



*1 – Charles Jervas, JONATHAN SWIFT (1709-10)
oil on canvas (detail) (courtesy Bodleian Library, University of Oxford)*

Images of devotion: Swift and portraits

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IF WE SCAN SWIFT'S WRITINGS FOR SIGNS OF INTEREST IN, EVEN AWARENESS OF, THE world of paintings and painters, we would find only two poetical reflections, one written very early, the other very late, in his lengthy literary career. Both reflections identify a painter rather than a painting, and offer an interesting contrast in terms of judgement and approval. The first reference to a painter comes in a poem written in the final years of the seventeenth century, 'On the Burning of Whitehall in 1698', a poem in which Swift exercises his loathing for Henry VIII and all his works. The fire which destroyed Whitehall is welcomed as a sign of divine retribution against a megalomaniac, and the poem details the collapse of all the trappings of Henry's vanity, including the royal portraits:

The carvings crackle and the marbles rive,
The paintings shrink, vainly the Henrys strive,
Propped by great Holbein's pencil, down they fall,
The fiery deluge sweeps and swallows all.¹

This is an image of apocalyptic justice, in which a monstrous ego, best represented in Holbein's portraits, is destroyed through a purgative inferno. The second reference is found in 'A Character, Panegyric, and Description of the Legion Club', a satire written in Swift's twilight years, wherein he compares Irish MPs to a horde of unclean devils from Hell. After more than 200 lines of outrage and disbelief in the face of the parliamentarians' venality, the poet suggests that words cannot convey the full horror of these creatures; perhaps only a painter could do the scene justice:

How I want thee, humorous Hogart!
Thou I hear, a pleasant rogue art;
Were but you and I acquainted,
Every monster should be painted;

You should try your gravng tools
 On this odious group of fools;
 Draw the beasts as I describe 'em,
 Form their features, while I gibe them;
 Draw them like, for I assure you,
 You will need no caricatura;
 Draw them so that we may trace
 All the soul in every face.²

Here Swift imagines a satirical partnership between himself and William Hogarth – a collaborative project inspired by the poet, and executed by the painter. Faced with a scene which threatens to defeat or frustrate the poet's efforts, Swift conjures up the idea of an illustrated text, where word and image together might finally render what had until then seemed indescribable. Swift even anticipates and resolves any problem of credible verisimilitude in such a venture. The MPs are already so grotesque that no exaggeration or emphasis will be necessary; all Hogarth need do is simply copy what is in front of him, following Swift's textual directions.

In the four decades which separate these two reflections, there is scarcely another imaginative word on the subject.³ However, we know that Swift experienced and enjoyed many encounters with the world of painters and paintings, despite the fact that these encounters were rarely translated into literary fictions. As I will show, Swift acquired and valued a small but significant collection of paintings, mostly portraits, which are of considerable biographical as well as aesthetic interest. It could be argued that Swift's involvement in the world of art remained a personal and sociable affair, evidence of his changing sense of cultural taste, as well as political preference, and ultimately quite a revealing part of his estate.

A large part of the reason for Swift's shyness with regard to the visual arts may be found in the age rather than in the man. Most historians of modern English culture agree that after the collapse of the court of Charles I, and the rise of Puritan government, painting, patronage and the collection of works of art went into chronic decline. In his overview of the state of painting in the mid-seventeenth century, Iain Pears summarises this cultural decline as follows:

there were few collectors, and the most distinguished of the painters were foreign. Not only was there no 'English School' of painting, there was little sign than anyone particularly wanted one. Only a small number of people wrote about the arts and there were no exhibitions. It was illegal to import paintings for sale, auctions were forbidden in London unless held under the aegis of the Corporation and painters were tied into the essentially artisanal guild of the Painter Stainers' company. The catastrophe of the Civil War made this situation even worse as many of the Englishmen apprenticed to

foreign painters lost their masters and the best of the great collections were broken up. Moreover, painting came under a degree of theological disapproval which made the life of many practitioners unhappy and less profitable.⁴

In the final years of the seventeenth century, however, this dire situation was dramatically transformed, and paintings became an important part of a new cultural awareness and appetite amongst the middle and upper classes in England. Swift's initiation into this new phenomenon of art appreciation may be taken, to a large degree, as representative of the experience of many people. In this sense, what I have to say about Swift and painting may have an illustrative historical value which includes but goes beyond his individual case.

Swift's public and social exposure to the visual or fine arts began with his visits to London in the first decade of the eighteenth century, when he regularly accompanied the Earl of Berkeley as his chaplain and private secretary. During these years, there had been a complete transformation in the production and reception of paintings in London, largely due to changes in the law regarding imports of works of art, greater freedom to travel on the continent, the emergence of a commercial market for paintings, and the rapid growth of major picture auctions.⁵ Swift's connection with the Earl of Berkeley brought him into personal contact with leading figures in the world of politics and the arts, most notably with Andrew Fountaine, who served as secretary to the Earl of Pembroke, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (Plate 2). Fountaine was a leading virtuoso of the period, a young, wealthy connoisseur who had travelled extensively on the continent, building up his various collections in the fine arts, including paintings by Raphael, Titian, Poussin, Rubens and Tintoretto.⁶ The culmination of these social and political contacts in London over a decade led, of course, to Swift's triumphant years with the Tories, when he served as their chief propagandist.

