SWIFT'S POEMS TO STELLA

by

Paul Michael Comeau

B.A. Simon Fraser University, 1974

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
English

© PAUL MICHAEL COMEAU 1977
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

September, 1977

All rights reserved. This work may not be reproduced in whole or in part by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.
NAME: Paul Michael COMEAU

DEGREE: Master of Arts

TITLE OF THESES: SWIFT'S POEMS TO STELLA

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Chairman: Dr. Jared Curtis, Associate Professor of English, Simon Fraser University

Dr. Ann messenger, Associate Professor

Dr. Temple Maynard, Assistant Professor

Dr. Mason Harris, Associate Professor

Dr. Philip Pinkus, Professor of English, U.B.C.

Date Approved: September 6, 1977
PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis or dissertation (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Dissertation:

SWIFT'S POEMS TO STELLA

Author:

(signature)

Paul Michael Comeau

(name)

April 4, 1978

(date)
ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to view Jonathan Swift's poems to Stella from a new perspective. Critics generally have acknowledged these poems to be admirable compositions, but the tendency has been to analyze them categorically as either love poems or as testimonials to the efficacy of Christian virtue. The problem with both approaches is that, whereas they explore important individual aspects of the poems, Swift's overall artistic achievement is not sufficiently revealed. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to analyze the poems to Stella in as much individual detail as possible so that the achievement of each is recognized clearly, while the integrity of the group is maintained. More specifically, this study will demonstrate what exactly these eleven poems say about Swift and why they are among the best poems he wrote.

However, to gain even a superficial appreciation of Swift's artistic achievement in the poems to Stella, some familiarity with his views on language and poetry is required. Accordingly, this study begins with a review of Swift's most important writings on language and poetry, namely "A Letter to a Young Gentleman, Lately Enter'd into Holy Orders," "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet," Polite Conversation, and "On Poetry: A Rapsody." Some attention is also given to classical and eighteenth-century theories about
poetry and about the sublime, especially as they relate to Swift's own ideas on these subjects. Turning to the poems to Stella themselves, Swift's style and methodology are analyzed in some detail, as is the nature of his relationship with Stella, as it is revealed in the Journal to Stella, in particular letters and in other short prose pieces, and of course in the Stella poems.

This detailed study of the poems to Stella reveals that, as metrical compositions, they are technically precise and admirably contrived; furthermore, as intimate poems to a "most valuable friend," they indirectly reveal as much about Swift as they do about Stella. The poems reveal many of Swift's beliefs and even some of his hopes and fears as clearly as anything else he wrote. But, more than this, they illuminate a lasting and powerful friendship, the strength of which provides the emotional impetus by which the plain, simple style of the poems is transformed into something more than just "proper words in proper places."
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to acknowledge a sincere debt of gratitude to Professor Ann Messenger, whose friendship, guidance, and support were of inestimable value to the completion of this work. My thanks are also due to Professor Temple Maynard and to Professor Mason Harris for their helpful comments and criticisms. And finally, I owe special thanks to my parents for their unfailing encouragement.
For Judith,

whose love and understanding have really made this possible.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td></td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE:</td>
<td>Swift's Views on Poetry</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO:</td>
<td>Style and Methodology in the Poems to Stella</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE:</td>
<td>Swift's Relationship with Stella and His Presence in the Poems to Stella</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR:</td>
<td>Swift's Last Poem to Stella</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Ever since Patrick Delany declared in his Observations upon Lord Orrery's Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift, 1754 that the poems to Stella are "the finest in their kind, the friendliest, the best imagined, and the most truly elegant that ever any language produced,"1 critics have, with few exceptions, responded similarly to these poems. For example, in 1805 Nathan Drake ranked them among those of Swift's verses "which are not only free from any thing which ought to revolt a correct taste, but exhibit much elegance, urbanity, and well-turned compliment."2 And in 1966, one hundred and sixty years after Drake's appreciation, Maurice Johnson noted that Swift's poems to Stella "contain his most gravely musical, most affecting phrases,"3 an observation which he has subsequently reiterated in an article entitled "Swift's Poetry Reconsidered," adding there that "it is not very surprising after all that Swift's most private and personal poems are his most universal."4

Other critics have used different language to describe Jonathan Swift's poems to Esther Johnson but their sentiments are generally the same: the poems are among Swift's most
reputable, sincere, and affecting verses. Nevertheless, in the midst of such acknowledgements, as it were, some critics have contended that Swift's poetry is anti-poetic or, when they are unwilling to extend themselves quite so far on this controversial subject, that it is at least anti-sublime. E. San Juan, Jr., the chief proponent of the anti-poetry theory, argues that

Swift's method is unfailingly anti-poetic in the handling of materials . . . . While his imagination orders details into an ideal harmony, the substance is always solid: his poetry presents "imaginary gardens with real toads in them."5

And Maurice Johnson summarizes the anti-sublime theory as follows:

Swift surprises the ear with audacious rhymes and parodies, deliberately avoiding the pretentious and would-be sublime. He employs almost no ornamental imagery seriously intended. Instead, he confers unexpected interpretations upon conventional metaphors, which suddenly are shown to be canting or empty. He borrows elevated images only to twist, shrink, shred, or dissolve them, altering cliches into puns by treating them as though they were not verbal abstractions but palpable things to be sat on, cooked and eaten, made love to, mailed in a letter, slammed down like a window, or watched fly through the sky.6

It is interesting to observe that, essentially, both theories are attempts by critics to understand and label Swift's rather blunt, "palpable" style of writing in terms of some preconceived notion of what poetry is or should be. Little or no effort is made to analyze his poems within a context taking into account his own ideas about his art in general and about his obligations
as a poet in particular. Little or no effort is made to adopt as a critical guideline the Aristotelian maxim expressed so competently by Alexander Pope in *An Essay on Criticism*:

> In ev'ry Work regard the *Writer's End,*  
> Since none can compass more than they *Intend,*  
> And if the *Means* be just, the *Conduct* true,  
> Applause, in spite of Faults, is due.  

And, through it all, the inconsistency between the level of praise accorded the poems to Stella by Delany, Drake, and even Johnson himself and the judgment that Swift's poetry is anti-poetic goes unnoticed.

Looking not only to Swift's intentions in his poetry but also to numerous literary conventions and precedents, Robert Uphaus has capably disputed the anti-poetry theory in "Swift's Poetry: The Making of Meaning." He demonstrates convincingly how Swift "alters or reshapes poetic conventions," and how, at the same time, he consistently "aligns his verse with, rather than against, the traditional uses of poetry." The effect of this line of argument on the poems to Stella is to place them solidly within the conventions of amatory verse. But even as Uphaus' brief analysis of the Stella poems further legitimizes Swift's poetic vision in a general way, it fails to reveal either the richness or the complexity of the poems themselves.

For example, on the surface, the early poems to Stella appear to be only playful compositions, replete with clever puns and dexterous similes and allusions. But a close reading of these early poems reveals an underlying tone of seriousness which is
consistent with that found in the later poems. The later poems, on the other hand, are more apparently *memento mori* aimed at fortifying and consoling Stella. In the poems from 1719 through 1725, Stella's virtues are enumerated and praised. In the final two poems, and in "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27" especially, those virtues must serve as her psychological and spiritual mainstays in the face of death. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that all eleven poems were perhaps of more importance to Swift than has yet been realized.

The purpose of this study, then, is to analyze the poems to Stella as carefully as possible so that the achievement of each is recognized clearly, while the integrity of the group is maintained. My specific objectives are to demonstrate what exactly these eleven poems say about Swift and why they are among the best poems he wrote. The best way to accomplish these objectives is to shift the critical focus, which has traditionally been on Stella, to Swift: his views on poetry, his style and methodology of writing in the poems, and his special relationship with Stella, keeping in mind the while that these poems are neither representative nor typical of the majority of his poems to or about women. For it seems to me that the two greatest obstacles in viewing the poems to Stella in a proper perspective are the critics' inclinations, whether they are intent on characterizing the nature of Swift's love for Stella10 or on establishing a specific philosophical context for the poems,11 to
assume that Stella's welfare is Swift's only concern in the poems and to allow their readings of the poems to be coloured by speculations about Swift's misogyny arising from his depiction of various Daphnes, Chloes, and Corinnas.

On the contrary, however, when Swift's correspondence between July 1726 and December 1727 is considered in conjunction with the Stella poems, the misogyny issue and the idea that Stella is the only beneficiary of the poems are dispelled immediately. In letters to John Worrall and James Stopford, Swift lapses into uncharacteristic paroxysms of emotional and mental despair at the thought of Stella's impending death. He emerges as the principal sufferer in these letters while Stella's situation recedes into the background. Turning to the poems, one finds that it is Swift who manifestly needs help as much as Stella. Although he has educated her in the uses of virtue, he is surprisingly lacking in virtues like courage and patience himself; he is frequently either lamenting his failing health in "unmanly strains" or complaining of his declining poetical ability.

I am not saying that Swift is not writing according to the conventions of panegyric, that is, minimizing Stella's faults and maximizing his own helplessness in order to portray her obvious merits more emphatically. He surely is. And I am not saying that he does not experience Stella's distress as acutely as his own in the poems. What I am suggesting is that critics have observed Swift's presence in the poems to Stella too narrowly. These
poems should be read within a context of Christian doctrine or belief or, indeed, within whatever other philosophical context illuminates them constructively, but they should also be read as Swift's very practical attempts to retain some semblance of value in his own life, a life that he must shortly learn to live without the help of the one person who, in his words, "was all that is Valuable." 12

This, I believe, is the underlying struggle in the later poems to Stella especially. In preparing Stella to face death courageously and patiently, Swift is preparing himself to face life without her with equal courage and patience. He therefore writes the poems for her benefit but, just as importantly, he also writes them for the same reason he takes up his pen to begin her biography on the night of her death: "for [his] own satisfaction." 13 Thus, it is Swift's great personal need, a need that he expresses nowhere in his poetry but in these annual tributes to Stella, that initiates the intensity, the elegance, and the universality of the poems.
FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION


9 Ibid., p. 586.


13 "On the Death of Mrs. Johnson," in Jonathan Swift: Miscellaneous and Autobiographical Pieces, Fragments, and
Marginalia, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 227. All subsequent excerpts from Swift's prose are taken from Herbert Davis' fourteen volume edition of the prose works, which is divided thus:

(I) A Tale of a Tub with Other Early Works 1696-1707; (II) Bickerstaff Papers and Pamphlets on the Church; (III) The Examiner and Other Pieces Written in 1710-1711; (IV) A Proposal for Correcting the English Tongue; Polite Conversation, Etc.; (V) Miscellaneous and Autobiographical Pieces, Fragments, and Marginalia; (VI) Political Tracts 1711-1713; (VII) The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen; (VIII) Political Tracts 1713-1719; (IX) Irish Tracts 1720-1723 and Sermons; (X) The Drapier's Letters and Other Works 1724-1725; (XI) Gulliver's Travels 1726; (XII) Irish Tracts 1728-1733; (XIII) Directions to Servants and Miscellaneous Pieces 1733-1742; (XIV) Index, Addenda, Errata, Corrigenda. References will be cited by volume and page numbers. HD refers to Herbert Davis.
CHAPTER ONE
SWIFT'S VIEWS ON POETRY

There is nothing critically profound about the assertion that Jonathan Swift's prose and verse styles are clearly related to his ideas about language. The obvious truth of the statement almost precludes its being made. Nevertheless, a clear apprehension of this simple truism marks the first step in understanding his poetry. Samuel Johnson was accurate in noting that Swift's verses are "for the most part, what their author intended. The diction is correct, the numbers are smooth, and the rhymes exact. There seldom occurs a hard-laboured expression, or a redundant epithet; all his verses . . . consist of 'proper words in proper places."¹ Yet the basic simplicity of Swift's verse style deceived even Johnson into concluding that "in the poetical works of Dr. Swift there is not much upon which the critick can exercise his powers."² A closer look at Swift's views on language and poetry proves Johnson right in his first observation but wrong in his second. For, once the deceptive simplicity of Swift's style of writing is penetrated, the complexity of his thoughts and emotions is revealed.
At the expense of being repetitious and possibly a bit long-winded, I shall present what I take to be Swift's key writings on language and poetry at some length, in this chapter, for very specific reasons. First, I want to demonstrate that poetry played an important role in Swift's literary life despite the fact that the immense success of his prose has relegated his poetry to a secondary position in the eyes of many critics. Second, it is imperative that his views on language and poetry be examined in conjunction with each other in order for the interdependence of these views to be appreciated fully, in order for the subtleties of his satires on false modern poets, critics, and projectors to be apprehended more easily. And third, it is impossible to analyze the poems to Stella adequately without first gaining some insight into how Swift thinks and works in his poetry.

Swift's views on the English language are expressed most comprehensively in four essays: The Tatler, No. 230 (1710), "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue" (1712), "A Letter to a Young Gentleman, Lately Enter'd into Holy Orders" (1720), and Polite Conversation (1738). The Tatler essay consists primarily of the observations of an anonymous critic on the deterioration of written English as exemplified in a letter from an accomplished modern correspondent. By sending his remarks to Isaac Bickerstaff of The Tatler, the anonymous critic hopes to expose and, if possible, to remedy "the deplorable Ignorance that for some years hath reigned among
our English Writers; the great Depravity of our Taste; and the continual Corruption of our Style" (HD, II, 173-174). Motivated by a genuine desire for reforms in the language, the critic proceeds to enumerate the most obvious abuses that have crept into written English at an alarming rate:

The first Thing that strikes your Eye, is the Breaks at the End of almost every Sentence; of which I know not the Use . . . . Then you will observe the Abbreviations and Elisions, by which Consonants of most obdurate Sound are joined together . . . . And this is still more visible in the next Refinement, which consisteth in pronouncing the first Syllable in a Word that hath many, and dismissing the rest . . . .

The third Refinement observeable . . . consisteth in the Choice of certain Words invented by some pretty Fellows, such as Banter, Bamboozle, Country Put, and Kidney . . . .

(pp. 175-176)

The anonymous critic appends a brief repudiation of cliches to this list of abuses before concluding with an exhortation to all authors to develop a style of writing which embodies "that Simplicity which is the best and truest Ornament of most Things in human Life" (p. 177).

Swift discusses the English language further in "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue." Here he attacks those unthinking modern writers who multiply the corruptions in the language in their pitiful struggles to remain fashionable. What distinguishes this proposal from The Tatler essay, though, is the fact that here the underlying assumption—that the English language can and should be stabilized, perfected, and then fixed permanently—is stated outright. The
need for such measures is implied near the beginning of The Tatler essay when the anonymous critic suggests that a man of wit, upon returning from the dead, would find communication with the present society of men and women impossible. But the author of the "Proposal" argues openly that if the English tongue "were once refined to a certain Standard, perhaps there might be Ways found out to fix it for ever . . . " (HD, IV, 9).

As his proposal continues, it becomes evident that the proposer is an historian of sorts. He traces the abuses in written English back in history to what he calls the fanatic times of the Restoration; he discovers the genesis of modern linguistic perversions in the moral and religious corruptions resulting from that time. However, whereas the root causes of linguistic abuses lie in the fanaticism of the past, the abuses themselves derive from the enthusiasm of the present. Accordingly, the proposer blames false modern refinements in language on modern writers, especially modern poets, who cultivate the use of monosyllabic and vowel-deficient words at the expense of correct grammar and proper stylistics. These same writers compound their guilt by prostituting themselves to the current fashion of spelling words exactly as they are spoken, "which beside the obvious Inconvenience of utterly destroying our Etymology, would be a Thing we should never see an End of" (p. 11).
Others besides the poets must accept responsibility for the proliferation of false linguistic refinements. The entire country is guilty to a large extent because, as the proposer admits sadly, Englishmen, as a people, are not very polite. In fact, women, who could make a positive contribution to society by returning a valuable measure of politeness to conversation, have been unaccountably ignored.

Now, though I would by no means give Ladies the Trouble of advising us in the Reformation of our Language; yet I cannot help thinking, that since they have been left out of all Meetings, except Parties at Plays, or where worse Designs are carried on, our Conversation hath very much degenerated. (p. 13)

Unable to offer a final decision on who should be employed to perfect and fix the language, the proposer concludes his essay in the defense of those principles upon which the reforms should be based. Politeness and simplicity, he decides, must be the foundations of any linguistic reforms because only when politeness and simplicity are reintroduced into the English language will conversation be profitable and enjoyable; only then will books "be always valuable... and not thrown aside... because they are out of Fashion" (p. 15).

It is fair to say that Swift's writings on the English language are cumulative if sometimes repetitive in their subject-matter and effect. For example, The Tatler essay catalogues the various abuses in written English, whereas the "Proposal" establishes the source of those abuses and, by singling out
politeness and simplicity, the directions that linguistic reforms should take. "A Letter to a Young Gentleman, Lately Enter'd into Holy Orders," on the other hand, deals not with the effect of written language upon a reader but with the effect of spoken language upon a listening audience: Holy Orders, as a vocation, naturally demands a high level of oratorical skill, but even so, the impact of what the cleric says can in many instances be attributed directly to the style in which his sermon is written.

The author of the letter, who identifies himself as a person of quality, defines style as "Proper Words in proper Places" (HD, IX, 65). With this definition in mind, he cautions the young man to whom he is addressing his remarks against padding his sermons with unnecessary epithets and thread-bare phrases conducive only to nausea and boredom:

> When a Man's Thoughts are clear, the properest Words will generally offer themselves first; and his own Judgment will direct him in what Order to place them, so as they may be best understood. Where Men err against this Method, it is usually on Purpose, and to shew their Learning, their Oratory, their Politeness, or their Knowledge of the World. In short, that Simplicity, without which no human Performance can arrive to any great Perfection, is no where more eminently useful than this is.

(p. 68)

The key to perfect oratory is simplicity of style. Affectation counteracts simplicity and misguides human judgment. Pride begets affectation which begets error or, as Swift phrases this genealogy in the digression on critics in A_Tale_of_A_Tub, "Momus and Hybris
... begat Zoilus, who begat Tigellius, who begat Etcetera the Elder, who begat Bentley, and Ayscough, and Wotton, and Perrault, and Dennis, who begat Etcetera the Younger" (HD, I, 57). For Swift, pride is always the cause and immorality always the result. Hence, morality becomes a real consideration no matter what profession one chooses because all men are subject to pride. As Paul Fussell explains,

The English humanist is thus obsessed by ethical questions. He sees man not primarily as a maker or even as a knower, but rather as a moral actor. Prescription rather than description is the humanist's business. We may almost define a humanist as one who finds it impossible to leave serious moral subjects alone.3

Swift's writings on the English language appropriately culminate in the discourse, Polite Conversation. This final treatise is a compendium of England's politest, most fashionable dialogues compiled by one of Swift's most delightful personae, "Simon Wagstaff." Wagstaff sets the tone of the piece in his lengthy introduction where he proudly announces, "That except some Smattering in French, I am, what the Pedants, and Scholars call, a Man wholly illiterate; that is to say, unlearned" (HD, IV, 118).

Far from deploring modern linguistic abuses, Wagstaff heralds each abuse as a refinement of monumental importance to the perfection of polite conversation. At one point he gleefully observes that the "only Invention of late Years, which hath any Way contributed to advance Politeness in Discourse, is that of
abbreviating, or reducing words of many syllables into one, by lopping off the rest" (p. 106). And at another point he solemnly announces that spelling words as they are pronounced has polished his present treatise immeasurably. Similar flights of folly are performed with equal dexterity, for Simon Wagstaff is a true modern enthusiast. In his own humble way he desires nothing more than to be worshipped like a God as the heroes of antiquity were, "upon the merit of having civilized a fierce and barbarous people" (p. 119). He therefore requests that people quote his name and drink his health at every opportunity.

When considered as a group, then, the above four essays represent Swift's views on the English language expressed both straightforwardly and ironically; he offers various other scattered thoughts on the subject elsewhere in his writings, notably in The Battle of the Books and in Book Three of Gulliver's Travels, but his primary concerns remain the same throughout. Briefly, they are that written English should be simplified, perfected, and fixed, while spoken English should be rendered more polite. In keeping with the theme of simplicity, these prescriptions are themselves uncomplicated and untechnical, a fact for which J. H. Neumann supplies a sensible reason. Swift, he suggests, is not a professional linguist in these writings, but only a concerned, practicing writer. His diagnoses should therefore be accepted for what they are:
They are rather the opinions of a person who approaches linguistic problems with fixed ideals of order and form, derived from the traditional attitude towards the classical languages, and who is moved, above all, by a great desire to bring beauty and regularity to what he regards as the awkward and shifting features of his native tongue.4

Neumann further implies that Swift's views on language are not eccentric by eighteenth-century standards, however conservative they may appear to be now. In fact, Swift is ultimately more liberal in his ideas about spelling, for example, than were many of his contemporaries. At all times, his "influence was on the side of order and tradition, with certain minimum allowances for modernity and change."5

Swift's determined adherence to the conventional rules of language structure—he deviated from the rules only in his most informal notes and letters—will be misunderstood if it is seen essentially as a stubborn and unbending reaction against current fashion by someone who rejected everything new as a matter of course. Critics who apparently object to conventionality on principle are apt to depict the major writers of the early eighteenth century as thoroughly arrogant conformists, more willing to live in the past than to adapt themselves to the present. For Swift, and doubtless for many of his contemporaries, however, the maintenance of traditional spellings, pronunciations, and sentence structures represented artistic stability in a world in which art was growing as subject as clothing to rapid changes in fashion.
Swift sincerely believed that to lose linguistic stability meant to forfeit all valuable modern and classical writings to incomprehensibility. But clarity of thought and simplicity of style meant still more to him than the continuation of literature. They meant "sanity" in the broadest sense of the word, something that any age so preoccupied with reason and reasonableness must always fear to lose. It is therefore no accident that in two of his major works those characters who are associated with modern refinements in language are madmen. The first instance appears appropriately in the digression on madness in *A Tale of A Tub*. Near the end of the digression, the author of the Tale observes that many Bedlamites could find employment in the outside world. One poor soul who is "eternally talking, sputtering, gaping, bawling, in a Sound without Period or Article" (HD, I, 112), should undoubtedly be given a green bag and be sent to Westminster Hall. Another inmate, who closely resembles a modern writer, is described thus:

Behold a Fourth, in much and deep Conversation with himself, biting his Thumbs at proper Junctures; His countenance chequered with Business and Design ... A Great Saver of Time, somewhat thick of Hearing, very short of Sight, but more of Memory. ... A huge Idolator of Monosyllables and Procrastination; so ready to Give his Word to every Body, that he never keeps it. One that has forgot the common Meaning of Words, but an admirable Retainer of the Sound. ... What a compleat System of Court-Skill is here described in every Branch of it, and all utterly lost with wrong Application.

