Mafia sense), professions, and parties that Swift attacked are unions of interest and privilege: their closure defines them. Swift's irony, on the other hand, forms a meritocracy rather than an aristocracy. Admission to the group of *cognoscenti*, the "Men of Tast" that can appreciate satire, is granted on the basis of intellect and wit (*A Tale of a Tub*, Apology, 3). The faculty that is cultivated in Swift's ironic exercises is the ability to "smoke"[80] the jest—a faculty that secures a local victory over prejudice and prepossession.

In constructing *Gulliver's Travels* as a bite, Swift played complex games with the reader's desire to believe in fictions. If we compare *Gulliver's Travels* to an earlier, cruder, experiment from which Swift learned many tricks, we see how perversely ingenious Swift's conception was.[81] The fraudster who styled himself *Psalmanaazaar* published his *Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa* in 1704 as an elaborate practical joke at the expense of the public. The rogue invented an entire country including its history, geography, costume, customs, religion, and language. Psalmanaazaar had a brief but successful career as a self-made "Formosan," during which he defended himself against

skeptics at a public meeting of the *Royal Society* (2 February 1703/04), and was even commissioned to teach his fabricated Formosan language at Christ Church, Oxford, to young gentlemen training to be missionaries. His claim to be an authority on the delicate flavor and market potential of human flesh was later to earn him an honorable citation in *A Modest Proposal* (*Works*, 12:113). The plausibility of Psalmanaazaar's *Description* depended on its audacity, its rigorous internal consistency and its use of detail which deliberately resists incorporation within an ethical or a philosophical journey scheme. It was necessary to sustain the tedium to distance Psalmanaazaar's ostensibly nonfictional work from fictional voyage genres. The *Description* was only finally discredited in 1708 after much controversy and scandal. Lemuel Gulliver ("*Splendide Mendax*") managed to outdo his impudent predecessor by publishing a work that was not even a genuine hoax; whereas the imposter had told lies like truth, the satirist paltered with the reader in a double sense, telling truth disguised as specious lies.

Satire and Private Spirit

> There are two Ends that Men propose in writing Satyr; one of them less noble than the other, as regarding nothing further than the private Satisfaction, and Pleasure of the Writer; but without any View towards *personal Malice:* the other is a *publick Spirit,* prompting Men of *Genius* and Virtue, to mend the World as far as they are able. And as both these Ends are innocent, so the latter is highly commendable. . . . If I ridicule the Follies and Corruptions of a *Court*, a *Ministry,* or a *Senate,* are they not amply paid by *Pensions, Titles,* and *Power;* while I expect, and desire no other Reward, than that of laughing with a few Friends in a Corner? (*Intelligencer, Works*, 12:34)

As an analysis of satire or as a satiric manifesto, this is a disturbingly complacent statement; nevertheless, it is revealing. On the official level it stresses the innocence of satire, as if Swift's work were merely harmless humor, no offense in the world. But the paragraph admits by implication the possibility of poison in jest, of satire as invective, created on behalf of a self-regarding minority. A similarly complacent and misleading account of the satirist's calling appears in a letter from Pope to Swift:

> After so many dispersions and so many divisions, two or three of

> us may yet be gathered together; not to plot, not to contrive silly schemes of ambition, or to vex our own or others hearts with busy vanities (such as perhaps at one time of life or other take their Tour in every man) but to divert ourselves, and the world too if it pleases; or at worst, to laugh at others as innocently and as unhurtfully as at ourselves. (*Correspondence*, 3:96, 14 September 1725)

At this time Swift was completing the *Travels;* if public spirited corrective schemes and reformatory ambitions are indeed no more than "busy vanities," they had not yet relinquished their hold on him. Although he accepted the picture of two or three gathered together to laugh at the absurdly divided post-Babelian world, he objected to Pope's coyness. He replied in his most famous letter, 'I like your Schemes of our meeting after Distresses and dispertions but the chief end I propose to my self in all my labors is to vex the world rather then divert it' (*Correspondence*, 3:102, 29 September 1725). Swift realized that Pope's illusion of a general sharing of pleasure ("the world too if it pleases") is an evasion of the essentially private nature of satire, a blood sport in which the many are goaded for the amusement of the few. The final years of Swift's satiric career see him retreating from the reformatory undertakings of earlier days into a humor that is private in the sense (though not the innocence) described here.