From various remarks in Swift's *Journal to Stella*, we can recreate and observe the distinguished social network which introduced Swift directly into the world of the fine arts, especially that of portraiture. We learn, for example, that in September 1710, only days after Swift had arrived in London, Charles Jervas is putting the final touches to a portrait of Swift which he had started in the previous year.⁷ It seems that Andrew Fountaine had originally commissioned the portrait for his personal collection, and was already investing in Swift's modest but growing reputation. Swift must have been flattered to be asked to sit for Jervas, but was clearly sorry not to be able to afford the work himself. He remarks, ruefully, to Stella, 'If I were rich enough, I would get a copy of it and bring it over.'⁸ A few weeks later, he tells Stella of a scheme which might guarantee him an affordable copy of the portrait: 'I'll try some contrivance to get a copy of my picture from



2 – Jonathan Richardson, the elder, *SIR ANDREW FOUNTAINE*
c.1710, oil on canvas (detail) (courtesy Art Institute of Chicago).

Jervas. I'll make Sir Andrew Fountain buy one as for himself, and I'll pay him again and take it, that is, provided I have money to spare when I leave this.'⁹ The 'contrivance' seems to depend on the fiction that Fountaine, as buyer, could get a copy at a discounted rate, and then come to Swift, waiting in the background, with some gentleman's agreement about payment. Swift's hopes for a copy were not realised, it seems, and Fountaine's original by Jervas – a defining image of Swift – ended up in the Bodleian at Oxford (Plate 1), where it was presented by Alderman Barber in 1739, the same year in which Francis Bindon executed another portrait in oils of Swift, this work commissioned by the Chapter of St. Patrick's cathedral, to be hung in the Deanery, where it remains to this day.¹⁰

During Swift's early years in London we can see signs of a new, emergent fashion amongst the public for cultural artefacts to add to collections, especially for art works.¹¹ Picture auctions were by now hugely popular events, and very much what Iain Pears describes as 'part of the social round' in the capital.¹² Once again, Swift's *Journal to Stella* provides us with a vivid and direct image of this new cultural activity in the metropolis – shopping for pictures. In his letters to Stella, Swift is quite frank about the novelty of this kind of experience and outing, and about his own ignorance regarding matters of taste and value. This sense of cultural novelty is heightened by the image of Irish visitors to London, escaped from the Irish colony for a welcome break. In early 1713 Swift was joined by an old friend from his undergraduate days at Trinity College, Benjamin Pratt, now Provost of the college. Pratt seems to have been on a very specific mission for St George Ashe, Bishop of Clogher, Swift's former tutor at Trinity.¹³ Over the course of several weeks, Swift records seven visits to picture-auctions in the city, with Pratt searching for works to purchase on behalf of Ashe. It is always interesting, and sometimes amusing, to listen to Swift's account of these visits, in which he is clearly unsure of how to assess and judge the works, while acknowledging Pratt as an experienced buyer:

I sauntrd about this morning, and went with Dr Prat to a Picture Auction where I had like to be drawn in to buy a Picture that [I] was fond of, but it seems was good for nothing. Prat was there to buy some Pictures for the Bp Cl--- who resolves to lay out ten pound to furnish his House with curious Peeeces.¹⁴

Registered clearly if subconsciously by Swift is the tension or confusion between pleasure and calculation, and the novel idea of a picture as an investment, whose market value needs to be authenticated. There is also the fear, for the novice buyer, of being deceived by the appearance of value. Swift was much more at home shopping for books, when he was sometimes accompanied by Pratt.¹⁵ On their second recorded outing together, this new sense of gambling with paintings as investments is paramount in Swift's considerations, since he suspects that he may be purchasing

a classic work of art by the greatest Venetian painter of the Renaissance:

I was to day at an auction of Pictures with Pratt, & layd out 2ll 5s for a Picture of Titian, & if it were a Titian it would be worth twice as many Pounds; if I am cheatd I'll part with it to Ld Masham, if it be a bargain I'll keep it my self; that's my Conscience. But I made Prat buy severall Pictures for Ld Masham; Prat is a great Virtuoso that way.¹⁶

There is a certain kind of cultural irony underlying these anxieties about the ability to see and know the difference between the authentic and the fake, especially when voiced by Swift, the literary virtuoso of rhetorical impersonation and disguise. Swift seems to have enjoyed the betting which went on at these auctions, especially watching others spending large amounts of money. On 12 March 1713, he describes yet another day out spent at an auction: 'I was at another Auction of Pictures to day, and a great Auction it was; I made Ld Masham lay out 40ll, there were Pictures sold of twice as much value a piece.'¹⁷

This particular auction was almost certainly that held by the renowned professional dealer, James Graham, the third and final auction he had organised at Covent Garden in London over a three year period.¹⁸ The sale catalogue for this auction has survived, and shows that many of the leading collectors of the period attended, including the Earl of Burlington, the Duke of Rutland, and Swift's friend, Andrew Fountaine.¹⁹ The auction presented sixty paintings, and the total sale raised just under £1,000. Masham bid successfully for three pictures, *Diana and her Nymphs* by 'Haensberghe', *A Piece of Still-Life* by the Dutch artist Jan David De Heem (1606-1683), and an unattributed work, *Architecture, and Ruins, with Figures, and a View of the Sea*. Pratt's name is also on the list of buyers, having purchased a religious picture, *The Presentation of St John in the Temple*, by another Dutch artist, Gerrit Dou (1613-1675). Swift noticed, correctly, that his friends were buying at the lower end of the sale, with Pratt, for example, spending just over £17 on his picture, and Masham spending a total of just over £25 for three pictures. At the higher end of the sale, collectors such as the Duke of Rutland were spending nearly £100 on, for example, *Architecture, with a Landskip and Figures*, by Poussin. By the time this series of visits to auctions had come to an end, Swift noted that Pratt had helped Ashe purchase 'abundance of Pictures', many of them at bargain prices.²⁰ Ashe, it seems, was determined to invest time and money in this extended London search for paintings which would then grace the walls of his rural bishopric at home in county Tyrone, reminders and icons of his sense of cultural class and aesthetic taste. From this experience with Pratt, Swift also learned something about the importance and the value of paintings, both as signs of distinction and advertisements of social connections.

