

## **Writing Irish Nationhood: Jonathan Swift's Coming to Terms with his Birthplace.**

By Afrin Zeenat

“Swift can...combine contraries of the most compelling kind.”<sup>1</sup>

Seamus Deane.

“... the Janus-faced ambivalence of language... in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation.”<sup>2</sup>

Homi K. Bhabha

Echoing Bhabha's statement, Jonathan Swift's "Janus-faced ambivalence" toward his birthplace Ireland has puzzled many readers making it difficult for them to identify him as an Irish patriot.<sup>3</sup> Despite Swift's works on Ireland in which he rallies for Ireland and the native Irish, many critics continue to stress Swift's anathema and contempt for people of his native land.<sup>4</sup> Such an essentialist reading of Swift would fail to understand the innate ambivalence that is a salient feature of his works. Swift's Irish tracts point to a change in his attitude towards his native land, which asserts itself forcefully as his love for England and things English ebb, and can be attributed to personal, political and historical reasons. Swift's life and works presage the ambivalence that is later pronounced in the works of post-colonial writers, who often vacillate between the country of their colonial overlords and their native countries. Based on Frantz Fanon's ideas on the formation of a national consciousness,<sup>5</sup> this chapter will trace a similar formation of Swift's national consciousness for his native country, which finds a voice in his works on Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> Seamus Deane, "Classic Swift," *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 245.

<sup>2</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 3.

<sup>3</sup> John Richardson, "Still to Seek: Politics, Irony, Swift," *Essays in Criticism*, XLIX (1999)

<sup>4</sup> Joseph McMinn, "Swift's Life," *Cambridge Companion*, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Frantz Fanon, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1961), 119-162.

Critics of Swift and his works can be categorized as “hard” and “soft”, depending on how they evaluate him and his work.<sup>6</sup> Critics belonging to the “hard” school comprise some of his contemporaries and those who come later, like Samuel Johnson, Lord Orrery, Sir Walter Scott, George Orwell and Edward Rosenheim, Jr. For them, Swift remains till his death disgruntled and unhappy with his life as Dean of St. Patrick’s and in Ireland. Because he was an Anglo-Irish and a Protestant, his works on Ireland have been looked upon with suspicion. Citing his comments on the deplorable condition of the Irish, these critics brand him anti-Irish. In this regard John Richardson suggests “it is commonplace that an observer’s context limits his or her perception of another’s situation sometimes to the point of total blindness. This kind of contextual limiting, though not blindness, seems to have played a part in modern account of Swift.”<sup>7</sup> According to Richardson this kind of “contextual limiting” make critics understand Swift merely as an elitist who could only take sides with people of his kind, the Anglo-Irish and not the native Irish. They believe that the natural affiliation he felt for the Anglo-Irish or the English remained unchanged till his death. These critics ignore his works like *The Drapier Letters*, *A Modest Proposal* and *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*, which are sympathetic to the plight of the native Irish, instead see them as resulting from Swift’s conscious desire to create a mythologized persona of a pro-Irish Englishman.<sup>8</sup> This chapter identifies a change in Swift’s outlook that resulted in these works and in Book 3 of *Gulliver’s Travels*, where Swift takes up the cause of the native Irish.

Conversely, critics of the “soft” school—namely Edward Said, Irvin Ehrenpreis, Claude Rawson, Samuel Holt Monk, Carole Fabricant, John Richardson—read his Irish tracts as an indictment of the eight-century-long English conquest of Ireland.<sup>9</sup> This school relies primarily on Swift’s use of irony and satire, to state that Swift’s writing displays his desire to slip away from being assigned any particular political position. John

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<sup>6</sup> J. Paul Hunter, “*Gulliver’s Travels* and the Later Writings,” *Cambridge Companion*, 233.

<sup>7</sup> John Richardson, “Still to Seek: Politics, Irony, Swift,” *Essays in Criticism* XLIX (1999): 300.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Cline Kelly, *Jonathan Swift and Popular Culture: Myth, Media and the Man*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 81.

<sup>9</sup> Carole Fabricant, “Swift the Irishman,” *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48-72.

Richardson notes, “Swift is wary of being perceived and pinned down by others, and of thus being their thing. The result is that the reader who tries to find Swift in his shifting pronouncement...is likely that he or she has ‘still to seek.’”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, instead of trying to ‘pin’ him down according to modern standards of equality and democracy, we could as ‘judicious’ readers interpret his affiliations and his works in their actual historical and social context. Summing up Swift’s life, Said gives us an unbiased view of him:

No doubt Swift wanted more out of life than to be Dean of St. Patrick’s, or that he hoped Harley and St. John would some day make him a minister, or that he would acquire more wealth and position than his modest station allowed him initially. But these ambitions, however much their frustration angered him, did not prevent him from being energetic, powerful, and effective when he did his writing.<sup>11</sup>

Bringing within its ambit the criticism of both schools, this paper will establish that Swift’s contempt for the Irish, imbibed from his Anglo-Irish community and his love for England, informs his writings on Ireland as he attempts to transcend his prejudices.