The species of anagnorisis that took place in Swift's early satire was purpose-built for enclosed, secretive, and self-protective structures; it penetrated the closed ranks of the Whig Ministry, the dissenters, and Wood's cabal. It exposed corruption and denounced private interest. As I have argued, the limitations of an ad hominem satire, explaining behavior in motivational terms of covert private interest (selfish individualism), led Swift to a consideration of communal private interest (faction). Polemic directed at the falsehood of individuals (political lying) gives place to more sophisticated satire, concerned with the expedient ideological environments cultivated by parties, cliques, sects, and vested interests (private language and private morality). There is a transition from the concern with hypocrisy which dominates the political writings to ironically adept games with relativity in the satires, scrutinizing the nature of ideology. This more complex work casts light on the self-confirmatory assumptions and values (religious, cultural, and political) that flourish in privileged environments.

Swift's last attempts at satire, on the other hand, seem to turn in on themselves. The few grouped together in a corner (in the Swiftian passage above) is a figure that Swift had used in early

days to point at local heroes and private spirited parasites: "What People then, are these in a Corner, to whom the Constitution must truckle?" (*Examiner, Works,* 3:134). At the prime of his career he had confidently asserted that libel without regard to truth or probability was the speciality of a writer in a ruined cause, upon whom devolves the dubious privilege of "hugging [him]self in a Corner with mighty Satisfaction" (*Examiner, Works,* 3:75). Ironically, by the early 1730s Swift found that this description fitted his own satiric work and the private satisfaction shared by his diminishing audience.

In a letter to Pope, Swift described his recent writings as "little accidental things writ in the country; family amusements, never intended further than to divert our selves and some neighbours; or some effects of anger, or publick Grievances here, which would be insignificant out of this kingdom" (*Correspondence,* 4:30, 12 June 1732). He recommended to Gay, with familiar self-destructive mock homily, the sort of local humor (*Correspondence,* 4:31) that would produce "domestick libels to divert the family and the Neighboring Squires for five-miles round" (*Correspondence,* 4:15, 4 May 1732). These are prescriptions for precisely the parochial humor that Swift had ridiculed in early days (*Tatler, Works,* 2:237).

In his late Anglo-Latin games and exchanges with Sheridan, Swift created his own genre of self-enclosed and self-destructive literature. The lineaments of satire's private humor may be seen in these trifles in a form that is as exclusive as possible (in code), unpublishable, and, in several respects, unreadable. "I ad ore ape in tr, ime an ape inter, nota da uber offa sine post; an ob ut ara fel, a Rubens, agi do rene, a Titi an, a Cor regio, a bona rota, a cara vagi, a leo nardo de vinci."[82] By playing fast and loose with spelling conventions, these language games cut the links between written language and its oral equivalent. All other considerations are surrendered to the construction of an arbitrary appearance (combinations of letters that look like Latin or French until you try to read them). In its absurd demands on readers, Swift's late satire is self-destructive. The rules of these late language games attempt to realize in literary form the absurd instructions jotted on a note from Swift to Fontaine—"Be so kind to burn this before you read it . . ." (*Correspondence,* 1:269, 7 November 1711). Pathetically, he watched his writing career dwindle into an old age of ephemera and trifles "which three or four of us read & laugh at today, & burn to Morrow" (*Correspondence,* 4:262, 1 November 1734).

