

Claude Rawson in Print

Linda Bree

Abstract: The essay offers a wide-ranging account of Claude Rawson's printed writings over a period of sixty years. It charts the ways in which these writings reflect Rawson's principles about the study of literature, his methodology, and his skills as a literary critic. It goes on to describe the reception of Rawson's work by other scholars and critics, and the immense influence it has exerted in the field of eighteenth-century literature and literary studies more widely. Separate attention is given to his monographs, notably *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* (2001), his essays and reviews, his editions of texts, and his role in bringing forward the work of others.

Keywords: Claude Rawson; study of literature; eighteenth-century literature

Author: **Linda Bree** was Head of Humanities at Cambridge University Press until her retirement in 2018; there, she commissioned, among many other projects, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift, of which she is now a General Editor. She is editor of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1998) and (with Janet Todd) *Later Manuscripts* (2008), Henry Fielding's *Amelia* (2010) and (with Claude Rawson) *Jonathan Wild* (2003), Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (2011) and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (2020). She married Claude Rawson in 2017.

Literary scholars circulate their ideas, and establish their wider reputations, chiefly by means of the printed word. Claude Rawson's list of published work, like his reputation, is formidable. Over a period of more than sixty years, through five major monographs, more than twenty other books including edited volumes and scholarly editions, nearly 250 journal articles and book chapters, and more than 500 reviews, Rawson has established a leading presence, and exerted immense influence, in his chosen academic fields: "Augustan" writing in general and the work of Jonathan Swift in particular; eighteenth-century studies more broadly; the history of satiric, heroic and mock-heroic writing; and "taboo" subjects including killing and cannibalism.

Rawson's first venture into print—under the name C. J. Rawson, which he used in his early academic years—was an article, "Some Unpublished Letters of Pope and Gay: And Some Manuscript Sources of Goldsmith's Life of Thomas Parnell,"

published in *The Review of English Studies* in 1959,¹ when Rawson had not long left his student years at Oxford and was teaching at the University of Newcastle. His topic was prompted by working alongside John Butt, the eminent editor of the poems of Alexander Pope, who impressed on Rawson a belief in the importance of accurate and informative scholarly presentation of primary texts which he has retained throughout his career. Essays on Henry Fielding, Samuel Johnson, and “eighteenth-century delicacy” (this topic a legacy of his postgraduate research into then-neglected fictions of sentimentalism) soon followed; also, less predictably, appraisals of Horace and Rabelais, on the one hand, and Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes and Wallace Stevens on the other, an early indicator of Rawson’s growing range of reading and of scholarship.

The academic monograph—the book-length scholarly study—is the basic currency of the circulation of scholarly ideas in the humanities. Monographs are generally constructed in one of two ways: either the author explores a pre-chosen topic, offering a coherent thesis about it driven by a through-narrative and with a pre-determined end in view, perhaps testing out some individual arguments through journal articles en route; or the author builds up a topic from working through a series of separate but related arguments at article length, with the whole gaining enhanced effect through the reworking of the articles in light of their relationship with each other. Rawson falls into the latter category: indeed he believes some of his best work has been published in the form of the long article of fifty pages or so, a length he is in some respects most comfortable with in representing his scholarly ideas.² He had published more than a dozen scholarly articles before his first book appeared, and went on to publish many more afterwards. But inevitably the body of work by which he is most prominently identified appears in his five major monographs—*Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress: “Nature’s Dance of Death” and Other Studies* (1972), *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader: Studies in Swift and Our Time* (1973), *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (1985), *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830* (1994), and *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945* (2001)—together with two more recent volumes collecting sometimes more disparate material together, *Swift’s Angers* (2014) and *Swift and Others* (2015).

Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress (1972) aims to show that

1 See C. J. Rawson, “Some Unpublished Letters of Pope and Gay: And Some Manuscript Sources of Goldsmith’s Life of Thomas Parnell,” *The Review of English Studies* 40 (1959): 371-387.

