

Claude Rawson: An Overview and Appreciation, and Other Observations

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Abstract: This essay offers an account of the range of Claude Rawson's work as a literary scholar, critic, editor and reviewer. It considers Rawson's particular importance for the study of Jonathan Swift, for our understanding of Swift's irony and satire, and the recognition of Swift's achievement and influence as a poet. Drawing upon Rawson's insights into the character of Swift's satire, and particularly of its proleptic quality, the essay observes Swift's satiric anticipation of Artificial Intelligence and of the "Death of the Author." The essay reports Swift's significance for the American confessional poet Delmore Schwartz, indicates a polemical ancestry for Swift's favourite trope of the satirist with a whip, and suggests an unnoticed contemporary model for the "Language Machine" in Part III of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Keywords: criticism; irony; satire; Jonathan Swift

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Scholar, Critic, Editor, Reviewer

For the past six decades Claude Rawson has been one of the best literary critics in English. The erudition and range of his published work as literary scholar, critic, editor, and reviewer have been extraordinary. He has written eight books (monographs and collections of studies), all of which are landmarks in the field of literary studies, scholarly essays for books and learned journals, and review essays and reviews for learned journals and the literary press (such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and *London Review of Books*). Such has been his pre-eminence as a critic of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that in scholarly journals and in the literary periodical press this period has sometimes been labelled the "Age of

Rawson” (see for examples, Steintrager and Donoghue). The authors who have been the subjects of his critical studies and substantive review essays include Dryden, Rochester, Oldham, Defoe, Prior, Swift, Congreve, Mandeville, Steele, Addison, Parnell, Gay, Pope, Richardson, Hervey, Fielding, Johnson, Sterne, Hawkesworth, Smollett, Smart, Burke, Cowper, Gibbon, Boswell, Chatterton, Byron, Austen, Moore, and Shelley. This list is by no means exhaustive. He has since the early 1970s been the foremost scholar critic of Henry Fielding and of Jonathan Swift and is frequently acknowledged as such by his peers. He has been described in the top two “of the best scholars ever to have written on Fielding” (Hume 237) and Terry Eagleton describes Rawson as “a critic of striking flair and delicacy” and “probably the most accomplished Swift specialist in the business” (“A Spot of Firm Government”).

Rawson’s specialist scholarly interests are not limited to eighteenth century literary studies. He writes essays and reviews on twentieth century and contemporary English and American poetry. He writes on Anglo-Irish authors after Swift, including Wilde, Yeats and Shaw, and on the literary history of the mock-heroic. He has been long interested in cannibalism and fiction and in exploring the cultural reticence on cannibalism. His book *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945* (2001) is a searching examination of extermination rhetoric across literary genres and European and colonial history, from the Book of Genesis to the present day, exploring the range of aggressions which inhabit the space between extreme figures of speech, such as threatening to wipe offenders “from the face of the earth,” and the literal implementation of mass slaughters, war, and genocide. Swift is central for this book since his disturbing irony and satiric rage and menace inhabit this space between “meaning it, not meaning it, and *not* not meaning it,” to use Rawson’s formulation. In his auto-obituary “Verses on the Death of Dr Swift, D.S.P.D.” Swift claims (ironically, readers are to suppose, since the lines are part of a jokey coterie compliment, but Swift also means it) that “irony” was what “I was born to introduce, / Refined it first, and showed its use” (ll. 57-58 *The Complete Poems* 487). In Rawson, Swift found his responsive literary critic. Works such as Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*, and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, figure prominently in Rawson’s critical oeuvre as exemplary texts for several of the issues and themes he treats in his literary and cultural studies. Rawson has a capacious critical range which extends beyond the Anglophone literary tradition drawing upon classical authors (the satirists Juvenal, Horace, and Lucian are of course particularly important and often adduced in detail in Rawson’s work on satire), the Latin masterpieces *In Praise of Folly* and *Utopia* of the great Renaissance

humanists Erasmus and Thomas More, and French literature, especially Montaigne, but also Rabelais, Voltaire, Sade, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Proust, Céline, Genet and Wittig among others.

