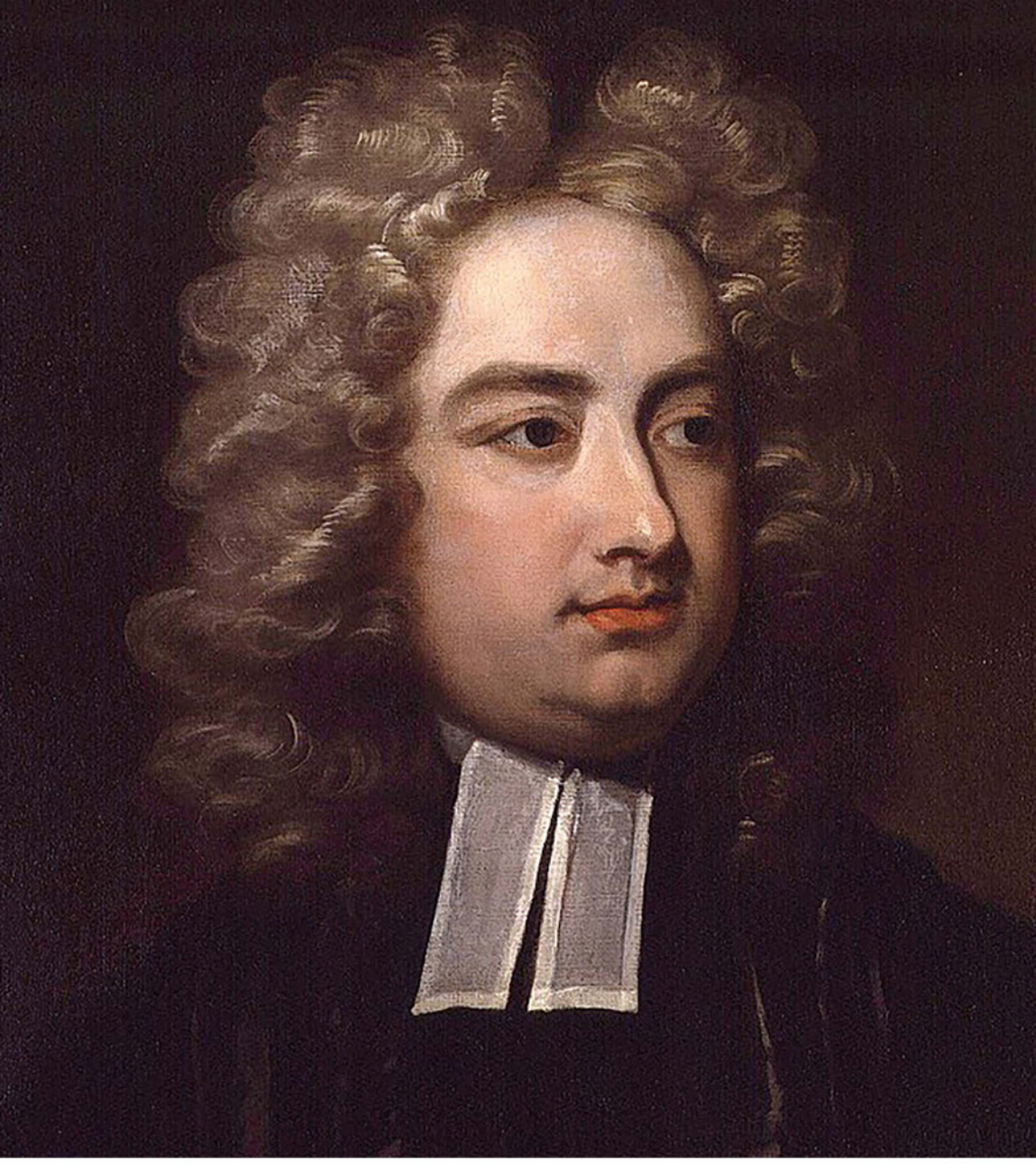

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The Life of Jonathan Swift

THOMAS LOCKWOOD

WILEY Blackwell

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The Life of Jonathan Swift

A Critical Biography

Thomas Lockwood

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2023

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John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Lockwood, Thomas F., author.
Title: The life of Jonathan Swift: a critical biography / Thomas Lockwood.
Description: Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2023. | Series: Blackwell critical biographies | Includes index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2023013315 (print) | LCCN 2023013316 (ebook) | ISBN 9781118957233 (hardback) | ISBN 9781118957202 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781118957189 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Swift, Jonathan, 1667-1745. | Authors, Irish–18th century–Biography. | Satirists, Irish–18th century–Biography.
Classification: LCC PR3726.L595 2023 (print) | LCC PR3726 (ebook) | DDC 828/.5209 [B]–dc23/eng/20230627
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023013315
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023013316

Cover Design: Wiley
Cover Image: © National Portrait Gallery/wikimedia

Set in 10/12pt Bembo by Straive, Pondicherry, India

For Juliet Shields

Contents

Abbreviations and Texts

Account Books	*The Account Books of Jonathan Swift*, transcribed by Paul V. Thompson and Dorothy Jay Thompson (Newark, DE, 1984).
Cook	Daniel Cook, *Reading Swift's Poetry* (Cambridge, 2020).
Corr.	*The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, ed. David Woolley, 5 vols. (Frankfurt, 1999–2014).
Damrosch	Leo Damrosch, *Jonathan Swift: His Life and His World* (New Haven, 2013).
Davis, *PW*	*The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis, 14 vols. (Oxford, 1939–1974).
Deane Swift, *Essay*	Deane Swift, *An Essay upon the Life, Writings, and Character, of Dr. Jonathan Swift*, 2nd ed. (London, 1755).
Delany	Patrick Delany, *Observations upon Lord Orrery's Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (London, 1754).
Downie	J.A. Downie, *Jonathan Swift, Political Writer* (London, 1984).
Drapier's Letters	Jonathan Swift, *The Drapier's Letters*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1935).
Ehrenpreis	Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1962–83).
EPW 1711–1714	Jonathan Swift, *English Political Writings 1711–1714*, ed. Bertrand A. Goldgar and Ian Gadd (Cambridge, 2008).
GT	Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. David Womersley (Cambridge, 2012).
IPW after 1725	Jonathan Swift, *Irish Political Writings after 1725*, ed. D.W. Hayton and Adam Rounce (Cambridge, 2018).
Johnson, *Swift*	Samuel Johnson, "Swift," in *Lives of the Most Eminent Poets* (1779–1781), ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford, 2006), 3:189–214.
Journal to Stella	Jonathan Swift, *Journal to Stella*, ed. Abigail Williams (Cambridge, 2013).

