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The Canon and the Eighteenth Century: A Modest Proposal and A Tale of Two Tubs

Brian McCrea

To come at the question of the canon and the eighteenth century—and the particular case of the decline of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele from major authors to minor¹—I begin with a modest proposal about the canon of twentieth-century American literature: Gerald Warner Brace's *The Department* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) should be required reading for all graduate students in English. Brace's novel is important not because it "reveals" that English professors sometimes lead unhappy lives, sometimes drink too much, and sometimes argue over trivialities. I suspect our students long ago surmised all those things about us, that if we cannot admit to the accuracy of Brace's portrait, then we imitate Conrad's "pathetic" Jim, going "about in sunshine hugging his secret, which was known to the very upcountry logs on the river."² Rather, *The Department* is important because it, like all successful historical novels, gives us a character who stands both as an individual and as a representative of, even as a medium for, important changes in society—changes in the family, the workplace, the schools. Brace's protagonist, Robert "Sandy" Sanderling, writes in the mid-1960's, on the verge of retirement after forty years in the academy. A Yankee, a Harvard Ph.D., Sanderling published one novel in the 1920's and then wrote no more. He does nothing with his dissertation on Smollett, but he does watch the Department grow and change from the 1920's through the 1960's. He recalls colleagues who gave "nice" talks on American literature to "a following of schoolteachers, spinsters, and librarians, all full of generous affection and good nature," but he knows all this is irrelevant to "modern scholarship," to "departments . . . full of very serious specialists whose first article of faith is that American literature embodies profundities and mysteries; nothing is what it seems, and whatever is apparently pleasant and simple marks depths of frustration or tragic hypocrisy" (p. 237). Sanderling's observations are not the rant of a man whose day has passed. He is not bitter but puzzled, and his reflections become most remarkable as he considers what "the new critical analysts" represent: "Their intention is to find esoteric meanings. . . in a way it is the tide of our time, it is what is happening—in the arts and in all behavior; the only possible advance is toward complexity, or, to put it more simply, toward the discovery of new complications" (p. 273).

Sanderling never really understands why "the tide of our time" is toward "the discovery of new complications," and in this essay I also cannot answer the question.³ But I can show how the literary demise of Addison and Steele reveals the "advance toward complexity" at work in eighteenth-century studies, my argument being that they have dropped out of a canon now dominated by Swift, Pope, Fielding and Sterne not because of their values, ideas or achievements, but because of their

technique and its lack of complexity. Taking Swift as representative of currently-canonized eighteenth-century authors, we can see that the greatest difference between him and the Kit-Kats, although their ideas and values do diverge, is in matters of technique, of form. Addison and Steele and Swift all write a tale of a tub; it is how they tell that tale that today makes two of them minor authors, one of them major.

A good place to begin specifying the differences in technique between Addison and Steele and Swift is C. S. Lewis's 1945 essay "Addison," first published in a Clarendon Press festschrift for David Nichol Smith, then reprinted in James Clifford's collection of essays *Eighteenth Century English Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1959). Lewis assumes the fact of Addison's decline, noting that, "If he is not at present the most hated of writers, that can only be because he is so little read." He argues that Addison's "*smugness, complacency, and bourgeois ideology*" (p. 155) are responsible for his loss of favor. Rather than accept Lewis's account for Addison's decline, I want to begin at the beginning, with an assumption that Lewis makes in his opening sentences.

'I have always,' said Addison, 'preferred cheerfulness to mirth. The latter I consider an act, the former as an habit of mind'; or again, 'Though I am always serious, I do not know what it is to be melancholy.' These sentences pretty well give us the measure, if not of the man, yet of the work; just as the limpidity of their style, conveying a distinction of almost scholastic precision in such a manner that even a 'teatable' could not fail to understand it, gives the measure of his talent. (p. 144)

With the comment "said Addison," Lewis commits what many students of eighteenth-century English literature today take to be a cardinal sin; he sees no distance between Addison and his mouthpiece, Mr. Spectator, who actually makes these claims in No. 381 and No. 26. For Lewis, Addison and Mr. Spectator are indivisible. I hasten to add that I think Lewis is correct, but I want to suggest that this treatment of the *persona* sharply distinguishes Addison (and Steele) from Swift. It, along with several other techniques of clarity, has debarred Addison and Steele from serious treatment by post-World War II academic critics.

By comparing two works, Addison and Steele's *Tatler* No. 257 and Swift's *A Tale of A Tub*, we can see quite clearly the powerful impact of their different techniques—even when all three share a value and an idea. Both works defend the Anglican Church against religious extremism, whether it takes the form of Roman Catholicism or of dissenting Protestantism. Both use an allegory—Swift's being that of the three brothers who inherit coats from their father and, in various ways, abuse them; Addison and Steele's being a description of an entertainment in which wax figures represent different religious groups. The ideas that underlie both works, then, are similar—products of what Phillip Harth has called Anglican Rationalism.⁴ And the feelings that underlie both works also are similar; esteem for moderation, veneration of traditional forms, fear and hatred of religious enthusiasm. Where the works finally and irrevocably divide is in their technique.

