



# Prose Satire

ENGLISH LITERATURE ( I ) WEEK 17

# Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

- A Dubliner
- From 1720 on, Swift actively speaks for the Irish interests against English exploitation.
- In 1724 Swift becomes a leader. He helps the Irish people in their resistance against England.
- A misanthropist? (“I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth.”)
- Daniel Defoe (1660-1731): *Robinson Crusoe* & *Moll Flanders*

## Swift's "The Tale of a Tub" (1696, 1704)


- Title: empty tubs to divert whales
- Story: three brothers, representing Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran and Anglican churches, and Calvinism.
- Purpose: No religious trappings. Unity of believers in the fundamentals of Christianity.

# Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" (1729)

- Age of Pope
- Satire: a great piece of irony
- Historical Background: Glorious Revolution (1688/James II/Protestants William and Mary/Catholic Ireland)
- Proverb: "The English are devouring the Irish."


# “A Modest Proposal”

- Title: Contemporary pamphlets on famine or over-population in Ireland
- Narrator: realistic, not sentimental
- Proclaimed Purpose:
  - “FOR PREVENTING THE CHILDREN OF POOR PEOPLE IN IRELAND FROM BEING A BURDEN TO THEIR PARENTS OR COUNTRY, AND FOR MAKING THEM BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLIC”



## ○ Problems:

- “It is a melancholy object to those who walk through this great town or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling to beg sustenance for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up, either turn thieves for want of work or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.”

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- Beggars
  - Poverty
  - Unemployment in the Country/City
  - Indentured Servitude
  - Thieves




## Source of the Proposal

- “I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.”



# Proposal


- “ I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine; and my reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four females. (NEXT)

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- That the remaining hundred thousand may at a year old be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.”

# Digression on Adolescents

## ○ Refinement of a Solution?


- “A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased in discoursing on this matter to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, (NEXT)

- 
- not exceeding fourteen years of age nor under twelve, so great a number of both sexes in every country being now ready to starve for want of work and service; and these to be disposed of by their parents, if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations.”

# Digression on Adolescents

## ○ Swift's Answer

- “But with due deference to so excellent a friend and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments; for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me from frequent experience that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys, by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable; and to fatten them would not answer the charge. (NEXT)


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- Then as to the females, it would, I think with humble submission, be a loss to the public, because they soon would become breeders themselves [...].”

# Advantages of the Proposal

1. “[I]t would greatly lessen the number of Papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation as well as our most dangerous enemies [...].”
2. “[T]he poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own [...].”
3. With less money spent on children, the nation can improve its economy.

>>NEXT



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4. Parents make money from giving birth to children, and they do not have to raise them.
  5. There will be new dishes at restaurants.
  6. This would be a great inducement to marriage.

# Conclusion


- “I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing.”

# Question

- Explain how the following features of “A Modest Proposal” relate to Jonathan Swift’s satiric purpose: the title of the essay; the allusions to “my American friend”; the references to culinary methods; the digression on adolescents; and the narrator’s final “autobiographical” remark.

# Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)

- *Gulliver's Travels*:
  - A Voyage to Lilliput
  - A Voyage to Brobdingnag
  - A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbudrib, Luggnagg, and Japan
  - A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms
- Satire/Fantasy/Travel Adventure

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- Style: from lighthearted satire to more serious one (from book to book)
  - Gulliver: an everyman figure
  - Gulliver's change: from a restless figure to a jaded misanthropist
  - Targets of Swift's satires: irrational humanity, specific persons, England, politics, ambitious rulers

# A Voyage to Lilliput

- Gilliver is shipwrecked but manages to make shore, where he falls unconscious.



## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?


- “I confess I was often tempted, while they were passing backwards and forwards on my body, to seize forty or fifty of the first that came in my reach, and dash them against the ground.”





- Target of Swift's Satire?

- “At the place where the carriage stopped, there stood an ancient temple, esteemed to be the largest in the whole kingdom, which having been polluted some years before by an unnatural murder, was, according to the zeal of those people, looked on as

- 
- ❑ profane, and therefore had been applied to common use, and all the ornaments and furniture carried away.” (Note in Norton: The execution of Charles I was sentenced in Westminster Hall.)



## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

- “He [king of Lilliput] is taller, by almost the breadth of my nail, than any of his court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into the beholders. His features are strong and masculine, with an Austrian lip [...].” (Note in Norton: Most British thought George I gross.)



## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

□ “They apprehended my breaking loose, that my diet would be very expensive, and might cause a famine. Sometimes they determined to starve, or at least to shoot in the face and hands with poisoned arrows, which would soon dispatch me [...]”.

\* Swift once worked for the Irish resistance.




## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

- “He desired I would not take it ill, if he gave orders to certain proper officers to search me: for probably I might carry about me several weapons, which must needs be dangerous things, if they answered the bulk of so prodigious a person.” (Note in Norton: in 1715 Swift was investigated by a committee of secrecy.)



## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

- “This diversion is only practiced by those persons who are candidates for great employments, and high favor, at court. They are trained in this art from their youth, and are not always of noble birth, or liberal education.  
(NEXT)

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- When a great office is vacant either by death or disgrace (which often happens) five or six of those candidates petition the Emperor to entertain his Majesty and the court with a dance on the rope; and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the office. Very often the chief ministers themselves are commanded to show their skill, and to convince the Emperor that they have not lost their faculty.”





## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

□ “Flimnap, the Treasurer, is allowed to cut a caper on the strait rope, at least an inch higher than any other lord in the whole empire.”

\* “Sir Robert Walpole, the Whig head of the government, was notorious in Swift's circle for his political acrobatics.”



- Target of Swift's Satire?

- High Heels and Low Heels

- Tories, Whigs.

- “We apprehend his Imperial Highness, the heir to the crown, to have some tendency towards the High-Heels; at least we can plainly discover one of his heels higher than the other, which gives him a hobble in his gait.”

# Question 1

- What might be Swift's attitude toward the prince of Wales who has friends in both parties?



## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

- “It is allowed on all hands, that the primitive way of breaking eggs before we eat them, was upon the larger end: but his present Majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg, and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers. Whereupon the Emperor his father published an edict, commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs.”

## Question 2

- The note to the egg episode says, “Swift’s satirical allegory of the strife between Catholics (Big-Endians) and Protestants (Little-Endians) touch on Henry VIII (who ‘broke’ with the Pole), Charles I (who lost his life), and James II (who lost his crown). What might be Swift’s attitude toward this issue?”

## From Book I to Book II

- Gulliver single-handedly carries off the fleet of the hostile Blefuscu. The Lilliputian king wants to enslave the defeated Blefuscans, but Gulliver wants peace. In disfavor at court, Gulliver later goes to Blefuscu and then sails away still later. (Lilliput=England; Blfescu=France)

# A Voyage to Brobdingnag


- Wandering on the coast of Great Tartary, Gulliver gets trapped in a field of giant corn and is later captured by a forty-foot-tall nine-year-old girl. Then he is sold to the queen of the kingdom.






- Target of Swift's Satire?


- “The King was struck with horror at the description I had given of those terrible engines and the proposal I had made. He was amazed how so impotent and groveling an insect as I (these were his expressions) could entertain such inhuman ideas,

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- and in so familiar a manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and desolation which I had painted as the common effects of those destructive machines [...]"



## A Voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubdrib, Luggnagg, and Japan

- Marooned by Chinese pirates on an island, Gulliver is surprised to see a flying island descend. The inhabitants of Laputa (this flying island) are impractical intellectuals. Gulliver's description about how the Grand Academy of Lagado works serves to satirize the Royal Society of London.

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- By boat Gulliver proceeds to Glubbudrib. In Luggnagg Gulliver finds the Struldbrugs, the immortals.



## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

- The Struldbruggs live eternally, but they get old, grow weak, and lose their ability to learn. The luckiest of them grow mad.

## Question 3

- A lot of people believe in utopia. In which way is the part on the Struldbruggs an attack on that belief?

# The Land of the Houyhnhnms

- Cast adrift by mutinous sailors, Gulliver lands on the land governed by intellectual horses.






## ○ Target of Swift's Satire?

- Houyhnhnms
- Yahoos

# Return to England

Afraid of being treated like a Yahoo, Gulliver departs in a canoe. A Portuguese ship takes him to Lisbon. Then he takes ship for England. When he is home, he finds his wife unbearable at first. He prefers horses.




# Age of Johnson and Thomas Gray's “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”

# Historical Background to Thomas Gray's Elegy

- Age of Johnson (1750-85)
- 1752: Replace the Julian calendar with the Gregorian calendar. January 1 the start of each year.
- Industrial Revolution
- 1788: *The Times*

# Language

- Court lost control over language. Gentlemen and authors took its role.
- English, instead of the classic languages, dominated charity schools.
- Women given education.
- First true English dictionary (1755), by Samuel Johnson

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- Modern Punctuation: “I put in a comma where I feel a pause.”
  - Modern Style of Capitalization: Only for proper nouns.

# Samuel Johnson

- Dictionary: Replaced by OED in 1928
- The first figure in English literature to achieve major stature through scholarship and criticism.




## John's "On Spring"

- Published in *Rambler* No. 5
- Apparently about spring. Actually about human choices and their consequent happiness.

## The Last Paragraph from “On Spring”

- He that enlarges his curiosity after the works of nature, demonstrably multiplies the inlets to happiness; and, therefore, the younger part of my readers, to whom I dedicate this vernal speculation, must excuse me for calling upon them, to make use at once of the spring of the year, and the spring of life; to acquire,



- 
- while their minds may be yet impressed with new images, a love of innocent pleasures, and an ardor for useful knowledge; and to remember, that a blighted spring makes a barren year, and that the vernal flowers, however beautiful and gay, are only intended by nature as preparatives to autumnal fruits.