In Swift’s time, when an English colonial ambition was taking shape, Scotland and Ireland became the first victims. Untrained in their vocation of colonization and settled in foreign climes, the English settlers in Ireland and Scotland felt an acute sense of displacement from their homeland. Memories of England and English culture may have heightened their dislike for life in foreign lands and the natives in the new lands. These English settlers had to be content with that life. Swift’s own life mirrors the life of these settlers who oscillated between England and Ireland.

Reports suggest that Swift’s childhood in Ireland was quite a traumatic one.<sup>12</sup> Fatherless and abandoned by his mother, who settled in England, Swift saw England as the land of promise. His earliest experience of life in Ireland was one of “loss and

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<sup>10</sup> Richardson, “Still to Seek: Politics, Irony, Swift,” 309. Richardson further notes “its [Swift’s irony] elusive quality fends off commitment to what might be false self-definition, keeps the dogs of interpretation at bay, and leaves the reader always ‘still to seek.’”

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, “Swift as Intellectual,” *The World, The Text, and The Critic*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1983), 79.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph McMinn, “Swift’s Life,” *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.

insecurity.”<sup>13</sup> Ireland, then, for the young Swift was the place where he suffered hardships. Swift went to England for the first time at the age of twenty-two when he visited his mother at Leicester in 1689.<sup>14</sup> Immediately afterwards, he took employment under Sir William Temple, a renowned diplomat, residing in Moor Park where Swift spent considerable time. London and its many attractions had an impact on Swift, as it would have had on any Anglo-Irish visiting England for the first time. The immense opportunities and the intellectual atmosphere that Swift experienced in London, first under Sir William Temple and later in the literary circle of the likes of Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison, propelled him to nurture ambitions of his own. Though dazzled by the brilliance of London life, Swift still returned to Ireland during his service under Sir William Temple. After a year of residence with Sir William Temple Swift took “holy orders” in a church in Kilroot.<sup>15</sup> Swift probably could not make up his mind regarding the course of his life. Vacillating between England and Ireland became a recurrent pattern in Swift’s life. Attributing a sense of nostalgia that Swift may have felt for Ireland, Carole Fabricant observes “that if Swift’s stays in England rendered him susceptible to the enticements of a permanent settlement there, they also impressed upon him the sacrifices such a settlement would entail by making him acutely conscious of what he would be leaving behind in Ireland.”<sup>16</sup> In these oscillations we can trace Swift’s divided loyalty for England and Ireland.

Swift’s political life in England, too, follows a similar pattern. He started his political career, influenced by his mentor Sir Temple, as a Whig. But he differed with the Whigs on religious issues and later became a Tory propagandist. According to F. P. Locke, Swift is “Whiggish by nurture but Tory by nature.”<sup>17</sup> But as he matured, he became disillusioned by both parties. David Oakleaf remarks, “As Whig and Tory positions changed around him, he found himself neither Whig nor Tory in the terms of

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<sup>13</sup> McMinn, “Swift’s Life,” *The Cambridge Companion* 16.

<sup>14</sup> McMinn, 16. In *Family of Swift*, Swift writes that he was abducted and taken to England by a nurse when he was one year old. In the absence of evidence this account has not received credence.

<sup>15</sup> Fabricant, “Swift the Irishman,” *Cambridge Companion*, 49-50.

<sup>16</sup> Fabricant, “Swift the Irishman,” 50.

<sup>17</sup> Qtd. in David Oakleaf, “Politics and History,” *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 35.

Queen Anne's reign."<sup>18</sup> These changes in Swift's ideologies and political affiliations pave the way for Swift's changed feelings for Ireland as he matures.

Aligning with the Anglo-Irish community and harboring pro-English feelings are the oft-mentioned charges leveled against Swift. Thomas Moore and Seamus Deane see him primarily as an Anglo-Irish who cared hardly cared for the fate of the native Irish.<sup>19</sup> The stereotypes of the Irish created by English and the Anglo-Irish may have contributed in Swift's initial or lifelong (as many critics would have us believe) dislike for the Irish.<sup>20</sup> Being a product of the community, Swift's allegiance to the Anglo-Irish and the English is understandable. But his attempts to speak on behalf of the native Irish in *The Drapier Letters* and *A Modest Proposal*, are commendable. In *A Modest Proposal* Swift reverses the stereotype of the Irish as cannibals and accuses the purveyors of this stereotype, the English, of being the real cannibals.<sup>21</sup> At a time when taking sides with the Irish would have been harmful for him personally and professionally, Swift undertakes to protest English inequalities. Charles Hinnant observes, "Any attempt to evaluate the conclusion of *Gulliver's Travels* should recognize that this special kind of individualism lies at the heart of Swift's vision of human nature and inspires his assaults, throughout the four voyages, on parties, factions, professions and the herd mentality."<sup>22</sup> In *Gulliver's Travels*, criticizing the English conquest of Ireland, Swift writes: "If a Prince sends Forces into a Nation, where the People are poor and ignorant, he may lawfully put half of them to Death, and make Slaves of the rest, in order to civilize and reduce them from their barbarous Way of Living."<sup>23</sup> Summing up English colonization, Swift tells readers how the English legalize their conquest. By declaring the natives barbaric and ignorant, the English justify to themselves and the people in England the need to civilize them by