Swift's *Tale*, at least in part, is told by the famous Grub-street hack,

and the relation between Swift and his *persona* has been a source of well-nigh inexhaustible critical debate. Academicians have built careers upon this question. While certainly not as fully realized as a character in a novel, the hack does have a background; we know about his eating, reading, and writing habits, his lodgings, his bouts with madness.⁵ *The Tatler* No. 257 reputedly is narrated by “an ingenious friend of mine [Bickerstaff’s], who is lately returned from his travels.”⁶ The friend has seen the wax show in Germany, and Bickerstaff, intrigued by the report, asks for “an account of it in all its particulars” (IV, p. 304). We get no more information about the friend, and we must assume, with Bickerstaff, that his account is reliable; indeed, as the story progresses, and Bickerstaff comments upon it, it seems to become his story, if anyone’s. The sense of unreliability that Swift creates by giving us select details of the hack’s Grub-street life is lacking in *The Tatler* No. 257. As is their wont, Addison and Steele wear only the thinnest of masks.

No one has claimed that the religious allegory in Sections II, IV, VI, VIII, and XI of the *Tale* is particularly hard to understand (Peter equals Roman Catholicism, Jack equals religious dissent as practised by English Calvinists, Martin equals legitimate Protestant reformation and vindicates Anglicanism). Swift begins the story without comment and speaks contemptuously of Wotton’s attempt to provide a “Key” for it. Some of Wotton’s notes are included in the fifth edition, the last Swift supervised, but only to ridicule them. The allegory is there for the reader to master, and, while simple enough, is perhaps disarmingly so. For, particularly in his discussion of the sect of tailor-worshippers, Swift fuses Christian and contemporary history in complicated ways. We witness at once the history of the early church and the history of the seventeenth-century English church. Or do we? Generations of readers have assumed that Peter, Jack, and Martin represent English religious groups, but the most direct associations of their names are continental. Wotton’s notes do not help readers to define and apply the chronology of the story; that task is left for them.

Unlike Swift, Addison and Steele immediately inform us that the show we will witness, “represents all the religions of Great Britain in waxwork” (IV, p. 303). As the show opens, we are told “that it was not hard for an Englishman to comprehend the meaning of it” (IV, p. 305). The emphasis is upon clarity and ease. Even so, Addison and Steele pause to make sure their readers do not miss the point: “I need not tell my reader, that the lady before described was Popery, or that she I am now going to describe is Presbytery”; “On the right hand of Popery sat Judaism”; “On his right hand was Deism or natural religion” (IV, p. 306, p. 307). Addison and Steele offer an uncomplicated allegory, built upon one-to-one correspondences between objects and the ideas they represent. Roland Barthes has spoken of a realm of expression in which “signification is *excessively* named,” in which authors “impose a dense plenitude of meaning or, if one prefers, a certain redundancy, a kind of semantic prattle typical of the archaic—or infantile—era of modern discourse, marked by the excessive fear of failing to communicate meaning.”⁷ Addison and Steele help to invent the modern literary audience, even as they guide the genre of the

periodical essay through its infancy. In those roles, their concern for clarity is so intense that they pause to explain the obvious.

With the exception of telling us things they “need not,” Addison and Steele move directly to their point: Anglicanism is a religion of moderation and peace, deserving both the intellectual and emotional loyalty of Englishmen. They offer nothing like the famous digressions that complicate Swift’s *Tale*—that make it harder to read. These digressions are the hallmark of the *Tale*, and I want to summarize the recent critical debate about them as a means to understanding why Swift today remains an important figure, while Addison and Steele have declined. As early as 1961, two critics who eventually would exert considerable influence in what American academicians refer to as eighteenth-century studies—Ronald K. Paulson and Phillip Harth—were at odds about the digressions. Harth, writing shortly after Paulson, attacked him for attempting “to show that there is a unity of purpose and structure in Swift’s book.” Harth describes the *Tale* as a work written in two parts—two parts authored at different times and spoken by different voices (one Swift, one the created *persona*, the Grub-street hack).⁸ Most revealing about the Paulson-Harth difference is that, with their division drawn so sharply, seemingly one of them should have been right, one wrong; seemingly one should have had his career off to a good start, one off to a less-than auspicious. Of course, such was not the case. Even though their diametrically opposed positions seemed to preclude it, both critics were right and both went on to academic positions of considerable prestige. Clearly Swift is wondrous resource if he provides such convenient controversies (intense critical debate, a clearly-stated division, a conclusion in which both opponents win, both prosper). How Swift does this is a matter of technique rather than theme.

At its base the Paulson-Harth dispute over the digressions is also a dispute over *persona*. Harth hears two distinct voices in the *Tale*; Paulson hears one. The truth, however, which Harth comes closest to admitting,⁹ is that Swift’s impersonation is inconsistent. His mask repeatedly slips. The voice of the Grub-street hack occasionally enters the religious satire, and the hack, in the digressions, sometimes speaks directly for Swift. Thus the line between allegory and digression in the *Tale* is fine (finer than Harth allows), even as most readers sense a sharp difference between Sections II, IV, VI, and XI, the story of the three brothers, and the rest of the *Tale* (a difference Paulson demeans). Swift’s elusive authorial presence becomes, then, an important source for his work’s ambiguity. This elusiveness not only makes Swift useful to practicing academic critics, it also makes him relevant to the concerns of post-modern literary theory, at least as Roland Barthes defines them. Barthes argues that an author should provide, “a salutary discomfort of writing; he does not stop the play of codes (or stops it only partially), so that (and this is indubitably the *proof* of writing) *one never knows if he is responsible for what he writes* (if there is a subject *behind* his language); for the very being of writing (the meaning of the labor that constitutes it) is to keep the question *Who is speaking?* from ever being answered” (*S/Z*, p. 140). By Barthes’ standard—one that has

held a powerful appeal for post-World War II American academic critics—writers like Flaubert and Swift do very well, while writers like Addison and Steele are classed as “infantile” or “archaic.” Critics who approach Swift’s *Tale* with the question *Who is speaking?* create a pleasantly insoluble problem—one that can provide seemingly inexhaustible material for lectures and publications.