(p. 112)
And the author of the Tale, who, if his own refined method of writing is any indication, has not the least notion of wrong or right application, is himself a resident of Bedlam.

The second instance appears in chapter five of Book Three of Gulliver's Travels. Besides cucumbers and excrement, the modernizing of writing is of great interest to the Academy of Lagado. The Academy has modernized the writing of books to such a degree that, with the help of a huge word machine, "the most ignorant person at a reasonable charge, and with a little bodily labour, may write Books in Philosophy, Poetry, Politics... without the least Assistance from Genius or Study" (HD, XI, 182-184). By this process, several volumes of broken sentences can be composed with astounding speed to the great benefit of mankind. Spoken language among the learned and the wise, on the other hand, has been marvelously abolished altogether:

For, it is plain, that every word we speak is in some degree a diminution of our lungs by corrosion; and consequently contributes to the shortening of our lives. An expedient was therefore offered, that since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them, such things as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on.

(p. 185)

The disadvantages attendant upon carrying about enough objects to facilitate lengthy conversations are easily outweighed for the projectors by the prospects of a longer life and a universal language.
The only difference between the projectors at Lagado and the Bedlamites appears to be that the latter are confined to an institution, for all of them represent modern enthusiasm in one form or another. The author of the Tale would free mental patients in his over-zealous efforts to find value in each person's life (he subsequently becomes unable to distinguish between sanity and insanity), and the projectors in Lagado produce nonsense-books in their enthusiasm to refine the art of writing. As a result, their projects fail not because the objects of their reforms require no reformation but because their pride and enthusiasm in being projectors misdirects their reforms. Given the importance of reason and sanity in a so-called "Age of Reason," it becomes apparent that, for Swift, the adherence to conventional rules of language structure and the cultivation of a clear, simple style are not simply matters of personal preference. Rather, these elements help to make the fine line between reason and madness a little broader, and the detection of both a little easier.

Swift's non-satiric observations in his short prose essays, together with the direction his satire takes in A Tale of A Tub, Gulliver's Travels, and Polite Conversation, make his views on language quite clear. But the importance of those views to the argument of this thesis lies in the extent to which they influence his views on poetry. As may be expected, the extent is great, and Swift's ideas about what poetry should be and how it should be
written are, in effect, extensions of his views on language. Questions about the nature of poetry were as much debated in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as they have been in subsequent times, but since it is my intention here to investigate Swift's views on poetry, I shall not try to summarize the entire critical atmosphere of his day. However, a brief glance at one or two contemporary theories of poetry is necessary principally to determine just how typical of his day Swift's views were.

The essential doctrine of poetry, as eighteenth-century theorists expressed it, was derived almost entirely from Aristotle. In chapter four of the Poetics, Aristotle argues that "Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, the instinct of imitation . . . Next there is the instinct for 'harmony' and rhythm. . . ."7 He also says that

Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity; such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies. . . . Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he.' For if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to imitation as such, but to the execution, the colouring, or some other cause.8

From this proceeds the dictum that poetry should instruct and delight since "learning" and "pleasure" are key words in the above passage. Aristotle's comments would probably have been
enough to convince Augustan writers of poetry's dual purpose, but the fact that Horace reiterated what Aristotle said put the question beyond doubt. Horace, in *Ars Poetica*, expresses his belief in poetry's dual purpose in the following way:

To teach--to please--comprise the poet's views,  
Or else at once to profit and amuse.  
In precept be concise. What thus is told  
The mind shall grasp with ease, with firmness hold;  
While all that's heaped superfluous shocks the taste,  
From memory's tablet fads, and runs to waste.9

It is not surprising, then, that John Dennis--one of the most prolific critics on the subject of poetry in the eighteenth century--writing under the influence of Aristotle and Horace, defined poetry in similar terms:

Poetry then is an Art, by which a Poet excites Passion (and for that very Cause entertains Sense) in order to satisfy and improve, to delight and reform the Mind, and so to make Mankind happier and better: from which it appears that poetry has two Ends, a subordinate, and a final one; the subordinate one is Pleasure, and the final one is Instruction.10

Poets like Dryden, Pope, Johnson, and especially Swift upheld the idea that poetry should instruct and please, in that order.

To arrive at a more comprehensive assessment of the eighteenth-century's general theory of poetry, the treatise, *Peri Hupsous (On the Sublime)*, must finally be considered. *Peri Hupsous* was erroneously attributed to Longinus, but if its authorship is debatable,11 its impact on eighteenth-century poetical theory is not. Although *Peri Hupsous* was probably circulated in eighteenth-century literary circles in the original Greek or in
John Hall's 1652 English translation, Nicolas Boileau's French translation of 1674 propelled the work to its greatest heights of popularity. The sublime had always been of implicit concern to poetical theorists since Aristotle, but the elements that comprise the sublime had never been as explicitly delineated as in Peri Hypsous. For example, Aristotle's argument that Tragedy is superior to Epic Poetry and particularly to Comedy--because Tragedy "fulfills its specific function better as an art" vaguely implies a gradation of each form's relative sublimity. And this is especially the case as regards Tragedy and Comedy because the type of language suitable to each can be so different. But Longinus is much more definite than Aristotle in his analysis of the nature of the sublime. Sublimity, he says,

consists in a certain excellence and distinction in expression, and . . . it is from this source alone that the greatest poets and historians have acquired their pre-eminence and won for themselves an eternity of fame. For the effect of elevated language is, not to persuade the hearers, but to entrance them . . . these sublime passages exert an irresistible force and mastery and get the upper hand with every hearer.14

The five sources of the sublime, he goes on to say, are

the ability to form grand conceptions . . . the stimulus of powerful and inspired emotion . . . the proper formation of the two types of figures, figures of thought and figures of speech . . . the creation of a noble diction . . . the total effect resulting from dignity and elevation.15

Longinus spends a good deal of time expanding on these five sources and, in the process, establishes the relationships of
language in general and of figures of speech in particular to
the sublime.

Besides the works of the classical writers, Swift's views on
poetry seem to have been influenced most significantly by two
contemporary works: Boileau's *L'Art Poétique* (1673) and Sir
William Temple's "Of Poetry" (1690). Boileau's *L'Art Poétique* was
much less popular than his translation of Longinus (1674) but it
was the former work that Dryden chose to translate into English in
1683. Since Swift possessed a 1697 edition of *Boileau ses Ouvres,
Tome I & II. Avec Satire Postume*, it is possible that he was
familiar with *L'Art Poétique* either in the original or at least in
Dryden's translation.16 Temple's essay was published a year after
Swift first arrived at Moor Park, and Swift's familiarity with
Temple's writings must surely have included a knowledge of "Of
Poetry."

At the outset of *L'Art Poétique* (I here use Dryden's
translation), Boileau establishes the tone for his poem by
cautions poets against insincerely undertaking "the Sacred Art
of Rhyme."17 He thus characterizes the writing of true poetry as
a sacred act, and the remainder of his poem is based on this
assumption. By implication, false or insincere poets are morally
culpable and reprehensible.

As regards the composition of poetry, Boileau advises,

> What-e'er you write of Pleasant or Sublime,
> Always let sense accompany your Rhyme;
> Falsely they seem each other to oppose;
> Rhyme must be made with Reason's Laws to close;
> And when to conquer her you lend your force,
> The Mind will Triumph in the Noble Course . . . .

(11. 27-32)
Poetry must combine sense and reason and the poet must consequently "Chuse a just Stile; be Grave without constraint, / great without Pride, and lovely without Paint" (ll. 103-104) to accomplish this end. Here the poet's moral obligation to himself, to his audience, and to his art is emphasized, as humility almost becomes the moral precondition for writing good poetry.

Humility plays a part in determining the kind of language appropriate to poetry as well. Boileau implores poets to

Observe the Language well in all you Write,
And swerve not from it in your loftiest flight.
The smoothest Verse, and the exactest Sense
Displease us, if ill English give offence;
A barbarous Phrase no Reader can approve;
Nor Bombast, Noise, or Affectation Love.
In short, without pure Language, what you Write,
Can never yield us Profit, or Delight.
(11. 155-162)

He is concerned, like Aristotle and Horace, about poetry's ability to instruct and delight. Pure language assures the accomplishment of both objectives. Nevertheless, at the end of it all, Boileau focuses on the integrity of the poet upon which everything else depends:

Let not your only bus'ness be to Write;
Be Virtuous, Just, and in your Friends delight.
'Tis not enough your Poems be admir'd;
But strive your Conversation be desir'd;
Write for immortal Fame; nor ever chuse
Gold for the object of a gen'rous Muse.
I know a noble Wit may, without Crime,
Receive a lawful Tribute for his Time:
Yet I abhor those Writers, who despise
Their Honour; and alone their Profit prize . . .
(11. 975-986)
William Temple's assessment of the nature of poetry, on the other hand, is considerably less emotional and less moralistic than Boileau's. Temple refuses to "allow poetry to be more divine in its effects than in its causes, nor any operation produced by it to be more than purely natural . . . ." He does not disagree basically with Boileau on the issue of poetical composition, he simply centers his attention more on the theory of poetry than on the practical and ethical implications of that theory.

Temple argues that true poetry can incite love or hate in the reader and, indeed, can change love into hate and hate into love. Poetry has such force because, "in it are assembled all the powers of eloquence, of music, and of pictures, which are allowed to make so strong impressions upon human minds" (p. 176). But poetry can only succeed if invention and wit are tempered with good sense and sound judgment:

Without the forces of wit, all poetry is flat and languishing, without the succours of judgment, 'tis wild and extravagant. The true wit of poesy is that such contraries must meet to compose it; a genius, both penetrating and solid; in expression both delicacy and force; and the frame and fabric of a true poem must have something both sublime and just, amazing and agreeable. There must be a great agitation of mind to invent, a great calm to judge and correct . . . . To work up this metal into exquisite figure, there must be employed the fire, the hammer, the chisel, and the file.

Without denying the need for genius and imagination in a poetical composition, Temple asserts the importance of the poet's technical skill. The fire of which he speaks represents
imagination or inspiration, the hammer and the chisel indicate the actual labour of writing, and the file suggests the polishing and refining required to perfect the poem.

Before he concludes his remarks on the nature of poetical composition, Temple expresses the opinion that contemporary writers would do better to translate Aristotle and Horace rather than to try to improve upon them. "After all, the utmost that can be achieved, or I think pretended by any rules in this art, is but to hinder some men from being very ill poets, but not to make any man a good one" (p. 183). His mention of Aristotle and Horace emphasizes the impact that these classical writers had on eighteenth-century poetical theory and, consequently, provides a suitable entrance into a discussion of Swift's views on poetry; Swift is as indebted to the classical writers for the basic precepts of poetical composition as his predecessors and his contemporaries were.

Swift never wrote lengthy treatises on the nature of poetry, on the rules of poetical composition, or on the nature of the sublime in poetry, but all of these concerns are effectively dealt with in "On Poetry: A Rhapsody," Swift's last poem on poetry as an art and, in effect, his *ars poetica*. Recently, Robert Uphaus has called "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" a poem "which is both a defense of Swift's use of poetry and a critical estimate of the verse of many of his contemporaries."19 Uphaus has shown also that Swift was indebted to Dryden's translation of Boileau's *L'Art Poetique*
and to Horace's *Ars Poetica* for sections of "On Poetry."20 I concur with Uphaus in both instances; however, I would like to demonstrate that "On Poetry" is the culmination of Swift's earlier comments on poetry, thereby directing attention to the particulars of his poetical views.

Critics generally agree that Swift's early poems are mediocre at best. These writings represent the young poet's first public attempts at poetry while showing, simultaneously, his reactions to the medium within which he has chosen to work. His reactions are interesting because they depict an angry young poet, steadfast in his hatred of falsehood and vice, determined to combat both evils, and yet uncomfortable within the confines of the heroic couplet. In "To Mr. Congreve" (1693), Swift lashes out at critics who, having no sense whatever of the art of poetry, nonetheless stand entirely committed to the rules of poetry: "These are the lords of the poetic schools, / Who preach the saucy pedantry of rules."21 His frank characterization of this type of critic justifies his anger:

Last year, a lad hence by his parents sent
With other cattle to the city went;
Where having cast his coat, and well pursu'd
The methods most in fashion to be lewd,
Return'd a finish'd spark this summer down,
Stock'd with the freshest gibberish of the town;
A jargon form'd from the lost language, wit,
Confounded in the Babel of the pit;
Born'd by diseas'd conceptions, weak, and wild,
Sick lust of souls, and an abortive child;
Born between whores and fops, by lewd compacts,
Before the play, or else between the acts:
Nor wonder, if from such polluted minds
Should spring such short and transitory kinds,
Or crazy rules to make us wits by rote
Last just as long as ev'ry cuckow's note:
What bungling, rusty tools, are us'd by fate!
'Twas in an evil hour to urge my hate,
My hate, whose lash just heaven has long decreed
Shall on a day make sin and folly bleed

(HW, I, 46-47, 11. 115-134)

Throughout his career (as a poet and prose writer) Swift never falters in his determination to "make sin and folly bleed."

Swift's tone becomes more embittered and despairing in "Occasioned by Sir William Temple's Late Illness and Recovery" (1693). Frustrated by society's tendency to transform genuine virtue into vice—to mistake his scorn of fools for the sin of pride—Swift defiantly upbraids his muse as a malignant goddess whose demands are not proportioned to her rewards:

Such were thy rules to be poetically great,
"Stoop not to int'rest, flattery, or deceit;"
"Nor with hir'd thoughts be thy devotion paid;"
"Learn to disdain their mercenary aid;
"Be this thy sure defence, thy brazen wall,
"Know no base action, at no guilt turn pale;
"And since unhappy distance thus denies
"Th' expose thy soul, clad in this poor disguise;
"Since thy few ill-presented graces seem
"To breed contempt where thou hast hop'd esteem."

(HW, I, 55, 11. 137-146)

The young poet renounces his muse's enchantment and visionary power because of his disillusionment: "And since thy essence on my breath depends, / Thus with a puff the whole delusion ends" (11. 153-154).

As far as is known, Swift wrote no poetry for the next five years; his next published poem is "Verses Wrote on a Lady's Ivory Table-Book" (1698). During the years between 1693 and 1698 his
creative powers were employed elsewhere than on poetry. In May 1694, he left Moor Park and travelled to Ireland where he entered the Anglican ministry; he was granted a prebend at Lisburn "during March and April 1695 . . . and at the end of April read divine service at Lisburn." In May 1696, he returned to Moor Park where he completed much of _A Tale of A Tub_ before the year ended. _The Battle of the Books_ followed in 1697. It appears, then, that between the writing of "Occasioned by Sir William Temple's Late Illness and Recovery" and "Verses Wrote on a Lady's Ivory Table-Book," Swift not only established himself more securely in the world financially but, more importantly, he came to terms with his poetical abilities. Certainly, by the time he writes "Verses Wrote on a Lady's Ivory Table-Book" his poetical style has altered drastically, and he seldom attempts the heroic couplet and style thereafter.

Glimmerings of Swift's poetical views emerge in three satirical poems on the architect turned playwright, John Vanbrugh. Swift investigates the nature of both poetry and the sublime in a humourous if somewhat superficial manner in these poems. Because he is an architect and a poet, Vanbrugh is the ideal subject for the architectural metaphor used commonly in the early eighteenth century to describe the art of poetic composition. And in addition to the happy coincidence of Vanbrugh's occupations, Swift could depend for added humour on the dual usage of "sublime," which was used to describe tall buildings as well as noble
sentiments. Together, these facts make Vanbrugh the perfect subject of a series of satires in which building modern houses is juxtaposed with writing modern poetry.

"Vanbrugh's House, 1703" begins the series. The initial comparison Swift sets up between ancient and modern poetry establishes modern poetry and modern poets alike as impotent. In ancient times

A Song could draw a Stone or Beam,
That now would overload a Team,
Lead them a Dance of many a Mile,
Then rear 'em to a goodly Pile . . . .

(HW, I, 79, 11. 3-6)

Modern poetry, by contrast, can no longer build houses and, as for modern poets, "Not one of all the tuneful Throng / Can hire a Lodging for a Song" (11. 15-16). Swift continues to argue against the moderns, using images familiar in the ancients/moderns debate in the process. He transforms the spider, the antagonist of the bee in *The Battle of the Books*, into a silkworm and identifies it with modern poets in general and playwrights in particular. Like the worm—and the emphasis is deliberately on "worm"--the modern poet "Consumes it self to weave a Cell" (I. 32). The modern poet's self-delusion is evidenced by the fact that, once more like the worm, "He flutters when he Thinks he flyes, / Then sheds about his Spau'n, and dyes" (11. 37-38).

The proof of the modern poet/worm analogy is Vanbrugh himself:
Van, (for 'tis fit the Reader know it)
Is both a Herald and a Poet;
No wonder then, if nicely skill'd
In each Capacity to Build:
As Herald, he can in a Day
Repair a House gone to decay;
Or by Accomplishments, Arms, Device
Erect a new one in a Trice;
And Poets if they had their Due,
By antient Right are Builders too.
(11. 59-68)

Swift begins by identifying Vanbrugh as a herald and a poet, but lest the reader take this announcement to indicate the diversity of Vanbrugh's expertise, the parenthetical remark implies that without being told, nobody would know that he was either one. Certainly, there is not much hope that a lineage "repaired" in a day or a new one thought up with equal speed will favourably advertise his integrity or creative skill as a herald or, for Swift extends the implication of Vanbrugh's repairing of family lines (houses) to include his skill in architecture,23 as an architect. Nevertheless, having made the initial connection between poetry and heraldry/architecture and having identified Vanbrugh as a modern practitioner of these arts, Swift can now use the imagery associated with them interchangeably to discredit "Modern Rhymers" who "strive to blast / The Poetry of Ages past"
(11. 89-90)

This is Swift's primary objective in "Vanbrug's House, 1703" and, consequently, the exact details about Vanbrugh's play and house are of secondary importance and therefore relatively sketchy. All that Swift says of the play is that
After hard Throws of many a Day
Van was deliver'd of a Play,
Which in due time brought forth a House . . . .

(11. 73-75)

Similarly, the house is described as being "One Story high, one
postern Door, / And one small Chamber on a Floor" (11. 77-78).
The relationship between the two is of an almost incestuous
nature, which, besides calling the morality of Vanbrugh's efforts
into question, also renders both the play and the house corrupt.24

The second Vanbrugh poem, "Vanbrugh's House, 1706," is
important to a discussion of Swift's views on poetry only insofar
as it reveals in greater depth the character of a false artist
and a plagiarist, both of which Swift, justifiably or
unjustifiably, believes Vanbrugh to be. But since it does not
deal directly with poetry and poetic composition,
I shall not include it in the present discussion.
Instead, I shall turn immediately to an analysis of Swift's last
Vanbrugh poem, "Vanbrugh's House" (1708/9).

"Vanbrugh's House" (1708/9) is actually a refined version of
the 1703 text. Swift here preserves much of the early text but
places more emphasis on Vanbrugh the poet than he had done
formerly. Vanbrugh methodically sets about to restore the art of
poetry by writing a play. Jove consents to the idea and,
anticipating an opportunity for some fun, suggests that Vanbrugh
choose a suitable style on his own. Van decides to write or,
rather, to plagiarize a farce:
But well perceiving Wit was scarce,
With Cunning that Defect supplies,
Takes a French Play as lawful Prize
Steals thence his Plot, and ev'ry Joke . . .

(HW, I, 107, 11. 56-59)

Swift's opinion of plagiarists is stated candidly in the "Apology" for *A Tale of a Tub*, which appeared in 1710: "I know nothing more contemptible in a Writer than the Character of a Plagiary"

(HD, I, 7).

Predictably, Vanbrugh derives no benefit from plagiarism, either in terms of his play or in terms of his house, which results from the play and is constructed of "experienced Bricks that knew their Trade, / (As being Bricks at Second Hand,)" (11. 76-77). Rather, in accordance with what Swift believes to be Vanbrugh's skill in both arts, the quality of the house reflects the quality of the play:

*The Building, as the Poet Writ,*
*Rose in proportion to his Wit:*
*And first the Prologue built a Wall*
*So wide as to encompass all.*
*The Scene, a Wood, produc'd no more*
*Than a few Scrubby Trees before.*
*The Plot as yet lay deep, and so*
*A Cellar next was dug below:*
*But this a Work so hard was found,*
*Two Acts it cost him under Ground.*
*Two other Acts we may presume*
*Were spent in Building each a Room:*
*Thus far advanc'd, he made a Shift*
*To raise a Roof with Act the Fift,*
*The Epilogue behind, did frame*
*A Place not decent here to name.*

(11. 79-94)
Vanbrugh's house/play is a hovel/hovel. When other modern poets flock to see his palace, they are surprised to find "A Thing resembling a Goose Py" (1. 140). Being Vanbrugh at heart themselves, however, they applaud Van's efforts exceedingly, condemning themselves further with each inane remark. Swift now reiterates his previous conclusion:

So Chymists boast they have a pow'r
From the dead Ashes of a Flow'r
Some faint Resemblance to produce,
But not the Virtue, Taste or Juice.
So Modern Rimmers wisely Blast
The Poetry of Ages past,
Which after they have overthrown,
They from its Ruins build their own.

(11. 127-134)

It is tempting to see the genesis of the satire of Book Three of *Gulliver's Travels* in the reference to chemists in these final lines of the poem. Nevertheless, however valid this speculation may be, it remains true that here, as in *Gulliver's Travels*, the chemists primarily represent modern enthusiasm in science just as Vanbrugh represents modern enthusiasm in poetry. Van and his counterparts exhibit their pride and ignorance when they boast of powers they do not possess. They become conspirators in immorality when they support each other in their delusions. Vanbrugh's play and the poets who praise it so vociferously are, for Swift, manifestations of the degenerating moral fabric of his age.