During these years in London, socialising at the highest levels of society,

including visits to Windsor and Hampton Court, Swift was undoubtedly influenced by the fashion for paintings as marks of refinement, and by the symbolism of portraiture, in particular, as an honorific sign of mutual recognition within a select society. John Brewer summarises the rationale behind the popularity of the portrait in early eighteenth century England:

...the English were infatuated with ‘face painting’: they filled their houses with portraits, gave portraits as gifts and used any number of occasions to sit for their picture. Any important moment in life was commemorated with a portrait: marriage, election to a club (including parliament), acquisition of an inheritance or a singular achievement for the men; coming of age, acquiring a lover, husband or family for women. Many paintings were commissioned not by the sitter but by relatives, spouses and friends. Frequently more than one was made and the copies were sent as gifts to friends, or as tokens of love and esteem to relatives.²¹

The world of portraits made Swift think about his own ancestry, lineage and class, and at one point he asks Stella to verify details on a portrait of his great grandfather, in order to make sure that the family coat of arms is correct and consistent.²² On another occasion, Swift acknowledges a letter from Stella’s mother, sent from Moor Park in Surrey, in which she asks Swift to help transport a portrait of her mistress, Lady Martha Giffard, from Surrey to Dublin. Lady Giffard, Sir William Temple’s sister, was sending her portrait as a gift to the young Stella.²³ Swift promptly paid for the cost of sending the portrait across the Irish Sea,²⁴ and a full year later he tells Stella that the portrait is packed along with his books and other belongings, ready for his final move back to Dublin.²⁵ This portrait of Lady Giffard, by Sir Peter Lely, was in Swift’s possession as late as 1737, when he wrote to John Temple, Lady Giffard’s nephew, offering to return the portrait to the family at Moor Park.²⁶ In this same letter, he says that his acquaintance, Charles Jervas, had confirmed the high quality of Lely’s work on the portrait. This portrait must have conjured up deep emotions for Swift, recalling as it did his youthful years at Moor Park at the end of the previous century, when he first met Lady Giffard and the young Stella, both of them dead for over a decade. The link with Moor Park was preserved in the person and company of Rebecca Dingley, Stella’s companion, who continued to live in Dublin. Swift was returning the portrait of Lady Giffard to the Temple family, hoping thereby to gain some financial favour for Mrs Dingley, a former waiting woman of Lady Giffard, and now an ageing spinster dependent on Swift’s kindness. Moor Park was probably the very first home in which Swift observed paintings as part of a gentleman’s estate. Sir William Temple was a knowledgeable and dedicated collector whose home was decorated with over seventy pictures, in the form of oil paintings and prints, including several small portraits of the Temple family by the

Dutch artist, Caspar Netscher.²⁷

Portraits were very much part of what Louise Lippincott calls ‘a traditional or gift economy’ within the upper ranks of society, often circulating outside the commercial markets, and representing tokens of love, loyalty and respect.²⁸ Perhaps nothing demonstrates Swift’s social ascension during these years so dramatically as his being presented with personal portraits as gifts from new aristocratic friends. In December 1712, a week before Christmas, he writes to Stella to tell her of two presents delivered to his lodgings in Rider Street, St James’s: ‘The Duchess of Ormd promised me her Picture, & comig home to night I found hers & the Dukes both in my Chamber, was not that a pretty civil surprise; yess & thy are in fine gilded Frames too. I am writing a Letter to thank her, which I will send to morrow morning.’²⁹

The Ormondes were the leading family in Protestant Ireland, and had been loyal Royalists during the Civil War. They were also the patrons of Swift’s old school in Kilkenny. Now socialising in London with the 2nd Duke of Ormonde and his wife, Mary Somerset, and receiving personal and expensive gifts from them, Swift was thrilled at such a gesture from such distinguished friends (Plate 3). In his letter of thanks to the Duchess, one of the most graceful and ingenious he ever composed, Swift creates quite a daring erotic conceit around the idea of a lady in a portrait observing a clergyman in the privacy of his own apartments:

Any other person, of less refinement and prudence than myself, would be at a loss how to thank your Grace, upon the surprise of coming home last night, and finding two pictures where only one was demanded. But I understand your Grace’s malice, and do here affirm you to be the greatest prude upon earth. You will not so much as let your picture be alone in a room with a man, no not with a clergyman, and a clergyman of five and forty, and therefore resolved my Lord Duke should accompany it, and keep me in awe, that I might not presume to look too often upon it. For my own part, I begin already to repent that I ever begged your Grace’s picture; and could almost find in my heart to send it you back: For, although it be the most beautiful sight I ever beheld, except the original, yet the veneration and respect it fills me with, will always make me think I am in your Grace’s presence; will hinder me from saying and writing twenty idle things, that used to divert me; will set me labouring upon majestic, sublime ideas, at which I have no maner of talent; and will make those who come to visit me think I am grown, on the sudden, wonderful stately and reserved. But, in life, we must take the evil with the good; and it is one comfort, that I know how to be revenged. For the

3 – *Unknown artist, in the manner of Michael Dahl, MARY SOMERSET (1665-1733), DUCHESS OF ORMONDE, oil on canvas (Kilkenny Castle; courtesy Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government)*



sight of your Grace's resemblance will perpetually remind me of paying my duty to your person; which will give your Grace the torment, and me the felicity, of a more frequent attendance.³⁰

The suggestive sexual conceit played out in these lines would have made a most interesting poem, if Swift had cared to write one. As it stands, he enjoys the fictional possibilities of considering the portraits in terms of voyeurism and decorum, desire and restraint. His desire to flatter the Duchess is tempered most effectively by his playful irony which accuses her of being 'the greatest prude upon earth', this seeming rebuke then followed by the even more daring suggestion that the presence of the picture in his home will render him permanently distracted and useless. Swift is here flirting with the Duchess of Ormonde through a playful confusion of the original and the replica, of the woman herself and her likeness. These two paintings remained with Swift until his death.