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<sup>18</sup> Oakleaf, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Seamus Deane, "Classic Swift," *Cambridge Companion*, 251, and Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Anglo-Irish Literature*, (London: Hutchinson, 1986), 46.

<sup>20</sup> Claude Rawson, *God, Gulliver, and Genocide*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and F. P. Locke, *The Politics of Gulliver's Travels*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 9.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Fox, "Introduction," *Cambridge Companion*, 6, and J. Paul Hunter, "Gulliver's Travels and the Later writings," *Cambridge Companion*, 227.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Hinnant, *Purity and Defilement in Gulliver's Travels*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 96.

<sup>23</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 227.

force. Swift's narrative attempts to critique the 'herd mentality' among the English which would accept the Prince's justification to conquer another land on the basis of the natives' barbarity. Swift is pointing at the natural inclination to group around one's own kind as the reason for the members of such a group to accept blindly whatever is said about the natives. In his works, Swift attacks this 'herd mentality' by writing on behalf of the Irish natives.

Aspiring to a preferment in England, Swift first woos Whig and then Tory politicians but to no avail. Disappointed, he returned to Ireland as Dean of St. Patrick's, where he served for the next fifty years. Swift's contribution to St. Patrick's and the Protestant community made him a known figure. Slowly he rose to prominence as a figure in Ireland. Nominated to represent Ireland in negotiations with the Whig government in England to get a remission of the First Fruits, taxes imposed on the Irish church by England, Swift is unsuccessful in 1707 and but then in 1710 succeeds. Immediately after this success he joined as editor of the Tory weekly, *The Examiner*. He enjoyed many privileges in this phase of his life, but this too was short-lived and did not result in the much-wanted opportunity Swift was seeking. F. P. Locke observes that Swift was aware that "As an Anglican Churchmen he belonged to a group that would exert less political influence than it had...As a member of the alien English colony in Ireland, he was condemned to perpetual insecurity."<sup>24</sup> Thus, Swift's experience in England was a mixture of contentment and frustration. Later in *A Modest Proposal* he recounts, "But, as to my self; having been wearied out for many Years with offering vain, idle, visionary Thoughts; and at length utterly despairing of Success, I fortunately fell upon this Proposal..."<sup>25</sup> Embittered with failure, Swift settles in England and spends the fifty remaining years of his life in Ireland. He dedicates himself to the service of his community and his birthplace.

Referred to as the "Irish tracts," Swift's writings on Ireland were considered in his own time and even today as a form of protest against England, making him an Irish patriot. Contrary to the views of some of his detractors like Samuel Johnson, Macaulay,

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<sup>24</sup> F. P. Lock, "The Politics of Pessimism," *The Politics of Gulliver's Travels*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Swift, "To The Whole People of Ireland," *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 332.

Lord Orrery, George Orwell and F. R. Leavis, Jonathan Swift's name finds its place in the pantheon of Irish nationalists. Celebrated as an Irish hero who "served human liberty" and seen "consistently (as) a champion of liberty," Swift acquires greater prominence as the Irish Struggle movement gathered steam.<sup>26</sup> According to Patrick Kelly, following Swift's *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*, "there was the extraordinary flowering of economic publications in the Ireland of 1720s and 1730s after two decades of near silence on the subject."<sup>27</sup> Echoing Mark Antony's patriotic speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Swift addresses all Irish as "Brethren, Friends, Countryman, and Fellow Subjects:" in the first letter of *The Drapier Letters*. He goes on "I will therefore first tell you the plain Story of the Fact; and then I will lay before you, how you ought to act in common Prudence, and according to the *Laws of your country*."<sup>28</sup> By invoking the "laws" of Ireland Swift writes Irish nationhood much before Ireland becomes independent country and instills the sense of nationhood among the Irish.

