

A Valediction Forbidding Laughing: The Outburst of Rage and Despair in Jonathan Swift's "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry: A Rhapsody"*

Inhan Jeon (University of Seoul)

I

Satire should not necessarily be corrective. If satire is understood as a literary genre which thrives on its attack on other people, satire, in its broadest meaning, does not need to have correction for its purpose. It might be written to correct the vice and folly of a person or of society, yet it can also be written from the satirist's personal malice, or it can even be written for a satirist's private satisfaction, whatever the private satisfaction might be. Yet, if a satirist advocates the public role of his satire against its opponent, then a whole new bundle of requirements necessarily arises to guarantee its corrective function. If

* This paper was supported by a research grant from the University of Seoul in 2005.

a satire is to have a corrective function, it should get the readers' approval. To get the reader's, including the neutral readers', approval, a satirist should demonstrate his satire's justness. Yet, justness alone does not ensure the readers' approval, as excessive attack on its victim might turn away the readers regardless of its justness. John Dryden, in his influential theory of satire *Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693), emphasizes the importance of artistic control of attack as follows:

Yet there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly Butchering of a Man, and the fineness of a stroak that separates the Head from the Body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as *Jack Ketch's* Wife said of his Servant, of a plain piece of Work, a bare Hanging; but to make a Malefactor die sweetly, was only belonging to her Husband. I wish I cou'd apply it to my self, if the Reader wou'd be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The Character of *Zimri* in my *Absalom* is, in my Opinion, worth the whole Poem: 'Tis not bloody, but 'tis ridiculous enough. (Swedenberg 17.71)

Of course, ridicule resulting in the readers' laugh is not the only way of demonstrating satirist's control over his emotion. Yet, we cannot deny that it is the most efficient and promising way of getting the readers' approval, as, though the satirist writes satire because of his anger about the vice or folly, the ridicule and laugh can make the readers feel that the satirist's anger is under firm control and that they can trust the man who can sublimate his anger into ridicule.

Yet, should satirist always put his anger under control? Or, can he not vent his anger without any inhibition, when he estimates his satire hopeless in its corrective function? In front of overwhelming sense of his helplessness, can he not turn satire into a vehicle for his private satisfaction? It is this paper's contention that to interpret Jonathan Swift's "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry:

A Rapsody"¹⁾ is to witness a satirist surrender his ideal about the corrective function of satire and to observe him say his valediction to laughing satire.

To investigate Swift's frustration in the face of reality, we should take into consideration that his ideal about satire orientates from the corrective function of satire and results in his preference for laughing satire. Swift's ideal about satire can be witnessed in the following passage in his contribution to *Intelligencer*, No.3 (1728):

There are two Ends that Men propose in Writing Satyr, one of them Noble than the other, as regarding nothing further than personal Satisfaction, and Pleasure of the Writer, but without any View towards Personal Malice; the other is a Publick Spirit, prompting Men of Genius and Virtue, to mend the World as far as they are able. And as both these Ends are innocent, so the latter is highly commendable. . . .

But if my Design be to make mankind better, then I think it is my Duty; at least I am sure it is the Interest of those very *Courts* and *Ministers*, whose Follies or Vices I ridicule, to reward me for my good Intentions: For if it be reckoned a high Point of Wisdom to get the Laughters on our Side, it is much more Easy, as well as Wise to get those on our Side, who can make Millions laugh when they please. (Davis 12.34)

We should notice that Swift prizes the corrective function of satire and for this he emphasizes the importance of getting laughter from the widest-possible spectrum of readers. In the same journal, he again advocates the public function of satire by expressing his preference for Horatian satire over Juvenalian one

1) I follow Pat Rogers, ed., *Jonathan Swift: Complete Poem* (London: Penguin, 1983) for the text of Swift's poems in this paper. Yet, for the title of "On Poetry: A Rapsody" I follow Harold Williams, ed., *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958). The reason for this decision, I enunciate in the beginning of the discussion on this poem.

while defending John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*: "Taste of Humour is certainly the best Ingredient towards that kind of Satyr, which is the most useful, and gives the least Offence; which, instead of lashing, laughs Men out of their Follies, and Vices; and is the Character that gives Horace the Preference to Juvenal" (Davis 12.35). This emphasis on the positive function of satire and thus on laughing satire is again repeated in his letter to Charles Wogan even as late as 1732, just one year before the publication of the "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry: A Rapsody": "I followed what I thought to be my Talent, and charitable People will suppose I had a Design to laugh the Follies of Mankind out of Countenance, and often to lash the Vices out of Practice" (Williams 4.33).

Yet, the "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry: A Rapsody" reveals Swift's painful recognition that his ideal about satire cannot be achieved and his satire has no corrective function. In a way, both satires are a very strange breed of satire, as they show the collapse of the public role of satire at the same time as they reveal the importance of that ideal. Then, what is left of satirist who is forced to let go of the corrective function of his satire? Satire as a means of private satisfaction. It is this paper's contention that, as satire is conceived as an ineffective means of reforming the corrupt age, the emphasis in these satires comes to be shifted from the public function of satire to its private function, that is, satire as a means of private satisfaction, whether this is the defence of satirist's private integrity or the expression of his inner rage whatever the outcome.

