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We, the undersigned members of the Committee appointed by you to examine the Thesis submitted by Robert Lorin Calder, B.A., in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, beg to report that we consider the thesis satisfactory both in form and content.

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We also report that he has successfully passed an oral examination on the general field of the subject of the thesis.

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WOMEN IN THE WRITINGS OF JONATHAN SWIFT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

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by

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INTRODUCTION

There are few writers who have been more badly treated by biographers and literary critics than Jonathan Swift. His writing is concerned with the very basic aspects of human nature, and he treats such matters with intense satire and slashing irony. Many critics, disturbed by the intensity of Swift's writing, attempt to negate his arguments by claiming that he is a misanthropist, a misogynist, or simply a madman. Such critics search in Swift's life for evidence which will prove his madness. They seize upon his passion for cleanliness, charge him with cruelty to Vanessa, and refuse to forgive him for not marrying Stella. They extract statements out of context, distort Swift's meaning, or simply alter the facts to fit their theories. As a result, there has arisen a massive volume of myths and old wives' tales about Swift the misanthropist, Swift the misogynist, and Swift the madman. This thesis is an attempt to take a fresh look at one of these areas of criticism--Swift's treatment of women.

Critics who charge Swift with misogyny ignore many things--his magnetic appeal to women, his large number of female friends, admirers, and correspondents, his remarkable relationship with Stella, and his ceaseless concern with the role of women in eighteenth century society. Swift, according to Herbert Davis,

"sets before us in his own inimitable fashion a new view of woman, unromantic but not unpleasing. She is able to take her place in the world on equal terms, a free, intelligent gentlewoman, worthy of man's highest regard and friendship whether within or without the bounds of holy matrimony."¹

1. Herbert Davis, "Stella: A Gentlewoman of the Eighteenth Century", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, New York, 1964, p. 45.

This thesis is an examination of the development of Swift's technique for presenting his "new view of women". It will show: that in A Letter to a Young Lady on Her Marriage, Swift established a set of criteria by which marriage should be conducted; that in Cadenus and Vanessa, he portrayed a serious and intelligent young woman; that in the Journal to Stella, the poems to Stella, and On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, he praised a witty, intelligent, virtuous woman; and that in the satiric verses, he depicted the follies and vices of contemporary women. It will prove that, however sensible and articulate these works are, Swift did not discover his most powerful means of expression until the "unprintable" poems of 1730-31.

CHAPTER I

A LETTER TO A YOUNG LADY ON HER MARRIAGE

A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, first published in 1727, presents a picture of Swift's view of woman's role in marriage. Although originally addressed to Miss Elizabeth Moore on the occasion of her marriage to George Rochfort, it has a universality which transcends the particular situation. The advice of the letter applies to any young woman who is married to a man of taste and intellect.

Swift's picture of marriage is free of the popular romantic notions of marital bliss. He dismisses sentimental romanticism when he reminds the young lady that hers was "a match of Prudence and common Good-liking, without any mixture of that ridiculous passion which has no Being but in Play-Books and Romances."¹ Swift does not rule out romantic feeling; he wants it tempered with rationality and good sense. In Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation, he writes:

"a little grain of the romance is no ill ingredient to preserve and exalt the dignity of human nature, without which it is apt to degenerate into everything that is sordid, vicious and low."²

In A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, Swift explains that there are enough hours in the day when the husband and wife are alone to conduct a passion as exalted as any "ever described in French Romances".³

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1. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, in Satires and Personal Writings, ed. W.A. Eddy, London, 1951, p. 66.
 2. Swift, Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation, in Selections from Swift's Works, Vol. 11, ed. Henry Craik, Oxford, 1893, p. 340.
 3. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, p. 62.

The most important consideration for the new wife, however, is the retention of her husband's love. According to Swift, "The Grand Affair of your life will be to gain and preserve the friendship and Esteem of your Husband."⁴ It is essential to their continued happiness that the young lady be able to replace the inevitable loss of youth and beauty with the more durable qualities of intellect, wit, and sense. Joseph Manch comments:

"Swift, with his keen, far-seeing eye, looks ahead down the long years and sees final disillusionment unless the union be arranged in a way that will provide for the ultimate loss of youth and beauty. Companionship is the final reality, the only thing that matters in the end."⁵

Unless social life and education provide the materials to insure a lasting companionship after the first flush of physical ardor has cooled, the marriage will be doomed.

The marriage that Swift discusses in the letter is not an ordinary one in that the young lady has married an exceptional man. Swift reminds her that he is "a Man of good education and learning, of an excellent understanding, and exact taste"⁶, and Swift is determined to insure that she will not spoil her good fortune. He notes that the parents of the young lady have neglected to cultivate her mind, an essential thing for a lasting marriage. The letter, therefore, represents his attempt to compensate for this lack of education; he prescribes what she should read, how she should act socially and privately, and of what

4. Ibid., p. 65.

5. Joseph Manch, "Jonathan Swift and Women", in University of Buffalo Studies, vol. XVI, no. 4, Feb. 1941, p. 157.

6. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, p. 65.

her conversation should consist. A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage is especially interesting because the lady addressed will live in a society of intelligent, educated, witty people.

In his unfinished treatise Of the Education of Ladies, Swift summarizes the many eighteenth-century arguments against the education of women:

"It is argued...that a humour of reading books, excepting those of devotion or housewifery, is apt to turn a woman's brain. That plays, romances, novels, and love-poems, are only proper to instruct them how to carry on an intrigue. That all affection of knowledge, beyond what is merely domestic, renders them vain, conceited, and pretending. That the natural levity of women wants ballast; and, when she once begins to think, she knows more than others of her sex, she will begin to despise her husband, and grow fond of every coxcomb who pretends to any knowledge in books. That she will learn scholastic words; make herself ridiculous by pronouncing them wrong, and applying them absurdly in all companies. That, in the mean time, her household affairs, and the care of her children, will be wholly laid aside; her toilet will be crowded with all the under-wits, where the conversation will pass in criticising on the last play or poem that comes out, and she will be careful to remember all the remarks that were made, in order to retail them in the next visit, especially in company who know nothing of the matter. That she will have all the impertinence of a pedant, without the knowledge; and, for every new acquirement, will become so much the worse."⁷

In A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, Swift completely rejects these contemporary opinions and superstitions. He writes that he is "ignorant of any one quality that is amiable in a Man which is not equally so in a Woman"⁸. He therefore advocates that the young lady improve her mind, and he suggests a method of study. She should

7. Swift, Of the Education of Ladies, in Works, vol. IV, ed. Herbert Davis, Oxford, 1957, p. 226.

8. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, p. 69.

read books about history and travel, making extracts from them if her memory is weak⁹. Because it is essential that she be able to read and understand her native language, the young lady should read aloud every day to her husband, or a friend, so that he can correct her errors. She should associate with persons of knowledge and understanding, and benefit from their conversation. Much can be learned, says Swift, from hearing men discussing the manners and customs of Europe, travels to remote nations, the great men of Greece and Rome, or the merits of French and English writers.

In opposition to eighteenth-century practices and beliefs, Swift advocates that women participate in male conversation. In Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation, he writes:

"This degeneracy of conversation, with the pernicious consequences thereof upon our humours and dispositions, has been owing, among other causes to the custom arisen, for some time past, of excluding women from any share in our society, farther than in parties at play, or dancing, or in the pursuit of an amour."¹⁰

In the letter, he attacks the contemporary practice of having the lady of the house withdraw immediately after dinner, "as if it were an established Maxim, that Women are incapable of all Conversation"¹¹. He abhors the practice of the ladies gathering after dinner to discuss the price and choice of lace and silk, or to criticize the dresses they saw at the church or the playhouse. Women should participate in the conversation

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9. It is interesting to note that Swift's advice to the young lady is much like Stella's qualities he admires in On the Death of Mrs. Johnson. Swift, for example, mentions that Stella read history and travel books, and made extracts of them. A good deal of the letter seems to be modelled after Stella.
 10. Swift, Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation, in Selections from Swift's Works, vol. II, ed. Henry Craik, Oxford, 1893, p. 340.
 11. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, p. 67.

of men:

"It is a shame for an English Lady not to relish such Discourses, not to improve by them, and endeavour by Reading and Information, to have her share in those Entertainments; rather than turn aside as it is the usual custom, and consult with the Woman who sits next to her, about a new cargo of Fans."¹²

Throughout the letter, Swift warns the young lady about the dangers of associating with, and adopting the habits of, the types of women he calls "fools, prudes, coquettes, gamesters, saunterers, endless talkers of nonsense, splenetic idlers, intriguers, given to scandal and censure"¹³. Since she is likely to contract some foppery, affectation, vanity, folly, or vice from such women, Swift warns the young lady to resolve to act in full opposition to their practices. The young lady should not make her maid her confidant in order to spread gossip, or to flatter her vanity. She should not be out of fashion, but her clothes should be chosen with taste, and with consideration for her husband's income. She should avoid the common female affectation of appearing frightened at the slightest provocation. Swift warns the young lady about "a tribe of bold, swaggering, rattling ladies"¹⁴ whose talent is using "rude choqing [sic] expressions" and ruining others' reputations. Such women, says Swift, "ought to be stripp'd and kick'd down Stairs."¹⁵

At the end of the letter, Swift adds some advice which, if

12. Ibid., p. 68.

13. Swift, Of the Education of Ladies, in Works, vol. IV, ed. Herbert Davis, Oxford, 1957, p. 226.

14. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, p. 70.

15. Ibid., p. 71.

it were more widely followed, would preserve many marriages. He hopes that the young lady will learn to value and esteem her husband for "those qualities which he really possesseth and not to fancy others in him which he certainly hath not."¹⁶ Although it may be a sign of love that a wife imagines her husband has many qualities that he does not, it may also be affectation or ill-judgement. Swift asks the young lady to see things as they really are, not as she may wish to think they should be. This honesty and lack of pretense is, for Swift, essential to a lasting marriage.

A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage indicates that Swift had great respect for marriage as an institution, and for women. The young lady has been very fortunate in marrying a man of exceptional qualities, and Swift wants to preserve their chance for a lasting, happy union. Marriage, for Swift, is a serious business, one which should be governed by reason and good sense, not by passion and poor judgement.

A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage elaborates a fine ideal about woman's place in marriage and society--an ideal which remained consistent throughout Swift's career as a writer. But the letter, despite its good sense and excellent style, is not great literature. Although it embodies Swift's positive ideal for women, it belongs to the minor genre of advice letters and moral epistles. It is only one of a series of attempts Swift made to find a suitable literary vehicle for his specific view of women. Subsequent chapters will discuss other such attempts, ending with his perfected expression in the "unprintable"

16. Ibid., p. 71.

poems of 1730-31.

CHAPTER II

CADENUS AND VANESSA

Next to Esther Johnson, the most important woman in Swift's life was Esther Vanhomrigh, to whom Swift gave the name "Vanessa". She was the "other woman" of the Swift-Esther Johnson relationship. Many critics have argued that Swift actually loved Vanessa and would have married her had it not been for the effect it would have had upon Esther Johnson.