As he is an Anglo-Irish and a Protestant, Swift's anti-British diatribe in *The Drapier Letters*, *A Modest Proposal*, *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* and *The Story of an Injured Lady* may be considered insincere and an outcome of his frustrations against the English. Some scholarship considers Swift to be speaking only for the Anglo-Irish community and not for the native Catholic Irish. John Traugott remarks, "Swift as a Church of Ireland priest had no sympathies for the Catholic religion—he had experienced at firsthand the last spasms of the wars of religion in Ireland—but he had profound sympathies for the cruelly deprived Catholic people and hatred of their oppressors, his own class."<sup>29</sup> Traugott also points out that "the class Swift despised—his own—slaves to the English, slave drivers to the papists."<sup>30</sup> Anyone who has religious ideals of any sort would understand that as a Protestant cleric, Swift's lack of sympathy for the Catholic religion was quite natural. We need to see him as a human

<sup>26</sup> W. B. Yeats translates Swift's Latin phrase he intended to be his epitaph, and F. P. Locke, *The Politics of Gulliver's Travels*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Kelly, "Swift on Money and Economics," *Cambridge Companion*, 130.

<sup>28</sup> Swift, *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, 319.

<sup>29</sup> John Traugott, "'Shall Jonathan Die?' Swift, Irony, and a Failed Revolution in Ireland," *The Politics of Irony; essays in Self Betrayal*, (1992), 33.

<sup>30</sup> Traugott, "Shall Jonathan Die?" 34.

being with his own limitations and not expect him to be all-inclusive. Swift, however, manages to rise above his prejudices and includes the “whole of Ireland” in the *Drapier Letters*. He writes, “Therefore I do most earnestly exhort you as Men, as Christians, as Parents, and as Lovers of your Country, to read this Paper with the utmost Attention, or get it read to you by others; which that you may do at the less Expence, I have ordered the Printer to sell it at the lowest Rate.”<sup>31</sup> The intended audience is the poor illiterate native Irish who may need to get the letter “read ...by others” and since Swift had made it a point to keep its price low, these native Irish could afford it. Reading Swift merely as obsessed with his own community and religious belief all his life, and against the Irish based on some individual remarks he made, would be reductive. David Macaree sheds light on this aspect, when he writes: “Swift, of course, was himself an Anglo-Irish clergyman of the state church and as such possessed the prejudices natural to one of his background, yet by his *Drapier Letters* he united Irishmen of all classes, by giving them a sense of community which is a prime condition for nationhood.”<sup>32</sup> Hence we can sense a change in Swift’s attitude towards the Irish. This empathy for their condition in Ireland may have existed along with his disgust at their habits, but in no way should that discredit Swift as the foremost Anglo-Irish to acknowledge the presence of the native Irish in his works. Therefore, in the fourth Letter of *The Drapier Letters*, by “address[ing] [it] to a demographically inclusive Irish audience,”<sup>33</sup> Swift tries to overcome both his Protestant and Anglo-Irish prejudices by “uniting the Irish.”<sup>34</sup>

Edward Said’s appreciation for Swift’s works helps dispel some harsh scholarship that does not do justice to Swift. According to Said, Swift is criticized on account of the time in which he wrote, the eighteenth century, the people he associated with, and because his works deal with “contortions of the mind, acrobatics of spirit that intrigue and debate with us but that tend to refuse us in the end, since so often Swift impersonates

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Swift, “The Drapier Letters,” *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 318.

<sup>32</sup> David Macaree, “Drapier’s Letters and the Language of Political Protest,” *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 2 (1976), 49.

<sup>33</sup> Sean Moore, “ ‘Our Irish Copper-Farthen Dean’: Swift’s Drapier Letters, the ‘Forging’ of a Modernist Anglo-Irish Literature, and the Atlantic World of Paper Credit Preview,” *Atlantic Studies*, 2 (Apr. 2005), 78.

<sup>34</sup> Macaree, “Drapier’s Letters and the Language of Political Protest,” 49.



people we would not like to resemble.”<sup>35</sup> Said praises Swift’s contribution to Ireland and his representation of the marginalized native Irish.<sup>36</sup> Lavishing praise upon Said, Swift refers to him as “preeminently a reactive writer,” and refutes George Orwell’s remarks against Swift—“he [Swift] did not like democracy”—by pointing out that in Swift’s times even the most progressive people “were not believers in democracy.”<sup>37</sup> For Swift, Said is “a self-conscious” and “courageous” intellectual whose contribution to the Irish cause goes unrecognized because he writes much before his time.

On a similar note, Swift’s works prefigure the notions of an “intellectual,” “a patriot” and “nationhood.” Modern critics who expect him to be aware of modern definitions of equality and democracy, succumb to a “contextual limiting” when they judge him according to their time. Since the “notion of an intellectual is not usually associated with any period before the late nineteenth century,” not many critics have viewed Swift as an intellectual.<sup>38</sup> Said considers Swift to be both a “traditional intellectual”—on account of being a priest—and an “organic intellectual” in Gramscian terms. Swift is also a native intellectual as defined by Frantz Fanon. I would argue, that Swift is an intellectual in the mold of Gramsci and Fanon. Swift becomes an “organic intellectual,” as he opposes English domination of Ireland. It development is especially praiseworthy because of Swift’s position as a church priest and a member of the ruling class, with not much precedence of the Anglo-Irish elite rallying for the native Irish they were trying to expropriate into their culture.<sup>39</sup> Swift expresses the unofficial and unrecognized “needs and aspirations of the class that are not officially represented.”<sup>40</sup> In *The Drapier Letters* and *A Modest Proposal* Swift’s role as an “organic intellectual” comes to the fore succinctly. In the guise of Mr. Drapier, in *The Drapier Letters*, Swift

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<sup>35</sup> Said, “Swift as Intellectual,” 74.