2 Personal communication.

the moral, social and aesthetic ideals of harmony associated with early eighteenth-century thought and expression, often described as “Augustan,” were in fact increasingly under strain even at the height of their popularity, “and that disruptive pressures and radical insecurities became evident in some of the seemingly most confident, and some of the most conservative, writing of the period” (“Preface”). In this Preface Rawson goes on to assert his general methodology, stating principles which to a large extent he has adhered to in his writings ever since:

The various chapters of this book are, in some ways, separate studies, each exploring certain aspects of my theme in their own way, whilst being linked with the others by the common larger theme. There is some overlapping and repetition, because similar points, and the same Fielding passages, seemed to me to belong naturally to more than one exploration. There may even be some contradictions, because what might in one sense appear to be opposite views both seemed valid in the respective contexts of exploration. I believe that certain kinds of inconsistency or self-contradiction are truer to the many-sidedness of a literary text or topic than critical acts of reductive coherence. I prefer to think of this book as having certain faults of open-endedness and of doubt, than the virtues of a systematically articulated certainty. (*Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress* “Preface”)

This is an unusual and uncompromising method, and one not universally admired: some critics are made uncomfortable by the way Rawson circles round in his arguments, referring back to particular texts he sees as particularly significant, and being willing, as he states here, to repeat and even contradict himself on occasion. But it’s a method entirely characteristic of a scholar already at this early stage in his career confident in his mastery of a vast range of material, dedicated in pressing and intensifying his arguments, and more than willing to probe, provoke or challenge received critical opinions. And it is also consistent with the fact that throughout his career Rawson has ever been on the side of the writer rather than the critic, the primary rather than the secondary text.

Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal under Stress also displays for the first time at book length Rawson’s predilection for juxtaposing the writings of different literary figures, not only in conventional comparisons of contemporaries, but also in the drawing of often startlingly unexpected relationships between the thinking and writing of individuals widely distant in time and space. Rawson’s chapter on Fielding’s last novel *Amelia* (1751) for example, draws links not only with the

work of Daniel Defoe and Tobias Smollett, as might be expected, but also with that of George Orwell; multiple discussions of Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* (1743) assert comparisons with, among others, Thomas Mann's insinuating con-man Felix Krull and Alfred Jarry's anarchical Ubu.

Major critics of eighteenth-century literature recognized that the book heralded the presence of a new, distinctive and formidable voice in literary studies. Paul Hunter wrote, "Claude Rawson's essays are as important as most people's books, and hence his first book is a major event." Pat Rogers called the study "a fully adult reading of Fielding by a deep and original mind" (187).

Jonathan Swift is mentioned in *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress*, but from the early 1970s Swift became Rawson's central topic, often the focus for larger arguments concerning the ideas and ideals of other authors before and after him. When asked the reason for this shift of emphasis, Rawson responds that since Swift was incomparably the better writer, he repays, much more than did Fielding, all the time and energy that could be devoted to the study of his thinking and his work.¹ It seems likely, also, that Rawson felt more of a temperamental affinity with a thinker and writer who chose to court controversy, and challenge and provoke his readers through satire on serious subjects, rather than amuse, entertain and tease them.

Gulliver and the Gentle Reader: Studies in Swift and Our Time (1973), published shortly after, and to some extent designed as a companion-piece to, the study of Fielding, demonstrates clearly Rawson's comfort in this shift of emphasis; he has said that he believes his first chapter, which gave its title to the book as a whole, is one of his best pieces of writing.² *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* explores the relationship between Swift, his narrators and his readers, in subtle and serious ways. "There is something in Swift's relations with his reader that can be described approximately in terms of the edgy intimacy of a personal quarrel that does not quite come out into the open, with gratuitous-seeming sarcasms on one side and a defensive embarrassment on the other," Rawson writes in that chapter, and goes on to point to the "peculiar aggressiveness" which characterizes Swift's approach to his readers.

As the book proceeds, with explorations of order and cruelty and chapters on circles, catalogues, conversations, corpses and cannibals in Swift's writings, Rawson invokes—in a way now becoming familiar—Samuel Johnson, W. B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, Gustave Flaubert, Eugène Ionesco, Walt Whitman, Joseph Conrad, Norman Mailer, R. D. Laing, and many other writers and thinkers before

1 Personal communication.

2 Personal communication.

and after Swift's time. Colin J. Horne described the book as "a powerful exposition of an intriguing exploration into Swift's psyche and his concern for moral order, both within his own being and everywhere within an age that 'wanted it so much'" (157). "There has been a good deal of profitable discussion lately about how to read eighteenth-century texts," wrote Martin Price in the *Sewanee Review*, "Some of the very best of it has come from Claude Rawson."

