Jonathan Swift was the most influential political commentator of his time, in both England and Ireland. His writings are a major source for historians of the eighteenth century, as well as including some of the greatest works of satire in verse and prose. This volume presents wide-ranging new perspectives on Swift’s literary and political achievement in its English and Irish contexts, bringing together some of the most energetic current scholarship on the subject in both historical and literary studies. The essays consider Swift’s attitude to Dissenters, his relationship with Walpole, and his place in, and understanding of, the political demography of colonial Ireland. They also examine Swift’s poems and pamphlets, and his hoaxes and satires, showing his extraordinary versatility in a wide variety of genres. There is a special emphasis on his political and personal poetry, sometimes undeservedly overshadowed by the towering stature of his better-known prose masterpieces, *A Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver’s Travels*. Full of original insights, this volume offers a rich and important new treatment of Swift’s central role in eighteenth-century political and literary culture.

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Preface

This volume seeks to present a wide-ranging perspective on Swift’s literary and political achievement in its English and Irish contexts. It brings together some of the most energetic scholarship in the subject in both historical and literary studies. The first and third sections deal directly with political ideas, events and relationships in England and Ireland. These include the large questions of Swift’s attitude to Dissenters, his relationship with Walpole, and his place in, and understanding of, the political demography of colonial Ireland, as well as the important particularised topics of the Kentish Petition and Conolly’s speakership of the Irish House of Commons.

The middle section, on ‘The writer and his world’, shows Swift in a more direct writerly mode. This includes the hoaxing, which is one of Swift’s unsung gifts, culminating in *Gulliver’s Travels* but beginning in a richly political April Fool’s caper in 1708. It also includes the typographical strategies Swift exploited in his political pamphleteering of 1711–14, examined in a particularly fine example of the application of bibliographical studies to literary understanding. The largest part of this section concerns the poems, a deliberate emphasis designed to draw attention to Swift’s distinction as a poet, still somewhat occluded by that of his friend Pope, and also by Swift’s own towering reputation as the greatest of prose satirists. Swift’s achievement as a poet has perhaps been more wholeheartedly celebrated by poets (from Byron and Yeats to Eliot, Auden, and Geoffrey Hill) than by critics, although critical and academic recognition in recent decades has been considerable. The poems studied here belong to the 1720s and 1730s, his greatest period both as a poet and as an activist in Irish politics. The third section begins with a close study of the ‘Castle’ party in the Irish Parliament, which often came within the range of Swift’s fire in the writings of this period.

In planning this volume, I have avoided topics specifically dedicated to familiar major works already much discussed in their own right. *A Tale*
of a Tub, Gulliver’s Travels, and A Modest Proposal have been left to find their natural place within the various political and literary contexts provided by the individual contributors. The volume is closely associated with the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift. Many of the contributors are editors or general editors, or serve on the advisory board. The volume could not have been undertaken without the support of Linda Bree, Publisher, Literature at Cambridge University Press, and Robert C. Ritchie, Director of Research at the Huntington Library, whose distinguished institution provided a setting for a conference, on 14–15 March 2008, at which early versions of these papers were delivered. I also owe thanks to all the contributors for their exemplary cooperation. The final preparation of this volume owes everything to the dedication and expertise of my assistant, Cynthia Ingram.
Abbreviations


**Correspondence** *Correspondence*. Edited by David Woolley, 4 vols. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999–2007.