Coda: From Reformation to Quotation

While the enlightening insights of reformatory satire move from ignorance to knowledge, in the famous exchange between Gulliver and the Houyhnhnm about warfare, the nature of irony's knowingness is itself subjected to satiric pressure. The satire here operates retrogressively, turning away from Gulliver's worthless knowledge to the Houyhnhnm's precious innocence. A fundamental paradox in Swift's outlook has produced this reversal. Although Swift was an adept manager of appearances, masks, and ironies, he believed that the moral and political ideals that he sought to promote through these means were in the best sense common and obvious. He understood that a language's elaborately encoded assumptions control the perception of reality, but he preferred to believe that reality is entirely independent of language: a turnip is a turnip and there's an end on't. There is a conflict, therefore, between his skill in doing the police in different voices and his belief in univocity. In his late work satire was made impossible by his impatient belief (the preacher encroaching upon the jester) that there should be no need for art, cunning, or eloquence in arguing for plain reason (Drapier's Letters, *Works,* 10:29), and that novelty and wit should have no place in plain and true discourse (Sermons, *Works,* 9:214).

Although his works have the reputation of despairing cynicism, they contain several declarations regarding the perspicuousness of truth that are so idealistic as to be naive. Swift's intellectual nostalgia looks back to the Eden of right reason, of clear values, of heroes and villains whose qualities are transparent and universally acknowledged, where the plausible is not necessarily falseness well dissembled. The idea that good taste is universal (*Correspondence,* 3:226, July 1727), that "Truth always forceth its Way into rational Minds" (*Gulliver's Travels,* 2.8, 146), that "*Reason* alone is sufficient to govern a *Rational* Creature" (*Gulliver's Travels,* 4.7, 259), that God wants no more of us than we are able to perform, and that therefore our duty can be explained in terms that may be understood by anyone (*To a Young Clergyman, Works,* 9:66) are all declarations that Swift made and wanted fervently to believe. All imply that right reason is simple and accessible, a belief that militates against the need for irony.

The ideal laws of Brobdingnag, short, plain, and unambiguous (*Gulliver's Travels,* 2.7, 136), and the Houyhnhnm conviction that reason "strikes you with immediate Conviction" (*Gulliver's Travels,* 4.8, 267), imply a belief in the strength of the truth to win

through without need for the stratagems adopted by error. Swift's straight-faced impersonations are put before the reader with the intention that vice should essentially convict itself. Quotations and extracts from the targeted form or style are reproduced so that they can simply parody themselves.[83] Apodictic truths lie at the end of satire's long road—but they also make satire itself obsolete.

A Modest Proposal is Swift's valediction to satire. Adopting the same tone as Gulliver's claim to have thrown off all visionary schemes of reforming the Yahoo race (*Gulliver's Travels,* Letter, 8), the modest proposer rejects all other alternative projects. Swift's recognition of the projector in himself and his eventual renunciation of satire's reformatory brief have been discussed before by commentators: "Swift was led to see himself as a political projector because, like the projector, he had preached simple solutions to complex problems, and, as with the projector, the gap between aspiration and achievement had been infinitely wide."[84] Swift's ambiguous attitude toward ambiguity has led to this conclusion. Perspicuous truth is an ideal that appears in Swift's work throughout his career; simplicity and clarity are moral strengths rather than just stylistic preferences. As his sermons and his famous opposition to philosophy demonstrate, Swift believed that self-defeating refinement had intricated what God made plain.[85]

One final example illustrates the self-destructive potential of such a satiric program. It has not been much noticed that the Modest Proposer wrote a second piece, *The Answer to the Craftsman.* This pamphlet begins with the persona's defense of his earlier charitable proposal, which is then topped by one that is even more outrageous. The wild project that is proposed on this latter occasion is not actually prescriptive in any way: it merely describes the existing state of affairs (absentee English landlords, loss of population to colonies, proscribed exports, highly finished imports, lack of currency, and so on). Absurd fantasy is created simply by taking an extract from reality. The implied rhetorical question is: How could anyone seriously countenance let alone design such measures?