My purpose here is not to solve the riddle of Swift but rather to indicate how that riddle derives from his technical differences with Addison and Steele—writers who try to avoid both “surprize” and “discomfort.” Perhaps the cruellest blow Swift strikes against our yearning for clarity is his multiplication of prefatory matter, without allowing any of the various dedications and prefaces to focus the material that follows, to “stop the play of codes.” This is particularly true of the early editions of the *Tale*; the Apology, added to the fifth edition in 1710, does give some sense of Swift’s motives, and is the one document that critics can cite in reference to the *Tale* without working through complicated questions of pose and tone. Even so, after the Apology, Swift offers two dedications (one to Lord Somers in his voice; one to Prince Posterity in the hack’s), a letter from the Bookseller to the reader (another voice), a Preface, and then an Introduction. None of these prepare us for the story of the three brothers, which begins in Section II. There is no anticipation of that story’s moral by means of a general discussion of Anglicanism; there is no sense that the story is introduced to illustrate a point made earlier. If the two parts of the work and the prefatory matter are to be put together, it is up to the reader-cum-interpreter to do so. It is up to a fine critic like Ronald Paulson to show that throughout the work Swift is attacking a vanity that he finds underlying all aspects of modernism, most particularly modern learning and modern religion.¹⁰ But Paulson, or anyone, must win these truths through diligence and ingenuity. Swift did not pause to leave signposts and “often blotted out much more than he left” (p. 10).

Addison and Steele operate differently. When they put a work together, they rely upon repetition and cross-referencing—“a certain redundancy, a kind of semiotic prattle”—to guarantee clarity. One reason *The Tatler* No. 257 conveys its message so easily is that it follows papers on the same subject.¹¹ It illustrates general truths earlier announced. Swift, because he mimes so many different voices and remains elusive himself, forestalls this kind of linkage. At one point in the Apology he claims that “there generally runs an Irony through the Thread of the whole Book, which the Men of Tast will observe and distinguish, and which will render some Objections that have been made, very weak and insignificant” (p. 8). It is the reader’s job to find the thread, to tie the book together, not Swift’s. And Swift implies that few readers, only the “Men of Tast,” will be equal to the task. Addison and Steele not only give the readers the threads, carefully pointing out series of papers, but also weave the threads together—bring issues seemingly as diverse as education and dancing together in one paper.¹² Swift’s art continually asserts its status as an object in need of interpretation, and interpretation only by the best and brightest, not by mere pedants like Wotton. The art of Addison and Steele is, at its best, self-explanatory.

A passage in Steele's *Apology* (1714)¹³ defines very clearly this basic difference with Swift. Defending himself from the charge that his pamphlet, *The Crisis*, is seditious, Steele claims, "That which I shall insist on is this, that if an Author's Words, in the obvious and natural Interpretation of them, have a Meaning which is Innocent, they cannot without great Injustice be condemned of another Meaning which is criminal" (*Tracts*, p. 317). Steele takes this point to be so important that he later repeats it almost verbatim, referring to "a natural Interpretation" and a "Candid and natural Interpretation" (*Tracts*, p. 335). As they pause to tell us what all the wax figures represent, Addison and Steele design *The Tatler* No. 257 to permit "natural Interpretation," to be available to those who have no special critical skills. But we must note that words only can be "plain and express" in their meaning when their context is unambiguous, when we can assume that Mr. Spectator says what Addison means. This, essentially, is the function of all their techniques of clarity—that is, creating a context in which words will have only one obvious meaning.

While Addison and Steele will establish *personae*, they will not use them to complicate their tone. *The Tatler* No. 257 could present us with something akin to a Borgesian labyrinth: we hear a story through two intermediaries, and the first speaker is anonymous. But the potential goes undeveloped, principally because, by No. 257, Steele had fused his identity with his mask's. And the "ingenious friend" who tells the story receives no characterization to set him apart from Bickerstaff (and thus from Addison and Steele). A mere cipher at the beginning of the story, by its end he has disappeared completely; the glosses on the story—the explanations of the religious significance of all the figures—come from Bickerstaff himself. As the account proceeds, the "I" of the narrative shifts from the friend to Bickerstaff. Addison and Steele eliminate any distance between themselves and their masks, and thus any potential for ambiguity or irony. The words of the essay are "plain and express" because they come in only one voice. The words of Swift's *Tale* are ambiguous and ironic because the speaker stands apart from the author at an ever-shifting distance.