II

Swift's "Epistle to a Lady" is not straightforward in its import. It is neither

an apologia for the Horatian type of satire nor a downright abandonment of the corrective power of satire. There does exist considerable inconsistency in this poem, as there are some lines which advocate Horatian banter while others are more the expression of personal rage. However, it seems to me that this inconsistency does not need to be regarded as a hindrance to our understanding of the poem: rather, it is a clue to a proper understanding of this poem, as it embodies the expression of Swift's painful realization that there is an insurmountable gap between what satire is supposed to be and what it is forced to be under the pressure of reality.

Written in the form of a response to the lady's (Lady Acheson's) request that he should stop ridiculing her and his friends in low style and instead praise her in "strain sublime" (58), the ostensible aim of this poem is to defend his preference for satire written in low style. In defending his preference for satire, Swift needs to justify its *raison d'être* in the face of the lady's following appeal:

But, I beg, suspend a while
 That same paltry, burlesque style;
 Drop for once your constant rule,
 Turning all to ridicule:
 Teaching others how to ape ye;
 Court nor parliament can 'scape ye;
 Treat the public and your friends
 Both alike, while neither mends. (49-56)

Beneath the lady's appeal, there lurks her serious accusation: for her, Swift is simply wasting his time, since she regards satire as ineffective in its function of reform, as it cannot reach even the ears of his friends, let alone those of the public.

Against this imagined charge of the lady, Swift provides the readers with the following answer, which vindicates his use of satire through advocating its effectiveness in inducing improvement or reform:

From the planet of my birth,
 I encounter vice with mirth.
 Wicked ministers of state
 I can easier scorn than hate:
 And, I find it answers right;
 Scorn torments them more than spite.
 All the vices of a court
 Do but serve to make me sport.
 Were I in some foreign realm,
 Which all vices overwhelm;
 Should a monkey wear a crown,
 Must I tremble at his frown?
 Could I not, through all his ermine,
 Spy the strutting, chattering vermin?
 Safely write a smart lampoon,
 To expose the brisk baboon? (149-64)

In these lines, Swift shows his confidence in the effectiveness of laughing satire to cause reform, and asserts his integrity which enables him to attack the vice of the age by ridicule.

However, when he turns his eyes to reality, the theory of laughing satire does not hold up. When he offers the following lines, the purpose is to prove the validity of the theory by demonstrating its applicability to the contemporary political world, here symbolized by Walpole:

When my muse officious ventures

On the nation's representers:
 Teaching by what golden rules,
 Into knaves they turn their fools:
 How the helm is ruled by Walpole,
 At whose oars, like slaves, they all pull:
 Let the vessel split on shelves;
 With the freight enrich themselves: (165-72)

However, the lines that follow expose the inconsistency which stems from a different reaction to the state of affairs:

Safe within my little wherry,
 All their madness makes me merry:
 Like the watermen of Thames,
 I row by, and call them names.
 Like the ever-laughing sage,
 In a jest I spend my rage. (173-78)

Swift starts these lines by confirming his theory of laughing satire as he argues for his calmness in the face of reality. However, from line 175, his theory begins to collapse, as it turns out that such a satirical attitude cannot effect reform or correction. However merry or facetious the obscene remarks of the Thames watermen might be, their random ribaldry can never be an appropriate model for the serious satirist who should select his objects carefully. Even Swift's calmness begins to disappear when he compares himself to the "ever-laughing sage" who "spend [his] rage in a jest." The key here is the juxtaposition of the words "jest" and "rage." As Louise K. Barnett argues, unlike "jest," "rage" symbolizes the satirist's realization of his impotence in inducing any change:

Jest is the satirist's art, purposeful and controlled, not necessarily funny but jesting in the sense that it is not part of the world's serious business. Rage is provoked first by the existence of evils and second by the satirist's lack of power to affect them. He knows that he cannot act literally against the world's malefactors but can only act symbolically by writing satire. "Drown the world," Swift confessed to Pope, "I am not content with despising it, but I would anger it if I could with safety." Satire is therefore a substitute for action, which for various reasons, such as the danger Swift's letter suggests, cannot be carried out. (34)

We cannot regard all the satires as a substitute for action, since some satires can be regarded as the satirist's method of involving himself actively in the world. A satirist can participate in the world by writing satire in the hope that it brings about the desired effect. What is valid, though, in Barnett's observation is that, by pointing out the satirist's realization of the impotence of his rage, she notices the emptiness which surrounds the word "jest" in line 178. When originated by "rage," this "jest" cannot be purposeful and controlled: rather, it is a empty gesture of resignation. However, Swift cannot maintain even this empty gesture of "jest" as he reveals his sadistic desire to torture the object of satire in the lines that follow: "(Though it must be understood, / I would hang them if I could:)" (179-80). There is an element of self-mockery in his desire to torture his victims, acknowledging his impotence in attacking his victims in any real way. Yet, we should recognize that, despite the element of self-mockery, the main thrust of Swift's emotion is towards his satiric butt and his emotion is not sublimated to a reformatory function. We can say that in these lines Swift loses the control over his emotion while he expresses the desire to punish rather than reform whatever the consequences. As Nora C. Jaffe observes, in lines 165-180, Swift gradually abandons his theory of laughing satire in the face of reality:

Swift rises to a crescendo of rage that his friend (rightly enough) finds incomprehensible. He has set up a series of expectations, only to violate them in the most obvious way. He has pretended to a detachment he cannot maintain. He tried to imply the triviality of his butts in words and rhythms that prove them not trivial. The comparison of Walpole to a schoolboy ready for whipping extends like a favorite fantasy and explodes in an ecstasy of revenge. (23-24)

Seen in this way, the motive for satire becomes private relief rather than public reform. Our suspicion about this motive becomes stronger when we encounter the following lines:

If I can but fill my niche,
 I attempt no higher pitch.
 Leave to D'Anvers and his mate,
 Maxims wise to rule the state.
 Pulteney deep, accomplished St Johns,
 Scourge the villains with a vengeance:
 Let me, though the smell be noisome,
 Strip their bums; let Caleb hoise 'em;
 Then apply Alecto's whip,
 Till they wriggle, howl, and skip. (181-90)

Readers may laugh at the scene where the members of the administration came to be stripped and whipped. Yet, the readers who may laugh are the ones who already have sympathy with Swift. If this scene is comic for the contemporary readers, it is so only for opposition sympathizers. In these lines, the responsibility of reform is left to the authors of *The Craftsman*, such as Pulteney and Bolingbroke, while Swift enjoys the imagination of the sadistic (at least for neutral readers) torture of his victims in lines 187-90. At this point, the theory

of laughing satire totally collapses as Swift indulges in impotent rage, not even in the form of “jest.”

What makes this poem strangely disorientating is that Swift curiously returns to advocating the theory of laughing satire after the lady interrupts his burst of rage:

‘Deuce is in you, Mr Dean:
What can all this passion mean?
Mention courts, you’ll ne’er be quiet;
On corruptions running riot.
End, as it befits your station:
Come to use, and application:
Nor, with senates keep a fuss.’ (191-97)

Jaffe is quite right to point out that the lady’s opinion is much closer to Swift’s official position about satire and thus her words express, as her poetic voice is a creation of his, his criticism of himself for “keep[ing] a fuss” with senates which should not make him lose his temper (24). Indeed, after the intervention of the lady, Swift seems to return to calmness while defending the theory of ridicule:

It is well observed by Horace,
Ridicule has greater power
To reform the world, than sour.
Horses thus, let jockeys judge else,
Switches better guide than cudgels. (210-14)

Thus, I find it by experiment,
I may storm and rage in vain;
It but stupefies your brain.

But with raillery to nettle,
Sets your thoughts upon their mettle: (219-24)

I, who love to have a fling,
Both at senate house and king;
That they might some better way tread,
To avoid the public hatred;
Thought no method more commodious,
Than to show their vices odious:
Which I chose to make appear,
Not by anger, but a sneer:
As my method of reforming
Is by laughing, not by storming, (233-42)

These lines are a perfect vindication of laughing satire in its corrective power by demonstrating that it is more effective than mere rage. However, again, the calmness shown in these lines begins to be disturbed when Swift ponders on the state of public reality:

If I treat you like a crowned head,
You have cheap enough compounded;
Can you put in higher claims,
Than the owners of St James'?
You are not so great a grievance,
As the hirelings of St Stephen's.
You are of a lower class
Than my friend Sir Robert Brass.
None of these have mercy found,
I have laughed and lashed them round. (251-60)

Even though he does not lapse into such an outburst of rage as in lines 165-90,

Swift again shows his predilection for sadistic punishment whenever the public reality and its culprit (such as Robert Walpole) are mentioned, as the phrase “lashed them round” sits uncomfortably with his argument that his “method of reforming / Is by laughing, not by storming” (241-2). As Peter J. Schakel rightly observes, though he does not acknowledge Swift’s minor outburst in line 260, Swift’s theory of ridicule is “each time undercut by the practice within the poem itself” (150). Then, what seems to be a case of a *non sequitur* between the part before the lady’s intervention and that after it proves to be otherwise. The lines that follow Swift’s outburst of rage in lines 165-90 demonstrate the same case for Swift, even though in a lesser degree: that is, Swift cannot maintain his calmness in the face of public corruption, his rage resulting from the realization of his impotence as a satirist who ought ideally to aspire to be a reformer of the state.

In this respect, the “Epistle to a Lady” is a poem which demonstrates the insurmountable gap between precept and practice. Swift recognizes himself that, to borrow Barnett’s words, in theory “to effect changes in people’s behavior or attitudes, he must not express anger baldly in the alienating form of Juvenalian raging” because “as the image of scourging proves, to do so is satisfying to the writer, but contrary to his purpose of gaining his victim’s or his audiences’ cooperation” (34). However, Swift is also painfully aware that the idea that laughing satire can itself effect reform is false, as, a year before the publication of this poem, he had written to Pope about the limited power of his poems on society:

As to those of four or five years past, that you are pleased to require soon [for the 1732 volume of the Pope and Swift Miscellanies], they consist of little accidental things writ in the country; family amusement, never intended further

than to divert our selves and some neighbours; or some effects of anger, or publick Grievances here, which would be insignificant out of this kingdom.
(June 12, 1732; Williams, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift* 5.30)

