

PART I

*The political Swift I (England)*

## CHAPTER I

*Jonathan Swift's political confession**Ian Higgins*

Jonathan Swift claimed a place for himself in the history of political thought. In April 1726 Swift was in London. He had an unproductive private meeting with King George's first minister, Sir Robert Walpole, on 'the affairs of Ireland'. After the meeting Swift reported that he could not reconcile Walpole's opinions on Ireland with 'the notions I had of Liberty'.<sup>1</sup> Writing to a Whig official in Dublin Castle later that summer, Swift declared that he was weary of being among Whig ministers 'who are all Rank Tories in Government, and worse than Whigs in Church: whereas I was the first Man who taught and practiced the direct contrary Principle'.<sup>2</sup> The subject of this chapter is Swift as rank Tory in Church affairs and worse than Whig in affairs of state. It considers Swift's political self-portrait in relation to his Irish biography. The chapter examines his polemical reading and invective on the subject of Scots Presbyterianism, and the inflection this Church Tory gives to whiggish political language. This essay sees religious confession as central to the political extremism of Swift's reactive and insurgent writing. Swift's contemporaries did not divorce the priest from the political satirist, and this essay attends seriously to the anticlerical Whig Anthony Collins's imputation of Swift's place in a royalist and High Church polemical tradition of violent ironical invective.

Walpole's apparently imperious treatment of Swift at their private meeting prompted Swift to meditate revenge. In February 1727 he told his Hanoverian court contact, Henrietta Howard, to tell Walpole 'that if he does not use me better next Summer than he did the last, I will study revenge, and it shall be *vengeance Ecclesiastique*'.<sup>3</sup> Swift's *vengeance Ecclesiastique* perhaps recalls Bartolomeo Platina, whose *Vitae Pontificum* took vengeance on Pope Paul II for imprisoning him and depriving him of his offices.<sup>4</sup> Swift executed his threat in 'An Account of the Court and Empire of Japan' (written in 1728), a thinly disguised allegory satirizing George I and Walpole. The Hanoverian King 'although of the royal family, was a distant relation', and he is said to have caused the Jacobite

rebellion of 1715 by his proscription of the Tories. The character assassination of Walpole in the work focuses on his systemic bribery and corruption which would turn George II into Walpole's client.<sup>5</sup> This dangerously specific satire on the Hanoverian–Walpolean regime is incomplete and was unpublished in Swift's lifetime. This essay will address another aspect of Swift's *vengeance Ecclesiastique*: his shortest way with the Dissenters and its sometimes radical 'whig' political expression.

## READING WITH MENACES

At the trial, in 1641, of Thomas Wentworth, first Earl of Strafford, lord lieutenant of Ireland and Charles I's chief councillor, the prosecution and defence contested the interpretation of almost every aspect of his controversial career. The 'pathos of Strafford's final trial and execution has also prompted historians to investigate the validity of the charges against him and to ask just what it was that Strafford died for'.<sup>6</sup> 'The Earl of Strafford the Day that he made his own Defence at his Tryall' appears in Swift's list '*Of those who have made great FIGURES in some particular Action or Circumstance of their Lives*' in his 'Of Mean and Great Figures'.<sup>7</sup> Swift knew what Strafford had died for. That 'illustrious Earl', Swift wrote in a letter of 1735, 'who dyed to preserve The Church, his King and the old Constitution, so shattered and crazy almost ever since'.<sup>8</sup> Wentworth's brand of ecclesiastical imperialism in Ireland during his time as lord deputy no doubt endeared him to Swift. With the support of Charles I and Archbishop Laud he had set about re-endowing the established but impoverished Church of Ireland and sought to bring it into line with Laudian reforms. He attempted to root out nonconformity in Ulster by pressuring the Scots Presbyterians settled there to conform to the established episcopal Church of Ireland or to remove back to Scotland. The Ulster Scots sympathized with the Scottish Covenanters. Wentworth imposed the notorious 'black oath' on them in 1639 requiring Ulster Scots to abjure the covenant.<sup>9</sup>

The 'Great Figure' Strafford made in his last days and martyrdom so impressed Swift that Strafford may be a background presence in some famous lines Swift wrote about himself in 'Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D. S. P. D.'. Although Strafford had expressed his willingness to sacrifice himself for King Charles, when the King gave his assent to the bill of attainder Strafford is reported to have said: 'Put not your trust in princes.'<sup>10</sup> Swift read the account of Strafford's trial in his copy of Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon's *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in*