<sup>36</sup> Said, “Swift as Intellectual,” 80-84.

<sup>37</sup> Said, “Swift as Intellectual,” 77-78.

<sup>38</sup> Said, “Swift as Intellectual,” 79.

<sup>39</sup> Deana Rankin, “Conclusions,” *Between Spenser and Swift: English Writing in Seventeenth-Century Ireland*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 277. Rankin lists some Anglo-Irish who wrote against English dominance of Ireland. They are: Richard Hadsor, Patrick Darcy and William Molyneux.

<sup>40</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “The Formation of the Intellectual,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Vincent B. Leitch, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 1136.

critiques the English decision to circulate the Wood's halfpence in Ireland. Immediate action by the British result in the arrest of the publisher and the new viceroy, Lord Carteret, was sent to Ireland to make investigations.<sup>41</sup> The patent was cancelled and Swift succeeds in uniting the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish, against their oppressors, the Anglo-Irish landlords who collaborated with the English and the English.

In *A Modest Proposal*, the black humor Swift invokes to criticize England's policies that caused a plague in Ireland, also qualifies him as an "organic intellectual." Swift inverts the English stereotype of the Irish as cannibals to implicate the purveyors of that myth, the English. While colonial accounts of natives as cannibals have thrived into the twentieth century,<sup>42</sup> very few accounts of anti-colonial or post-colonial writing ascribe this attribute to the colonial powers. Said, then, is right in calling him a "courageous intellectual." Urging his readers to partake of Irish infants, Swift's satire instills disgust even in modern readers. Though his incisive satire includes both the English and the Irish, Swift's attack is primarily on the "cannibalistic" desires of England.

In Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*, the Lindalinian rebellion hints at Ireland's anger. Swift's depiction of a hostile relationship between the flying island Laputa and Lindalino the second city in the Kingdom symbolizes the relationship between England and Ireland. Swift's representation of the ingenuity of the Lindalinians is expressed in *Gulliver's Travels*,

Three days after his [the Laputian king's] Departure, the Inhabitants who had complained of great Oppressions, shut the Town Gates, seized on the Governor, and with incredible Speed and Labour erected four large Towers one at every Corner of the City...they had fixed a great Loadstone, and in case their design should fail, they had provided a vast Quantity of the most combustible Fuel, hoping to burst therewith the adamantine Bottom of the Island, if the Loadstone project should miscarry.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> John Traugott, " 'Shall Jonathan Die?' Swift, Irony, and a Failed Revolution in Ireland," *The Politics of Irony; essays in self betrayal*, 43-45. Traugott mentions that Swift and Carteret were friends and that Carteret knew the identity of the author of *The Drapier Letters* before he arrived in Ireland as he had received a copy of the *Letters* from Swift.

<sup>42</sup> Achebe's reading of Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* in his seminal essay entitled, "An Image of Africa."

<sup>43</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 160-161.

Swift's narrative points out the failure of the Laputians to stave off the Lindalinian rebellion. Instead of being critical of the rebellious Lindalinians, Swift's narrator, Gulliver informs us that the Lindalinians were united, organized and far-sighted, as they make a project that would ensure their victory over the Laputians.

In addition to being an "organic intellectual," Swift doubles as a "native intellectual." According to Frantz Fanon, a "native intellectual" "at the beginning... produce[s] his [works] to be read exclusively by the oppressor, whether with the intention of charming him or of denouncing him through ethnic or subjectivist means," but later "the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people." In this respect critics have variously interpreted the intended audience of Swift's *The Drapier Letters*, *A Modest Proposal* and the other Irish writings to be the English, Anglo-Irish landlords, the Anglo-Irish community and also the native Irish. Irrespective of its audience, these works created a furor when published because they reached across social groups. In the fourth letter addressed "To the Whole People of Ireland," Swift informs us that "*Money, the great Divider of the World, hath, by a strange Revolution, been the great Uniter of a most divided People.*"<sup>44</sup> Hence, through his works Swift creates "a struggle which mobilizes all classes of the people and which expresses their aims and their impatience," and such a native intellectual who, in Fanon's opinion "is not afraid to count almost exclusively on the people's support, will of necessity triumph." Swift does triumph in his project to present a united Irish front to oppose English inequalities. Furthermore, Fanon explains that these native intellectuals "feel the necessity for a planned economy, the outlawing of profiteers." Swift's success in repealing the Wood's halfpence is Swift's way of 'outlawing the profiteers.'

