

## Critics on Swift

**Dr. Samuel Johnson** ‘Perhaps no writer can be so easily found that has borrowed so little, or that in his excellencies and all his defects has so well maintained his claim to be considered original.’ (Ibid.) See also Dr. Johnson’s celebrated sarcasm about at *Gulliver’s Travels*: ‘When once you have thought of big men, it is very easy to do all the rest’ (Boswell, *Life of Dr. Johnson*; q.p..)

“Vanity of Human Wishes”: ‘In life’s last scene what prodigies surprise, / Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise? / From Marlborough’s eyes the streams of dotage flow / And Swift expires a driv’ler and a show.’ (*Poems*, ed. E. L. McAdam, Jr., with George Milne, Yale Edn. of *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vol. VI, 1964, p.106, ll.315-18.)

**Nathan Drake**, *Jonathan Swift* (1805): ‘These great and estimable qualities were sullied and debased by pride, dogmatism and misanthropy; by a temper harsh, gloomy and discontented. Such is the malignancy of a disposition prone to vilify and degrade human nature, that no abilities, however eminent, can atone for such a tendency’ (Vol. 3, p.160; quoted in Robert Mahony, *Jonathan Swift, The Irish Identity*, 1995).

**W. M. Thackeray**, ‘To think of him is like thinking of the ruin of a great empire.’ (*English Humourists*, 1851). Further, regarded him as ‘a lonely eagle behind bars’ and considered *Gulliver* ‘horrible, shameful, unmanly blasphemous’ (idem.)

**Augustine Birrell**: ‘[H]is language is horrible from first to last. He is full of odious images, of base and abominable allusions ... It is a question not of morality, but of decency, whether it is becoming to sit in the same room with this divine. How the good Sir Walter ever managed to see him through the press is amazing’. (q. source.)

**Denis Florence MacCarthy**, ‘The name of Jonathan Swift is unquestionably the greatest in our literature [...] He was the first Anglo-Irish writer who felt that he was an Irishman, and that his injured and despised country was worthy even of the affectation of patriotism.’ (*The Poets and Dramatists of Ireland*, Duffy 1846; p.130, quoted in Robert Mahony, *op. cit.*; cited in Rosine Auberting, MA Dipl., UUC 1996.)

**John Mitchel**: ‘[Swift’s example] penetrated the character of the whole English colony and bore fruit long after that unquiet and haughty heart lay at rest.’ (*History of Ireland from the Treaty of Limerick to the Present Time*, Duffy, 1869, p.94.)

**Stephen Gwynn**: ‘For a century and a half from Swift’s day, nearly all the literature that came out of nationalist Ireland was forged as a weapon for combat.’ (Stephen Gwynn, *Irish Literature and Drama*, 1936, p.12.) Further, ‘[His works] so affected popular imagination in their lifetimes that a ghost of them survives, vaguely familiar to thousands who in reality know nothing but the name.’ (q.p.)

**Shane Leslie**: ‘Modern Irish nationalism was born at the tip of Swift’s pen ... the first Sinn Feiner - all-aloner.’ (*The Irish Tangle for English Readers*, 1946, p.17.)

**Arthur Griffith**: ‘By his great genius, he [Swift] united all Ireland, peer and peasant, Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter, Norman, Cromwellian and Gael in opposition to England.’ (United Irishman, 8 Jan. 1905.)

**Irvin Ehrenpreis**: ‘*The Modest Proposal* joins not only the Drapier’s but all Swift’s tracts on Ireland in its paradoxical view of human misery. The sufferers whom he wishes to help are people for whom he has a degree of contempt.’ (Swift, *The Man, His Work and the Age*, 1962-83.)

**J. W. Foster**: ‘Swift was philosophically married to the idea of decline [...]. At best, life was a modest proposal, a holding of the pale of reason against unnecessary degeneration.’ (‘Encountering Traditions’, in Foster and Helena C. G. Chesney, ed., *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, Dublin: Lilliput 1997, p.49.)

**Victoria Glendinning**, ‘Swift sought to shock and shame the British public by bringing their unthinking inhumanity to its logical conclusion.’ (*Jonathan Swift*, London: Hutchinson 1998, p.164.)