Lyon, *Anecdotes*	'Biographical Anecdotes of Dean Swift,' in *A Supplement to Dr. Swift's Works*, ed. John Nichols (London, 1779), 3 vols., 1:xvii–xlvii.
Münster (year)	*Reading Swift: Proceedings of the [First, Second, etc.] Münster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, ed. Hermann J. Real et al. (Munich, [year]).
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
Orrery, *Remarks*	John Boyle, Fifth Earl of Orrery, *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (London, 1752), ed. João Fróes (Newark, DE, 2000).
Pilkington, *Memoirs*	*Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. A.C. Elias, Jr., 2 vols. (Athens, GA, 1997).
Parodies, Hoaxes	Jonathan Swift, *Parodies, Hoaxes, Mock Treatises*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (Cambridge, 2013).
Rawson, *Swift's Angers*	Claude Rawson, *Swift's Angers* (Cambridge, 2014).
Rogers	*Jonathan Swift. The Complete Poems*, ed. Pat Rogers (London, 1983).
Sheridan, *Life*	Thomas Sheridan, *The Life of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Swift* (London, 1784).
Stubbs	John Stubbs, *Jonathan Swift: The Reluctant Rebel* (London, 2016).
Tale	Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. Marcus Walsh (Cambridge, 2010).
Twickenham Pope	*Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, Maynard Mack, et al., 11 vols. in 12 (London, 1939–1969).
Williams, *Poems*	*The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1958).
Works, ed. Scott	*The Works of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, ed. Walter Scott, 19 vols. (Edinburgh, 1814).

Preface

Swift was an Irish Protestant clergyman of indifferent origins who rose up to the middle chambers of power in state and church, but – as he himself would bitterly stipulate – no higher. He was born in Dublin and spent most of his life in Ireland, with only a few years in England. He never traveled elsewhere. The outward marks of his life would not distinguish him from many another secular clergyman belonging to this age of black gowns mingling comfortably in coffee houses and assembly rooms or striving for preferment. This clergyman, however, also wrote his way onto the world historical stage of literature with a book of travels, while with his left hand as it were opening up a buried seam of scorching Irish nationalism long before its time. Swift's work is the part of his life that matters now, and makes us want to scan his personal history for answers to the natural readerly question, Who wrote this? His work mattered to him as well, though neither did he think of it as his life. With Swift we are a long way from the Romantic hero of art.

Swift has been catnip for biographers, from the time of his death onward, with sympathetic or hostile treatment partly reflecting the ups and downs of what might be called his moral credit, a pattern discussed in more detail at the end of this volume. While the black gown and frustrated clerical career would not themselves set him far apart, it doesn't take much exposure to his complex personality to see why he is a ready-made biographical subject. He was touchy, insecure, and self-dramatizing. He had a gift for friendship but tried the patience of his friends mightily and knew he did, as appears by the exasperating character he gives himself in some of his domestic verse. His letters channel a stream of turbulent personal complaint which seldom falls silent. He hated the English but longed to live in England. He hated the Irish and their island of slaves. He hated bishops and much of the rest of mankind. His misogyny was stomach-churning even by period standards. He set no store by rank, ostentatiously, but was vain of his credit with lords and deferential toward them face to face. He quarreled with all sorts of people, from the Archbishop of Dublin to old friends to beggars in the street. He was

physically violent with some who could not fight back, like servants or women of humble status.

Swift also had a lethal nose for hypocrisy and delusion, like a terrier at a rat's nest: tearing off the mask of imposture from the world, Hazlitt called it. He thought seriously and compulsively about himself, at a Proustian level of awareness which could nevertheless drain away mysteriously when he wanted to talk himself into a belief in the innocence of his own motives or feelings. He dreaded poverty and dependence, having begun life that way, and clung to his cheapskate habits long after they made any sense, arguing with tavern keepers over the reckoning, while nevertheless paying his servants board wages even though already providing them board, improving the deanery from his own funds, and devoting all his wealth at death to a charitable foundation. Swift had a raw instinct for a leveling vision of humankind entirely alien to the social order he otherwise lived and breathed as second nature. He was made for pulling down the old order but spent his life propping it up.

The circumstances of his birth and infant life were unclear thanks in part to his own mystifications, such as occasionally pretending he was born in England. The woman he loved most, Esther Johnson or Stella, was the daughter of an estate steward at Moor Park. Swift knew her first there when she was about eight, then later brought her with him to Dublin to live nearby with her lifelong companion Rebecca Dingley, against a murmurous chorus of town gossip. But what she was to him, wife or lover or daughterly soulmate, or him to her, we really have no idea, though the years since have produced an encyclopedia of speculation. Equally opaque is his relationship with Esther Vanhomrigh, 'Vanessa,' though in her case we have enough correspondence between them to tell that the relationship went from loving and playful to conflicted and tormenting. We know a lot about his life, more indeed than for some authors of his stature, but with Swift the black holes of his story have a way of pulling everything else down inside: Was he a bastard son? Did he secretly marry Stella? Have sex with Vanessa? Here too the vacuum of factual knowledge has inevitably filled up with guesswork and invention.

I have tried to give fresh measure to these staples of Swift's personal history. At the same time my aim has been to bring the whole of Swift's writing and creative sensibility more assertively into the story of his life, and so I take the most important events there to be his writings, and give considerable room to them within the narrative. The range of his writing – in vivid, freestanding orders of work from political journalism to casual verse-making to intensely imagined projections of experience like *Gulliver* – has not been very well explained as an organic whole of authorship, still less as a career of writing. The reason is partly historical, in that the idea of such a career, by what was then called a 'professed' author, had not yet quite taken hold as it later would in the time of mass readerships and authors writing for

payment from publishers. And Swift's professional career was clerical, not literary. So to talk of a career of authorship in his case is somewhat anachronistic, in terminology at least. Nevertheless, Swift was powerfully driven to put himself forward in written composition, both in public print and in private or semi-private manuscript, and it is this complex life of writing that runs at the heart of his story. Swift's writing was not organized by its venue of end-consumption, like Shakespeare's theater or Dickens's novel-reading public. It had its own highly variable occasions, but there was a robust consistency and expressive purpose through it all as well.

