GREGORY A. SCHIRMER

OUT OF WHAT BEGAN

A HISTORY OF IRISH POETRY IN ENGLISH

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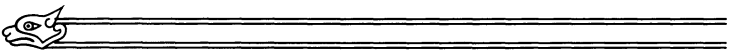

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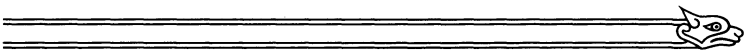

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CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

ITHACA AND LONDON

First published 1998 by Cornell University Press.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA
Schirmer, Gregory A.
Out of what began : a history of Irish poetry in English / Gregory A. Schirmer.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8014-3498-X (cloth : alk. paper)
1. English poetry—Irish authors—History and criticism. 2. Ireland—Intellectual life. 3. Ireland—In literature.
I. Title.
PR8761.S35 1998
821.009'9417—dc21 98-8409

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Cloth printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR JANE

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?

—W. B. YEATS,
"The Circus Animals' Desertion"

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PREFACE

> By the knowledge of the acts, opinions, and condition of our ancestors . . . we can extend the three score and ten years, which is our immediate portion in time, back and back as far as facts exist, for the support of speculation. It is this enlarging of our portion of space, of time, of feeling, that is the true source of all intellectual pleasure.
>
> —Samuel Ferguson, *Dublin University Magazine* (1840)

Ferguson's statement might be taken as sufficient justification for a history of any kind. There are, however, more specific arguments to be made on behalf of a history of Irish poetry in English. For one, although a number of general histories of Irish writing, and several more specialized historical accounts of Irish fiction and Irish drama, have appeared within the past two decades, to date no history of Irish poetry written in English has been published, even though such a genre can be identified as a significant part of the Irish literary and cultural landscape at least as far back as the early decades of the eighteenth century. (That two of Ireland's four Nobel Prize winners in this century are poets might be said to testify to the continuing importance of Irish poetry to literature written in English as well as to Irish writing.) This book attempts to provide such a history, to chart the development of Irish poetry in English from the work of Jonathan Swift at the beginning of the eighteenth century to that of John Montague near the end of the twentieth, to establish the distinctive aesthetic and cultural qualities of the genre, to consider its complex relationship to the traditions of English poetry and of poetry written in Irish, and to make clear the ways in which it both reflected and contributed to the social, political, and cultural history of Ireland.

All the principal terms of a phrase like "a history of Irish poetry" are, I

realize, open to question. In the first place, the writing of any *history* inevitably entails exclusions and simplifications, inevitably constitutes a narrative that is grounded in and itself generates values, attitudes, and assumptions that profoundly, and often covertly, affect the historian's attempt to discover and represent the past. While trying to be sensitive to this problem, and wary especially of the tendency of literary histories to engender their own critical criteria, I have relied on a relatively conventional approach in writing this history, following a chronological structure, and organizing the narrative around individual poets rather than themes, issues, or poetic styles. This focus on specific writers reflects in part my own belief in the centrality of the author; it also encourages the bringing to light of numerous writers, including a considerable number of women poets, who have fallen into undeserved neglect over the past two-and-a-half centuries. In considering the question of what constitutes *"Irish* poetry," I have tried to define the tradition in such a way as to reflect the variety and diversity of Irish culture as it has developed from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the present. Thus, this book is as interested in an Ulster Protestant like Louis MacNeice, whose work on the whole belongs more to English poetry than to Irish but who wrote seriously about Irish issues and conditions, as it is in a Dublin Catholic like James Clarence Mangan, whose work is thoroughly and intimately bound up with Irish culture. At the same time, this book does not attempt to provide a history of poetry written in Irish, a tradition that is in fact far older, and arguably richer, than that of Irish poetry written in English. This is, in my view, a subject for another full-length study, but I have tried to represent to some degree the complex relationship between the two traditions, principally in considering the development of translation as a distinct and significant poetic mode in Ireland. Finally, this history defines "Irish *poetry"* in ways that, for the most part, exclude popular ballads and songs. This decision is not meant to suggest that these forms are not worthy of serious analysis—indeed, it might be argued that in the long run popular ballads and songs have been more important to the development of Irish culture, at least from the middle of the nineteenth century on, than Irish poetry has been —but instead to suggest that they deserve separate consideration, attentive to their distinctive purposes, aesthetic qualities, and audiences.

"There is no History, just histories," the Irish critic Declan Kiberd has said. This book was written in the understanding that it represents just one possible account of its subject, that it is *a* history of Irish poetry in English, not *the* history of Irish poetry in English. At the same time, it was written in the spirit of Samuel Ferguson's faith in the liberating power of history, and so represents one more attempt at that "enlarging of our portion of space, of time, of feeling."

GREGORY A. SCHIRMER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the Office of Research and the Department of English at the University of Mississippi, and to the School for Irish Studies Foundation in Dublin, for their generous support of this project. I would also like to acknowledge the staffs of the National Library of Ireland, the Trinity College Dublin Library, the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Mississippi Library for their cooperation and assistance. In Ireland, conversations with the late Sean White and the late Augustine Martin were, as always, inspiring as well as informative. Finally, the bulk of this book was written in Ireland, and I am most grateful to Jack and Barbara O'Connell of Schull Books for their invaluable assistance and to Dan and Jane O'Donovan, whose hospitality and generosity contributed to this work in ways too numerous to mention.

Grateful acknowledgment is given for the use of the following material:

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PART ONE

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

The very concept of eighteenth-century Irish poetry in English is shrouded in ambiguity. For one thing, the overwhelming presence of Swift casts into shadow, if not oblivion, the work of lesser poets, many of whom have indeed been forgotten. Then there is the more oblique but nearly as powerful presence of Yeats, whose rewriting of eighteenth-century Anglo-Ireland into a remarkable moment of high culture, a civilization of "high laughter, loveliness and ease," posited a more-or-less monolithic literary environment that has only recently been called into serious question.[1] From various nationalist points of view, almost all the writing produced in Ireland during the eighteenth century belongs more to the English tradition than to an Irish one. Although there is something to be said for all these versions of Irish writing, none of them does justice to the complex realities of eighteenth-century Ireland, or to the literature, especially the poetry, that came out of it. Ireland in the eighteenth century was, in fact, marked by considerable cultural, political, and sectarian diversity; the conventional, principally nationalist, model of a society divided into a prosperous class of Anglo-Irish Protestant gentry and an oppressed class of Irish Catholic peasants ignores, among other things, the importance of Presbyterian dissenters in Ulster and of a sizable Catholic and Protestant middle class scattered throughout the island. Eighteenth-century Ireland also had its fair share of recurrent and serious disruptions—the agrarian violence of the 1760s and 1770s, for instance, and the 1798 insurrection. The condition of Ireland during these years was, as one literary historian has put it, one of "tense coexistence" among several different kinds of Irish, compounded by the inevitable and always uneasy relationship with the politics and culture of England.[2] This relatively unstable and culturally complex society produced a large and varied body of poetry written in English that was at times quite distinctively Irish in

its concerns, if English in its forms. There were more publishers in Dublin during the eighteenth century than in any other English-speaking city outside London, and most Irish poets writing during the eighteenth century, unlike many of their later counterparts, published their poems first in Dublin, not London. And if this poetry was written and read almost exclusively by members of the Anglo-Irish governing class, at its best it both reflected the diversity of eighteenth-century Irish society and was energized by it, often demonstrating the extent to which the Anglo-Irish were conscious, often uneasily, of the complexity and instability of the society that they presumed to govern and of the cultural and political ambiguity of their own position within that society.