*England.* Swift admired Strafford's 'Great magnanimity' in persuading the King not to delay the order for his execution, but Swift was certainly critical of Charles I's 'weakness' in capitulating to the demands of his parliament, and he comments that the word of a king was 'Never to be relied upon'.<sup>11</sup> It is said of Swift in the 'Verses': 'He followed David's lesson just, / "In princes never put thy trust".'<sup>12</sup> Swift's 'Fair LIBERTY' was all his cry; / For her he stood prepared to die; / For her he boldly stood alone; / For her he oft exposed his own' may recall lines from a passage in John Denham's *Coopers Hill*, in which Strafford's and Charles I's martyrdoms are commemorated: 'Fair liberty pursu'd, and meant a Prey / To lawless power, here turn'd, and stood at bay.'<sup>13</sup>

Swift annotated the prosecution's allegations at Strafford's trial with attentive animus in the margins of his copy of Clarendon's *History*. Clarendon wrote that the prosecution 'alleged "That at his coming from Ireland the Earl had said in council there; That if ever he returned to that sword again, he would not leave a Scottishman in that kingdom"'. Swift writes in the margin: 'And it was a good resolution.' Clarendon reports that it was alleged that when Strafford was back in England and the Lord Mayor and some aldermen of London did not give the satisfaction expected about the loan of moneys to the crown, Strafford said that he should "'tell the King, That it would never be well till he hanged up a Lord Mayor of London in the City to terrify the rest'". Swift's marginal comment is: 'At worst, only a rash expression'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it was an expression Swift liked to use himself, as for example in his *A Short View of the State of Ireland* (written in 1727): 'I have often wished, that a Law were enacted to hang up half a Dozen *Bankers* every Year; and thereby interpose at least some short Delay, to the further Ruin of *Ireland*.'<sup>15</sup> Such resolutions and rash expressions, a rhetoric of extirpations and hangings, were a signature of Swift's polemic and invective satire against Whigs and Dissenters, according to Swift's contemporary Whig readers, for whom, as one Irish Whig put it in 1727, Swift was '*a Divine that scatters Fire-brands, Arrows, and Death*'.<sup>16</sup>

At one point in *The History of the Rebellion* Clarendon defines his terms: 'The Presbyterians, by whom I mean the Scots, formed all their counsels by the inclinations, and affections of the people.' 'Hellish Scotch dogs', writes Swift on the margin.<sup>17</sup> Swift's notorious Scotophobia, as Christopher Fox has called it, has its roots in religious confession and political allegiance as much as ethnicity.<sup>18</sup> The flagitious Scots, in Swift's venomous annotation in Clarendon and elsewhere, are overwhelmingly perfidious Presbyterians. The Scots are a cipher for Presbytery and Genevan Calvinist republicanism. Swift did make some exceptions in his treatment

of the Scots. Swift's world may not have a dozen John Arbuthnots in it, but there were some good Scots in Swift's polemical reading of history. The royalist leader, the Marquess of Montrose, was one, or rather, as Swift wrote in his copy of Clarendon's *History*, 'the only man in Scotland who had ever one grain of virtue; and was therefore abhorred, and murdered publicly by his hellish countrymen'. Montrose was 'A perfect hero; wholly un-Scotified'. Swift followed Clarendon's account of Montrose's royalist military actions. Clarendon wrote that Montrose 'had in one battle killed fifteen hundred of one family, of the Campbells, of the blood and name of Argyle'. Swift adds in the margin: 'Not half enough of that execrable breed'. Against Clarendon's account of the sentence passed on Montrose in 1650, 'That he was . . . to be carried to Edinburgh Cross, and there to be hanged upon a gallows thirty foot high, for the space of three hours', Swift wrote: 'Oh! if the whole nation, to a man, were just so treated! begin with Argyle, and next with the fanatic dogs who teased him with their kirk scurrilities.'<sup>19</sup>