While *The Tatler* No. 257 illustrates differences in diction between the Whig and Tory wits, probably the most revealing example of this difference comes in *The Tatler* No. 125, a paper by Steele on the topic of madness. It opens with a definition that Swift would accept: "... all those who do not live up to the principles of reason and virtue, are madmen" (III, p. 61). The voice in the Digression Concerning Madness says much the same thing when it speaks of madmen "having generally proceeded in the common Course of their Words and Actions, by a Method very different from the vulgar Dictates of *unrefined* Reason" (p. 166). Obviously, however, the word "vulgar" presents a problem in interpretation, as does "*unrefined*." We may wish to claim that these are the hack's words, that Swift has the *persona* describe reason as "vulgar" only to discredit his modern ways. But even this debatable strategy will not help us with "unrefined" and the multitude of questions that it begs. The speaker (the hack?, Swift?) moves on from this definition to a call for superficiality and folly. He reasons that if careful analysis of man's condi-

tion leads us to see only weakness and corruption, then we should not take the pains to investigate. At the beginning of this much-discussed passage, the distance between Swift and the speaker seemingly is quite small; the speaker makes a comment that jibes nicely with Swift's respect for tradition and custom: "For, the Brain in its natural Position and State of Serenity, disposeth its Owner to pass his Life in the common Forms" (p. 171). At the end of the passage, however, most critics have sensed a much greater distance, with the speaker using happily words that we assume Swift understands pejoratively: "This is the sublime and refined Point of Felicity, called, *the Possession of being well deceived*; The Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves" (p. 174). Where the shift takes place (and if the shift is as I have described it) are questions impossible to answer with any precision; thus the multitudes of interpretations of this passage and the words in it—"common," "superficies," "knave," and "fool" among them—which become equivocal.

Contrast this to Steele's account (unknown today), which is roughly equivalent in length to Swift's famous (at least in English Departments) "Imagination . . . at Cuffs with the Senses" passage:

We are therefore to look upon every man's brain to be touched, however he may appear in the general conduct of his life, if he has an unjustifiable singularity in any part of his conversation or behaviour: or if he swerves from right reason, however common his kind of madness may be, we shall not excuse him for its being epidemical, it being our present design to clap up all such as have the marks of madness upon them, who are now permitted to go about the streets, for no other reason, but because they do no mischief in their fits. Abundance of imaginary great men are put in straw to bring them to a right sense of themselves: and is it not altogether as reasonable, that an insignificant man, who has an immoderate opinion of his merits, and a quite different notion of his own abilities from what the rest of the world entertain, should have the same care taken of him, as a beggar who fancies himself a duke or prince. (III, p. 62)

Here we see Steele's concern for common understanding, for simplicity and "nature," in perhaps its most unattractive light. Any "unjustifiable singularity" is defined to be madness, and Steele stands ready to root out the disease in the quiet as well as the flamboyant. Arguing on the basis of an analogy (treat "insignificant" madmen as you would significant), he comes up with a proposal that probably would put ninety percent of all living Americans into some sort of institution. But most important is the confidence with which Steele uses terms like "right reason," "madness," "a right sense of themselves," and "care." Not having placed a *persona* between himself and his audience, Steele assumes that we will understand these words as he understands them, that he shares with us common and natural definitions for these terms. He does not even bother to define words like "right" and "reason" which tie most post-modern philosophers and critics into knots. The passage is as brutally straightforward in its discussion of madness as Swift's is frustratingly difficult. Swift probably would not disagree with Steele's basic definition so much as he would

point out that, so simply and obviously put, it can have little effect on its readers—who will peruse it, but then bat it away.¹⁴

Addison and Steele make special use of both analogy and allegory, to establish contexts in which words take only their most obvious meaning. In *The Tatler* No. 257, by pointing out the direct correspondence between the wax figures and the religions that they represent, Addison and Steele eliminate ambiguity. *The Spectator* No. 262¹⁵ offers another interesting illustration of this tendency. In this paper Addison glories in his large audience and praises “my Readers, who give much greater Attention to Discourses of Virtue and Morality, than ever I expected, or indeed could hope.” Addison sees his popularity as an evidence “that the World is not so corrupt as we are apt to imagine,” for he has avoided “all such Thoughts as are loose, obscene, or immoral” and written “after such a Manner, that nothing may be interpreted as aimed at private Persons” (II, p. 517). The differences with Swift are obvious: to purify his fallen readers, Swift repeatedly doses them with their own obscene ordure; to have moral force, satire must, for Swift, be personal. Addison’s kinder view of human nature (he claims here that “No Man is so sunk in Vice and Ignorance, but that there are still some hidden Seeds of Goodness and Knowledge in him”) divides him from Swift, and this division finds its formal counterpart in the analogy with which he concludes the paper:

Among those Advantages which the Publick may reap from this Paper, it is not the least, that it draws Mens minds off from the Bitterness of Party, and furnishes them with Subjects of Discourse that may be treated without Warmth or Passion. This is said to have been the first Design of those Gentlemen who set on foot the Royal Society; and had then a very good Effect, as it turned many of the greatest Genius’s of that Age to the Disquisitions of natural Knowledge, who, if they had engaged in Politics with the same Parts and Application, might have set their Country in a Flame. The Air-Pump, the Barometer, the Quadrant, and the like Inventions, were thrown out to those busy Spirits, as Tubs and Barrels are to a Whale, that he may let the Ship sail on without Disturbance, while he diverts himself with those innocent Amusements. (II, p. 519)

