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978-0-521-19804-2 - Jonathan Swift in Print and Manuscript

Stephen Karian

Excerpt

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Introduction

This book explores the uses of print and manuscript throughout Jonathan Swift's career. Its central premise is that our understanding of Swift as an author is incomplete without attending to both print publication and manuscript circulation as well as to their complex intersection. As with many of his contemporaries, Swift is primarily perceived as an author who disseminated his works via print. But manuscript circulation pervades his career. In some instances, Swift sought to limit his writings to a small circle of readers personally known to him. In other instances, he was indifferent to the fate of his writings, which resulted in them being dispersed in manuscript beyond his control. In still other instances, he deliberately circulated works in manuscript to avoid the kinds of punishment usually imposed upon authors and distributors of libelous printed texts. Regardless of Swift's intentions, the uses of both print and manuscript in the circulation of his works sometimes created patterns of textual transmission so complex as to have baffled scholars for generations.

Such complexity is especially evident in Swift's poetry of his late period. For the most part, Swift's prose works did not circulate in manuscript, the major exception being the *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen*. Three of Swift's most admired poems – "On Poetry: A Rapsody," "The Legion Club," and "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" – were never printed in their entirety in an edition that Swift authorized. Instead, they circulated in manuscript or appeared in incomplete printed editions annotated by contemporary readers. As a result, bibliographers, editors, and literary critics have not known with confidence exactly what Swift wrote. The second half of this book examines the multiple texts of these three poems in order to answer a series of fundamental questions. Why were these poems not printed in full? How do we explain the sometimes wide variation among the various texts in both print and manuscript? Was Swift solely responsible for all the lines that have been linked to each

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poem? How did these poems circulate? How did Swift's readers participate in establishing, supplementing, and transmitting these poems?

These questions have not been previously addressed in part because of the relative lack of attention to the manuscript texts of Swift's writings. Although Harold Williams examined many manuscripts for his major edition of Swift's poems (1937, revised 1958), over one hundred additional manuscripts have since been discovered. These discoveries have not yet resulted in a re-examination of what was previously known, and therefore their significance has not been fully recognized. In the intervening decades, the general lack of attention to manuscript texts was in part because scholars did not have an adequate conceptual framework for understanding manuscript transmission in the era of the printed book. Thanks to the pioneering scholarship of Harold Love and others, we now have a much better opportunity to recognize the manuscript transmission of literary texts as something more than a persistence of a seemingly outdated technology.¹

This understanding has in turn prompted attention to the interrelationships between printed and manuscript texts. Love initially focused on manuscript as a distinct medium, an emphasis necessary to establish it as a worthy object of study. But subsequent writings by him and others have highlighted the interactivity and fluidity between print and manuscript. No longer categorizing print and manuscript as belonging to separate social and cultural spheres, scholars have recently sought to understand how authors, readers, and the texts themselves modulate and adapt to the differing media. That conceptual shift is also evident in the work of David McKitterick, who explores the complementary nature of print and manuscript in the minds of early modern librarians, book collectors, and others. This "second wave" of scholarship is without question influenced by our contemporary existence as members of an emerging digital culture that is still very much immersed in print.²

Now is thus an appropriate time to apply these insights to specific authors of the eighteenth century, a period in which print and manuscript continued to co-exist. The career of Jonathan Swift merits careful attention in this context. Unlike Alexander Pope, whom Margaret J. M. Ezell surveys in *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (1999), Swift has not been studied as an author involved with manuscript transmission, even though his works circulated in manuscript throughout his career. Born in 1667, Swift came of age during a period when there was a thriving trade in manuscript texts. These texts were sometimes produced by professional scribes and sold by individuals such as Captain Robert Julian, who was

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well known for selling manuscript lampoons. But around 1700, this trade in manuscript texts declined. Julian died in the 1690s and his successors did not last. The manuscript lampoons composed during the reigns of Charles II and James II were increasingly printed for the popular *Poems on Affairs of State* series (1689–1705). The professional scribes may have continued to copy texts for the legal profession and other groups, but they seemed to cease producing the lampoons that had such a significant political and cultural impact during the Restoration period.³