Two months after he received the twin portraits of the Ormondes, Swift took possession of yet another personal portrait as a gift, this time from the Countess of Orkney, a former mistress of William III, and an intimate of royal and ministerial circles.³¹ Swift tells Stella about this unique present, noting, with the practised eye of the satirical realist, how the painter had drawn attention to a telling detail: 'Ldy Orkney has given me her Picture a very fine Originall of Sr Godfry Knellers it is now a mending. He has favoured her squint admirably, & you know I love a Cast in the Eye.'³² Swift would have had no doubt about the value, symbolic and material, of this work, since Kneller was the leading portrait-painter of the age; he was also the official portraitist of the Kit-Cat Club, a gathering of leading Whig gentlemen.³³ Indeed, Swift had nearly agreed to sit for Kneller a couple of years beforehand, but the arrangements came to nothing.³⁴ A fortnight later, he mentions the Kneller portrait again, this time telling Stella that it is now in 'a fine Frame'.³⁵ In this same letter, we hear Swift talking about portraits as precious souvenirs of his time in London, and doing so in terms which suggest that the portraits will always serve as cues for nostalgia: 'Ld Bolingbr – & Ldy Masham have promised to sit for me, but I despair of Ld Tr, onely I hope he will give me a Copy, and then I shall have all the Pictures of those I really love here; just half a dozen.'³⁶ These portraits, actual and desired, assumed a special imaginative importance for Swift at this time, since he knew that his days with the Tories were coming to a sad and confused end, and that soon he would be returning to Ireland, where the portraits would remind him (and his visitors) of his former greatness, seeming like trophies from his years of fame and influence. In a darker mood, however, they might torment him as reminders of his fall from grace.

Swift returned as Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral to an Ireland where painting, almost invariably in the form of portraiture, was still at a very early stage of devel-

opment.³⁷ Only the Ormondes of Kilkenny owned a systematic and extensive gallery of paintings, and only institutions such as Trinity College and the Royal Hospital at Kilmainham displayed portraits on their walls, the visual equivalent of a roll-call of worthies.³⁸ Once the art-market opened up, however, the acquisition of paintings was increasingly seen as an important sign of good taste amongst what Toby Barnard calls ‘the quality’ in Protestant Ireland.³⁹ Collectors and virtuosi like Ashe and Pratt had to come to London to see what was coming onto the art market, since picture-auctions in Dublin were only just beginning in these years – the very first one was held in 1707 – and the offerings were more limited.⁴⁰

Several notable and distinguished collectors of art gradually emerged in Swift’s Ireland, nearly all of them senior clergymen, but none of them close friends of the Dean. George Berkeley (Plate 4) was a leading virtuoso of the age, and had established an impressive collection of art-works at Cloyne, county Cork, including works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Kneller.⁴¹ However satisfying the collection, Berkeley was keenly aware of the probable absurdity of its provincial location, and the absence of any culture of enlightenment in Ireland, or at least any culture similar to that of England and continental Europe. Like Swift, Berkeley often expressed his sense of isolation and frustration in terms which damned Ireland as a cultural backwater: ‘The finest collection is not worth a groat where there is no one to admire and set a value on it, and our country seems to me the place in the world which is least furnished with virtuosi.’⁴²

For those who feel trapped in a colonial culture, travel abroad is both a blessing and a curse. Temporary escape from the colony may restore and refresh a sense of cultural homecoming, but the inevitable and inescapable return to the colony will usually bring about a depressing mixture of nostalgia and resentment. There is an interesting display of some of these tensions in a letter which Swift wrote to a young Irish clergyman he greatly admired, James Stopford, who was travelling through France on his way to Italy, as part of his cultural and artistic education. Swift entitled his letter, ‘Wretched Dublin In miserable Ireld’, and in the course of the letter characterises himself as ‘the Dean of St Patricks sitting like a Toad in a Corner of his great house with a perfect Hatred of all publick Actions and Persons.’⁴³ Sometimes it is hard to tell whether the misanthropic spirit is authentic or affected, but it is often a reaction to a traveller’s tale. In this reply to Stopford, it is clear that the younger clergyman has promised Swift a gift of a portrait of King Charles I, in return, probably, for letters of recommendation for the London stage of the journey:

I had your kind Letter from Paris dated Novbr.14. N.S. I am angry with you for being so short, unless you are resolved not to rob your Journal-book. What have vous autres voyageurs to do but write and ramble. Your picture of



4 – John Smibert, *GEORGE BERKELEY*
1730, oil on canvas (detail) (courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London)



5 – After Sir Anthony Van Dyck, KING CHARLES I
c.1635, oil on canvas (detail) (courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London)

K.C.I. will be a great Present whenever I shall receive it, which I reckon will be about the Time of your Return from Italy. For my Lord Oxfords picture was two Months coming from London.⁴⁴

In the course of giving Stopford lots of news about mutual friends, Swift asks him to try and bring back some rare Italian coins for Irish collectors, 'which some people would be glad of for Curiosityes', as well as extra 'good Copyes of Pictures by great Hands', which clearly indicates that Swift himself might be one of the interested buyers (Plate 5). Irish collectors and amateurs of art obviously depended heavily upon friends and acquaintances who undertook these tours of the continent; it is easy to imagine the imminent traveller being the recipient of many last-minute requests and shopping-lists. Swift seemed quite comfortable with the idea of securing imported reproductions of famous works by renowned artists, either as potential gifts or, more likely, for the embellishment of his deanery, just as Ashe had done so over a decade beforehand.