As Addison rewrites the Preface to Swift’s *Tale*, his ideological differences with Swift are important and clear. He is optimistic about human nature and believes that man can, through science, improve his lot—thus his praise for the Royal Society, satirized so sharply by Swift in Book III of *Gulliver’s Travels*. Even more important, however, is Addison’s simplifying and popularizing of Swift’s complicated appeal to the few. He takes the analogy with which Swift begins his *Tale* and renders it unambiguous. Swift also describes a tub thrown to whales as a means of avoiding their fury and suggests that his work will provide a similar vent for the dangerous and impassioned minds around him. But what the tub actually corresponds to never is clear: “. . . how to analyze the *Tub*, was a Matter of difficulty” (p. 40). It could refer to the story itself (but then the title would be “The Tale as A Tub”), or to the proposed academy for wits, to “idle discourse,” or even to a dissenter’s pulpit.¹⁶ After the Preface Swift never returns to the analogy, so it receives no clarification. Leaving much

unsaid, he renders “tub,” like most of his words, ambiguous. Addison makes the correspondence direct: the tub equals first the Royal Society, then *The Spectator*, both of which provide means for the “greatest Genius’s” to avoid deleterious involvement in political broils. The words are unambiguous because the analogy is so clearly and patiently drawn.

The Spectator No. 262, like *The Tatler* No. 257, is part of a series of papers, a fact to which Addison alerts us by prefacing this particular discussion of the subject with the tag, “I have shown in a former Paper” (II, p. 518). Swift introduces his *Tale* with, indeed names it after, an analogy that he drops. He will not repeat the comparison, illustrate it in greater detail, explain it to correspondents who misunderstand. The “Thread” is there for a skillful reader to pick up, but Swift will not lower the degree of difficulty to broaden his audience. He claims that “to answer a Book effectually, requires *more* Pains and Skill, more Wit, Learning, and Judgment than were employ’d in the Writing it” (p. 10, my italics). The reader who picks up the “Thread” becomes his co-author; the reader who cannot should humbly admit his critical limitations, lest he too become a satiric target.¹⁷ Thus Swift’s *Tale* offers only the barest of narrative continuity. The hack’s modern forgetfulness serves Swift well here. Writing always to the moment, the hack, even if he could remember what he said earlier, cannot pause to cross-reference it. The story actually is dominated by its digressions, and Swift uses its disorder to test his readers. Addison and Steele, working on an almost daily series of periodical essays, that is, working in a mode given to formlessness and discontinuity, find ways to make connections for their readers. Just as Addison finds a way to uncomplicate (and, of course, simplify the truth behind) Swift’s “tub.”

Through the technical simplicity of *The Tatler* No. 257 and papers like it—the fixed narrative voice, the unambiguous diction, the direct and extended analogy, the repetition of issues raised earlier—Addison and Steele effect one other important difference with Swift. *The Tatler* No. 257 glories in direct expression of powerful emotional responses. Here Bickerstaff’s friend describes his response to the wax figure representing the Anglican Church: “I found my heart touched with so much love and reverence at the sight of her, that the tears ran down my face as I looked upon her; and still the more I looked upon her, the more my heart was melted with the sentiments of filial tenderness and duty” (IV, p. 305). His responses to the other religious groups are similarly expressive; the sight of them makes him “sick,” “peevish,” and he blushes at the figure representing Deism, “an half-naked aukward country wench” (IV, p. 307). Addison and Steele take this emotional openness to be a great virtue; they value sincerity and honesty. One need not go as far as Aldous Huxley does in his attack on Swift, claiming Swift hated his bowels and had no emotional life,¹⁸ to see that Swift’s satiric strategy—his technique—required that he misplace (not necessarily repress) his emotions. To remain elusive, he had to hide his feelings.

Here the differences in technique between Swift and the Whig wits most clearly involve differences in value. Swift, the Augustinian Christian, always is sympathetic to control; believing man’s nature to be profoundly

flawed, he values arts that disguise it. To return to nature (for example, to bathe naked on a hot summer day) is to risk an encounter with the Yahoo in us all.¹⁹ Thus, while he believes that man never must be too proud of his reason or his art, Swift still believes that we must use them. We should not, like Jack, resolve to keep our eyes always closed because they occasionally fail us (*Tale*, pp. 192-4). Swift's standards for literary art, as evidenced in his Apology for the *Tale*, are rigorous and exclusive. He presents complicated problems in tone designed to discriminate "the Men of Wit and Tast" (p. 20) from the common herd. A man who relished a good "bite," he achieves his most memorable effects by striking an astonishing variety of poses, or, take your choice, wearing an astonishing variety of masks.²⁰

Addison and Steele are great exponents of openness (recall Bevil Jr. tearing off his mask as he rescues his father at the opening of *The Conscious Lovers*). Even when they practice disguise, they develop irony that is simple to ken—one need merely reverse all the speaker says. Thus in *The Tatler* No. 50 when Benjamin Hoadly writes in the character of the puppetmaster Powell and claims, "I suppose I have now sufficiently made it clear that I have a paternal right to keep a puppet-show and this right I will maintain in my prologues on all occasions" or "my puppets are my property and therefore my slaves" (II, p. 10), the *reductio ad absurdum* is manifest; Powell has proved nothing.²¹ But even this rather simple irony is the exception rather than the rule in the journals of Addison and Steele. For them, to be successful, wit "must be natural." "Premeditation" ruins such true wit (*Tatler*, II, p. 93). They believe that "there is nothing touches our imagination so much as a beautiful woman in a plain dress" (*Tatler*, II, p. 196) and they apply that standard in their own works, seeking beauty in simplicity, in artlessness.