He followed this up with *Order from Confusion Sprung* (1985), the range of which is only partly indicated by its sub-title, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper*. The word "studies" is significant of course. Once again Rawson is exploring his general subject from a series of different access points, testing his central concern, with "the ironic energies contained in assertions of order [as much] as with the assertion itself" ("Preface"), rather than building up any kind of chronological argument about literary developments. Swift and Fielding again feature prominently: and Rawson's choice of title for the book, from the closing couplet of Swift's *Lady's Dressing Room*,

Such order from confusion sprung,
Such gaudy tulips raised from dung.

signals what had by now become other regular preoccupations in his work: the high quality of Swift's poetry (often dismissed by critics as trivial, in comparison with his friend Pope's poetry and his own prose, but—as Rawson reminds us—much admired by later practising poets), and, by extension, the exuberant power of the demotic, which Rawson argues deserves as serious notice as does high literary endeavour. Swift and Fielding again figure prominently, and there are chapters on James Boswell, William Cowper and Christopher Smart. Again intelligent and vigorous close readings of individual eighteenth-century works (notably a widely-admired chapter on Swift's controversial tract *A Modest Proposal*) are illuminated by unusual juxtapositions. Chapter and section titles—"Gulliver and Crusoe in Malamudland," "Nymphs of the City in Swift, Baudelaire, Eliot," and "Pope's *Waste Land*"—suggest the intellectual and chronological agility involved.

By the mid-1980s Rawson was widely recognized as one of the foremost critics not only of Swift, but of literature more generally, and as greatly instrumental in drawing new attention to the literature of the eighteenth century, in those years regarded as something of a literary and critical backwater. At the time of his studies of Fielding and Swift in the 1970s the *University of Toronto Quarterly* had described him as "perhaps the most exciting commentator on Augustan literature

currently writing” (Brückmann 85). He was now regularly referred to as “one of our leading commentators on eighteenth-century literature” (Nokes 1261); Maximillian E. Novak commented that “he may well be the most impressive critic now working in this period [that is, the eighteenth century]” (112); Penelope Wilson wrote of “the revival in 18th-century studies to which [Rawson’s] earlier books have largely contributed.”

Rawson’s reputation was consolidated with *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830: Stress Points in the English Augustan Tradition* (1994). By now his methodology was well established, but here he both extends the chronological range of his main enquiries and limits to some extent, for once, the wider analogies to later literature which characterized his earlier work; instead, he refers more frequently to the past and to the classical models which were so influential to Augustan literary ideals. Once again concentrating on “stress points” rather than a progressive narrative, he turns his attention specifically to a series of literary genres in his chosen period. He gives an account of poetry, juxtaposing the Earl of Rochester and John Oldham in the late seventeenth century with Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley more than a century later. He turns to fiction: “Richardson, alas” (as the relevant chapter title has it, clearly indicating Rawson’s opinion both of the popular mid-eighteenth-century novelist, and of the strain of sentimental fiction which he fuelled) and Jane Austen. He explores the popular early eighteenth-century journals the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, the political polemics of Edmund Burke, and the more personal journal-writing of James Boswell and Thomas Moore. Throughout, Rawson’s interest is in “the energies of a patrician culture in decline” (*Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830: Stress Points in the English Augustan Tradition* ix): the ways in which the widely recognized “*embourgeoisement*” of culture in the long eighteenth century was in fact fraught with tensions and ironies, as much in Addison and Steele, in their early-century commitment to popularizing “polite letters,” as in Richardson, who while radically anti-Augustan was yet caught up in many of the Augustan mannerisms and attitudes he rejects, or as in Jane Austen, who domesticated the ironies she learned from Fielding (a writer to whom Rawson sees Austen much more indebted than do many other critics).¹

Once again reviews were positive. Particular praise was given to two long central chapters, one on mock-heroic and war, and the other on the literary and rhetorical