As a critic, Rawson's work has been consistently and primarily focused on major *literary* works and with *literary* tradition, as the principal business of someone professing English literary studies as their academic discipline. He has a particular view of the relation between the individual literary talent and tradition. In the "Preface" to his book *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (1985) he declares his *modus operandi*: "I have worked on the assumption that eighteenth-century authors are not only rooted in their own time and culture, but exist in an older and continuously evolving tradition. Their attitudes, themes and styles derive from the past and look forward to the future. The continuities and interactions (as well as the discontinuities) of eighteenth-century writers both with their predecessors (notably classical predecessors in satire and epic) and with writers of our own century are frequently under scrutiny in these pages" (ix). His is a humanist literary-historical enquiry with a distinctive approach and consonance in literary-critical method. He writes literary history through an intensive attention to exemplary works (or passages in works), probing tone, nuance, and register, reporting continuities and changes, and comparing themes, images, tropes, and literary forms over several periods. What the reader gets from Rawsonian literary criticism is a performance of an erudite, historically informed, in-depth close analysis that persuades on the alertness and sensitivity of the reading, adduces often surprising yet illuminating juxtapositions and collocations of literary texts, and arrests attention with the wit and verve of the writing. It is a literary criticism that is challenging and indeed often provocative and controversial, but which makes you want to read or re-read the work under discussion.

In the various roles usually understood by "editor," Rawson's contribution to English literary studies has also been distinguished. He is on record as saying that editions "are the single most useful activity in literary scholarship." The provision of a "reliable text of an important writer, with historical and contextual annotation" is foundational for literary scholarship, criticism and teaching (Rawson, "Recent Studies in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century" 697 and see also "Claude Rawson in conversation with Marjorie Perloff" 623-624). As a scholarly editor, his major contribution has been the *Collected Poems of Thomas Parnell* (1989) which he edited with Fred Lock, providing authoritative texts, richly and helpfully annotated. It presented the first complete edition of the poet including 70 poems from newly discovered Parnell manuscripts and more than doubled the known

canon. Parnell had been the only member of the so-called “Scriblerus” group (that included Swift, John Arbuthnot, Alexander Pope and John Gay) for whom a modern scholarly edition did not exist. Rawson has also edited or co-edited editions of works by Swift, Fielding and Austen, and Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* in Norton Critical Editions, Oxford University Press’s World’s Classics, Random House’s Modern Library and Dent’s Everyman’s Library, editions aimed at a wider public domain of university teachers and students and interested general readers as well as specialists of these authors. As a General Editor his major scholarly contribution is the ongoing *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift* project, which he initiated and directs as a foundational general editor and in which, among much else, the now standard scholarly editions of Swift’s great prose satires *A Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver’s Travels* and the (in)famous pamphlet *A Modest Proposal* have appeared. He is also a general editor of important scholarly series such as the Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, the Blackwell Critical Biographies, and Unwin Critical Library (of major texts), and for several years was a general editor of the Yale edition of Boswell’s private papers. He has edited landmark collections of scholarly essays on Dryden, Swift, and Fielding. For many years he was editor of the *Modern Language Review* and *Yearbook of English Studies*.

Rawson is also an incredibly prolific reviewer of literary works and critical studies. In addition to the many substantive review essays, he has written over 500 notes and reviews. His review essays on influential critics, such as Lionel Trilling, and the literary editor and critic Karl Miller, are also commentaries on the state of English and American letters in public life and reflect on the state of the discipline of English literary studies within the Academy. He observes about “the moderate and subtle liberal thinker” Trilling, that he “set great store by modulation, nuance and complication” (Rawson, “The last intellectual” 3). Rawson also sets great store by them. Miller is described as “an extraordinary stylist, in the precise sense that his style is unlike anyone else’s” and his critical work “combines the virtues of journalism and scholarship in the best senses of both” (“On Karl Miller”), assessments that may also be applied to Rawson’s own reviewing. Rawson observed that Trilling in 1972 was reporting a “developing insensitivity” to literature in the universities (“The last intellectual” 3). This complaint has long been a threnody in Rawson’s commentary, with the profession of literary criticism witnessed as having become remote from the public, obscurantist in its theoretical discourse, and becoming less concerned with reading books. Political, economic and cultural changes are also at the root of the perma-crisis that English and the Humanities seem always to have been in during recent decades. Rawson recalls that in “those

palmy days of welfare state education, grants were conferred automatically by the national system on candidates admitted by a university. *Tempora mutantur*, indeed” (“Rawson in Conversation” 621). The dismantling of the welfare state largely begun under Thatcher’s government in Britain has come to pass and university students are now the paying customers of the technocratic corporate universities and the former departments of English, History and Philosophy have increasingly been assimilated within larger entities such as Schools of Humanities and Social Sciences where underfunded they have often atrophied beyond recognition if not disappeared entirely.