Whereas Swift will complicate definitions of key words, and thus perhaps enrich our sense of their meaning, Addison and Steele, if they cannot rely upon our sharing a common, natural sense of words, will define them for us: "I know no two Words that have been more abused by the different and wrong Interpretations which are put upon them, than those two, *Modesty* and *Assurance* . . . [I will] restore these two Words to their true Meaning, to prevent the Idea of *Modesty* from being confounded with that of *Sheepishness*, and to hinder *Impudence* from passing for *Assurance*" (*Spectator*, III, p. 404). The presently canonized Augustan satirists—Swift, Pope, Fielding—never are this expository. Rather they take important words—"reason," "learning," "charity," "prudence"—give them to a mouthpiece (or mouthpieces) and force the reader to derive a true (often complicated and balanced) sense of the words. Characters like Blifil Jr., Peter Pounce, Mrs. Tow-wouse, the Grub-street hack and Martinus Scriblerus all *show* us, if we are alert enough, how words can be misused, misdefined. Addison and Steele *tell* us. Their emphasis on simplicity and clarity culminates when the time comes for Addison to report Sir Roger's death. Several accounts are available: Captain Sentry's, the chaplain's, the butler's. But the last is chosen because it "mentions, in the Simplicity of his Heart, several Cir-

cumstances the others have passed over in Silence.” Those “Circumstances” achieve the desired effect when Sir Andrew, upon hearing the butler’s account, bursts into tears (IV, p. 341).

Such cultivation of sentiment is inimical to satire, at least as Swift writes it. And, although the de Coverley papers long have given Addison and Steele a certain cachet as Augustan satirists, the label is misleading. *The Tatler* No. 257 illustrates the point well. Here Addison and Steele take a volatile issue—religious sectarianism—and, even as they argue for the Anglican Church, avoid the particularity that raises passions. Of course, Roman Catholicism is figured as “a woman so covered with ornaments, that her face, her body, and her hands, were almost entirely hid under them. The little you could see of her face was painted, and what I thought very odd, had something in it like artificial wrinkles.” And Presbytery is figured as “sickly and splenatick. Her face had enough to discover the relation [in Swift’s *Tale*, Peter and Jack are brothers, so here Popery and Presbytery are sisters], but it was drawn up into a peevish figure, sowed with discontent” (IV, p. 306). All the stereotypes are in place. But there are no individual representatives who speak, no Peter, Martin, or Jack. The argument proceeds at a level of generalization that reduces ill will. The wax figures only can be described, not argued about or with.

In this regard *The Tatler* No. 257 typifies the attitude of Addison and Steele toward satire; they do not like it, and, if they do write it, they want it to be gentle (Sir Roger de Coverley) or general. Throughout their journals, both men domesticate satire. Thus in *The Tatler* No. 71, Steele comments with reference to his papers attacking sharpers, “I have long been against my inclination employed in satire,” and takes a month’s vacation from the chore (II, p. 159). When a correspondent subsequently claims that Bickerstaff owes “reparation” to a man whose “reputation” has been tainted in the paper, Steele promises to “acknowledge the offense in as open a manner as the press can do it” and adds that “giving disturbance, though not intended, to men of virtuous characters, has so sincerely troubled me, that I will break from this satirical vein” (II, p. 162). *The Tatler* No. 72 continues the topic, with Steele noting that to live up to his promise to spurn satire, he must “keep in general upon the passions and affections of men, with as little regard to particulars as the nature of the thing will admit” (II, p. 167). And this will be Steele’s goal whenever, as in *The Tatler* No. 257, he finds himself an unwilling attacker—stay general, avoid wounding individuals. Swift believes that this approach will fail; if satire stays general, we all, rackets in hand, bat it away. Addison and Steele once were famous for some of their satiric characterizations: Sir Roger de Coverley, Timothy Tittle (the rule-bound critic), Ned Softly, the political upholsterer. But by and large, as they avoid personal satire, so they will avoid such characterization in papers that touch upon particularly sensitive issues. *The Spectator* No. 185, like *The Tatler* No. 257, redacts one of the great themes of Swift’s *Tale*—religious zealotry. Addison and Steele, however, do not create any zealous characters. The essay remains expository and general: “Every Proselyte is like a new Argument for the Establishment of his [the zealot’s] Faith. It makes him believe that his Principles carry Conviction with them, and are more likely to be true,

as he finds they are conformable to the Reason of others, as well as to his own" (II, p. 329). The message is not all that different from Swift's in the Digression Concerning Madness: "But when a Man's Fancy gets *astride* his Reason, when Imagination is at Cuffs with the Senses, and common Understanding, as well as common Sense, is Kickt out of Doors; the first Proselyte he [the zealot] makes, is Himself, and when that is once compass'd, the Difficulty is not so great in bringing others; A strong Delusion always operating from *without*, as vigorously as from *within*" (p. 171). But lacking characters like Peter, Jack, the hack, and the Aeolists to act it out, the message of Addison and Steele is both easier to grasp and more innocuous. *The Tatler* No. 257 proceeds in the same way; religious groups are represented by wax figures, not by characters who speak and act, and the religious comment is both simpler and less sticky than Swift's. In *The Spectator* No. 568 Addison complains about "the Difficulty of writing any thing in this censorious Age, which a weak Head may not construe into private Satyr and personal Reflection" (IV, p. 540). To avoid the taint of such "private Satyr," Addison and Steele will stay in an expository mode for the majority of their essays, telling rather than showing, allowing their audience to be comfortably seated at a public lecture rather than forced to participate in—to admit complicity in—a drama not of their own choosing.