Vanessa was born in Dublin in 1688, which means that she was twenty-one years younger than Swift, and seven years younger than Esther Johnson. She was the eldest of the four children of Bartholomew Vanhomrigh, the Lord Mayor of Dublin. When Bartholomew died in 1703, the family moved to London.

Swift first encountered the Vanhomrigh family in 1707, while on his way to London. Their paths apparently crossed at an inn near Dunstable where Vanessa spilled some coffee in the chimney¹. In London, Swift became a close friend of the family.

When he returned to London in 1710, Swift made a habit of calling at the Vanhomrigh home every day. It seems that the Vanhomrighs set aside a study for their guest, and Swift kept his periwig and

1. In a letter to Vanessa, dated August 12, 1720, Swift writes: "What would you give to have the History of Cad---and--- exactly written through all its steps from the beginning to this time.---It ought to be an exact Chronicle of 12 Years; from the time of spilling the Coffee to drinking of Coffee, from Dunstable to Dublin with every single passage since." Swift, Correspondence, vol. 11, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1963, p. 356.

gown there. At this time, he began educating Vanessa, as he had educated Esther Johnson previously. From their correspondence, it is obvious that Vanessa fell passionately in love with Swift, and this love never really ceased.

Swift returned to Dublin in 1713, and in 1714, Vanessa followed, spending the remainder of her life in Ireland. From 1714 until her death in 1723, Swift occasionally visited Vanessa, but their relationship became much less intense. In her will, Vanessa made no mention of Swift.

According to the critical consensus, Cadenus and Vanessa (1713) is a purely personal poem describing the specific relationship of Swift and Vanessa, and meant only for Vanessa's eyes. Bernard Acworth says that it was designed to "preserve Vanessa's self-respect in the extraordinary situation which her reckless infatuation had created."² It is, he claims, a complete vindication of both Vanessa's and Swift's honor. Maurice Johnson calls the poem a "comic valentine"³. Other critics are convinced that the poem was Swift's method of placing the affair with Vanessa in its proper perspective, and of allowing Vanessa to discover how matters stood between them.

For a poem often considered to be a private testament of a personal relationship, Cadenus and Vanessa is remarkably free of specific biographical details, though Swift does mention Vanessa's

2. Bernard Acworth, Swift, London, 1947, p. 93.

3. Maurice Johnson, The Sin of Wit: Jonathan Swift as a Poet, Syracuse, 1950, p. 43.

inheritance of five thousand pounds. The mechanism of the deities and the Court of Love, furthermore, serve to remove the poem from a specific social context. Vanessa, in addition, seems more like an idealized type than a vivid representation of the actual Esther Vanhomrigh. One does not receive the impression of a living, full-blooded woman.

According to Herbert Davis, "Cadenus and Vanessa is as literary as anything Swift ever produced."⁴ Davis notes that, however charged with passion and pity their relationship actually was, Swift treats it with as little emotion as possible. Neither cynical nor sentimental, he detaches himself from the actual, placing it a little way off. Ricardo Quintana emphasizes the involved design and elaborate care in the development of the poem. For Quintana, the episode between Cadenus and Vanessa is made unnecessarily to depend upon the mythological framework. This, he argues, diverts attention from the self-contained drama of the Cadenus-Vanessa affair.⁵ It could be argued that the fable of Venus and the Court of Love is merely Swift's method of absolving himself of any responsibility for Vanessa's dilemma, a type of defense mechanism designed to ease his conscience.

This absence of emotional intensity and specific biographical material noted by various critics may indicate that Cadenus and Vanessa is much more than just a private communication. Most of the poem is, after all, concerned with the mythological framework, and with the

4. Herbert Davis, "Swift's View of Poetry", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, New York, 1964, p. 183.

5. Ricardo Quintana, The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift, London, 1953, p. 223.

creation and education of Vanessa. The Cadenus and Vanessa relationship is actually an interlude which begins late and occupies only about half of the poem. Vanessa is not treated with any real emotion, and Cadenus is mostly a comic figure. Cadenus and Vanessa may be much more understandable if attention is diverted from the biographical content, and directed toward the mythological machinery and educational theories.

Classical deities and pastoral figures are rare occurrences in Swift's poetry. The romanticism of the early poetry written at Moor Park, the estate of Sir William Temple, quickly disappeared, and, in the late poems, romantic and pastoral references are used as satirical devices. For example, "Strephon and Chloe" (1731) and "Cassinus and Peter" (1731) burlesque the conventions of traditional romantic pastoral poetry to expose the world as it really is. In Cadenus and Vanessa, however, the mythological machinery is not mock-, but pseudo-, classical. Swift's poem is much like Pope's The Rape of the Lock, except, of course, that Pope is much more successful in weaving the machinery into his story.

The function of the classical deities in Cadenus and Vanessa is twofold: first, they are the device whereby the great experiment in womanhood is originated, and second, they lift the story above the level of personal relationship and give it a kind of universality. It is only the gods who can create such a perfect female as Vanessa. The poem opens with an argument between the "shepherds" and the "nymphs" about the sad state of love in the modern world. Love, they say, has dwindled to intrigue, and marriage has become a "Money-League"

(1.62). Venus, the Queen of Love, is disturbed by these male allegations, and decides to try an experiment by producing the perfect woman.

The creation of Vanessa, the ultimate in womanhood, is a very graphic portrayal of Swift's conception of the ideal eighteenth-century gentlewoman. Calling the Graces to her assistance, Venus endows Vanessa with physical beauty, and a cleanliness which is "Incapable of outward Stains" (1.163).

To the physical beauty of woman, Venus adds male mental characteristics by tricking Pallas into believing that Vanessa is a boy. Swift's vision of the ideal gentlewoman included many qualities which, in his age, were generally associated with the male sex. The particular type of frail femininity of the times disturbed him, and he saw no reason why women should not display many of the admirable qualities found in men. In A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, he writes, "I am ignorant of any one quality that is amiable in a Man, which is not equally so in a Woman"⁶ and he ridicules women who affect terror at the sight of a mouse. In On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, Swift admires Stella for her courage in shooting a would-be thief. In the poem "To Stella, Visiting Me On My Sickness", he notes that Stella, though a woman, has a "manly" soul. The most important male characteristics with which Vanessa is endowed are knowledge, judgement, wit, and taste, and this theme runs throughout Cadenus and Vanessa. Vanessa is, in addition, given the qualities of justice, truth,

6. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, in Satires and Personal Writings, ed. W.A. Eddy, London, 1951, p. 70.

fortitude, honor, generosity, and a small regard for "State and Wealth" (1.217).

With such a combination of feminine beauty and masculine knowledge, judgement, wit, and taste, Vanessa is ready to dazzle the world. In a society of fops and foolish women, however, Vanessa finds no place. In describing Vanessa's experiences in social life, Swift provides a vivid picture of the frivolous, vain women he later was to call "the senseless Tribe"⁷. They are the women who casually play cards while discussing his death⁸, the women whom he warns his young lady to avoid after her marriage, and the women so vividly dissected in "The Furniture of a Woman's Mind". The contrast with Vanessa is powerful. They tell the tattle of the day, gossip about duels and the weather, and quote "Fustian from exploded Plays"(1.330). To their "Titles, Figure, Shape, and Dress"(1.341), Vanessa prefers knowledge, judgement, wit, and taste. When she discusses history, foreign customs, art, and law, her listeners are convinced that she is the "dullest Soul"(1.359). When the party of "glitt'ring Dames" (1.364) comes to call on Vanessa to prate about ribbons, fans, lace, and gloves, they discover her reading Montaigne. As Vanessa observes them with disdain, they proceed to slander and libel her, and from her vantage point, Venus is forced to conclude that:

"great Examples are but Vain,
Where Ignorance begets Disdain."(11.436-7)

Yet, says Swift, with those few people who possess knowledge,

7. "Stella's Birthday"(1720-21) 1.51.

8. "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.", 11.225-42.

judgement, wit, and taste, Vanessa succeeds; she pleases them and improves herself. The learned have free access to Vanessa's company, and at this specific point, Swift introduces Cadenus. The poem then becomes more biographical. Swift relates how Cupid's darts strike Vanessa, and how she falls in love with Cadenus in much the same fashion that an impressionable pupil becomes infatuated with an unsuspecting teacher. Cadenus is first struck with guilt, surprise, and compassion, but this soon gives way to the pride of being preferred to a crowd of beaux. Swift, however, ends the affair on an ambiguous note, saying that the "conscious Muse" will never tell whether "They temper Love and Books together"(1.825).

The poem, however, does not end at this point, and this is important. Venus has conducted an experiment, and she now sees the result. She concludes that it is the men, not the women, who are to blame for the sorry state of modern love. Her "Nymph of Wit and Sense" (1.865) could not find a lover because the "fellows had a wretched Taste"(1.869). She decides that men are a stupid senseless race, and that the only solution is the reformation, not of the women, but of the men. With a touch of biting irony, Venus concludes that the only alternative would be to make the women even more silly and foolish than they already are so that they would be equal matches for the men. Surely in this latter part of the poem, Swift is saying that, if women are to be advanced socially and intellectually, the attitude of the men will have to be transformed. As long as men want silly, weak, frivolous women, the female sex will remain a "senseless tribe".

One might argue that, since Cadenus has judgement, knowledge,

wit, and taste, he should succumb to Vanessa's perfection. That Vanessa cannot find a lover even in the person of Cadenus would seem to contradict the thesis that men must be made more intelligent in order to appreciate ideal women. J. Middleton Murry thinks that Vanessa's dilemma is that of a woman who can only love a man she admires, and the one man whom she admires is too old to be capable of a complete relationship. This is speculation, of course, but the fact that the poem is constructed around biographical events explains why Swift could not have Cadenus surrender to Vanessa's charms. Not only would it have been inconsistent with actual events, but it would have introduced an element of sentiment and romanticism inconsistent with the intention of the poem.

There is, however, a more significant reason for the ambiguous ending to the affair. Cadenus and Vanessa is not a love poem, it is an attempt to make love seem small in comparison to the need for a constant, rational relationship between the sexes. The poem contains as clear a statement of Swift's conception of love as can be found in his writing. At the beginning, Swift contrasts the state of modern love with his own ideal:

"A Fire celestial, chaste, refin'd,
 Conceiv'd and kindled in the Mind,
 Which having found an equal Flame,
 Unites, and both become the same,
 In different Breasts together burn,
 Together both to Ashes turn."(ll.29-34)

Vanessa's love for Cadenus, however, is the result of Cupid's darts, an irrational passion of the heart only. To Vanessa's passionate

attraction, Cadenus offers "Friendship in its greatest Height"(1.781). Swift argues that love is not composed of one passion, but is a compound of many elements--hot and cold, sharp and sweet, pleasure and pain, sorrow and joy, and hope and fear. His idea of love is founded on "Virtue's Basis"(1.782), and will last long after romantic allurements are gone. It is a relationship "Which gently warms, but cannot burn" (1.784).