Swift, an Anglo-Irishman enmeshed in one love-hate relationship with his native country and in another with his adopted country, England, embodied many of these pressures in his work. Indeed, Swift's art might be said to be governed almost entirely by the principle of division: between England and Ireland, between Anglo-Ireland and native Ireland, between an Irish audience and an English one, between affection for Ireland and hatred of it, between political liberalism and religious conservatism. The general restlessness and satirical energy that mark the best of his writing grew out of this condition. Many important social and cultural issues were not reflected in Swift's writing, however, but were examined by other Irish poets writing in the eighteenth century. Swift's literary circle in Dublin included, for example, several women poets who explored the situation of women in eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish society, at times drawing distinctly nationalist parallels between the condition of women as an oppressed class and that of Ireland in its relationship to England. Also, the work of Thomas Parnell, Swift's contemporary, included poems marked by a lyricism and melancholy that anticipate the development of an Irish Gothic tradition in the nineteenth century. The vexing question of Irish rural life, and specifically of the politics and economics of the tenant-landlord system—carrying powerful and potentially explosive implications for the relationship between Anglo-Ireland and native Ireland, and between Ireland and England as well—was explored not only in the 1760s and 1770s in Goldsmith's critiques of the rise of commercialism and the threatened demise of the rural way of life, but also earlier, and with considerable force, in the work of the lesser-known Laurence Whyte, writing sympathetically about tenant farmers in his native Westmeath. Goldsmith also developed Swift's sense of cultural ambiguity into an extended meditation on the condition of exile, introducing into Irish poetry in English a theme that was to preoccupy Irish writing through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first traces of romanticism, a phenomenon that, because of its associations with the English tradition, was particularly problematic for Irish writers, also could be found in the work of several late-eighteenth-century Irish poets. Although the poems of Samuel Whyte and Thomas Dermody did not attempt the fusion of romanticism and nationalism

that was to inspire so much Irish writing in the nineteenth century, Dermody's writing especially was characterized by a formal unconventionality that anticipated later efforts to free Irish poetry from the inhibiting effect of forms inherited from the English tradition. At the same time, in the politically charged closing years of the century, a popular political poetry began to appear; much of this work, coming at the time of the French Revolution and, in Ireland, of the events leading up to the insurrection of 1798, advanced more radically nationalist positions than those taken earlier in the century by Swift. Finally, although many Anglo-Irish writers in the eighteenth century were contentedly ignorant of the Gaelic culture that lay for the most part beyond the English pale, and indeed were part of a political enterprise destined, if not intended, to destroy it, and although a relatively sophisticated antiquarian movement to recover the culture of the colonized would not emerge until the nineteenth century, there were some significant points of contact in eighteenth-century poetry between the two cultures, including the first collection of translations of Irish poems into English—the work of an Anglo-Irish Protestant woman.

It might be said that the entire Anglo-Irish cultural enterprise, from the poems of Swift to the splendid architecture of Georgian Dublin, rested on an unjust base of exclusion and oppression, a base that was, therefore, fundamentally unstable. The Anglo-Irish Ascendancy responsible for most of the Irish poetry written in English during the eighteenth century was, in fact, suspended between two uneasy relationships. On the one hand, it was dependent on England—culturally, politically, economically, and, because of the perceived threat of a Jacobite uprising, militarily. At the same time, it was also intent on establishing a reasonable degree of independence from English political control, as evidenced in Swift's attack on the Woods coinage scheme in the 1720s and in the movement for legislative independence that resulted in the constitution of 1782 and Grattan's parliament. The Anglo-Irish were also dependent on the native Irish population that they considered themselves essentially separate from, if not superior to; it was native Irish labor that drove much of the economy that supported them in relative comfort, it was native Irish culture that provided them with one important means of differentiating themselves from the English, and it was native Irish hostility that nagged at them with the worrying threat of insurrection. The implications of this instability for eighteenth-century Irish writing were far-reaching. For one thing, the ambiguous position of the Anglo-Irish inevitably generated a disjunction between language and reality,[3] often taking the form of anxieties about writing about Irish experience in the English language or of using poetic forms and conventions taken more or less wholesale from the English tradition. The state of cultural limbo in which most eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish poets found themselves also tended to produce a sense of exile and alienation, of homelessness, expressed with particular force in the work of Goldsmith, but also in that of

several lesser poets. And finally, writing from a position defined by ambiguity often led to an unusual degree of self-consciousness, of writing anxiously concerned with the poet's place and function in society. That all these issues are familiar to readers of Irish literature written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries only attests to the significance of eighteenth-century Irish poetry to the tradition of Irish writing as a whole.

CHAPTER ONE

SWIFT AND HIS WORLD

Any number of reasons might be given for placing Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) at the beginning of this history. It might be argued, for example, that he was the first Irish poet writing in English out of significant Irish interests.[1] More specifically, Swift might be described (as he often has been, and as he was in his own day) as Ireland's first patriot-poet writing in the English language. This view of Swift's Irishness appealed particularly to nineteenth-century Irish poets committed to reading Irish literature as a history of nationalist writing; thus, Denis Florence MacCarthy, a poet associated with the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s, described Swift as "the first great Anglo-Irish writer who felt that he was an Irishman, and that his injured and despised country was worthy even of the affection of patriotism."[2] It might further be argued that Swift had at least some knowledge of and interest in the Gaelic tradition; he did publish one version of a poem taken from the Irish, and there are other instances in his work in which the English literary tradition intersects, albeit somewhat inaccurately, with the Gaelic tradition. More generally, it might be pointed out that, especially in comparison with his English contemporaries, such as Dryden and Pope, Swift's writing manifests a rugged, rough aggressiveness and energy that could be said to register the influences of his experiences in Ireland on his neo-classical aesthetics. More important than any of these arguments, however, is the quality of ambiguity and doubt, of insecurity and restlessness, that characterizes the best of Swift's writing. No Irish poet writing in English before Swift, and very few after him, so consistently or so powerfully embodies the tensions and pressures arising from cultural displacement and instability that have come to define so much Irish writing in general, and very few Irish poets have been so profoundly, even obsessively, self-reflexive in their work, so blatantly anxious about the poetic self and its relation to society.

The most obvious manifestation of this is the difference felt in Swift's life and art between England and Ireland. His family came to Ireland as part of the Act of Settlement in 1662, and Swift was born in Dublin five years later. But his father, an attorney, had died before Swift was born, and Swift spent the early years of his childhood in England before returning to Ireland to be educated (at Kilkenny School and Trinity College). It was, moreover, in England that Swift first made his mark as a public figure and a writer, and he devoted considerable energy to remaining there. When, in 1714 (after the death of Queen Anne and the fall of the Tory ministry with which Swift had been closely associated), Swift returned to Ireland to become the Dean of St. Patrick's in Dublin, he went with great reluctance, seeing Ireland as a provincial, backward nation, a place fit only for outcasts from the glitter of London life, and, as he took every opportunity of saying, a land of slaves. He never really abandoned this view. In 1732, after nearly two decades of living in Ireland, and nearly a decade after the triumph of his *Drapier's Letters,* Swift gave this account of Ireland to a newcomer:

> Tipperary . . . is like the rest of the whole kingdom, a bare face of nature, without houses or plantations; filthy cabins, miserably tattered, half-starved creatures, scarce in human shape; one insolent ignorant oppressive squire to be found in twenty miles riding; a parish church to be found only in a summer-day's journey, in comparison of which, an English farmer's barn is a cathedral; a bog of fifteen miles round; every meadow a slough, and every hill a mixture of rock, heath, and marsh; and every male and female, from the farmer, inclusive to the day labourer, infallibly a thief, and consequently a beggar, which in this island are terms convertible.[3]

Much of Swift's satire written in the 1730s squarely places the blame for Ireland's suffering not on the English but on Anglo-Irish absentee landlords and a corrupt Irish parliament. It is also true, however, that in the end Swift spent sixty-four of his seventy-seven years in Ireland, and that his sympathies often lay with the Irish in opposition to the England to which he yearned to return. The Woods halfpence controversy in the 1720s, the occasion for Swift's most effective political satire and, in some ways, the triumph of his career (after the *Drapier's Letters,* Samuel Johnson said, the Irish "reverenced him as a guardian, and obeyed him as a dictator"[4]), drove Swift into a strongly anti-English position. And when finally, in 1732, Swift was offered the English living to which he had so long aspired, he turned it down with hardly a second thought, preferring to live out his days in Ireland. The truth is that Swift never resolved the Ireland-England conflict within himself. Near the end of his life, when he was afflicted with various maladies, mental as well as physical, he started telling people that he had been born not in Dublin of an attorney but in

Leicester (where his mother in fact spent most of her life) of a clergyman. Johnson's comment on this extraordinary bit of deception is apt: "The question may, without much regret, be left in the obscurity in which he delighted to involve it."[5]

The obscurity of Swift's position went considerably beyond questions of his divided loyalties to Ireland and England. Not only did Swift, living in Dublin, feel himself in exile from the country of his preference, but also, as an Anglo-Irishman, he could not help but feel alienated from the culture of the native Irish, from which he was decidedly separated by social class and religion, but with which he apparently felt some genuine sympathy. In a letter written in 1732, he said that the English ought to be "ashamed of the Reproaches they cast on the Ignorance, the Dulness, and the Want of Courage, in the *Irish* Nations; those Defects, wherever they happen, arising only from the Poverty and Slavery they suffer from their inhuman Neighbors."[6] Nevertheless, Swift's sympathies could extend only so far. The native Irish culture was, if visible, finally out of reach; moreover, Swift's attitude toward it—like that of many of the Anglo-Irish, especially those arriving as part of the post-Cromwellian settlement—had to be tinged with some guilt. Also, as he well knew, his defense of Irish independence during the Woods controversy was a defense of the independence of the Irish parliament, from which Irish Catholics were excluded. And there is evidence that his status as an Irish patriot rested uneasily on his shoulders. According to Johnson, at one point late in his life, when he was told that "the usual bonfires and illuminations" were being prepared around the city to celebrate his birthday, Swift said, "It is all folly; they had better let it alone."[7]

Swift's private life was also marked by ambiguity. The two women in Swift's life—Stella (Esther Johnson) and Vanessa (Hester Vanhomrigh)—seemed to represent, for Swift at least, two different aspects of the feminine: Stella was the passive pupil perfectly willing to be created in Swift's own image, while Vanessa was much more aggressive and independent. Swift's inability or unwillingness to choose finally one or the other, however much he was tormented by this dual presence in his life, suggests the extent to which he needed both, yet needed to be free from both. Furthermore, each of the two relationships was characterized by paradox. If Stella and Swift were, as seems likely, secretly married, the marriage was not only never publicly acknowledged but also probably never consummated; as Johnson put it, Stella "never was treated as a wife, and to the world she had the appearance of a mistress."[8] And if Vanessa can be seen, in some ways, as Swift's mistress, the betrayal enacted by their passion is itself incomplete, since the marriage being betrayed had never been consummated. Moreover, it seems likely that Swift's relationship with Vanessa, although considerably more sexual than that with Stella, also was not consummated, presumably by Swift's choice.[9] All the various contending forces behind

and between these two relationships—including the central one of chastity versus sexuality, often projected by Swift into lasting spiritual virtue versus transient physical indulgence—inform the best of what might be called Swift's love poems, including the birthday poems to Stella and "Cadenus and Vanessa."

Standing behind all these contradictions and paradoxes, public and private, in Swift's life and art, are broader, more far-reaching dichotomies. Swift's political and religious views, and the ambiguities surrounding his position as an Anglo-Irish writer, reflect a deep-seated conflict between tradition and revolution, moral discipline and liberal license, authoritarianism and libertarianism. Swift's *Drapier's Letters,* for example, may have had the effect of a call for freedom that could be read as revolutionary, but Swift's arguments themselves carefully skirt political radicalism, resting firmly on appeals to precedent and tradition, on the strength of the monarchy as an institution, and on the constitutional validity of the legislative bodies.[10] More generally, Swift's work manifests an unresolved tension between stability and disorder, evident in the difference between the harmonizing principles of the English Enlightenment and the unstable reality of everyday, variegated life that Swift saw around him in an Ireland that must have seemed largely indifferent to those principles. Although Swift almost always wrote in defense of stability, his work is marked by an unsettling awareness that chaos is just around the corner. That awareness often makes itself felt in the rhetorical and formal qualities of Swift's poetry: the defense of an essentially conservative position is usually made by means of an unconventional assortment of paradoxes, allegories, personae, masks, fantasies, exaggerations, grotesqueries, puns, word-plays, and the like. Finally, for Swift, the surface of life, the evidence of the senses, is never to be wholly trusted; there is always an underside that contradicts the surface and threatens to destroy it. Moreover, that underside, no matter how distressful, may well contain truth, the surface only illusion; much of Swift's satire takes the form of a stripping away of the surface to expose the often unsettling realities that lurk just below.

It is hardly surprising, given the cultural and political ambiguities surrounding Swift's position as an Irish writer, that one of the established figures that comes under question in Swift's work is the poet himself. A remarkable number of Swift's poems, especially among those written relatively late in his life, consider critically both Swift's own career as a writer and the broader question of the artist's place and function in society. Characteristically, Swift addresses these issues by means of an array of varying masks, tones, and points of view. Nevertheless, the picture of the poet that emerges is fairly consistent: a figure of exile and alienation, of someone excluded, as Swift considered himself to be, from the mainstream of society, doomed to observing, often through the lens of irony and satire, all that he could not have.