1 Many critics have perhaps been over-influenced by Austen’s (clergyman) brother Henry, who in his posthumous “Biographical Notice of the Author,” attached to *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* (1817), stated that as far as his sister’s view of Fielding was concerned “Neither nature, wit, nor humour could make her amends for so very low a scale of morals.”

uses of clothing as metaphors both for the practice of government in the eighteenth century and for human nature more generally. “At his best, Rawson is among the most sensitive and illuminating of critics [...] his critical discrimination is first rate,” wrote David Nokes in the *Times Literary Supplement*. “Nowadays, it would be little exaggeration to say that, for most British students at least, the literature of eighteenth-century England has become a place not of rest and refreshment but of Rawson and [Pat] Rogers” (22).

By now readers knew what to expect from Rawson’s monograph-length works: and as monograph followed monograph it became increasingly evident that his methodology of addressing aspects of his main subject from a number of different perspectives extended to conversations between, as well as within, his individual books, as he returns, in new contexts, to those texts he sees as key “stress points” in an eighteenth century he is ever more convinced is much more conflicted and contradictory than critical orthodoxy has suggested.

In a later review Terry Eagleton described Rawson as “one of the finest 18th-century specialists, who unusually in such a traditionally stodgy area is also a critic of striking flair and delicacy” (“A Spot of Firm Government”). Eagleton was not alone in referring with admiration to the “flair and delicacy” of Rawson’s approach, something reflected in his distinctive writing style, which combines a vigorous and discriminating precision with an instinctive sense of rhythm and a strain of (often satiric) humour. In a not unrelated attempt to analyse the different strengths displayed in Rawson’s work Dustin Griffin wrote that Rawson’s “career has combined elements not commonly found in the same writer—a lively and opinionated critical mind, and a methodical and learned scholar” (159). But while it has always been difficult to catch Rawson out in a factual error of method or learning not everyone was convinced by his opinions, or by the value of his characteristic method of drawing relationships, however bravura, between writers of very different times and cultural contexts. That this method is controversial in challenging some of the accepted norms of literary critical method has been recognized in many reviews of his work over the years. Not untypically, Roy Porter called *Satire and Sentiment* “an ideal book to browse, savour and quarrel with.”

Denis Donoghue, in an otherwise generally favourable review of *Order from Confusion Sprung*, had challenged Rawson’s methodology in a more detailed way.

If you say that A is like B in some respect and like C in another respect, what have you said? [...] I’m left wondering what it’s supposed to prove [...] [Rawson] knows the consequences of Baudelaire’s coming after Swift and

before Eliot, but he suspends this knowledge or holds it in abeyance so that he can establish the continuity of sentiment and attitude as the ground of his discourse, and local differences of mood as his nuance. But it is not clear to me that, in particular cases, this amounts to more than the ping-pong of likeness and difference. Truths of greater universality don't seem to get themselves established. ("Denis Donoghue writes about the Age of Rawson, and Rogers")

It could be said to be questionable whether many even outstanding works of literary criticism offer "truths of greater universality," but in fact Rawson—albeit very probably unconsciously—addressed this criticism directly and triumphantly in his next, and most important, monograph, *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945* (2001). Here he returns to many themes and observations familiar from his earlier work, including the strain between satiric and sentimental thought in the eighteenth century, the crisis in the development of the epic tradition, the reasons for the responding rise of mock-heroic writing, and the towering influence of Swift in the thought of his own time and its resonance in others; but here he wraps them into an argument of genuine, indeed existential, universality. The book is, among other things, an examination of the inherent contradiction between the "heroism" of epic writing and the reality of brutal barbarism, and of the ways in which that contradiction became acute, and eventually overwhelming, as ways of killing developed from individual combat to the multiple destruction wrought by gunpowder, and as confrontations between the "civilized" and the "savage" tore open destructive ambiguities of language, thought and action.

Rawson opens the preface of *God, Gulliver, and Genocide* with a statement, the formulation of which is perhaps his most memorable contribution to intellectual discourse, with resonances that are relevant to the ambiguous power of language in its most general sense and in many contexts:

When we say certain people "ought to be shot," or exterminated "from the face of the earth," we usually do so in the knowledge that we will not be thought to "mean" it literally. It is a figure of speech, partially sanitized by the conventions of social usage. In this sense, it creates a protective fiction around itself [...] We mean it, don't mean it, and don't *not* mean it [...]