# James Boswell (1740-95)

- *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791)
- The World's Greatest Biography
- Carefully Selected Details/ Conversations to let Johnson Show Himself (Dramatic)/ What Johnson was, Instead of What Johnson did

# The Decline of Neoclassicism

- The middle class had no time for art. Feeling and sentiment began to exert influence against pure rationalism.
- From early 18th century, emotional literature and interest in the external nature grew.
- More subject matters foreign to neoclassicism

# The Graveyard School

- Mid-18th century
- A dark night's contemplation on burial ground, charnel house, and so forth.
- Pleasing melancholia: later Romantic temperament

# Thomas Gray

- The only survivor of twelve children
- 1757: declined the offer of the poet laureateship
- From decaying neoclassicism toward a growing taste for romantic themes.



## “An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”

- Neoclassic: heroic quatrain (abab) in iambic pentameter, elegy to Man, rather than some specific persons, meticulous craftsmanship
- Romantic: gracious English countryside/ melancholy

# Setting

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary  
way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to  
me.

\* Note the long vowels.

## Night and Imagery/Sounds

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the  
sight,

And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning  
flight,

And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

# Sounds

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower

The moping owl does to the moon  
complain

Of such, as wandering neat her secret bower,  
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

# The Graves

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree's  
shade,

Where heaves the turf in many a  
moldering heap,

Each in his narrow cell forever laid,

The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

# The Grave's Inhabitants

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,

The swallow twittering from the straw-built  
shed,

The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,

No more shall rouse them from their lowly  
bed.

## Peaceful Death in Contrast to Busy Life

For them no more the blazing hearth shall  
burn,

Or busy housewife ply her evening care;

No children run to lisp their sire's return,

Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.



# Simple Life

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has  
broke;

How jocund did they drive their team afield!  
How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy  
stroke!

## Criticism of Fame, Personifications

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor.

# Personifications

The boast of **heraldry**, the pomp of **power**,  
And all that **beauty**, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike the inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to grave.



# City People Nothing to be Proud of

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,

If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies  
raise,

Where through the long-drawn aisle and  
fretted vault

The pealing anthem swells the note of  
praise.



## Personifications, Useless for the Dead

Can storied urn or animated bust

Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?


Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust,

Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of  
Death?


# The Potential of the Rustic People

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial  
fire;  
Hands that the rod of empire might have  
swayed,  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.






But knowledge to their eyes her ample page  
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er  
unroll;  
Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,  
And froze the genial current of the soul.




Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.






Some village Hampden, that with dauntless  
breast


The little tyrant of his fields withstood;  
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,  
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's  
blood.



The applause of listening senates to  
command,  
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,  
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,  
And read their history in a nation's eyes,



Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone  
Their growing virtues, but their crimes  
confined;  
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a  
throne,  
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,



The struggling pangs of conscious truth to  
hide,  
To quench the blushed of ingenuous  
shame,  
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride  
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

## City People to be Pitied

**Far from the madding crowd's ignoble  
strife,**

Their sober wishes never learned to stray;  
Along the cool sequestered vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.


## In Contrast to the Rich People's Elegies

Yet even these bones from insult to protect

Some frail memorial still erected nigh,

With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture  
decked,

Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.




Their name, their years, spelt by the  
unlettered Muse,  
The place of fame and elegy supply:  
And many a holy text around she strews,  
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

## Personifications, Memory

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?





On some fond breast the parting soul relies,  
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;  
Even from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,  
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires.

# Address the Reader

For thee, who mindful of the unhonored  
dead

Dost in **these lines** their artless tale relate;  
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,  
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

\*What are “these lines”?

## Monologue, Sunrise

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,

“Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn


Brushing with hasty steps the dews away

To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

## Noon

“There at the foot of yonder nodding beech  
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so  
high,  
His listless length at noontide would he  
stretch,  
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.






“Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,  
Muttering his wayward fancies he would  
rove,  
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,  
Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless  
love.

# Absence

“One morn I missed him on the customed  
hill,

Along the heath and near his favorite tree;  
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,  
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;



“The next with dirges due in sad array  
Slow through the churchway path we saw  
him borne.  
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the  
lay,  
Graved on the stone beneath yon aged  
thorn.”

# *The Epitaph*


*Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth*

*A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.*


*Fair Science frowned not on his humble  
birth,*

*And Melancholy marked him for her own.*





*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,  
He gained from Heaven ( 'twas all he  
wished) a friend.*



*No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread  
abode  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),  
The bosom of his Father and his God.*

# Question 1

- Why is “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” a very popular poem?

## Question 2

- The title, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” is very interesting. Do you believe that Thomas Gray wrote this poem in a churchyard? If not, why did he give this poem such a title?

## Question 3

- Does the scenes in this poem refer to any specific place? If not, what do we gather from this generality?

## Question 4

- What make some lines of this poem become famous quotations?