

# Introduction

## Nie Zhenzhao & Wang Songlin

This special issue of the journal of *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature (ISL)* is devoted to honoring Professor Claude Rawson, the world-famous expert on eighteenth-century literature on the happy occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Terry Eagleton once called Claude Rawson “one of the finest eighteenth-century specialists, who [...] is also a critic of striking flair and delicacy” (*London Review of Books*, 23 Aug. 2001). Marjorie Perloff, one of the foremost critics of avant-garde poetry and poetics who had a long and sincere friendship with Claude Rawson, regarded him as a scholar with a “very wide-ranging mind,”<sup>1</sup> “perhaps the best living scholar in eighteenth century satire” (“Claude Rawson in conversation with Marjorie Perloff” 603). Zhenzhao Nie, current President of International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism (IAELC) holds Claude Rawson in high esteem and thinks Claude Rawson’s principles and methodologies have “reshaped the field of ethical literary criticism”<sup>2</sup> in China by his advocacy of returning to the primary texts in literary studies and their ethical and moral considerations.

Before his retirement in 2014, Claude Rawson was the first Maynard Mack Professor of English at Yale, where he had taught since 1986. Before that, he was for many years (1971-1986) professor at the University of Warwick, served as chairman of the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies and was the co-editor of *Modern Language Review* and *Yearbook of English Studies* from 1974 to 1988. He was the Clifford Lecturer for 1992 (American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies), and Bateson Lecturer for 1999 (University of Oxford). Claude Rawson is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and served for many years on the Educational Advisory Board of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He is a former President of the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and a former President of IAELC. Claude Rawson has held many distinguished visiting professorships around the world, most recently in China, where he was born and grew up. He has lectured widely in Europe, the Americas, Australasia and the Far East.

Claude Rawson is the author of numerous books and articles. His major publications include *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress* (1972),

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1 See Marjorie Perloff’s article in this issue.

2 See Zhenzhao Nie’s article in this issue.

*Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* (1973), *Order from Confusion Sprung* (1985), *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830* (1994), *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945* (2001), *Swift's Angers* (2014) and *Swift and Others* (2015). Among the volumes he has recently edited are *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding* (2007); *Henry Fielding, Novelist, Playwright, Journalist, Magistrate: A Double Anniversary Tribute (1707-1754)* (2008); *Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift: A Norton Critical Edition*, with Ian Higgins (2009); *Literature and Politics in the Age of Swift: English and Irish Perspectives* (2010); and *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets* (2011). In addition, he is a General Editor of the Cambridge History of Literary Criticism and the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift as well as the General Editor of the Blackwell Critical Biographies and the Unwin Critical Library. Since the 1980s he has been a regular contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement*, *New York Times Book Review* and *London Review of Books*, writing on a great variety of literary and cultural topics. Since retirement, Claude Rawson lives in Cambridge UK.

The special issue contains sixteen articles and recollections in honour of Claude Rawson's anniversary. Ian Higgins' article "Claude Rawson: An Overview and Appreciation, and Other Observations" offers an account of the range of Claude Rawson's work as a literary scholar, critic, editor and reviewer, focusing upon Claude Rawson's insights into the character of Swift's satire, and particularly of its proleptic quality. Linda Bree's "Claude Rawson in Print" is a comprehensive account of Claude Rawson's printed writings over a period of sixty years and their influence in the field of eighteenth-century literature and literary studies. Now a General Editor of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift, Linda Bree could perhaps be the best one to understand Claude Rawson's principles of literature, his methodology, and his skills as a literary critic. Joseph Roach's essay "Chinese Orphans and the Social Contract from Swift to Brecht" is a very original essay inspired by Claude Rawson's critical practice in *God, Gulliver, and Genocide*. Roach extends Claude Rawson's Swiftian genealogy of "unsocial socialism" in George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Bertolt Brecht and applies it to Anglo-Irishman Arthur Murphy's *The Orphan of China* (1753), showing how Murphy's transcultural adaptation shares a source in the great zaju dramas of Yuan Dynasty China with Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944). James McLaverty's article "Books as Self-Representation: A Comparison of Pope and Swift" renders an insightful comparison of Pope's and Swift's self-representation by drawing on Claude Rawson's investigation and evaluation of Swift's epitaph with Swift's other self-representations and those of Yeats and Pope. The article