This violent rhetoric was not confined to the private adversarial annotation in the margins of books of history and polemic that Swift read. In the first edition of *A Letter from a Member of the House of Commons in Ireland to a Member of the House of Commons in England Concerning the Sacramental Test* (published in December 1708), the polemical work that announced Swift's break with the Whig party, there is a passage, excised from later editions, in which Swift rounds on the leader of the Irish Whigs, the Irish MP Alan Brodrick, at this time perceived to be a principal supporter of the attempt to repeal the Sacramental Test in Ireland. Brodrick's real design, according to Swift, was the abolition of episcopal church government in Ireland. After an anecdote about how Brodrick, in parliament time, had shaken Bishop Thomas Lindsay 'by his Lawn Sleeve' and told the Bishop 'in a threatening Manner, *That he hoped to live to see the Day, when there should not be one of his Order in the Kingdom*', Swift wrote, in the first edition:

Now, because that Gentleman is ambitious to be thought one of our Patriots, I can put him upon a much better way of serving his Countrey, which is to take some Course that himself and his *whole worthy Family* may be *Hang'd* tomorrow Morning; and if this had been done (How long is it since my Lord *Capel's* Government?) about Fifteen Years ago, our miserable *Betrayed* Kingdom had been some Millions the better.<sup>20</sup>

Swift believes that the consequence for Ireland of a repeal of the Test would be that Scots Presbyterianism would become the national religion. Swift writes that the Scots in Ireland regard the established church as

worse than popery, and they have 'come over full fraught with that Spirit which taught them to abolish Episcopacy at home'.<sup>21</sup>

Swift's violent animus against Scots Presbyterians and their Whig abettors expressed itself in rhetorical short ways with both. But there were also literal Swiftian menaces. Swift sought short ways with Whigs and Dissenters with the assistance of Henry St John when he worked for Queen Anne's Tory government. On 21 September 1711 Swift reports to Stella that the 'pamphleteers begin to be very busy against the ministry: I have begged Mr. secretary to make examples of one or two of them; and he assures me he will.' The space between rhetoric and actual physical threat is closed when, on 10 October 1711, a Whig writer who wittily reflected on Swift as 'an ambitious Tantivy' – the word 'tantivy' was a nickname for High Churchmen but it also meant 'swift' – is, at Swift's instigation, taken up by the secretary of state: 'he shall have a squeeze extraordinary ... I'll *Tantivy* him with a vengeance.' On 16 October Swift confides to Stella that the victim of his *vengeance Ecclesiastique* is the French Protestant Whig journalist Abel Boyer: 'One Boyer, a French dog, has abused me in a pamphlet, and I have got him up in a messenger's hands: the secretary promises me to swinge him ... I must make that rogue an example for warning to others.'<sup>22</sup>

#### SENTIMENTS OF A CHURCH-OF-IRELAND MAN

Much has been written about Swift's opposition to the Dissenters. The sources of his dislike have been traced to his family history, his early experiences as a priest in Antrim, and to his reading of history. His particular animus against Protestant Dissent and apparent lack of interest in promoting Protestant unity against the threat from popery would seem to identify him with Toryism in Ireland. However, Swift's polemical writing and political statements reflect a strong degree of idiosyncrasy and independence, as do the marginal annotations he made in books he read. Swift's Whig political profession but High Church religious confession are an apparent instance of this idiosyncrasy. In unpublished memoirs written in 1714, Swift wrote that it was at the beginning of Queen Anne's reign (when the terms Whig and Tory began to be employed in Ireland)<sup>23</sup> that:

I first began to trouble myself with the difference between the principles of Whig and Tory ... having been long conversant with the Greek and Roman authors, and therefore a lover of liberty, I found myself much inclined to be what they

called a Whig in politics; and that, besides, I thought it impossible, upon any other principle, to defend or submit to the Revolution: But, as to religion, I confessed myself to be an High-churchman, and that I did not conceive how any one, who wore the habit of a clergyman, could be otherwise.<sup>24</sup>

Swift presents himself as a High Church Whig. The High Church part is uncontroversial. The necessity of episcopacy and the view of it as an apostolic institution are at the heart of his High Church ecclesiology. For Swift the Church of England, and of Ireland, was the true Catholic Church, and the claims of the rival confessions of Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism were invalid and subversive. Swift supported the exclusion of papists and Dissenters – the overwhelming majority of the Irish population – from civil, military, and ecclesiastical offices and power. Whatever Swift's real political views were and however the political content of his unpublished imaginative writings might be interpreted, this High Churchman's employment history in the 1690s certainly suggests that at the start of his career Swift had a Whig political reputation. He was secretary to Sir William Temple, a Williamite. He was recommended to Baron Capel, a strong Whig with a record of appointing and promoting like-minded supporters who was made lord deputy of Ireland in 1695, and Swift was advanced under Capel to his first living in the Church of Ireland, in an Antrim parish. Swift later became chaplain to the Earl of Berkeley, another Whig.