As Johnson once said, "Swift was not one of those minds which amaze the world with early pregnancy." [11] What is generally considered to be Swift's early poetry was written when he was in his thirties and forties, which may explain why even Swift's earliest poems often embody the same qualities and express the same themes that characterize his later work. The two well-known "description" poems, for example—"A Description of the Morning" (1709) and "A Description of a City Shower" (1710)—depend upon and exploit a variety of conflicts and reversals of convention: pastoral idealism versus urban realism; conventional notions of the dawn and of water as life-giving sources versus perceptions of the morning as the revealer of the night's sins and the day's coming drudgery and of water as the bearer of evidence of the city's ugliness and inhumanity; poetry as a form of heightened discourse attached to the classical tradition and governed by certain conventions versus poetry as more-or-less ordinary language meant to describe things as they are. What is perhaps most remarkable about these poems is the way in which Swift manipulates tone and voice to dramatize these tensions, foreshadowing the extraordinary powers of ventriloquism with which, throughout his career, he negotiated the unresolvable conflicts that are central to his art. In "A Description of a City Shower," for example, Swift welds together in a single sentence two radically different forms of discourse, allowing high and low culture to coexist in an uneasy relationship:

> Mean while the South rising with dabbled Wings,
> A Sable Cloud a-thwart the Welkin flings,
> That swill'd more Liquor than it could contain,
> And like a Drunkard gives it up again.[12]

When Swift finally took up his pen to write on behalf of Ireland, he was fifty-three years old. He had vowed, when he arrived in Ireland six years earlier, in 1714, to steer clear of Irish politics. This vow was no doubt motivated by the bitter disappointments that he suffered in seeking some reward—specifically, an ecclesiastical position in England—for his four years of service to the Tory ministry during the reign of Queen Anne. In fact, as is suggested in a poem entitled "In Sickness" that Swift wrote upon his arrival in Ireland, he seemed at that point to have considered his useful life to be at an end, and ready to embrace, almost eagerly, the role of sick and dying victim:

> 'Tis true,—then why should I repine,
> To see my Life so fast decline?
> But, why obscurely here alone?
> Where I am neither lov'd nor known.
> My State of Health none care to learn;
> My Life is here no Soul's Concern.[13]

It took the Declaratory Act of 1720, which stated that the English parliament had full authority to make laws "of sufficient force and validity to bind the kingdom and people of Ireland," to draw him out of this gloom. Swift's immediate response, expressed in the pamphlet "A Proposal for the Universal Use of *Irish* Manufacture" (1720), took precisely the opposite view. Indeed, one of the pillars of Swift's political position throughout the closing decades of his life was that the relationship between the English parliament and its counterpart in Dublin should be one of equality, both parliaments existing side by side and in the service of the monarchy. This theory inspired *The Drapier's Letters,* as Swift made clear in the third of them:

> Were not the People of *Ireland* born as *free* as those of *England?* . . . Is not their *Parliament* as fair a *Representative* of the *People,* as that of *England?* . . . Does not the same *Sun* shine over them? And have they not the same *God* for their *Protector?* Am I a *Free-man* in *England,* and do I become a *Slave* in six hours by crossing the *Channel?*[14]

Of course, as Swift well knew, the Irish parliament was not a fair representative of the Irish people, but was in fact constructed on the principle of exclusion: of Catholics, about whom Swift does not seem to have been very worried, and of dissenters, whose aggressive characteristics and history (specifically, the Puritan revolution) did worry him considerably. At the same time, he seems to have been reasonably aware of the poverty and suffering experienced by the native Irish. "Whoever travels this Country," he said in "A Proposal for the Universal Use of *Irish* Manufacture," "and observes the *Face* of Nature, or the *Faces,* and Habits, and Dwellings of the *Natives,* will hardly think himself in a Land where either *Law, Religion,* or *common Humanity* is professed." [15] The way to reform, in Swift's view, lay inside existing political and cultural institutions—the "*Law, Religion,* or *common Humanity*"—rather than through revolution. Moreover, from his position as a person of Irish birth who saw himself as betrayed by the English political system, Swift could blame England for much of the suffering of the Irish. As a person who considered himself one of the king's loyal subjects, however, he also could argue that the Irish themselves bore some responsibility for their oppressed condition. Swift did not exclude the Irish parliament from his list of the accused. Indeed, one of his most vitriolic satirical poems is "A Character, Panegyric, and Description of the Legion Club" (1736), an attack on members of the Irish parliament. Swift's view is summed up neatly in these lines, from "A Libel on D——D——and a Certain Great Lord" (1730), concerning the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Carteret:

> And what Condition can be worse?
> He comes to *drain* a *Beggar's Purse:*

He comes to tye our Chains on faster,
And shew us, E——is our Master:
Caressing Knaves and Dunces wooing,
To make them work their own undoing.[16]

Although many of Swift's satirical poems about Ireland are marred by shrillness or oversimplification, at their best his Irish satires, by manipulating various voices and personae, and by entertaining more than one competing view of a given question, effectively embody the complexities of eighteenth-century Irish political and cultural life. Not long after the anonymous publication of "A Proposal for the Universal Use of *Irish* Manufacture," the printer, a Mr. Waters, was prosecuted, inspiring Swift's "An Excellent new Song on a seditious Pamphlet" (1720). In this poem, the satire is delivered through the persona of an Irish shopkeeper who, unlike the narrator of *The Drapier's Letters,* is not sympathetic to Swift's position:

Brocado's, and Damasks, and Tabbies, and Gawses,
Are by *Robert Ballentine* lately brought over;
With Forty Things more: Now hear what the Law says,
Whoe'er will not were them, is not the King's Lover.
Tho' a Printer and Dean
Seditiously mean
Our true *Irish* Hearts from old *England* to wean.[17]

While remaining true to the shopkeeper's point of view, largely by means of colloquial rhythms and diction, these lines ironically undermine that position by exposing the assumption that stands behind the case against Swift: that the ideal relationship between Ireland and England is that of infant suckling and mother. Later, Swift uses the voice of the shopkeeper both to expose the English fear that lies behind the fierce reaction to Swift's pamphlet and to flirt with, without actually embracing, a relatively revolutionary sentiment:

Whoever our Trading with *England* would hinder,
To *inflame* both the Nations do plainly conspire;
Because *Irish* Linen will soon turn to Tinder;
And Wool it is greasy, and quickly takes Fire.[18]

This is Swift's most effective mode of satire, governed by and exploiting the multiple ambiguities that defined the political and cultural context in which he was writing. It enabled him to gesture, when rhetorically necessary, toward relatively extremist views (and thereby encouraged the nineteenth-century reading of him as Ireland's first great nationalist poet), while his sense of the

complexity of Irish life prevented him from embracing without qualification any one position. For example, the view that England was the principal cause of Ireland's deprivation, and the related, essentially nationalist argument for severing Ireland's relationship with England, might be inferred from some of Swift's poems about the Woods halfpence controversy. The conclusion of a version of an Horatian ode that Swift adapted to this purpose ("Horace. Book I. Ode XIV") certainly invites that kind of reading:

> Beware, and when you hear the Surges roar,
> Avoid the Rocks on *Britain's* angry Shore:
> They lye, alas, too easy to be found,
> For thee alone they lye the Island round.[19]

But Swift's view of Ireland's condition is considerably wider than this interpretation suggests. The theme of this ode, as of much of Swift's writing about Ireland, is betrayal, but for Swift the Irish themselves are as guilty of this crime as are the English. Moreover, the principal victim of the betrayal attributed to the Irish is (and here Swift anticipates many modern Irish writers) the writer himself:

> As when some Writer in a public Cause,
> His Pen to save a sinking Nation draws,
> While all is Calm, his Arguments prevail,
> The People's Voice expands his Paper Sail;
> 'Till Pow'r, discharging all her stormy Bags,
> Flutters the feeble Pamphlet into Rags.
> The Nation scar'd, the Author doom'd to Death,
> Who fondly put his Trust in pop'lar Breath.[20]

Swift's ambiguous position as an Anglo-Irishman who considered himself alienated from both England and Ireland stands behind this condemnation of both English "Pow'r" and the "pop'lar Breath" of the Irish on whose behalf he is writing. This self-reflexive, autobiographical stance is characteristic of much of Swift's writing about Ireland. Not until Yeats is there an Irish poet so obsessed as Swift with creating and exploring various images of self, and these self-conscious self-presentations reflect not only Swift's own personal, political, and cultural insecurities but also the complexity and instability of the eighteenth-century Ireland in which he was working. In "My Lady's Lamentation and Complaint against the Dean" (1728), for example, Swift's ironies generate a complexity that gives this self-portrait considerable psychological authenticity, and describes the ambiguous, unstable relationship between the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish. Swift's ability to negotiate between these two

divided groups and between their stereotyped perceptions of each other—one of the principal causes of their mutual alienation—can be seen when the Anglo-Irish narrator disparagingly describes Swift's relationship with those below him on the social ladder:

> He's all the day saunt'ring,
> With labourers bant'ring,
> Among his colleagues,
> A parcel of Teagues,
> (Whom he brings in among us
> And bribes with mundungus.)
> Hail, fellow, well met,
> All dirty and wet:
> Find out, if you can,
> Who's master, who's man.[21]

This method of projecting his self-image through other characters reaches its most ambitious point in "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" (1731), in which multiple voices of evaluation are filtered through a first-person narrator, and in which Swift sets out his views on the poet and his position in society. In the self-reflexive argument of this poem—and in Swift's experience, as he saw it—the writer is certain to be a figure of alienation whom society punishes with obscurity for telling the truth: "Had he but spar'd his Tongue and Pen,/He might have rose like other Men."[22] Nonetheless, the writer has a moral obligation to address political and social issues, even if the result is enforced or effective silence. Moreover, all writing, but particularly satire, can be justified only if it is written out of a moral vision, not out of spite. "Malice never was his aim," says the narrator speaking on Swift's behalf.[23] All kinds of ironies and paradoxes hover around this self-image. Swift was not, at least in Ireland, the outcast figure that he often projected himself to be. And malice was quite frequently his aim; much of his satire is marred by a bitterness and invective that he could not or would not control. Finally, the idea that the successful satirist is doomed to an ineffectual alienation is belied by the very poem that makes the argument; "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" was widely regarded at the time as a powerful and effective satire on Irish society. Nonetheless, through all the mirrors and ironies, the poem does present an aesthetics of alienation that clearly defined Swift's view of himself as an Irish poet and that governed much of his writing.

Swift was aware, to some extent at least, of the other culture that surrounded him but was essentially foreign to him: the Gaelic tradition that during Swift's lifetime suffered a continual decline from which it has never recovered. The most obvious evidence for this is Swift's "The Description of an *Irish-Feast*"

(1720), an English version of an eighteenth-century Irish poem, "Pléaráca na Ruarcach," which tells of a famous feast given by a Co. Leitrim chieftain named Brian O'Rourke in the sixteenth century. Believed to be the work of Aodh Mac Gabhráin (Hugh MacGauran), an Irish poet who flourished in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the poem was set to an air, "O'Rourke's Feast," by the blind Irish harper Turlough Carolan. How it came to Swift's attention is not known—Carolan's air may well have had something to do with it[24]—but Swift's version, written in a thumping iambic/anapaestic dimeter, is not at all faithful to the subtle rhythms of the original (a far more sensitive version was written by Austin Clarke in the twentieth century [25]). Nonetheless, the poem is informed by a rough, driving energy that is true to the occasion that it describes, and by an unblinking realism true to the nature of Gaelic poetry in general, as is evident in this description of the brawl that follows the eating and drinking:

> What Stabs and what Cuts,
> What clatt'ring of Sticks,
> What Strokes on Guts,
> What Bastings and Kicks![26]

However much Swift has imposed an alien poetic form on this Irish material, there are a few places in his version where he seems to echo the complex assonantal patterns that are the trademark of much Gaelic verse, specifically a standard Gaelic pattern of linkages between terminal and medial positions:

> O'Rourk's noble *Fare*
> Will *ne'er* be forgot,
> By those who were *there,*
> Or those who were not.
> . . .
> O there is the *Sport,*
> We rise with the Light,
> In dis*ord*erly *Sort,*
> From *snor*ing all Night.[27] (emphasis added)

Swift was, of course, perfectly capable of seeing his own interest, and that of his class, in Ireland's Gaelic past in the context of his own characteristic division between affection for Ireland and exasperation with it. On the surface, his poem entitled "Verses occasioned by the sudden drying up of St. Patrick's Well" (1729) can be read as contrasting the glories of Ireland's cultural past with the debasement and corruption of its present. The claims for Ireland's

native culture are made, appropriately enough, by St. Patrick himself, who narrates the poem:

> *Ierne,* to the World's remotest Parts,
> Renown'd for Valour, Policy and Arts.
> Hither from *Colchos,* with the fleecy Ore,
> *Jason* arriv'd two thousand Years before.
> Thee, happy Island, *Pallas* call'd her own,
> When haughty *Britain* was a Land unknown.[28]

The ironies that lurk here within St. Patrick's unqualified enthusiasm (the kind of enthusiasm that led many nineteenth-century nationalists to make extravagant claims for Ireland's culture and history) are reinforced in extensive footnotes that Swift attached to the text of the poem, citing in strictly scholarly form but with obvious ironic intent a host of classical and English authorities to support St. Patrick's assertions of former glories for Ireland, including Virgil, the text of a Greek poem about the Argonaut, and even the venerable Bede.

In September of 1727, Swift was literally suspended between England and Ireland, forced by unfavorable winds to lay up at Holyhead while on a journey back to Ireland. Swift was irritated by the delay; he knew that Stella was ill, and he was eager to be with her. In his anxiety and frustration, he scratched out the angry lines of "Holyhead," ending with a scathing denunciation of Ireland:

> I never was in hast before
> To reach that slavish hateful shore
> Before, I always found the wind
> To me was most malicious kind
> But now, the danger of a friend
> On whom my fears and hopes depend
> Absent from whom all Clymes are curst
> With whom I'm happy in the worst
> With rage impatient makes me wait
> A passage to the land I hate.
> Else, rather on this bleaky shore
> Where loudest winds incessant roar
> Where neither herb nor tree will thrive,
> Where nature hardly seems alive,
> I'd go in freedom to my grave,
> Than Rule yon Isle and be a Slave.[29]

This fantasy did not come true; Swift is buried, with Stella, in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Moreover, Swift did, as its leading literary figure, rule "yon Isle"

for years while remaining, despite and because of this, its slave. A significant tradition of Irish writing might be said to rest on that Swiftian paradox.

Satire and Song in the Shadow of Swift

Most of the writers in Dublin in the early decades of the eighteenth century had some kind of relationship, sympathetic or hostile, with Swift, and most were arguably inhibited by Swift's powerful and singular poetic voice, much as many of the poets associated with the Irish literary revival were overshadowed by Yeats nearly two centuries later. Swift's contemporaries also tended to rely on the neo-Augustan poetic conventions that dominated poetry in England at the time but, when applied to Irish materials, often produced problematic results. Nevertheless, these poets embody in their work aspects of eighteenth-century Irish culture not always evident in Swift's work, and they anticipate several important aspects of the tradition of Irish poetry as it develops in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Two political satirists working very much under the shadow of Swift were Jonathan Smedley (1671–c. 1729) and John Winstanley (c. 1677–1750). Born in Dublin just four years after Swift, Smedley followed Swift to Trinity College and then into the Church of Ireland, becoming dean of Killala in 1718 and dean of Clogher in 1724. Unlike Swift, however, Smedley was an ardent supporter of the Whigs in Dublin, and so saw Swift's going over to the Tories in 1710 as the unforgivable act of a traitor. Like Swift, Smedley had a gift for sharp-edged satire. The difference is that Smedley directed his satire less toward political and social issues than toward individuals, including, in perhaps his best-known poem, Swift himself. "Verses, *Fix'd on the Cathedral Door, the Day of* Dean Gulliver's *Installment*" depicts Swift as a man of neither political principle nor religious faith:

> Today, this Temple gets a *Dean,*
> Of Parts and Fame, uncommon;
> Us'd, both to Pray, and to Prophane,
> To serve both *God* and *Mammon*
> . . .
> This Place He got by Wit and Rhime,
> And many Ways most odd;
> And might a Bishop be, in Time,
> Did he believe in God.
> . . .
> Look down, St. *Patrick,* look, we pray,
> On thine own *Church and Steeple;*

Convert thy *Dean,* on this *Great Day;*
Or else God help the People![30]

Given the evidence, Smedley's claim that Swift was not a believer went close to the mark.[31] But Swift did, of course, reply—"Ah never lay thy Head to Rest!/That Head so well by Wisdom fraught!/That writes without the Toil of Thought"[32]—and Smedley was included as one of the dunces in Pope's *The Dunciad.*

For many in Swift's circle, rural Ireland and the Gaelic culture that lay beyond the English pale were hardly worth thinking about. This prejudice, based on a willed ignorance and usually manifesting itself in condescension, is exemplified in Smedley's "A Familiar Epistle to the Earl of Sunderland," a poem in which Ireland outside Dublin is viewed as a cultural wasteland: "Cloudy's the Climate, *Poor* the Land;/Verse thrives not on the barren Sand."[33] Smedley's stance illustrates how the neo-classical affinity for urban culture in general could be put to particular political use in Ireland, making it possible to see the native Irish as savages in need of Anglo-Irish if not English civilization.

Winstanley's work is considerable in bulk: his poetry was collected in two thick volumes, one published in 1742 and one in 1751.[34] But his verse is generally more limited than is Smedley's by neo-Augustan conventions and a voice too strongly imitative of Swift. There is also a tendency toward low farce and vulgarity. At times, however, this son of a Dublin lawyer is capable of writing with convincing realism about aspects of eighteenth-century Dublin ignored by much of the relatively polite or politically focused verse of the period. In "An Elegy on Capt. Molineux," for example, Winstanley gets much closer than a poet like Smedley ever does to the seamy underside of the city's nightlife:

'Twas twelve at Night; patrolling were the *Watch,*
Poor strolling *Strums,* or bosky *Cits* to catch;
While roaring *Bullies* pass them boldly by,
And *Rogues* and *Robbers* sculk, or from them fly;
When luckless *Molineux* just made a sally,
From guz'ling Belch and Brandy in *Smock-Ally*
With *Bawds, Pimps, Bullies, Pickpockets,* and *Whores,*
Who made him drunk, then kick'd him out of Doors.[35]

This passage echoes Swift's early descriptive poems about urban life, but with a specifically Dublin focus, and Winstanley's work in this vein anticipates the urban realism of twentieth-century Dublin poets such as Seamus O'Sullivan and James Stephens. But in the end, "An Elegy on Captain Molineux" dissi-

pates its energies in a vulgar farce in which the hero is strangled by his mistress using his own wig.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Winstanley is the work of Thomas Parnell (1679–1718), the most polished and probably most accomplished of the early-eighteenth-century Dublin poets. Next to Swift, Parnell was the best-known Irish poet in his age (his poems stayed in print through most of the eighteenth century, Goldsmith wrote a biography of him, and Samuel Johnson included him in *The Lives of the Poets),* and his work has survived into the twentieth century better than that of most of his contemporaries (the Cuala Press published a selection of his poems, edited by Lennox Robinson, in 1927, and a new collected edition was published in 1989). The son of a Chesire gentleman who had supported Cromwell and, following the Restoration, gone to ground in Ireland, Parnell entered Trinity College at the precocious age of thirteen, taking a Master's degree in 1700. He entered the church, and in 1705 was made archdeacon of Clogher, the church of which Smedley later became dean. His life was divided between his duties in Ireland and his friends in London, notably the members of the distinguished if somewhat maverick Scriblerus Club (Pope, Swift, Dr. John Arbuthnot, John Gay, and the Earl of Oxford among them). Parnell was particularly close to Pope; he wrote the preface for Pope's translation of the *Iliad,* and Pope, it has been said, revised many of Parnell's poems.

Given his background, education, and associations, it is hardly surprising that so much of Parnell's writing bears the marks of the neo-classical fashion that dominated the English literary scene to which he aspired. "He appears to me," Goldsmith wrote, "to be the last of that great school that had modelled itself upon the ancients, and taught English poetry to resemble what the generality of mankind have allowed to excel."[36] He also had something to teach eighteeenth-century Irish poetry in English, most notably the high pitch of lyricism to be found in his love poems. Dr. Johnson praised "the easy sweetness of his diction,"[37] and in this "Song," that quality combines with a pleasantly casual, partly anapaestic rhythm to generate the lyric quality for which Parnell was so admired:

When thy Beauty appears
In its Graces and Airs,
All bright as an Angel new dropt from the Sky;
At distance I gaze, and am aw'd by my Fears,
So strangely you dazzle my Eye!

But when without Art,
Your kind Thoughts you impart,
When your Love runs in Blushes thro' ev'ry Vein;
When it darts from your Eyes, when it pants in your Heart,
Then I know you're a Woman again.[38]

Although it seems unlikely that Parnell was well acquainted with the traditions of Irish verse, the rhythms here resist the iambic rigors of much eighteenth-century English poetry,while seeming to anticipate the connections made later, most notably by Thomas Moore at the beginning of the next century, between poetry in English and the Irish song tradition.

By all accounts, Parnell was emotionally unstable, subject to fits of acute depression. He reportedly spent the last years of his life, after the death of his wife and the failure of his political ambitions in London (similar to those in which Swift was disappointed), in the throes of alcoholism. When he fell into a melancholic mood, he retreated, Goldsmith says, "to the remote parts of Ireland, and there made out a gloomy kind of satisfaction, in giving hideous descriptions of the solitude to which he retired."[39] Some of these found their way into his verse, sounding the note of melancholy characteristic of much Irish writing and often identifying his own despair with the condition, or at least the landscape, of Ireland, a practice brought to its romantic fruition in the work of James Clarence Mangan more than a century later. One of Parnell's best-known poems, "A Nightpiece on Death," which Goldsmith described as a poem that "with very little amendment might be made to surpass all those night pieces and church yard scenes that have since appeared,"[40] exemplifies both Parnell's melancholy and his empathic use of Irish scenery, here with characteristics that anticipate Irish Gothicism:

> The slumb'ring Breeze forgets to breathe,
> The Lake is smooth and clear beneath,
> Where once again the spangled Show
> Descends to meet our Eyes below.
> The Grounds which on the right aspire,
> In dimness from the View retire:
> The Left presents a place of Graves,
> Whose Wall the silent Water laves.
> That Steeple guides thy doubtful sight
> Among the livid gleams of Night.
>
> . . .
>
> Now from yon black and fun'ral Yew,
> That bathes the Charnel House with Dew,
> Methinks I hear a *Voice* begin;
> (Ye Ravens, cease your croaking Din,
> Ye tolling Clocks, no Time resound
> O'er the long Lake and midnight Ground)
> It sends a Peal of hollow Groans,
> Thus speaking from among the Bones.[41]