In achieving a wide readership, *The Drapier Letters* manages to garner support for the cancellation of Wood's halfpence in Ireland, as it brings together both the Anglo-Irish community, who resented the English policies in Ireland, and the native Irish who were the most abject. Swift foreshadows Fanon's advice: "The settler and the native are

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<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Swift, "To The Whole People of Ireland," *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 332.

old acquaintances,”<sup>45</sup> as they have “suffered together.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly *A Modest Proposal* achieves its writer’s aim in addressing the oppressor in its own ‘language,’ at the same time informing the native people of their deplorable condition and goading them to improve their lot. In *Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* Swift best performs his role as a native intellectual. He insists “...that Ireland would never be happy ‘till a law were made for burning every Thing that came from England, except their People and their Coals...”<sup>47</sup> Calling the Irish to boycott English products and increase their dependence on their own, Swift foreshadows Fanon’s pronouncement in *The Wretched of The Earth* that “...a national economy is an economy based on what may be called local products.”<sup>48</sup> The “cult of local products” that Swift espouses later becomes a popular form of resistance in many colonial countries fighting for their independence.

As a result of the popularity and success of *The Drapier Letters* in Ireland, Swift was honored with the title of “Hibernian Patriot.” In spite of the apparent anonymity of the author of the letter, it was known to everyone that the Dean of St. Patrick was its writer. Contradictions recur in Swift’s life and his writing. In spite of his being an Anglo-Irish, Protestant and pro-English, the Walpole administration in London suspected Swift of colluding with the Jacobites and Catholic Irish. Being aware of these suspicions, Swift may have finally realized that in England he would always be an outsider. Whether the Tories or the Whigs were in power, Swift did not benefit personally. The much-sought preferment in England that he had hoped for never materialized, even when the Tories were at the helm. F. P. Locke informs us that following the death of Queen Anne in 1714, Swift reflected on “his Political ideas and philosophy that had been denied him while caught up in the day-to-day affairs of political life between 1710 and 1714.”<sup>49</sup> Both *Gulliver’s Travels* and *The Drapier Letters* written after this period of reflection. Perhaps Swift had come to a realization that he belonged to Ireland and hence decided to play a

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<sup>45</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 30.

<sup>46</sup> Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” *Nation and Narration*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Swift, “A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture,” *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 302.

<sup>48</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 123.

<sup>49</sup> F. P. Lock, *Politics*, 22.

greater role in Irish politics. This marked change in Swift's political career was an outcome of serious deliberations and was to reinvent Swift as a patriot.

The concept of a patriot, understood in modern terminology as a nationalist, was not available to Swift. But interestingly his literary friends and political patrons were writing about being the concept of patriotism. Simon During notes:

The word 'patriotism' first became current as part of the Tory resistance to Walpole headed by Bolingbroke, author of *The Idea of a Patriot King*. Here a patriot is a person defined in a classical sense by his love of country rather than personal ambition... The patriot king (who, unlike the Hanoverians, should be a native) would communicate directly to the people, without mediation by state or politicians, in unison with the aristocracy... Thus the word 'country' here tends to oscillate between naming the sum of estates in the realm and the object of sentiments self-consciously borrowed from Roman formulations of *patria*.<sup>50</sup>

Referring to Bolingbroke's concept of a 'patriot' as narrow, During tells us that he employed it to gain political mileage, as a patriot should be concerned for his country. According to Ernest Renan, "the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community..." should be considered the essence of a true patriot. Swift may have been more influenced by Alexander Pope's idea of a "patriot wit" in his *Epilogues to the Satires*. Pope's 'patriot wit' rises above the Tory Patriotism to become a "proto-nationalist symbolization." Simultaneously, the Whigs Addison and Steele's idea of a separate cultural sphere, which During calls "the civil Imaginary," counters the Tory attempts to create the notion of 'patriotic Englishness.'<sup>51</sup> During explains that the 'civil Imaginary' is "ethical," "secular," "not political," and "reproduces everyday life in the public domain."<sup>45</sup> In his Irish tracts, Swift collapses the two practices of the Tories and the Whigs and through his writings accomplishes a dual task. Having actively participated in the political repartee between the Tories and the Whigs, Swift uses his knowledge for the benefit of Ireland. First he creates 'civil society' in Ireland through his writings, to create awareness against English coercive practices in Ireland. In doing so, he fashions himself as an Irish 'patriot.'

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<sup>50</sup> Simon During, "Literature –Nationalisms Other?" *Nation and Narration*, ed. By Homi K. Bhabha, (London: Routledge, 1990), 140-141.

<sup>45</sup> Simon During, "Literature –Nationalisms Other?" *Nation and Narration*, 142-44.