In the last stanza of the Cadenus-Vanessa episode, Swift leaves the outcome of their relationship in doubt:

"Whether the Nymph, to please her Swain,
Talks in a high Romantick Strain;
Or whether he at last descends
To like with less Seraphick Ends;
Or, to compound the Business, whether
They temper Love and Books together;
Must never to Mankind be told,
Nor shall the conscious Muse unfold."(ll.820-7)

We are not told whether the "high Romantick Strain" of Cadenus' "constant, rational Delight" succeeds, or whether Vanessa's "less Seraphick" passion holds sway. As the biographers have noted, this stanza is designed to protect Vanessa's, and Swift's, honor; it also serves, I believe, to end the episode with a social or philosophical question.

As in the case of A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, while the content of Cadenus and Vanessa is logical and sensible, the vehicle is not great art. Although he manages to place the actual affair at some distance, Swift is, nevertheless, bound by the biographical context. Cadenus and Vanessa raises the question of woman's role in society, and of her mental development, but it does not strike the

reader with any amount of force. It is not until later that Swift discovers that he must shock the reader into an awareness, and then present his ideal.

CHAPTER III

STELLA: THE "TRUEST, MOST VIRTUOUS AND VALUABLE FRIEND"

The most important woman in Swift's life was Esther Johnson, to whom he gave the name "Stella". Although he never married her, they enjoyed as complete an understanding, and as deep a friendship, as can be found in many marriages. When Stella lay dying, Swift wrote in agony to Rev. James Stopford: "Dear Jim, pardon me, I know not what I am saying; but believe me that violent friendship is much more lasting, and as much engaging, as violent love."¹ When he believed that Stella had died, he wrote: "I am able to hold up my sorry head no longer."²

Swift first met Esther Johnson in 1689 at the household of Sir William Temple, when he was twenty-two and she was eight. Esther was fatherless, and her mother was employed by Temple's sister. Swift tells us that he had some share in Esther's education, by directing what books she should read, and by instructing her in the principles of honor and virtue. She had been sickly when young, but when Swift returned to the Temple household in 1696, she was a beautiful, graceful fifteen. Sir William Temple died in 1699, and in 1700 or 1701, Swift persuaded Esther to move to Ireland where the money bequeathed her by Temple would last longer. Accompanying her was a sort of paid

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1. Letter to Rev. James Stopford, July 20, 1726, Correspondence, vol. III, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1963, p. 145.
 2. Letter to Rev. Thomas Sheridan, September 2, 1727, Ibid.



companion, Rebecca Dingley, who was fifteen years older than Esther. Except for one visit to England in 1705, the two ladies spent the remainder of their lives in Ireland.

Although it appears that Swift never met Esther except in the presence of Dingley, they developed a tender, intimate friendship. When Swift lived in England from September, 1710, to June, 1713, he wrote the famous Journal to Stella, a series of letters in journal form to the two ladies in Ireland. In 1719, he began an annual custom of writing a birthday poem to Esther, and he then began to call her "Stella". On January 28th, 1728, Stella died, and Swift wrote one of the most moving tributes to a woman, On the Death of Mrs. Johnson.

Very little is known about Stella apart from what is mentioned about her in Swift's writings. None of her letters has been preserved, and only a few of her poems have survived. The sole picture of Stella, therefore, is that created by Swift's pen--The Journal to Stella, the poems, the prose tribute, and a few references in Swift's correspondence. The portrait that Swift gives us, however, is not precise or complete; it is a picture of a literary Stella--the embodiment of all the virtues and qualities which he thinks a gentlewoman should possess. Stella, according to Herbert Davis, appears only in a formal way, and we really know nothing beyond what is revealed by the part Swift had her play:

"In the process of making literature out of his experience of friendship with Esther Johnson, in all the various studies and sketches he made of her, Swift does more than set before us an individual person who lived a very private life among a small circle of friends in Dublin during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, for he is working at the same time a larger subject in which he was always intensely interested, a

study of the English gentlewoman, and her place in enlightened and civilized society."³

The Journal to Stella.

Swift, according to Margaret L. Woods, "writes his Journal to Stella without even a subconscious aim at artistic effect; and gives us the most vivid, the tenderest and wittiest series of love letters in the English language."⁴ If anyone, she continues, denies the love-letterness of the Journal to Stella, let him compare it to Swift's other correspondence. That the letters are tender and witty, and that they are unique among Swift's correspondence, is certainly true, but they are much more. Carl Van Doren suggests that the Journal to Stella was partly news sent from the great world to a friend waiting in a small one, and partly a detailed memorandum to his other self.⁵ To be considered Swift's "other self" would indeed be a tribute to Stella's wit and intellect. Other critics such as Virginia Woolf, Irvin Ehrenpreis, and Herbert Davis, emphasize the value of the Journal as a form of escape from the pressures of the London political and social scene.

Just as the Journal to Stella is extremely valuable to the historian because of its vivid picture of Queen Anne's London, its value to the Swift critic is equally important because it is an intimate view of the private Swift, and a literary testament to a

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3. Herbert Davis, "Stella: A Gentlewoman of the Eighteenth Century", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, New York, 1964, p. 36.
 4. Margaret L. Woods, "Swift, Stella, and Vanessa", in The Nineteenth Century and After, LXXIV, Dec., 1913, p. 1230.
 5. Carl Van Doren, "Swift", in The Portable Carl Van Doren, New York, 1945, p. 195.

unique relationship. The Journal to Stella is a photographic portrait of Swift, his anger, pride, kindness and generosity, sympathy and affection, genius and wit, and his artistic sensibility. But it is as much, in a less direct way, a comment on his "other self", Esther Johnson. From observation of the manner in which Swift wrote to the woman he most admired, and with whom he was most intimate, much can be discovered about Swift's attitude toward women in general.

The sixty-five letters comprising the Journal to Stella were written in the period from September, 1710, to June, 1713, when Swift lived in London. He had gone to England to secure the "First-Fruits" for the Church of Ireland, and the Tory administration persuaded him to remain there as a Tory pamphleteer. Although they are addressed to Rebecca Dingley, and many of the comments are directed at the "Irish ladies", it is obvious that Swift is writing for Stella. He refers to Dingley in a formal manner, but shows genuine concern, indeed love, for Stella. The tone of the addresses to Dingley never changes; the addresses to Stella vary considerably, especially, it appears, during the period that Swift became most involved with Esther Vanhomrigh. Seen in the light of Swift's later writings about Stella, it becomes obvious that the Journal was written primarily for her.

The most important aspect of the Journal to Stella is its tone. Swift does not talk down to Stella; she is an equal who is unluckily isolated from the political and social milieu of London life. There is a good deal of affectionate pleasantry and good-humored raillery at Stella's expense, but it does not approach censure:

"Come, come, young women, I keep a good fire; it costs me twelve-pence a week, and I fear something

more; vex me, and I'll have one in my bed-chamber too.---Now you're at it again, silly Stella; why does your mother say, my candles are scandalous? They are good sixes in the pound, and she said, I was extravagant enough to burn them by day-light."⁶

He makes fun of her spelling, her ignorance of the Bible and of politics, her losses at cards, her lack of exercise, and her notorious puns. The letters are written in the affectionate language of household speech, and the intimate enquiries of a familiar friend:

"Now let us proceed to examine a saucy letter from one madam MD--God Almighty bless poor dear Stella, and send her a great many Birth-days, all happy and healthy, and wealthy, and with me ever together, and never asunder again, unless by chance."⁷

There are the little commissions and duties which Swift assigns to Stella, and chocolate and tobacco to be sent to the ladies. The number of double-entendres and jokes about sex indicate that the relationship between Swift and Stella was one of understanding and ease. For example, he writes:

"I wish my cold hand was in the warmest place about you, young women, I'd give ten guineas upon that account with all my heart, faith; oh, it starves my thigh; so I'll rise and bid you good morrow, my ladies both, good morrow."⁸

Swift prevents this remark from being offensive by presenting it as a sign of his affection for the ladies.

In an essay on Swift⁹, Aldous Huxley attacks him on the grounds that he is both a ferocious hater and gross sentimentalist.

6. Swift, Journal to Stella, vol. 1, ed. Harold Williams, vol. 1, Oxford, 1948, p. 149.
7. Swift, Journal to Stella, vol. 1, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1948, p. 232.
8. Ibid., p. 181.
9. Aldous Huxley, Do What You Will, London, 1929.

In this extremely bad attempt at literary criticism, Huxley points to the Journal to Stella, with its pet names and its "little language", as an example of Swift's childish sentimentalism. What Huxley obviously fails to recognize is that it was not Swift's mind that was split, but his works. Gulliver's Travels, A Modest Proposal, and the "unprintable" poems, were written for publication; the Journal to Stella was not. More important, the claim that the Journal is sentimental is nonsense. As Herbert Davis says, there is "from time to time a flash of sentiment, a feeling of deeper tone, even though the actual expression is never allowed to become emotional."¹⁰ Occasionally Swift approaches sentiment, but he is quick to withdraw. Commenting on Stella's remembering his birthday, he writes:

"And so you have kept Presto's little birth-day, I warrant: would to God I had been at the health rather than here, where I have no manner of pleasure, nothing but eternal business upon my hands. I shall grow wise in time; but no more of that: only I say Amen with my heart and vitals that we may never be asunder again ten days together while poor Presto lives.-----I can't be merry near any splenetick talk; so I made that long line, and now all's well again."¹¹

The aspect of the Journal to Stella for which Swift is most often praised or condemned is the "little language". The "little language" is a form of nursery or baby talk which is usually found at the end of each day's entry. It is composed of symbolic names,

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10. Herbert Davis, "Stella, A Gentlewoman of the Eighteenth Century, in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, New York, 1964, p. 82.
11. Swift, Journal to Stella, vol. 1, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1948, p. 147.

and substitutions of letters within words.¹² For example, "Ppt" stands for "poor pretty things", "MD" for "My dears", and "Pdfr" for "poor dear foolish rogue" (Swift himself). Most of Swift's letters close with a liberal sprinkling of "little language":

"Nite deelest richr Md, farewell dee Md Md Md FW FW
FW Me Me Me lele lele lele."¹³

"Farewell Md Md Md FW FW FW Me Me Lele Lele Lele
Sollahs lele."¹⁴

For Huxley, the "little language" is inexcusable sentimentalism; for others, it is a manifestation of latent insanity. These highly subjective critical approaches grow out of the critics' embarrassment that a man of Swift's stature could indulge in "little language". Other critics offer more sober explanations. Herbert Davis believes it offered Swift an escape from the pressures of his political career. To Ehrenpreis, it was an expression, for Stella, of Swift's tenderness and of their intimacy. Rossi and Hone argue that the "little language" was a symbolical way of erasing the age difference between Stella and himself.¹⁵ Like Davis, Virginia Woolf suggests that it served as an emotional release from the high formality of his social routine:

"The proudest of men coming home from the company
of great men who praised him, of lovely women who

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12. The actual mechanics of the "little language" have been excellently discussed by Irvin Ehrenpreis in his book, The Personality of Jonathan Swift, London, 1958.
 13. Swift, Journal to Stella, vol. 11, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1948, p. 607.
 14. Ibid., p. 507.
 15. Mario M. Rossi and Joseph M. Hone, Swift or the Egoist, New York, 1934, referred to by Ehrenpreis in The Personality of Jonathan Swift, London, 1958, p. 51.

flattered him, from intrigue and politics, put all that aside, settled himself comfortably in bed, pursed his severe lips into baby language and prattled to his 'two monkies', his 'dear Sirrahs', his 'naughty rogues' on the other side of the Irish Channel."¹⁶

Perhaps one may conclude that the "little language" was indeed a form of escape from the pressures of the political and social life, and was, at the same time, an expression of the intimacy of the relationship between Swift and Stella. The "little language" was, after all, a secret code known only to Swift and Stella (and perhaps to Dingley).