Swift's career as a published author began in earnest just as this trade in manuscript texts declined. Of the many dozens of manuscript texts of Swift's poetry, none appears to be the product of a professional scribe. Nonetheless, in the eighteenth century, manuscripts continued to be copied and continued to circulate. These were most often copied by those Love terms "users," individual readers who provided single copies for themselves and others and who sometimes compiled manuscript miscellanies (personalized collections of verse). Evidence of early eighteenth-century manuscript circulation is found in the activities of the bookseller Edmund Curll, who sometimes acquired these manuscripts and published them in printed editions without the authors' permission. Swift frequently complained about Curll's activities, though he continued to allow some of his works, usually poems, to circulate in manuscript.

Although the manuscript circulation of Swift's writings occurred throughout his entire career, it was especially prevalent in his "late period," which I define from just after his final visit to England that ended in September 1727 until the end of his activity as a writer around 1739. There are many reasons why manuscript circulation was more common during this late period than earlier in his career. First, as Swift's popularity grew, so did demand for his writings, including those writings not yet available in print. Second, as Arthur H. Scouten has noted, Swift's late period marks a major shift in his career as he became primarily a poet.⁴ Prose writings sometimes circulated in manuscript in the eighteenth century, but poetry was more likely to have been copied and recopied from one manuscript to another. Third, by this period, Swift was no longer seeking patronage that might alter his residence and ecclesiastical position in Ireland. That acceptance of his professional status seems to have liberated him toward being quite politically outspoken as a writer, even more outspoken than earlier in his career. This freedom accordingly contributes, I believe, to the high quality of his poetry in this period, and it explains why some of these outspoken poems were not printed or at least not printed in full.

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Finally, Swift's late period reveals him becoming a canonized author to a greater extent than ever before. For the first time in his career, his works formed the sole contents of a multi-volume edition. George Faulkner's publication of four volumes of *Works* (1735) marks a significant step beyond the single volume of *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1711) and the joint volumes of *Miscellanies* (1727–32) that also contain works by Pope, John Arbuthnot, John Gay, and others. Faulkner's edition brings together about 170 works, many of them previously unpublished, thus preserving Swift's literary legacy and providing the starting point for all subsequent editions of his writings. Faulkner's publishing efforts were in part a response to the circulation of Swift's writings in manuscript, which made Faulkner's edition all the more difficult and necessary. But even after Faulkner's edition, Swift's writings continued to circulate in manuscript. As a result, Faulkner's edition, as significant as it is, cannot be considered complete, and the study of Swift's texts must attend not only to that edition, but also to the many other texts that appeared in print and manuscript.

This book is the first to examine how both print and manuscript functioned in Swift's career and how the material existence of his texts affected their circulation and reception. It also attempts to recreate the complex textual existence of three major poems in great detail. These three are among the most admired of Swift's poetic satires and contain some of his most stinging political attacks. Two of them – “On Poetry: A Rapsody” and “Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift” – explore the interdependent relationship between the printed book trade and authorial fame. Most importantly, the textual histories of all three poems reveal the simultaneous use of print publication and manuscript circulation, and an analysis of those histories offers great insight into Swift's general habits of composition and revision. In the process, I show the extent to which Swift accommodated himself to the limits of the printed word and how he found alternative ways to disseminate his strident political rhetoric using the manuscript medium. Thus this study contributes to the current interest in press censorship and even self-censorship on the part of members of the book trade.

By recreating these poems' transmission, I have been able to gain an understanding of Swift's contemporary readers to an extent greater than was previously possible. The interest in contemporary readers has been spurred by both the “history of the book” and the rejuvenated historicist trend in eighteenth-century studies. I show that at times Swift's readers were quite active in trying to locate, infer, and establish the texts of these

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poems. In short, my discussion offers us a better basis for understanding these poems from the perspectives of both Swift and his contemporary readers.