The fame and distinction which Swift achieved through his *Drapier's Letters* (1724-25), followed immediately by *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), ensured that his image would become a valuable possession, especially for individuals and institutions who could afford an original portrait of the Dean. An exchange of letters between Swift and the Earl of Oxford in the summer of 1725 tells us something about the value of Swift's image during these years. The Earl reminds Swift that he enjoys looking at a Jervas portrait of the Dean which he had commissioned in 1718, when he knew that Jervas would be in Ireland. In a very rare expression of personal taste, Swift compares this version with the one which Jervas had painted of him in London nearly ten years previously: 'I hope the Picture of me in your House is the same which Mr Jervas drew in Ireland, and carried over, because it is more like me by severall years than another he drew in London.'⁴⁵ Swift's friends now knew that if they wanted an original portrait of him, they would have to have the job done in Ireland; if this was not possible, then they would have to content themselves with copies or prints. In Dublin in 1735, Lord and Lady Howth commissioned Francis Bindon to paint a full-length portrait of the elderly Dean, who gave what sounds like weary consent, as we hear in his letter to Sheridan: 'I have been fool enough to sit for my Picture at full length by Mr Bindon for My Ld Howth. I have just sate 2 hours and a half.'⁴⁶ Lord Howth was careful to thank the Dean for his patience, while letting him know that he was making very careful arrangements to ensure that he would be buying the original, and not a copy.⁴⁷ This portrait, which remains at Howth Castle, emphasises Swift as the patriotic Drapier, the champion of Irish liberties.⁴⁸ Whereas the Howths had wealth, Swift had fame, and it is tempting to suggest that the family, despite the fact that they were not intimates of Swift, saw an opportunity to cover itself with some of the Dean's national glory. Swift himself was

finally becoming a collector's item (Plate 6).

Some collectors were clearly in a hurry to secure permissions from Swift before he died, since a will might suddenly put a legal stop to all requests and approaches. In 1740 Robert Nugent, for example, a poet, politician and social-climber who seems to have married his way to the highest levels of society,⁴⁹ wrote to Swift's guardian, Mrs Whiteway, asking for the return of any of Alexander Pope's letters to Swift which might be in the deanery. He could not resist adding another entreaty, this time for a piece of Swiftian memorabilia, reminding Mrs Whiteway of his earlier request for a portrait of Swift, to be carried out by Bindon. This portrait, as he explained, would be the perfect companion piece to the one of Pope already in his possession.⁵⁰ Originals and copies, both by Bindon and Jervas, were suddenly in renewed demand, a demand growing as intensely as the speculation concerning Swift's declining health.

In April 1739, the Irish MP William Richardson had written to Swift to inform him of yet another tribute to the Dean, this time using the original Jervas portrait, now to be formally presented to Oxford University:

Your friend Mr alderman *Barber*, whose veneration for you prompts him to do any thing he can think of that can shew his respect and affection, made a present to the university of *Oxford* of the original picture done for you by *Jarvis*, to do honour to the university by your being placed in the gallery among the most renowned and distinguished personages this island hath produced; but first had a copy taken, and then had the original set in a fine rich frame, and sent it to *Oxford*, after concerting with Lord *Bolingbroke*, the vice chancellor, and Mr. *Pope*, as I remember, the inscription to be under the picture, a copy whereof is inclosed.⁵¹

Arrangements for the installation of the Jervas in the Bodleian sound quite complicated, as if it is being carried out by a committee of friends. Richardson notes the telling detail about a copy being made by Barber for himself before the original is surrendered to Oxford. Hardly has Richardson completed his account of the Jervas, than he informs Swift that the chapter of St Patrick's cathedral had commissioned another portrait of the Dean by Bindon, and that Alderman Barber had submitted an article on the event to the *London Evening Post*. With so many commemorative events being planned, Swift must have known that his term was coming to an end.

Swift's interest in these moves to immortalise him may be gauged by his complete silence on the matter in his reply to Richardson. The somewhat ghoulish determination to secure authentic likenesses of the declining Swift can be seen in the successful interventions by Rupert Barber, son of Mary Barber, who produced four profile portraits of Swift, three in crayons, one in miniature.⁵² Through his



6 – Francis Bindon, JONATHAN SWIFT
c.1735, oil on canvas. (courtesy National Gallery of Ireland)



*7 – Studio of Michael Dahl, ALEXANDER POPE
c.1727, oil on canvas (detail) (courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London)*



8 – Rupert Barber,
JONATHAN SWIFT
c.1745, pastel on paper
(courtesy Bryn Mawr
College Collections; gift
of Mary K. Woodworth)

mother's influence at the Deanery, Barber was able to observe Swift while he was under the medical care of guardians. Barber even had posthumous access to Swift, whose body was laid out in an open casket in the Deanery for three days, during which time it seems that Barber took quick sketches of the Dean's profile (Plate 8). Unlike the oil-portraits by Jervas and Bindon, Barber's profile-portraits were executed rapidly, sometimes borrowing features or touches from Bindon's earlier versions of Swift.⁵³