Because Swift wrote the letters of the Journal to Stella with no thought of publication, some important conclusions can be drawn about Swift's attitude to women. First, it is obvious that Swift was capable of a deep, intimate friendship (one might call it love). Second, and more important, it shows that he certainly was not a misogynist. Because Stella was intelligent, sensitive, and witty, Swift could write to her about London politics and the English social scene, and test her with subtle and tricky puns. The extremely high quality of the letters indicates that Swift's opinion of Stella's intellect and sensibility was equally high.

The Verses to Stella.

The name "Stella" appears with the first birthday poem, written in 1719. Herbert Davis argues that the name is a private

16. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader (second series), London, 1932, p. 67.

literary joke on all romantic nonsense, and particularly, a mocking of the lover-loved one relationship of the conventional sonnet sequence.¹⁷ Furthermore, says Davis, it could hide and flaunt the truth that Esther really was Swift's "star". While Davis may be right, the conventional name also serves as a distancing device, a means of preventing the poetry from becoming too intimate or verging on the sentimental.

The verses written to Stella have been called poems of love or friendship, but they embody emotions too subtle and complicated to be accurately described in conventional terms. Herbert Davis says that "The poems to Stella are if possible both in subject and in style an even more complete triumph over any temptation to indulge in sentiment or romance."¹⁸ Although they have more literary formality than the letters of the Journal to Stella, they are written in the same familiar, relaxed, everyday language. Swift does not hesitate to compare Stella to an old inn or to a lank, lean cow, and he uses many household terms. These birthday poems are, with the exception of the last, light, witty, and affectionate.

The central theme of the Stella poems is the dichotomy between the body and the soul. As Stella's health and physical beauty steadily deteriorate, there is an increasing emphasis on virtue, sense, and wit. This split between body and soul follows the traditional Christian teaching that, while the body is a symbol of sin and frailty,

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17. Davis develops the idea that Swift was mocking Sir Philip Sydney and his "Stella", pointing out that, instead of Sydney's knightly worship, there is affectionate, intimate raillery. Herbert Davis, "Stella, A Gentlewoman of the Eighteenth Century", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, New York, 1964, p. 37.
18. Herbert Davis, "Swift's View of Poetry", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, New York, 1964, p. 186.

and subject to decay and death, the soul is pure and immortal. From his writing, it is obvious that Swift regarded bodily health as very important; he was fully aware of the frailty that flesh is heir to. He required health from Jane Waring, he stressed its importance to Vanessa, and he constantly urged Stella to exercise and remain healthy.

The best example of the body-soul theme can be found in the 1721 birthday poem, where Swift compares Stella to an old inn. According to Swift, the traveller is first attracted to an inn because of its outward appearance, but his patronage is retained by the quality of the food, drink, and hospitality found within:

"And though the Painting grows decay'd
The House will never loose [sic] its Trade"(ll.7-8)

Stella, says Swift, is like the inn; her friends, first drawn by the beauty of her youth, remain faithful to her because of her "Breeding, Humour, Wit, and Sense"(l.25). Cloe may be younger, but her scandal-mongering and innuendo are no match for Stella's virtues:

"No Bloom of Youth can ever Blind
The Cracks and Wrinkles of Your Mind,
All Men of Sense will pass your Dore
And crowd at Stella's at fourscore."(ll.55-58)

Similarly, in the 1725 birthday poem, Swift acknowledges that Stella and he are no longer young, but her fading beauty is unimportant because his own sight is failing. Since no length of time can destroy her honor, virtue, sense, and wit, it is just as well that he can hear better than he can see. What Swift means is that the communication of their minds is much more valuable and lasting than mere physical attraction.

The Stella poems were written during the period in which

Swift produced many of his great satiric anti-romantic poems---
 "Phyllis, or, the Progress of Love" (1719), "The Progress of Beauty"
 (1719), and "The Progress of Marriage" (1722)--and the Stella poems
 reflect their anti-romantic cast. In "To Stella, Who Collected and
 Transcribed his Poems", Swift makes fun of the conventional devices
 of romantic poetry:

"Thou Stella, wert no longer young,
 When first for thee my Harp I strung:
 Without one word of Cupid's Darts,
 Of killing Eyes or bleeding Hearts:
 With Friendship and Esteem Possesst,
 I ne'er admitted Love a guest" (ll.9-14)

Throughout his verses to Stella, Swift speaks to her honestly and
 truthfully, without using "Cupid's Darts", "killing Eyes", or "bleed-
 ing Hearts". Instead of "Love", and here Swift means romantic nonsense,
 he prefers friendship and esteem.

Swift's description of the romantic poet is typical of his
 attitude to romantic poetry. The romantic poet, starving in the
 traditional garret, is deluded by a fleeting glimpse of some Chloe,
 Sylvia, Phyllis, or Iris, into imagining that the damsel is a paragon
 of beauty, and he proceeds to translate his delusion into romantic
 verse. Sooner or later, however, the poet suffers a cruel awakening.
 If he were to seek out his "Nymphs divine", he would find them tippling
 with the footman, beating flax in prison, mending ragged smocks, or
 suffering from the pox. Their own fathers would not recognize them as
 they are decked out in poetry. The romantic poet's cruel awakening is
 the same kind of discovery that Swift later describes much more power-
 fully in "Strephon and Chloe" (1731) or "Cassinus and Peter" (1731).

It is, says Swift, only the true poet who can see through the false beauty on the surface to the inner reality. His praises of Stella are not, therefore, based on "Beauty, Dress, or Paint, or Youth" (l.62), but on virtue and honor which is solid and lasting.

All of Swift's writings about Stella are controlled by a moral realism. He may at one time playfully admit that Stella has "An Angel's Face, a little crack't", that she is getting grey, and that she may no longer be a fitting subject for his poetry. In "To Stella, Who Collected and Transcribed his Poems", he even criticizes her quick temper. He claims that her truth, judgement, and wit often give place to spite, and this suspends all her virtues. Yet, Swift softens his charge by ending the poem on a lighter note, daring her to copy out his lines. The moral realism in the Stella poems is the same honest quality found in On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, and in the "unprintable" poems. It results from Swift's constant desire to see things as they really are; in the verses to Stella, it makes his tributes sincere and believable.

The poem written for Stella's birthday in 1727--when her health was failing and it was growing clear that she would soon be dead--stands apart from the other verses. While the atmosphere of the earlier poems is light and joking, in the last one it is nostalgic and calmly melancholic. Swift signals the change early in the poem:

"From not the gravest of Divines,
Accept for once some serious Lines" (ll.13-14)

The poem is a backward glance at Stella's life, and a statement of the value of virtue, courage, and kindness. Swift says that Stella

can look back with content on a life well spent; she has nursed people, given them support, defended her friends, and detected "Vice in all its glittering dress"(1.48). Just as food has maintained her body, virtuous actions will support her mind. Having lived a life of virtue and honor, Stella can look,

"Back with Joy where she has gone,
And therefore goes with Courage on" (11.75-76)

On the Death of Mrs. Johnson.

From 1725 until her death in 1728, Stella's health steadily deteriorated; on several occasions she was near death. During these years, Swift twice went to England because, it appears, he could not bear the agony of seeing her die. Nowhere else in his writing can we find the passion or desperation of Swift's correspondence during Stella's decline. In 1726, he wrote to Rev. John Worrall:

"I have these 2 months seen through Mrs. D's [Dingley's] Disguises, and indeed ever since I left you my Heart hath been so sunk that I have not been the same man, nor shall ever be again, but drag on a wretched life till it shall please God to call me away."¹⁹

In 1727, Swift wrote to Rev. Thomas Sheridan that,

"The distressed and desperate condition of our Friend, makes Life so indifferent to me, who by the Course of Nature have so little left, that I do not think it worth the time to struggle----- to see the loss of that Person for whose sake Life was only worth preserving."²⁰

19. Swift, Correspondence, vol. 111, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1963, p. 141.

20. Ibid., p. 236.

In comparison to the general tone of Swift's writings and other correspondence, the passionate and emotional nature of these letters is striking. On January 28th, 1728, Swift's worst fears were realized with Stella's death. In the following three days, he composed the moving remembrance, On the Death of Mrs. Johnson.

Swift's prose tribute to Stella has the calm, peaceful resignation of a requiem. There is no longer any note of anguish, despair, or violent friendship. It is, according to Herbert Davis, "a rare document among Swift's writings, in its quiet, placid surface, unruffled and unbroken, without even a touch of irony."²¹ Occasionally, however, there is a subtle indication that Swift is indeed suffering:

"This is the night of the funeral, which my sickness will not suffer me to attend. It is now nine at night, and I am removed into another apartment, that I may not see the light in the church, which is just over against the window of my bed-chamber."²²

There are numerous instances throughout the tribute where Swift is repetitive, indicating that he probably did not have complete control of himself.

According to Herbert Davis, Swift's account of Stella's life is "a conventional tribute. It answers no questions and gives away no secrets."²³ While it is certainly true that the tribute may conceal much about Stella, it does reveal much of what Swift admired

21. Herbert Davis, "Stella: A Gentlewoman of the Eighteenth Century", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, 1964, p. 92.
22. Swift, On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, in Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings, ed. Ricardo Quintana, New York, 1958, p. 478.
23. Herbert Davis, "Stella: A Gentlewoman of the Eighteenth Century", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, 1964, p. 92.

in a woman. Swift has obviously selected only what he thought important qualities in Stella, and this selection helps to form his picture of the ideal gentlewoman.

Swift writes of Stella: "Never was any of her sex born with better gifts of the mind, or more improved them by reading and conversation."²⁴ The gifts of the mind were wit, judgement, honor, virtue, and generosity. Stella possessed gracefulness of motion, action and word, and never was there "so happy a conjunction of civility, freedom, easiness, and sincerity."²⁵ Because she seldom bought clothes and then purchased only those which were cheapest and plainest, Stella was able to be extremely generous to the poor. She chose her charities judiciously, writes Swift, so that her generosity would accomplish much.²⁶ Stella was loved by her servants because she treated them freely, but with firmness. She always gave good advice, and offered it with decency. When, however, a "rude or conceited coxcomb" offended her taste or modesty, Stella would demolish him with a barbed comment.