This account of Swift's writing life also puts his poetry closer to the center than usual. Verse writing was a vital constituent of his creative being, from beginning to end. In his twenties he was ambitious to make himself somebody within the culture of lettered art then dominated by Dryden, and he tried this by writing serious Pindaric odes which showed he had got the wrong end of the stick in mistaking his form, though not his ambition. Swift produced nearly half the total volume of his verse in the final decade of his life, including some of his greatest poems. He was one of the most gifted and original poets of his time, a branch of his work chronically underrated, with his own half-serious deprecation of it giving a license to the rating. His verse as a whole represents an imaginative achievement of high order, obscured somewhat by the dazzle and drama of the prose which made him so famous. Swift was also a poet in the old sense corresponding roughly to the modern idea of creative or imaginative writer. That meaning included verse of course but can also be extended not only to prose works of imagination, like the *Tale of a Tub* or *Gulliver's Travels*, but also to his occasional pamphlets and periodical writing and for that matter the *Journal to Stella*, which for all its documentary value is even more compelling as a brilliant if unclassifiable literary monologue.

Those early Pindarics look worse than they deserve to, only because it is hard to take such solemn work seriously from an author we know as a genius of humor and satire. They must have been ironic! (They weren't.) But for the genius of satire, here is a difficulty too. Henry Fielding – a qualified witness if ever there were one – ranked Swift with Lucian, Rabelais, and Cervantes. But like Lucian and Rabelais at least, Swift's standing has been compromised somewhat by the historic critical bias against comedy and satire as inferior forms of art. This was true in his own lifetime and the disposition continues to thrive. I have tried to make my account of Swift's writing life and achievement a confrontation also with this prejudice. Certainly some modern criticism of Swift has captured and communicated the transcendent quality of art that Fielding saw there, but his reputation is still running a deficit on that score.

This *Life of Jonathan Swift* provides critical profiles for most of his work, meaning biographically contextualized descriptions meant to give the reader some idea of what Swift was trying to do and how he did it. These treatments are aimed at the reader who may not know the work or has forgotten it. For his best-known works,

like *Gulliver's Travels*, I have assumed greater familiarity, integrating them with the biographical narrative as well as their historic and modern critical context. The *Tale of a Tub*, the *Journal to Stella*, the *Drapier's Letters*, and *Gulliver* each take up their own chapters. I have tried throughout to give a compact but representative critical account of all the works I cover. These are inevitably inflected by my own views, I hope without compromising the representation. With works nobody but a specialist would know very well, like *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711), the challenge is to describe it fairly without boring the reader, which means striking a balance between summary and critical scrutiny, either of which can easily overwhelm the other. This is therefore a critical biography of the writing as well as the writer, running roughly half and half. Samuel Johnson professed himself an enemy of reading books 'through,' and for anyone nevertheless minded to read this book through, I wanted to end up with an accurate and readable story about Swift's life and work which could also serve as a useful reference for the possibly greater number who might want a word of critical description or historical context for the *Argument against Abolishing Christianity* or that notorious letter to the young lady about to get married or even *The Conduct of the Allies*.

For Swift's personal history I have relied largely on his correspondence, in the absence of other documentary sources. Around 800 of his letters survive and add significantly to what we know of him and his life, though as usual with figures who come only slowly into fame, his later years are much better represented in correspondence than his earlier. It is certain likewise that many more of his letters altogether are lost than survive, with some estimates on the lost side running to 20 times the number surviving. The letters are a very partial source then, but they are direct and vivid, and sufficient in number and range to establish representative patterns. For some of Swift's most important writings, like the *Tale of a Tub*, the *Journal to Stella*, and *Gulliver's Travels*, I have had the advantage of the ongoing new Cambridge Edition of his works, under the general editorship of Claude Rawson. The value of this magnificently produced resource for biographical, textual, and critical study can hardly be overstated.

Much of this book was written during the COVID-19 pandemic, which kept me, like many others, long apart from colleagues, conferences, and libraries. For various forms of assistance I am grateful to staff of the British Library, the Edinburgh University Library, and the University of Washington Libraries. Giles Flitney was my superb copy editor at Wiley. The late Bertrand Goldgar was a Swift scholar and friend whose humanity and intellectual integrity were abiding influences on me. I owe thanks also to the late Michael Harris, Pat Rogers, Valerie Rumbold, Juliet Shields, the late Howard Weinbrot, David O'Shaughnessy, and Linda Bree, who steered the *Works of Jonathan Swift* project at Cambridge University Press and kindly gave me access to some of the related activities there and in Oxford. To Claude Rawson as general editor of the *Works*, along with his editorial colleagues, I would

add my thanks to those of so many others who have testified to the revelatory result of these new volumes. To Claude as a colleague and friend I am deeply indebted. He has brought Swift onto the center stage of modern world literary history under a light of critical imagination more searching than any other of his time. I am grateful for the chance he has offered me to write about Swift for this series, and for his friendship over the years.

It should be said that I am not a paid-up Swiftian. My previous work covers his early eighteenth-century period, but I have mostly followed other subjects and authors, and particularly the work of his admirer Fielding, born into a very different world 40 years later. I am hoping that this forward angle of view may have produced an interesting result, but mindful of the rough community of dedicated Swift scholars who keep brickbats within reach, I am crouched behind the sofa, peering over uneasily.

I will just add a word of heartfelt thanks to my friend Malcolm Griffith, for encouragement both personal and intellectual all along the way. To my beloved son Damon once again I give thanks for the support and happiness he has given me for so long, always unstinting, always in laughter and joy. I have dedicated this volume to Juliet Shields, in love and gratitude impossible to capture in words.

April 15, 2023
Seattle

1

Brought over to Ireland in a Band-Box

1667–1689

Childhood and Schooling

What we know directly of Swift's family history and childhood comes mostly from an unfinished 10-page manuscript account he wrote in later life called 'Family of Swift,' an eccentric and undependable document which nevertheless tells a story worth following. Swift's cousin once removed, Deane Swift, first printed this paper in 1755, along with his own additions and notes, saying that Swift wrote it sometime in the late 1720s, though more likely it was 10 years later, when Swift was about 71.[1] The narrative is characteristically detached in its third-person form but stuck in with shards of opinion, also characteristic: 'a good deal of the Shrew in her Countenance.'[2] The first half of the account is devoted to his forebears on the Swift side, particularly his admired grandfather Thomas, who died some years before Swift was born, and his own part of the story cuts off when he is little more than 30. Some of the details are wrong, as if he had worked purely from memory – always bad and getting worse by the time of this writing – though deliberate misrepresentation has been suggested too, unpersuasively if in some ways understandably: Swift did have a history of talking nonsense about his origins, in ways perhaps not always quite intended to be seen as nonsense. Pope thought he had been born in England, apparently because Swift told him so.[3] The document seems innocent enough, however, within its inevitably self-serving purpose 'as an introduction to his life,' in Deane Swift's description, 'which he had reason to apprehend would some time or other become a topick of general conversation.'[4] In the absence of better evidence, and even allowing for the unreliability of any autobiographical

The Life of Jonathan Swift: A Critical Biography, First Edition. Thomas Lockwood.

representations, including perhaps especially those by this author, the fragmentary work has authoritative value.