Rawson’s reviewing likes to keep the continuing presence of his favourite Augustan writers in view even in the most unlikely of modern poets, as a measure of comparison, if not of demonstrable influence. His reviews of writers and critics whose work he doesn’t much like combine erudition and élan with a Swiftian animus and acerbic humour. Dylan Thomas is a writer Rawson doesn’t much like. In an iconoclastic early critical essay and a review article on the poetry and letters of this author, Thomas emerges as a poet of what Dryden in *Mac Flecknoe* derided as “the suburban Muse.” Elements of Thomas’s satirical humour, especially in his letters, and some themes and images in his poems, seem to recall or have precedents, analogues or parallels, however fortuitous, with passages in Pope and Swift. The surprising presence of Pope and Swift in Thomas was unacknowledged and probably unconscious. Rawson writes that “Thomas liked to align himself, or to see others aligning him, with poetry’s counter-cultural heroes: Villon, Whitman, Rimbaud” but “simultaneously liked to deny or undercut such alignments” (“Swansea’s Rimbaud” 475). Thomas called himself “the Rimbaud of Cwmdonkin Drive,” his family’s middle-class suburban Swansea address. But deep down he saw himself as the offender against and antagonist of bourgeois and suburban values, which, Rawson observes, is an “archetypal suburban idea of the poet” (“Swansea’s Rimbaud” 475). Thomas is conventionally seen in terms of neo-romantic expressionism, in the later poems especially, as a celebrant of idyllic countryside and childhood innocence, but Rawson in an iconoclastic early essay on Thomas concludes that Thomas “was almost certainly unaware” of “a conception of his poetic nature” which sees him as “not ‘the Rimbaud of Cwmdonkin Drive’ but a suburban Larkinized Pope” (“Randy Dandy in the Cave of Spleen” 103). Philip Larkin, the self-styled “Laforgue of Pearson Park,” was another poet of the suburban muse and another rather remote from charismatic French symbolists, but a poet who happily escaped from the influence of Dylan Thomas, and whose poetic cadences sometimes have their downbeat precedents in Swift’s verse (Rawson,

“Larkin’s Life and Letters” 154-155; “Larkin’s Desolate Attics” 40, 42).

Thomas’s poetry is of course unlike that of Pope or Swift. Rawson drily finds two other poets that Thomas better resembled: Christopher Smart (though the resemblance to this great poet is only in physical appearance, both were little men with booze-distended bellies) and Thomas Moore (who used “Thomas Little” as an early pseudonym and was known as “Anacreon Moore” being a celebrant of drinking, in life as in translated Anacreontic Ode). Rawson writes that Dylan Thomas “perhaps most resembled Moore, as a genially self-displaying poet with a high public profile, a talent for melodious fluency in his otherwise bad but highly popular poems, and a genuine gift for lively observant prose in his letters and journals. The comparison does Thomas too much honour [...]” (“Swansea’s Rimbaud” 476).

Claude Rawson and Jonathan Swift

A festschrift for Rawson entitled *Swift’s Travels: Eighteenth-Century British Satire and its Legacy*, edited by Nicholas Hudson and Aaron Santesso, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2008. The collection’s focus on Swift and the editors’ arrangement of the scholarly essays into three parts: “Swift and his Antecedents,” “Swift in His Time,” and “Beyond Swift” was completely appropriate. Rawson’s critical work has brought a capacious knowledge of major authors and texts in the European literary tradition to bear on the greatest satirist in the English language and it characteristically keeps in critical focus Swift’s literary predecessors, his contemporaries, and influence upon (and proleptic satiric parody of) later writers and modern modes. Rawson represents, in my view, the apogee of what literary criticism can perform on Swift’s writings.

Among Rawson’s many contributions to our understanding of Swift has been a concern to emphasise Swift’s stature and influence as a poet, and identification of his signature satiric style. In literary history, Swift’s reputation as a poet undoubtedly has been occluded by his reputation as the greatest of prose satirists and by the poetic achievement of his contemporary, his friend and collaborator Alexander Pope who perfected the heroic couplet which was the dominant serious poetic style of the time. But, as Rawson has shown in detail, Swift “has always been admired (and sometimes preferred to Pope) by poets. His reputation as a poet has indeed been higher among poets than among critics. His admirers and imitators include Byron, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill and Derek Mahon” (*Swift’s Angers* 170). The list can be added to, of course, and perhaps with an unexpected modern poet. As Rawson has shown, Swift was a parodic satirist of the “compulsively confessional” in the satirised modern “author” of *A Tale of a Tub*. For Swift, private feeling and