The most prescient of all Swift's contributions to Ireland is his writing of Irish nationhood at a time when the very notion of it was not in circulation. After committing himself to the Irish cause, Swift's writing after 1720 increasingly focuses on Ireland. Contrary to the belief among some Swift scholars, Swift worked towards the amelioration of the native Irish. His concerns were not merely to extract some advantages for the Anglo-Irish community. Yet again placing Swift in his context, the definition of nationhood in Swift's works does not correlate to that available to us in our present time. Hence, contending on that basis that Swift was opposed to an Ireland separate from English control would not be appropriate.

An examination of the origin of nation states and the parameters of its scope would be useful in understanding the extent of Swift's ideas. According to the French social historian, Ernest Renan:

...what things are not adequate for the creation of such a spiritual principle, namely, race, language, material interest, religious affinities, geography, and military necessity...A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form...The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion.<sup>52</sup>

The Ireland of Swift's time unites through Swift's writings in spite of the vast disparities among its inhabitants. In writing the Irish nation, Swift attempts to wipe off his association with England, which had been unfruitful, and writes himself into the tradition of Irish nationalists. Foreshadowing Renan, his Irish tracts are "the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion." Conjuring the Irish struggle for independence in the past in *The Drapier Letters*, Swift writes

It is true, indeed, that within the Memory of Man, the Parliaments of *England* have *sometimes* assumed the Power of binding this Kingdom, by laws enacted there; wherein they were, at first, openly opposed (as far as *Truth, Reason* and *Justice* are capable of *opposing*) by the famous Mr. *Molineaux*, an *English* Gentleman born here; as well as by several of the greatest Patriots, and *best Whigs* in *England*;... But in *Fact, Eleven Men well armed, will certainly subdue one single Man in his Shirt*.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" *Nation and Narration*, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Swift, "To The Whole People of Ireland," *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, 333.

This culmination is not entirely Swift's, but it also incorporates the various attempts by both Irish and Anglo-Irish writers in Ireland to protest English control over it. It is the culmination of Swift's entire career. Immersed in English politics and the Scriblerus Club, Swift early writings on English politics, his training as a political writer combined with his disappointments in a successful professional career culminate in his writing for Ireland. Swift's political endeavors and devotion for a foreign country (England) that would never accept him as its own culminates in future endeavors for the unified Irish people.

Swift's attempts at 'writing the Irish nation' maybe fraught with contradictions based on Ireland's inherent disparities of race and economics, but it still can be counted as an attempt by a patriot at serving the cause of his nation. Homi K. Bhabha's explication is pertinent to Swift, as it illustrates how "The barred Nation *It//Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal form of social representation, a space that is internally marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations." The presence of cultural difference and the history of contention between the antagonistic groups do not restrict the formation of nations. Nor can it be the reason to deny anyone's aspirations of creating his nation. Seen in this light, Swift's 'writing of Irish nationhood' cannot be denied solely on account of him having ambivalent feelings for his native place.

The concept of an Irish nation that Swift propagates through his writing may not sound revolutionary to modern times and readers, but coming at a time when parliamentary democracy was in its infancy it does offer hope for Ireland. F. P. Locke points out that Swift "wanted to put forward some moderate ideas for practical reforms," and "to attack political corruption, not just its particular contemporary embodiment in the Walpole administration."<sup>54</sup> While Seamus Deane contends that Swift was not in favor of "dissent against the state,"<sup>55</sup> F. P. Lock tells us that Swift was "firmly opposed to Hobbes's doctrine of absolute sovereignty."<sup>56</sup> Swift's idea of a good government then is:

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<sup>54</sup> Lock, *Politics*, 89.

<sup>55</sup> Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Anglo-Irish Literature*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Lock, *Politics*, 10.

“a strong central government, but one that would be subject to strict scrutiny to prevent the erosion of the liberties of the subject,”<sup>57</sup> and a constitution “that balanced the powers of prince, nobles, and people.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, for Swift human liberty was important to governance, as he writes in the fourth Drapier Letter:

Those come over hither to us from *England*, and some *weak* People among ourselves, whenever, in Discourse, we make mention of *Liberty* and *Property*, shake their Heads, and tell us, that *Ireland* is a *depending Kingdom*; as if they would seem, by this Phrase, to intend, that the People of *Ireland* is in some State of Slavery or Dependance, different from those of *England*:...For in *Reason*, all *Government* without the Consent of the *Governed*, is the *very Definition of Slavery*:<sup>59</sup>

Swift’s indignation against domination of Ireland is reflected again in *A Proposal for the*

*Universal use of Irish Manufacture*:

I WOULD be glad to learn among the Divines, whether a law *to bind Men without their own Consent*, be obligatory...because, I find *Scripture, Sanderson and Suarez*, are wholly silent in the Matter. The Oracle of Reason, the great *Law of nature*, and general Opinion of *Civilians*, wherever they treat of *limited Governments*, are, indeed, decisive enough.<sup>60</sup>

Swift’s views with respect to the form of governance he hopes for Ireland is one based on ‘consent’ and ‘liberty.’ Though not democratic in its entirety, it resembles modern notions of democracy as practiced in the different nations of the world.