It seems extraordinary that only two painters ever persuaded Swift to sit for his portrait. As Marks notes, it is a great pity, and a great loss to eighteenth-century portraiture, that Kneller never obtained Swift's consent for a portrait. Swift actually seems to have avoided the most famous portraitist of the age. Those who craved a picture of Swift usually had to turn to either a copy or a variation of Bindon, or wait for the mass-production of engravings based on either Jervas or Bindon.⁵⁴ As a churchman and an amateur writer, Swift seems to have had reservations about the

vanity of promoting one's image for public display. Pope, on the other hand, a secular professional writer, seems positively exhibitionistic compared to the Dean. According to Morris Brownell, Pope was 'probably the most frequently portrayed person of his generation.' Through the leading portraitists of the age, such as Jervas, Kneller and Richardson, he carefully constructed and promoted iconic versions of his literary image (Plate 7).⁵⁵ William Wimsatt notes eighty-one types of portrait for Pope, executed by over a dozen artists.⁵⁶ Even Samuel Johnson, a self-proclaimed philistine of the arts, sat for ten portraitists in his lifetime.⁵⁷ For Swift, portraits seem to have represented what Morris Brownell calls 'one of the sacraments of friendship', valued more for their associations than for their artistry, for their sentimental rather than their promotional value.⁵⁸

Certain artefacts may acquire a value in death which was never apparent in life. Posthumous designs, such as wills and testaments, give a certain definition to the order and hierarchy of objects treasured over a lifetime, and often confound, at least surprise, those who survey the nature and the distribution of a legacy. An inventory of Swift's personal possessions, dated 30 September 1742, drawn up when he became terminally confused, lists forty-five items under the heading 'Paintings'.⁵⁹ Nine of these items are portraits, the rest a miscellaneous collection of unidentified landscapes and still-lives, with only a couple of religious subjects.⁶⁰ The first entry under 'Paintings' is the gift from Stopford, the only portrait which names a painter, *King Charles 1st by Vandyke*. The other entries simply name the sitter – Sir Kenelm Digby, the Duke of Ormonde, the Duchess of Ormonde, the Earl of Oxford, Lady Orkney, Matthew Prior,⁶¹ Alexander Pope and Mr Joseph Beaumont. Like so many sale catalogues of the age, this inventory presents the paintings and prints as part of the household 'furniture', rather than a special category which requires informed identification and authentication.⁶² We may think of these portraits as a private gallery, a record of Swift's personal sympathies, one which is dominated by royal and aristocratic figures. If the portraits betray or declare an ideological sympathy, then the figures of King Charles and Sir Kenelm Digby, his loyal courtier (Plate 9), suggest the admiration and approval of a traditional monarchist,⁶³ while the pictures of the Ormondes strengthen this sense of reverence for a courtly culture which was destroyed by the barbarous politics of seventeenth-century Puritanism. Even though the 2nd Duke of Ormonde was exposed in 1715 as a Jacobite, one who fled to France to escape the government, and remained there in political disgrace for the rest of his life, Swift kept his portrait until the end.⁶⁴ The absence of any pictures of those several monarchs who ruled during Swift's long life perhaps confirms his Caroline sympathies. The remaining portraits represent a tribute to contemporary friendship, with the inclusion of two writers, Pope and Prior, as old friends, and Joseph Beaumont, the merchant from Trim, county Meath, who had advised the young Swift about money matters when he first came to



9 – Sir Anthony Van Dyck, *SIR KENELM DIGBY*
c.1640, oil on canvas (detail) (courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London)

Laracor. Notably absent are portraits of Bolingbroke and Lady Masham who, as noted earlier, had promised to sit for Swift.

Even though they lie outside the aim and scope of this essay, the prints which are listed separately in this inventory tell a complementary story to that of the portraits, and merit a brief mention. Thrown in amongst household furniture, such as a 'Writeing Box with a Cover', and '1 Shagreen Case with 2 Razors, a hone and penknife', Swift's small collection of prints includes several of those contemporary friends whose portraits he already owned, such as Prior, Ormonde, and Oxford. The list includes prints of two former Lord Mayors, both good friends of Swift, Humphrey French in Dublin, and John Barber in London. There is also a print of Lady Orrery, one of *A Lady in a Rideing Habit*, and one of Thomas Tompion, 'the father of English watchmaking', and a contemporary of Swift.⁶⁵ Listed under 'Prints' is Swift's modest but significant collection of medals, including a gold medal of King Charles I, and a silver one of Milton. The only 'fictional' picture in all of this comes from his greatest satire, a set of six prints 'of Captain Gulliver', from a work which would lend itself to the worlds's greatest illustrators in every generation.

Swift's will, solemn and meticulous, is justly famous for its generous gift of money for St Patrick's Hospital, yet the bequests within the will, especially those which identify portraits and pictures, are of special interest, and help complete our understanding of Swift's regard for painting.⁶⁶ Only two of the nine portraits mentioned in the 1742 inventory are mentioned in Swift's will; that of King Charles I is returned to its original donor, James Stopford, and the portrait of Lady Orkney is given to Swift's relatively new friend, Lord Orrery. The print of the Earl of Oxford is left to Pope, the medal of King Charles I to Revd James King, and various other medals and coins to a variety of friends, including Mary Barber and Patrick Delany.