God, Gulliver, and Genocide, he continues,

is about how the European imagination has dealt with groups which it

habitually talks about killing, and never quite kills off, because the task is too difficult or unpleasant, or the victims are needed for their labour, or competing feelings get in the way. It is concerned with the imaginative resonances of the idea of the savage, the “other,” not as simply noble or ignoble, but as a figure through whom we confront our own selves in an anguished self-implication too complex and “conflicted” to be amenable to the customary reductive categorizations. We are obsessed with “barbarians.” They are the “not us,” who do not speak our language, or “any language,” whom we despise, fear, and kill [...] and whose suspected resemblance to us haunts our introspections and imaginings.

And so, as Terry Eagleton describes it in his review of “this erudite, passionate book,” Rawson goes on to dissect “those unstable mixtures of racism and anti-racism, collusion and rebellion, aversion and attraction [...] the half-joking yet half-serious idea to exterminate others, as well as [...] the way that authors like Swift and Montaigne are outraged by colonial brutality while being deep-dyed authoritarians themselves” (“A Spot of Firm Government”).

Rawson’s subject matter here is universal, controversial and uncompromising: he addresses prejudice, violence and atrocity, beginning with the Bible and classical epic and culminating in the horrors of Nazism, confronting the reader with uncomfortable, sometimes shocking, claims about human perceptions and human behaviour. Throughout he sees Swift—here particularly following on from the example of another key intellectual figure, the sixteenth-century French essayist Michel de Montaigne—as the most powerful proponent of the moral ambiguity at the heart of the satiric imagination, and as a writer central to “some of the most troubling moral nightmares of European intellectual history in the last five hundred years: war, imperial conquest, the impulse to exterminate [...]” (Rawson, *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945* 1).

All the many reviews of the work engaged with its argument on a very direct level. Tom Keymer summarized the book’s effect for literary readers:

Claude Rawson has written a book of major importance for genres ranging from Renaissance encounter literature to modern Holocaust fiction. But his greatest gift has always been for torpedoing the prevailing assumptions of eighteenth-century studies, and in this bold new account of Swift, and the implications arising for other writers, he has done it, explosively, again. (“On not not meaning it” 13)

The book was also reviewed in a much wider range of journals than most literary productions are, and the genuinely shocking implications of Rawson's wider argument were addressed by reviewers in diverse non-literary fields. In the *Journal of Genocidal Research*, John Docker, finding the book as a whole "a major contribution to the literature which sees '1492' as a key event in world history," asked "Are we Westerners all, then indeed is the human psyche itself, complicit in a received millenia-long rhetoric of extermination?" (161, 163) Richard A. Rosengarten, in *The Journal of Religion*, described it as "one of the more sobering portraits available of the dynamic of religion in culture in the modern period" (159). In a long and detailed review in *The New Republic* Robert Alter identified Rawson's argument as "a study in the workings of the literary imagination of rage, with all the moral irresponsibilities that it entails," and concluded that "It behooves us [...] to acknowledge that works of literature can conceivably contribute to creating a context of imaginative enablement for the perpetration of terrible acts in the real world" ("Immodest Proposals").

The book has had success outside the UK and North America. It was favourably reviewed in both France and Russia, and has been successfully published in China in an admired translation by Professor Songlin Wang.

More recently Rawson has spent time collecting and re-presenting some of his most significant articles which had not previously appeared in book form. His two most recent full-length books, *Swift's Angers* (2014) and *Swift and Others* (2015), have a looser structure than his earlier book-length studies and are particularly valuable in making some of his more prominent articles widely available for the first time. Some of his best journal articles, however, have not so far been assimilated into his full-length books: book projects exploring themes of cannibalism and of mock-heroic remain works in progress, and it will be interesting to see how they proceed. Others of his articles are on topics which do not lend themselves to assimilation into a larger whole and are therefore unlikely to become available in book form, but many of which demonstrate Rawson's critical analysis at its best. One example is an essay published in *The New Criterion* on "C. S. Lewis, Schoolboy among the Moderns," in which Rawson, prompted by a recent biography of Lewis by A. N. Wilson, offers a fascinating assessment of a scholar who had been his undergraduate tutor at Oxford and whose work he learned to value highly. In one notable passage Rawson analyses Lewis's methodology, drawing comparisons with another author-critic whom he very much admires, Samuel Johnson. Rawson sees Lewis as