Seen in this respect, even the lines in which he advocates laughing satire reveals his deep suspicion that satire may torture more effectively than it corrects. When he argues that “And I find it answers right; / Scorn torments them more than spite” (153-54), his preference for scorn is proved to be due to his realization that it is a more effective means of inflicting pain, not that it is a more effective means of correction. Barnett interprets the end of this poem as positive in its outlook: “For a moment the raw material of passion threatens to overwhelm the aesthetic construct; by dramatizing both the strength of this passion and its atavistic nature, Swift makes us aware of the effort needed to channel it in a positive way and the desirability—indeed, the necessity—of doing so” (36). Yet, I cannot agree with this interpretation, for it misses Swift’s desire for sadistic torture in line 260 and thus the fact that the theory of ridicule is undercut after the lady’s intervention as well as before. This poem is not a vindication of the Horatian type of satire, as it feigns to be, but a justification of the man Swift who is forced to vent rage in the face of the public corruption which he acknowledges cannot be corrected, demonstrating the real state of affairs in which, to borrow Schakel’s words, “the evil evident in the ministry and court, the ‘Machinations brewing, / To Complete the Public Ruin’ [199-200], drive a good man past ridicule to rage” (150). By declaring this, Swift bids farewell to the type of satire that he has tried to adhere to. However, once he justifies his outburst of rage, the fetters of Horatian type of satire begins to be broken, and he enters into a very different realm of satire—a satire which is not concerned about its corrective power, its public function, but rather about its function as the direct expression of private feeling.²⁾

III

While Swift's pessimism about the corrective power of satire is expressed in the form of an outburst of rage in the "Epistle to a Lady," in "On Poetry: A Rhapsody," written in the same year of 1733, it is revealed in the form of a justification of vile encomium by the "old experienced sinner." The power of this poem derives from the confusing nature of this narrator, the "old experienced sinner," whose views the readers can neither agree with nor reject comfortably. In a way, Swift forces his own dilemma upon the readers by setting up a trap, through this narrator, from which there is no escape.

-
- 2) The Legion Club (1736) is one example of satires in which Swift utilizes the attack on his satiric butts only for the private satisfaction. In this poem, without any regard for correction, Swift is completely indulged in the repetitive and prolonged imagination of sadistic torturing of his satiric butts as in the following lines:

Could I from the building's top
 Hear the rattling thunder drop,
 While the devil upon the roof,
 If the devil be thunder-proof,
 Should with poker fiery red
 Crack the stones, and melt the lead;
 Drive them down on every skull,
 While the den of thieves is full, (21-28)

Tie them, keeper, in a tether,
 Let them stare and stink together;
 Both are apt to be unruly,
 Lash them daily, lash them duly,
 Though 'tis hopeless to reclaim them,
 Scorpion rods perhaps may tame them. (153-58)

Swift's sadism is only the indicator of his helplessness in reality, as the attack of this kind can never be carried out in reality and thus can only be imagined.

Donald C. Mell, Jr. is quite right when he describes Swift's manipulation of his narrator as a mode of literary entrapment:

Swift's satiric irony in the poetry constitutes an important mode of literary entrapment. The "open-ended" feature of this irony in "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" has the effect of entrapping the reader, as Vieth notes for Rochester's best lyrics and satires, "between two opposite extremes with no compromise or reconciliation between them." That is, Swift is compelling his reader to be an active participant in a drama of unresolved conflicts between two norms: the traditional ideal of good poetry to communicate moral truths and aesthetic values and what the world will actually reward the poet for writing. ("Irony" 312)

In other words, Swift is demonstrating to the readers that neither option is viable: as I shall argue later, the ideal of poetry proves to be impossible to achieve in a corrupt age, while the sensible readers cannot be persuaded by the poem's justification of vile encomium. I believe that it is through this dilemma that Swift communicates his rage and despair towards the world.

Swift entraps us, the readers, by thwarting our expectations. As the title "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" reveals, this poem is designed to debunk the readers' facile expectations.³⁾ The readers might expect this poem to be a glorification of poetry in general, as it is about poetry written by a poet. However, if there had been readers who expected this poem to be a praise of poetry, they should have taken a hint from the spelling of the word "rhapsody," a "rapp" being a

3) I prefer the spelling "rhapsody" which Harold Williams's edition retains to "rhapsody" adopted by Pat Roger's edition, because it opens up the connotation of the word "rap." There seems to be a pun involved in this word, as G. P. Mayhew observes its connection with a "slangy double-pun upon 'a rapp' or counterfeit coin and a 'rap' or knock on the head" (112). This pun is obscured if we follow Pat Rogers's modernization of the word to "rhapsody."

counterfeit coin as well as a blow to the head. Thus, the meaning of “rapsody” is quite different from the modern understanding of the word as “rhapsody,” as John I. Fischer explains:

Though the pun on “rap” is obvious, the significance of the word “rapsody” may be somewhat obscured for the modern reader since both the connotation and denotation of that word have changed considerably since Swift used it. For us, the word “rhapsody” commonly denotes a type of music which exhibits agreeable lyrical freedom. In the eighteenth century, however, the word was often used to refer to any work distinguished by an unhappy disorder. Thus, Pope, writing to Swift in 1729, defined the word “rhapsody” the opposite of true wit’s creative and orderly process. “This letter . . . will be a rhapsody; it is many years ago since I wrote as a wit” (*Swift’s Correspondence*, 3.362). As Swift, then, would have understood the words of his title, “On Poetry: A Rapsody,” that title delineates the process his poem describes; a debasing and disordering of the very art that traditionally taught the proper end of things and men. (183-84, n8)