As satire, *The Answer to the Craftsman* is an unmitigated failure because it eliminates the vital distance between the parodic fiction and its referent. There is no extravagant exaggeration here, simply because reality has outstripped fantasy. In this late work Swift ran out of comic prophecy, the dry mockery that is always unsurprised by events, and is always able to outdo and overkill. Genuinely scandalized, his heart was too heavy to maintain irony any

longer (*A Short View of the State of Ireland, Works,* 12:10). Swift found himself at the end of his satiric career facing the predicament of Thersites, who could not find the words with which to insult Menelaus. Dog, mule, toad, and lizard are clearly much too bland as epithets because, according to Thersites, there is no more despicable condition than to be Menelaus himself.[86] When naming the thing itself becomes the most terrible possible damnation, satire collapses into tautology.

Poetry, ed. David M. Vieth (Hamden, Conn., 1984), pp. 3–20, 21–32, respectively.

47. E.g. Lock, "Swift and English Politics, 1701–14," p. 127.

48. John R. Clark, *Form and Frenzy in Swift's* Tale of a Tub (Ithaca and London, 1970), p. 17.

49. See "Verses Upon the Death of Dr Swift," *Poems*, 2:565, l. 326. Swift's satire as a grotesque travesty of justice will be discussed in the section entitled "The Hanging Judge" in the next chapter.

50. On private judgment, see Harth, pp. 38–39, 129–30.

51. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols (Oxford, 1934), vol. 2, p. 126.

52. Denis Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 43.

53. J. L. Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," trans. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 234–36 (p. 236).

54. John Donne, *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford, 1967), "Satire 3," ll. 71–73, p. 13; cf. Deuteronomy 32:7.

55. Locke, *Two Treatises*, p. 199. See my article, "The Modest Proposer's American Acquaintance," *Review of English Studies* n.s. 36 (1985):538–41, which argues that Locke's castigation of Filmer's uncritical citation of precedents to justify paternal authority exerted a formative influence over Swift's rhetorical strategy in *A Modest Proposal*.

56. The "new schemes in philosophy," "new systems," and "new religions" in sec. 9 of *A Tale of a Tub* are novel, original, and singular in contrast to the "common Forms"; Harth, pp. 127–28.

57. See also Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (Glasgow, 1976), pp. 192–93. Originality is celebrated in Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition, in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (London, 1759).

58. E.g. Geoffrey Hill, "Jonathan Swift: The Poetry of 'Reaction'," in Donoghue *Anthology*, pp. 273–84 (p. 276). In the next chapter, Swift's response to the pressure of extant forms is discussed.

59. Pope, *Peri Bathous, or, The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, ed. Edna Leake Steeves (New York, 1952), pp. 12–13.

60. R. S. Downie, "Can There Be a Private Morality?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n.s. 68 (1968):167–86.

61. Pat Rogers, "Swift and the Idea of Authority," in *The World of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford, 1968), pp. 25–37 (pp. 28–29).

62. See *Works*, 9:219 and 12:279, quoted as the epigraph to the Introduction.

Chapter 5. Book-Burning, Parsimony, Private Jokes, and Antinomian Fiction

1. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London, 1973), p. 93.

2. John Irwin Fischer, "Introduction: 'All . . . Manifestly Deduceable'," in *Contemporary Studies of Swift's Poetry*, ed. John Irwin Fischer and Donald C. Mell, Jr. (Newark, London, and Toronto, 1981), pp. 11–22 (p. 13).

3. Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters: An Historical Comedy* (Bloomington, 1968), pp. 131–32.

4. See Williams, *Library*, pp. 74–75 which notes that Swift may once have possessed the works of Shakespeare, although no record appears in the Sale Catalogue. Emile Pons rejects the view that Swift did not know his Shakespeare as a canard, but his claim that innummerable allusions and echoes appear in Swift's work is supported with no more than a handful of (mis)quotations (largely from the Histories) in Swift's correspondence; *Swift: Les Années de Jeunesse et le "Conte du Tonneau,"* Publications de la Faculté de Strasbourg Fascicule 26 (Strasbourg, 1925), pp. 219, n. 1, 295–96, n. 2.