This Gothic gloom gives way, by the end of the poem, to religious consolation, although a considerable amount of poetic force is lost in the transition. Parnell

was seriously committed to writing poetry of religious belief. In this, he stands somewhat apart from most writers in Swift's circle, and certainly from Swift himself, who treated religion almost exclusively in terms of its political and cultural significance. Parnell's religious verse is not among his best writing, but at times it embodies a nearly romantic view of the relation between the natural world, God, and the poet, as in this passage from "A Hymn on Contentment":

> The Sun that walks his airy Way,
> To light the World, and give the Day;
> The Moon that shines with borow'd Light,
> The Stars that gild the gloomy Night,
> The Seas that roll unnumber'd Waves,
> The Wood that spreads its shady Leaves,
> The Field whose Ears conceal the Grain,
> The yellow Treasure of the Plain;
> All of these, and all I see,
> Wou'd be sung, and sung by me.
> They speak their *Maker* as they can,
> But want and ask the Tongue of Man.[42]

Parnell died in Chester, at the age of thirty-eight, while en route from London to Ireland. Like many Anglo-Irishmen of his day, he lived a life that was deeply divided in its national loyalties and cultural interests. If, as Lennox Robinson said of him, "he belonged completely to neither country,"[43] it might also be said that, because of his poetry, he belongs still to both.

While Parnell's reputation depended to some extent on his being friends with Pope and Swift, that of Matthew Concanen (1701–1749) depended to more or less the same extent on his being their enemy. Believed to be a native of Dublin, Concanen went to London in the 1720s, taking up journalism on behalf of the Whigs. Among those whom he attacked was Pope, who promptly included him in *The Dunciad* of 1729 in highly unflattering terms: "True to the bottom see Concanen creep,/A cold, long-winded native of the deep."[44] Swift denigrated him in "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" four years later. It seems unlikely that this Irish-born poet who did not attend Trinity College and did not become a Church of Ireland clergyman (and who may have had Catholics of Gaelic origin in his background) deserved all this vituperation. His literary credentials were quite impressive. His first successes as a writer came at an astonishingly early age; his play *Wexford Wells* was staged at Dublin's Smock Alley Theatre in 1720, when Concanen was just nineteen. Two years later he was well enough regarded in literary circles to be asked to write the prologue and epilogue for Thomas Betterton's *The Amorous Widow,* also put on at Smock Alley. Concanen had by then already published the long, mock-heroic poem that established his reputa-

tion, "A Match at Foot-ball" (1721), and in 1722, when he was twenty-one, his *Poems upon Several Occasions* appeared. In 1724, he published *Miscellaneous Poems,* generally regarded as the first anthology of Irish poetry in English, which included several poems by Swift and Parnell, among others. However, this career that started so early ended early as well; Concanen seems to have given up poetry once he became established as a London journalist, and he spent his mature years in public service (he was appointed attorney general to Jamaica in 1732) and in amassing a sizable private fortune.

The poetry, then, is the work of a young man. The best of it is closer to the traditions of popular song than it is to that of the English neo-classicism that inspired those Anglo-Irish poets who were products of Trinity College. Although Concanen's poetry in this vein bears few if any marks of the tradition of Gaelic airs that shaped Thomas Moore's poetry nearly a century later, Concanen did at times use the forms of popular song to deliver political messages. In "A Ballad," for example, a song from *Wexford Wells,* the popular drinking song becomes a vehicle for sharply anti-English views:

Let others raise
Their Voice to praise
The *Rhenish* or the *Sherry,*
The sparkling *White,*
Champaign so bright,
The *Claret* or *Canary.*
'Tis true, they'll thaw the freezing Blood,
And hinder our being sober;
But what for that was e'er so good
As lovely brown *OCTOBER?*

What Knaves are they
Who cross the Sea.
To bring such Stuff among us?
How blind are we,
Who will not see
How grievously they wrong us?

They spoil the Products of the Land,
And of her Coin disrobe her;
But yet their Dregs can never stand
Against our brave *OCTOBER.*[45]

This poem was sung on a Dublin stage the same year that Swift's pamphlet "A Proposal for the Universal Use of *Irish* Manufacture" was published, and it echoes Swift's argument for supporting Irish-made products and boycotting

foreign ones. Concanen's poem is certainly less blatant in its revolutionary sentiments than is Swift's pamphlet—the shift from "lovely brown OCTOBER" to "our brave OCTOBER" is perhaps the most politically daring part of the poem—but it is nonetheless effective, and deserves a place in the rich tradition of Irish songs with political subtexts.

"A Match at Foot-ball," Concanen's best-known poem, illustrates all too well a problem faced by many eighteenth-century Irish poets writing in English: the difficulty of writing about Irish material in forms essentially alien to it. "A Match at Foot-ball" is a mock-heroic epic, modelled on Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" (written a decade earlier), and part of its business is to parody satirically many of the poetic conventions then in vogue. But Concanen's poetic vehicle is not English social life but a football match between two Irish teams, and whatever Concanen's own position might have been—and it does seem less thoroughly Anglo-Irish than that of someone like Smedley or Parnell, writing from inside the Anglo-Irish Protestant establishment—the disjunction between the poem's form (part of the world of English poetics and manners) and its subject-matter (part of the world of native Irish life) encourages an attitude of condescension, as can be seen in this portrait of one of the players:

> The next to these in Place was sturdy *Hugh,*
> His Sinews tougher than the twanging Yew,
> For hence on *Wicklow's* steepy Mountains bred,
> With strengthening Pig-nuts and Potato's fed.[46]

This tendency seems endemic to Anglo-Irish poetry in Concanen's day, and can be found even in poems apparently intended to celebrate native Irish culture. Like many of the poets writing in Ireland at this time, Matthew Pilkington (c. 1701–1774) was educated at Trinity College and ordained into the Church of Ireland. He was also a classical scholar and a musician. His "The Progress of Music in *Ireland*" (1725) is a kind of cultural history in verse, and represents an attempt to recognize the significance and validity of Ireland's Gaelic past. For example, the poem contains a tribute to Turlough Carolan, the Irish harper who inspired a number of Irish poets writing in English in the eighteenth century:

> The Vagrant *Bard* his circling Visits pays,
> And charms the Villages with venal Lays.
> The solemn *Harp,* beneath his Shoulder plac'd,
> With both his Arms is earnestly embrac'd,
> Sweetly irregular, now swift, now slow,
> With soft Variety his Numbers flow,
> The shrill, the deep, the gentle, and the strong,

With pleasing Dissonance adorn his Song;
While thro' the Chords his Hands unweary'd range,
The Music changing as his Fingers change.[47]

There certainly seems to be no conscious condescension in these lines, or, for that matter, in most of this lengthy poem, but the heroic couplet, a trademark of neo-Augustan English verse, keeps the poem at a considerable distance from its subject matter. In this passage, for example, the regulated rhythm of the heroic couplet is inappropriate to a description of the "Sweetly irregular" rhythms of Carolan. It is a significant measure of the hold that English poetry had on eighteenth-century Irish poets that it is not until a century after the time of Swift and his contemporaries that Irish poets writing in English began to incorporate into their verse some of the sweetly irregular music of poetry written in Irish.