I also hope that my study will prompt further examination of the wealth of eighteenth-century manuscript material that is too rarely discussed. Most online textual databases contain printed texts but no manuscripts, a situation that will surely dictate future directions in research. We therefore need more investigation that is true to the complicated nature of eighteenth-century textuality, in which print and manuscript were complementary and intersecting media. Indeed, one of the broader implications of my study is that we should challenge the simple opposition that always defines print as authoritative, public, stable, and author-centered, and conceives of manuscript as ephemeral, private, variable, and reader-centered. The eighteenth century presents a far more complex situation, and the more closely one examines the documents that circulated in that period, the more that absolute distinctions between the two media seem to vanish.

Throughout my research for this book, I have tried to track down all eighteenth-century documents (and some nineteenth-century ones) that offer clues about the composition, transmission, and reception of these three poems as well as others that I discuss. In that effort, I have drawn on the following major resources: Harold Williams's edition of the poems; the Teerink-Scouten bibliography of Swift's writings; D. F. Foxon's catalogue of English verse; Pat Rogers's edition of the poems; Alexander Lindsay's entry on Swift in the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*; the online *English Short-Title Catalogue*; *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*; and other resources available to many scholars.

But I was not limited to these tools, because I also consulted a major resource not yet publicly available: the electronic archive called the *Swift Poems Project (SPP)*. The *SPP* attempts to inventory and transcribe all texts of all poems by or related to Jonathan Swift through the early nineteenth century. It is edited by John Irwin Fischer, James Woolley, and me, and in the coming years we hope to convert the archive to an online format that is readily available to interested scholars. In its attention to textual and bibliographical matters, the *SPP* builds on and surpasses previously published scholarship. Its inventories exceed a thousand pages, cataloguing many previously unknown texts of poems that appeared in printed editions, periodicals, and manuscripts, including over 12,000 poem-texts not taken into account by Harold Williams. Of the 1,700 poems that the *SPP* covers, about 600 constitute the core canon of Swift's poetry, and the

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archive has over 5,800 different transcriptions of those 600 poems. The benefits of a digital archive are multiple; not least among them is its portability. I was able to carry the *SPP* to many libraries and archives, and instantly situate particular documents within the context of the entire textual tradition.

Using all of these resources in the study of “On Poetry: A Rapsody,” “The Legion Club,” and “Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift,” I have consulted over eighty poem-texts, including about thirty not cited by previous editors of Swift’s poetry. In the process I have made many new discoveries concerning manuscripts and printed editions previously cited. Access to all these texts and use of the *SPP*’s collation software have enabled me to reconstruct the complicated existence of these poems in a way that improves on the work of my predecessors. For the reader’s convenience, I include full details of all the texts I consulted, both manuscripts and printed editions, in a bibliography at the back of the book.

The first half of this book explores the roles of print and manuscript throughout Swift’s career. Chapter 1 details his relationships with members of the printed book trade, showing the patterns evident in those relationships and the way that his late period marked a break from such patterns. Although Swift remained in Ireland after 1727, he continued to prefer London publication, and his distance from the place of publication caused problems in the transmission of his texts. The major exception to his preference for London publication is Faulkner’s 1735 edition of his *Works*. Although Swift was closely involved with Faulkner’s edition, he was not as involved as Faulkner sometimes claimed and as scholars such as Harold Williams have argued. The Faulkner edition has at times dominated the textual study of Swift, and I suggest that too much attention to that edition has inhibited study of other matters, most notably the manuscript evidence that is the focus of subsequent chapters.

Chapters 2 and 3 turn to that manuscript evidence by surveying the many uses of manuscript circulation in Swift’s career. Early on, manuscript circulation was an outgrowth of Swift becoming a famous author. The earliest evidence that his writings circulated in manuscript appears in 1708, by which time Swift is known as the author of *A Tale of a Tub*. Perhaps as a result of that fame, Swift allowed six unpublished works to circulate in manuscript. One unanticipated consequence of this activity was that some of these works were published by Edmund Curll in 1709 and 1710. Swift then became more protective of his unpublished writings,

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and manuscript circulation of them seemed to cease during the years 1711–14.