Because he is essentially concerned with reform in his satires, Swift never lets slip an opportunity to expose immorality
and foolishness. Therefore, he cannot, in conscience, allow Vanbrugh to continue dishonouring poetry and misleading society. Everything Vanbrugh is and everything he represents run contrary to Swift's idea of the nature of true poetry. Vanbrugh's pride renders him incapable of teaching virtue to others through his poetry; indeed, his plays are so bad that they neither instruct nor delight, as far as Swift is concerned. Furthermore, Vanbrugh's plays are not properly founded on classical rules, a fact which, to anticipate Swift's reasoning, identifies Vanbrugh in some measure with the group of modern poets described in the "Apology" for the Tale as being "illiterate Scribblers, prostitute in their Reputations, vicious in their Lives..." (HD, I, 2); for when modern poets ignore the ancient rules of poetry, they are left to their own resources and, in this predicament, they invariably confuse their abilities, make fools of themselves, mislead others, and debase the art of poetry. Moreover, as Vanbrugh's house proves, a modern poem or play, like a building, can never reach sublime heights if it is not constructed on a solid foundation.

A more comprehensive investigation into the nature of poetry and of the sublime, and a better representation of Swift's views on poetry, can be found in a prose essay entitled "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet; together with a Proposal for the Encouragement of Poetry in this Kingdom" (1720). Although the model for this satire may have been Sidney's *Defense of Poetry*.
its contents are characteristically Swiftian to the extent that Sidney's piece need not even be referred to. The essay is a masterpiece of sustained irony by which Swift satirizes the state of poetry in Ireland. If the advisor's enthusiastic praise of the prescriptions for the composition of modern poetry are reversed, however, it is usually possible to discover Swift's views on poetry fairly accurately.

The author of the letter begins by stating that if the young poet to whom he is addressing his remarks is inclined to be a good Christian instead of a great wit, then he had better abandon poetry. This course of action, he continues, is dictated by the fact that modern poetry has happily "been altogether disengag'd from the narrow notions of Virtue and Piety" (HD, IX, 329). Nevertheless, while a poet should not be religious—religion threatens poetic license—he should be conversant in the scriptures:

For the Scriptures are undoubtedly a Fund of Wit, and a Subject for Wit. You may, according to the modern Practice, be witty upon them or out of them: And to speak the Truth, but for them, I know not what our play-wrights would do for Images, Allusions, Similitudes, Examples, or even Language it self.

(p. 330)

Thus far, if the proper reversals are performed, a poet should be a good Christian. Additionally, modern poetry should be consistent with virtue and piety: it should be a product of wit but not of wit derived from or aimed at the scriptures; it should be comprised of images, allusions, similes, and examples but not
of the sort which are lifted directly from the Bible and serve only to demean their source.

The author next expresses the belief that a good poet need not be a scholar. He defends this belief by arguing, in the manner of a true modern enthusiast, that the artist's internal resources are superior to any external influences:

For to speak my private Opinion, I am for every Man's working upon his own Materials, and producing only what he can find within himself, which is commonly a better Stock than the owner knows it to be. I think Flowers of Wit ought to spring, as those in a Garden do, from their own Root and Stem, without Foreign Assistance. I would have a Man's Wit rather like a Fountain that feeds it self invisibly, than a River that is supply'd by several Streams from abroad. (p. 333)

This modern author is obviously captivated by his own rhetoric, but his metaphors are as ill-chosen as they are overdone. The hammer, chisel, and file to which Temple likened the mechanical labours of poetical composition are discarded in favour of the supremacy of the poet's initial fire, or inspiration. For Swift, uncontrolled inspiration (passion astride reason, to use the metaphor of the day) cannot imitate reason or direct the reader toward virtue as poetry ought to do. This author's flowers of wit, proceeding as they do from his own root and stem, are both extravagant (they profess man's ability to create apart from God) and false (they demean man by likening the process of his wit to the growth of flowers in a garden and, eventually, to an inanimate fountain).27 In short, the poet who, like the author of the
letter, writes extempore from his own fire, is more apt to be self-consumed than to be genuinely creative. Here Swift is relying heavily on the reader's common sense to recall that poetry must be the product of classical as well as modern learning, of thought as well as fancy, and of reason which orders the parts into a natural, harmonious whole.

The author's next pronouncement, that rhymes and similes are essential to poetry, represents a drop of reason in an ocean of madness. But reason is rapidly engulfed with the recommendation that the best way to practise rhymes is to indulge continually in boyhood games like Crambo, a word game in which two participants take turns rhyming words. Similes, on the other hand, can be judged successful to the degree to which they "bring things to a likeness, which have not the least imaginable Conformity in Nature" (p. 336). Providing they comply with the definition, a poet's similes should be "siz'd, and rang'd, and hung up in order in his Shop, ready for all Customers, and shap'd to the Feet of all Verse . . ." (p. 336). The author is successful according to his own definition because there could be no less conformity than between the job of a poet and that of a shoemaker. Given Swift's high regard for poetry and his low opinion of modern hacks, his position on this point is clear. Whereas he would agree that rhymes and similes are germane to poetry, he would not agree with the author's methods of supplying them; boyhood games will not perfect the art of rhyming,
and similes must be drawn in accordance with what is natural and just.

As his confidence in and enthusiasm for his topic increase, the author of the letter takes it upon himself to transcribe rules for the composition of poetry along with a range of topics upon which a poet may exercise his talent. He lists the following items as significant guidelines to be adhered to: the poet must write in number and verse; he must invoke the muse; he must invariably head his verse with a Greek or Latin motto; he must never write in a plain style; he must wear his poorest clothes when he writes; he should begin by writing libels and lampoons because they are more easily composed than panegyrics; he must sell his services to a political party. To attempt total reversals here would lead to statements more foolish than the originals. For example, if a poet did not write in rhymed verse in Swift's day, he was not usually considered to be a poet. Similarly, whether or not a motto heads a poem makes as little difference as the type of clothes the poet wears; both considerations can cast suspicion on the poet's motives and are therefore equally repugnant to Swift. What is worth noting, however, especially with respect to Swift's views on language in general, is the injunction not to write in a plain style. To restate Swift's position in The Tatler essay, "I should be glad to see you the Instrument of introducing into our Style, that Simplicity which is the best and truest Ornament of most
things in human life" (MD, II, 451).

How all of this relates to the sublime in poetry is of some interest even to a modern enthusiast like the author of the letter:

I will do my Countrymen the justice to say, they have Written by the foregoing Rules with great exactness, and so far as hardly to come behind those of their profession in England, in perfection of low Writing. The Sublime, indeed, is not so common with us, but ample amends is made for that want in the great abundance of the Admirable and Amazing, which appears in all our Compositions.

(p. 349)

Here the author is covertly equating the sublime with high writing and, because the writing done in Ireland is low writing, it is not sublime. Yet, to equate the "admirable" and the "amazing" with low writing and not with the sublime is a bit strange; what could be more admirable or amazing than the sublime?

Simple reversal does not work in this instance either. Swift is playing with the connotations and denotations of words. If a piece of writing is worthy of admiration, it is "admirable" in a positive sense. If, however, a piece of writing is horribly bad, one can admire that something that bad was ever written; it is "admirable" in a negative sense. Or "admirable" may be simply used straightforwardly as a satirical comment on a piece of bad writing; the implication is negative here too but in a slightly different way than in the previous instance. This same reasoning holds true for "amazing." For Swift, the sublime is both "admirable" and "amazing" in a positive sense--he would add a
caution to this assertion which I shall discuss later—but the profanation of poetry that would accompany an adherence to the above rules is not. Ironically, the author of the letter is quite accurate in describing his style of writing as "admirable" and "amazing" but the sense in which it is so is not the positive sense he wishes to portray; in Swift's day, "admirable" and "amazing" had negative connotations suggesting a certain degree of mental confusion. Swift therefore lets these words stand on their own and thereby allows the author, whose enthusiasm blinds him to their perjorative meanings, to undermine his own position. Thus, the author is correct in recognizing that not much modern poetry is ultimately sublime, although he is mistaken in assuming that "our Compositions" supply the deficiency.

Swift's career as a poet was drawing to a close by about 1733. Intermittently throughout the preceding ten years he had complained about his increasing inability to write poetry. In "To Stella on her Birth-day" (1722) he writes,

You, every Year the Debt enlarge,
I grow less equall to the Charge:
In you, each Virtue brighter shines,
But my Poetick Vein declines.

(HW, II, 739, 11. 7-10)

When he prepares to write a birthday tribute to her the following year, he bites his nails and scratches his head but no poem is immediately forthcoming. On one level, these complaints are ironically, even playfully, intended since the verses in which they are expressed do not reveal a declining power. Nonetheless,
on another level, Swift's complaints assume an appearance of
greater seriousness the more often they are repeated. In
"Stella's Birth-Day (1725)," for example, he confides to Stella
that he now finds prose an easier medium to work in than poetry:

As when a beauteous Nymph decays
We say, she's past her Dancing Days;
So, Poets lose their Feet by Time,
And can no longer dance in Rhyme.
Your Annual Bard had rather chose
To celebrate your Birth in Prose . . . .
(HW, II, 756, 11. 1-6)

And in 1732 he composes these poignant lines after receiving a
book from Boyle and a silver standish from Delany as birthday
gifts:

A Paper Book is sent by Boyle,
Too neatly guilt for me to soil.
Delany sends a Silver Standish,
When I no more a Pen can brandish.
Let both around my Tomb be plac'd,
As Trophies of a Muse deceas'd . . . .
(HW, II, 611, 11. 1-6)

Despite the irony of the situation, there is nothing humourous or
playful about these lines.

Almost nobody of his day could match Swift in his capacity
to perceive the irony of any particular situation, especially if
the situation involved himself. This, plus the fact that the
poems to Stella and the short poem commemorating the
thoughtfulness of his two friends are basically compositions
dealing with domestic matters of a private nature, indicates that
Swift was conscious of and prepared for the time when he must
abandon the writing of poetry. It is perhaps not altogether
fanciful, then, to view "An Epistle to A Lady, Who desired the Author to make Verses on Her, in the Heroick Stile" (1733) and "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" (1733) as the attempts of an aging poet (Swift was sixty-six) to sum up his poetical ability and his views on poetry respectively.

"On Poetry: A Rhapsody" is Swift's *ars poetica*, as I suggested earlier. But it is a different kind of *ars poetica* as the spelling of the title itself indicates. The O.E.D. defines "rhapsody" alternately as "an epic poem," "a medley or confused mass of things or string of words," "a written composition having no fixed form or plan," and "an exalted or exaggeratedly enthusiastic expression of sentiment or feeling; an effusion (e.g., a speech, letter, poem) marked by extravagance of idea and expression, but without connected thought or sound argument." "A number of parts joined together, without necessary dependence or natural connection" is the only definition that Johnson gives to "rhapsody" in his dictionary. Although it would require excessive rationalization to argue that Swift's poem parodies the epic form, the other definitions fit "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" perfectly. Further, by leaving the "h" out of "rhapsody" he alerts the reader to the possibility that the poem will be a "rap" or knock against modern poetry, or perhaps something of a counterfeit nature, since "a rapp" was a "spurious, counterfeit coin." By writing a rhapsody, then, Swift allows himself the scope to satirize the undisciplined
nature of modern poetry and the freedom—since a rhapsody is disjointed by definition—to insert comments on the nature of true poetry.

It is fitting that the great satirist should summarize his theory of poetry in a satire that is simultaneously simple and complex, playful and serious, in a word, "Swiftian." The first verse paragraph, for example, is as serious if not as sophisticated as Pope's *Dunciad* in its condemnation of modern poets as false wits and fools. Reiterating his constant theme, Swift accuses these poets of pride and perverseness, and he concludes his assault in lines comparable to *An Essay on Man* in subject-matter, forcefulness, and polished rhymes:

*Brutes* find out where their Talents lie:
A *Bear* will not attempt to fly:
A founder'd *Horse* will oft debate,
Before he tries a five-barr'd Gate:
A *Dog* by Instinct turns aside,
Who sees the Ditch too deep and wide.
But *Man* we find the only Creature,
Who, led by *Folly*, fights with *Nature*:
Who, when she loudly cries, *Forbear*;
With Obstincacy fixes there;
And, where his *Genius* least inclines,
Absurdly bends his whole Designs.

(HW, II, 640-641, 11. 13-24)

His point regarding the destructiveness of man's pride is made forcefully as the declension of brute nature moves from bear, to horse, to dog, to man, whose folly and pride render him the lowest brute of all. This same pride seriously threatens true poetry since "Our chilling Climate hardly bears / A *Sprig* of Bays in Fifty Years" (11. 7-8). The sad, desperate truth of the statement overshadows the pun on "chilling Climate."
Swift next asserts that no job requires more heavenly influence than that of being a poet. Nobody is less able to prosper or is less courted by society than he whom Phoebus "Hath blasted with poetick Fire" (1. 43):

Court, City, Country want you not; You cannot bribe, betray, or plot. For Poets, Law makes no Provision: The Wealthy have you in Derision.

Poor starv'ling Bard, how small thy Gains! How unproportion'd to thy Pains!

(11. 47-50; 11. 59-60)

The meaning here is double-edged. On one level, these lines seem proudly and enthusiastically to applaud the plight of the modern poet by making him a martyr. On another level, however, they present the poet's plight starkly and realistically. Swift's bitterness at not being rewarded in proportion to his pains at various times in his political life has been amply detailed by critics over the years. But the importance of the above lines to the poem extends beyond considerations of personal bitterness. Poets in general, whether they are good or bad, are not supported by society. Unfortunately false poets do not scruple to employ flattery and bribery to sell themselves and their poetry; they seem to survive despite adversity. The true poet, conversely, believes that he has a serious obligation to himself, to society, and to his art. He is therefore not only a good or a great rhymer, but a moral being compelled by his conscience to embrace virtue in his poetry and in his life. Flattery and bribery are as alien to the true poet as they are to true poetry, and society's
moral turpitude is ultimately exposed when true poets are despised and subjected to the inequity of court preferment. In a real sense, the genuine poet has been "blasted" or plague-stricken poetic fire because he has more difficulty surviving than his false counterpart. (Cibber is made poet laureate, but Swift is denied the post of historiographer royal.) The exaggeration that characterizes Swift's lines here thus emphasizes rather than obscures the truth.

Just when it appears that rhapsody is not a part of Swift's plan at all in "On Poetry," he interrupts the narrative to introduce a simile which, on the surface, complies with the pronouncement of the author of "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet" that similes should "bring things to a likeness, which have not the least imaginable Conformity in Nature":

And here a Simile comes Pat in:  
Tho' Chickens take a Month to fatten, 
The Guests in less than half an Hour 
Will more than half a Score devour. 
So, after toiling twenty Days, 
To earn a Stock of Pence and Praise, 
Thy Labours, grown the Critick's Prey, 
Are swallow'd o'er a Dish of Tea; 
Gone, to be never heard of more, 
Gone, where the Chickens went before.  
(11. 61-70)

To add to the confusion, not only is what appears to be a modern criticism/excrement analogy abruptly inserted into the poem, but the reader's attention is deliberately and rather amateurishly drawn to it by the fact that it is specifically called a simile.
In actuality, Swift is effectively demonstrating the false poet's incorrect use of similes without lowering himself to their level of incompetence. The rhapsody form sufficiently provides for the break in the narrative; Swift's genius does the rest. He has set up his composition in such a way that the "Poor Starv'ling Bard" (1. 59) is linearly situated directly between "A Monarch's Right" (1. 58) and the critics as they are depicted in the simile. The poet is dependent on the monarch for financial support or physical continuity and on the critics for professional support or artistic immortality. The adjectives "poor" and "starv'ling" acquire added poignancy because the monarch and the critics alike are so oblivious to the bard that his existence on both levels is threatened.

The simile itself, apart from its linear situation in the poem, is a condemnation of bad modern critics and, by implication, bad modern poetry. Swift likens the speed and indifference with which some critics devour poems to the speed and indifference with which guests devour chickens, the product of both acts being excrement. The simile suggests that such critics are morally reprehensible in their callousness. If what they are devouring is bad poetry then there is no loss. But when they devour true poetry, they are symbolically devouring virtue and truth, a circumstance which aligns them with the false wits, the fools, and the flatterers depicted in the opening paragraphs of the poem. And regardless of whether the literary works are
essentially good or bad in themselves, the false critics reduce them all to excrement.

With a logic more apparent than actual, Swift shifts to a discussion of how a young, inexperienced poet can learn to distinguish between "The Poet's Vein, [and] Scribbling Itch" (I. 74). The answer, which comprises much of the remainder of the poem, is given by an "old experienc'd Sinner," whom I take to be Swift. His first piece of advice echoes Horace's caution to the poet to mark his abilities well before he begins writing:

Consult yourself, and if you find
A powerful Impulse urge your Mind,
Impartial judge within your Breast
What Subject you can manage best . . . .

(11. 77-80)

Whether the young poet chooses to write satires, panegyrics, elegies, or prologues, he should be sure to rise early, invoke the muse, and then begin to write. The procedure for composition is as follows:

Blot out, correct, insert, refine,
Enlarge, diminish, interline;
Be mindful, when Invention fails,
To scratch your Head, and bite your Nails.

(11. 87-90)

This advice, though playfully exaggerated, recalls Sir William Temple's idea that great mental agitation should accompany the writing of poetry.

Already Swift's overall purpose in the poem is becoming clear. Thus far the word "rhapsody" in the title has been largely a ploy. Except for the introduction of the chicken
simile, the narrative has not been particularly rhapsodic. But
the word "rhapsody" has served a useful purpose; it has created
anticipation within the reader which forces him to judge each
line according to whether it is logical and reasonable or
rhapsodical. The description of the narrator as an "old
experienc'd Sinner" produces a similar effect. The reader must
question whether what follows in the narrative is wise and moral
or stupid and immoral. The constant tension that results from the
anticipation prevents the reader from mental relaxation, thereby
dramatizing Swift's conviction that reason must remain always
alert in order to combat unreason adequately.

Certainly, the allusions to Horace and Temple, though
admittedly exaggerated as I have indicated, are neither stupid nor
immoral. However, the same cannot be said of the narrator's
subsequent advice on the art of transcribing a poem:

Your Poem finish'd, next your Care
Is needful, to transcribe it fair.
In modern Wit all printed Trash, is
Set off with num'rous Breaks--and Dashes--
To Statesmen wou'd you give a Wipe,
You print it in Italick Type.
When Letters are in vulgar Shapes,
'Tis ten to one the Wit escapes . . . .

(11. 91-98)

Swift had expressed his abhorrence of breaks and dashes and the
like "refinements" in written language frankly and decisively in
The Tatler essay twenty-one years earlier. Consequently, there
is no doubt that his advice here regarding the transcription of a
poem is ironically and perhaps even bitterly intended. The irony
lies in his apparent approbation of "modern wit" and "printed Trash," although "Trash" reveals his actual feelings on the matter, and the bitterness stems from the reality inherent in what he says: if a poem is to be published and accepted, it must follow modern rules of composition and style. Swift is disabusing the young poet of whatever illusions he may still have about being a successful poet. If he is to survive and thrive, he must write according to modern rules, thereby producing bad poetry. If he perseveres in writing good poetry, he might very well not survive. And to compound his dilemma, he is at the mercy of the coffee-house critics in either case.

The best way to learn the coffee-house critics' opinions of your poem, the narrator advises the young poet, is to "Be sure at Will's the following Day, / Lie Snug, and hear what Criticks say" (11. 117-118). If the consensus of critical opinion condemns your work, then "Sit still, and swallow down your Spittle" (1. 122). Never admit to authorship lest you be dubbed a fool, and never blame the critics for their criticisms because "Criticks have no partial Views, / Except they know whom they abuse" (11. 131-132).

It is not surprising, then, that Swift's hostility towards false critics is more pronounced than his hatred of false poets, because the false poet and his vile rhymes are soon forgotten but the false critic endures. He governs the judgment of the town to such a degree that his immorality quickly infects the town itself. As Pope expresses the problem in An Essay on Criticism.
'Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill
Appear in Writing or in Judging ill;
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th'Offence
To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense.
Some few in that, but Numbers err in this,
Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss . . . . 29

After his ironical assault on false critics, Swift deftly
breaks with irony and turns to a straightforward presentation of
poetic abuses; once again, the disjointed nature of the rhapsody
allows him to interrupt the satire at appropriate juctures. He
advises the young poet to avoid

The trivial Turns, the borrow'd Wit,
The Similes that nothing fit;
The Cant which ev'ry Fool repeats,
Town-Jests, and Coffee-house Conceits;
Descriptions tedious, flat and dry,
And introduc'd the Lord knows why . . . .

(11. 151-156)

Despite the fact that what Swift says here is sound advice, it is
not without its irony with respect to what precedes it in the
poem. Whereas the young poet and his sad plight have demanded
all of the reader's sympathy, it turns out that he is not a good
poet after all, his first two attempts at poetry having been
filled with the above errors.

The list of errors continues, with Swift providing examples
of some of them as he goes along. He illustrates false similes by
likening a cripple's heel-piece and a bridge joining two moorlands
to epithets employed to fill gaping lines. These analogies are
clever enough, but, and this is Swift's point, they are
unsuitable. A heel-piece and a bridge both serve useful purposes
and are not, therefore, analogous to useless epithets. And to
the same purpose, geographers who "o'er unhitable Downs / Place Elephants for want of Towns" (11. 179-180), besides its excessiveness, is an example of descriptions introduced into a poem "the Lord knows why."

Swift is not through yet, however, for the reader, like the young poet, must be stripped entirely of illusions. To this end, Swift has the young poet fail in his third attempt at poetry even though he has presumably recognized and reformed his former faults. Swift's point is clear; the rules of poetry in themselves are insufficient to produce good poetry. A poet must have genius and judgment, neither of which the young poet possesses. His only recourse is to seek party patronage or, alternately, to comprise elegies on dead and panegyrics on living monarchs. Should these productions fail too, and the bottom of the barrel plainly have been reached, the young poet may "Put on the Critick's Brow, and sit / At Wills the puny Judge of Wit" (11. 235-236). By implication, coffee-house critics are failed poets who, devoid of wit themselves, are puny judges of it in others. The ensuing description of the failed poet turned critic exposes false modern critics in all their deceitfulness. When scornful silence can no longer hide his ignorance, the false critic is forced to learn the terms of art:

Proceed no further in your Part,  
Before you learn the Terms of Art:  
(For you may easy be too far gone,  
In all our modern Criticks Jargon.)  
Then Talk with more authentick Face,  
Of Unitie, in Time and Place.
Get Scraps of Horace from your Friends,  
And have them at your Fingers Ends.  
Learn Aristotle's Rules by Rote,  
And at all Hazards boldly quote:  
Judicious Rymer oft review:  
Wise Dennis, and profound Bossu.  

(11, 239-250)

The irony elicited by words like "judicious," "wise," and "profound" is devastating, given what Swift says elsewhere, notably in The Battle of the Books, about these same modern critics in particular and about the supremacy of the classical critics over modern critics in general. But there is sadness and bitterness here as well. Witless critics like Dennis and Rymer epitomize the deplorable state of modern criticism, and yet the true poet and the false poet alike are tragically at the mercy of just such imposters. It is left to the reader to decide in which case the tragedy is greater.