The inflation of the readers’ expectation and its debunking can be found from the early part of the poem in the two paragraphs which describe poetry-writing as a demanding job and the lines that follow. The first paragraph describes the writing of poetry in exalted terms and expresses sympathy for the real difficulties faced by the poets:

Not empire to the rising sun,
 By valour, conduct, fortune won;
 Nor highest wisdom in debates
 For framing laws to govern states;
 Nor skill in sciences profound,
 So large to grasp the circle round;

Such heavenly influence require,
 As how to strike the muses' lyre. (25-32)

In these lines, poetry-writing is raised to the highest level possible, as it is related to divine influence. However, while this passage puts the poetry in the highest order, it backfires somewhat on the poet: the more he elevates in status, the harder he makes it as an ideal to be achieved. In this sense, Swift is demonstrating what poetry should be and how difficult it is to achieve, expressing "a mixture of sympathy for the real difficulties faced by the would-be poet and a certain skepticism toward the possibility of achieving high art" (Mell, "Irony" 317). This scepticism hinted at in the first paragraph is fully expressed in the paragraph that follows. Through somewhat similar rhetorical and syntactical strategies, the second paragraph also describes the demanding challenge to poets:

Not beggar's brat, on bulk begot;
 Not bastard of a pedlar Scot;
 Not boy brought up to cleaning shoes,
 The spawn of Bridewell, or the stews;
 Not infants dropped, the spurious pledges
 Of gypsies littering under hedges,
 Are so disqualified by fate
 To rise in church, or law, or state,
 As he, whom Phebus in his ire
 Hath *blasted* with poetic fire. (33-42)

Our expectation that this paragraph will continue the image of lines 25-32 is disappointed, for the emphasis shifts abruptly. In the previous passage, Swift's emphasis is on the high art of poetry accompanied by sympathy for a poet who

seeks to accomplish such a demanding task. However, though this paragraph also describes the idea of poetry-writing as a demanding task, Swift now implies that he knows what kinds of people do aspire to be a poet in his age and how they are disqualified from being a proper poet, through the use of different language and vulgar imagery. His posture in these two paragraphs seems to be, to borrow Claude J. Rawson's words, "that of an enraged righteousness, the champion of poetry denouncing a vicious and philistine age, the true poet towering above Grub street" (89), as he shows the difference between ideal and reality as well as contempt for contemporary poetasters. However, Swift does not let the readers remain in the domain of facile differentiation between good and bad poets. He puzzles and entraps the readers, as this lofty postures is not to be sustained. As we can see in the lines that follow the previous two paragraphs, this indignation gives way to "a more low-pitched note of irritated commiseration, with Swift hovering between the roles of embattled scourge and crushed victim, both poised against a poetry-scoring age" (Rawson 89):

What hope of custom in the fair,
 While not a soul demands your ware?
 Where you have nothing to produce
 For private life, or public use?
 Court, city, country want you not;
 You cannot bribe, betray, or plot.
 For poets, law makes no provision:
 The wealthy have you in derision.
 Of state affairs you cannot smatter,
 Are awkward when you try to flatter.
 Your portion, taking Britain round,
 Was just one annual hundred pound.
 Now not so much as in remainder

Since Cibber brought in an attainer;
 For ever fixed by right divine,
 (A monarch's right) on Grub Street line.

Poor starveling bard, how small thy gains!
 How unproportioned to thy pains! (43-60)

What is important to notice in these lines, which deplore the reality in which poets are despised and thus do not get proper rewards, is that Swift does not differentiate between good poets and bad ones in describing their plights. In an ideal world, good poets should be rewarded while mere poetasters might be despised and unrewarded. Yet, in reality, there exists no difference between them, as both of them are not wanted by "Court, city, country," which demonstrates that poets have little to offer apart from being impotent observers.

4) In this paragraph, as the lines proceed, his indignation towards Grubstreet shown in the previous paragraph fades away, and there remain only Swift's realization of the difference between ideal and reality and his sense of inescapability from dire reality.

The introduction of the fictive narrator, the "old experienced sinner," actually deepens the sense of puzzlement on the part of the readers rather than resolving it:

How shall a new attempter learn
Of different spirits to discern,

4) That poets are not wanted by court or city might not be so important as these have been objects of satire for their lack of understanding of literature, as Alexander Pope's "To Augustus" demonstrates. The real damage to the status of poets is done by the fact that they are not wanted by the country as well, which denotes that they are irrelevant to all sections of the nation.

And how distinguish, which is which,
 The poets' vein, or scribbling itch?
 Then hear an old experienced sinner
 Instructing thus a young beginner. (71-76)

There is some uncertainty about the relationship between Swift's previous narrator and this one: does there occur a change of narrator or does the previous narrator simply call now himself an "old experienced sinner"? Considering that he uses the indefinite pronoun "an" instead of "this," which would have clarified the identification of him with the earlier narrator, Swift seems to imply that this character is a different personality. However, Swift again confuses the reader's response by making it difficult to dissociate this narrator totally from himself. If Swift had utilized this sinner as a sort of satiric butt whose views he undermines while making him the representative of the corrupt age, the puzzlement he caused in the previous part might be dispelled: the poem would have become a criticism of the follower of the corrupt age. However, this is not to be.