Swift places considerable emphasis on Stella's courage and presence of mind: "With all the softness of temper that becomes a lady, she had the personal courage of a hero."²⁷ When a parcel of rogues once attempted to break into her household, Stella carefully

24. Swift, On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, p. 477.

25. Ibid., p. 477.

26. It is interesting, but not surprising, that Stella's ideas about charity are identical to Swift's. In her memoirs, Letitia Pilkington records how Swift once ran home to avoid the rain, thus saving sixpence in carriage fare. This sixpence Swift gave to his servant to give to a lame old man who sold gingerbread instead of begging.

27. Swift, On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, p. 478.

and calmly shot one of their members, and frightened the rest away. Swift admires Stella because she never took notice of the trivial distractions which produce frequent fears in other women. As he had written in "To Stella, Visiting Me in my Sickness":

Stella never learn'd the Art
At proper times to scream and start" (ll.71-72)

Stella, says Swift, was well-educated, and had improved her mind by reading. She was familiar with the Greek and Roman myths and legends, spoke French well, and read the best travel books, which opened and enlarged her mind. She understood, and was an accomplished critic of, Platonic and Epicurean philosophy. She understood the nature of government, and Swift is pleased that she could point out the weaknesses of Hobbes. According to Swift, Stella had a true taste for wit, and a good sense of both poetry and prose, being a perfect critic of style. Swift's account of Stella's learning is extremely interesting because it was, after all, he who had been responsible for her education.

Swift emphasizes the value to Stella of good conversation, and wise, witty companions. She chose friends who were honorable, truthful, liberal, good-natured, and modest. She would allow for other defects if her companions possessed these qualities. Stella was a good conversationalist; she was patient, reserved, and never interrupted another speaker. Her "Bon Mots", he claims, were of the highest quality. Stella preferred the company of men because:

"The usual topics of ladies discourse being such as she had little knowledge of, and less relish.--- She was but little versed in the common topics of female chat; scandal, censure, and detraction, never came out of her mouth."²⁸

28. Swift, On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, p. 478

She did not, however, avoid women, but chose those with "easiness" or good sense. Stella had been educated by Swift, and was best fitted for the company of his cultured friends. Swift implies that the general population of women fell far below the ideal, the woman he could honestly call "the truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend, that I or perhaps any other person ever was blessed with."²⁹

Stella, as portrayed in Swift's writings, is a remarkable woman: in the Journal to Stella, Swift treats her as an intelligent, perceptive, witty companion who shares the hopes, fears, and achievements of a great man; in the poems, he admires her intelligence, honor, virtue, and wit, and stresses their durable quality; in On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, he summarizes her achievements in educational and social endeavours, and eulogizes the beauty of her mind and person. The composite picture formed of Stella is a portrait against which, one suspects, most eighteenth-century women would have compared unfavorably. Yet there are only three years between On the Death of Mrs. Johnson and the "unprintable" poems in which, it has been charged, Swift reveals an obsessional hatred of women.

29. Swift, On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, p. 476.

CHAPTER IV

SOME EARLY EXPERIMENTAL SATIRIC POEMS

According to Maurice Johnson, "a society of fashionably dressed, charmless ladies moves noisily through Swift's writing".¹ Some members of this noisy band are Lady Smart and Lady Answerall of A Compleat Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation, the "tribe of bold, swaggering, rattling Ladies"² of A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, and the Brobdingnagian maids of honor. Most of the "charmless ladies", however, are found in Swift's verse--the recipient of "Verses Wrote in a Lady's Ivory-Table-Book", Phillis in "The Progress of Marriage", the decaying nymph in "The Progress of Beauty", and the lady whose frivolous activities comprise "The Journal of a Modern Lady".

Satiric poems about women appear at all stages of Swift's literary career, and contrary to the opinions of such commentators as Middleton Murry and Aldous Huxley, they are not the products of a psychologically disordered mind. From "Verses Wrote in a Lady's Ivory Table-Book" (1698) to "Cassinus and Peter" (1731), Swift is motivated by a moral concern to protest against ideas and conduct that are against common sense and reason. If, therefore, the poems

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1. Maurice Johnson, The Sin of Wit: Jonathan Swift as a Poet, Syracuse, 1950, p. 39.
 2. Swift, A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, in Satires and Personal Writings, ed. W.A. Eddy, London, 1951, p. 70.

are to be appreciated fully, they must not be explained according to biographical speculation, but rather, seen in their literary context. Just as we judge A Modest Proposal, A Tale of a Tub, or Gulliver's Travels on their literary and critical merits, so should we examine Swift's verses about women in their literary and philosophical aspects. Critics such as Murry, Huxley, and Hardy, whose critical faculties appear to have been unhinged by the intensity of Swift's satire, confuse the materials of his poetry with the object of his satiric attack. For Irvin Ehrenpreis, this confusion is the major weakness of Murry's biography:

"He assumes that if Swift ridiculed bad families, he must have hated domesticity; if he ridiculed female faults, he must have hated women; if he ridiculed false amorous ideals, he must have hated love."³

In making such judgements, critics such as Murry tend to forget such complimentary verses as "To Mrs. Biddy Floyd", "To Lord Harley on his Marriage", "Cadenus and Vanessa", and the verses to Stella.

While Swift's ideas about women and their place in society are consistent throughout his verse, there is a development of intensity, a perfecting of satiric technique, which culminates in the "unprintable" poems. The verses written before 1730 are primarily concerned with treating women in society; the four "unprintable" poems of 1730 and 1731--"The Lady's Dressing Room", "A Beautiful Young

3. Irvin Ehrenpreis, reviewing J.M. Murry's Jonathan Swift: a Critical Biography, in Times Literary Supplement, April 16, 1956, p. 248.

"Nymph Going to Bed", "Strephon and Chloe", and "Cassinus and Peter"--are penetrating studies in discontinuity, by which is meant the use of any discrepancy between appearance and reality. Much of the critical reaction to the former poems has been disapproval and discomfort; to the latter, it has been shock and outrage.

In the earlier poems, Swift is concerned with female participation in four areas. In "Verses Wrote in a Lady's Ivory Table-Book" (1698) and "The Journal of a Modern Lady" (1729), he satirizes woman's role in social life. In "The Furniture of a Woman's Mind" (1727), he portrays a female mind barren of any knowledge or intellect. In "The Progress of Love" (1719) and "The Progress of Marriage" (1722), he attacks romanticism in life and literature, and shows the folly of marriage without compatibility. "The Progress of Beauty" (1719) is a hint of what is to come in the later poems with its exposure of the discontinuity between physical deterioration and the effects of cosmetics.

"Verses Wrote in a Lady's Ivory Table-Book" takes the reader into the familiar world of the Restoration comedy of manners. Its conciseness of form and epigrammatic quality give Swift's satire a biting sharpness. His method is essentially to compound the basic incongruity of appearance and reality by placing romantic conventions and cosmetic devices in grotesque couplings. In this respect, Swift anticipates Pope's use of the satiric couplet in The Rape of the Lock. The first line and a half of Pope's couplet often creates a romantic illusion, but the last half of the second line completely destroys it:

"Her looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those:

Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
 Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
 Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,
 And like the sun, they shine on all alike."
 (Canto 11, 11.9-14)

Similarly, Swift portrays the frivolity and insincerity of romantic and social conventions by coupling a trifle written by a beau with a cosmetic prescription:

"Here you may read (Dear Charming Saint)
 Beneath (a new Receipt for Paint)
 Here in Beau-spelling (tru tel deth)
 There in her own (for an el breth)
 Here (lovely Nymph pronounce my doom)
 There (a safe way to use Perfume)" (11.7-12)

The poem is consistent with Swift's basic belief that the appearance is usually suspect and belies the hidden reality. By examining the lady's table-book, we symbolically see the owner's heart, which is hard, senseless, and light. The "Beau-spelling" is and "excrement" which can be eliminated by a mere "Spittle and a Clout" (1.21). Swift ends the poem with the implication that only the rich fool deludes himself that he can hold the affections of such a frivolous, fickle, woman.

In "The Journal of a Modern Lady", Swift presents a light-hearted, but vivid, picture of the meaningless lives of many eighteenth-century ladies. The poem was composed for Lady Acheson of whom Swift wrote: "She is an absolute Dublin rake, sits up late, loses her money, and goes to bed sick."⁴ A hint of Swift's intended high spirits

4. Swift, Letters to Charles Ford, ed. D. Nichol Smith, Oxford, 1935, p. 145.

can be found in the couplet:

"My Word is past, I must submit,
And yet perhaps you may be bit" (ll.26-27)

In spite of the high spirits, however, Swift portrays the scandal, false wit, coquetry, and loose morals of the kind of frivolous women against whom he warns the young lady in A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage. The "modern Dame" rises at noon, complaining of a headache and the spleen as a result of spending the night playing quadrille. Nevertheless, she immediately plans for another evening of cards, and arranges to pay for the debts incurred the previous evening. The scene changes, and the lady interviews several tradesmen and merchants, driving hard bargains. At dinner, which must be delayed because the lady is slow at dressing,

"She sits tormenting every Guest,
Nor gives her Tongue one Moment's Rest,
In Phrases battered, stale, and trite,
Which modern ladies call polite;
You see the Bobby Husband sit
In Admiration at her Wit!" (ll.110-115)

At tea, silence, discretion, and modesty yield to pride, scandal, hypocrisy, scurrility, malice, vanity, impudence, affectation, and ignorance. Each female accuses an absent member of the same vice from which she suffers herself, and according to Swift, they "set the very Lap-Dog barking" (l.179). The ladies next turn to quadrille, during which they "rail, scold, and storm" (l.270) at one another. When the session finally ends at four o'clock, the "modern Dame" steals to bed "with empty Purse and aching Head" (l.292).

It should be noted that Swift's description of female participation in card-playing and gambling is historically accurate.

J.B. Botsford⁵ says that, because of boredom and ennui, many women of the eighteenth century played cards constantly, and some were forced to borrow money in order to continue playing, hoping to recoup their losses. This sometimes led to immorality because, if they could not pay in money, the women were often forced to pay with something else. Through his writing, Swift uses card-playing as a symbol of the scandal, frivolity, and immorality resulting from the unfortunate position of women. The best example of this device is the passage in "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D." where his gaming female friends receive the news of his death:

"My Female Friends, whose tender Hearts
 Have better learn'd to act their Parts.
 Receive the news in doleful Dumps,
 'The Dean is dead, (and what is Trumps?)
 'Then Lord have Mercy on his Soul.
 '(Ladies I'll venture for the Vole.)
 'Six Deans they say must bear the Pall.
 '(I wish I knew what King to call.)
 'Madam, your Husband will attend
 'The Funeral of so good a Friend.
 'No Madam, 'tis a shocking Sight,
 'And he's engag'd To-morrow Night!
 'My Lady Club wou'd take it ill,
 'If he shou'd fail her at Quadrill.
 'He lov'd the Dean. (I lead a Heart.)
 'But dearest Friends, they say, must part.
 'His Time was come, he ran his Race;
 'We Hope he's in a better Place." (ll.225-242)

"The Furniture of a Woman's Mind" (1727) describes the severely limited knowledge and intellect of many eighteenth-century women. The woman whose mind Swift dissects forms a sharp contrast to the Stella he admires in the poems and the prose tribute. While

5. J.B. Botsford, English Society in the Eighteenth Century, New York, 1924, p. 279.

Stella was a brilliant conversationalist, this female knows only a "Set of Phrases learn't by Rote" (1.1). Stella was reserved, but this lady cannot hold her tongue a minute. The coxcomb whom Stella refused to tolerate, this woman takes to be witty. Unlike Stella, she buys expensive clothes and uses the latest cosmetics. While Stella was courageous, this lady knows how to counterfeit a fright and,

"By frequent practice learns the Trick
At proper seasons to be sick" (11.39-40)

The lady's compliments are insincere platitudes, and "she calls it witty to be rude" (1.18). Like so many women in Swift's satiric poems, she spreads scandal over her morning tea, and she cheats and wrangles at quadrille. She knows nothing about politics, yet argues irrationally for one party or another.