the kind of critic who, again like Johnson, derived his power less from the

rightness of his judgments than from the passion and insight that went into their making, from the centrality of the issues he raised and the boldness and baldness with which he raised them. His hostility to the humanists of the Renaissance, or to Donne or Dryden, or to virtually the whole modern movement is not shared by all admirers of his criticism, but even his most perverse judgments are vitalizing provocations to re-examine first principles and question received ideas. Like Johnson, Lewis had the courage of his passions and his wrongnesses, and a wise readiness to be inconsistent. (“C. S. Lewis, schoolboy among the moderns”)

This is both a finely-tuned analysis of the two writers, and a very evident demonstration of the influence of both on Rawson’s own thinking about literature.

Even if he had never written any books or articles, Rawson would still be well known and respected in academic circles as an acute and prolific reviewer of other scholars’ work. Rawson has written more than 500 reviews over a sixty-year publishing career, in a wide variety of specialist and non-specialist journals in the UK and North America: indeed for a period in the 1980s and 1990s it seemed that very few editions of the *London Review of Books* or the *Times Literary Supplement* did not carry a Rawson review. These pieces include his views on topics which might startle even those familiar with his wide range of literary knowledge and interests. He has written, for example, on children’s literature (albeit including the “little people” created by Mary Norton in *The Borrowers* series, which inevitably recall for him the inhabitants of Swift’s Lilliput), and on twentieth-century figures far removed from his own specialist interests, such as Katherine Mansfield or Lionel Trilling; and for some years he regularly assessed new volumes of contemporary poetry for the *London Review of Books*.

Men and women setting out on an academic career are often warned by seasoned academic advisers to steer well clear of reviewing. Those with experience point out that the input required is often substantial, making for a massive distraction from the main research work of the scholar, while rewards (intellectual as well as material) may be small or non-existent. Rawson accepts that there is some truth in these observations, but adds that “over a lifetime of practising both the specialist form of reviewing and the broader kind I believe my own work has profited from the enlarged perspective and the breadth of knowledge and insight provided by thinking of other people’s writings.”¹ The other main reason scholars are advised to avoid reviewing the work of others is that they risk offending or

1 Personal communication.

alienating those scholars whose work is being reviewed, for whom often even quite mild criticism can be received and resented as a personal attack (a situation exacerbated by the fact that the general slow pace of review journals means there is rarely the opportunity for a timely right of reply or follow-up debate). This concern Rawson rejects—a view which will surprise no-one who has read his own vigorous and forthright reviewing. He acknowledges the scruples that lead some scholars, in principle, to refuse to review books that they cannot praise, but he does not agree with them. “I think it’s a cop-out. If a book is inaccurate, tendentious or simply bad scholarship it’s important to say so. Reviews are intended to inform readers and it is part of their role to offer a responsible, informed judgement. It is no service to intellectual or academic standards to omit mention of inaccurate or otherwise defective arguments.”¹

Both in his own work and in his role as reviewer Rawson is particularly impatient with a certain kind of heavily theoretical writing which was gaining popularity in the later decades of the twentieth century and is still in vogue today, regarding it as reflecting some of the worst aspects of what he frequently calls, dismissively, “the Ph.D. era.” “The best theories are reflections of practising writers about their craft,” he says. “I think of Coleridge, Proust, and T. S. Eliot. I’m hostile to academics who prefer their own lucubrations to the knowledge of and engagement with literary works, and sometimes give the impression that they would rather do anything with a book than actually read it.”² Back in 1981 Rawson took particular issue, in the *London Review of Books*, with a theoretically-based study of Henry James by Susanne Kappeler:

It is not surprising [...] that a high creative standing should be claimed for critics, with both James and his narrators adopted into the fold. Given a certain dearth of common-or-garden first-level correspondence between Ms Kappeler’s bombinations and what most normal humans will recognise as taking place in the novels, nothing less than a declaration of the critic’s unfettered rights over the polysemic work, and of his parity of standing with the author, can give her enterprise any semblance of intellectual pertinence. (“Purloined Author”)