Swift concludes the poem by discussing poetic fame and the sublime. He sarcastically wonders why it "Remains a Difficulty still, / To purchase Fame by writing ill" (11. 367-368), and why so few poets "From Flecknoe down to Howard's time, / . . . have reach'd the low Sublime?" (11. 369-370) -- modern poets are generally incompetent enough to do so. For Swift, the integrity of any piece of writing is directly dependent upon the author's integrity as a writer, which, in turn, is directly dependent upon his self-knowledge. He is aware of his own limitations as a poet compared to someone like Pope, for example: "In Pope, I cannot read a Line, / But with a Sigh, I wish it mine" ("Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," HW. II, 555, 11. 47-48). Therefore, in "An
Epistle to a Lady, who desired the Author to make Verses on Her, in the Heroick Stile," when Lady Acheson begs Swift to

\[\ldots\ldots\text{suspend a while,}\]
\[\text{That same poultry Burlesque Stile:}\]
\[\text{Drop, for once, your constant Rule,}\]
\[\text{Turning all to Ridicule}\ldots\ldots\]

(HW, II, 631, 11. 49-52)

and to "Sing my Praise in Strain sublime" (1. 57), he responds playfully but sincerely:

\[\text{To conclude this long Essay;}\]
\[\text{Pardon, if I disobey;}\]
\[\text{Nor, against my nat'ral Vein,}\]
\[\text{Treat you in Heroick Strain.}\]
\[\text{I, as all the Parish knows,}\]
\[\text{Hardly can be grave in Prose;}\]
\[\text{Still to lash, and lashing Smile,}\]
\[\text{Ill befits a lofty Stile.}\]

(11. 133-140)

Swift is not denying the effectiveness of Pope's denunciation of false critics in _An Essay on Criticism_ or the power of the _Dunciad_, both of which lash in the lofty style. He is simply acknowledging the fact that the lofty style is not his forte. Moreover, because of his integrity, he does not aspire to the lofty style: "If I can but fill my Nitch, / I attempt no higher Pitch" (11. 171-172).

And there is another reason why Swift avoids the high sublime in his poetry. That reason is his abhorrence of deception, a virtually inevitable facet of the high sublime because of the exaggeration inherent in the elevated style. He explains to Lady Acheson that writing in the heroic style would only deceive them both. He would be deceiving himself regarding his ability in
heroic verse, besides neglecting a very real talent in the hudibrastic mode, and he would be deceiving her by feeding her pride: "I Shou'd make a Figure scurvy, / And your Head turn Topsy-turvy" (11. 219-220). Swift had too strong a sense of his moral obligation as a poet to do either. He therefore concludes "An Epistle to a Lady" with a metaphor designed to reinforce his point about his inability to achieve the high sublime and to justify his position as a poet in practical terms:

Have you seen a Rocket fly?  
You would swear it pierc'd the Sky;  
It but reach'd the middle Air,  
Bursting into Pieces there:  
Thousand Sparkles falling down  
Light on many a Coxcomb's Crown.  
See, what Mirth the Sport creates;  
Sindges Hair, but breaks no Pates.  
Thus, Shou'd I attempt to climb,  
Treat you in a Stile sublime,  
Such a Rocket is my Muse,  
Shou'd I lofty Numbers chuse,  
E'er I reach'd Parnassus Top  
I shou'd burst, and bursting drop.  
All my Fire would fall in Scraps,  
Give your Head some gentle Raps;  
Only make it smart a while:  
Then cou'd I forbear to smile,  
When I found the tingling Pain,  
Entering warm your frigid Brain  
Make you able upon Sight,  
To decide of Wrong and Right?  
Talk with Sense, whate'er you please on,  
Learn to relish Truth and Reason.  
Thus we both should gain our Prize:  
I to laugh, and you grow wise.  

(11. 249-274)
Hence, Swift knows that if he tries to write in "a Stile sublime," his muse will burst before it reaches "Parnassus Top," the high sublime. He accepts this self-avowed handicap with what appears to be surprising equanimity, until it is revealed that he is labouring under no handicap at all. He need not reach the high sublime because, in achieving only half the height, his poetry does exactly what he wants it to do: it teaches and delights; his audience benefits most from the teaching and he benefits most from the delight. With this playful twist of the classical notion of poetry's dual purpose, Swift justifies his role as a satirist. This is the "nitch" he spoke of filling earlier, the "nitch" that, in terms of the early eighteenth century's conception of the Chain of Being, although he cannot rise above--he cannot reach the high sublime, for example--he can nevertheless achieve perfection within.

Thus, the playfulness of the rocket metaphor, though typically Swiftian, is not simply or even primarily a camouflage for Swift's inability to write in the style of the high sublime. To be sure, he has his cake and eats it too: self-knowledge prevents him from attempting the sublime style and in the process arms him with the truthfulness and the humility to attain perfection within a style more suited to his capabilities; however, even if he should attempt the high sublime, and fail to reach it, his purpose would still be served.
It is abundantly clear, therefore, that Swift's distrust of elevated diction, together with his awareness of his limitations as a poet, led him to avoid the high sublime. But this circumstance does not automatically preclude a high level of artistic achievement or impede the expression of genuine and heartfelt emotion in his poetry. Indeed, the clear, simple style that Swift adopts in his poetry generally is an integral part of his achievement in the poems to Stella particularly. For besides being entirely appropriate to the celebration of truth and Christian virtue that comprises the framework of the Stella poems, Swift's octosyllabics enhance the playful tone of the early poems while they help to soften the pain and the sadness of the later ones.
FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER ONE


2. Ibid.


6. It should be noted here that whereas Aristotle, Horace, and Dennis are concerned with imaginative literature in general and with poetry in particular in their treatises, when Swift writes about poetry, he is dealing specifically with "verse." Nonetheless, much of what Aristotle, Horace, and Dennis say informs Swift's views on poetry.

8 Ibid.


11 Critics continue to associate Longinus' name with Peri Hupsous, and for simple convenience I will do so throughout my thesis.

12 Boileau's translation of Longinus is famous for its influence on the Scriblerus Club; Pope, in conjunction with the other members of the Club, wrote Peri Bathos, a satirical rendition of Peri Hupsous, during the period from 1726-1727. See Edna Steeves' introduction to her edition of The Art of Sinking in Poetry (1952; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), especially p. xxxv.

13 Aristotle's Poetics, p. 118.

15. Ibid., p. 108.

16. See Harold Williams, Dean Swift's Library (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1932), at the end (pp. 1-16 facsimile), for a catalogue of the books in Swift's possession at the time of his death.


20. Ibid., pp. 583-584.

101-102. Henceforward I shall refer to individual poems in the text by name, volume, page, and line numbers. HW refers to Harold Williams.

22

23
It is important to note here that neither Vanbrugh's competence as a playwright nor his expertise as an architect were as questionable as Swift makes them out to be. As regards his popularity as a playwright, Bonamy Dobree in his introduction to Volume One of *The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh*, ed. Bonamy Dobree and Geoffrey Webb (Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1928), quotes Spence's observation that "Vanbrugh, with Congreve and Garth, was one of 'the three most honest-hearted and good men of the poetical members of the Kit-Cat Club'" (p. xi) and Noble's observation that "No person ever lived or died with so few enemies as Sir John Vanbrugh owing to his pleasant wit and unaffected good humour" (p. xi). And as regards his success as an architect, Geoffrey Webb in his introduction to Volume Four of *The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh* remarks that Vanbrugh, as an architect, was born too early. Webb explains the problem by quoting Sir Reginald Blomfield's words: "Vanbrugh's 'passionate appreciation of the abstract qualities of architecture gives him a place by himself among the architects of a country in which the very existence of those
qualities has almost ceased to be recognized" (p. x1). Webb goes on to say that it was because of this appreciation for the abstract that "while all others of his successors derided him," Vanbrugh "drew forth tributes from such a succession of men as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Robert Adam, and Sir John Soane" (p. x1).

In fairness to Swift's position in the Vanbrugh poems, though, even Dobree notes that "towards the end of the [seventeenth] century he was becoming too busy to invent original plays" and therefore Vanbrugh "contented himself with adaptations and translations" (p. xxiii). Moreover, the house that he built for himself on the ruins of Whitehall Palace was not a success. To quote Webb again, the Goose Pie, as the house came to be called and as Swift refers to it in the 1708/9 version of "Vanbrugh's House," "may, it seems to the writer, be ignored as evidence of style. The nickname seems to have been extraordinarily apt, and the crenellations, the disproportionate height, and the scale of the rustications do indeed suggest what is known in the trade as a Raised Pie" (p. xii). And if Swift needed further reasons for his attack, Vanbrugh's domestic conduct provided it. He was always in debt and he apparently was not averse to poking fun at the clergy, something that Swift always took personally when he was not doing it himself.

24 I have been unable to discover for certain whether or not Vanbrugh actually built his house at Whitehall from the royalties of his plays as Swift implies here—in which case, poetry can
ironically still build as it did in ancient times, if only vicariously—but it seems to me that the innuendo is all that is important in the development of Swift's theme in the poem.

25 In a footnote to the line in "Vanbrug's House" (1708/9) in which Swift accuses Vanbrugh of plagiarism, Harold Williams observes that "Although Vanbrugh's two best plays, The_Relapse and The_Provok'd_Wife, were original, he borrowed largely and adapted from Boursault, Le Sage, Moliere, and Dancourt" (I, 107, n. 58). Vanbrugh was probably no worse than numerous other playwrights in this regard, but Swift had little respect for such persons. In fact, it was a matter of personal pride for Swift to have been able to state in verses on his own death that "To steal a Hint was never known, / But what he writ was all his own" (HW, II, 565, 11. 317-318). For even though this line is ironically plagiarized from Denham, it is a typically Swiftian way of satirizing something by mimicking it. As regards the hint that Vanbrugh's house at Whitehall was an architectural plagiarism of sorts—"Why then, old_plays deserve old_Bricks" (I. 72)—it is not clear whether Vanbrugh used the old stones of Whitehall Palace in his building or not. Nevertheless, the idea does round out the satiric impact of the poem.

authenticity of the letter. He claims that it is uneven in the final pages and too repetitive in many of its trivial phrases to be Swift's. See Vol. 9, pp. xxvi-xxvii. I include the letter here because I am not convinced by Davis' argument. Harold Williams accepts it as authentic in his revised edition of the poems in 1957, and Paul Fussell, in his article, "Speaker and Style in a Letter of Advice to a Young Poet (1721), and the Problem of Attribution," Review of English Studies, 10 (1959), 63-67, argues that "Although in the absence of external evidence we are left with the insecurity of conjecture, we can imagine perhaps that somehow the manuscript left Swift's hands before it was finished and found its way into print without his permission" (p. 67). In any case, it seems to me that the construction of the letter is so like Swift's other satires and the tone, diction, and imagery so Swiftian, that I believe the letter to be authentic.

27 In The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism, Paul Fussell points out that "the humanist believes that man is absolutely unique as a species. . . . The humanist scorns analogies between men and dogs, even though both salivate similarly; between men and lower animals, even though both breed similarly; and between men and insects, even though both tend to organize societies similarly." See pp. 9-10. Note also that Swift uses such analogies in his poetry to great advantage because of the belief in man's uniqueness.

CHAPTER TWO

STYLE AND METHODOLOGY IN THE POEMS TO STELLA

Perhaps the best way to begin a discussion of the poems to Stella is to observe that it is impossible to analyze them as if they were a unified group. To begin with, not all of the poems are birthday poems, a fact which necessarily implies a certain variety in subject-matter. Furthermore, the poems as a group do not display strict thematic unity; the theme most often extracted from them is the importance of living a virtuous life, but this theme is only remotely insinuated in "To Stella on her Birth-day 1721/22" and nowhere evident in "Stella's Birth-Day" (1723). And finally, the poems exhibit no unity of tone; the tone of "On Stella's Birth-day 1718/19" is light and teasing, whereas that of "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27" is subdued and serious. Despite this seemingly hopeless diversity, however, there are elements in the poems to Stella which contribute to a certain internal consistency if not to a definite unity. Two of these elements are style and methodology. In this chapter I propose to investigate Swift's style and methodology in writing the poems to Stella as a step towards apprehending the true nature of his commitment to them.
It is through a clear perception of the delicate combination of style, methodology, and personal commitment that the special nature of the poems begins to emerge.

Swift's style of writing in the poems to Stella conforms to his definition of style in "A Letter to a Young Gentleman Lately Enter'd into Holy Orders": "proper words in proper places." His methodology (by methodology I mean the rhetorical techniques through which he variously invites, warns, and exhorts Stella to face the realities of life) is deceptively simple. Briefly, Swift presents his compliments, warnings, and exhortations directly, indirectly, or by means of both methods combined; neither method dominates in any one poem and each depends to some degree for its effectiveness on Swift's ability to achieve a richness of stylistic variation within his own relatively confining definition of style. By distinguishing between style and methodology, though, I do not mean to imply that they in fact operate independently of each other, or indeed that Swift saw them as separate. Rather, since some of the poems to Stella are more clearly exhibitions of stylistic finesse than others, I look upon the distinction as a useful way of identifying specific qualities of composition that simultaneously represent Swift's skill as a poet and the actual complexity of the poems.

Swift's first exhibition of stylistic finesse in the poems to Stella appears in the very first poem, "On Stella's Birth-day
and although it is relatively short, this poem also
reveals something of his method of indirect teaching. It begins
on a note of frankness that might have offended some women of his
day who lacked Stella's self-knowledge, judgment, and wit:

Stella this Day is thirty four,
(We won't dispute a Year or more)
However Stella, be not troubled,
Although thy Size and Years are doubled,
Since first I saw Thee at Sixteen
The brightest Virgin of the Green,
So little is thy Form declin'd
Made up so largly in thy Mind.
(HW, II, 721-722, 11. 1-8)

The initial fact is unalterable. Stella has aged. It does not
matter that Swift gives her age as thirty-four when she is
actually thirty-eight. A dispute about one or two years either
way is possible as the parenthetical remark of the second line
indicates, but such a dispute would neither be sensible nor
profitable because Stella herself knows the truth of the matter.
The fact that time has passed is what she must learn to accept in
any case and, therefore, Swift "won't dispute" the precise number
of years.

John Fischer has recently argued that Swift knew Stella's
exact age perfectly well and that the first line of the poem
therefore "records his refusal to 'count the clock that tells
the time,'" while at the same time it "insists that, for Swift,
even the verities of simple arithmetic are subject to sudden and
surprising revisions."2 The liberties Swift takes with Stella's
age, Fischer implies, are partially justified by the nature of
the birthday poem itself in that "birthday poems--like every
other form of birthday festivity--are by their very nature an act
of reconciliation." He explains what he means by "reconciliation"
by observing that such poems

mark, and thereby emphasize, that passage of
time which leads us to the grave. Simultaneously,
however, such poems mark, and thereby emphasize,
a particular day within the flux of time on
which an individual and valuable life was
born. In effect, then, all sensitively
written birthday poems shimmer between an
affirmation of human life and a recognition
of its mortal limits. As a genre, however,
birthday poems do even more than this.
For the final thrust of the birthday
poem is to transcend the very paradox
which it illuminates and to celebrate
joyously all of human life, including
even its inexorable movement towards
death.3

Fischer concludes from this that Swift's poetic manipulations in
the poems to Stella must be seen as efforts to transcend the
passing of time and not simply as entertainments.

Whereas Fischer is likely correct in saying that Swift knew
Stella's actual age, his conclusion that Swift's poetic
manipulations are not simply entertainments is somewhat
misleading. For this conclusion implicitly undervalues the
important role that humour plays in the Stella poems; in these
poems as in A Tale of a Tub, in Gulliver's Travels, or in "Verses
on the Death of Dr. Swift D.S.P.D.," one of the resources Swift
draws upon most frequently is his reader's sense of humour.
Clearly, Fischer's solemn concern with manifestations of stoicism
and Christian doctrine has caused him to underestimate
dangerously the playful aspect of the poems, an aspect which, in "On Stella's Birth-day 1718/19," is initiated conjointly by Swift's clever manipulations of style and his complex method of teaching Stella indirectly through compliments, which are alternately direct and indirect themselves.

Part of the humour of Swift's outright mention of Stella's age arises from the fact that the age he gives is inaccurate. He is engaging Stella in a joke by playfully mimicking the time-worn notion that a woman should never divulge her true age. The beauty of his joke is that it is entertaining on a superficial level inasmuch as it pays lip-service to a silly social convention (he after all conceals her true age effectively) while at the same time it allows him to protect her privacy, a courtesy that Swift extended to Stella even after her death.4 Thus, to say that Stella is thirty-four when she is really thirty-eight is not so much an indication of Swift's refusal to "count the clock that tells the time," in the sense of his suggesting to Stella that time is unimportant, as it is an example of his indirect method of teaching, a subtle and entertaining way of inviting Stella to think about and thereupon to accept the fact of her aging. For it is inconceivable that when confronted with her incorrect age she would not immediately think of, and thereby privately admit to, her correct age.

In the second half of "On Stella's Birth-day 1718/19," Swift turns the seemingly uncomplimentary remarks about age and size in
the first half of the poem to Stella's advantage. With her increased size and years has come a valuable commodity, an improved mind: "So little is thy form declin'd / Made up solargly in thy Mind." Moreover, if the Gods were to split Stella into equal halves, each half would surpass any whole woman in beauty and wit:

Oh, would it please the Gods to split
Thy Beauty, Size, and Years, and Wit,
No Age could furnish out a Pair
Of Nymphs so gracefull, Wise and fair
With half the Lustre of Your Eyes,
With half thy Wit, thy Years and Size:
And then before it grew too late,
How should I beg of gentle Fate,
(That either Nymph might have her Swain,)
To split my Worship too in twain.

(11. 9-18)

If Stella were divided, Swift would wish his worship to be divided too, "That either Nymph might have her Swain." With these lines, his control of style becomes apparent.

He has divided the poem into two equal parts by choosing proper words and by putting them in appropriate places. The first nine lines, which comprise one complete sentence, are characterized by words and phrases which insinuate growth, reflecting the effect of time on Stella's age and size: "doubled" appears in line 4; "little . . . declin'd" appears in line 7; and "largly" appears in line 8. Just when the growth reaches a climax in terms of Stella's beauty, size, and wit, a split occurs. This is signalized in the final nine lines, another complete sentence, by words which imply division: "split"
itself appears at the end of line 9, the exact midpoint of the poem, and again in line 18; "half" appears in lines 13 and 14; and "twain" appears in line 18 and concludes the poem. Stylistically, Swift has effectively split his worship, which is after all the poem, in twain.

In addition to this general demonstration of stylistic finesse, however, there are two instances in the poem in which Swift's very precise word choice is especially poignant. The first instance is the reference to the diminished lustre of Stella's eyes, which would result from the splitting of her person. Even though no whole woman's eyes could boast half of the halved lustre of Stella's eyes, the implication remains that the lustre of her eyes will soon be half of what it is now. As it turns out, "Half the Lustre of Your Eyes" is also an accurate measurement of the quality of Stella's eyesight outside the context of the poem as compared with when Swift first met her. Hence, the compliment Swift offers in line 14 serves to remind Stella indirectly of the reality of her human condition, a reality which has already begun to overtake her.

The second instance in which Swift's precise word choice reminds Stella indirectly of her humanity is the reference to nymphs and swains. Swift's so-called scatological poems depicting various Daphnes, Chloes, Corinnas, and Strephons reveal his distrust of the illusion of pastoral. As a result, his likening of Stella to a nymph and of himself to a swain must have
been the clearest reminder to them both of the true nature of their relationship: they were not pastoral lovers. Indeed, the pastoral convention of the beautiful nymph who remains physically unchanged in the timeless pastoral setting is exposed as fantasy by the realizations that Stella is larger and older, and that her eyesight is poorer than formerly.

If, as Fischer decides, in his first poem to Stella "Swift achieves something of the status of that god whom, at its close, he imagines to be able to create two young and beautiful nymphs out of Stella's multiplied years and bulky size,"6 it is on that level on which he and Stella are swain and nymph respectively. It is on the level of fantasy, a level which is both comic and complimentary at the same time, and not on the level of reality, because Swift never sets out to deceive Stella. He is, through a series of playful exaggerations, inviting her to accept reality on every level. And the greatest tribute to Stella's wit, judgment, and understanding is Swift's implied trust that she will not only perceive but also acquiesce in whatever truth or reality is revealed in each poem no matter how indirectly it is communicated. As James Tyne has pointed out, "Nowhere does her poet have to spell things out for Stella, temper his wit or his humour, or become less subtle or less ironic than he is when dealing with his peers."7

Much has been said and written about Swift's achievement in the octosyllabic couplet, and Clarence Kulischek sums up the
extent of this achievement as well as anybody in a short but perceptive article, "Swift's Octosyllabics and the Hudibrastic Tradition." Kulischek is more interested in the differences than in the similarities between the poetry of Butler and Swift and, consequently, he is able to bring Swift's uniqueness as a stylist into sharp focus. Taking "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" as representative of Swift's highest achievement in poetry, Kulischek itemizes those special qualities that are present in all of Swift's best verses:

The poem is characterized by a consciously contrived spareness. Latinate words are infrequent and monosyllabic words predominate impressively over polysyllabic. Although an effect of extreme simplicity amounting almost to casualness is thus achieved, the lines are actually fashioned with extreme precision. As in the customary practice of Pope and his followers with the long couplet, almost all the octosyllabic couplets here are closed and all the lines are end-stopped. The caesura is delicately handled with discriminating variations of placement. . . . the syntax is made prosodically functional, serving as a device to solidify the couplets internally and to link them together in verse paragraphs. 8

Unquestionably, Kulischek's statement holds true for the Stella poems generally and for "On Stella's Birth-day 1718/19" particularly, especially as regards the use and effect of monosyllabic words and the handling of syntax. It is in part the very casualness of his style, together with the conversational and friendly tone which results from it, that Swift ultimately depends upon here and in the other Stella poems to render the
realities of age and death less frightening and therefore easier for Stella to accept.

Although Swift's overall style of writing remains consistent throughout the poems to Stella inasmuch as he never deviates from the octosyllabic couplet, he nevertheless manages to achieve surprising variety of technique within this style. For example, he can masterfully invite Stella to accept the reality of age in a complimentary and indirect way as he does in "On Stella's Birth-day 1718/19," but he is equally capable of encouraging her to accept her earthly condition by more emphatic means. Accordingly, when he wishes to be more severe in his methodology, notably when he determines to confront her with her faults, he uses a direct approach. A case in point is his enumeration of her faults at the end of "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems" (1720).

