

IRONY AND EARNESTNESS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

The conventional literary history of the eighteenth century holds that upstart novelists and other intensely serious writers worked against the conservative and ironic sensibility of an earlier generation of satirists. However, many of these ostensibly earnest writers were exceptional satirists in their own right, employing the same ruses, tricks, and deceptions throughout their work. The novels of such canonical figures as Behn and Defoe, for example, passed themselves off as real documents, just as an earlier generation of hack writers combined the serious and the absurd. Reexamining this nexus between the ludicrous and the solemn, Shane Herron argues that intense earnestness was itself a central component of the ironic sensibility of the great age of literary satire, and of Swift's work in particular. The sensationalism and confessionalism of earnestness were frequently employed tendentiously, while ironic and satirical literature often incorporated genuine moments of earnestness to advance writerly aims.

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Dimensions of Satire and Solemnity

SHANE HERRON

Flinders University, Adelaide



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Abbreviations

CE	<i>The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift</i> . Ed. Claude Julien Rawson, Ian Higgins, James McLaverty, and David Womersley. 18 Vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008–.
GT	<i>Gulliver’s Travels</i> (2016). Ed. David Womersley. Vol. 16. <i>The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift</i> .
MP	<i>A Modest Proposal</i> . In <i>Irish Political Writings after 1725: A Modest Proposal and Other Works</i> (2018). Ed. David Hayton and Adam Rounce. Vol. 14. <i>The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift</i> . 143–60.
PW	<i>The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift</i> . Ed. Herbert John Davis and Irvin Ehrenpreis. 14 Vols. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939–68.
TT	<i>A Tale of a Tub and Other Works</i> (2010). Ed. Marcus Walsh. Vol. 1. <i>The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift</i> .