This review prompted an outraged letter in a subsequent issue of the journal from Frank Kermode, complaining in part about what he saw as Rawson’s “sneering” about the value of theoretical studies, and making specific reference to Roland Barthes’s then highly influential theoretical text *S/Z*. In responding in turn to Kermode’s

1 Personal communication.

2 Personal communication.

criticisms, Rawson first addressed the relationship between *S/Z* and its own source text, a short story by Balzac, in vigorous terms: “Let it be clear that Barthes’s text contains Balzac’s and that one could go through the latter within it, much as one might go through a built-up area by jumping over or by knocking down all the houses on the way.” He then amplified his own deeply-held critical principles more seriously: he had condemned the book under review, he wrote, because the author

writes at a level of abstraction where particularities disappear inside reductive and often arbitrary systems of formalist and socio-linguistic taxonomy; where one text can easily be made to look much like another; and where [...] very little that is said pays sensitive attention to the full individual immediacy of what the author actually wrote. (Rawson, “Purloined Author”)

It is another revealing statement of Rawson’s consistent and determined plea for a return to the primary literary text over critical or (increasingly) theoretical interpretations.

As can be seen from the comment on Barthes and Balzac above, reviewing also gives Rawson the opportunity for some virtuoso, often very funny, flights of writing. Assessing a book on the early sources and responses to the work of the “marvellous boy,” the mid-eighteenth-century Bristol poet Thomas Chatterton, Rawson offered a serious extended analysis of the differences between parody and impersonation as exemplified in some of Chatterton’s work, but he also found time to make play with the mock-Medieval language which Chatterton invented for some of his “Rowley” poems, which, Rawson pointed out:

seems to boil down to a few crude principles. Make as many words end in *e* or [...] begin with *a* as possible, change *i* to *y* at will, duplicate or otherwise add consonants freely: “Whatterverre schalle be Englysch wee wylle slea [...] Eftsoones we will retourne, and wanquished bee no moere,” says Hurra the Dane in *Aella*, where both foreigner and Bristolian sometimes sound like demented “medieval” prefigurations of *Guys and Dolls* (“unmanned, uneyned, exclooded aie the lyghte”) [...] as though old Dan Runyounne himself had been inclooded in the Rowleian roll-call.¹

1 Review of Thomas Tyrwhitt, Edmund Malone, Thomas Warton, Horace Walpole et al, *Thomas Chatterton: Early Sources and Responses*, in *Times Literary Supplement* 6 May 1994. The review is reproduced, in adapted and expanded form, in *Swift and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 252-267.

This is, incidentally, one of Rawson's very few printed allusions to Medieval literature; and it is wholly characteristic that it should be in the context of parodic/satiric imitation.

In this review of Claude Rawson's relationship with the world of print attention should be given to his substantial achievement in encouraging the publication of other scholars. As editor of the distinguished journal *Modern Language Review* (MLR) and the related *Yearbook of English Studies* (1974-1988) he oversaw the preparation and publication of a very long list of articles and reviews of the highest quality. His editorship of book series also makes an impressive list: notably the Unwin Critical Library, the multi-volume Cambridge History of Literary Criticism (with his friend the late Barry Nisbet) 1985-2013, and Blackwell Critical Biographies (ongoing since 1987, with more than 20 volumes published to date). He has edited, and often contributed to, a range of distinguished essay collections, including *English Satire and the Satiric Tradition* (1984), *John Dryden (1631-1700): His Politics, his Plays and his Poets* (2004, with Aaron Santesso), *The Cambridge Companion to Henry Fielding* (2007), *Great Shakespeareans, Volume 1: Dryden, Pope, Johnson, Malone* (2009), *Politics and Literature in the Age of Swift: English and Irish Perspectives* (2010) and *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets* (2011).