5. C. S. Lewis, "Addison," in *Eighteenth-Century Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. James L. Clifford (New York, 1959), pp. 144–57 (p. 152).

6. Williams, *Library*, p. 22. Swift left 657 volumes (although he may have owned more books than eventually appeared in the Sale Catalogue)—about half the number in Fielding's collection, and just over a fifth of Locke's final library.

7. Robert H. Hopkins rightly draws attention to the fact that section 9 of *Tale* defines its subject as "the Original, the Use and Improvement of Madness in a Commonwealth" (*A Tale of a Tub*, 9:162); see "The Personation of Hobbism in Swift's *Tale of a Tub* and *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*," *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966):372–78 (p. 372).

8. *A Tale of a Tub*, Preface, 39–40. One factor may have been the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695; see Michael Foot, *The Pen and the Sword* (London, 1957), pp. 78–80.

9. *The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland, The Twickenham edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, 5, 3rd ed. (London and New Haven, 1963), p. 49.

10. *Correspondence*, 3:201, 17 February 1726–27, quoting Ecclesiastes 12:12. When Don Quixote's friends set about burning his library, they refer to the books that are saved from the flames as "los escogidos," rendered as "the elect" in J. M. Cohen's translation of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Adventures of Don Quixote* (Harmondsworth, 1950), p. 62.

11. Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London, 1972), pp. 145–66, in "Artery of Dulness."

12. Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, 1, in *No's Knife: Collected Shorter Prose 1945–1966* (London, 1967), p. 72.

13. On battology, see *A Tale of a Tub*, 7:147, and *A Tale of a Tub*, 1:69, and the "repeating poets" mentioned in *A Tale of a Tub*, 4:108.

14. George Mayhew, "Two Entries of 1702–3 for Swift's *Polite Conversation, 1738*," *Notes and Queries* 296 (1961):49–50. On Crambo and other language games, see George P. Mayhew, "Jonathan Swift's Games with Language" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1953).

15. J. L. Borges, "The Library of Babel," trans. J. E. Irby, in *Labyrinths*, ed. D. A. Yates and J. E. Irby (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 78–86.

16. F. R. Leavis, "The Irony of Swift," *The Common Pursuit* (London, 1952), pp. 73–87 (p. 86).

17. *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Denis Donoghue (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 66–67; Robert W. Uphaus, "Swift's Irony Reconsidered," in *Contemporary Studies of Swift's Poetry*, ed. John Irwin Fischer and Donald C. Mell, Jr. (Newark, London, and Toronto, 1981), pp. 169–77 (p. 170).

18. Michael Seidel, *Satiric Inheritance: Rabelais to Sterne* (Princeton, 1979), pp. 3–4. Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 30–31; Carnochan, "On Satire, Negation, and the Uses of Irony, *Eighteenth Century Studies* 5 (1971–72):122–44 (136); Rawson, "Cannibalism and Fic-

tion: Reflections on Narrative Form and 'Extreme' Situations," *Genre* 10 (1977):667–711 (669, 671–72); Ong, "Swift on the Mind: The Myth of Asepsis," *Modern Language Quarterly* 15 (1954):208–21 (210, 219, 220).

19. On Swift's gratuitous cruelties, see C. J. Rawson, *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader: Studies in Swift and our Time* (London and Boston, 1973), pp. 34–37 and passim.

20. Thomas Sheridan, *Life of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin* (London, 1784; reprint ed., Swiftiana 15, New York and London, 1974), p. 443.

21. In his recent biography, Nokes (unlike Ehrenpreis) has included certain elements of Swiftian mythology, although he does not necessarily believe them to be historically true; see *Jonathan Swift, A Hypocrite Reversed: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 1985), pp. viii–ix. An interesting study in Swiftian mythology is Mackie L. Jarrell, "'Jack and the Dane': Swift Traditions in Ireland," in *Fair Liberty was all his Cry: A Tercentenary Tribute to Jonathan Swift 1667–1745*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London, 1967), pp. 311–41.

22. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols (Oxford, 1934), 3:37. (I am grateful to Tim Langley of University College, London, for bringing this amusing parallel to my attention.)

23. Joseph Heller, *Catch 22* (London, 1962), p. 8.

24. *A Tale of a Tub*, 3:102. Cf. Ralph Cohen, "The Augustan Mode in English Poetry," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 (1967):3–32 (7) on Swiftian "dismemberment" and his "harmony of garbage."

25. Swift hindered a man of his pardon who was condemned to the gallows for rape, or so he reports jokingly in the *Journal to Stella*, 1:319–20, 25 July 1711.

26. On punitive satire, see Edward W. Rosenheim, Jr., *Swift and the Satirist's Art* (Chicago and London, 1963), pp. 12–17, 109–112.

27. *Pace* those who see him as a trimmer, e.g., Kathleen Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise* (London, 1959), chap. 1, pp. 1–12.

28. *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, 6th ed. (London, 1975), 2.1, 146 (50), and Introduction, pp. xxxiv–xxviii. Robert C. Elliott discusses the tendency of utopian fictions (including those of Plato and Montaigne) to omit or abolish literature in *The Shape of Utopia* (Chicago and London, 1970), pp. 121–28.

29. J. F. Reichert, "Plato, Swift, and the Houyhnhnms," *Philological Quarterly* 47 (1968):179–92.

30. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. R. Hackforth (Cambridge, 1972), 275A, D–E (pp. 157–59). The Spartan model for Swift's laconic linguistic ideal is discussed by Higgins, "Swift and Sparta: The Nostalgia of *Gulliver's Travels*," *Modern Language Review* 78 (1983):513–31 (523).

31. *A Tale of a Tub*, 5:126 and *Gulliver's Travels*, 3.5, 186. On eating books, see Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, Revelation 10:10–11, and *Correspondence*, 3:108, 15 October 1725.

32. In Ray Bradbury's dystopia, *Fahrenheit 451* (London, 1954), the condensing and simplifying pressures of mass media, the elimination of minority cultures, the argument that books disagree with one another ("a regular damned Tower of Babel," p. 40), and the suppression of dissidence have conspired to produce a book-burning culture (54–61). Ironically, *Gulliver's Travels* is one of the few books saved from the holocaust by the intellectual underground (67, 145).

33. E.g. *A Tale of a Tub*, 1:62; 4:108; *Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, 279; *Dunciad*, 1:155–62, 247–60.

34. *Correspondence*, 1:4, 11 February 1691–92. For other examples of Swift unsentimentally disposing of his own manuscripts, letters, and sermons in this punitive fashion, see *Correspondence*, 1:30, 13 January 1698–99.

35. See *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford, 1956), 1:234, quoted by Pat Rogers, "Gulliver's Glasses," in *The Art of Jonathan Swift*, ed. C. T. Probyn (London, 1978), pp. 179–88 (p. 182).

36. Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven, 1959), pp. 7–12.

37. "Falshood being naturally more plentiful than Truth," *Works*, 3:75. Cf: "There are but few Truths in the world, but Millions of Errors and falsities, which prevayle with the Opinion of the world"; Samuel Butler, *Characters and Passages from Notebooks*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge, 1908), p. 349. The same kind of cynical wisdom appears regularly in Hobbes: "so much greater [is the] number ordinarily of false Prophets, then of true" (*Leviathan*, 3.36, 467) and "Of the severall kinds of Madnesse, he that would take the paines, might enrowle a legion" (*Leviathan*, 1:8, 140).

38. Maxims, *Works*, 1:242. The odds against princes being amongst the few men of genius in an age are estimated by Swift at 20,000,000 to 1 (*Works*, 8:138).