Of course, this narrator in part represents the corrupt age, as he advises a young beginner how to transform literary failure into commercial success by writing a panegyric of people who are in power and by attacking the Opposition:

But though you miss your third essay,
 You need not throw your pen away.
 Lay now aside all thoughts of fame,
 To spring more profitable game.
 From party merit seek support;
 The vilest verse thrives best at court.
 And may you ever have the luck

To rhyme almost as well as Duck;
 And, though you never learned to scan verse,
 Come out with some lampoon on D'Anvers.
 A pamphlet in Sir Bob's defence
 Will never fail to bring in pence;
 Nor be concerned about the sale,
 He pays his workmen on the nail. (183-96)

However, this narrator is not to be easily brushed aside as Swift's satiric butt: for, to the readers' surprise, he also demonstrates that he is not a mindless dunce, but has been forced to recommend this kind of advice because of the inescapable reality imposed upon him. For example, when he advises a young beginner how to write a literary work, he reveals that he actually possesses a proper understanding of literature:

Consult yourself, and if you find
 A powerful impulse urge your mind,
 Impartial judge within your breast
 What subject you can manage best;
 Whether your genius most inclines
 To satire, praise, or humorous lines;
 To elegies in mournful tone,
 Or prologue 'sent from hand unknown.'
 Then rising with Aurora's light,
 The muse invoked, sit down to write;
 Blot out, correct, insert, refine,
 Enlarge, diminish, interline:
 Be mindful, when invention fails,
 To scratch your head, and bite your nails. (77-90)

What he actually does here is to communicate poetic inspiration and the

importance of decorum and genre, apart from his wry criticism of prologue writers in line 83. Some might argue that the old sinner's sudden reversion to head-scratching and nail-biting "when invention fails" reveals the true nature of him as a satiric butt.⁵⁾ However, considering other passages which demonstrate

5) Fischer argues that the final couplet reveals the "sly" nature of this sinner: "For while the sinner's sudden collapse into trivia does not really detract from the validity of the Horatian advice he mouthed, it does muddy that advice. Horace's counsel [in *Ars Poetica*], after all, is founded on his belief that to be excellent, both poets and poems must reflect the nature of things as things really are: thus the poet must follow his proper calling, the poem must truly illustrate its subject. But the sinner's counsel covertly suggests that there really is no 'nature of things' at all. For by mindlessly appropriating Horace's advice and then mixing in his own nonsense to make the whole serve him as an impressive opening, the sinner insidiously undermines the moral view of poetry's nature and function that Horace's advice both inculcates and assumes" (189). Yet, I do not accept this argument, because this interpretation does not take into consideration the fact that, even though in the end the sinner recommends the vile panegyric to a young beginner, there are too many positive aspects about him to dissociate him totally from Swift. It seems to me that Fischer's interpretation is based on the assumption that clear dissociation is possible, which, I contend, is not so. For example, we cannot say that the following lines instructing a young beginner how to revise his once-failed work are ironically intended:

But first with care employ your thoughts,
 Where critics marked your former faults.
 The trivial turns, the borrowed wit,
 The similes that nothing fit;
 The cant which every fool repeats,
 Town-jests, and coffee-house conceits;
 Descriptions tedious, flat and dry,
 And introduced the Lord knows why;
 Or where we find your fury set
 Against the harmless alphabet;
 On A's and B's your malice vent,
 While readers wonder whom you meant. (149-60)

In these lines, this old sinner does promote intellectual principles and aesthetic values

his proper understanding of literature without any hint of irony, this passage should be interpreted as acknowledging the old sinner's awareness of the real conditions of composition. Hence he both recognizes the ideal and accepts the limitations of the real world.

This sinner is unique in that he is always conscious that, when he advocates some nonsense, "he is himself being sarcastic, as distinct from being the innocent carrier of Swift's sarcasms" (Rawson 90). In other words, he is aware that he is in the wrong when he offers some vile advice to a young beginner. For example, when he proposes "Your poem finished; next your care / Is needful, to transcribe it fair. / In modern wit all printed trash, is / Set off with numerous breaks—and dashes— / To statesmen would you give a wipe, / You print it in *italic type*" (91-96), he is aware that this kind of work is nothing but "trash." Even when he advises a beginner to write some panegyric, saying "The vilest verse thrives best at court" (188), he is perfectly aware that the panegyric of this kind is worthless. In this respect, this sinner is not an enthusiastic follower of the corrupt age: rather, he gives the impression that he is being forced to adopt its procedures. This impression is strengthened when we encounter the following passage:

A prince the moment he is crowned,
Inherits every virtue round (205-6)

As soon as you can hear his knell,
This god on earth turns devil in hell.
And lo, his ministers of state,
Transformed to imps, his levees wait. (221-24)

which can be recommended to any seriously minded aspiring poet.

Even though this passage is provided in the context of apparently recommending political panegyric, it actually verges on political satire, as he demonstrates his awareness that political panegyric does not need an objective basis for its praise, and that its object is usually undeserving of such praise.

This sinner gives vile advice not fully out of enthusiasm, but out of his realization that this is the only way for a poet to survive in a poet-scorning and corrupt age. And, importantly, he actually does deplore this corrupt reality from which neither he nor any other poet can be free:

O, what indignity and shame
 To prostitute the muse's name,
 By flattering kings whom heaven designed
 The plagues and scourges of mankind.
 Bred up in ignorance and sloth,
 And every vice that nurses both. (421-26)

This poem becomes ambiguous in its import, for this sinner offers seemingly vile advice to a young beginner while at the same time actually “bemoans the state of affairs in the cadence and style of the elegiac ideal itself” (Mell, “Irony” 319). What is still more disconcerting is that his correct insight into the state of affairs—that is, his perception that the object of panegyric does not deserve it—does not necessarily make him different from the mindless dunces.