The Kit-Kats and the Scriblerians thus differ in their favorite modes as well as in their techniques. Swift and Pope are satirists in the tradition of Horace and Juvenal, while Addison and Steele will write satire only if they can redefine the term almost beyond recognition. And this difference in their attitudes toward satire ultimately parallels what we might call a philosophical difference—a difference, that is, in how these authors assess man's nature. In *The Tatler* No. 108 Addison contrasts the "ancient moralists" with "our modish French authors," concluding of the latter:

Their business is to depreciate human nature, and consider it under its worst appearances. They give mean interpretations and base motives to the worthiest actions: they resolve virtue and vice into constitution. In short, they endeavor to make no distinction between man and man, or between the species of man and that of brutes. As an instance of this kind of authors, among many others, let anyone examine the celebrated Rochefoucault, who is the great philosopher for administering consolation to the idle, the envious, and worthless part of mankind. (II, pp. 390-1)

Swift found his "whole character" in la Rochefoucauld²² and achieved literary immortality in a satire that blurred the "distinction between . . . the species of man and that of brutes." But while the differences in their messages are important, so too are the differences in the means by which Addison and Steele and Swift convey them. To find an audience, even a relatively small audience, Swift must rely upon surprise and guile. Not even "Men of Wit and Tast" will like to be told that they are mere Yahoos, that their nature, their "constitution," is unregenerate. Similarly, the rebuke to man's religious and intellectual vanity in Swift's *Tale* depends upon a seductive first step. Swift, as F. R. Leavis complained,²³ continu-

ally invites us to feel superior to the modern madness, only to trap us into recognizing our complicity in modern ways. We can escape the trap only by admitting to our vanity and exercising our powers with proper humility. Swift's "negative irony," at least in the *Tale*, has a positive end. But only a few will be strong enough to face the dark truth that Swift offers—given man's nature, progress can only be halting, and great innovations are unlikely; advances beyond traditional wisdom will be rare, and will only repeat, perhaps refine what has come earlier.²⁴ So Swift manipulates a *persona* to hide himself, crafts an ambiguous vocabulary to test our capacity to make important distinctions, confuses his allegory to take from us any complacency about what constitutes truth, and continually digresses to keep us uncertain and uneasy. He realizes that his message, baldly stated, is one from which most readers will turn away. Addison and Steele dispense with Swift's techniques because the truths they offer are much happier: man is basically good; science can improve our lot; the moderns can improve upon the ancients. The techniques of clarity help them to reach as many people as possible with this message and, ultimately, account for their large eighteenth-century readership.

The Tatler No. 257, *The Tatler* No. 125, and *The Spectator* No. 262, taken together, constitute a redoing of Swift's *Tale* with the techniques of clarity. The *persona* is rendered minimal, the allegory is based upon direct correspondence, the digressions are jettisoned, and, as a result, the words are made unambiguous. Superficially, the message remains the same as Swift's: support the Anglican establishment, avoid "unjustifiable singularity in any part of . . . conversation or behavior," use literary diversions as seamen use a tub, to distract and amuse threats to the commonwealth. But Swift vindicates Anglicanism by showing his reader how rare, evanescent, and difficult true religious faith is; if eighteenth-century readers understood his *Tale*, they would remain Anglicans because they would realize it is not for mere men to alter religious traditions. Great abuses, Roman Catholicism for example, should be reformed, but such reform should be as infrequent and as careful as possible. The fabric of the coat should not be tampered with by fallen men. Addison and Steele vindicate Anglicanism by making religious truth easy for all to see. They find that truth, not in a hard study of their own weakness, but in a popular entertainment and convey it to their readers as directly as possible. Addison and Steele's *Tale of A Tub*, as it contrasts with Swift's, thus gives one more powerful bit of evidence for the associated character of early-eighteenth-century sensibilities. Swift's difficult technique is associated with his difficult message; Addison and Steele's simple technique is associated with their simple message.

An influential passage by Maynard Mack reveals how (if not why) the simplicity of papers like *The Tatler* No. 257 has purchased no attention for Addison and Steele from English Department critics, particularly since World War II:

Swift's irony always presupposes a fictitious writer—what we shall call an assumed identity, a *persona*, a mask. The assumed identity was a speciality of the Augustan Age as we can readily see by remembering the

titles of the popular journals (*The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, etc.); and even a philosophical work like Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* was written 'in the character of a plain man applying the methods of common sense.' It is necessary to emphasize this fact about Augustan literature because, while all literature is dramatic in the sense that it implies a person speaking in a particularized situation, it is not necessarily fatal to identify the speaker of the 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' with its author Wordsworth, or the speaker of Andrew Marvell's 'Horatian Ode' with Marvell. On the other hand, in Augustan writing, this identification is very often fatal. (p. 12)