the confessional mode of written expression were not for publication in the public domain (Rawson, "Character of Swift's Satire" 25; *Swift's Angers* 221). Swift himself was the most guarded of writers, most of his works were published anonymously or pseudonymously, he preferred the protective carapace of irony to plain statement. Yet Swift has had a perhaps surprising admirer in that *poète maudit* of American poetry in the middle decades of the twentieth century, Delmore Schwartz, a poet who has been regarded as the inaugurator of a self-consciously modern autobiographical confessional poetry. Swift is probably at his most unguarded and uncensored about his private feelings in "the vulnerable intimacy" of his correspondence with Esther Johnson and Rebecca Dingley, known as the *Journal to Stella* (Rawson, "Swift" 328). Schwartz's poem "Swift," included in his *Summer Knowledge New and Selected Poems 1938-1958* (1959), takes extracts from the *Journal to Stella* correspondence of 1710-1713 and puts them into poetic lines. Schwartz presents Swift at his most vulnerably intimate, writing in a playful little language, using slang and affectionate raillery, being prosaically quotidian. It is a Swift in confessional mode, expressing his hopes and fears. He is anxious about his prospects of preferment. He is vain about his current publishing hit in London, a lampoon, and the special regard he is held in by the great: he has the love and esteem of the great Irish Tory hero the second Duke of Ormond, the favour and friendship of the leader of the Tory government Robert Harley and the entire ministry. He reports the coldness and his resentments as he falls out with his eminent former Whig friend, Joseph Addison. Schwartz's poem alludes to the great work still to come, *Gulliver's Travels*, the pride and allure of place and power for Swift, and Swift's huge angers. "Swift" expresses its subject's sentimental longing to be back with his female friends and at Laracor. The poem notices Swift when he is the sympathetic but also enraged witness of undeserved private tragedy and suffering, expressing a hatred of life. The poem closes with Swift fantasising about his return voyage to Ireland and the guns firing in welcome for Stella and himself. The poem's final line is Swift in private pain, his last recorded words "I am a Fool." Schwartz's "Swift" is an affective and confessional Swift, the private man without the self-protective ironies of the public figure.

Swift was a prolific and versatile poet, a surpassing genius at rhyming, and a master of the comic tetrameter couplet, a poet who refused the "heroic strain" as being "against my natural vein" since the Swiftian satiric vein "Still to lash, and lashing smile, / Ill befits a lofty style." He is a comic and moral satirist, but politically disaffected, an enemy of the "nation's representers," of the arbitrary Walpolean Whig regime in power. Readers are told in the lowered voice of a parenthetical aside, that what the satirist says in jest is meant in earnest: "In a jest I

spend my rage. / (Though it must be understood, / I would hang them if I could)” (“To a Lady” 143-144, 147-148, 166, 169-180, *Complete Poems* 518-519; Rawson, “The Character of Swift’s Satire” 75-76, 78).

One of Swift’s favourite tropes was the lash of satire. In an early Ode “To Mr Congreve,” Swift was already announcing his divine mission with “satire” as his muse: “My hate, whose lash just heaven has long decreed / Shall on a day make sin and folly bleed” (ll. 133-134, 176 *The Complete Poems* 71, 72). His reputation for applying the satiric lash is memorialized in his “Verses on the Death of Dr Swift.” The range of his lash escalates from individual knaves and vices to the entire world. In a famous letter to Alexander Pope in 1725 upon his completion of *Gulliver’s Travels*, Swift tells Pope that “when you think of the World give it one lash the more at my Request” (Swift, *Correspondence* 606). The author of *A Tale of a Tub*, however, had also reflected that “Satyrists” who use the “Lash” “might very well spare their Reproof and Correction: For there is not through all Nature, another so callous and insensible a Member as the *World’s Posteriors*” (Swift, *A Tale of Tub and Other Works*, “Preface” 29). In Swift we see the paradox of the radical satirist attempting to correct a world that cannot be mended and which he believes is too depraved to be saved.