'The Family of the Swifts was antient in Yorkshire,' is how Swift begins, making it clear, as others have noted, that they were anciently English too. It turns out that the Yorkshire connection was remote, though Swift seems to like one of that line he flags for attention under the name of Cavaliero Swift, 'a Man of Wit and humor' who was made an Irish peer 'but never was in that Kingdom.'[5] For his own clerical and lawyering branch of the family migrating to Ireland, Swift goes back to William Swift, a parish clergyman in Canterbury in the time of Elizabeth, whose son Thomas (1595–1658), vicar of Goodrich and rector of Bridstow in Herefordshire, was Swift's obstinately royalist grandfather. With him the family history begins to touch live feelings.

In the verses on his own death he wrote in his sixties, Swift jokes about being old enough to remember Charles the Second, which he was, though only 17 when the king died.[6] The aftermath of that event in the accession of James II and so-called Glorious Revolution of 1689, however, took much stronger form on the screen of Swift's memory. His personal adult experience of public life began there, with another disruption of royal authority 40 years after the execution of Charles I, non-violent this time but equally disconcerting on principle, in James's abdication or forced departure (the terminology was contested),[7] followed by the strange passage of events to a new monarch from the Dutch Republic, the Stadholder William, guided onto the throne by subjects with an unfamiliar-seeming power to allow or make such a change. Swift was a child of this Revolution settlement, except of course that nothing about it ever felt settled until many decades later, despite much hopeful rhetoric about peaceful national acceptance of a Protestant succession. The national and generational memory of the Civil War hung over politics and religion for a century, with the execution of King Charles as the semi-sacred talisman of the evils belonging to that time. Swift had no personal memory of these things yet absorbed an imaginative equivalent. He like many saw Charles's death as a martyrdom, and years later, when the execution anniversary day of fasting and prayer was losing its grip on public sentiment, Swift poured his conviction into a January 30 sermon designed to correct and rouse up that remembrance to its proper pitch of righteous sorrow.[8] The 'Family of Swift' fragment likewise breaks into sharpest feeling and detail when Swift comes to tell the vivid stories he had collected about his grandfather Thomas, faithful to his pastoral calling in Herefordshire, 'much distinguished by his courage, as well as his loyalty to K. Charles the 1st, and the sufferings he underwent for that Prince, more than any person of his condition in England.'

Thomas Swift died in 1658, two years before the Restoration. More than his loyalty to the King, his resistance to the King's enemies is what captures Swift's imagination, and not just his resistance but his indomitability in resistance: 'He was

plundred by the roundheads six and thirty times,' Swift writes, adding later in the margin, 'Some say above 50.'[9] He 'engaged' or borrowed against his small estate for three hundred pieces of gold which he delivered to the King's forces, quilted secretly in the lining of his waistcoat, and fashioned an array of iron spikes or caltrops in a river fording to disrupt the passage of a troop of Parliamentary army horsemen. All this activity led to ejection from his church livings and the sequestering of his estate. What resonates with the admiring grandson is the sanctified outlawry and guerrilla mentality of this country parson.

Thomas Swift had six sons and five daughters (Swift garbles this as 'ten Sons and three or four Daughters'), by his wife Elizabeth Dryden. Swift calls her 'a near relation to Mr Dryden the Poet,' but not really: Dryden's grandfather and Swift's maternal great-grandfather were brothers, and Elizabeth was the niece of John Dryden's grandfather Erasmus Dryden. Four of Thomas Swift's sons, all lawyers, made their way to Ireland, 'driven thither by their sufferings,' Swift writes, 'and by the death of their father.'[10] The family unquestionably suffered by the losses of their father, and would have seen their move as a forced and unwanted relocation downward. But for middling Protestant English gentry like this family, Ireland was a place to repair losses too. Under Cromwell's confiscatory land settlement act of 1652, and the follow-on modifications after the Restoration, there were good opportunities for such emigrants to establish themselves on a footing that would have been impossible in England. And Ireland, as Deane Swift put it, 'was very moderately supplied with lawyers or attornies of any tolerable reputation.' That demand and the confused state of land tenure made a market for law practice readily absorbing the four brothers, three of whom (Godwin, William, and Adam) built up 'very considerable estates.'[11]

The one who did not was Swift's father, Jonathan. He was Thomas Swift's fifth son, born in 1640. His wife Abigail Erick (or Ericke), Swift's mother, came from a Leicestershire family and was born the same year, probably in Dublin. Swift makes her family the descendants of 'Eric the Forester,' another of his resistance heroes, who supposedly raised a force to oppose William the Conqueror. Her father, James Erick, had been vicar of Thornton, to the west of Leicester, but in 1634 was disciplined for holding a conventicle, or private service, for some of his dissenting kinfolk and then was apparently deprived of his living.[12] He emigrated to Ireland later that year. In 1664 Abigail married Jonathan, who had got a foothold at the King's Inns, the Dublin law society that kept the gate of the Irish bar, and seems to have been at the entryway of a gainful occupation. Swift says of him simply that 'he had some employments, and agencyes. His death was much lamented on account of his reputation for integrity with a tolerable good understanding.'[13] How much lamented by the son writing here is hard to say, though the distant manner, on such a home point, suggests a well-defended heart. The couple had a daughter, Jane, in 1666. In March or April 1667 Jonathan died.

His 'posthumous' namesake son was born in Dublin on 30 November 1667, in 'Time enough to save his Mother's Credit,' according to his own famous remark,[14] at a house belonging to his eldest uncle, Godwin (1628–1695), part of a short street of newer buildings called Hoey's Court, running in a dogleg west from the Castle wall. This was a fashionable quarter near the center of Dublin social and political power. Hoey's Court and the immediate neighborhood of the parish church of St. Werburgh were known for the lawyers living there, like William and Adam Swift as well as Godwin. How or when Abigail came to her brother-in-law's house for her delivery we do not know, but presumably it was soon after the death of her husband that spring. At any rate, this was the beginning of the support rendered to Swift by his uncle, dwindling later to humiliating insufficiency as the nephew would see it.