“Reading Defoe with Rawson” by Tom Keymer and Dana Lew examines the implications for eighteenth-century studies of Claude Rawson’s *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* as the book approaches the twenty-fifth anniversary of its publication, and inspired by Claude Rawson’s approach to irony analyzes the vexed case of Defoe’s controversial pamphlet *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702) and Defoe’s troubled revisiting of themes from *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Nicholas Hudson’s essay “Gulliver in the History of Race” revisits the issue of race and racism in *Gulliver’s Travels*, as analyzed brilliantly in Claude Rawson’s *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* and concludes by pointing out that the difficulties in placing Swift in the history of race reflects emerging problems of definition and taxonomy that he deliberately exploited in order to perplex the reader. Pat Rogers’ article “Scriblerian Satire: Myth or Reality” studies the validity of the term “Scriblerian satire” as a concept in literary history and questions some fundamental aspects of Ashley Marshall’s definition of satire by identifying a more distinct mode of satire that can be meaningfully called Scriblerian. The essay “Johnson and Swift: Footnotes to Rawson” by Robert DeMaria, Jr. explores within Claude Rawson’s critical framework some Johnsonian responses to Swift in addition to those canvassed by Claude Rawson and takes up anew the question of Swiftianism in Johnson’s writings and conversation, suggesting that later in life Johnson could be more Swiftian in conversation and in ex tempore writing than in his more considered and more public utterances. Jenny Davidson’s “Swift and the Moderns: A Tribute to Claude Rawson” is a tribute to Claude Rawson whose brilliant work on Rochester, Swift, Pope, Austen, Céline and many others has proved a great treasure for her to conceive and construct a new lecture course called Swift and the Moderns. Marjorie Perloff had intended to contribute a substantive essay to this volume, but became too ill to do so. Her short but affectionate memoir “A Yeats Excursion with Claude Rawson, Summer 1974” is a warm recalling of the moments of memorable events in her fifty-year friendship with Claude Rawson.

Six articles by Chinese scholars are dedicated to Claude Rawson for his tremendous contribution to IAELC and ethical literary criticism in Chinese academia. Zhenzhao Nie’s “A Beautiful Memory and Eternal Friendship: Claude Rawson and China” presents a genuine tribute to Claude Rawson, with whom Nie has been keeping a sincere and everlasting friendship since 2010, when Claude Rawson was invited to visit China as part of the “Oversea Well-known Professor Project” of the Ministry of Education of P. R. China. As the current President of IAELC, Nie speaks highly of Claude Rawson’s enormous contribution to ethical literary criticism, hailing him as helping “build a bridge between Western and Chinese literary studies.” Biwu Shang’s “Claude Rawson’s China Complex and Ethical Literary Criticism” starts with

a warm recollection of Rawson's charming personality based on Shang's personal contact and communication with Rawson, followed by an introduction of what Shang terms as Rawson's "China Complex," i.e., his love for Shanghai where he was born and his active engagement in the academic activities in China as well as his remarkable addresses for the opening ceremonies of the annual IAELC conferences. "The Ethical Dimension of Irony: Claude Rawson's Swift Study and Its Implications" by Hui Su and Wenjun Bian is an in-depth discussion of Claude Rawson's subversive interpretation of Swift's use of irony, which creates a style featuring uncertainties that leads to a tendency toward ethical ambiguities. The article approves the social responsibility of Rawson as a literary critic who incorporates an ethical perspective into the interpretation of Swiftian irony. Songlin Wang's essay "In the Company of Claude Rawson: Revisiting the Writings of Barbarism in Chinese and Foreign Literature" is inspired by his close reading Claude Rawson's *God, Gulliver, and Genocide*, which he translated into Chinese with his colleagues. He applies Rawson's critical methodology to re-examining the writings of barbarism and cannibalism in both ancient and modern Chinese novels and unveils the complexities and paradoxes of moral sentiments in the writings of cannibalism in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Lu Xun's *The Diary of a Madman*, Chen Zhongshi's *White Deer Plains* and Mo Yan's *The Republic of Wine*. Juan Du's "The Interweaving of Cultural and Literary Criticism: Claude Rawson's Study of Eighteenth-century English Literature" is a general review of Claude Rawson's wide-ranging studies of eighteenth-century literature, specifically his early study on Henry Fielding's satire which Du takes as one of the cultural signs of the eighteenth-century. Du points out that Rawson's diverse interests explain his academic concerns on both the aesthetic qualities of literature and its moral engagement in social criticism. Gexin Yang's article "Beyond Achilles' Heel: Claude Rawson and Ethical Literary Criticism" is a warm recalling of his own academic contact and communication with Claude Rawson as well as a tribute to Rawson's contribution to IAELC.

### Works Cited

- Eagleton, Terry. "A Spot of Firm Government." *London Review of Books*, 23 August 2001. Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v23/n16/terry-eagleton/a-spot-of-firm-government>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2024.
- Rawson, Claude and Marjorie Perloff. "Claude Rawson in conversation with Marjorie Perloff." *Textual Practice* 4 (2017): 603-629.