

**Swift, Jonathan** (1667-1745), man of letters; born in Dublin, son of a steward of the King's Inns in Dublin, he was educated at Kilkenny School, and TCD. In 1689, disgusted with the policy of preferment of Catholics being practised in Dublin by \*James II's Viceroy, Richard Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnell, and anxious for his future, he left Ireland and became personal secretary to Sir William Temple, a retired diplomat, who had helped arrange the marriage of William and Mary. He lived with him at Moor Park, Surrey, where he met Esther Johnson (\*Stella), then a young girl, a life-long friend and companion. At Moor Park he studied and wrote a series of Pindaric Odes during 1690-91 before returning to Dublin where, in 1694, he took holy orders. He was then appointed to Kilroot, Co Antrim, an overwhelmingly Presbyterian area, where he began A \**Tale of A Tub* (1704), an attack on religious extremism, before returning to Moor Park. When Temple died in 1699 Swift moved again to Dublin, where he served as chaplain to the Earl of Berkeley, and obtained the vicarage of Laracor, Co Meath, the following year. While in London in 1701, he published *Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome* a political essay written to gain the attention of the Whig ministry, supporting a system of checks and balances in government. In 1707 he wrote *The Story of the Injured Lady* (1746), protesting that the Union between England and Scotland of that year was a betrayal of Protestant Ireland in favour of dissenting Scotland. He also began negotiations in London on behalf of the Church of Ireland in its attempts to resist additional taxation; *Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man* argues against extremism, over-zealous reformation, and for church independence. Over the next two years, he made friends with Addison and \*Steele, and wrote several satirical pieces for the *Tatler*, including the *Bickerstaff Papers* (1708), an attack on projectors and schemers, using Swift's favourite device, an obviously fraudulent spokesman, in this case an astrologer. In the autumn of 1710, he was courted by the new Tory ministry, and began the *Journal to Stella* (1766-68). Over the next three years, Swift worked as a party-writer for the Tories, taking on the editorship of *The Examiner* (1710-11), a weekly propaganda paper, and writing major essays defending government foreign policy, such as *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711). While in London he met Esther Vanhomrigh, whom he later named 'Vanessa' [see '\*Cadenus and Vanessa'], and published anonymously *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1711). He was also introduced to Alexander Pope and enjoyed the literary company of the Scriblerus Club. However, after three years of dedicated service Swift reluctantly accepted the Deanery of St. Patrick's, having hoped for an English post. In August 1714, he left for Dublin and took up residence in the deanery, where he stayed until his death. After six years of relative silence, Swift produced A \**Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* (1720), the first of many anonymous pamphlets by the

new Dean on Irish affairs, in which he challenged English assumptions about Ireland's colonial status. He also began work on *\*Gulliver's Travels*, parts of which he showed to close friends, including Vanessa, who died in 1723. In 1720, he wrote 'The Description of an Irish Feast', his translation of 'Pléaráca na Ruarcach' by Aodh \*Mac Gabhráin one of the circle of Gaelic scholars gathered around Seán \*O Neachtain in Dublin. According to \*folklore, having heard the Irish sung to him to music by Carolan he asked Mac Gabhráin to translate the Irish from whose literal version Swift worked. In 1724 his work on the *Travels* was interrupted by the controversy over Wood's half-pence, to which Swift contributed the famous *\*Drapier's Letters*, earning him the contemporary title of 'Hibernian Patriot', and the freedom of the city of Dublin. In 1726 he visited London with a copy of *Gulliver's Travels*, which was published in October of that year. This represented the climax of his literary career, after which he suffered many disappointments and losses, none worse than the death of Stella in 1728. *A Short View of The State of Ireland*, published in that year, expresses deep pessimism in relation to Ireland's unstable economy. He continued to write polemical pamphlets on Ireland, the most bitter of which, *A \*Modest Proposal*, appeared in 1729. He spent increasing amounts of time with friends outside Dublin, especially with Thomas \*Sheridan at Quilca, Co. Cavan. Together they produced *The Intelligencer* (1729), a weekly paper on literary, economic, and social topics, reflecting Swift's intimate knowledge of Irish, and especially Dublin, life. In the 1780s Swift wrote many pamphlets defending the rights of his own Church and attacking Dissent. With the author's assistance, George \*Faulkner published the first edition of Swift's *Works* in 1735. In 1736, Swift published one of his last major poems, 'The Legion Club', a satirical attack on the \*Irish parliament. In 1742, he was declared 'of unsound mind and memory', and for the next three years he was looked after by close friends. When he died he left part of his legacy for the establishment of St. Patrick's Hospital for the mentally ill.