There are certainly mysteries, if not also mystification, about Swift's parentage and birth. Was his father really the Jonathan Swift who died seven months before he was born? Why is there no baptismal record of his birth in the parish where he was supposedly born? Or no positive record of the date of his father's death? Was his mother possibly the daughter not of the vicar of Thornton but of a butcher from Wigston Magna, outside Leicester, named Herrick or Erick? And so on. Swift's own love of secrecy and misdirection has perhaps inevitably made these otherwise unremarkable gaps in the documentary record of a seventeenth-century family of emigrants seem irresistibly suspicious. But nothing has come of the suspicions, and as to any fresh evidence on these questions, we are little better off than the first generation of his biographers – who for the most part showed little interest anyway. The most sophisticated effort to reveal a hidden story behind the one Swift told or was told about his parentage, Denis Johnston's *In Search of Swift*,[15] depended on plausible possibility rather than evidence for the dramatic result. Johnston believed that Swift was the bastard son of Sir John Temple, Master of the Rolls in the Irish law establishment and a widower in his mid-sixties whose adult son William was to become Swift's future patron. Around this high-profile speculation Johnston traced out a web of other suppositional details, like a covering marriage arranged for Swift's mother with the elder Jonathan. It all makes a far better story than the ragged folder of facts we do have, not least in giving Swift the higher bloodline he would have been the first to think he deserved, but it is a story made of hypotheticals, as Johnston himself freely allowed, which has gone nowhere with most scholars.[16]

Whatever brought Abigail and Jonathan together was nothing to their advantage, as Swift saw it, or rather nothing to his own advantage. 'This marriage was on both sides very indiscreet,' he writes, 'for his wife brought her husband little or no fortune, and his death happening so suddenly before he could make a sufficient establishment for his family: And his son (not then born) hath often been heard to say that he felt the consequences of that marriage not onely through the whole course of his education, but during the greatest part of his life.'[17]

What consequences? The dramatic tone suggests something like a curse, though Swift is talking only about a material disadvantage: he had access to no family fortune. It felt like a curse though, and whatever the objective consequences impeding his advancement, a conviction of impediment did certainly cloud the greatest part of his life. If his mother ever gave him any reason to think that she made this indiscreet marriage for love or liking, it never gets through the filter of his outlook here, nor perhaps ever could.

When he was a year old, Swift reports, 'an event happened to him that seems very unusuall.' To say the least:

> for his Nurse who was a woman of Whitehaven, being under an absolute necessity of seeing one of her relations, who was then extremely sick, and from whom she expected a Legacy; and being at the same time extremely fond of the infant, she stole him on shipboard unknown to his Mother and Uncle [i.e. Godwin], and carried him with her to Whitehaven, where he continued for almost three years. For when the matter was discovered, His Mother sent orders by all means not to hazard a second voyage, till he could be better able to bear it. The nurse was so carefull of him that before he returnd he had learnt to spell, and by the time that he was three years old he could read any chapter in the Bible.[18]

Laetitia Pilkington, the poet and memoirist who got to know Swift well in his later years, gives a roughly corresponding version of this story as heard from Swift, in which the nurse is Irish and the relation calling her to England was her husband. She puts in some drama and sentimental touches belonging more to contemporary fiction than anything Swift might have told her, saying that Swift's mother and other relations had no word of him for three years until the nurse returned to Ireland (no word why), 'and restored the Child to his Mother, from whom she easily obtain'd a Pardon, both on Account of the Joy she conceived at seeing her only Son again, when she had in a Manner lost all Hope of it, as also, that it was plain, the Nurse had no other Motive for stealing him, but pure Affection, which the Women of *Ireland* generally have in as eminent a Degree, for the Children they nurse, as for their own Offspring.'[19]

Where to begin with such a story? Swift's own version reads as if meant to extenuate a nursemaid coping with irreconcilable demands of duty and incapable of separating herself from her infant charge, turning what looks like an abduction into a model of childcare, with value added which (he seems to imply) might not have come to him at Uncle Godwin's, like reading the Bible at three. Swift undoubtedly had loving if necessarily indistinct memories of his nurse. His mother's attitude here has been seen as indifferent, though I read the indirectly quoted 'by all means' as intended to impute just the opposite to her, whatever the reality. He was a widow's only son, and the crossing to Ireland was notoriously dangerous. Such a separation in infancy would not have been uncommon, if not in the 'very unusual'

form taken by this one, and nothing Swift says here or elsewhere suggests any feeling of reproach or reservation on this account. In any case, the story obviously mattered to Swift, almost it would seem as a nursery fable about being specially loved and taken up for care – in England, it is worth noting, away from Ireland.[20]

Swift made jokes about his infantile return to Ireland from Whitehaven – 'many ludicrous whims and extravagancies in the gaiety of his conversation,' according to Deane Swift. 'Sometimes he would declare, that he was not born in *Ireland* at all; and seem to lament his condition, that he should be looked on as a native of that country; and would insist, that he was stolen from *England* when a child, and brought over to *Ireland* in a band-box.'[21] To one admiring correspondent who looked on him that way, professing esteem for what he termed Swift's 'great affection to your native country,' the chance Irishman replied in good grace but pointedly, 'as to my Native Country, (as you call it) I happened indeed by a perfect Accident to be born here, my Mother being left here from returning to her House at Leicester, and I was a year old before I was sent to England.'[22] Hardly an accident, this birth in Ireland, though Swift certainly felt it so, flagging its randomness by that word 'perfect.' He makes it seem as if his mother barely belonged in Ireland either, though her parents had emigrated there more than 30 years before and she herself was likely born in Dublin. Being 'sent' to England, on the other hand, sounds a right thing, to the adult Swift who thought he should have started life there to begin with. As for the Irish-born toddler, it is fair to suppose he was happy in Whitehaven with his nurse, for reasons of childish comfort if not because he was finally breathing the air of England. According to his later-life friend and colleague John Lyon, Swift 'retained his affection for *Whitehaven* to the last, as if it were his native place.'[23] His return to Ireland from this honorary birthplace after three years (Swift first wrote 'two') might have made a more lasting impression on the boy of 4 than the departure could have, but we know nothing of that, or how he lived once back in Dublin.