39. *Coriolanus*, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, ed. Philip Brockbank (London, 1976), p. 210, 3.1, l. 243.

40. Geoffrey Hill, "Jonathan Swift: The Poetry of 'Reaction'," in Donoghue *Anthology*, pp. 273–84 (p. 276).

41. "Epilogue to the Satires," Dialogue 2, ll. 110–11, The Twickenham one-volume edition of *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London, 1965), p. 699.

42. *A Discourse on Hereditary Right*, Written in the Year 1712, by a Celebrated Clergyman (London, [1775]), p.32. See Appendix.

43. See D. C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 2nd ed. (London and New York, 1982), pp. 52–53 on the principle of economy.

44. See Johnson's famous description of the sublime in his "Life of Cowley," *Lives*, 1:21.

45. Pope, *Peri Bathous, or The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, ed. Edna Leake Steeves (New York, 1952), p. 32.

46. Ehrenpreis, "Swift on Liberty," pp. 137–38; Reilly, *The Brave Desponder*, p. 27.

47. See David P. French, "Swift and Hobbes—a Neglected Parallel," *Boston University Studies in English* 3 (1957):243–55 (243): "far from philosophically consistent, his mind was often a battleground for contending ideas."

48. Orwell, "Politics v. Literature: An Examination of *Gulliver's Travels*," *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols (London, 1968), 4:205–23 (212).

49. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton and London, 1975), p. 446.

50. Claude Rawson, "Review of: Oliver Fergusson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland*," *Notes and Queries* 208 (1963):478–79 (478); and *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader*, pp. 38–39.

51. The finest exponent of persona criticism, R. C. Elliott acknowledges the difficulties in relating satiric to novelistic "character" in *The Power of Satire:*

Magic, Ritual, Art (Princeton, 1960), pp. 187–88, 191–92, and in *The Literary Persona* (Chicago and London, 1982), pp. 125, 127, 131.

52. Donoghue, *A Critical Introduction*, pp. 3–11.

53. W. B. Carnochan, "On Satire, Negation, and the Uses of Irony," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 5 (1971–72):122–44 (139).

54. Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance* (New Haven, 1959), pp. 30–31.

55. Peter Steele, *Jonathan Swift: Preacher and Jester* (Oxford, 1978), p. 24.

56. Donoghue, *A Critical Introduction*, p. 8.

57. E.g. Michael V. DePorte, p. 69; Elliott, *Persona*, p. 121. Battestin argues that by now the question of the persona in the *Tale* should be thoroughly *non grata: The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 226, 311–12 n.

58. Contradictions within the fictive continuity of the *Travels* (e.g., mistakes of scale in the first two books) have always attracted the attentions of the curious, whose findings appear in *Notes and Queries* and even, on occasion, in the pages of *Scientific American*. I believe these inconsistencies to be merely local errors within a verisimilitudinous scheme (like Crusoe swimming naked to a wreck and filling his pockets with spoils), and seldom of much critical consequence, *pace* Frank Brady, "Vexations and Diversions: Three Problems in *Gulliver's Travels*," *Modern Philology* 75 (1977–78):346–67 (351–52).

59. Frank H. Ellis, "Arthur Mainwaring as Reader of Swift's *Examiner*," *Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981):49–66 (65).

60. The term *parodee* is used by Dwight Macdonald, ed., *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm–and After* (London, 1961), p. xii and passim.

61. Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 198–99 appositely discusses the role of factual detail in the realism of *Gulliver's Travels*, quoting Johnson on Swift's "vigilance of minute attention" and citing Henry James on the role of "solidity of specification" in the art of fiction.

62. Swift took great pride in his riddling, "wherein I exceed mankind" (*Correspondence*, 3:193, 5 December 1726). For other riddles, see *Poems*, 3:911–43; *Works*, 2:235–36; 9:281–84. Cf. *Hudibras*, 1.ii, 60–61, ll. 1130–54.