Rawson in several studies discusses lines in Swift’s poetic epistle “To a Lady” as exemplary of the Swiftian satiric signature:

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. (ll. 181-190 *The Complete Poems* 519)

Swift’s satire operates with menaces at close quarters, it has an aggressive and scatological intimacy, he performs the punitive dirty work, up close and personal with the victims, the voice is colloquial and unfriendly, and relations with the reader are uneasy and unpleasant. The self-image as satirist with the whip or scourge is preferred to the more lofty, classical and heroic trope of the satirist wielding

his quill using satire as a sword, deployed for example, by Pope (Rawson, “The Character of Swift’s Satire” 79; *Swift’s Angers* 197, 256; “Mock-heroic and English Poetry” 176). Swift’s signature trope of the satirist with the whip has the lowered atmosphere of political journalism and pamphleteering. It has, I think, an ancestry in Royalist newsbooks. For example, a royalist polemicist against the Puritan parliament in 1647 wrote: “in my Satyrick rage (arm’d with a whip of Scorpions) I’d scratch their brawnie hides, till their proud infected blood appear’d to atone my rage” (*Mercurius Pragmaticus*, No. 9). The royalist polemicist conflates a biblical reference to chastising with whips and scorpions in 1 Kings 12:11 and an allusion to the classical Fury Alecto (“behold Alecto stand, / A whip of scorpions in her hand” as she is described in Swift’s poem “Cassinus and Peter” (Lines 81-82, *Complete Poems* 465). In Swift’s time High Church Tory journals had titles such as *The Whipping-Post* (by William Pittis) and *The Scourge* (by Thomas Lewis). In the quoted lines from “To a Lady” Swift lets the leading Opposition politicians and journalists do the heavy lifting (“Caleb D’Anvers” was the pseudonymous author of the Opposition paper *The Craftsman*), while Swift will perform the punitive satiric entertainment on the hoisted victim, acting in the collaborative supporting role of the Fury Alecto as dominatrix.

Rawson demonstrates that Swift “is not a reassuring or companionable writer. His vision of humanity is often uncompromisingly bleak and his views of society seldom agreeable to the social and political principles which are taken for granted in later times [...] Swift was, as a persistent matter of style, ostentatiously insulting to his reader. There is every indication that, at least in a stylistic or rhetorical sense, he did not want to be liked” (*Swift and Others* 147). Rawson is a trenchant critic of that modern academic scholarship on Swift which has sought to sanitise Swift of his satiric extremism, which presents him as a comfortable moderate conforming to the academic’s notions of progressive political virtue, and whose irony is assumed to be eirenic when its actual effect is disquieting, hostile and intolerant. Whereas the irony of other eighteenth-century satirists such as Pope and Fielding establishes solidarity with the reader, Swift remains reader unfriendly.

Rawson has also described Swift’s continued relevance as a proleptic satirist, an advance parodist of modern modes and writers. I’ll conclude with one still topical instance of Swift as proleptic satirist. In 1967-1968 the “Death of the Author” was announced. The news came not from the Muses on Parnassus but from Paris, in an essay published by Roland Barthes. The stark announcement had perhaps been foreshadowed: in that twentieth century critical formalism that regarded the text in isolation from its author and historical contexts; in structuralism

and in theories that viewed the text as a tissue of signs and quotations produced by a cultural nexus of texts or linguistic systems with the text's meaning produced by the reader and not by the biographical author; and in the random "cut up" techniques of Tristan Tzara's Dadaist aesthetics in the 1920s and in the literary experiments of the later Beat writer William Burroughs. But the demise of the author had, as Rawson suggests, "a ghoulish prefiguration" in "The Epistle Dedicatory" of *A Tale of a Tub* in "the suspected non-existence of Dryden (as of other moderns, Tate, Duffey, Rymer, Dennis, Bentley and Wotton)" (*Swift and Others* 21; *A Tale of a Tub* 23). In Swift's satire the contemporary Age is viewed by Posterity as "devoid of Writers," the "Titles" of the vast number of works produced are almost instantly replaced with others, the volumes remaindered and destroyed without even a shelf life: "the Memorial of them was lost among Men, their Place was no more to be found." The putative author of the *Tale of a Tub* is the eulogist of allegedly still-living authors presumed dead and gone and regarded as non-existent by posterity (*A Tale of a Tub* 20-24).

