

do so). Rather, he adroitly allows the many convolutions and contradictions to become an essential part of his analysis. Ironically, however, it is this very attempt to engage with the concepts of taste and beauty in all their nuanced complexity that constitutes what I see to be the study's principal shortcoming: a paucity of attention to the portraits and novels that comprise only two of the book's five chapters. Jones has worked so hard to establish the cultural context—and his close visual and textual readings are so rich, well-informed, and evocative—that one can only desire more such readings. Yet in its incisive and insightful readings of early modern culture, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain* is an important book for all scholars of the period.

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Swift as Nemesis: Modernity and Its Satirist. *Frank Boyle*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000. Pp. xviii+242.

This is at once an elegant and a self-lacerating book. We are given due warning of the anxiety Swift generates in his intelligent readers by an epigraph from Ecclesiastes about the endlessness of making books. Then we are tracked out of the text by something that purports to be a letter from a friend of the author and is an attack on the preceding book. Swiftians will suspect the show of anonymity in this afterword—my first, inaccurate, guess was that it might be in the voice of Swift—and my feeling is that Boyle is being impossibly hard on himself. That he writes well is already a consolation, but, more importantly, he has taken seriously the clash between his professional responsibilities as an academic and his personal responsibilities as the subject of satire. The subject of satire is easily enough managed while it is kept as an object of study. There are many moderately useful things a professional critic can say about it. However, satire is an outlandish genre that only takes on its real moral urgency when the reader becomes the subject. It is comfortable enough to read if the fools and the knaves stay firmly in the third person, but no honest reader of Swift can keep them there. The commencement of hostilities is in the preface to the *Battle of the Books* (1704), where we are told that “Satyr is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own.” You can only cut yourself on this sort of irony, and Boyle dutifully lacerates himself and others on this

image throughout his book. He wants to be both a good scholar and a good reader of Swift; nowhere have I seen it so clearly demonstrated that it is impossible to be both.

An editor's solution to the problem would be to point out that there are actually two books struggling to get out of *Swift as Nemesis*: a scholarly one about modernity and a readerly one about grappling with Swift's ironies. The scholarly book addresses problems in literary and cultural history, and its basic argument is that the prime target of Swift's satire—from the *Ode to the Athenian Society* (1691) to *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)—is the New Science and the modern world view it constructed. Boyle points out that “modernism” makes its first appearance in the *OED* with a citation from Swift and argues that he was there at the birth with a pillow, intent on smothering the newborn. If you like your cultural history writ large, it is fair enough to see Swift aligned with the Renaissance Humanists against the materialism of René Descartes, John Locke, and Isaac Newton. However, the argument at broad-brush level does not proceed much beyond the point reached by the ancients and moderns dispute in the 1690s. Focused more narrowly, it allows Boyle to provide an angle on *Gulliver's Travels* through which book 3 seems central and the “aesthetic” of the Royal Society a constant object of criticism. It also allows him to present the *Ode to the Athenian Society* as an impertinent riposte to Abraham Cowley's panegyric ode *To the Royal Society* (1667) rather than merely as a bad poem. Most provocatively, it allows him to propose Newton's *Principia* (1687) as central to the satire of *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), especially in the extensive play on wind, air, and spirit. The afterword hints that Boyle once thought to assert that *A Tale* is an explicit parodic attack on the *Principia*; unlike the harsh friend of the afterword, I am glad that Boyle withdrew from so positive and exclusive an identification. There is room in the *Tale's* tub of fools for Newton and his physical abstractions, but the text so spins that many others attach to each parodic gesture. Moreover, the case for connection to the *Principia* relies on little explicit evidence, textual or historical. Rather, it is an interesting pattern of similarities and transformations, available to a reader willing to see them allegorically.

These identifications are useful additions to textual scholarship on Swift's backgrounds, but they are not earth-shattering. The image of modernity assumed goes back to Stephen Toulmin's argument (*Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* [University of Chicago Press, 1992]) that modernity had a politico-theological agenda that was rationalist rather than rational. Perhaps I am being overly reductive here, but it seems to me that this should not come as much of a surprise to historians of science any longer, and a literary alternative to

the Whig reading of intellectual history has been available at least since T. S. Eliot proposed that a dissociation of sensibility set in during the Restoration. The good scholar in Boyle finds some handy textual analogs for Swift's works, in pursuit of a traditional antimodernist literary-historical argument.

The other Boyle wants to read Swift personally and responsibly, rather than professionally. He invokes the example of Edward Said, writing on Swift and on the critical life more generally: "But Said keeps listening to the agitation and energy, to the wit and restlessness, and this listening leads, not to simpleminded judgments on Swift's personality or to anachronistic labels for his politics, but to profound questions about *current* critical responsibility" (p. 22). In order to question his current critical responsibilities, Boyle elaborates a mythos of the process of grappling with Swift. He casts the reader as Narcissus, inclined to admire his own image in the pool of the text; the voices of Swiftian parody, aping different aspects of modernity dissonantly, are the nymph Echo; and Swift's satire is Nemesis, visiting vengeance on knavish and idiotic ways of talking about the world. That Swift discovers a universal (and grotesquely unfounded) narcissism in the prideful humans he attacks is well known. The important, and less broadly acknowledged, turn given to this notion by Boyle is that the narcissism includes the readers as well. He puts it thus: "As an interpretative construct, the Nemesis myth points in a direction away from that of most traditional Swift criticism, because the literary dynamic that becomes primary is not that between satirist and subject but between the reader and the text as reflecting pool" (p. 149). He is not the only critic taking this difficult path through Swift's works, but he does it well and is particularly strong in hailing us into a sense of responsibility for the absurdities exposed by Swift. There is little point in a reviewer summarizing the content of Boyle's arguments about Swift as Nemesis; rather, you should read his careful accounts of Swift's vengefulness and look for your own face in the mirror, the pool, the Glass. William Butler Yeats wrote decades ago that "Swift haunts me; he is always around the next corner" (*The Words upon the Window-Pane* [Dublin Cuala Press, 1934], p. 3), and I have always imagined him around that corner holding a big stick. It is this sense of being in hand-to-hand combat with Swift and the inadequacies of humans that troubles Boyle and enlivens his criticism. Readers and critics willing to confront Nemesis in the form of Swift's ever-troubling satires should read for themselves to see how Boyle fares, "*et imitare, si poteris.*"

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