Issues of Gender

In his last active years, during the 1730s, Swift was surrounded by a circle of admirers, including three Anglo-Irish women intent on making their marks as poets in a male-dominated literary world: Mary Barber, Constantia Grierson, and Laetitia Pilkington. Whatever his motives—and The Earl of Orrery, for one, found the situation a little odd: "You would have smiled," he wrote to a friend, "to have found his house a constant seraglio of very virtuous women, who attended him from morning till night, with an obedience, an awe and an assiduity,"[48]—Swift used his considerable influence to help all three get their work published. The particular difficulties that these women faced as aspiring poets were unwittingly identified by Swift in a letter that he wrote to that same Earl of Orrery in 1733, recommending the poetry of Mary Barber. "She seemeth to have a true political Genius," Swift wrote, "better cultivated than could well be expected, either from her Sex, or the Scene she hath acted in, as the Wife of a Citizen."[49] For these women, the attitudes revealed in these remarks compounded significantly the cultural and political ambiguities surrounding Anglo-Irish writers in the eighteenth century in general. And the work of all three of these writers is distinctively marked by this situation: not only is their writing more gender-conscious than is that of their male counterparts, but also their satire is frequently directed at oppressive male attitudes and a society seen to be governed by them. All three women poets led lives that were, for their time, unconventional. Barber lived apart from her husband for years while she was trying to make her way as a writer, Grierson came from a relatively poor family who expected her to become a midwife, and Pilkington was charged by her poet-husband Matthew with adultery and eventually divorced,

amid considerable scandal. (Swift banished both husband and wife from his circle, reportedly remarking: "He proved the falsest rogue and she the most profligate whore in either kingdom." [50]) It is hardly surprising that these writers tended to see themselves as alienated, or that their work tends to be preoccupied with defining and defending their positions as women who write, a concern that characterizes Irish women writers from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

It is ironic that Mary Barber (1690–1757),[51] who depicted herself in her poetry as a prisoner of the domestic role that her society expected her to play, should have begun her poetic career by writing poems aimed at helping her children remember the moral precepts that she was teaching them. The wife of a Dublin woolen draper described by one of Barber's friends as a man who "drinks his claret, smokes his pipe and cares not a pin for any of his family who, if they had not met with better friends than himself, might have starved," [52] she emerged into the public literary eye as a result of her attempt to help an officer's widow get satisfaction in her stalled petition for support from the government. Barber wrote a petition in the form of a poem addressed to Lady Carteret, wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland at the time (1724), and the poem, "The Widow Gordon's Petition," made such an impression that it led to an introduction to Swift. Ten years later, after much struggle, she published *Poems on Several Occasions,* which ran to a second edition in 1735 and a third in 1736. For most of the rest of her life, plagued by illness and her apparently indifferent husband, Barber struggled to establish her independence as a writer, even when that required the scandalous act of keeping house separately from her husband.

"The Widow Gordon's Petition" constructs a relatively sophisticated rhetorical appeal on behalf of the widow, first making the emotional claim of one mother speaking to another and then arguing that a woman of Lady Carteret's reputation for generosity could do no less than help. With at times remarkable success, the poem employs an appropriately melodramatic voice to present the widow as lonely and helpless, a woman adrift without the support of a man in a male-controlled society. This image becomes an emblem of Barber's own position as a woman poet:

> No friendly Voice my lonely Mansion cheers;
> All fly th'Inflection of my Widow's Tears:
> Even those, whose Pity eas'd my Wants with Bread,
> Are now, O sad Reverse! my greatest Dread.
> My mournful Story will no more prevail,
> And ev'ry Hour I dread a dismal Jail:
> I start at each imaginary Sound,
> And *Horrors have encompass'd me around.*[53]

This ability to manipulate dramatic voice is characteristic of the best of Barber's work. No doubt it owes more than a little to the influence of Swift, but this kind of poetic ventriloquism also derives from and embodies the cultural insecurities that define Barber's position as an Anglo-Irish woman in the eighteenth century. At times, this dramatic mode works through irony to expose the forces responsible for that position. In a poem entitled "Conclusion of a Letter to the Rev. Mr. C——," Barber uses a male fictional voice to satirize male attitudes toward women:

> I pity poor *Barber,* his Wife's so romantick:
> A Letter in Rhyme!—Why, the Woman is frantick!
> This Reading the Poets has quite turn'd her Head!
> On my Life, she should have a dark Room, and Straw-Bed.[54]

Later, ironic mask firmly in place, the narrator outlines what he considers to be the qualities of an ideal wife:

> If ever I marry, I'll choose me a Spouse,
> That shall *serve* and *obey,* as she's bound by her Vows;
> That shall, When I'm dressing, attend like a Valet;
> Then go to the Kitchen, and study my Palate.
> She has Wisdom enough, that keeps out of the Dirt,
> And can make a good *Pudding,* and cut out a *Shirt.*
> What Good's in a Dame, that will pore on a Book?
> No!—Give me the Wife, that shall save me a Cook.[55]

In "To a Lady who invited the Author into the Country" (1728), Barber converts the conventional, polite form of a verse letter into a vehicle for her frustration:

> O! would kind Heav'n reverse my Fate,
> Give me to quit a Life I hate,
> To flow'ry fields I soon would fly:
> Let others stay—to *cheat* and *lie.*
> There, in some blissful Solitude,
> Where eating Care should ne'er intrude,
> The Muse should do the Country Right,
> And paint the glorious Scenes *you* slight.[56]

This poem reverses the eighteenth-century convention associating the city with cultural fertility and the country with barrenness, a convention more English than Irish; the city is seen as the place of the woman's imprisonment, the place

where she is made to conform to society's expectations of what a woman should be, while the countryside is perceived as a place where she could fulfill herself as an artist precisely because there she could be liberated from those expectations.

As is particularly evident in some of the nationalist poetry written by women in the nineteenth century, the image of Ireland as a woman (Cathleen Ní Houlihan, the Shan Van Vocht) victimized by male England often occludes issues of gender in the interest of a political ideology committed to eliminating or absorbing difference. Barber's writing, however, tends to resist the tendency to make gender issues subservient to nationalist ones. As a middle-class Anglo-Irish woman trying to establish herself as a poet in a male-dominated society, Barber draws correspondences between her position and Ireland's difficulties in establishing its independence and prosperity, but she does so in ways that insist on the validity of both gender and nationalist issues. In "To the Right Hon. Lady Dowager Torrington," Barber yearns for a poetic release from her position both as a woman and as a woman living in Ireland:

> A Life of unsuccessful Care
> Too often sinks us to Despair.
> From such a Life as this, I chuse
> To snatch some Moments for the Muse;
> To slight Mortality, and soar
> To Worlds where Anguish is no more;
> Forget IERNE'S wretched State,
> Tho' doomed to share her cruel Fate;
> Destin'd to pass my joyless Days,
> Where Poverty, relentless, preys;
> And form'd, unhappily, to grieve
> For Miseries I can't relieve.[57]

The sophistication of Barber's writing can, to some extent, be measured by comparing it with that of her contemporary and friend, Constantia Grierson (c. 1706–1733). Born into a relatively disadvantaged family in Co. Kilkenny, Grierson managed to pick up considerable learning from the minister of her parish, including knowledge of Greek and Roman literature. She married a man who was given a patent as a king's printer, but the relatively few poems that she wrote in her short life—she died when she was twenty-seven—were never collected in a single volume; several were included in Barber's *Poems on Several Occasions* and in an anthology entitled *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755). Barber praised Grierson's poems for doing "Honour to the Female Sex in general, as they are a strong Proof that Women may have so much Virtue," [58] but in truth Grierson's poetry, consisting chiefly of light satire on the comings