After 1714, Swift returned to Ireland, where he remained for the rest of his life except for visits to England in 1726 and 1727. During this phase of his career, manuscript circulation was far more prevalent than it had been in the years up to and including 1714. While in Ireland, Swift befriended a number of minor poets, some of whom circulated their writings in manuscript within a close circle of friends. Swift participated in this casual form of manuscript circulation, though he also used the medium to distribute some lampoons more widely. In still other instances, he restricted the circulation of his writings by limiting a work to a single manuscript copy. And in the case of *The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen*, he may have maintained final corrections and revisions on multiple manuscripts. Thus the manuscript circulation of Swift's writings after 1714 reveals diverse uses and intentions.

Each of the last three chapters attends to that diversity by discussing a major late poem that circulated, in whole or in part, in both print and manuscript during Swift's lifetime. Chapter 4 analyzes the lines of "On Poetry: A Rapsody" that were originally unprinted. In my analysis of these "extra" lines, I show that because they attacked the system of monarchy, the initial publisher and all subsequent publishers during Swift's lifetime refused to print the poem in full. "On Poetry" thus existed in two distinct traditions, one that was entirely printed and incomplete, and the other that combined manuscript annotations with a printed text. I also show which lines belonged to Swift's original pre-publication manuscript and which ones were added over the course of manuscript transmission. In this instance, manuscript circulation invites a supplementary writing practice.

Chapter 5 turns to "The Legion Club," a scathing satire on the Irish Parliament that was not printed in Ireland during Swift's lifetime. It instead circulated in manuscript, and was printed in London, first in a magazine and then in other publications. Current scholarly editions favor the printed tradition of this poem, but I argue that the manuscript texts deserve more careful consideration. Study of these reveals a previously unrecognized distinction between Swift's original and revised versions of the poem. The revision shows that Swift seemed to regret his wholesale indictment of the Irish House of Commons. I also examine this poem's contextual circumstances, which have not been studied in detail.

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Chapter 6 examines Swift's major poem "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" to uncover its complicated publication history and material forms in the 1730s. I argue that Swift used this poem and its companion-poem "The Life and Genuine Character of Dr. Swift" to vex readers and arouse publicity. Devoting particular attention to the incompletely printed Dublin edition and to the manuscript annotations to that edition, I show that the unprinted material was of two kinds and was transmitted in two distinct manners. The unprinted material from the notes was transmitted in a fairly consistent and stable fashion, which suggests an effective and perhaps centralized mode of scribal publication. In contrast, the unprinted material from the poem itself was often left to readers' inferences. The result was a variable text that contemporary readers actively completed in different ways. The eighteenth-century texts of this poem visually capture the complex intersection of print and manuscript that is at the heart of this study.

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Swift's Career in Print and Manuscript

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CHAPTER I

Print publication

Although Swift often satirized booksellers and other members of the book trade, he had close and long-lasting relationships with a number of them. In this respect, Swift is both like and unlike his friend Alexander Pope. Pope also ridiculed booksellers in his writings, most memorably in Book Two of *The Dunciad* (1728), and his professional relationships with trade members were marked by competition and sometimes antagonism. Over the course of Pope's career, he sought independence from the trade, maximizing his control and profits in part by increasingly treating his own booksellers as mere agents.¹ Swift's contacts with his booksellers and printers, in contrast, reveal cooperation and collaboration. Swift expected and received loyalty from his booksellers. Once he established a professional relationship with a particular book trade member, he usually maintained that relationship until that person's death and even beyond in the form of successors. Swift's dealings with the book trade are known and documented; nonetheless, no one has yet examined these relationships in a way that covers his entire career. As a result, we do not yet understand the changes and continuities that characterize Swift as a print author.

Swift faced many challenges in seeking print publication, which suggests why manuscript circulation might have continued to be of use to him. In the early part of his career, his close contacts with a cautious but shrewd bookseller helped ensure that his writings were published in full and that possible threats from the political authorities were minimized. But as Swift's career advanced, the problems associated with his efforts at print publication increased quite dramatically. Swift's original London bookseller died, and was replaced by a less experienced bookseller. That shift set the stage for future difficulties. Some of Swift's works were censored by friends or booksellers, and others were deemed too controversial to be published at all. As Swift aged, he did not become a more cautious writer. On the contrary, his writings became more politically aggressive, even as the prospects diminished for publishing those writings in full.