And finally, there are scholarly editions. For many years Rawson was reluctant to review critical works, but was always interested in assessing scholarly editions, which he—rather unfashionably, then as now—felt represented some of the most important work any literary scholar could undertake. (He has praised Harold Love's edition of the works of Lord Rochester as one of the most impressive volumes he has ever reviewed.¹) His own earliest research was directed towards a volume of the collected poems of Thomas Parnell, though the edition itself was not published until 1989 (co-edited with F. P. Lock). Since then he has edited or co-edited a number of texts, for scholars and for students, including Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1990); Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1991), *Joseph Andrews and Shamela* (1998) and *Jonathan Wild* (with Linda Bree, 2003); Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1992); and a number of Swift's works including *The Basic Writings of Jonathan Swift* (with Ian Higgins, 2002, itself superseded by the *Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift*, 2009), and *Gulliver's Travels* (also with Ian Higgins, 2005).

In 1990 he took charge of the Yale Editions of the Private Papers of James Boswell, as General Editor 1990-1997 and Chairman 1991-2001. Since 2001 he has been General Editor of The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift, an enterprise which Cambridge University Press commissioned at his instigation, and to which he has devoted an enormous amount of time and energy over more

1 Personal communication.

than twenty years. Scholarly editions are indeed time-consuming and long-term projects: six volumes of a projected seventeen have been published so far, and the much-anticipated four-volume edition of Swift's Poems, edited by Stephen Karian and James Woolley—a body of work particularly close to Rawson's heart, the culmination of his career-long championing of Swift's achievements as a poet—is scheduled to appear in 2025. As Claude Rawson approaches 90, there is still much to do.

Works Cited

- Alter, Robert. "Immodest Proposals." *The New Republic*. 11 February 2002. Available at: <https://newrepublic.com/article/66116/immodest-proposals>. Accessed 12 October 2024.
- Brückmann, Patricia. "Reviews." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 1 (1976): 83-91.
- Docker, John. "Review of *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945*." *Journal of Genocide Research* 1 (2003): 161-165.
- Donoghue, Denis. "Denis Donoghue writes about the Age of Rawson, and Rogers." *London Review of Books*. 6 February 1986. Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v08/n02/denis-donoghue/denis-donoghue-writes-about-the-age-of-rawson-and-rogers>. Accessed 12 October 2024.
- 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 12 October 2024.
- Griffin, Dustin. "Satire and Sense." *Essays in Criticism* 2 (1995): 158-166.
- Horne, Colin J. "Review." *The Modern Language Review* 1 (1975): 155-157.
- Hunter, Paul. *Philological Quarterly* 52 (1973).
- Keymer, Tom. "On not not meaning it." *The Times Literary Supplement* 19 Oct. 2001: 12-13.
- Nokes, David. "Augustan analogies." *The Times Literary Supplement* 8 November 1985: 1261.
- . "Lordly numbers, new tunes." *The Times Literary Supplement* 13 May 1994: 22-23.
- Novak, Maximillian E. "Review of *Order from Confusion Sprung*." *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 (1989): 112-113.
- Porter, Roy. *Archives*, 1995.
- Price, Martin. *Sewanee Review* 85 (1977).
- Rawson, C. J. "C. S. Lewis, schoolboy among the moderns." *The New Criterion* 1990: 8-19.
- . *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
- . *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress*. London and New York: Routledge, 1972.
- . *Order from Confusion Sprung*. Crows Nest: George Allen & Unwin, 1985.
- . "Purloined Author." *London Review of Books*. 5 February 1981. Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v03/n02/claude-rawson/purloined-author>. Accessed 12 October 2024.

- . *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830: Stress Points in the English Augustan Tradition*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000.
- . "Some Unpublished Letters of Pope and Gay: And Some Manuscript Sources of Goldsmith's Life of Thomas Parnell." *The Review of English Studies* 40 (1959): 371-387.
- Rogers, Pat. "Reviews and Comment of *Henry Fielding and the Augustan Ideal Under Stress*." *Critical Quarterly* 15 (1973): 187-188.
- Rosengarten, Richard A. "Review of *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492-1945*." *The Journal of Religion* 1 (2006): 158-159.
- Swift, Jonathan. "The Lady's Dressing Room." *Poetry Foundation*. 1732. Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50579/the-ladys-dressing-room>. Accessed 12 October 2024.
- Wilson, Penelope. *Times Higher Education Supplement* 21 February 1986.