63. *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Kenneth Palmer, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London and New York, 1982), 1.3, 136, l. 193.

64. "Most Kinds of Diversion in Men, Children, and other Animals, are an Imitation of Fighting" (*Works*, 4:247).

65. "To Mr Delany," *Poems*, 1:215, ll. 23–24.

66. Swift's use of catalogues and lists has been discussed extensively by Rawson (*Gulliver and the Gentle Reader*, pp. 87–89, passim).

67. E.g. the inventory in "The Lady's Dressing Room," *Poems*, 2:526, ll. 10 ff.

68. See John Traugott, "The Yahoo in the Doll's House: *Gulliver's Travels* the Children's Classic," in *English Satire and the Satiric Tradition*, ed. Claude Rawson (Oxford, 1984), pp. 127–50 (p. 129).

69. Nokes, *Jonathan Swift, A Hypocrite Reversed*, p. 402.

70. See Kernan, *The Cankered Muse*, pp. 168–69 on the sheer density of things in Jonson's plays.

71. Swift disclaimed civility (*Correspondence*, 3:172, 15 October 1726, and *Correspondence*, 3:126, 29 January 1725–26) and launched assaults on a number of other polite euphemisms; e.g., the literalisation of the "forgetfulness" of favourites (*Gulliver's Travels*, 3.6, 188).

72. Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (London, 1972), p. 38.

73. A recent minor masterpiece in the tradition of the "bite" (or, in Kenner's useful terminology, "counterfeiting"). A large proportion of the audience at every showing of this film sits through the lengthy final credits watching for some reassuring (or disappointing) admission of the fictionality of the work.

74. *Poems*, 2:707–8, "Cadenus and Vanessa," ll. 668–73.

75. *The Tatler*, ed. G. A. Aitken, 4 vols (London, 1898), 1:109.

76. Irony's differentiation of the few in the know from the vulgar many is discussed by Ian Watt, "The Ironic Tradition in Augustan Prose from Swift to Johnson," in *The Character of Swift's Satire*, pp. 305–26 (pp. 307–8). The two audiences of satire have been recognized and discussed by Robert C. Elliott, *The Literary Persona*, p. 132. Ehrenpreis (3:447) describes the inner core of enlightened readers of the *Travels* as the "initiate."

77. Hobbes's definition of laughter, *Leviathan*, 1:6, 125.

78. John Traugott, "A Tale of a Tub," in *The Character of Swift's Satire*, pp. 83–126 (p. 83).

79. Traugott, "The Yahoo in the Doll's House: *Gulliver's Travels* the Children's Classic," in *English Satire and the Satiric Tradition*, ed. Claude Rawson (Oxford, 1984), 127–50 (p. 145).

80. In slightly more recent English idiom, to "rumble."

81. *Gulliver's Travels* as a "bite" and the demonstrable influence of Psalmanaazaar's *Description* is discussed in my article "Gulliver's Fellow-Traveller Psalmanaazaar," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 8 (1985):173–78.

82. Forster Collection, Add. MS 530, p. 119. (I adore a painter, I mean a painter, not a dauber of a sign-post. . . .)

83. Kenner, *The Counterfeiters*, p. 11.

84. J. M. Treadwell, "Jonathan Swift: The Satirist as Projector," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 42 (1975):439–60 (451); see also, Zoltan Abadi Nagy, "The Satirist as Projector, A New Approach to Jonathan Swift," *Hungarian Studies in English* 6 (1972):5–46; and C. J. Rawson, "A Reading of *A Modest Proposal*," in *Augustan Worlds: Essays in honour of A. R. Humphreys*, ed. J. C. Hilson et al. (Leicester, 1978), 29–50.

85. *Works*, 2:96; 9:151; on Swift's opposition to philosophy, see *Works*, 9:160 and *Correspondence*, 1:11, 3 May 1692.

86. *Troilus and Cressida*, act 5, scene 1, ll. 56–63.