The charge against Swift that he despised the native Irish would be unpardonable if it was something he had consciously cultivated and stuck to till his death. Instead it was predominant in all members of the Anglo-Irish community and the English. But Swift’s attempt to give the native Irish a voice in his Irish writings is laudable. In *A Modest Proposal*, Swift unsettles his English and Anglo-Irish readers by reminding them of their own savage past, when he says “They look upon us as a sort of Savage Irish, whom our

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<sup>57</sup> Lock, *Politics*, 37-38.

<sup>58</sup> Lock, *Politics*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Swift, “To The Whole People of Ireland,” *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 332-3.

<sup>60</sup> Swift, *A Proposal for the Universal use of Irish Manufacture: The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, 304.



Ancestors conquered several Hundred Years ago: And if I should describe the Britons to you, as they were in Caesar's Time, when they *painted their Bodies, or cloathed themselves with the Skins of Beasts*, I should act full as reasonably as they do."<sup>61</sup> Critics mainly cite excerpts from Swift's writings as proof of Swift's loathing for the native Irish, but there are few instances where he showers praise on them. One such example is the following:

I cannot but highly esteem those gentlemen of Ireland, who, with all the Disadvantages of being Exiles and Strangers, have been able to distinguish themselves by their Valour and Conduct in so many Parts of Europe, I think above all other Nations, which ought to make the *English* ashamed of the Reproaches they cast on the Ignorance, the Dulness, and the Want of Courage, in the *Irish* Natives; those Defects, wherever they happen, arising only from the Poverty and Slavery they suffer from their inhuman Neighbours, and the base corrupt Spirits of too many of the chief Gentry, etc.<sup>62</sup>

This excerpt, from Swift's reply to Catholic Charles Wogan, a Jacobite, points that Swift was not biased against the Irish all his life. Nor will it be appropriate to believe that all his life Swift considered the English and the Anglo-Irish to be superior to the native Irish. Speculating the origin of the Yahoos in Houyhnhnmland, Gulliver toys with the idea of them having an English antecedent. He says:

I mean, if the Inhabitants ought to be believed; unless a Dispute may arise about the two *Yahoos*, said to have been seen many Ages ago on a mountain in *Houyhnhnmland*, from whence the Opinion is, that the Race of those Brutes hath descended; and these, for anything I know, may have been *English*, which indeed I was apt to suspect from the Lineaments of their Posterity's countenances, although very much defaced.<sup>63</sup>

Swift's constant inversion of antithetical ideas, whether the English or the Irish are savages, is a technique to escape being pinned down. Hence, assertions of his anti-Irish feelings are also questionable.

Recent scholarship has traced in Swift's Poetry and later works a love for things Irish. While Carole Fabricant informs us that Swift incorporated Irish words in his poetry,

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<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Swift, "To The Whole People of Ireland," *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 334.

<sup>62</sup> Qtd. in Claude Rawson, "Introduction," *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), xxiv.

<sup>63</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 270.

McHugh and Harmon document that he also translated some Irish poetry.<sup>64</sup> McHugh and Harmon also inform us that writing satire has been an Irish literary tradition and that *Gulliver's Travels* has parallels with some Gaelic literature. Swift's portrayal of Mr. Drapier, "an ignorant, unlettered [Irish] shopkeeper"<sup>65</sup> who yet displays knowledge of law and scripture is Swift's answer to English stereotypes of the native Irish. According to Traugott, Swift creates "a world upside down in which a slavish people suddenly become savvy to political games and machinations..."<sup>66</sup> Swift wants his readers to know that "savages" can also use their reason and acquire knowledge. In this way, Swift humanizes the Irish and gives himself a literary space within Irish tradition.

Looking at Irish tracts, and its reception in Ireland and England, Swift's contribution to the Irish Freedom Struggle becomes significant. Other Irish patriots and literary figures since Swift have all acknowledged his role in creating awareness among the native Irish and instilling dread in the English rulers. Among the foremost patriots of Ireland, Swift continues to be celebrated by the nation that is now free. Encapsulating Swift's Irish connection, Carole Fabricant explains: "Ireland did not simply provide an inert background for Swift's life; it was an integral part of his, an essential ingredient in the way he viewed the world."<sup>67</sup> Swift's initial dislike of Ireland and the native Irish, however, does not decrease his glory. What matters is that he had the courage to initiate resistance to English oppression.

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<sup>64</sup> See Fabricant, "Swift the Irishman," *Cambridge Companion*, 64 and Roger McHugh and Maurice Harmon, *Short History of Anglo-Irish Literature*, (New Jersey: Barnes and Nobles, 1982), 57.

<sup>65</sup> Traugott, 40.

<sup>66</sup> Traugott, 49.

<sup>67</sup> Fabricant, "Swift the Irishman," 48.