

Jonathan McCreedy, Vesselin M. Budakov, and Alexandra K. Glavanakova, Editors.
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Taking the qualification “Swiftian,” this collective volume aptly explores meanings and contexts related to what is caustic, sardonic, pessimistic, and satirical in Jonathan Swift’s own work as well as in some of the literary and cinematic re-interpretations and adaptations of his texts. In addition, some contributors explore the repercussions of the Anglo-Irish author’s satires in the age of Trump, characterized as it was by fake news and post-truth. Overall, the book presents a comprehensive analysis of Swift’s multiple impact on life and culture from the Enlightenment to the present.

In their ambitious task to revise “the multifarious Swiftian voices over time” (Budakov et al. xvi), the contributors examine Swift and his texts from a wide variety of perspectives. Even a cursory glance at the titles of the chapters reveals the wide-ranging scope of the book. Numerous attempts are made to demonstrate Swift’s relevance to our own time. Citing the Irish writer Colm Tóibín, the volume’s editors quite correctly remind us “that a modern-day Swift would probably be a blogger” (Budakov et al. xiv), or, in the words of Noah Charney, “a grumpy pundit on CNN, slinging pithy wisecracks and moonlighting ... on *Saturday Night Live*” (quoted in Budakov et al. xiv), that is, someone employing the technological advancements and media opportunities of the twenty-first century for the purposes of stringent political criticism.

Reading Swift’s inimitable satires involves understanding what is beyond his razor-sharp ironies, and this can come as a shocker to a naïve reader of our time. There are certain online postings of *A Modest Proposal* which warn unwary readers that the text is not to be understood literally. Another problematic text is the fourth part of *Gulliver’s Travels* in which the narrator finds himself in the land of the Houyhnhnms. From a present-day perspective, it is not hard to see this invented land as a fictional precursor of fascism; for one thing, it is a land in which culture (in the traditional humanist sense) does not exist. To a modern person the noisy, apish Yahoos may appear to be far more appealing than the self-righteous, conceited Houyhnhnms. However, to our consternation, upon his return to England, Gulliver refuses to talk to people, opting for the company of horses whom he mistakenly believes to be the counterparts of his beloved Houyhnhnms. Is this madness, misanthropy, or harsh criticism of humankind? These and many other questions find their new, updated answers in the excellent collection of essays under discussion.

The volume’s opening section examines aspects of Swift’s *oeuvre* in the context of the eighteenth century. In a chapter with the significant title “Satire, Truth, and the Art of Lying,” Marc Martinez makes a useful distinction between Swift’s political writings in which truth and falsehood are kept in separate compartments and never mixed and his satires in which he facetiously plays with the two “moral opposites” (3). Martinez links the latter tendency to Swift’s “partiality for a popular tradition: the practical jokes played on All Fools’ Day” (4). He further argues that the Dean’s satirical work may be placed within “the Lucianic tradition of Menippean satire” in which “truthful lies” are emphasized and fixed interpretive positions are problematized (5). Martinez’s view of the antecedents of Swiftian satire is similar to Mikhail Bakhtin’s; Bakhtin was one of the early theorists of the Menippean satire and explicitly linked Swift’s work to that genre. However, exploration of the Dean’s indebtedness to an earlier satirical tradition is only one of the interpretive strands in Martinez’s chapter. He also provides an incisive reading of some of Swift’s satirical strategies and singles out “the tension between lies and truth [and] anger and playfulness” as the Anglo-Irish writer’s most enduring legacy to later times (18).

James Ward’s chapter, which comes next, considers the meaning of madness in the eighteenth century and its place in Swift’s work. He maintains that Swift’s satirical texts speak “through madness as much as about it” (24) and goes on to raise important questions about the Dean’s “rhetorically constructed madness” some of whose legacy has been “bequeathed to us not as outlandish fantasy but as political reality” (35).

Evgenia Pancheva, who is the translator of a collection of Swift’s poems into Bulgarian, explores self-reflexivity in the Dean’s poetry. She detects “a fissure between speaker and fictional persona” in his

texts. In her opinion, the fissure creates “a non-lyrical narrative structure” with the poet narrating – rather than speaking to – himself (41).

Part II looks at the afterlives of Swift’s texts in film and fiction and discusses the transformations that they have undergone at the hands of later writers and film directors. In Chapter 4, Vesselin M. Budakov focuses on Elbert Perce’s *Gulliver Joi: His Three Voyages* (1851), a work of science fiction inspired by *Gulliver’s Travels*. Taking his cue from earlier scholars, who have examined the impact of the Dean’s political satire on nineteenth-century science fiction, Budakov presents Perce’s text as an early example of the sci-fi genre. The text combines elements from different kinds of fantastic literature, such as utopian writing, interplanetary travel, and adventures in a lost world. Budakov concludes that “the polyphony of genres and themes” that characterizes Perce’s text anticipates “the generic framework and development” of later science fiction but is also traceable back to Swift’s imaginary travels (79).

Mariya Dogan’s chapter dwells on Aleksandr Ptushko’s *Novyi Gulliver* [*The New Gulliver*] (1935), the first film adaptation of Swift’s satire in the Soviet Union. Dogan illuminates the possibilities of *Gulliver’s Travels* to be used as ideology (83–100), affirming that “Swift’s satirical novel, which provided fruitful material for Ptushko’s adaptation, would time and again be addressed and modified by film-makers, giving life to autonomous and inspirational works of art” (98).

Alexandra Glavanakova explores several American re-writings of *A Modest Proposal* in the context of strongly polarized debates in the United States over racial intolerance, class division, and economic inequality. She reflects upon the distinctive political and social climate of the Trump era which she sees as completely “dissociated from the Enlightenment values and ideals upon which America was founded” (102). Glavanakova focuses on two entirely different American “modest proposals”: Benjamin Franklin’s *Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade* (1790) and Paul Beatty’s novel *The Sellout* (2015). The latter is a bitter satire on present-day race relations, which takes up the bizarre proposition of restoring slavery in post-racial America by a black man.

The volume’s third section looks into Swiftian legacies concerning the politics of language, and the fourth one is concerned with further analogies between Swift’s time and the age of post-truth. Both sections include thought-provoking essays that will no doubt appeal to a multitude of scholars in key areas in the humanities and social sciences.

Swiftian Inspirations brings together essays which successfully explore diverse aspects of the rich legacy of a prolific writer whose concerns and artistic methods remain invariably challenging and relevant almost 300 years after they were expressed in his texts. Despite the wealth of critical writing on Swift, there is still a lot to say about him – and this is borne out by the contributions to this volume.

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