He was absorbed into his uncle's household, on what footing is impossible to say, but there is nothing to suggest any extreme, either of privilege or rejection: he was fed and cared for. His mother apparently went back to her people in Leicestershire, where she lived the rest of her life, visited by her son faithfully whenever he came to England. Godwin Swift had prospered by law business since coming to Ireland, mainly in the drafting of wills and family property settlements, and through a connection with the Duke of Ormonde he got the attorney-generalship of Tipperary. He had a large family of his own, by four wives, which would have made it difficult to concentrate on his nephew in any case. Godwin got into money difficulties later through bad investment schemes outside his trade of law, with his retrenchments drawing back money from Jonathan's provision too. Deane Swift was Godwin's grandson and in his account of Swift's life he takes his grandfather's part, noting that by the time Swift was at the university 'he had been wholly depending on his uncle from the hour of his birth, as well before as after that period, until he arrived at the

age of twenty one years.'[24] Swift's aversion to dependence is often traced to this circumstance, logically enough, but we know nothing really about the spirit of his uncle's charity, whether grudging or generous. The nephew himself was certainly grudging in his words about Godwin: 'He was an ill pleader,' he wrote in the 'Family of Swift' manuscript, 'but dextrous in the subtil parts of the Law,' which sounds like praise, except that at some later date he inserted 'perhaps a little too' above 'dextrous.' Deane Swift says simply that Swift 'never loved his uncle, nor the Remembrance of his uncle, to the hour of his death.'[25]

Kilkenny and Trinity College

When he was six years old Swift was sent to the school at Kilkenny founded in the sixteenth century. Swift's slightly older cousin Thomas was already there. His own father had died when Tom was about five and they kept up a close friendship all through this period and some years beyond. Kilkenny was a long journey from Dublin, about 70 miles southwest. The school and town were the preserve of the family of the Duke of Ormonde, whose castle seat lay at one end, above the river Nore. The school was then situated next to St. Canice's Cathedral, at the other end of the town, and had been known as Kilkenny College since 1667, when the first duke reopened it after a period of closure in the rebellion years. It was the prestige grammar school in Ireland for the sons of the Anglo-Irish ruling class, with a notable roll of pupils who later distinguished themselves in divinity, letters, and law: William Congreve, Bishop Berkeley, and George Farquhar, among those of the Restoration period. Only Congreve attended with Swift, and then for just an overlapping half-year. Our knowledge of the Kilkenny curriculum comes from slightly later than Swift's own time there, but on that evidence it was typical of the grammar schools in England aiming to prepare students for the university and public life: an unremitting exercise in Latin grammar, reading, and writing, with Greek added at a later stage, along with oratory and rhetoric. All this long day's work was carried out within a rigid framework of Anglican training in prayer and moral conduct. We know roughly what went on in the school forms to produce a narrow but powerful fluency in Latin language and (to some extent) literature and culture. Certainly Swift got that there.

We know too in a general way about the low-grade fear and abuse – sometimes worse – that came with the grammar school routine along with the sentences to be construed. Dryden famously remembered how Richard Busby's prolonged floggings at Westminster School beat the spirit out of a boy so thoroughly as to turn him into a 'Confirmd Blockhead.'[26] Swift told his friend Charles Ford, in reference to the way memory filters for the pleasant side of the past, 'So I formerly used to envy my own Happiness – when I was a Schoolboy, the delicious Holidays, the Saterday afternoon, and the charming Custards in a blind Alley; I never

considerd the Confinement ten hours a day, to nouns & Verbs, the Terror of the Rod, the bloddy Noses, and broken Shins.'[27] This galley of boys under the lash, bent over their dismal repetitions, was part of Swift's experience, along with scuffles and fights outside the schoolroom. Even so, the custards in an alley here seem if anything a little more vivid somehow than the bloody noses, despite his downgrading of the custardy bits of the past to a form of illusion he now knows better than to envy. He can still taste them. His memory for the pleasures never tasted, on the other hand, or for those falling just out of reach, was heroically tenacious. In a letter to Pope and Bolingbroke half a century later, Swift writes 'I remember when I was a little boy, I felt a great fish at the end of my line which I drew up almost on the ground, but it dropt in, and the disappointment vexes me to this very day, and I believe it was the type of all my future disappointments.'[28] If this great typological fish got away from him at the River Nore, as seems likely, this would be Swift's only other reference to his Kilkenny experience, in the surviving record at any rate. He was there for eight years, having entered younger than most, and in April 1682 was admitted to Trinity College, Dublin, with his cousin Tom, both as 'pensioners,' meaning students paying fees.

Dublin in 1682 was a busy and important city which for more than 20 years since the Restoration had been consolidating its place as the center of English Protestant rule, expressing that identification in public works like the enclosure of St. Stephen's Green, the expansion of Trinity College, and posh residential development along the Liffey. Pulling down the old buildings could not quite dispel the jittery memory of bloody civil conflict from mid-century, which overhung the city for at least another generation. The population was around 60,000 – roughly the same size as Antwerp, Rouen, or Seville. It had the orientation of a colonial capital city, in the directness of its many connections with London and England. But it was full of Anglican Protestants who by this time had established local networks of family and business for the past generation, like Swift's uncles. Dublin had become majority Protestant in the 1640s, when panicky non-Catholics retreated there following the Irish Rebellion, and by Swift's time its civic and commercial population was virtually all Protestant, not counting the native Catholic underclass who cleaned their houses or swept the crossings and did not otherwise count. Dublin was thus the capital of the Anglican Protestant 'ascendancy' in Ireland, with church and state government both facing almost entirely east, toward England, and their senior employments mostly filled from there as well. Swift never thought much of the city. 'Nine tenths of the Inhabitants are beggars,' he wrote in 1734, well after a handsome 'Georgian' Dublin was taking shape, 'the chief Streets half ruinous or desolate; It is dangerous to walk the Streets for fear of Houses falling on our heads.' And yet Dublin was 'a Paradise compared to every part of the Country.'[29] But Swift did love to exaggerate the horrors, and in fact found much to like in Dublin even if only at times the pleasure of abusing it.