Swift's claim to a hybrid High Church Whig political identity was not implausible in Ireland. Swift, and later historians, have contended that no conflict existed in Ireland between high churchmanship and the espousal of Revolution principles.<sup>25</sup> Anglican Whigs in Ireland, as well as Tories, could display considerable hostility against Dissent, especially against Ulster Presbyterianism. Anglican Whigs were opposed to the relaxation of the existing civil penalties imposed on Protestant Dissenters, and they opposed English Whig government attempts to repeal or weaken the Sacramental Test in relation to Protestant Dissenters.<sup>26</sup> Swift's ecclesiastical superior Archbishop William King has been claimed to be a Church Tory and State Whig, as has Swift.<sup>27</sup> Since the revolutionary political alternative to the Williamite settlement, Jacobitism, was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic in Ireland, Jacobitism there was beyond the pale for most Irish Protestants, although, that said, there were a small number of Protestant Jacobites in Ireland, some of whom Swift counted among his friends.<sup>28</sup> Even high-flying Irish Tories can look whiggish. The Irish High Churchman Francis Higgins, the Irish Sacheverell, described

James II as 'that Unhappy, Deluded, and Bigotted Prince' and William III as 'our *Gideon*', the 'Happy Instrument to us for Good', restoring and preserving 'our Civil and Religious Rights'. Higgins's Toryism is a matter of nuances and emphases, of innuendo and inflection. Higgins adds riders to his approval of the Williamite settlement, warning of a 'set of Men' threatening the 'Establishment in Church and State, under the pretences of greater Liberty of Conscience, and a more perfect and thorough Reformation' and of the 'very Fundamentals' being struck at since the Revolution.<sup>29</sup> This is Swift's idiom when he writes that those who had destroyed the monarchy and church in Charles I's time had called out 'for a *thorow Reformation*' and 'after the late King's coming to the Throne, there was a restless Cry from Men of *the same Principles*, for a *thorow Revolution*'. In his 'Sermon upon the Martyrdom of King Charles I' of 1726, Swift says that 'since the late Revolution, men have sate much looser in the true fundamentals both of religion and government'.<sup>30</sup>

Swift's High Church confession seems to have been a problem for his Whig reputation, because although he solicited further preferment it did not materialize from the Whig side of politics. Archbishop William King in Dublin, writing to Swift in London in February 1709, was not persuaded that Swift really was a Whig: 'But pray by what artifice did you contrive to pass for a Whig? As I am an honest man, I courted the greatest Whigs I knew, and could not gain the reputation of being counted one.'<sup>31</sup> By 1710 Swift had gravitated to Robert Harley, whose High Church clerical allies included Francis Atterbury and Thomas Lindsay. Among Swift's lost works is a pamphlet Letter supposedly addressed to the Irish Tory Bishop Thomas Lindsay in 1708. A manuscript pamphlet that may be this work will appear in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift. The hitherto unprinted work of 1708 is an answer to an anonymous pamphlet calling for the abolition of the Sacramental Test in Britain, supporting Scots Presbyterians, and denouncing Jacobite-episcopalians in Scotland and their High Church sympathizers. Swift, if it is he, defends the Test Act and discerns in the anti-Test pamphlet the old Solemn League and Covenant project to disestablish prelacy in England and introduce Presbyterian church government throughout Britain and Ireland. Swift gives acute attention to the Presbyterians' plea of merit in the Revolution and to the claim that it is in the civil interest of Great Britain to have a united Protestant interest. Swift points to the collusion of papists and Dissenters against the established episcopal church, and the support of Dissenters for James II's liberty



of conscience by edict, and notes that radical Scots Covenanters in the North of Ireland refused to abjure the Catholic Pretender. The real principles of the Dissenters are the same as in 1641, presbytery and republicanism, and the main design is the abolition of episcopacy, as has happened whenever they gain civil power.<sup>32</sup> The unpublished manuscript defending the Sacramental Test in 1708 is in its politics a companion piece to the published *Letter Concerning the Sacramental Test*.