Taken together, the inventory and the will suggest quite a 'modern' taste in pictures, with little evidence of a determination on Swift's part to surround himself with images of the classical or ancient world. With the important exception of King Charles I, Swift's portraits, pictures and prints reflect his engagement with the living rather than the dead, with people he knew and admired rather than with historical heroes. For someone who regularly declared his faith in the Ancients, and his contempt for the Moderns, Swift's personal collection of pictures suggests a less dogmatic, and a much more contemporary, spirit.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ P. Rogers, *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth 1983) 81.
- ² *ibid.*, 556. In his note on the term ‘caricatura’, Rogers points out that, at the time, this was ‘a new and slightly exotic word’, which suggests Swift’s early awareness of the vocabulary of art.
- ³ There is a passing mention of the Irish painter Charles Jervas in Swift’s poem, ‘The Grand Question Debated’, written around 1729, as part of a witty pastiche of ‘polite conversation’. See *ibid.*, 383
- ⁴ I. Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680-1768* (New Haven and London 1988) 1.
- ⁵ See J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago 1997) 201-08, and Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*, 51-57.
- ⁶ See I. Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works and the Age*, 3 vols (London and Cambridge, MA, 1962-83) II, 179-80.
- ⁷ This may not have been the first time that Swift sat for his portrait. There is, at the time of writing, an unresolved enquiry about a portrait by Thomas Pooley, probably of Swift as a student at Trinity College Dublin. The portrait, which is privately owned, is dated c.1685, when Swift was graduating from Trinity. If this is indeed a picture of the young Swift, aged eighteen, it may confirm the argument, first put forward by Denis Johnston in his work, *In Search of Swift* (1959), that Swift was the illegitimate son of Sir John Temple. This, in turn, would suggest that Temple commissioned the portrait of his son. Johnston’s argument, which does not mention this portrait, has been vigorously revived by Bruce Arnold in *Swift: An Illustrated Life* (Dublin 1999), the front cover of which offers a fine reproduction of the portrait. For both sides of this argument about the identity of the sitter, see T.G. Wilson, ‘Pooley’s Portrait of Swift’, *Dublin Magazine*, VIII, nos 1-2, 1969, 47-50, D. Wooley, ‘Miscellanea in Two Parts: I. An Autograph, II. A Portrait’, *Swift Studies*, 1993, 94-99, J. Fenlon, ‘More about the Portrait of Jonathan Swift when a Student at Trinity College, Dublin’, *Swift Studies*, 2000, 33-38, and D. Wooley, ‘A Rejoinder from the Author of The Doubtful Portrait, &c’, *Swift Studies*, 2000, 39-41.
- ⁸ Harold Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, 2 vols (Oxford 1974) I, 14.

- ⁹ *ibid.*, 71.
- ¹⁰ For what remains a major study, see Sir F. Falkner, 'The Portraits of Swift', in T. Scott (ed.) *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, 12 vols (Oxford 1897-1908) 1-56. For a detailed analysis of Jervas's portraits of Swift, see N. Figgis and B. Rooney, *Irish Paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin 2001) 309-11.
- ¹¹ See J. Brewer, "'The most Polite Age and the most Vicious'". Attitudes towards Culture as a Commodity, 1660-1800', in A. Bermingham and J. Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800* (London and New York 1995) 341-61.
- ¹² Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*, 106. The first picture auction to be held in London was in 1682. For a detailed account of these early days of picture auctions, see *ibid.*, 57-67.
- ¹³ On Ashe as a collector, see T.C. Barnard, 'From Imperial Schatzkammer to the Giant's Causeway', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, VI, 2003, 140-61: 141-42.
- ¹⁴ Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, II, 601.
- ¹⁵ See, for example, *ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, 633. Buying a Titian for so little would have been the bargain, or the deception, of the century. Iain Pears has documented the sales of the major painters during this period, and points out that only three paintings by Titian were sold between 1711 and 1730, each reaching a maximum price of £120. This purchase is not mentioned again by Swift.
- ¹⁷ Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, II, 636.
- ¹⁸ The first of these auctions was advertised in *The Spectator*, no.67, 17 May 1711. On Graham's career and for fuller details of these auctions, see Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*, 72.
- ¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 243-44, n.95. My thanks to Charles Noble and his staff at Chatsworth House, who provided me with copies of Graham's sale catalogues, held in the Devonshire Collection. Mr Noble points out that the correct reference for the sale catalogue of 12 March is 134.1, and not 134.0, as given in Pears.
- ²⁰ Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, II, 646.
- ²¹ Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 209.
- ²² Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, II, 496-97. This picture, along with several others at Swiftsheath, county Kilkenny, seems to have been sold by the Swift family at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the pictures have survived, in poor condition, and are in private hands in Ireland. I have tried, unsuccessfully, to elicit more precise details about these paintings from their owners.
- ²³ *ibid.*, 420.
- ²⁴ Swift noted the expense in his account book. See P.V. Thompson and D.J. Thompson, *The Account Books of Jonathan Swift* (London 1984) 121.
- ²⁵ Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, II, 630. This was written in early May 1713: Swift returned to Dublin three months later.
- ²⁶ Harold Williams (ed.), *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 5 vols (Oxford 1963-72) V, 5-6. This portrait, along with several others of the Temple family, is presently in Broadlands House, Hampshire, a stately home bought in 1736 by Henry Temple, 1st Viscount Palmerston. A reproduction of the portrait can be found in J.G. Longe, *Martha Lady Giffard* (London 1911), opposite p.8. Henry Temple was a nephew of Sir William Temple, whom Swift knew since his days at Moor Park.
- ²⁷ A complete inventory of Temple's pictures may be found in the British Library copy of the sale catalogue for his collection, shelfmark S.C.1518 (7). The collection was auctioned on 30