"The Progress of Love" (1719) is a satiric attack on romantic nonsense in life and literature. Swift ridicules the artificial conventions, outworn ornaments, and false sentimentality of romantic poetry, and scorns the popular notions of romantic love. In his travels through Dublin and London, Swift saw nothing resembling pastoral or romantic figures, and he was convinced that romance, in its blindness to what people are really like, in its simplification of motives, is a distortion of reality.

At the beginning, the heroine with the romantic name of "Phillis" is a perfect prude, blushing with simulated modesty; she trembles when a man comes near. After a reasonable marriage has been arranged, Phillis elopes with John, the butler, leaving an explanatory

note for her father upon which Swift comments:

"('Tis always done, Romances tell us,
When Daughters run away with fellows)" (11.47-48)

Phyllis explains that she has eloped with the butler because a fortune-teller had once said that her husband would be "a serving-Man of low Degree" (1.54), and that she must be forgiven because "Marriages are made in Heaven" (1.55). With typical penetrating realism, Swift exposes things as they really are: the money runs out, the food is bad, the lodgings uncomfortable, and both Phyllis and John lament their error. Phyllis is forced to pawn her trinkets, and eventually turns to prostitution. Poetic justice terminates the farce:

"For John is Landlord, Phyllis Hostess;
They keep at Stains the old blue Boar,
Are Cat and Dog, and Rogue and Whore." (11.98-100)

In "The Progress of Marriage" (1722), Swift attacks another aspect of many unfortunate marriages--physical and intellectual incompatibility. A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage emphasizes the importance of compatibility in marriage, and "The Progress of Marriage" shows the disastrous effects of a gross mismatch of marital partners. Parodying the devices of romantic verse early in the poem, Swift notes that "the Cyprian Queen", the Graces, the Muses, Juno, Iris, and Hebe, all make excuses for not attending the ill-fated wedding. Treating the characters as pastoral figures, he establishes that "the Swain is Rich, the Nymph is fair" (1.28), but immediately qualifies this by revealing that the "Swain" is old, and the "Nymph" is a coquette. The entire poem is summed up in the couplet:

"Both from the Goal together start;
Scarce run a Step before they part;" (11.31-32)

The "Swain" is a fifty year old dean who has long since passed his prime, while the "Nymph" is a frivolous, senseless gadabout. She is everything Swift warns against in A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage; she makes her maid her confidant, spends her husband's money on dress, and wastes her time at cards and gossip. The husband dies of a fever after a year of conjugal misery, and Swift predicts that the widow will squander the inheritance and be left with only "a rooted Pox" (1.167).

Of all the early satiric verses about women, "The Progress of Beauty" (1719) approaches nearest the style of the later "unprintable" poems. As in the later poems, "The Progress of Beauty" blends Swift's attack on literary romanticism with his moral view of society by extending the gap between the artifice of cosmetic deceits and the physical reality beneath the appearance. For Swift, physical deterioration implies moral corruption, and he loathes the false solution of other poets who cover both with paint and poetic convention.

The poem is an extended conceit of the diminishing kind in which the conventional comparison of the chaste lady with the pure Diana is reversed. In a burlesque of the devices of romantic poetry, Swift describes how the moon rises with "frouzy dirty colour'd red" (1.3) on her "cloudy wrinckled Face" (1.4). The "Nymph", Celia, similarly rises from her pillow "all reeking in a cloudy Steam" (1.14), and "Strephon"--any romantic swain--would be shocked by her "Crack't Lips, foul Teeth, and gummy Eyes" (1.15). Swift points out that her cosmetics have "chang'd their Ground" (1.32) during the night, yet

describes how Celia's workmanship can once again make her "the Wonder of her Sex" (l.54).⁶ But, says Swift,

"Art no longer can prevayl
When the Materialls are all gone,
The best Mechanick Hand must fayl
Where Nothing's left to work upon" (ll.77-80)

All the powers of cosmetics and the devices of romantic poetry cannot preserve a woman's beauty if it is merely superficial. Because "rotting Celia" must live up to the romantic vision created by society, she must walk the streets when everyone else is in bed. Swift, according to Kathleen Williams, "will have no short cuts, no false pretenses of order or goodness or beauty where none exists; better to face the muddle and imperfection of human life as it really is."⁷

Although Swift creates a vivid picture of the discontinuity between appearance and reality in "The Progress of Beauty", his main interest seems to be to burlesque the conventions of romantic poetry. Herbert Davis writes:

"I would suggest that some of the unpleasant qualities of these poems, which have caused his admirers so much difficulty, may have been due

6. It is clear that Swift's description is based on actual experience rather than the product of a diseased imagination. In the Journal to Stella, he writes:
"I was to see Lady ____ who is just up after lying-in; and the ugliest sight that I have seen, pale, dead, old and yellow, for want of her paint. She has turned my stomach. But she will soon be painted and a beauty again."
Swift, Journal to Stella, vol. 1, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1948, p. 443.
7. Kathleen Williams, Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise, London, 1959, p. 148.

as much to his impatience with poetic cant as to any unspeakable perversions in his mind."⁸

Swift's poems about women written before 1730 have disturbed many critics, although not nearly so much as the poems composed in 1730 and 1731. On the basis of these earlier verses, Swift is often accused of being a confirmed misogynist. It is clear, however, that these poems are attacks on the weaknesses and follies of women, not on women themselves. By implication, Swift criticizes the social system which creates card-playing scandal-mongering, frivolous females. If, in spite of their high spirits, the poems are disturbing, it is because Swift's satire is intense. Maurice Johnson says:

"In so many of his poems he sought through laughter to call the age's attention to its ills, using wit to shock mankind into sanity, often distorting in a furious, grotesque fashion meant to remind the sick world of its own distortions."⁹

As disturbing as these early poems may be, it is not until the later poems that Swift discovers his most powerful satiric weapon. Intensifying the technique of "The Progress of Beauty", Swift would soon take his readers on further visits to the lady's dressing-room, and for many, the shock is too great.

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8. Herbert Davis, "Swift's View of Poetry", in Jonathan Swift: Essays on his Satire and Other Studies, New York, 1964, p. 181.
9. Maurice Johnson, The Sin of Wit: Jonathan Swift as a Poet, Syracuse, 1950, p. 107.

CHAPTER V

THE "UNPRINTABLE" POEMS

The Previous chapters have examined Swift's portrait of the ideal eighteenth-century gentlewoman, and studied the variety of literary forms he used to communicate this ideal. In A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, he established a set of criteria by which marriage should be conducted. In Cadmus and Vanessa, he portrayed a serious and intelligent young woman, and concluded that society must be reformed before many such women could come into being. In the Journal to Stella, Swift treated Stella as the witty, intelligent, virtuous woman he later eulogized in the poems and On the Death of Mrs. Johnson. In the satiric verses about women, he depicted the weaknesses and follies of many eighteenth-century women. In A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, Cadmus and Vanessa, the Stella poems, and On the Death of Mrs. Johnson, Swift presented his positive ideal of the perfect gentlewoman; in the satiric verses, he exposed the negative side--the follies and vices of contemporary women.

Swift's opinion of women is consistent from the early poems to the last verses. There is, however, a change in the means of expression, a development of technique which culminates in the "unprintable" poems. None of the compositions presenting Swift's positive ideal of women was originally intended for publication (although he later allowed many of them to be printed), and while they offer an impressive ideal, as literature they lack intensity and power. The early satiric verses, on the other hand, were intended for publication, and many of them are effectively sharp. They are, however, primarily

concerned with social vices rather than with the more basic and universal problem of physical reality and its relation to moral ideals. It is not until the "unprintable" poems that Swift discovers the most powerful vehicle for the expression of his ideal. The lady's dressing-room and the "excremental vision"¹ become effective symbols of the discontinuity between outward appearance and inward reality. As Norman Brown says, "For Swift it [scatological imagery] becomes the decisive weapon in his assault on the pretensions, the pride, even the self-respect of mankind."²

The critical reaction to the "unprintable" poems has been extreme and varied. For critics such as Herbert Davis, Ricardo Quintana, and Kathleen Williams, they are superb moral satires; for such others as J. Middleton Murry, Aldous Huxley, and Evelyn Hardy, they are the inhuman ravings of a man obsessed with excrement. Murry calls "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" "utterly inhuman", and talks of "cold brutality" and "complete lack of charity".³ Aldous Huxley concurs:

"Swift's poems about women are more ferocious even than his prose about the Yahoos; his resentment against women for being warm-blooded mammals was incredibly bitter."⁴

Middleton Murry explains the "unprintable" poems, as he explains all of Swift's works, from the biographical viewpoint. His

1. This is the chapter heading Murry uses to cover Swift's life from 1729 to 1731.
2. Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision", in Swift: Critical Essays ed. Ernest Tuveson, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p. 31.
3. J. Middleton Murry, Jonathan Swift: A Critical Biography, New York, 1955, p. 439.
4. Aldous Huxley, Do What You Will, London, 1929, p. 93.

theory is that the rejection of Swift by Varina (Miss Jane Waring) in 1695 turned him from women as a love object, and that the consequent repression of his feelings for Stella and Vanessa led to a guilt which emerged finally in the verse satires against romantic passion. Swift, according to Murry, came to believe that animal desire and rational friendship are mutually destructive. Therefore, Murry argues, Swift tried to create a chasm between love and the sexual relation: "The idea that the sex-relation was a natural and beautiful fulfillment of the relation of love between a man and a woman was excluded from his mind."⁵ This loathing of the sexual and physical functions of humanity, says Murry, was self-induced, arising from the deliberate and prolonged repression of the emotion of love. After Stella's death, Swift's misogyny became the deeper and more irrational part of his misanthropy. This led, Murry claims, to an upsurge of peculiarly revolting coarseness in Swift's writings after 1729: "One cannot read Swift's writings of 1729 to 1732, without feeling that he is positively obsessed by human excretion."⁶

Norman Brown has labelled Murry's biography "a case study in perverted argumentation"⁷, and not without reason. Murry's entire theory is based on the rather shaky assumption that a man's lifelong attitude toward women could be determined by a brief romance at twenty-seven years of age. Furthermore, Murry is oblivious to

5. Murry, p. 348.

6. Ibid., p. 439.

7. Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision", in Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ernest Tuveson, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p. 33.