Trinity College – otherwise the University of Dublin but then and now simply Trinity College – had been founded only 90 years earlier and was still enlarging in Swift's time. It was an English project established to consolidate Reformation principles and learning within Ireland. Like most other European universities, it was a training ground for clerical careers, with an enrollment of about three hundred students in this period. The library was exceptionally rich for its comparatively recent beginnings. The undergraduate course of study was organized around lectures on Latin and Greek language and composition, as at Kilkenny, with Aristotelian subjects and commentary at the center of learning. The characteristic feature of instruction at Trinity was an elaborate form of scholastic disputation by syllogistic formulas, which Swift hated, though years later he nevertheless gave the institution superior marks on instructional discipline compared to Oxford or Cambridge. The provost during Swift's first two years was Narcissus Marsh, notably more liberal in his view of Ireland and the native Irish than most like him who were exported to church or state office there from a life and career in England. Swift in later years had hard words for him.[30] Swift's tutor was St. George Ashe, a Trinity College fellow only about nine years older, for whom he developed great friendship and affection. Ashe's intellectual outlook was not entirely compatible with Swift's. He was an enthusiastic member of the Dublin Philosophical Society, rigging up the same kind of observational back-garden experiments that seem designed to be ridiculed, and were, most memorably by Swift himself in *Gulliver's Travels*. But this seems merely to be just one extra-visible dissimilarity within a broadly kindred disposition, in religion, in learning, and in humanity.

The first thing Swift says about his Trinity College experience is that he was too depressed to apply himself properly: that 'by the ill Treatment of his nearest Relations, he was so discouraged and sunk in his Spirits, that he too much neglected his Academical Studyes, for which he had no great relish by Nature, and turned himself to reading History and Poetry.'[31] It was about this time that his uncle Godwin ran into financial stresses and presumably reduced his nephew's stipend. How much reduced, or how discouraging it would have been, we have no idea. Swift calls it ill treatment and says it put him off his studies, though at the same time these were studies he didn't care for in the first place: so he read history and poetry (it almost seems) to make himself feel better. On cause and effect this is not such a credible account, though perfectly believable as to his feeling ill treated and his preference for history and poetry over logic and Aristotle. Some of the shortfall in Swift's money just now may have been made up by his uncle William and merchant cousin Willoughby (Godwin's son), both of whom we know did help him a few years later when he was at Moor Park. Deane Swift tells a dramatic story of the empty-pocketed Swift in his rooms at Trinity, staring out his window and seeing a ship's master down in the court below who turned out to be looking for Swift to deliver a bag of money to him from Willoughby, then at Lisbon.[32]

At Trinity Swift was 'stopped of his Degree,' as he explains it, 'for Dullness and Insufficiency, and at last hardly admitted in a manner little to his Credit, which is called in that College *Speciali gratia*, And this discreditable mark as I am told, stands upon record in their College Registry.'[33] There is obviously a story here, in Swift's academic history at the time as well as in the mocking tone he takes about it here, long after – embracing the dullness and insufficiency, but as belonging to himself or to Trinity? Ehrenpreis got us closer to the contemporary story by a detailed contextual reading of Swift's marks in the examination results which happen to survive from Easter term 1685, the conclusion of which was that his work was not that bad (among the best in Latin and Greek, poor on Aristotle).[34] Why he was 'stopped' of his degree and then admitted to it only by special dispensation is unclear – possibly he failed to sit one of the required term examinations. He was not the only one to take his degree in this form, but there were only a few such and despite Ehrenpreis's argument to show that the result was really not all that discreditable, Swift and others also clearly thought it was. His friend Patrick Delany was one who did, recalling that Swift often would say that the lame degree 'was owing to his being a dunce,' meaning that 'he looked upon the study of Greek and Latin to be downright pedantry, and beneath a gentleman. That poetry and plays and novels, were the only polite accomplishments.' This sounds like an ironical rendition of his Trinity self, defensive and aspirational. The experience of academic humiliation, according to Delany, shocked Swift into a passion of competitive study when he later went to Oxford.[35] If it had not mattered to him he would hardly have kept talking about it. Swift also ran up a disciplinary record of some substance at Trinity, in fines for absences and nonattendance, as well as sanctions for misconduct the worst of which seems to have been helping (with others) to foment a disorder of some kind in the College, with insulting words to the junior dean for which he and another were compelled to kneel and ask pardon. The documentation of these infractions is fragmentary and covers only a short period of Swift's time there, so may or may not be representative. At any rate, he was clearly capable of flouting and occasionally outraging College authority, though no more dramatically than some other students.[36]

As for the ill treatment Swift saw as the emotional correlative of his negligent studies, Deane Swift tells a different story, saying that when Godwin Swift's money problems began, about two years after Swift's entrance to Trinity College, his remittances to his nephew came short of what Swift had been used to, or else that the manner of support was 'somewhat less affluent than was agreeable to the spirit and ambition of the aspiring Jonathan.' But he adds that he believes that Swift never knew why his allowance was reduced, and that it was 'thought sufficient to maintain him at the university, without making any kind of apologies to such a boy as Jonathan was at that time,' especially considering that he had been supported by his uncle since birth. It does not take much imagination to see here a family disposition

to regard Swift as lucky to have the support he was still getting, with a touchy nephew feeling injured and put down. And Swift never forgot or forgave, 'so deep were the characters this want of money in the university of *Dublin* had engraven upon his mind.'[37] As David Nokes drily remarked, comparing Swift at Trinity to Samuel Johnson at Oxford, 'the combination of poverty and pride did not make him an ideal student.'[38]

Swift took his degree early in 1686 and continued at Trinity in studies for the M.A. Once James II succeeded his brother to the Crown in 1685, however, the Catholic earl of Tyrconnel rose quickly to influence in Ireland as head of the army and then as Lord Deputy, following a policy of shifting military and civil power to Catholic control, with an eventual goal of repealing the Cromwell settlement. In all this Tyrconnel made considerable headway. By 1687 Trinity College was feeling the pressure of these changes, and in another year students and fellows had begun to leave. In late January 1689 Swift and his cousin Tom joined them. 'The Troubles then breaking out,' as Swift writes of this period, 'he went to his Mother, who lived in Leicester, and after continuing there some Months, he was received by Sr Wm Temple, whose Father had been a great Friend to the Family, and who was now retired to his House called Moorpark near Farnham in Surrey.'[39] Swift had spent nearly seven years at Trinity. James, having abdicated in December 1688 and fled to France, landed in Dublin with a French-augmented invasion force about two months after Swift's departure, and another two and a half years of war followed, ending with James's defeat at the Boyne and English Protestant control of Ireland established unshakably for the rest of Swift's lifetime, and long beyond.