Yet, Swift does try to dissociate himself from his old sinner as the poem draws to an end. Up to now, this old sinner has shown his sharp understanding of reality, and his yearning for an ideal state of affairs. When he compares praise of Augustus Caesar with that of modern kings, that comparison leads to an invective against modern kings—that is, a vicious attack on George II, as he demonstrates their shortcomings by comparing them to beasts:

Perhaps you say Augustus shines
 Immortal made in Virgil's lines,
 And Horace brought the tuneful choir
 To sing his virtues on the lyre,
 Without reproach of flattery; true,
 Because their praises were his due.
 For in those ages kings we find,
 Were animals of humankind,
 But now go search all Europe round,
 Among the savage monsters crowned,
 With vice polluting every throne
 (I mean all kings except our own) (427-38)

Thus think on kings, the name denotes
 Hogs, asses, wolves, baboons, and goats,
 To represent in figure just
 Sloth, folly, rapine, mischief, lust.
 O! were they all but Nebuchadnezzars,
 What herds of kings would turn to grazers. (457-62)

Though he feigns to exclude George II from his incrimination, the readers cannot fail to detect the irony of this exclusion from the knowledge that this sinner has been attacking contemporary society without exception in previous lines. The feigned exclusion of George II, thus, is a thinly disguised tongue-in-cheek criticism of him. In these lines, we come to almost forget that the narrator is the old experienced sinner, not Swift, since they express Swift's attitude towards modern kings, including George II, without any hint of irony. However, after this passage, we no longer find any overt hint of sarcasm, as the old sinner's lines become a blatant encomium of the King and Robert Walpole:

Fair Britain in thy monarch blessed,
 Whose virtues bear the strictest test;
 Whom never faction can bespatter,
 Nor minister, nor poet flatter.
 What justice in rewarding merit!
 What magnanimity of spirit!
 How well his public thrift is shown!
 All coffers full except his own.
 What lineaments divine we trace
 Through all his figure, mien, and face; (463-72)

At first, we are not quite sure whether the old experienced sinner is being ironic or not. However, as his blatant encomium carries on for another 76 lines to the end of the poem without any hint of irony to undermine the surface import, we come to suspect that he really means this vile advice. It is as though he finally gives up the resistance of conscience and joins the corps of mindless dunces out of despair. Even though he still believes in the wrongness of the praise, it is as if he is no longer hovering between ideal and reality: from this point, he renounces completely any lingering yearning for the ideal state of things and settles for the actual world. As he continues his blatant praise of King George and Robert Walpole in the remaining part of the poem, the irony is now delivered not directly from the sinner but from Swift behind this narrator at his expense.

The corruption of this sinner is completed when he renounces the need for divine help in writing in the final lines of the poem, which border on blasphemy:

Translate me now some lines, if you can,
 From Virgil, Martial, Ovid, Lucan;

They could all power in heaven divide,
 And do no wrong to either side:
 They teach you how to split a hair,
 Give George and Jove an equal share.
 Yet, why should we be laced so straight;
 I'll give my monarch butter-weight.
 And reason good; for many a year
 Jove never intermeddled here:
 Nor, though his priests be duly paid,
 Did ever we desire his aid:
 We now can better do without him,
 Since Woolston gave us arms to rout him.

* * * * * *Caetera desiderantur* * * * * * (535-49)

As Jove can be replaced by Christ,⁶⁾ line 540, which gives King George and Christ equal station, implies blasphemy. In addition, the elevation of the free thinking Woolston over the aid of Jove/Christ proposes a blasphemous re-ordering of human priorities. By renouncing Christ, the corruption of this sinner reaches its nadir, and the final words "*Caetera desiderantur*" (the rest is missing) cannot be more appropriate for the ending: as the old sinner hits rock bottom in his corruption, there is no more to be said; or, if there is more, it had better not be heard.

To assume, as does Fischer, that the complete degradation of this sinner makes the poem more positive in its outlook than it seemed at the start, because we live in God's world while this sinner lives in his own hell (194-97), is to miss the point of the poem.⁷⁾ Although Swift dissociates himself from the old

6) Lord Orrey, an acquaintance of Swift's, filled the blank in the original edition with "Christ" (Rogers 878, note to line 544).

7) Mell provides a similar interpretation of the poem to Fischer's: "through the poem's ultimate self-destruction, having it fall under the weight of false praise in a flourish

sinner at the end of the poem by making him beyond redemption, this dissociation does not produce a resolution of the tension between ideal and reality. The gap between ideal and reality still remains insurmountable, indeed is even widened now that another writer has surrendered his conscience to the power of corrupt reality. Thus, the complete degradation of this sinner makes deeper the dilemma we are forced into, as one, who used to have a correct understanding of the ideal and an accurate insight into reality, surrenders to the pressures of reality, in which the poetry is denied the power to communicate the ideal and correct the wrong. This old sinner is the outcome of Swift's despair about the world, as he represents the possibility of reform as frustrated by the world of reality.