Swift's moral intentions or his satiric techniques in the "unprintable" poems, and he judges the attitudes of the eighteenth century according to those of the early twentieth century.

Murry's theory is based on biographical assumptions. He claims that Swift's misogyny became intense after Stella's death, but this remarkable alteration would have had to occur in the short period of two years which separate On the Death of Mrs. Johnson (1728) and "The Lady's Dressing Room" (1730). Furthermore, there is proof that Swift continued to write witty, affectionate letters to women such as Lady Worsely, the Duchess of Queensbury, and Mrs. Howard, and that he enjoyed the company of such women as Lady Acheson and Letitia Pilkington. If Swift was the bitter misogynist that Murry claims he was, the burden of proof still rests with Murry.⁸

It seems to me to be clear that Swift's purpose in writing the "unprintable" poems was moral and didactic. The verses certainly are not pornographic, that is, they do not titillate the reader's sexual appetites, and they do not satisfy anyone's demented desire to wallow in filth and excrement.⁹ Swift's purpose is to startle

8. For example, the Memoirs of Letitia Pilkington, who saw Swift a good deal during these years, makes no mention of any indication of misogyny, either latent or overt.

9. Huxley argues that, in the "unprintable" poems, Swift is torturing himself by wallowing in filth:

"He felt a compulsion to remind himself of his hatred of bowels, just as a man with a wound or an aching tooth feels a compulsion to touch the source of his pain--to make sure that it is still there and still agonizing." (Do What You Will, p. 98).

Huxley forgets that Swift nearly always wrote with intensity. If Swift really had a neurotic fear of excremental and sexual matters, is it likely that he would write violently about them? Would not he write mildly about such topics, or not write about them at all?

the reader into awareness, to make him see reality. Ricardo Quintana points out that the poems are parodies of sentimental poetry, and styptics to the sensual imagination. Similarly, Maurice Johnson comments:

"Swift meant to ridicule the trumped-up poetry of sighing nymphs and panting shepherds; to snatch away the old fraud of Woman's simpering perfection; to reform the world's hypocrisy; and, raising his voice almost didactically, to say aloud in front of everyone that these frauds are a barrier to the life he praised: a life founded on sense and honesty and wit."¹⁰

Although the four "unprintable" poems--"The Lady's Dressing-Room" (1730), "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1731), "Strephon and Chloe" (1731), and "Cassinus and Peter" (1731)--are similar in tone and imagery, "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" stands apart in some aspects of its subject matter and treatment. It is concerned with a prostitute, and is a direct exposure of a woman of vice; the others are concerned with "virtuous" females, and involve a romantic young man who suffers a cruel awakening. The poem is, for Irvin Ehrenpreis, a literary equivalent of Hogarth's "Harlot's Progress".¹¹

Swift's purpose in writing "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1731) is twofold: first, as a conscientious cleric, he wishes to discourage fornication and prostitution; second, as a writer, he wants to ridicule the literary fashion of praising women for their physical charms. Swift accomplishes both purposes by using coarse

10. Maurice Johnson, The Sin of Wit: Jonathan Swift as a Poet, Syracuse, 1950, p. 120.

11. Irvin Ehrenpreis, The Personality of Jonathan Swift, London, 1958, p. 41.

allusions which make vice revolting and virtue, by contrast, attractive, and by inverting the literary practices of romantic poets.

Bernard Acworth says that, "just as he used the 'proper word in the proper place'--for proper things--so he used improper words to describe improper actions or improper things."¹² Corinna, the Drury-Lane prostitute, is a "batter'd strolling Toast" (1.4), whom even a drunken rake will not pick up. Returning at midnight, she climbs four stories to her room, and,

"Then, seated on a three-legg'd Chair,
Takes off her artificial Hair:
Now, picking out a Crystal Eye,
She wipes it clean, and lays it by.
Her Eye-Brows from a Mouse's Hyde,
Stuck on with Art on Either Side,
Pulls off with Care, and first displays 'em,
Then in a Play-Book smoothly layds 'em.
Now dextrously her Plumpers draws,
That serve to fill her hollow Jaws,
Untwists a Wire; and from her Gums
A Set of Teeth completely comes.
Pulls out the Rags contriv'd to prop
Her flabby Dugs and down they drop." (11.9-22)

Swift attacks literary romanticism by using his old trick of turning things upside down and inside out. The traditional romantic poets used pastoral imagery to glorify woman's beauty, treating her as if she would never grow old or become sick, nor have need to clean herself, to read, or to think. Instead of rapturously describing the beauty of the body or the poetry of dress, however, Swift exposes the ugliness and unpleasantness that was usually kept hidden in the eighteenth century. All Corinna's aids to beauty--artificial hair, crystal eye, mouse-hide eyebrows, false teeth, and plasters--are ruthlessly described

12. Bernard Acworth, Swift, London, 1947, p. 123.

in nauseous detail. Because it is dependent upon mechanical devices, Corinna's beauty cannot withstand physical disasters:

"Behold the Ruins of the Night!
A wicked Rat her Plaister stole,
Half eat, and dragg'd it to his Hole.
The Crystal Eye, alas, was miss't;
And Puss had on her Plumpers p---st.
A Pigeon pick'd her Issue-Peas;
And Shock her Tresses fill'd with Fleas." (ll.58-64)

In "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed", Swift utilizes a symbol which can be found in all the "unprintable" poems ("Cassinus and Peter" excepted)--the lady's dressing-room. As Maurice Johnson says, "Women in their dressing-rooms were for Swift a symbol of mankind's vanity, hypocrisy, and imperfection."¹³ In "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed", Swift shows the artificiality of the prostitute's beauty, and connects her ugly, degenerate reality with her moral imperfections. At night, when she is in a "mangled plight", she is tormented by fearful dreams of Bridewell and the lash, of watchmen and constables, or of propositioning in the "Hundred Stinks" of Fleet-Ditch.

In the other three "unprintable" poems, Swift uses a different technique, that of having a romantic young male make the disillusioning discovery that his "goddess", whom he has been accustomed to think of in terms of pastoral love poetry, participates in human bodily functions. Of the use of the dressing-room in this fashion, Ricardo Quintana writes:

13. Maurice Johnson, The Sin of Wit: Jonathan Swift as a Poet, Syracuse, 1950, p. 114.

"The explorer in the dressing-room is a dramatization of the inside-outside contrast, and the nature of his discoveries accords perfectly with a comedy that characteristically works through images of nakedness and functions of the human body."¹⁴

It is important to recognize that the romantic young men in the poems are masks or personae, not Swift himself. One of the major difficulties for some of Swift's critics is their failure to understand this essential point. They are willing to recognize that Swift utilizes a mask in A Modest Proposal, The Drapier's Letters, or Gulliver's Travels, but they refuse to admit that he employs one in the "unprintable" poems. As a result, when each young man reaches his cruel awakening, when his romantic delusion has been shattered, such critics react violently. Because they have associated themselves with the deluded young men, they too cannot face the truth, a truth which Swift can see rationally and calmly. Swift, realizing that he has caught them in his trap, would say, "Go, go, you're bit."¹⁵

"Strephon", the young man exploring the dressing-room in "A Lady's Dressing'Room" (1730) is a good example of Swift's use of a dramatic character as a type of mask. Celia, a goddess "Array'd in Lace, Brocades, and Tissues" (l.4), leaves her room, and Strephon surreptitiously enters only to make some shocking discoveries. He finds dirty combs, a paste of sweat, dandriff, powder, lead, and

14. Ricardo Quintana, Swift: An Introduction, London, 1955, p. 52.

15. Swift, "The Day of Judgement", l.22, The Poems of Jonathan Swift, vol. 11, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1937, p. 579.

hair, dirty clothes, filthy basins, and the "Chest". The important moment for both reader and critic is the poem's ending. After his "Grand Survey", Strephon steals away in his "Amorous Fits", grievously punished for his peeping because,

"His foul Imagination links
 Each Dame he sees with all her Stinks:
 And, if unsav'ry Odours fly,
 Conceives a Lady standing by:
 All Women his Description fits,
 And both Idea's jump like Wits:
 By vicious Fancy coupled fast,
 And still appearing in Contrast." (ll.121-8)

Strephon's reaction to women after his revelation is remarkably similar to Gulliver's treatment of humans after his return from the land of the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver is obviously meant to be a comic figure at the conclusion of Book IV. Here it is Strephon who is ridiculed for his extremism. Unable to bear reality, raving and in agony, he rushes from one unreality to another. His new view of women is just as preposterous as his former romantic delusion:

"I pity wretched Strephon blind
 To all the Charms of Female Kind;
 Should I the Queen of Love refuse,
 Because she rose from stinking Ooze?" (ll.129-32)

In her perverted and distorted biography, Evelyn Hardy writes that, for Swift, "The most exquisite nymph in the world was unapproachable beyond certain flirtatious overtures, because simultaneously with her image there sprung up in his mind the associated one of filth and loathsome odours."¹⁶ This is nonsense. Hardy describes the reaction of Strephon, and blindly assumes that it must

16. Evelyn Hardy, The Conjured Spirit, London, 1949, p. 58.

necessarily be Swift's. She continues, "This inability to accept the human body and its animal functions arose from an inability to accept life itself."¹⁷ Actually, Swift's ability to laugh at the romantics, and accept the body and its animal functions, means that he can face life as it is. He says that Strephon should

"bless his ravisht Sight to see
Such Order from Confusion sprung,
Such gaudy Tulips raised from Dung." (ll.142-44)

When Swift portrays real life intensely, it is Strephon and Cassinus (and Huxley, Murry, and Hardy) who lose their wits.

In A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage, Swift had discussed the qualities which a wife should possess, and in "The Progress of Love" and "The Progress of Marriage" he had portrayed some of the follies of irrational marriages. In "Strephon and Chloe" (1731), however, he dramatizes much more powerfully the menace to marital happiness of romantic delusions. The poem is an attack on the practice of forming attachments on the basis of superficial beauty, a practice whose mistaken values have led to many wrecked marriages.

"Strephon and Chloe" is a burlesque epithalamium, but compared to the raucous wedding ballads of the period, it is obviously didactic and moral in purpose. Swift's method of attack is to trick the reader into believing that this marriage is ideal, startle him into awareness by taking him into the bedroom and dressing-room, and then read him a sermon. In the first part of the poem, Swift deludes

17. Ibid., p. 244.

the reader by describing the wedding in terms of the conventional epithalamium. "Chloe", the bride, is a "Nymph" whose kind of beauty appears only every twenty thousand years. Like the traditional romantic heroine, she is not subject to the bodily functions of other humans; she has:

"No Humours gross, or frowzy Streams,
No noisom Whiffs, or sweaty Streams," (ll.11-12)

Swift describes the traditional reaction of romantic "swains" to such wondrous beauty:

"What ogling, sighing, toasting, vowing!
What powder'd Wigs!.What Flames and Darts!
What Hampers full of bleeding Hearts!
What Sword-knots! What Poetic Strains!
What Billet-doux, and clouded Cains!" (ll.34-38)

The wedding of Strephon and Chloe is described in terms taken from the traditional pastoral romance. There are the appropriate deities--Hymen, Apollo, Juno, Mercury, Hebe, and Mars--and the customary "Pigeons billing" and "Sparrows treading". After the wedding, the bride and groom return to the nuptial bed, Strephon afraid of dying "By Lightning shot from Chloe's Eyes" (l.110).