- March 1824 at Christie's in London. The collection is strongly Flemish and Dutch in character, reflecting Temple's long diplomatic involvement with the Low Countries.
- ²⁸ L. Lippincott, 'Expanding on Portraiture. The Market, the Public, and the Hierarchy of Genres in Eighteenth-century Britain', in Bermingham and Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture*, 75-88.
- ²⁹ Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, II, 583.
- ³⁰ D. Woolley (ed.), *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, 4 vols (3 vols to date), (Frankfurt am Main 1999-2003) I, 458-59.
- ³¹ See Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works and the Age*, II, 574, on Swift's relationship with the Countess.
- ³² Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, II, 617.
- ³³ For an account and analysis of Kneller's painterly aesthetic and his work with the Kit-Kat club, see D.H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London 1992) 28-38.
- ³⁴ Williams (ed.), *Journal to Stella*, I, 114.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, 628.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*, 628-29.
- ³⁷ See A. Crookshank and the D. FitzGerald, Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters 1600-1940* (New Haven and London 2002) 1-2, 24.
- ³⁸ Barnard, 'From Imperial Schatzkammer to the Giant's Causeway', 142-43.
- ³⁹ T.C. Barnard, *A New Anatomy of Ireland: The Irish Protestants, 1649-1770* (New Haven and London 2003) *passim*.
- ⁴⁰ See Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 52-53, and Barnard, 'From Imperial Schatzkammer to the Giant's Causeway', 143-44. On the art-market and collectors in eighteenth-century Ireland, see T.C. Barnard, 'Art, Architecture, Artefacts and Ascendancy', *Bullán*, I, no.2, 1994, 17-34. For the most comprehensive account of the material culture of Protestant Ireland in the eighteenth century, see T.C. Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure: Lives and Possessions in Ireland, 1641-1770* (New Haven and London 2004) *passim*, but especially 151-87.
- ⁴¹ Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 54.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, 27.
- ⁴³ Woolley, *Correspondence*, II, 619-22.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 619.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 584.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, IV, 353.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 358.
- ⁴⁸ The National Gallery of Ireland holds a Bindon portrait of Swift which is very similar to that at Howth Castle. For detailed analysis of Bindon's several portraits of Swift, see Figgis and Rooney, *Irish Paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland*, 82-88.
- ⁴⁹ See DNB.
- ⁵⁰ Williams (ed.), *Correspondence*, V, 182-83. For a detailed account of Nugent's activity and legacy as a collector, see W.K. Wimsatt, *The Portraits of Alexander Pope* (New Haven and London 1965) 283-87.
- ⁵¹ Williams (ed.), *Correspondence*, V, 143.
- ⁵² A.S. Marks, 'Seeking an Enduring Image: Rupert Barber, Jonathan Swift and the Profile

- Portrait', *Swift Studies*, 2001, 31-82.
- ⁵³ One of Barber's portraits of Swift was used as the frontispiece to both the Dublin and London editions of Lord Orrery's *Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* (1752). See Marks, 'Seeking an Enduring Image', 64-70.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 33.
- ⁵⁵ See M. Brownell, *Alexander Pope & the Arts of Georgian England* (Oxford 1978) 9-38.
- ⁵⁶ Wimsatt, *The Portraits of Alexander Pope*, 15, n.2.
- ⁵⁷ See M.R. Brownell, *Samuel Johnson's Attitude to the Arts* (Oxford 1989) 79. Brownell's argument here is that Johnson's philistinism is, in fact, an anecdotal construction by friends and enemies, as well as an intellectual strategy on the writer's own part.
- ⁵⁸ Brownell, *Alexander Pope*, 37-38. This personalised view of the value of portraits probably accounts for the fact that, in the early days of their friendship, Swift agreed to sit for Pope, an enthusiastic amateur painter, who was instructed in the art by his close friend, Charles Jervas. Pope's pictures of Swift have not survived. See Wimsatt, *The Portraits of Alexander Pope*, 11-12.
- ⁵⁹ T.P. Le Fanu, 'Catalogue of Dean Swift's Library in 1715, With An Inventory of his Personal Property in 1742', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, XXXVII, 1927, 263-75. The inventory was found in Swift's writing desk in St Patrick's hospital after his death.
- ⁶⁰ One of these is entitled 'Paul and Barnabas at Lystra', based on a story in Acts of the Apostles 14, 6-19, which shows the two apostles being revered by the city's inhabitants for having cured a cripple at the temple. The other painting is simply titled 'Magdalena', with no descriptive detail. Such paintings are quite exceptional for Swift, whose collection is overwhelmingly secular.
- ⁶¹ Prior, best known as a diplomatist and poet, and a good friend of Swift, was also a serious art collector. See H. Bunker Wright and H.C. Montgomery, 'The Art Collection of a Virtuoso in Eighteenth Century England', *Art Bulletin*, XXVII, 1945, 195-204.
- ⁶² As Iain Pears points out, in the absence of any aesthetic distinction between 'pictures' and works of art, the former almost invariably ended up being sold off, or auctioned, as part of household effects. See Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*, 63.
- ⁶³ Sir Kenelm Digby (1603-65), naval commander, diplomat and scientist, is one of the most colourful figures of the seventeenth-century struggle between King and Parliament, noted above all for his loyalty to Roman Catholicism and to King Charles I. Van Dyck, official painter to the monarch, painted Digby several times.
- ⁶⁴ As a result of his treason, the Duke's inherited collection of paintings was confiscated and auctioned by the government. See J. Fenlon, *The Ormonde Picture Collection* (Dublin 2001) 15-18, 73-4.
- ⁶⁵ For details of Tompion, see DNB.
- ⁶⁶ Herbert Davis et al. (eds.), *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, 16 vols (Oxford 1939-68) XIII, 149-57.