After showering Stella with unqualified praise at the outset of the poem, Swift resolves to "mortify [her] pride" by exposing her "weaker side":

Your Spirits kindle to a Flame,  
Mov'd with the lightest Touch of Blame,  
And when a Friend in Kindness tries  
To shew you where your Error lies,  
Conviction does but more incense;  
Perverseness is your whole Defence:  
Truth, Judgment, Wit, give Place to Spite,  
Regardless both of Wrong and Right.  
Your Virtues, all suspended, wait  
Till Time hath open'd Reason's Gate:  
And what is worse, your Passion bends  
Its Force against your nearest Friends . . . .

.................
You think this Turbulence of Blood
From stagnating preserves the Flood;
Which thus fermenting, by Degrees
Exalts the Spirits, sinks the Lees.
(HW, II, 730, 11. 87-98; 11. 127-130)

To direct her anger at her nearest friends is bad enough, but to claim, or at least to think, that that anger is justified because it keeps her blood from stagnating, and thereby exalts her spirits, is pure folly. And Swift's argument against such reasoning is that if anger and spite are allowed to ferment too long, "By Time subsiding, you may find / Nothing but Acid left behind" (11. 133-134).

Similarly, even though Swift does not chastise Stella so stiffly in "Stella at Wood-Park" (1723), he playfully but bluntly exposes her pride there also in an unbecoming light. Having been entertained regally at Wood-Park for almost half a year, Stella has "At last grown prouder than the D--1" (HW, II, 750, 1. 21). Consequently, it is a bleak day when she must eventually return home:

But now arrives the dismal Day:
She must return to Ormond Key:
The Coachman stopt, she lookt, and swore
The Rascal had mistook the Door:
At coming in you saw her stoop;
The Entry brusht against her Hoop:
Each Moment rising in her Airs,
She curst the narrow winding Stairs:
Began a Thousand Faults to spy;
The Ceiling hardly six Foot high;
The smutty Wainscot full of Cracks,
And half the Chairs with broken Backs:
Her Quarter's out at Lady-Day,
She vows she will no longer stay,
In Lodgings, like a poor Grizette,
While there are Lodgings to be lett.
(11. 45-60)
Luxury has spoiled Stella, and she is no longer happy in her former humble lodgings and lifestyle. A brief fit of pride causes her to ignore frugality and to indulge in luxurious living beyond her means. Swift reports that this farce of genteel living continued for about a week, after which time, her money exhausted, Stella "fell into her former Scene. / Small Beer, a Herring, and the D--n" (11. 71-72).

Before he concludes the poem, Swift confesses that he has been having fun at Stella's expense, that he has exaggerated the facts "a little" (1. 82). His purpose in exaggerating is purely conciliatory, however, for in order to reconcile Stella to her impoverished lot he offers new expression to the cliche that "money isn't everything":

The Virtue lies not in the Place;
For though my Rallery were true,
A Cottage is Wood-Park with you.

(11. 90-92)

Ostensibly, if the full implications of the poem are drawn out, Stella's value as a friend ameliorates the burden of poverty, and in this context poverty becomes more valuable than luxury, because, whereas pride and affectation can only survive comfortably amid wealth and plenty, humility and simplicity can adapt to any situation; when she was humble, Stella could tolerate Ormond Key as well as Wood-Park. Furthermore, although it is something that Swift states covertly only in later poems, there is an underlying realization here that if one is not committed to earthly possessions, then one can take leave of life more easily.
Swift's technique of teaching directly is not limited to the instances in which he is reminding Stella of the unhappy effects of pride, however dominant those instances appear to be. And simply because his method is direct does not mean that stylistic precision is of less importance than when his method is indirect. If anything, proper word choice is more important with each passing year and with each new poem, because, as it becomes apparent that Stella's death grows yearly more imminent, his arguments must be made more convincing than ever.

And yet, Swift is confronted with a dilemma here. On the one hand, his octosyllabics are eminently suited to concise, logical argument. As Paul Fussell explains, "the texture of the octosyllabic couplet, regardless of who is writing in it, is likely to be lean and clean, spare and logical, a texture supremely appropriate to sarcasm or solid virile reasoning." On the other hand, the problem arises that direct teaching of the sort just presented is not appropriate deathbed talk; comfort and support are more in order than accusations, in such circumstances. Swift's solution is to attempt greater stylistic variety, and to this end he employs analogy as a means of teaching in two of the final three poems to Stella. The beauty of an analogy is that as a stylistic device, it can either be explicit or implicit, while it remains an essentially indirect method of teaching overall.
However, to better understand the stylistic impact of Swift's use of analogy in the two later Stella poems, a glance backward to his initial use of analogy in "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems" (1720) is helpful. The poem begins with an analogy:

As when a lofty Pile is rais'd,
We never hear the Workmen prais'd,
Who bring the Lime, or place the Stones;
But all admire Inigo Jones;
So if this Pile of scatter'd Rhymes
Should be approv'd in After-times,
If it both pleases and endures,
The Merit and the Praise are yours.

(HW, II, 727-728, 11. 1-8)

The first noticeable characteristic of the analogy is its "As when . . ." form, a familiar form of the epic simile. However, any expectations of epic are immediately thwarted by the simple style in which the analogy is written. For instance, whatever epic connotations "lofty Pile" may evoke, they are playfully undercut by the mundane reference to workmen who must "bring the Lime, or place the Stones." In addition, the lofty pile is paralleled with "this pile of scatter'd Rhymes." Not only is Swift not claiming epic grandeur for his poem, he is scarcely allowing it any enlightened plan or design at all. This general trend towards ironic deprecation naturally reflects unfavourably on the epic evocations of "lofty Pile." And it should be noted here that the overturning of any sense of epic whatever is Swift's way of rejecting the elements which are commonly associated with the conventional "high sublime."
The trend continues as the poem progresses:

Thou Stella, wert no longer young,
When first for thee my Harp I strung:
Without one Word of Cupid's darts,
Of killing Eyes, or bleeding Hearts:
With Friendship and Esteem possesst,
I ne'er admitted Love a Guest.
(11. 9-14)

Already there is a recognition of the poet as a craftsman or workman, consciously choosing the proper and rejecting the improper word. But the special impact of these lines derives from the fact that Swift is the poet. The exaggerated and often affected romance identified with epics and pastorals has never been part of his style; killing eyes and bleeding hearts bear no relation in fact to his feelings for Stella. As in "On Stella's Birth-day 1718/19," Stella's age at the time the poems were begun ("Thou Stella, wert no longer young"), together with his allegiance to truth, account for Swift's abhorrence of professions of love in the courtly tradition.

When compared with the cliche descriptions of love implied in the references to Cupid's darts, killing eyes, and bleeding hearts, friendship and esteem strike a note of freshness, sincerity, and permanence. Stella's friendship becomes emblematic of that sincerity and permanence in the next stanza since "his Pursuits are at an End, / Whom Stella chuses for a Friend" (11. 23-24).

Partly to applaud the merits of Stella's friendship more emphatically and partly to complete whatever undercutting of the
courtly love and epic conventions remains to be done, Swift next posits the case of a starving poet:

A Poet, starving in a Garret,
Conning old Topicks like a Parrot,
Invokes his Mistress and his Muse,
And stays at home for want of Shoes:
Should but his Muse descending drop
A Slice of Bread, and Mutton-Chop,
Or kindly when his Credit's out,
Surprize him with a Pint of Stout,
Or patch his broken Stocking Soals,
Or send him in a Peck of Coals;
Exalted in his mighty Mind
He flies, and leaves the Stars behind,
Counts all his Labours amply paid,
Adores her for the timely Aid.

The starving poet's adorations of his muse result from the fact that she occasionally and arbitrarily drops in to supply him with the meagre necessities of life, in sharp contrast to the genuine praise due to the selflessness of Stella's friendship. And whereas Swift is an original craftsman in his poetry, the starving hack is perpetually "Conning old Topicks like a Parrot." It is no wonder that the hack's invocation of his muse is only sometimes profitable; he lacks talent and she lacks interest in his situation.

What is still more crucial, though, is Swift's emphasis on the incongruity between the small amount of assistance the hack receives from his muse and the excessive amount of praise and adoration he heaps upon her. The key word in line 38 is "adores." Its excessiveness under the circumstances makes it one with "killing eyes" and "bleeding hearts," thoroughly supporting
Swift's conviction that such phrases are silly and affected, a further derogatory comment on the conventional sublime, since these phrases are the very stuff of which the conventional "high sublime" is made. Additionally, the excessiveness of "adores" completes the ironic impact of "mighty Mind," since the man who grows delirious over a pint of stout and a peck of coals shows little sign of a "mighty" mind.

Swift's exposure of the hack's feeble mind leads naturally into a consideration of truth in poetry:

True Poets can depress and raise;
Are Lords of Infamy and Praise:
They are not scurrilous in Satire,
Nor will in Panegyrick flatter.
Unjustly Poets we asperse;
Truth shines the brighter, clad in Verse;
And all the Fictions they pursue
Do but insinuate what is true.
(11. 53-60)

Since he has already established himself as a craftsman and different from the hack, it follows that Swift must be one of the group called "True Poets." And because even the true poets' fictions "Do but insinuate what is true," it follows that Swift's compliments to Stella, which are not fictions, are both warranted and sincere. As it transpires, Swift's praises do not owe their truth "To Beauty, Dress, or Paint, or Youth, / What Stoicks call without our Power" (11. 62-63), because Stella's virtues

... on no Accidents depend:
Let Malice look with all her Eyes,
She dares not say the Poet lyes.
(11. 80-82)

His praises are all the more closely aligned with truth because
he has avoided affected phrases like "Cupid's darts," "killing eyes," and "bleeding hearts."

In this way, Swift undercuts the hack's poetical and moral credibility by distinguishing him from the true poet. But Swift accomplishes more than this. He secures for himself the distinction of being a true poet and subsequently makes it impossible for anyone to disagree with anything he says; anyone who disagrees with him disagrees with truth, and such a person is even worse than Malice who "dares not say the Poet lies."

Thus, the stage is set for the enumeration of Stella's faults that follows in the poem, and Stella is rendered powerless to say he lies.

Swift accuses her of pride, anger, and spitefulness. At this point it must be remembered that he is writing in his capacity as true poet, which signifies that his accusations must be true. Moreover, he has cleverly set up his defenses in such a way that if Stella objects to the accusations, then she is simultaneously calling a true poet a liar, exhibiting the very pride and anger he accuses her of, neutralizing his previous compliments to her virtuousness, and ultimately behaving worse than Malice.

Taking full advantage of the dilemma he places her in, Swift concludes the poem with this challenge:

Say, Stella, when you copy next, Will you keep strictly to the Text? Dare you let these Reproaches stand, And to your Failings set your Hand?
Or if these Lines your Anger fire,
Shall they in baser Flames expire?
When'er they burn, if burn they must,
They'll prove my Accusation just.
(11. 137-144)

If Stella transcribes the poem accurately, then she is virtually admitting to the validity of Swift's accusations by exposing her faults to the world. On the other hand, if she burns the poem in the face of Swift's challenge, she is guilty of the pride, anger, and spitefulness of which she is accused.

This reference to Stella's transcription of the poem is what ultimately links the opening analogy to the rest of the poem, the subject of transcription being mentioned nowhere but in the opening and closing lines. Once Swift's overall purpose—to mortify Stella's pride—becomes evident, however, the relatedness of the analogy to the rest of the poem as a whole emerges more clearly. Basically, the question of transcription provides the occasion and the framework for the poem, but it is not finally the subject of the poem. The mortification of Stella's pride is the subject, and the analogy initiates the method by which that mortification will be accomplished, that is, the analogy's plain vocabulary undermines its epic form. Without repeating the various instances in the poem in which people or situations are consistently undermined or undercut, it is enough to say that this is the methodology by which Swift sets up the mortification of Stella's pride. The presentation of her faults undermines the possibility that his praises might be mistaken for testimony to her unqualified virtue.
But finally, Swift's setting himself up as a true poet and his subsequent accusations against Stella should not be taken as egotistical snobbery or as pure entertainment either, for the simple reason that even though he delights in characterizing himself as a true poet, he is always aware of the moral obligations accompanying that distinction. He is obliged to remind Stella of her faults, and if possible to bring her to acknowledge them not only because he assumed the role of her temporal and spiritual guide very early in their friendship, but also because, as her poet, he is obliged to teach her truth. It is in the dual capacity of poet and friend that he reminds her of her failings by listing them openly and that he brings her to acknowledge them by trapping her into transcribing the poem.

Transcription is the only sensible course for Stella to pursue and the only one Swift leaves open to her. At worst she will be displaying faults which are universally human, and at best she will be laying claim to virtues which are sufficient at least to balance her faults. To admit to unflattering truth is never easy, but there is some consolation in knowing that it is truth; and "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems" is not without consolation. Stella is still deserving of praise for transcribing the poem because in so doing she is literally and symbolically setting her hand to her failings, which is all that Swift demands of her. If his tone sounds a bit imperious towards the end of the poem, it is because he has too much ambition, too
much respect, and too much love for Stella to allow her to fall short of his hopes for her. 10

In no other poem is Swift as hard on Stella as he is in "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems," albeit the fact that he can make such accusations frankly is high praise of Stella's judgment and wit. Clearly, he is not concerned with consoling her in this early poem, but the skill he develops in exploring and manipulating the stylistic possibilities of analogy serves him later when consolation becomes a necessity. Therefore, when he again employs analogy as a device in teaching, he does it more gently; he does not, for example, offer Stella unqualified praise and then proceed bluntly to qualify it. This does not mean that Swift is less concerned with truth or with his obligations to Stella in the later poems than he was previously, but it is almost as if he determines to be more gentle with her as her health grows worse. Thus, he begins "Stella's Birth-Day" (1725) in a subdued, compassionate tone, with an analogy paralleling the writing of poetry with dancing:

As when a beauteous Nymph decays
We say, she's past her Dancing Days;
So, Poets lose their Feet by Time,
And can no longer dance in Rhyme.

(HW, II, 756, 11, 1-4)

Swift is not interested in feeding Stella's pride with exaggerated compliments here. He observes frankly that both the nymph and the poet are decaying, both have lost their feet by time. Furthermore, it is clear from what follows that the nymph
is Stella and the poet, Swift. But whereas the imbalance of the opening analogy of "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems" was its message, the means by which Swift paradoxically offset Stella's virtues with her vices, balance is what this analogy insists upon. For instance, the fact that the beauteous nymph is said to be "past her Dancing Days" is balanced against the fact that the poet can no longer "dance in Rhyme." Similarly, the application of the dance metaphor to both situations asserts and strengthens the balance at the same time; thus, the nymph's condition can be seen to parallel the poet's, to a degree.

And even though the epic evocations of the "As when . . ." form of the analogy are not compatible with the plainness of the diction in the remainder of the poem and the pastoral evocations of "beautiful Nymph" are not consistent with the fact that she is decaying, the balance is not upset. Instead, the idea of decay dominates the analogy to such an extent that a sense of sadness derives from an awareness of the incongruity.

This feeling of sadness at the thought of a beautiful nymph decaying and at the thought of a poet losing his ability to write is accompanied by a sense of truthfulness as regards the frankness of the presentation. Time is inescapable and decay, inevitable, but at least the knowledge that one does not face the process in isolation helps to mitigate the loss. More and more in his later poems to Stella, therefore, Swift presents himself to her as a fellow-sufferer. It is this relationship that the analogy finally
highlights, and it is through the balance, the sadness, the truthfulness, and the camaraderie insinuated in the analogy that the important questions posed in the second verse paragraph become rhetorical:

No Poet ever sweetly sung,
Unless he were like Phoebus, young;
Nor ever Nymph inspir'd to Rhyme,
Unless, like Venus, in her Prime.
At Fifty six, if this be true,
Am I a Poet fit for you?
Or at the Age of Forty three,
Are you a Subject fit for me?
(11. 19-26)

The fitness of the nymph for the poet, which has already been implied in the opening analogy, is here reiterated: Stella is inspiring this poem and he is writing, for all of his arguments to the contrary, "sweetly," thus giving the lie to the myth that a poet must be "young" and a nymph, "in her Prime." Moreover, a simple couplet, which depicts the effect of time on Stella's eyesight and on Swift's wit strengthens the parallels:

Adieu bright Wit, and radiant Eyes;
You must be grave, and I be wise.
(11. 27-28)

The God of Wit and the poet have already been linked together as have Beauty's Queen (Venus) and the nymph so that wit is masculine and beauty is feminine. It follows therefore that Swift should be associated with wit and Stella with radiant eyes in the first line of the couplet. And the state of Swift's eyesight is later shown to be comparable to Stella's with his own admission that "My Eyes are somewhat dimnish grown" (1. 42).
Having presented the facts plainly, however, Swift proceeds to deny them in what is for him an uncharacteristic avoidance of reality:

But, Stella say, what evil Tongue
Reports you are no longer young?
That Time sits with his Scythe to mow
Where erst sate Cupid with his Bow;
That half your Locks are turn'd to Grey;
I'll ne'er believe a Word they say.
'Tis true, but let it not be known,
My Eyes are somewhat dimnish grown:
For Nature, always in the Right,
To your Decays adapts my Sight,
And Wrinkles undistinguish'd pass,
For I'm asham'd to use a Glass;
And till I see them with these Eyes,
Whoever says you have them, lies.
(11. 35-48)

Upon closer examination, though, what appear to be denials are not really denials after all. Once again, Swift's intention is not to deceive Stella, but the state of her health at this juncture in her prolonged illness makes his job as poet and friend more difficult, as will be shown later. He must teach, delight, and encourage her in as gentle and yet as convincing a manner as possible. To accomplish this, Swift paradoxically refuses to acknowledge Stella's physical decline. But this is all part of the game, since in refusing to admit that Stella has wrinkles and grey hair, he attests to the fact of their existence. Moreover, his own sophistical reason for not believing in her physical decay lies not in the fact that the wrinkles and the grey hair do not exist but in the fact that he cannot see them. Thus, by adapting his sight to Stella's decay, Nature secures
the final balance in the poem and proves herself to be always in the right, in terms of making life (and death) bearable.

There is yet a postscript to Swift's argument, a final piece of evidence supporting Nature's flawless wisdom:

No Length of Time can make you quit
Honour and Virtue, Sense and Wit,
Thus you may still be young to me,
While I can better hear than see . . . .
(11. 49-52)

In contrast to what he said earlier about beauty and wit being confined to youth, time's passing cannot make Stella quit honour, virtue, sense, and wit. The solution to this paradox is more complex than a simple assertion that Swift is contradicting himself; and, in part, it lies in the rhetorical nature of the questions in the second verse. The thrust of the argument of the second verse is that if beauty and wit are confined to youth, then Swift is not a fit poet for Stella and she is not a fit subject for him. On the one hand, Stella's wrinkles and grey hair, together with Swift's persistent complaints about his inability to dance in rhyme, support the suggestion that beauty and wit are confined to youth. On the other hand, however, the balance insinuated in the analogy, which runs through the rest of the poem, implies that Swift and Stella are fit for each other, and not just because their physical infirmities are comparable. Not surprisingly, the solution lies in a revaluation of "beauty," "wit," and even "youth."
Time has detracted from Stella's physical beauty but it has supplied the loss with a more profound beauty accruing from her commitment to honour, virtue, sense, and wit—a beauty of the mind. A similar difference is implied between the inexperienced wit of youth characterized by a quickness of invention and the experienced wit of older years characterized by self-knowledge. In a very real sense, then, Stella can always remain young not only because Swift can no longer see the signs of physical decay but also because she still possesses beauty and wit, though of different kind than formerly. Swift's earlier observation that "Our Fate in vain we would oppose" is therefore true not only because to combat time is impossible but also because to combat time is to fight against honour, virtue, sense, and wit, which are progressive virtues not limited to a particular age.

Thus far, it is clear that in "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems" and in "Stella's Birth-Day" (1725) Swift is playing with the expectations elicited by paralleling certain elements within specific analogies as well as the expectations elicited by the form of the epic simile generally. "A Receipt to Restore Stella's Youth" (1725) presents a slightly different case; the poem does not begin with an analogy in the usual "As when . . ." form but Swift's strategy in the poem is to compare Stella to a cow.

Without reproducing the poem in its entirety, it is enough to observe that Swift compares Stella to a cow who has grown lean for want of food over the winter months:
Whv, Stella, should you knit your Brow,
If I compare you to the Cow?
'Tis just the Case: For you have fasted
So long till all your Flesh is wasted,
And must against the warmer Days
Be sent to Quilca down to graze;
Where Mirth, and Exercise, and Air,
Will soon your Appetite repair.

(HW, II, 759, 11. 21-28)

During the last three years of her life in particular, Stella's health apparently fluctuated between poor and very poor. But although the state of her health throughout 1725 was never encouraging, in March of that year especially her inability to eat caused Swift some consternation. In a letter to Charles Ford dated March 1, Swift complains that "Mrs. Johnson is as usual, unless rather worse, for she eats now but a mouthfull a day" (Correspondence, III, 52). And writing to Ford again ten days later Swift says, "Our Friend with the weak Stomach eats less than ever, and I am in pain about her . . ." (Correspondence, III, 53).

His concern for Stella in the poem is therefore genuine enough, but his vision of her recovery is more hopeful than realistic. For upon her regaining her appetite, he foresees a miraculous alteration taking place in her physical aspect:

The Nutriment will from within
Round all your Body plump your Skin;
Will agitate the lazy Flood,
And fill your Veins with sprightly Blood:
Nor Flesh nor Blood will be the same,
Nor ought of Stella, but the Name;
For what was ever understood
By human Kind, but Flesh and Blood?
And if your Flesh and Blood be new,
You'll be no more your former You . . .

(11. 29-38)
The light tone of the piece makes it clear that Swift's primary concern here is with entertainment. He has already proven in "Stella's Birth-Day" (1725) that there is more to "human Kind" than flesh and blood. And if the impossibility of the title does not alert the reader to Swift's playful intent immediately, the reference to Medea's Kettle should. Swift knew perhaps better than anybody else that the only way that the health and vibrancy of youth could be restored would be through some impossible magic.