From Mack's Introduction to Volume V of Prentice-Hall's English Masterpieces series, this passage, first published in 1950 and reprinted in 1961, did much to establish the current canon of Augustan literature—the literature between Marvell and Wordsworth. The crucial term, of course, is *persona*; it is *persona* that Mack finds in the works of Dryden, Swift, Pope, Gay, and Johnson that he anthologizes. Despite Mack's reference to "the popular journals" of Addison and Steele, they do not, in fact, develop or exploit *personae* and complicate their tone. We have seen Lewis suffer no "fatal" consequences for making the identification against which Mack warns. And thus we should not be surprised that Mack himself includes no work by Addison and Steele in his selection of Augustan masterpieces. Possessing *personae* in name only, Addison and Steele are excluded from Mack's canon and, given Mack's influence, from the canon of most English Department critics.

The question remains: why do English Department critics need texts that are complicated by their use of *personae*? Why must we disvalue the techniques of clarity? Why should the definitions of writing offered by continental theorists like Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida—definitions that celebrate those texts in which we can locate neither an author nor a signified—so fascinate and exercise us. We cannot answer those questions until we begin to understand how English professors have been affected by the institutions in which they work—by the Department. We will have to give up the happy delusion that, even though we live within bureaucratic structures, we are unaffected by them—that somehow we miraculously remain iconoclasts and free spirits. It is this illusion that Robert Sanderling so quietly but brilliantly destroys. And it is for this reason that a sociology of the profession—and a valid account of why it canonizes only certain types of work—will do well to begin with Brace's novel.

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NOTES

1. From 1947 to 1957, ten articles on Addison and Steele appeared in *PMLA*; since 1957 none. Except for a short review essay, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* has published no work devoted to Addison and Steele. Robert J. Allen's Rinehart edition of *Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator* has been

- out of print for years. Daniel McDonald's Bobbs-Merrill edition of *Selected Essays from The Tatler, The Spectator, The Guardian* recently has suffered the same fate. This is only the briefest sample of evidence for Addison and Steele's decline from the high place they held for nineteenth-century critics like Leslie Stephen, Austin Dobson, and W. J. Courthope.
2. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (rpt. 1900; Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 141.
 3. I hope to do so in the final chapter of my work in progress, *The Making of The English Department*, in which I use sociological accounts of professionalization, particularly of the quest by professional groups for autonomy, to provide a context for developments in twentieth-century literary criticism and theory.
 4. *Swift and Anglican Rationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 145-150.
 5. Ed. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 44-5, pp. 63-4, p. 128, pp. 130-1, pp. 179-180. All subsequent references to Swift's *Tale* are from the 1958 edition; page numbers are in parentheses.
 6. *The Tatler*, ed. George A. Aitken (London: Duckworth and Co., 1899), IV, p. 303. All subsequent references to *The Tatler* are from the 1899 edition; volume and page numbers are in parentheses.
 7. S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 79. All subsequent references are to the Miller translation; page numbers are in parentheses.
 8. *Swift and Anglican Rationalism*, pp. 2-6.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
 10. *Theme and Structure in Swift's Tale of A Tub* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).
 11. Earlier papers (No. 70, with a contribution by Swift, and No. 72) raise the question of religious zeal. No. 220 describes an "Ecclesiastical Thermometer" which measures religious "Zeal" and finds "Moderation" and virtue in the Anglican church. It expresses all the ideas and values that Addison and Steele return to in No. 257.
 12. For one example see *The Spectator* No. 376 in which a letter from a "governess" at a girl's school concludes a series of papers (Nos. 296, 308, 314, 316, 334) on dancing, as well as a series on education (Nos. 330, 336, 353, 364, 365). Both series emphasize giving loose to nature, freeing young people from artificial standards and restrictions.
 13. *Mr. Steele's Apology for Himself and His Writings, Tracts and Pamphlets by Richard Steele* ed. Rae Blanchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1944). All subsequent references to Steele's *Apology* are to the Blanchard edition; page numbers are in parentheses.
 14. I allude here to Swift's comment in his *Tale* that satire is "but a *Ball* bandied to and fro, and every Man carries a *Racket* about Him to strike it from himself among the rest of the Company" (p. 52).
 15. Ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965). All subsequent references to *The Spectator* are to Bond's edition; volume and page numbers are in parentheses.
 16. See the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the last definition as well as the plates between pp. 56-7 in the 1958 edition of the *Tale*.
 17. See my "Surprised by Swift: Entrapment and Escape in *A Tale of A Tub*," *Papers on Language and Literature*, 18 (1982), 234-244.
 18. *Do What You Will* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), p. 99.

19. *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1941), pp. 250-1. Volume XI in *The Complete Works of Jonathan Swift*.
20. See my "Surprised by Swift," p. 235.
21. See *The Tatler* No. 214 (IV, p. 214) on "stiff-necked" moralists for another example of irony based upon simple reversal. In this case Bickerstaff says one thing and means another, but we see clearly that he is defending loyalty and perseverance.
22. See Swift's letter of November 1725 to Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-5), III, p. 118.
23. "The Irony of Swift," *Determinations* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), pp. 107-8.
24. The hack unwittingly reinvents, among other things, Horace's call for art to be *utile et dulce*, p. 124.



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