Swift's literary career is most remarkable for the way in which his artistic energy both served and transcended ideological conservatism. In nearly everything he wrote, he was mindful of the public and political responsibility of the writer. As a clergyman, he regularly used his literary talent to defend the material and constitutional interests of the Established Church. Reared and educated within a strict Anglican tradition, his essential and abiding loyalties were to the 'Glorious Revolution' and its constitutional guarantee of mixed government by which monarch and parliament assumed a cooperative sovereignty. His political principles, as he outlined them in *A Letter from Dr Swift to Mr Pope* (written in 1722, but not published until 1741), were those of a moderate yet critical Tory, a position which best seemed to unite and

protect his civil and religious values. In what may seem hypocritical to a modern reader, Swift always rejected the principle of legal toleration for religious dissenters such as Presbyterians, as well as for Roman Catholics, yet could write some of his most aesthetically satisfying work out of this intransigence. Religious dissent, of all kinds, represented a dangerous form of political disloyalty and subversion. His artistic humour was usually able to transform this hostility into outlandish satirical form as with *A Tale of a Tub*, even though his skills at literary impersonation often led critics to attribute the vices being exposed to Swift himself. He was most skilful at concealing his own views by mocking those of others. Through satire, parody and other kinds of literary impersonation, Swift diverts attention away from his own limited yet consistent principles towards the distortion of reason and sanity which he detects in his enemies. Swift's ambiguous art is reflected in the anonymous and pseudonymous forms he habitually employed. He very rarely spoke in his own voice, or signed his name to anything he wrote. This was largely a stylistic preference, but was often a legal safeguard, especially when he was engaged in contemporary satire. Some of his most memorable works, such as *Gulliver's Travels* or *A Modest Proposal*, are based solidly on the ironic exploitation of a seemingly innocent persona whose character eventually becomes part of the satirical strategy of rebuking the reader's complacency. In *The Drapier's Letters* the mask of a Dublin tradesman is used both to protect the Dean's identity and to provide a rhetorical platform for the author's criticism of English rule. If there is such a thing as the 'essential' Swift, it could be argued that he is at his best in the essay or pamphlet, especially those written in a polemical or ironic spirit, such as his *\*Argument against Abolishing Christianity* (1708), in which he uses his favourite tactic of allowing a fool to conduct unwittingly an idiotic defence of the unreasonable. He wrote over sixty pamphlets on Ireland, finally despairing of the effectiveness of such appeals, and yet never stopped writing until sickness forced him into silence. His literary personality was aggressive in temperament, classical in taste, inventive in form, and highly-disciplined in style. Swift's elusive literary identity may be linked to his ambivalent sense of national loyalty. Although he repeatedly referred to himself as 'an Englishman born in Ireland', he came to feel increasingly alienated from, and vengeful towards, England. Historically, he voiced and shaped the values and ambitions of Protestant Ireland [see *\*Protestantism*], even though, as in the *Drapier's Letters*, he could use the rhetoric of the 'Whole People of Ireland'. He advocated the abolition of the Irish language, which he associated with barbarism, and viewed the Catholic peasantry as 'mere hewers of wood and drawers of water'. Yet this ultra-conservatism rarely defended the existing political order, especially in Ireland, where Swift frankly encouraged constitutional and

legislative independence. It would be quite misleading and inappropriate, however, to characterize him as a 'nationalist', as many subsequent commentators have done. Swift's politics were of a very different age, and never amounted to a coherent theory. For editions of his work, see Herbert Davis et al., eds, *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, 16 vols (1939-68); Harold Williams, ed., *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, 3 vols. (1937 rev. 1958); *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 5 vols. (1963-5) Vols 4 and 5 rev. D. Woolley (1972); and Joseph McMinn, ed., *Swift's Irish Pamphlets* (1991). The standard biography is Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works and the Age* (3 vols. 1962-83), but see also O. W. Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift in Ireland* (1962); Caroline Fabricant, *Swift's Landscape* (1982); and McMinn, *Jonathan's Travels* (1994).