Having acknowledged Swift's playful intent, however, it is fair to add that "A Receipt to Restore Stella's Youth" is not without its serious side. There is a definite correspondence between physical health and mental well-being, and if one is "Meagre and lank with fasting grown" (1. 7), one's spirits likely will be weakened proportionately. The "Receipt" is therefore designed to provide Stella with psychological nutriment through entertainment as well as a recipe for physical revitalization. Presumably, only when the two are combined will Stella be able to "keep Life and Soul together" (1. 10) successfully.

It is significant that Swift's style and methodology in the poems to Stella are markedly different from his style and methodology in the earlier Vanbrugh poems or in the later "On Poetry: A Rapsody" and "An Epistle to a Lady" in that the Stella poems contain almost no satire; in Swift's eyes, Stella, unlike Vanbrugh, was neither a fool to be exposed nor a knave to be lashed, so naturally his style is much less accusatory and
defamatory when he is writing to her. As Kulischeck notes,

Although these occasional poems are saved from
the usual banality of this genre by the elaborate
play of wit, they are almost completely devoid
of satiric colour. The couplets are notable
for their simplicity of diction, their perfectly
ture but not pedestrian rhymes, and their graceful
metrical patterns.11

Nevertheless, Swift would probably still have described his
tactics in poems like "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed
his Poems" and "Stella at Wood-Park" in the very words of his
epistle to Lady Acheson:

Thus, I find it by Experiment,
Scolding moves you less than Merriment.
I may storm and rage in vain;
It but stupifies your Brain.
But, with Raillery to nettle,
Set your Thoughts upon their Mettle:
Gives Imagination Scope,
Never lets your Mind elope:
Drives out Brangling, and Contention,
Brings in Reason and Invention.
(HW, II, 636-637, 11. 207-216)

The thing to remember is that whereas Swift refuses to drop
his "constant Rule, / Turning all to Ridicule" (11. 51-52) for
Lady Acheson, he is often willing to drop his rule for Stella.
And whereas his complaint, "For my Friends have always thought /
Tenderness my greatest Fault" (11. 231-232) is ironic in that
epistle, tenderness directs much of the methodology in the Stella
poems. Whether he is teaching directly or indirectly, Swift is
always confident of Stella's ability to read between the lines,
to extract the tenderness from the weightiest teachings and the
occasional ridicule from her poet. Swift is not, as Fischer
wrongly concludes, intent upon dissolving for Stella "the whole world of hard facts and workable matter" in order to substitute for it "a world in which anything is true which can fairly be seen to be true,"12 because illusion is always its own reward. It is the strength and the patience to accept with equanimity the harshest truths of her human condition that Swift hopes to awaken in Stella, and it is the consolation derived from knowing that she is not alone in her suffering that will ultimately supply her with that strength and patience.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER TWO

1 See Harold Williams' edition of Swift's poems, Vol. II, p. 721, for a brief discussion of Swift's inaccurate representation of Stella's age. Williams attributes the inaccuracy to Swift's faulty memory, but I would suggest that Swift's method of indirect teaching adequately accounts for the misrepresentation.


3 Ibid., p. 5.

4 Although Swift guarded Stella's privacy almost fanatically, the fact remains that while she was virtually on her deathbed he was preparing many of his poems to her for publication. It is one of those strange Swiftian inconsistencies that must be acknowledged but that cannot, I think, be resolved.

5 Throughout his journal to Stella, Swift refers to Stella's poor eyesight. Typical of such references is an entry in Letter
IV dated September 23, 1710: "Stella writes like an emperor: I am afraid it hurts your eyes; take care of that pray, pray Mrs. Stella" (p. 28 of Harold Williams' edition of the *Journal to Stella*) and one in Letter VI dated October 15, 1710: "I will write plainer if I can remember it; for Stella must not spoil her eyes, and Dingley can't read my hand very well" (p. 59).

6 "Faith, Hope, and Charity in Swift's Poems to Stella," p. 16.


10 The crowning irony of Swift's extensive manipulations in the poem is that Stella, without denying the validity of his accusations, neither transcribed nor burned the poem. See Harold Williams' edition of the poems, *Vol. II*, p. 732, n. 140. It is interesting to speculate about Stella's reaction to receiving such a poem, and it would be satisfying to think that, living up to Swift's earlier claims regarding her wit and humour, she turned the tables on him by refusing both of his alternatives, and, in so doing, perhaps mortified his pride a little, too.

Chapter Three

Swift's Relationship with Stella and His Presence in the Poems to Stella

Some years ago, Evelyn Hardy argued that Swift's women, "if he was to love them, must first admit to being students and then become slaves, extensions of himself, who offered no opposition."1 Katherine M. Rogers went further to suggest that "Considered from a physical viewpoint, woman is either a mother or a mate; and Swift showed as much distaste for her in the first capacity as in the second."2 And more recently, Miriam A. Deford has used even stronger language in expressing her belief that "As women, Swift feared and hated them; as fellow-beings he could have toward them an attitude much nearer to our own than to that common in his masculine-dominant day."3 "Slavery," "distaste," "fear," and "hatred" are emotive words which, when used haphazardly, leave in their wake a stigmatism which is difficult to eradicate. Nowhere is this more evident than in the controversy that has grown up around the question of Swift's relationships with women in general and his relationship with Esther Johnson in particular. Was Swift constitutionally capable of loving anyone? Was he inclined towards marriage? Did he in fact marry Esther Johnson?
These are some of the questions around which the controversy revolves, the questions that have plagued Swift criticism in one form or another for over two hundred years.

Doubtless, Herbert Davis hoped he had sufficiently discounted the relevance of such questions to an understanding of the poems to Stella and had thereby laid to rest the marriage debate once and for all in 1942 when he began his Toronto lecture series thus:

Let me say at once that I have no secrets to reveal, no theory to put forward concerning the relationship of Swift and Stella. I have not discovered any fresh manuscripts of his letters to her, or of hers to him. I cannot prove that they were or that they were not married; nor am I much concerned or much impressed by old or recent suggestions that their parentage was more noble than honest.4

None of the evidence Davis lacked has surfaced since the Toronto lectures, and his refutation of Denis Johnston's theories about why Swift could not marry Stella and about their questionable parentage5 renders another such refutation superfluous. Nevertheless, despite Davis' efforts to dissociate the poems to Stella from the melodrama of the marriage question and to analyze them critically, as independent literary artifacts, and despite Irvin Ehrenpreis' decisive statement against the possibility of any clandestine union having taken place,6 discussions of the poems continue to enshroud the whole business with an aura of mystery. Thus, Sybil Le Brocquy, obviously caught up in the sentimental aspects of the mystery, hints that "It is reasonable to believe that Swift would not have persuaded Stella to
leave England, unless he had intended to marry her,"7 and again that "The fact that Swift almost certainly intended to marry Stella, soon after he persuaded the Ladies to move to Dublin, is proof that he then had no idea of his Temple connection."8 Le Brocquy systematically revives all of the issues that Davis played down as her initial belief in Swift's intention to marry Stella mysteriously transforms itself into a fact. And although he is forced to admit, on the basis of the evidence in her possession, that "Reason as well as Charity deny this marriage, for which Stella hoped so long,"9 the wistful tone of her final observation on Stella's disappointment does not inspire confidence in her understanding of Stella's relationship with Swift.

Without adding to the confused mass of criticism of which Le Brocquy's book is singularly representative, I would say simply that, for me, the poems to Stella do not reveal the key to Swift's inclination or disinclination to marry. Indeed, it seems that critics arguing in favour of the marriage nearly always follow reverse logic, that is, they begin with the conclusion that Swift married Stella and then they try to offer as much evidence as possible to support their conclusion, which, by the way, is never abandoned for lack of proof. In the process, the poems to Stella are ransacked for clues even though, in actuality, they do not reveal that a marriage took place any more than they record Swift's fear, hatred, or enslavement of Stella. What the poems
do reveal, I believe, is a relationship between two people based on mutual understanding, respect, devotion, and need, and in this chapter I shall examine how the nature of that relationship informs Swift's presence in the poems.

In her recent article dealing with "Death and Daphne" (1730), one of Swift's Market Hill poems, Nora Crow Jaffe associates Lady Acheson with Stella and Vanessa with reference to their respective relationships with Swift:

The theory that answers most questions for me is that Death is a stand-in for Swift himself and the poem is about the tutorial relationship he cultivated with Lady Acheson, which was similar to his relationships with Stella and Vanessa. The three women were all younger than Swift, with progressively greater intervals between his age and theirs . . . .

The tutor vied with the father in Swift as he strove to inculcate in all three women a love for walking or riding, a hatred for fops, an impeccable pronunciation in reading aloud and a comprehensive acquaintance with writers in philosophy, religion, politics, and literature.10

Jaffe goes on to suggest a parallel between Swift's reprimanding of Lady Acheson in "The Revolution at Market Hill" (1730) and his chastising of Stella in "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems" (1720). For her, this apparently cements the parallels between the two women. However, whereas there are interesting and even striking similarities among all of Swift's famous women friends with regard to their respective backgrounds and physical dimensions as Ehrenpreis has shown,11 their external similarities have brought many critics dangerously close to lumping Stella,
Vanessa, and now Lady Acheson together as if they also possessed one personality. It is this kind of uncritical lumping together of personal characteristics that encourages weak generalizations about Swift's love-life or about his supposed misogyny. But, besides the fact that is inconceivable to me that he thought of and treated all of his female friends identically, Swift left ample evidence to prove that he regarded Stella, Vanessa, and Lady Acheson as individuals, evidence that implies Stella's superiority over the others in his own mind.

Probably his most straightforward appraisal of Stella's value as a woman and as a friend is to be found in the brief biography he began writing on the night of her death. It begins with this general but manifestly sincere statement: "This day, being Sunday, January 28th, 1727-8, about eight o'clock at night, a servant brought me a note, with an account of the death of the truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend, that I, or perhaps any other person ever was blest with" ("On the Death of Mrs. Johnson," HD, V, 227). A few days later he elaborates on her accomplishments as time and his health permit:

She was well versed in the Greek and Roman story, and was not unskilled in that of France and England. She spoke French perfectly, but forgot much of it by neglect and sickness. She had read carefully all the best books of travels, which serve to open and enlarge the mind. She understood the Platonic and Epicurean philosophy, and judged very well of the defects of the latter. She made very judicious abstracts of the best books she had read. She understood the nature of government, and could point out
all the errors of Hobbes, both in that and religion. . . . She had a true taste of wit and good sense, both in poetry and in prose, and was a perfect good critic of style . . . . She preserved her wit, judgment, and vivacity to the last, but often used to complain of her memory.

(HD, V, 227)

Even Vanessa had not received such accolades from Swift; her idleness and immodesty had been rather a source of embarrassment to him from the beginning of their friendship, as he indicates in a letter to Miss Anne Long dated November 18, 1711:

I have a mighty Friendship for her: She had good Principles, and I have corrected all her Faults; but I cannot persuade her to read, tho she has an Understanding, Memory, and Tast, that would bear great Improvement: but she is incorrigibly idle and Lazy: thinks the world made for nothing but her perpetual Pleasure; and the Deity she most adores is Morpheur. Her greatest Favourites at present are Ldy Ashburnham, her Dog, and my self. . . . She will bid her Sister go down stairs, before my face, for she has some private Business with the Doctor. In short there would never be an end of telling you the Hardships she puts on me . . . .

(Correspondence, I, 278)

In many ways the difference between Stella and Vanessa was complete: Stella read as vigorously as her failing eyesight would allow, whereas Vanessa could hardly be prevailed upon to pick up a book; Stella judged well of the defects of Epicurean philosophy, whereas Vanessa seems to have been devoted to it. Swift's placing of the dog before himself in a list of Vanessa's current favourites demonstrates his annoyance with her, if not the true character of her transgressions against him.
Admittedly, Swift wrote of Stella's accomplishments in retrospect in his memorial biography of her, while suffering, presumably, under all of the emotional stress one would experience directly upon losing one's "truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend." When he wrote the above letter to Anne Long, on the other hand, Vanessa was very much a living reminder to him of his failure to redirect her worldly sensibilities. But this does not mean that his account of Stella's virtues is less accurate or dependable for her being deceased. Neither does it mean, as some critics imply, that he maintained a special feeling for Stella because her pliability made her his greatest teaching triumph. Pliability usually presupposes one of two things: a willingness to be directed or an inability to resist being directed, and since Swift had no use for slaves or fools, it is logical to conclude that Stella was of the first category. And from what is known of her character, she was indeed willing to be directed in areas relating to the improvement of her mind, for example, but she also possessed the ability to think and to act for herself. This she exercised, as I have mentioned earlier, in refusing to transcribe "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems."

It is to the poems to Stella that one must ultimately turn, however, to acquire a more detailed insight into Stella's individuality and the reciprocal nature of her relationship with Swift. For if he celebrated her virtuousness in his prose, he
was even more complimentary of it in his poetry; and it is interesting to observe that in the poetry as in the prose, Stella outshines Vanessa. In "Swift and the Agreeable Young Lady, but Extremely Lean," Jaffe draws a parallel between Pallas' performance in "Cadenus and Vanessa" (1713) and Prometheus' activities in "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness" (1720). Pallas endows Vanessa with manly virtues in the former poem and Prometheus bestows on Stella "The Fire that forms a manly Soul" (HW, II, 726, 1. 88) in the latter. Jaffe notes in passing that "Swift is usually literal in accepting an old pedagogical principle we all know well: students are there to be transformed into wizened little replicas of ourselves."12 But in her haste to discover similarities between Lady Acheson and Stella and between Stella and Vanessa, Jaffe misses an important detail. Pallas plays a role in "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness" just as she does in "Cadenus and Vanessa," but although her role in each poem is not all that different, her underlying motivation is.

The dissimilarity between Pallas' motivation in "Cadenus and Vanessa" and in "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness" is subtle, but it nonetheless serves to indicate the different esteem in which Swift held his two friends and the special regard he had for Stella. A little more than a quarter of the way through "Cadenus and Vanessa," Venus deceives Pallas into believing that the infant Vanessa is a boy and, since "Wisdom's above suspecting
Wiles" (HW, II, 692, 1. 198), Pallas bestows her various gifts on the baby:

Then sows within her tender Mind
Seeds long unknown to Womankind,
For manly Bosoms chiefly fit,
The Seeds of Knowledge, Judgment, Wit.
Her Soul was suddenly endu'd
With Justice, Truth and Fortitude;
With Honour, which no Breath can Stain . . . .
(11. 202-208)

In the Stella poem, however, Swift presents Stella initially as an infant, but as an infant already possessing a degree of wit which "Was more than for her Sex was fit" (HW, II, 723, 1. 2) and a degree of beauty which "soon or late, / Might breed Confusion in the State" (11. 3-4). Consequently, Pallas, "In high Concern for human Kind, / First Honour in her Infant Mind" (11. 5-6). There is no deception on Venus' part here. What Pallas would only give previously to a boy she grants willingly to Stella. The difference between the two cases speaks highly in Stella's favour because it characterizes her as more masculine and therefore more Swift's equal than Vanessa.

The remainder of "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness" is important insofar as it fixes Stella's value as a friend firmly in her virtues and, more than this, it initiates an awareness of Swift's dependence on her as well. Having acknowledged Pallas' gift, Swift next proceeds to define the "honour" that Stella has been granted, which amounts to stripping the word of all of its fashionable connotations:
But, (not in Wranglings to engage
With such a stupid vicious Age,)
If Honour I would here define,
It answers Faith in Things divine.
As nat'ral Life the Body warms,
And, Scholars teach, the Soul informs;
So Honour animates the Whole,
And is the Spirit of the Soul.
(11. 7-14)

True honour is neither affected by the humours that seize the body from time to time nor assessable according to the different complexions those humours may effect. It is neither expressed in "The drunken Quarrels of a Rake" (1. 24) nor evidenced in "the Payment of a Debt / We lose with Sharpers at Piquet" (11. 27-28). Rather, as "Stella's fair Example" preaches,

In Points of Honour to be try'd,
All Passions must be laid aside:
Ask no Advice, but think alone,
Suppose the Question not your own:
How shall I act? is not the Case,
But how would Brutus in my Place?
In such a Cause would Cato bleed?
And how would Socrates proceed?
(11. 35-42)

Stella's example thus teaches the necessity of achieving a stance of impartiality in judging points of true honour. Such a stance can best be achieved not by seeking the advice of friends, who may raise objections to acting honourably purely out of self-interest, or by relying upon one's own ability to judge, which, given human imperfection, cannot always be divorced from thoughts of self-aggrandizement, but by emulating the examples of past practitioners of true honour, whose reputation for honourable behaviour (at least in Swiftian terms) is unimpeachable. In
short, one must strive to "Drive all Objections from your Mind. Else you relapse to Human Kind" (11, 43-44). For if one relapses to "Human Kind,"

Ambition, Avarice, and Lust,
And factious Rage, and Breach of Trust,
And Flatter'ry tipt with nauseous Pleer,
And guilty Shame, and servile Fear,
Envy, and Cruelty, and Pride,
Will in your tainted Heart preside.

(11, 45-50)

An espousal of ambition, avarice, lust, and the other vices presented highlights the animalistic side of man's dual nature. At the other extreme, however, Swift implies that an allegiance to true honour elevates man above the level of common humanity; if one concentrates dispassionately on the examples of the power of true moral heroism provided by Socrates, Brutus, or Cato, then he will not relapse into being simply human.

The necessity of looking to the past for models for present actions is determined by the fact that man's post-lapsarian heart grows more tainted with time. As a Christian humanist, Swift believed man to be the victim of an irremediably flawed nature, a condition represented perfectly by the word "relapse," which indicates a process of repeated backsliding. But as a satirist, well steeped in the history and the literature of classical antiquity, he responded to the relative order, prosperity, and what many Augustans considered the moral integrity of classical Rome. This duality of belief is less paradoxical than it appears because for Swift, as for his contemporaries, there was
no such thing as a perfect post-lapsarian man, not even in the classical past. Consequently, not even ancient Rome could teach perfection. Nevertheless, whereas the classical models were not perfect, they were still more exemplary than modern men and, therefore, were the best available models. Furthermore, by following their examples one could at least rise above the level of "Human Kind" even if one could never attain perfection.

Stella's sense of true honour is such that it has already elevated her above the level of common humanity, but Swift playfully contrives to elevate her still higher by punning on the meaning of her name:

Heroes and Heroins of old,
By Honour only were enroll'd
Among their Brethren of the Skies,
To which (though late) shall Stella rise.

(11. 51-54)

"Stella" means star, and Swift draws upon the various literary associations that "star" conjures up to endow Stella with a kind of epic immortality. Her rising into the skies is appropriate since she has been designed as mankind's guiding light because of her honourable behaviour. What is still more complimentary, though, is the fact that these lines represent not a prayer but an assertion. They do not ask that Stella "may" rise, they confidently predict that she "shall" rise.

The reasons for this certainty in Swift's mind are clear:

Ten thousand Oaths upon Record,
Are not so sacred as her Word:
The World shall in its Atoms end,
E'er Stella can deceive a Friend.
By Honour seated in her Breast,
She still determines what is best:
What Indignation in her Mind
Against Enslavers of Mankind!
Base Kings and Ministers of State,
Eternal Objects of her Hate.

(11. 55-64)

Even allowing for a large measure of exaggeration for
entertainment purposes, entertainment being ever-present in the
poems to Stella, Stella's virtuousness is impressive. For whether
the oaths upon record number one hundred or ten thousand, Stella
is true to her word and will not deceive a friend. Additionally,
it is fair to say that in her hatred of the enslavers of mankind,
"Base Kings and Ministers of State," she has learned her lessons
well, that she is thoroughly Swiftian. Swift provides an indirect
clue to his own notion of true honour, and a clue to his choice of
a classical figure like Brutus to represent it, in a letter to
Alexander Pope dated January 10, 1721:

It is true, the Romans had a custom of chusing
a Dictator, during whose administration, the
Power of other Magistrates was suspended; but
this was done upon the greatest emergencies;
a War near their doors, or some civil Dissention,
for Armies must be governed by arbitrary power.
But when the Virtue of that Commonwealth gave
place to luxury and ambition, this very office
of Dictator became perpetual in the persons of
the Caesars and their Successors, the most
infamous tyrants that have any where appeared
in story.

(Correspondence, II, 373)

Swift could tolerate dictatorial rule so long as the integrity of
the Commonwealth was preserved and so long as individuals' rights
were respected, but when benevolent dictatorship transformed
itself into political tyranny, he lost all patience. True honour
acts with courage and decision to prevent or to overthrow such tyranny, and since Stella knows the nature and the value of true honour, she can appreciate, with Swift, the active quality of true honour that Brutus symbolizes in the context of the poem. But simply because she shares Swift's political convictions does not mean that she is therefore a wizened little replica of her tutor. After all, it would be more remarkable if she was not Swiftian, for no close, lasting relationship with Swift was ever founded on mutual incompatibility. And besides, the direction Stella's hatred takes is consistent symbolically with the direction Brutus' hatred took, so that her hatred contributes to the thematic unity of the poem.

Thus far, Swift has defined true honour almost exclusively in theoretical terms: "It answers Faith in Things divine," and it "is the Spirit of the Soul." Nevertheless, the test of true honour comes, as it always has, in its practical application. Not surprisingly, Swift's most recent observation of Stella's honourable behaviour, in terms of the composition of the poem, coincides with his present illness, throughout which she nurses him faithfully. Immediately one notices the incongruity between the domesticity of Stella's efforts and the epic build-up that Swift has given her in the preceding lines of the poem. The incongruity is central to Swift's purpose in the poem, however, because it not only indicates the considerable gap that normally exists between theoretical definitions and their practical
application, but it also demonstrates the pervasive power and range of true honour. Ostensibly, Swift's intention is to redefine honour, to align it with the daily interests of the common man, thereby making true honour universally accessible.

As may be expected of one who is entirely animated by true honour, then, Stella "thinks that Nature ne'er design'd / Courage to Man alone confin'd" (11. 65-66). Courage may be deemed a predominantly masculine virtue, but Swift makes it clear that women are capable of being courageous. For her part, Stella has never learned to display affected fears, to scream or to faint delicately at the least provocation. Moreover, where they might expect to witness the usual female coquetry and trifling conversation, "Her Hearers are amaz'd from whence / Proceeds that Fund of Wit and Sense" (11. 79-80) in Stella's conversation. And it should be noted that, in Swift's eyes, Stella does not lose her womanliness by the acquisition of manly virtues. If anything, she becomes a more perfect woman because she represents a balance of all that is outwardly and inwardly beautiful. Prometheus, as it turns out, was no more blind in bestowing on her "The Fire that forms a manly Soul" (1. 88) than Pallas was in endowing her with honour at the outset. But even this manly fire is incomplete in itself and, consequently, Prometheus, "to compleat it ev'ry way, / He molded it with Female Clay" (11. 89-90). Those who maintain a belief
Swift's misogyny should be interested to see that, in Stella's case at least, the masculine virtues find an excellent domicile in "Female Clay."