There is no way out for Swift or us the readers in the world of "On Poetry: A Rapsody." To pretend that satire has a corrective power is to ignore the power of the reality; nor can one turn to the advice of the sinner, as it is to renounce one's conscience and even providence. If there is one option left by which one can continue to write and keep one's conscience, it is to lash out at the corrupt reality in rage and despair for the sake of one's private satisfaction as a person of integrity.

IV

Some might argue that we cannot regard Swift's abandonment of laughing satire as his renunciation of corrective function of satire. They might contend

of dashes, lines, asterisks, and omissions, Swift demonstrates the power of genuine art to move and persuade, while underscoring the imaginative ideal totally lacking in the flatteries of court poetry" ("Imagination" 133).

that, even though he vent his rage and despair, Swift does not let go of his artistic control since these satires are written under the strict curb of heroic couplet. Even though the control over his rage and despair collapses in these satires, they might argue, there still remains the artistic control which facilitates the existence of these satires. In a way, if we emphasize the formal manipulation of these satires, we can even regard the venting of Swift's emotion as bogus, as his formal concern in writing these poems cannot be compatible with his seemingly uncontrollable outburst of rage and despair.

Yet, the interpretation of this kind does not take into account the fact that Swift is articulating his status as a satirist he is "forced" into. To reveal that he is "forced" to write satire for private satisfaction, Swift must retain the least control over his emotion, that is, the articulation of his emotion or thought in the form of a poem. Swift must remain as an accomplished artist and a man of integrity who can write satires for the public weal if he has had a chance of being listened to. Swift must show that, even though he cannot laugh in his satire in the face of overwhelming reality and thus forced to say "A Valediction: Forbidding Laughing," he can weep or vent better than any other poetaster. In a way, the artistic control in the "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry: A Rhapsody" is a kind of record of what Swift might have been if he had been given the ears of contemporary society.

주제어: 조너썬 스위프트, 「숙녀에게」, 「시에 대해서: 랍소디」, 풍자문학, 교정
적 기능, 분노, 절망

Works Cited

- Barnett, Louise K. *Swift's Poetic Worlds*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1981.
- Davis, Hebert, et al., eds. *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*. 16 vols. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939-1974.
- Fischer, John I. *On Swift's Poetry*. Tallahassee, Florida: UP of Florida, 1978.
- Jaffe, Nora C. *The Poet Swift*. Hanover, New Hampshire: UP of New England, 1977.
- Mayhew, G. P. *Rage or Raillery*. San Marino, California: Huntington Library P, 1967.
- Mell, Donald C., Jr. "Imagination and Satiric Mimesis in Swift's Poetry: An Explanatory Discussion." *Contemporary Studies of Swift's Poetry*. Ed. John I. Fischer and Donald C. Mell, Jr. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1981.
- _____. "Irony, Poetry, and Swift: Entrapment in 'On Poetry: A Rapsody.'" *PLL* 18 (1982): 310-24.
- Rawson, Claude J. "'I the Lofty Stile Decline': Self-apology and the 'Heroick Strain' in Some of Swift's Poems." *English Hero, 1660-1800*. Ed. Robert Folkenflick. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1982.
- Rogers, Pat, ed. *Jonathan Swift: Complete Poems*. London: Penguin, 1983.
- Schakel, Peter J. *The Poetry of Jonathan Swift: Allusion and the Development of a Poetic Style*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978.
- Sutherland, James. *English Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958.
- Swedenberg, H. T., Jr., et al., eds. *The Works of John Dryden*. 19 vols. Berkeley: U of California P, 1974.
- Williams, Harold, ed. *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1958.
- _____, ed. *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1963-65.

A Valediction Forbidding Laughing: The Outburst of Rage and Despair in Jonathan Swift's "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry: A Rapsody"

Abstract

Inhan Jeon

This paper aims to investigate the collapse of the corrective function of satire in Jonathan Swift's "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry: A Rapsody," the satires written towards the end of Swift's satiric career. This paper points out that, even though the corrective function of satire has been advocated by satirists against its opponents and thus a theory of laughing satire has been developed for the enhancement of its corrective function, satirist cannot always laugh in the face of reality. Swift's "Epistle to a Lady" and "On Poetry: A Rapsody," this paper contends, is a case in which Swift abandons the corrective function of satire and turn satire into a means of private satisfaction.

In the discussion of "Epistle to a Lady," this paper points out that the theory of laughing satire is collapsed at the same time as it is established, thus argues that the co-existence of these incompatibles is the very proof for Swift's growing anguish and doubt about the corrective function of his satire. In the discussion of "On Poetry: A Rapsody," this paper contends that Swift is articulating the dire situation he is forced into through his presentation of the "old experienced sinner," who had a right ideal about poetry but was forced to commend "vile encomium" due to the "poetry-scoring age." If the "Epistle to a Lady" can be understood as a poem in which Swift vent his rage, this paper claims, "On Poetry: A Rapsody" is a poem in which Swift's despair about the contemporary society is made more explicit.

This paper concludes that the artistic control retained in both poems cannot be regarded as Swift's control over his emotions. Rather, this paper argues, this control is Swift's last means of getting private satisfaction from his satires, and the artistic control in both poems can demonstrate what Swift might have been if he had been given the ears of contemporary society.

Key Words

Jonathan Swift, "Epistle to a Lady," "On Poetry: A Rhapsody," satire, corrective function, rage, despair