2

Moor Park

1689–1692

Sir William Temple; Pindaric Odes

After leaving Dublin and crossing the Irish Sea to Holyhead, Swift made his way to Leicester, most likely on foot, where his mother and sister were living now among their Erick relations. They had moved there possibly though not certainly when Swift went to Kilkenny.[1] Swift's time in Leicester was a matter of 'some Months,' he says, though at any rate long enough to make his mother anxious that he might have fallen in love with the daughter of a local clergyman. 'But when I went to London,' as he tells the story years later, 'she married an inn-keeper in Loughborow.' Her name was Elizabeth Jones and Swift seems to have written her love letters, though also recalling that 'she spells like a kitchen maid.'[2] Swift left his mother and joined Temple's household at Moor Park sometime probably in the summer of 1689. He was 21. Temple's father, Sir John Temple, was Master of the Rolls in Ireland, and it was his friendship with Godwin Swift, according to his grandson, that deepened to embrace the younger branches of the family and led Sir William to give this Moor Park foothold to Godwin's nephew with his otherwise indifferent prospects.[3]

Sir William Temple (1628–1699) managed to navigate the worst influences of party and religion in seventeenth-century public life while preserving a creditable reputation, as might be expected of the diplomat he was. He came from an English family with a tradition of legal and liberal learning, having a branch also in Ireland. He was educated at Bishop Stortford and tutored at Cambridge by Ralph Cudworth, though tennis competed for his attention and he left without a degree to travel in continental Europe. He moves invisibly just beyond the pages of Dorothy Osborne's

The Life of Jonathan Swift: A Critical Biography, First Edition. Thomas Lockwood.

famous letters and must have had some quality of mind or spirit beyond his good looks and lively disposition to make such a woman as her fall in love with him. His father had sided with Cromwell and lost his Irish post for several years. Things came right for the son at the Restoration and he began the diplomatic career that would be his identifying mark as a public figure. His signature professional achievement in negotiating the Triple Alliance was undermined by Charles's secret negotiations with France. He turned down some major posts, including the secretaryship of state three times, burnishing a reputation for integrity, and helped bring about the marriage of William and Mary. He was often in the position of working transparently, if not also naively, for worthy goals that others more cynically and cleverly were obstructing privately. By 1681 Temple had retired from political affairs in disgust, at his house in Sheen, near Richmond. In 1686 he moved to an estate in Farnham he had bought three years earlier and renamed Moor Park, after the Hertfordshire gardens he is remembered for describing as 'the perfectest Figure of a Garden I ever saw.'[4] Here he meant to build a smaller likeness of that setting and to live in even deeper retirement. Farnham was a long day's journey from London, nearly at the Hampshire border.

Macaulay called Temple 'one of those men whom the world has agreed to praise highly without knowing much about them,'[5] and he did have a knack for inviting praise without much to show for it. His great achievement was not the Triple Alliance (which fell apart) but the image he created of uncorrupted withdrawal from the public world, like a Roman philosopher. And he did distinguish himself by his integrity, if only (as Macaulay observes) by comparison with contemporaries who distinguished themselves in corrupt dealing and bad faith. In person he could inspire dislike for a self-satisfied outlook: 'a vain man, much blown up in his own conceit,' in Bishop Gilbert Burnet's impatient opinion, or 'a little of a Sir Charles Grandison,' as a modern editor reckoned him.[6] He was certainly intelligent and could write, though there too he somehow got an exalted reputation for style that owed less to any originality than to the social fixations of the period. 'Temple wrote always like a man of sense and a gentleman,' according to a typical if shallow later eighteenth-century opinion, 'and his stile is the model by which the best prose writers in the reign of Queen Anne, formed theirs.'[7] In one sense he was such a model, as to his clarity and avoidance of mannerism or anything 'gothic.' Swift also admired and absorbed those gentlemanly virtues but soon created for himself a vernacular form of radical clarity and force beyond anything imaginable from Temple.

After the Revolution, and despite his previous bond with William of Orange, Temple nevertheless refused office under his monarchy too, though willingly serving with advice. Temple's son John was made war secretary following William's coronation in April 1689 but then killed himself a week later, apparently in the belief that he had brought shame upon himself by misadvising the King to free an

Irish army general officer. This was the elder Temple's only surviving child. Sir William had given his Sheen property to John Temple and his family when he first moved to Moor Park three years earlier, but went back there when it appeared that Farnham might be exposed to conflict following James's accession. It was here in Richmond that Swift joined Temple's service, moving with the household when they returned to Moor Park at the end of 1689. The circumstance of Swift's arrival so soon after John Temple's death has been a building block of theories about what the relationship may have meant to the fatherless son and son-deprived father.[8] But this has been a post-Freudian pastime. The early biographies mostly ignored the circumstance.

Besides Sir William, the family residents at Moor Park included his wife Dorothy, remembered now for the captivating letters she wrote her husband during their frustrated engagement; his widowed younger sister Lady Martha Giffard, with her pet parrot; and his unmarried poor cousin Rebecca Dingley, who attended Lady Giffard in the office of a toad-eater, as such dependent companionship was cruelly designated in the slang of the next generation. At the next level down were the housekeeper Bridget Johnson, widow of Temple's previous steward, and her eight-year-old daughter Esther. This girl Hetty, as she was called – later poetically rechristened by Swift as Stella – belonged to that order of upper domestic service represented by estate stewards like her late father, respectable if not genteel. But in childhood and adult life she was smart, handsome, and self-possessed enough to appear as something much more than a housekeeper's daughter in the eyes of those around her, including Temple. He had a special liking and care for her which some both then and now have attributed to her being his bastard daughter, but however the circumstances are colored up to fit that idea, there is really no solid evidence for it.[9] We know almost nothing about the friendship that Swift formed with Esther Johnson in these earliest days of his work at Moor Park, except that he clearly liked her too, adopting her as a pupil, with practice in penmanship and guidance on reading. But out of that first association, whatever its everyday routines, eventually grew the one soul-piercing love relationship of Swift's life, inscrutable but undeniable.

Swift was to spend the better part of a decade at Moor Park, separating himself during that period for two lengthy intervals he thought might be permanent, then coming back. On the first occasion he was there about six months. What was his job? Temple himself summarized this earlier phase of Swift's employment in a letter to Sir Robert Southwell, a former diplomatic colleague who had resigned when James became king, then gone back into service under William III as Secretary of State for Ireland. Temple was shopping Swift's services to Southwell, saying that since his being forced away from Trinity College 'Hee has lived in my house, read to mee, writt for me, and kept all accounts as farr as my small occasions requird. Hee has latine and greeke & some french, writes a very good and current hand, is very