Thus, courage combines with humility, patience, and kindness as Stella tends Swift in his illness:

How would Ingratitude delight?
And, how would Censure glut her Spight?
If I should Stella's Kindness hide
In Silence, or forget with Pride.
When on my sickly Couch I lay,
Impatient both of Night and Day,
Lamenting in unmanly Strains,
Call'd ev'ry Pow'r to ease my Pains,
Then Stella ran to my Relief
With cheerfull Face, and inward Grief;
And, though by Heaven's severe Decree
She suffers hourly more than me,
No cruel Master could require
From Slaves employ'd for daily Hire
What Stella by her Friendship warm'd,
With Vigour and Delight perform'd.
My sinking Spirits now supplies
With Cordials in her Hands, and Eyes.
Now, with a soft and silent Tread,
Unheard she moves about my Bed.
I see her taste each nauseous Draught,
And so obligingly am caught:
I bless the Hand from whence they came,
Nor dare distort my Face for shame.
(11. 93-116)

There is a danger that the sentimentality of these lines can easily obscure Swift's craftsmanship. Stylistically, his unmanly lamentations serve to highlight Stella's courage, his impatience her patience, and his sinking spirits her cheerful face. But he makes Stella's honour more than just observable by contrast, for it is felt in her hands, seen in her eyes, heard paradoxically in her silent tread, and somehow even tasted in the medicine that
she samples before administering it to him. In short, Swift render an abstract virtue tangible with the result that honour acquires a sensible quality and courage becomes an everyday reality.

This, in fact, is what Swift has been working up to. Virtues in general and honour and courage in particular have lost their meanings, the sense of their importance having been perverted by the decadence of modern society. The way to apprehend their true meanings is to consult the past, but the only way to revive those virtues in the present is to apply the sense of their past meanings to everyday activities and events in the present. For Swift, virtuousness is not so much a product of intelligence but rather a product of personal integrity. It is the maintenance of personal integrity in a vicious world that demands the courage of the classical heroes and heroines, and he who meets the challenge is indeed heroic. Perhaps this is something of what Swift had in mind when he wrote in Stella's biography that "With all the softness of temper that became a lady, she had the personal courage of a hero" (HD, V, 229).

Interesting as it may be to speculate on the point at which Stoicism ends and Christian patience begins in Stella's behaviour, it seems to me that the real significance of those moments in the poems to Stella when Swift is especially dependent on her benevolence lies in their very personal and self-revelatory nature. Despite the fact that the closing lines of "To Stella,
Visiting me in my Sickness" are demonstrably Swiftian in their stylistic tightness and precision, they are uncharacteristic of Swift in the sense that he is seldom so honest or so revealing about himself. Not only does he not assume an ironic mask on a literary level, but he dare not even "distort [his] face for shame" on a physical level; as artist and man, he seems to be attempting complete honesty. Of course, the problem arises as to how playful Swift is being here. Clearly, in the context of the poem he lacks Stella's courage and patience and, therefore, he is less than her equal as regards the heroism of moderation.

But it may be argued that the expression of his suffering is contrived or exaggerated to display her virtues more advantageously.

There are two circumstances, however, which indicate that Swift's expression of his suffering is neither contrived nor exaggerated. In the first place, there is an underlying sense of intimacy and candor in the poems to Stella that precludes outright lying. This sense is largely inherent in what D. W. Jefferson has identified as the element of the personal, which he sees as representative of Swift's "latest and greatest period as a poet":

He had had friends before, but now friendship becomes a major theme in his poetry. He writes birthday poems for Stella during the later years of her life, and verse epistles to friends such as Ford, Delany, and Lady Acheson. Associated with the personal is the didactic. Swift becomes more overtly the moralist, and the moral tone
is idiosyncratic, the expression of a formidable character with settled, rather conservative attitudes diversified by an infinitely resourceful wit. . . . His habitual austerity and dryness, but also his aura of immense distinction, give priceless value to all that is gracious and complimentary in these poems for friends.16

Admittedly, Jefferson's comments are meant primarily as general observations based on overall impressions, so that his remarks about Swift's idiosyncratic tone and habitual dryness are arguable in degree. In addition, Jefferson fails to acknowledge that the poems to Stella are as different from as they are similar to the verse epistles to Ford, Delany, and Lady Acheson or that Swift's relationships with Stella and Lady Acheson cannot really be considered equivalent. Nonetheless, his point about the personal nature of the birthday poems to Stella is well taken. Not only are they personal, but it is their intensely personal nature that ultimately separates them from the rest of Swift's poetry. The same tacit assumptions that Stella can understand and accept the truths presented in his various lessons and perceive the tenderness that directs his teachings are evident in all of the poems to her.

And in the second place, there is little or no exaggeration in Swift's presentation of the state of his health in any of the Stella poems judging from the information in his correspondence. For example, in a letter he wrote to Charles Ford on April 4, 1720, a little more than two weeks after the birthday for which "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness" presumably was composed, he says that
I am hardly a Month free from Deafness which continues another month on me, and dejects me so, that I can not bear the thoughts of stirring out, or suffering any one to see me, and this is the most mortal Impediment to all thoughts of travelling, and I would dy with Spleen to be in such a Condition in strange Places; so that I must wait till I grow better, or sink under it if I am worse. You healthy People cannot judge of the sickly. Since I had your last of Mar. 10th I have not been able to write; and three Days ago having invited several Gentlemen to dinner, I was so attacked with a fitt of Giddyness for 5 Hours, that I was forced to constitute a Grattan to be my Deputy and do the Honours of the House while I lay miserable on my Bed. Your friendly Expostulations force me upon this old Woman's Talk, but I can bring all of my few Friends to witness that you have heard more of it, than ever I troubled them with.

(Correspondence, II, 341-342)

This letter is valuable for several reasons. It verifies the existence of the illness Swift depicts in "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness." Further, it documents Swift's unwillingness to talk extensively of his poor health to any but his closest friends. And, what is perhaps most important, it reveals his fear of being reduced to total dependency and to total helplessness by his maladies.

In order to combat this fear of dependency and also, I believe, in order to deal emotionally with the fact of his declining health, Swift developed a special method of writing about himself to his close friends, a method consisting of self-disparangement. By making light of his own inadequacies, he could talk about his ill health or about his poetical inabilities while still keeping them at arm's length from himself. Therefore,
in the above letter to Ford, Swift refers to the brief discussion of his infirmities as "old Woman's Talk," which he indulges in only to satisfy Ford's enquiries. Similarly, in his letter to Alexander Pope of July 19, 1725, he ends a serious report of his present health with a touch of self-mockery:

I would have seen you many times if a Cursed Deafness did not Sease me every 2 or 3 Months, and then I am frightened to think what I should do in London while my Friends are all either banished or attained or beggars, or retired. But I will venture all if I live and you must in that Case get me two or three Harridan Ladys that will be content to nurse and talk loud to me while I am deaf. Say nothing of my being eleven years older than when we parted . . . .

(Correspondence, III, 79)

Not to belabour the point, it is enough to say that Swift was acutely aware of his declining health and his subsequent inability to write, especially poetry. And it was characteristic of him to handle so important a circumstance by paradoxically making light of it. It is this same tendency toward ironic self-deprecation, first evident in "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness," that typifies the two poems to Stella in which he speaks not directly of Stella but of his own declining poetical abilities. The first poem dealing with this matter, and the one I shall discuss here, is "To Stella on her Birth-day 1721/22"; the second, "Stella's Birth-Day" (1723), I shall not deal with since it is chiefly a more playful rendition of its predecessor.

"To Stella on her Birth-day 1721/22" expresses, in a mere twenty lines, Swift's difficulty in producing yet another birthday poem:
While, Stella to your lasting Praise
The Muse her ann' all Tribute pays,
While I assign my self a Task
Which you expect, but scorn to ask;
If I perform this Task with Pain
Let me of partiall Fate complain;
You, every Year the Debt enlarge,
I grow less equall to the Charge:
In you, each Virtue brighter shines,
But my Poetic Vein declines.
My Harp will soon in vain be strung,
And all Your Virtues left unsung:
For, none among the upstart Race
Of Poets dare assume my Place;
Your Worth will be to them unknown,
They must have Stella's of their own;
And thus, my Stock of Wit decay'd;
I dying leave the Debt unpay'd,
Unless Delany as my Heir,
Will answer for the whole Arrear.
(HW, II, 739-740, 11. 1-20)

Swift's pain is clearly not primarily of the physical variety. He playfully ascribes much of his current difficulty to Stella's lack of consideration in not only expecting a birthday tribute but in yearly enlarging his debt to her as well, all of which is quite apart from the inconvenience put upon him by the fact that his poetic vein declines steadily as a matter of course. When combined, these elements make the task of composition all but impossible, and as a reflection of this fact the resulting poem is correspondingly short and simple.

Despite or perhaps because of its simplicity, "To Stella on her Birth-day 1721/22" provides a deeper insight into Swift's relationship with Stella and the nature of his presence in the Stella poems. His explicit compliments are not uncommon to birthday poems generally; Stella is virtuous and he alone is the
judge of her true worth: "Your Worth will be to them unknown, / They must have Stella's of their own." But it is his implied sense of audience that is most enlightening to the poem. He is writing to and for Stella, and he can write to her about subjects pertaining intimately to his art in as open and as playful or as serious a manner as he employs when writing to a fellow-craftsman like Pope, confident the while that she can read his work with almost as much sympathy for and understanding of art as Pope. But what, I think, was of still greater moment to Swift was the fact that although her comprehension of art was less than Pope's, Stella could bring to her reading of his work a greater sympathy for and understanding of Swift the man than Pope ever could. This, I believe, was Stella's real value to Swift in his literary career, a large part of the debt that time and partial Fate, as he realizes in the poem, probably will not allow him to repay adequately.

Generally speaking, Swift hated the thought of being in debt. It is a much quoted fact that he was obsessed with money, a fact that Leslie Stephen has explained succinctly and perceptively in his book entitled, *Swift*. He relates Swift's concern with financial matters to his fear of dependency:

He kept accounts down to halfpence, and rejoices at every saving of a shilling. The passion was not the vulgar desire for wealth of the ordinary miser. It sprang from the conviction stored up in all his aspirations that money meant independence. . . . Gay was a duchess's lapdog: Swift, with all his troubles, at least was a free man. . . .
He did not love money for its own sake. He was even magnificent in his generosity. He scorned to receive money for his writings; he abandoned the profit to his printers in compensation for the risks they ran, or gave it to his friends. . . . In late years he lived on a third of his income, gave away a third, and saved the remaining third for his posthumous charity,—and posthumous charity which involves present saving is charity of the most unquestionable kind. His principle was that by reducing his expenditures to the lowest possible point, he secured his independence and could then make a generous use of the remainder.18

In a letter to Knightley Chetwode, Swift himself goes further to equate the lack of money not just with dependency but with slavery: "For life is a trifle, and reputation is supplied by innocence, but the ruin of a man's fortune makes him a slave, which is infinitely worse than loss of life or credit" (Correspondence, III, 60).

Knowledge of the importance that Swift attached to money gives "To Stella on her Birth-day 1721/22" added poignancy because he speaks of his obligation to Stella in financial terms, punning beautifully on the general meanings and on the specifically monetary meanings of words like "Charge," "Worth," "Debt," and "Arrear." Undoubtedly, Stella would have perceived the significance of what Swift is acknowledging by using these terms. He is acknowledging the existence between them of a bond, founded on mutual understanding and mutual indebtedness, in the face of which "life is a trifle" because the debt outlasts life itself: "And thus, my Stock of Wit decay'd; / I dying leave the Debt unpay'd." As he did with the concept of true honour, then, Swift
expresses powerful feelings by giving substance to that which is intangible, while simultaneously avoiding the danger of sounding affected, overly sentimental, and generally insincere.

In his headnote to the poem, Harold Williams mentions that "To Stella on her Birth-day 1721/22" was the last poem that Stella copied into her notebook. He also notes that "In Stella's copy the name 'Delany' is scrawled and blotted out" (HW, II, 739). It would be nice to think that this represents Stella's acknowledgement of the bond and that it represents her feeling that Swift's debt was more than amply paid. But whatever her actual emotions may have been when she read the closing lines of the poem, her blotting out of Delany's name seems to indicate that, for her, Delany could never replace Swift as her poet. And since her notebook was apparently maintained for her personal pleasure alone, the sincerity of Stella's action cannot be questioned.

Naturally, examples of Swift's special relationship with Stella are not limited to those poems in which he portrays his physical illness or his creative incapacities, albeit the intensity of such poems serves to highlight their relationship more clearly. Moreover, it would be wrong to assume that Swift depended upon Stella purely for sympathy and nursing. For if he was drawn to her because she could empathize with his agonies as only a fellow-sufferer could—as he told Ford, "You healthy People cannot judge of the sickly"—he was also drawn to her because
she possessed a refined intellect and a sound judgment, both of which made her opinions valuable to him.

As early as 1710, he insists that he is interested mainly in her reactions to his recent poems:

My Shower admired with YOU; why, the bishop of Clogher says, he has seen something of mine of the same sort, better than the Shower. I suppose he means The Morning; but it is not half so good. I want your judgment of things, and not your country's. How does MD like it? and do they taste it all?  
(Journal to Stella, I, 109)

And a bit further on in the Journal to Stella he writes,

What you say of Sid Hamet is well enough; that an enemy should like it, and a friend not; and that telling the author would make both change their opinions. Why did not you tell Griffyth that you fancied there was something in it of my manner . . . .  
(Journal to Stella, I, 127-128)

Whatever the world at large may have known and thought of his work, Swift wanted his achievements to be clear to Stella. Furthermore, his opinion of her judgment remained constant, so that he could write in "On the Death of Mrs. Johnson" that "I cannot call to mind that I ever once heard her make a wrong judgment of persons, books, or affairs" (HD, V, 228).

Since virtually none of Swift's letters to Stella have survived except for those that comprise the Journal to Stella, and since none of her letters to him are extant, evidence concerning the nature of their relationship, outside of that provided by the Stella poems themselves, the brief biography, and a couple of prayers, must be gleaned by bits and pieces from
Swift's own letters or from those exchanged between his friends. Of the latter group, two letters in particular from Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, to Charles Ford fortunately have been preserved. Although there is no way of an outsider's knowing exactly how much Stella's friendship meant to Swift, Bolingbroke's estimate of her influence on him is interesting at least.

Bolingbroke, out of favour with the English government and writing from his self-imposed exile in Paris, observes somewhat philosophically that

*Every great genius borders upon folly. her dominions embrace those of Reason on every side; & the two frontiers are so alike, that he who pushes to the extremitys of one, wanders often into the other, & seldom finds his way back. for me, and those, who, like me, have not strength enough to make such long excursions, we are not expos'd to the same danger. we live in the mediterranean province, less fruitful, less beautiful, less elegant than those which are more remote from the center, but it furnishes us with every thing necessary, thanks be to Stella! I will neither pun nor quibble, but I am confident that we had lost the Dean if it had not been for her. if she had not fix'd his course, our poor friend would have wander'd from one ideal world to another, and have forgot even the Species he is of. he had been att this very instant perhaps freezing in Saturn, burning in Mercury, or stalking along with a load on his back, a bell under his chin, a plume on his head, and a fox tail att each ear, in that country which he discover'd not long ago, where Horses & mules are the reasonable Creatures, and men the Beasts of burden. But thanks to heaven & Stella, that danger is over. since he love a woman he will not forget that he is a man.*21
And in another letter to Ford written on September 12, 1724 but not sent until October 10, Bolingbroke reiterates his theme:

I know not whether to be pleas'd or sorry that Stella has so many good qualities. the easy hours which she procures to our friend are reasons for the first; and his attachment to Ireland, which I believe owing to his attachment to her, is a reason for the latter. . . . the deans fancy is like that Devil which a certain Conjurer had rais'd and which threaten'd to carry him away, if he left him a moment unemploy'd. When the Dean therefore has sung all Stella's perfections over in Sonnet, Ode, Pastoral etc., his Devil having no more employment will certainly run away with him.22

It seems unlikely that Swift would ever have forgotten that he was a man, his ill health being a constant reminder to him of his humanity. Nevertheless, Bolingbroke's firm conviction that Stella's virtues and influences were instrumental in securing Swift's sanity is significant for two reasons: first, it implies that Stella's virtues were not apparent only to Swift; and second, it suggests that their relationship was not so subtle or so secretive as to be indistinguishable from a casual acquaintanceship. Whether or not Bolingbroke's assessment of the nature of Swift's relationship with Stella is correct, however, is another matter.

It may be that "Every great genius borders upon folly" as Bolingbroke states, and certainly the question of insanity has been a red herring in Swift criticism for years,23 but to argue that Stella's value to Swift lay solely in her preservation of his mental faculties is surely to miss the principles upon which
their relationship was founded, the principles of mutual obligation and mutual need. The obligation on Swift's part is unequivocally expressed in "To Stella, visiting me in my Sickness," in "To Stella on her Birth-day 1721/22," in "Stella's Birth-Day" (1723), and in "To Stella 1723/24."

Stella's obligation to Swift is as unequivocally expressed in her birthday poem to him of November 30, 1721:

STELLA to you, her tutor, owes
That she has ne'er resembled those;
Nor was a burden to mankind
With half her course of years behind.
You taught how I might youth prolong
By knowing what was right and wrong;
How from my heart to bring supplies
Of lustre to my fading eyes;
How soon a beauteous mind repairs
The loss of chang'd or falling hairs;
How wit and virtue from within
Send out a smoothness o'er the skin:
Your lectures cou'd my fancy fix,
And I can please at thirty-six.

Long be the day that gave you birth
Sacred to friendship, wit, and mirth;
Late dying may you cast a shred
Of your rich mantle o'er my head;
To bear with dignity my sorrow,
One day alone, then die to-morrow.

(RW, II, 737-738, 11. 29-42; 11. 53-58)

Nowhere in these lines is there a hint of the disappointment that Le Brocqy imagines was Stella's when she realized that a marriage with Swift could never materialize. Neither is Le Brocqy's belief that Stella "loved him passionately and desired to marry him" supported in this, the only clearly authoritative piece of Stella's writing that survives, unless one is willing to read far more into the conventions of birthday poetry under
which Stella is writing than is advisable. For in Stella's poem to Swift as in his poems to her, the key word is "friendship." And there is no evidence from her hand that she preferred marriage over friendship, a fact which perhaps suggests a need for independence that complements Swift's need for independence perfectly. Even in this, then, Stella's perceptiveness proved superior to Vanessa's, because, whereas Vanessa misjudged Swift's intentions entirely, Stella never deceived herself as to her tutor's inclinations and designs.

Once her virtuousness, her willingness to learn and to be guided, her perceptiveness, and her individuality have been established, it is not so difficult to understand how Stella could have become Swift's friend; he admired all of these qualities. Similarly, it is not so difficult to detect from his works that she was his most valued female friend; the little language in the Journal_to_Stella, the letters written to his friends not long before her death, the biography, and both the existence and the contents of the birthday poems attest to the fact. Swift can be as engaging in his letters to Vanessa as he is in the Journal_to_Stella but one senses a more reserved tone in the former than in the latter, and he can be as self-disparaging when writing to Lady Acheson as he is when writing to Stella but, again, his tone is much freer when he is writing to Stella.
The difference in tone between, say, "An Epistle to a Lady" and "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness," it is true, is determined largely by the different subject-matter in each. And yet, even this is significant because Swift's choice of subject-matter and the tone in which he presents it is determined by his awareness of his audience. When writing to Lady Acheson, for example, he can comfortably assume a role of tutorial superiority. Armed with the defenses inherent in the role itself, he can then admit to an inability to reach the high sublime partly because he is able to talk of it as a blessing in disguise that more readily allows him to perform his professed function as a poet and also partly because it is a perfectly obvious fact anyway. Thus, he is absolutely honest with Lady Acheson and preserves his stature and dignity as a man by keeping strictly to those subjects that fall within the well-defined range of his control in his dual role as teacher and poet.

It would be untrue to say that Swift relinquishes all of his defenses when writing to Stella. Nevertheless, the fact that the range of subject-matter in the poems to Stella includes intimate accounts of his ill health, his poor eyesight, and even his aversion to wearing eyeglasses indicates that Swift felt less restricted by his need for defenses in Stella's presence. As a result, his presence in the poems becomes at once more personal and more free. He can speak freely to her of his afflictions, confident of her understanding of and her willingness to share in
his torments in a number of capacities. He can count on her to be a friend, a nurse, a student, and a mother as the situation and his needs demand. There is perhaps nothing extraordinary about Stella's versatility; undoubtedly, many women have done as much. But it is the mark of their special friendship that she does this much for Swift. Only in her presence can he comfortably, unashamedly, become what his sickness makes him, a helpless child. And although he playfully makes light of his helplessness by assuming the pose of a child who dares not distort his face, he does it, I think, with the understanding that Stella will see behind the mask, that she will sympathetically indulge him in even this slight gesture towards preserving his pride and dignity.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER THREE


5 Ibid., pp. 2-8.


The Personality of Jonathan Swift, pp. 11-20.

"Swift and the Agreeable Young Lady, but Extremely Lean," p. 5.


Howard Weinbrot, in an article entitled, "History, Horace, and Augustus Caesar: Some Implications for Eighteenth-Century Satire," Eighteenth-Century Studies, 4 (Summer, 1974), 391-414, argues that by the time Pope was writing his Horatian satires, "the discrediting of Augustus and Horace as exemplary political and satiric models" (p. 410) was all but completed, and that therefore when we use the term "Augustan" "to characterize any or all of the years between 1660 and 1800 we should be aware of that period's anti-Augustan stance" (p. 414). Nevertheless, however true this may be, there remains a general sense throughout Swift's writings that the classical past was still more admirable than the present.
15 See John Irwin Fischer's unpublished paper entitled "Faith, Hope, and Charity in Swift's Poems to Stella," p. 8, which was presented at the M.L.A. Conference in New York, December 1976. Fischer decides that there are stoic elements in the poems to Stella but that the Christian matrix of thought enlightens his reading of the poems more.