Barthes's announcement of "the death of the author" in the late nineteen-sixties, however, was premature, since it predated the arrival of computers, the internet and the digital era. Nor was it then the case that Artificial Intelligence was available for adoption by writers and turning "authors" into "generators," the prompters and editors of texts AI generated from vast data sets and algorithms. Swift was also the proleptic satirist of Artificial Intelligence. In the Academy of Lagado in Part III of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Gulliver meets a Professor who together with an operational team of pupils is experimenting with the scientist's invention of a mechanical language "Frame" which will be lucrative for the inventor who has plans on expanding the number of Frames. Gulliver is told that "the World would soon be sensible of its Usefulness." The "sole Inventer of this wonderful Machine" had "emptied the whole Vocabulary" into his computation machine. By the inventor's "Contrivance, the most ignorant Person at a reasonable Charge, and with a little bodily Labour, may write Books in Philosophy, Poetry, Politicks, Law, Mathematicks and Theology, with the least Assistance from Genius or Study" (266-270). I believe Swift was probably parodying the popular contemporary work *Artificial Versifying or, The School-Boys Recreation. A New Way to make Latin Verses* (1677) which provided a mechanical means of writing Latin verses without understanding one word of Latin. The plate in *Gulliver's Travels* showing "The Language Machine" resembles and may have been modelled on the "Versifying Tables" for making Latin verses in *Artificial Versifying* (*Gulliver's Travels* 267; John Peter, *Artificial Versifying* 10-11). Swift's satire on this anti-humanistic invention

in *Gulliver's Travels* reprises his earlier satire *A Tale of a Tub* where “the *Moderns*” have discovered shorter ways of becoming “*Scholars and Wits*, without the Fatigue of Reading or of Thinking” (*A Tale of a Tub* 96).

Barthes concluded his iconoclastic essay by stating that the birth of the reader must come at the cost of the death of the author. In the “Age of Rawson” texts were often authorless, published anonymously and pseudonymously. But knowledge of the author’s biography and the work’s immediate circumstances might radically alter the import of a work and indeed enhance a text’s pleasure for the reader. When the notorious *Shortest Way with the Dissenters* was published, anonymously, in 1702, it was taken straight by contemporary readers, read as the work of an extremist High Churchman opposed to the Act of Toleration, extravagantly calling for the extirpation of Protestant Dissent by sending Dissenters to the gallows or the galleys. The author of the anonymous pamphlet was discovered. It was the work of Daniel Defoe, a Protestant Dissenter and a current advocate of religious and political “Moderation,” a former Protestant rebel who had fought at Sedgemoor against King James II and had himself narrowly escaped capture and the subsequent mass hangings of rebels by an Anglican royalist government. The identification of the author of *The Shortest Way* as Daniel Defoe has liberated readers ever since, enabling new readings and ambiguity. The text, on the literal level apparently an extremist High Church polemic, was now construable as an irony, a hoax, a reader entrapment, a satire, a fiction, an imitation, a parody, an impersonation of a non-existent homicidal High Churchman. The pamphlet becomes an artful cento of rhetorically violent passages in High Church sermons and pamphlets which Defoe is seeking to expose as so many euphemisms for exterminatory enactments. *The Shortest Way* was still regarded as seditious by the government, the work burned, and its identified author stood in the pillory for it. But it was now not an inflammatory work literally against the toleration of Dissent, but an offensive and alarming work claiming that the toleration of Dissent was indeed in danger under the current government and members of the established Church.

Jorge Luis Borges was an author influenced by Swiftian themes, as Rawson observes (*Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* 77-78), and had something of Swift’s “ironically grave” stylistic vein (“Verses on the Death of Dr Swift,” Line 315, *Complete Poems* 493; Borges, “Preface” 13). The importance of knowledge of authors for the reader of texts is a theme in Borges’s amusing absurdist short story ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’ (1939). Borges’s fictional late nineteenth-century, early twentieth-century French symbolist poet Pierre Menard, with astounding application, has independently written sections of *Don Quixote* that

are verbally identical to those produced by Cervantes in the seventeenth century. Though the texts are verbally identical, Menard's text is judged infinitely richer and ambiguous. It is conceived and achieved in the twentieth century through the experience of being Menard writing in an archaic style, influenced by Nietzsche and so on. Menard has enriched the art of reading, his new technique of deliberate anachronism and erroneous attribution has infinite applications. It seems better for the meaning of a work and the excitement of the reader if the author is changed rather than dead. Borges's short story concludes: "This technique fills the most placid works with adventure. To attribute the *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce, is this not a sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiritual indications?" (Borges 71)

Rawson insists on the importance of knowledge of authors and their historical situation for an informed understanding of their works and he practices a criticism responsive to the complexity of literary works. His General Editor's preface to each volume in the acclaimed Blackwell's Critical Biographies series states: "An underlying objective is to re-establish the notion that books are written by people who live in particular times and places." The humanist literary-historical response to "the death of the author."

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