In 1710 Swift was recruited to write for the new Tory government. But preferment from the Tories was also long in coming. He tells Esther Johnson in February 1711: 'They call me nothing but Jonathan; and I said, I believed they would leave me Jonathan as they found me.'<sup>33</sup> Queen Anne would not permit Swift to kiss her hand. It is an honour that Lemuel Gulliver receives from Queens in the courts he visits, and Swift's syntax is rather emphatic about it: 'Her Imperial Majesty [of Lilliput] was pleased to smile very graciously upon me, and gave me out of the Window her Hand to kiss.' In Brobdingnag the 'Gracious Princess held out her little Finger', which Gulliver embraces in his arms, putting 'the Tip of it, with the utmost Respect, to my Lip'. But, as we know, things get even better for Gulliver, for he is taken up in the Queen's 'own Hand' or placed by the Queen 'upon her Hand'.<sup>34</sup> Swift's eventual preferment as Dean of St Patrick's came not from the hands of the Queen, but was in the gift of James Butler, second Duke of Ormond. In May 1714 the Duchess of Ormond's chaplain, Arthur Charleton, tells Swift 'at present we have disposed you in the first list of Rank Tories'.<sup>35</sup> There is evidence in the surviving correspondence of Irish High Churchmen that the new Dean of St Patrick's was still remembered as a 'vehement Whig',<sup>36</sup> and hostile Whig commentators after 1714 said that Swift had travelled from Whig to Tory and Jacobite and had offered to change sides and return to the Whigs.<sup>37</sup> But in Hanoverian England and Ireland Swift was certainly reputed to be a Jacobite. When the Whig Joshua, Lord Viscount Allen, accused 'some body without a name' of being 'a Tory, a Jacobite, an enemy to King George, and a libeller of the government', it was a 'character, the Dean said that many people thought, was applied to him'.<sup>38</sup>

Swift's High Church views not only contributed to his break from the Whig party, but they refract the meaning of what appear to be Whig revolution principles on the page. Swift's position statement of 1708 on religion and government, *The Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man*, first published in 1711, seems the classic expression of Swift as a High Church Whig. It is usually read in the contexts of English politics, as Swift's response to the allegiance controversy of 1689. In attempting to

answer nonjuring objections to the transfer of the crown from James II to William and Mary in 1689, Swift advances the conservative conformist line of least resistance: the English nation in 1689 supposed the throne to be vacant, resistance was not involved for most of James II's subjects at the Revolution. But Swift does go further in this work. He claims that James's departure had left the body of the people free to fill the vacancy or indeed choose whatever government they or their representatives wanted, all of which reads like Lockean Whig revolution principles. However, it is probably apposite to note that the idea of James's departure as a dissolution of government would in fact reflect the *Sentiments* of a Church-of-Ireland Man. Comparable things were being said by some Irish Tory clerics, such as Archbishop of Tuam John Vesey, Bishop Edward Wetenhall, and Swift's acquaintance John Winder.<sup>39</sup> In England this language is radical whiggery, part of an argument for popular revolution. In Ireland it is an Anglican response to an actual breakdown of government caused not by popular resistance but by James's abandonment of the Anglican community of allegiance.<sup>40</sup> However, without quite saying so literally, Swift clearly believes in the *Sentiments* that there *is* a natural right to resist and depose a tyrannical king.<sup>41</sup> In 1708 a Whiggish political language of resistance and dynastic revolution may have had a double edge. The High Churchman may well have had post-Revolution events in his sights.

Swift writes in his 'Sentiments on Religion' that the Church-of-England Man 'hath a true Veneration' for episcopacy and therefore thinks 'the Abolishment of that Order among us, would prove a mighty Scandal, and Corruption to our Faith, and manifestly dangerous to our Monarchy; nay, he would defend it by Arms against all the Powers on Earth, except our own Legislature; in which Case, he would submit as to a general Calamity, a Dearth, or a Pestilence'. In the 'Sentiments on Government' the High Churchman says it is certainly the right opinion that under no pretence at all is it lawful to resist the unlimited power of the sovereign legislature, but he puts the case that lawful kings acting tyrannically can reasonably be resisted and driven out.<sup>42</sup> This Whig revolution principle has a different inflection if Swift is alluding to post-Revolution events. What were Swift's views on the subject's duty when episcopacy was abolished in Scotland under William III? (Prelacy was abolished in Scotland in July 1689 and an act passed on 7 June 1690 replacing church government by bishops with Presbyterian government in the Scottish Kirk.) The answer seems to be that Swift the High Churchman privately approved the Jacobite counter-revolution there, as his annotations in a