17 This assertion, while generally true, is not universally applicable. There are times in his correspondence when Swift's impatience gets the better of him, so that he is hardly able to tolerate his infirmities. See, for example, his letter to Pope of February 26, 1729-30, in which he says, "Yet my Eyes hurt with reading by candle-light, so that I am forced to write and burn whatever comes into my head. If I sent my last letter without a Seal it is an honest pure blunder, of which I make fifty every day and what encreases them, is my fear of encreasing them" (Correspondence, III, 375).


19 Swift's inclination to feel a special closeness to people who suffered physical afflictions comparable to his own does not rest solely on this remark in his letter to Ford, previously
quoted in my text as Correspondence, II, 341. In the Journal to Stella, for example, he writes after a visit with Lady Kerry that "She sends me bottles of her bitter, and we are so fond of one another, because our ailments are the same; don't you know that, Madam Stella?" (Journal to Stella, I, 178).

20 See Harold Williams' note to a letter inscribed to Stella and dated April 30, 1721, in Correspondence, II, 385. Williams points out that this letter and perhaps the one entitled, "Prince of Lilliput to Stella," 11 March 1726-27, are all that remain of Swift's letters to Stella with the exception of the Journal.

21 This letter, dated December 25, 1723, is to be found in The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford, ed. David Nichol Smith (Folcroft: The Folcroft Press, Inc., 1935), p. 238. There is an interesting epilogue to the story of this letter, however, for, by some mistake, it was mailed not to Ford but to Swift. Swift's reaction was predictably prompt and defensive. Writing to Ford, he explains about receiving Bolingbroke's letter: "I was at a Loss about one of the Letters, at first, but after found it was to you, and that you are a Traytor into the Bargain: else how should he know any Thing of Stella or of Horses. . . . I would have him and you know that I hate Yahoos of both Sexes, and that Stella and Madam Villette are only tolerable at best, for want of Houyhnhnms" (Correspondence, III, 4). Swift is justifiably miffed at Ford for bandying about information relating to two of his most private
concerns, that is, his relationship with Stella and an as yet unfinished and therefore unpublished work. His deliberately ironic undercutting of Stella's value and his overemphasizing of his commitment to the Houyhnhnms is a typically Swiftian way of telling people to mind their own business. Additionally, by suggesting that Stella is "only tolerable," he is displaying his annoyance not at Stella but at Bolingbroke for invading his privacy and for discovering a dependency that Swift's pride would never permit him to admit to a man of Bolingbroke's stature.

22 Ibid., pp. 239-240.

23 The Personality of Jonathan Swift, pp. 117-126. In this chapter entitled "Madness," Ehrenpreis records that Samuel Johnson traced Swift's mental decay back to 1736, that Sir Walter Scott dated it at 1740, and that Middleton Murray split the difference and adopted 1738 as the date. Ehrenpreis argues convincingly that "Bad memory, poor eyesight, deafness, Meniere's Syndrome, orbital cellulitis" (p. 121) were Swift's physiological disorders in his last years and that "When nearly seventy-five, he went into the sort of decline that a brain lesion, associated with cerebral arteriosclerosis, can produce" (pp. 122-123) but that "Swift, from birth to death, was insane by no medical definition" (p. 125).

24 Swift's Most Valuable Friend, p. 125.
Harold Williams notes that only three poems have been attributed to Stella and that, of the three, this birthday poem "carries, perhaps, the best authority" (HW, II, 736).

I mention Swift's aversion to wearing eyeglasses because he introduces the subject himself in two of the poems. In "Stella's Birth-Day" (1725) he tells Stella how he is "asham'd to use a Glass" (HW, II, 758, 1. 46) and in "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27" he refers to talk of spectacles as "mortifying Stuff" (HW, II, 763, 1. 8). Further, in a letter inscribed jointly to Alexander Pope and John Gay he writes, "I have received a Box with the Spectacles but by whose Care they were conveyed I know not I onely desire that my Lord Bolingbroke may be assured the Spectacles were for two old Cozens and not for me" (Correspondence, III, 173). It is characteristic of their special relationship that Swift can not only introduce this subject in Stella's presence but also relate it to a quirk of pride in himself.
CHAPTER FOUR

SWIFT'S LAST POEM TO STELLA

From his earliest days as a poet, Swift believed the essence of a poet's obligation to himself and to society to be the representation and elaboration of truth, and the surest vehicle for conveying truth to be simple language devoid of cant expressions and cliches, a stance which I have already discussed at some length in Chapter One. And his adoption of the clean, spare style of the octosyllabic couplet is a result of these convictions. Moreover, besides the fact that unadorned rhetoric is eminently suited to Swift's satiric intent in the Vanbrugh poems and in "On Poetry: A Rhapsody," for example, it is also consistent with the playfulness and the simplicity with which he presents his moral vision in the early poems to Stella, a vision which is essentially derived from Christian doctrine.

For example, in "To Stella, Visiting me in my Sickness," Stella's sense of true friendship, which is animated by her sense true honour, is represented most convincingly in her essentially domestic ministrations to Swift in his illness:
Then Stella ran to my Relief
With cheerful Face, and inward Grief;
And, though by Heaven's severe Decree
She suffers hourly more than me,
No cruel Master could require
From Slaves employ'd for daily Hire
What Stella by her Friendship warm'd,
With Vigour and Delight perform'd.
My sinking Spirits now supplies
With Cordials in her Hands, and Eyes.
Now, with a soft and silent Tread,
Unheard she moves about my Bed.

(HW, II, 726-727, 11. 101-112)

Swift makes it clear that Stella's silence is expressive of the greatness of her mind; it is not the condition of silence that excites admiration but the idea implied by that silence, the idea that Stella "suffers hourly" more than Swift. Overmastering pain requires a combined and concerted effort of mind and will and Stella exercises both faculties impressively to subdue the intense pain arising from her own physical infirmities so that she can relieve Swift's pain effectively.

The great importance that Swift placed on true friendship is exemplified in a letter to Alexander Pope, referred to earlier in my text, in which he playfully complains to Pope that "I am frightened to think what I should do in London while my friends are all either banished or attained or beggars, or retired" (Correspondence, III, 79), but his fear of being friendless in as large a place as London is genuine enough. And he expresses the importance he places on friendship more emphatically when he confesses to the Reverend James Stopford his belief that "violent friendship is much more lasting, and as much engaging,
as violent love" (Correspondence, III, 145). But finally, it is the Christian aspect of Stella's friendship that impresses Swift the most. It is her selfless Christian charity that he commemorates in the short prayer he composes for her on November 6, 1727:

Accept and pardon our most earnest Prayers and Wishes for her longer Continuance... that she may be still a Comfort to us, and to all others who will want the Benefit of her Conversation, her Advice, her good Offices, or her Charity.

(HD, IX, 225)

One can go through the poems to Stella and discover further examples of Swift's moral vision as exemplified in Stella's friendship, courage, patience, and general virtuousness. And in each instance, the lightness of the octosyllabic couplet helps either to ameliorate the harsh truths that Stella must learn to accept as in "Stella's Birth-Day" (1725) or to reinforce a sense of playfulness as in "On Stella's Birth-day 1718/19." But the Stella poem in which Swift pushes the effect of the octosyllabic couplet to its limit is "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27." This poem, Swift's last birthday tribute to Esther Johnson, has justifiably been celebrated as the most affecting of the birthday poems. In one way it represents the culmination of the various themes of the preceding poems, a fact which is not at all surprising since Swift undoubtedly believed this birthday to be Stella's last. And in another way it is an entirely new poem, for in it Swift
assumes a new role, the role of priest.

Before one can analyze "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27" adequately, though, some measure of understanding of the general state of Swift's mind in the months leading up to the poem's composition is helpful. In a letter to the Reverend John Worrall postmarked "Twitenham. July, 15th 1726," Swift expresses his desperate belief that "Mrs. J-- cannot hold out till my Return." He goes on to inform Worrall of Stella's intentions regarding her last will and testament, but even as he focuses his reason on this legal matter he cannot restrain his emotions. In a state of severe mental and emotional agitation he tries to explain, among other things, why he cannot return to Ireland to watch Stella die:

Think how I am disposed while I write this, and forgive the Inconsistencies. I would not for the Universe be present at Such a Tryal of seeing her depart. She will be among Friends that upon her own Account and great worth will tend her with all possible Care, where I should be a Trouble to her and the greatest Torment to my self. . . . I conjure you to burn this Lettr immediatly without telling the Contents of it to any Person alive. Pray write to me every Week, that I may know what Steps to take, For I am determind not to go to Ireld to find her just dead or dying--Nothing but Extremity could make me so familiar with those terrible Words applied to such a dear Friend. Let her Know I have bought her a repeating gold Watch for her Ease in winter Nights. I designed to have surprised her with it, but now I would have her know it, that she may see how my Thoughts were always to make her easy--I am of Opinion that there is not a greater Folly than to contract too great and intimate a Friendship, which must always leave the Survivor miserable--On the back of Brereton's
Note there was written the Account of Mrs. J--s Sickness. Pray in yr next avoyd that mistake and leave the back side blank--When you have read this Lett twice and retayn what I desire, pray burn it . . . .

(Correspondence, III, 141-142)

And writing to the Reverend James stopford on July 20, 1726, Swift speaks again of his utter misery in the face of Stella's hopeless condition:

For my part, as I value life very little, so the poor casual remains of it, after such a loss, would be a burden that I must heartily beg God Almighty to enable me to bear; and I think there is not a greater folly than that of entering into too strict and particular a friendship, with the loss of which a man must be absolutely miserable . . . . Besides, this was a person of my own rearing and instructing, from childhood, who excelled in every good quality that can possibly accomplish a human creature.--They have hitherto writ me deceiving letters, but Mr. Worrall has been so just and prudent as to tell me the truth; which, however racking, is better than to be struck on the sudden.--Dear Jim, pardon me, I know not what I am saying; but believe me that violent friendship is much more lasting, and as much engaging, as violent love.

(Correspondence, III, 145)

What is most noteworthy about these letters is the agitated state of mind Swift is thrust into by thoughts of Stella's death. Perhaps for the first time in his adult life words fail him: he would not, he tells Worrall, attend at Stella's deathbed for the "Universe"; the term "World," which is more common to the expression, is apparently inadequate to express his determination on this point. He both "conjures" and "prays" Worrall to burn the letter upon reading it "without telling the Contents of it to any Person alive." And throughout the letter his thoughts
are rambling as one idea leads startlingly into another and unrelated idea: the thought of returning to Ireland to witness Stella's death leads him to ponder the word "dying" as applied to "such a dear Friend"; this leads him to contemplate the folly of contracting "too great and intimate a Friendship," which recalls him to Brereton's note, which finally returns him to his original plea to Worrall to burn the present letter. Similarly, in his letter to Stopford, Swift pauses to apologize for not having command over what his pen is writing.

I am not suggesting that Swift's mental and emotional anxiety continued uninterrupted for the almost nine months between the writing of these letters and the composition of "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27." Neither am I suggesting that he was preoccupied exclusively with thoughts of Stella's hopeless condition for that entire length of time. But the letters do indicate that Stella's impending death was a severe test of his spiritual fibre. In this light, "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27" represents more than just a final attempt on Swift's part to reconcile Stella to inevitable death; it represents his personal confrontation as a man with the power of what Edmund Burke was to call "this king of terrors."

Swift begins this last birthday poem by assuming the role of priest in the first verse paragraph:
This Day, whate'er the Fates decree,
Shall still be kept with Joy by me:
This Day then, let us not be told,
That you are sick, and I grown old,
Nor think on our approaching IIs,
And talk of Spectacles and Pills;
To morrow will be Time enough
To hear such mortifying Stuff.
Yet, since from Reason may be brought
A better and more pleasing Thought,
Which can in spite of all Decays,
Support a few remaining Days:
From not the gravest of Divines,
Accept for once some serious Lines.
(HW, II, 763-764, 11. 1-14)

John Fischer has suggested that "attuned to the decorum of sacramental service by an intimate thirty-year friendship with Dean Swift, Stella must have also recognized, in the request her friend and yearly poet makes to appear to her in his clerical robes, a preamble to what could only be a poetic 'communion of the sick.'" Whether or not she would have made the connection this explicitly, Stella would certainly have realized that something about this last birthday poem to her would be different. For in setting aside momentarily thoughts of sickness and age, of spectacles, pills, and other "such mortifying Stuff," Swift also sets aside the playful tone that characterizes the previous poems. Although he puns distinctly on the word "mortifying" as Fischer points out, he makes no further gestures towards playfulness after his entreaty to Stella to "Accept for once some serious Lines."

But to attribute Swift's seriousness to "Stella's rancor" at "the tumultuous surfacing of the much more troublesome
relationship he had long maintained with another woman, Esther Van Homrigh, as Fischer sees fit to do, is, I think, to miss the real importance of what is at stake as far as Swift is concerned in this poem. As his pupil, Stella is the repository of all of his teachings, and, coincidentally, the proof of their validity. However, if his teachings are now incapable of supporting her in her last extremity, then the beliefs upon which they are founded automatically come into question.

Furthermore, what must have been more unnerving to Swift, if his letters to Worrall and Stopford are accurate indicators, was the fact that his religious precepts were unable to assuage his own grief and religious doubt.

His only recourse is to retreat into the realm of pure reason and hope through that process to revitalize Stella's and, by extension, his own faith in religious doctrine about death. It is in this perspective that Swift's assumption of the role of priest and his accompanying adoption of complete seriousness must be viewed. Religious belief for most of the Augustans was a highly rational matter, since only through an exercise of the mind could present adversity be perceived as future good, could death be looked forward to as a happy occasion. Thus, Swift's determination to observe Stella's birthday with joy, "whate'er the Fates decree," is not so much reflective of grim-faced stoicism as it is indicative of the power and effect of reason, which henceforth becomes one of the major themes of
the poem.

In sound rhetorical fashion Swift next formulates his general argument in brief:

Although we now can form no more
Long Schemes of Life, as heretofore;
Yet you, while Time is running fast,
Can look with Joy on what is past.
(11. 15-18)

The elaboration follows and consists of a preliminary defense of virtue along fairly standard Christian lines. If Heaven and Hell are illusory, then would it not be too unbearable to suppose that virtue, traditionally acknowledged to be its own reward, "And by all Sages understood / To be the chief of human Good" (11. 27-28), was ultimately ineffectual in ameliorating the effects of "Grief, Sickness, Poverty, and Age" (1. 32)?

Swift's argument is constructed in such a way that Stella must believe in the existence of "future Happiness and Pain" (1. 19) and in the ability of virtue to deposit "Some lasting Pleasure in the Mind" (1. 30) as well: if she doubts the former, she is labelled an Atheist, a prospect that no Christian on his or her deathbed could endure; and if she doubts the latter, she denies the meaningfulness of a life spent in the pursuit and refinement of virtue, an equally difficult idea for a Christian to embrace. Armed with this tactical advantage, Swift particularizes his general thesis by referring directly to Stella's past life:

Say, Stella, feel you no Content,
Reflecting on a Life well spent?
Your skilful Hand employ'd to save
Despairing Wretches from the Grave;
And then supporting with your Store,
Those who you dragg'd from Death before:
(So Providence on Mortals waits,
Preserving what it first creates)
Your gen'rous Boldness to defend
An innocent and absent Friend;
That Courage which can make you just,
To Merit humbled in the Dust:
The Detestation you express
For Vice in all its glitt'ring Dress:
That Patience under tort'ring Pain,
Where stubborn Stoicks would complain.

(11. 35-50)

His purpose here is to reinvest Stella with the confidence that her life has been "well spent." His strategy is to recollect her virtues, the same virtues he celebrated in verse many times before, hoping thereby to restore to her the sense of joy she felt in performing virtuous deeds as well as the sense of pleasure she experienced in having those accomplishments praised annually. For optimum effect in this venture, therefore, Swift skillfully arranges the list of virtues beginning with generosity and ending with courage and patience, the two virtues she needs most at present.

However, such is the importance of his argument that Swift leaves nothing to chance. By inserting the parenthetical observation that "(So Providence on Mortals waits, / Preserving what it first creates)," he assures Stella that she has been the handmaid of a greater power, a power that will now preserve her as she has preserved others. And should this fail to convince her of the lasting value of virtuous action, the final lines of this stanza commemorating "That Patience under tort'ring Pain, / Where stubborn Stoicks would complain," are
calculated deliberately, I believe, to recall those times in the past when Swift himself benefitted from her patient care. Indeed, they appear to echo these lines from "To Stella 1723/24" directly:

She tends me, like a humble slave;
And, when indecently I rave,
When out my brutish passions break,
With gall in ev'ry word I speak,
She, with soft speech, my anguish cheers,
Or melts my passions down with tears:
Although 'tis easy to descry
She wants assistance more than I;
Yet seems to feel my pains alone,
And is a Stoic in her own.

(HW, II, 754, 11. 9-18)

Thus, Swift offers himself implicitly as proof of the efficacy of Stella's virtuous life.

Before concluding his oration Swift makes another appeal to Stella's reason. Once again, the argument is reminiscent of that of another Stella poem, "A Receipt to Restore Stella's Youth 1724/25," except that here Stella is not likened to a cow:

Does not the Body thrive and grow
By Food of twenty Years ago?
And, had it not been still supply'd,
It must a thousand Times have dy'd.
Then, who with Reason can maintain,
That no Effects of Food remain?
And, is not Virtue in Mankind
The Nutriment that feeds the Mind?
Upheld by each good Action past,
And still continued by the last:
Then, who with Reason can pretend,
That all Effects of Virtue end?

(11. 55-66)

Just as material foodstuffs maintain the life of the physical body, so virtue has been designed as "The Nutriment that feeds the Mind." The fact that a firm mind is Stella's last remaining
resource, then, is no accident, given her virtuous past. Moreover, the firmness of her mind implies two important things: first, that the Christian belief that man's need for spiritual nourishment takes precedence over his need for material food is valid; and second, that Stella is unquestionably in the capable hands of Providence.

All that remains to be accomplished is the summation, and Swift expends as much energy in convincing Stella here as in the previous lines of the poem:

Believe me Stella, when you show That true Contempt for Things below, Nor prize your Life for other Ends Than merely to oblige your Friends; Your former Actions claim their Part, And join to fortify your Heart. (11. 67-72)

But being able to contemplate her past with joy is only half of Stella's battle, for the ability to look forward to the future is equally crucial now. With this in mind, Swift likens Virtue to Janus, who becomes the emblem of the entire poem:

For Virtue in her daily Race, Like Janus, bears a double Face; Looks back with Joy where she has gone, And therefore goes with Courage on. She at your sickly Couch will wait, And guide you to a better State. (11. 73-78)

The comparison is more than apt, it is ingenious. In it, Swift captures the quintessence of Christian faith, the belief that for the virtuous man death signifies the admission "to a better State." The process by its very nature is two
directional, for admission into "future Happiness" depends entirely upon a meritorious past, upon acts of charity in which Stella's life has been rich. Thus, Virtue, by association with Janus, comes to represent renewal, but renewal as firmly rooted in the past as the new year is in the old. Virtue's advantage over Janus, however, is that she is engaged in a "daily Race" instead of an annual one and, consequently, her influence is more regular and incomparably fresher than Janus'; this is further proof that "Providence on Mortals waits" because sinful man requires constant revitalization. And finally, in the person of Virtue, Swift secures the services of a greater power than himself to do what he cannot bring himself to do for the "Universe," that is, to attend at Stella's "sickly Couch."

For all intents and purposes the poem is complete, every reasonable argument for Stella to face death courageously having been put forward. But Swift, "Like Janus, bears a double Face." He cannot contemplate Stella's death without emotion; he cannot, in a specialized sense of the word, be "the gravest of Divines" to the extent that he can forget his own loss. Therefore, after he entreats Stella not to let her "ills affect [her] mind (l. 81), he reiterates, in a personal and emotional plea for pity for himself, what he has been contending throughout the poem, that her life has been worthwhile:

Me, surely me, you ought to spare,
Who gladly would your suff'ring share;
Or give my scrap of Life to you,
And think it far beneath your Due;
You, to whose care so oft I owe,
That I'm alive to tell you so.

(11. 83-88)
Surely the emotional force of these lines indicates that Swift's relationship with Stella has not been one-sided, that she is not the only one in need of renewed faith and courage. While I agree with Fischer, then, that "by offering himself to Stella as an object for her pity, he provided her both an occasion for and a model of that practical virtue which he believed would 'guide [her] to a better state,'"5 I would suggest that Swift is equally focusing his own thoughts on their special relationship, the greatest proof to himself of the validity of the beliefs he has just expounded to Stella. She is still the example she has always been and if he can offer to "give [his] Scrap of Life to [her]," it is because she has already done as much for him.

Thus, it is the reciprocal nature of their friendship that Swift finally highlights in "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27" in a decided show of emotion that apparently runs contrary to the display of reason has preceded it. Furthermore, Swift's octosyllabic style initiates a tension of its own, for the lightness of the octosyllabic couplet appears to be at variance with the seriousness of Swift's intent in the poem. However, the tension between style and subject-matter, like that between reason and emotion, serves Swift's purpose admirably because it mirrors and effects a delicate balance between the conflicting feelings that comprise the poem; Stella must balance the pain of her present condition against the knowledge that her
eternal reward is imminent, and Swift must discover a balance between his profound sense of impending loss and the happiness that he is bound by reason to feel at her subsequent entry into a better state. It is in this delicate balance between style and subject-matter and between reason and emotion that a major part of Swift's artistic achievement lies.

Apart from its suitability to the overall subject-matter of "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27," though, Swift's simple style is appropriate for another reason. Summing up Samuel Johnson's views on elegy as a literary genre, Paul Fussell observes the following:

Thus elegy as a genre to Johnson, we gather, just because it focuses on an experience so central, so permanent and uniform in human nature, must be stripped of all literary pretties, must be brought as close as possible to "Nature" if it is to be tolerable at all.6

And analyzing Johnson's elegy, "On the Death of Dr. Levet," Fussell remarks how

The image-system of the poem aspires only to the simple and the universal . . . . The unpretentiousness of the stanza form, the imagery, and the rhetoric accord perfectly with the unpretentiousness of Levet himself. All the elements of the poem are enlisted in a quiet, orderly recital of Levet's virtues.7

Even though "Stella's Birth-Day 1726/27" is not, strictly speaking, an elegy, Stella's imminent death was uppermost in Swift's mind throughout its composition. His last poem to Stella, like Johnson's tribute to Levet, "aspires only to the simple and the universal," and it is for this reason, I believe, that critics have agreed generally that this, and the other Stella poems are Swift's most affecting pieces.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER FOUR


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 203.

5. Ibid., p. 209.


7. Ibid., p. 292.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES

Works Cited


Works Consulted