At this point, Swift abruptly changes the tone of the poem, and surprises the reader with his picture of the physical vulgarity of Chloe (and later, of Strephon). This sudden change is signalled by Swift's

"Now, Ponder well ye Parents dear;
Forbid your Daughters guzzling Beer;" (ll.116-7)

After describing Chloe's fall from goddess to vulgar, earthly female, Swift says that the little Cupids "With Garlands crown'd" never more appeared. "Ravishing delights", "High Raptures", "romantick Flights",

"Expiring Shepherds", goddesses, silver meads, and shady bowers, are replaced by indecency and vulgarity. The "Goddess" becomes "a filthy mate". Both Strephon and Chloe discard decorum without concern for the other's sensibilities:

"They soon from all Constraint are freed;
Can see each other do their Need.
On Box of Cedar sits the Wife,
And makes it warm for Dearest Life.
And, by the beastly way of Thinking,
Find great Society in Stinking.
Now Strephon daily entertains
His Chloe in the homeli'st Strains;
And, Chloe more experienc'd grown,
With Int'rest pays him back his own.
No Maid at Court is less asham'd,
Howe'er for selling Bargains fam'd,
Than she, to name her Parts behind,
Or when a-bed, to let out Wind." (ll.205-18)

At this point in the poem, when he has shocked the reader into awareness, Swift presents his ideal of marriage. Decency and physical decorum, he implies, are absolutely necessary to preserve both one's own beauty and the love of the other person. This emphasis on cleanliness is a thread which runs throughout Swift's writings. It first appears as one of the conditions which he demanded of Jane Waring¹⁸, it is one of Swift's Resolutions When I Come to be Old, and it is a main theme of the "unprintable" poems. Critics such as Murry, Huxley, and Hardy regard Swift's concern for personal cleanliness as obsessive. Yet Swift's emphasis is understandable when considered in the light of eighteenth-century hygienic practices, and it also has a philosophical significance apparently unnoticed by many critics. Swift simply believes that, if one is clean and pure on the inside, one cannot be

18. Letter to Jane Waring, May 4, 1700, Correspondence, vol. 1, ed. Harold Williams, Oxford, 1963, p. 36.

stained by exterior filth. Throughout the "unprintable" poems, he emphasizes the hard fact that the satin gown may hide, but cannot eliminate, a degenerate body. Personal cleanliness is a symbol of Swift's basic idea that false appearances can never substitute for a pure and clean reality.

Strephon and Chloe began under a delusion, and both degenerate into something worse. Strephon treated Chloe as a goddess because she managed to conceal her physical being beneath the workmanship of pencil and paint. Chloe had considered nothing but her physical appearance. After the wedding, however, they accept a coarse world without beauty, decency, or concern for opinion. Strephon, who should have married for the more solid reasons of sense, wit, and decency, degenerates into a beast, a Yahoo. Chloe, too, fails to practise as much decorum after the marriage as before. Like Gulliver, and Strephon in "The Lady's Dressing-Room", they fail to come to terms with reality. As Kathleen Williams says, "Indeed, both should face the facts of human nature, neither forgetting nor wallowing in the physical."¹⁹

Swift believes that marriage should be based on a sound foundation. Like a house constructed on an insecure base, a marriage founded solely on physical attraction will eventually and inevitably collapse. Swift is not protesting the decay of beauty, an inevitable fact of life, but rather, a defect which he knows to be correctible--the substitution of artifice for nature and the subsequent admiring

19. Kathleen Williams, Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise, London, 1959, p. 151.

of the delusion as if it were real and not merely a mechanism. Marriage, for Swift, should be founded on sense, wit, decency, prudence, and esteem. After the physical attraction has waned, friendship will still continue:

"On Sense and Wit your Passion found,
By Decency cemented round;
Let Prudence with Good Nature strive,
To keep Esteem and Love alive.
Then come old Age whene'er it will,
Your Friendship shall continue still:
And thus a mutual gentle Fire,
Shall never but with Life expire." (ll.307-14)

Middleton Murry reacts to "Strephon and Chloe", saying, "It is so perverse, so unnatural, so mentally diseased, so humanly wrong."²⁰ He claims that Swift's proposition is that no lover who has seen his mistress or wife performing her natural functions can possibly remain in love with her. Murry, however, has missed the point of the poem because, while Swift does advocate prudence, his emphasis is on the fact that if there is not sense, wit, and decency, there will be nothing once the physical beauty is gone. Swift is saying that a marriage based only on physical attraction is not likely to last. His example is intense, and purposely exaggerated, but that is his method of forcing the reader to consider his argument.

"Cassinus and Peter" (1731) is much like the other "unprintable" poems, except that it does not actually take the reader into the lady's dressing-room. Swift's technique is to create a romantic illusion throughout the poem, only to destroy it in the famous final couplet. In

20. Murry, p. 440.

none of the "unprintable" poems are the conventional devices of romantic pastoral poetry so much in evidence. Cassinus and Peter are "two College Sophs" who confer "On Love and Books in Rapture Sweet" (l.4). Peter, on discovering Cassinus in a terrible condition, launches forth in pastoral style:

"Why Cassy, thou wilt doze thy Pate:
What makes thee lie a-bed so late?
The Finch, the Linnet, and the Thrush
Their Mattins chant in ev'ry Bush:
And, I have heard thee oft salute
Aurora with they early Flute." (ll.39-44)

Cassinus cries "Caelia" thrice, and so Peter assumes that she must be dead. When he learns that this is not so, he guesses that she has played the whore, suffers from the pox, or has found another lover. After proclaiming his death in traditional romantic fashion, Cassinus agrees to tell Peter the dreadful news:

"Nor wonder how I lost my Wits;
Oh Caelia, Caelia, Caelia sh__." (ll.117-18)

In some respects, "Cassinus and Peter" is the most effective expression of Swift's hatred of sentimental romanticism. The reader is completely taken in, expecting to hear that the most devilish horror has overtaken Caelia. When Cassinus very seriously pronounces Caelia's "crime", "the blackest of all Female Deeds" (l.106), the reader can only laugh at Cassy's anguish. The devastating humor derives from the exposure that Cassinus, with his romantic flights of imagination, is a fool. When his romantic delusion is brought face to face with reality, and proved to be false, he wants to die.

Aldous Huxley (like Murry and Hardy) fails to recognize that Cassinus, like the other romantic young men, is a dramatic char-

acter or mask. He argues that when Caelia is exposed as human, it is a disaster for Swift. This is nonsense, because it can only be a disaster for those who have romantic illusions--Cassinus (and Huxley) --not Swift. Huxley claims that Swift is motivated by "a refusal to accept the universe as it is given", and then unconsciously describes his own mental condition:

"A yet greater, but no less common, childishness is to hate reality because it does not resemble the fairy stories which men have invented to console themselves for the discomforts and difficulties of daily life."²¹

Swift, however, has accepted the reality of physical existence, and when he brings Huxley face to face with it, it is Huxley who is childishly emotional because his fairy-tale attitude has been destroyed. Swift does not "hate reality"; he passionately pursues truth.

Why are the "unprintable" poems such effective vehicles for Swift's satire? Their power arises partly from their dramatizing folly and vice, and partly from the appropriateness of the lady's dressing-room as a symbol of hypocrisy and affectation. The ultimate power of these poems, however, lies in what has been called the "excremental vision", for in his use of excrement as a satirical device, Swift touches upon a universal neurosis of mankind.

Middleton Murry claims that, after the death of Stella in 1728, Swift turned misogynist, and began to think of women and excrement simultaneously: "It is the strange and disquieting combination of his horror at the fact of human evacuation with a peculiar physical loathing of women."²² Other critics such as Hardy and Huxley argue that

21. Aldous Huxley, Do What You Will, London, 1929, p. 101.

22. Murry, p. 439.

this association is a symptom of increasing insanity. There are, however, several grave errors involved in this theory. First, Swift's writings are hardly more scatological than those of his contemporaries; Prior wrote "On a Fart, Let in the House of Commons", Gay and Pope composed verses about the goddess Cloacina, and Smollett later concocted Adventures of an Atom. Many of the sermons of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century theologians make Swift's scatological poems seem tame by comparison.²³ The critics who attack Swift for his use of excrement make the serious error of measuring eighteenth-century poetry by early twentieth-century attitudes.

Second, the use of scatological imagery is not a late development in Swift's writings. Swift uses it in chapters of A Tale of a Tub (1704), A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit (1704), and extensively in Gulliver's Travels (1726). In his private life during this period, however, Swift was not known to utter a vulgar word. Delany wrote that "His ideas, and his style throughout the whole course of his converssion were remarkably delicate and pure; beyond those of most men I was ever acquainted with."²⁴ After Stella's death, nothing really changed in this respect. The "unprintable" poems, meant for publication, contain scatological material, but in his private life, Swift was as "delicate and pure" as he always had been. Letitia Pilkington wrote that Swift had an

23. Roland M. Frye presents many examples of such sermons in his article, "Swift's Yahoos and the Christian Symbols for Sin", Journal of History of Ideas, XV, 1954, pp. 201-17.

24. Delany, Observations on Lord Orrery's Remarks, p. 75, as quoted by Murry, p. 473.

ironical manner of prefacing a compliment with an affront, but nowhere did she record anything about an obsession with filth or excrement.

The "excremental vision" is, then, a literary development in Swift, not a pathological degeneration. In his earlier works, he satirized romanticism and silly women, and used images of excrement, but it is not until the "unprintable" poems that he brings the two together to create a powerful effect. In these poems, the anal function becomes "a symbol which perhaps better than any other reduces all mankind to a single level. In Swift's context human excrement is defined as the antithesis of the sublime."²⁵ Swift had discovered a universal neurosis of mankind which Sigmund Freud later made famous, and the violent reaction of many critics can be explained thus: "The history of Swiftian criticism, like the history of psychoanalysis shows that repression weighs more heavily on anality than on genitality."²⁶

The excremental symbol is not, in fact, directed at the women in the poems, but at the ridiculous attitudes of romance.

Norman Brown writes:

"For their real theme--quite obvious on a dispassionate reading--is the conflict between our animal body, appropriately epitomized in the anal function, and our pretentious sublimations, more specifically the pretentious of sublimated or romantic-Platonic love."²⁷

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25. Maurice Johnson, The Sin of Wit: Jonathan Swift as a Poet, Syracuse, 1950, p. 117.
26. Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision", in Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ernest Tuveson, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p. 32.
27. Ibid., p. 39.

Such anal symbolism might just as well be connected with males, if the male sex were surrounded with such romantic nonsense as were the women of Swift's time. Because women are so universally revered as objects of a false, artificial, and dangerous worship, they must be exposed as ordinary human beings. Swift's anal symbolism is, in fact, aimed at the romantic young men and their delusions, and anyone foolish enough to sympathize with them. It is Swift's ultimate weapon.

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