

The Reception of Jonathan Swift throughout the Victorian Era: Diverse Perspectives of Swift among Critics

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Abstract

Jonathan Swift, a prominent figure in the literary landscape of the eighteenth century, was widely recognized for his provocative and controversial satirical works. Scholars and literary experts have engaged in ongoing discussions and analysis over the controversial nature of his literary creations throughout the span of several centuries. While certain critics have said that his written works exhibit signs of misogyny, racism, and colonialism perspectives, alternative perspectives have seen him as a potent advocate for humanism and a catalyst for social change. This research focuses on the Victorian Era, spanning from 1837 until the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, and explores the various interpretations of Jonathan Swift's literary works within this historical period. This research draws upon the perspectives of several critics, such as Kelly, Orrery, Real, Thackeray, Macaulay, Graik, Bucknill, LoForte-Rand, and Taine, to assert that Swift was a figure of considerable controversy. The current study has also reached the finding that Swift demonstrated argumentative inclinations. The existence of multiple readings of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* serves as support for this claim.

Keywords: The Victorian Era, Critical views, Jonathan Swift, Satirist, Reformer, Racist, Gulliver's Travels

1. Introduction

The renowned satirist Jonathan Swift was born in the city of Dublin in the year 1667, thereby establishing Dublin as his birthplace. Jonathan's father, who had a professional occupation as a lawyer, passed away before his birth. Consequently, the oversight of his formative years was partially assumed by a nurse, presumably due to the absence of both parental figures. Without a doubt, he was registered as a student at Kilkenny College from the ages of six to fourteen. During this time, he gained a basic understanding of the classical humanist education that was commonly available to boys of his social level. In 1682, Jonathan Swift matriculated at Trinity College Dublin. Throughout the course of his tenure, he dedicated himself to his scholarly endeavors in the disciplines of Latin and Greek. Moreover, he deepened his comprehension of Aristotelian philosophy. After the culmination of a quadrennial duration, he effectively acquired a Bachelor of Arts degree. Swift's academic performance during his collegiate years was notably unremarkable. Following his departure from Trinity College in 1686, he experienced a state of uncertainty regarding his future professional trajectory. Despite the support extended by his paternal relatives, Swift faced considerable obstacles in securing employment that would enable him to uphold the esteemed societal status associated with a gentleman.

In his capacity as a clergyman, he demonstrated unwavering dedication to his responsibilities, diligently crafting his sermons, wholeheartedly attending to the needs of his flock, and fiercely safeguarding the interests of the Church of Ireland. According to Xiang (2009), Swift's perspective on church and religion exhibited a sense of contradiction. For him, Christianity was not just a vocation but also a decision made in the face of a moral quandary. Demonstrating steadfast commitment to the principles of the Enlightenment, he consistently exercised his prerogative to critique religion, particularly the malevolent actions of clergy and the divisions that existed among various denominations.

Swift is recognized as a prominent writer of satirical prose in the annals of English literature. He engaged in the composition of many literary works, including essays, poetry, and novels. Jonathan Swift's language, as argued by Bishop (1998), is perpetually in motion, shaping its own content via processes of inquiry and revision. The words of Swift do more than just state; they act. According to Bishop (1998), Swift's language is complex because of its uniqueness. His poetry is simple and beautiful, his prose is spare and clear, but his words always say more than they seem to on the surface. Body imagery is fundamental to Swift's poetry, Bishop (1998) explains. Even in his poems that don't explicitly deal with the body, Swift uses a lot of symbolism related to it. Khrais (2012) asserts that Swift used the mock-heroic style, characterized by the utilization of elevated descriptions and classical allusions, to parody ordinary or vulgar subject matter.

For a very long period, Jonathan Swift has generated controversy among critics. His writings and method of thinking have been the subject of intense discussion. Some reviewers have criticized Swift for being sexist, racist, and colonialist. On the other hand, he has been regarded as a major reformer and humanist. To that purpose, this study will outline many Swift critics' perspectives, including Ann Cline

Kelly, Lord Orrery, Hermann Josef Real, William Makepeace Thackeray, Andrea LoForte-Rand, Hippolyte Taine, Mary Gerace, Melanie Maria Just, Ricardo Quintana, Thomas Barbington Macaulay, Craig Hawkins Ulman, Henry Graik, Sir John Charles Bucknill, and Sir William Wilde.

According to the review of the literature, most studies on Swift concentrate on his writing style (Schakel, 1978; Higgins, 2003; Holm, 2020), the themes of his literary works (Williams, 1965; Jaffe, 1977; Pollak, 1985; Higgins, 1994; Higgins, 2003; Barnett, 2007; Alff, 2014; Lázaro-Lafuente, 2020), and his philosophical views (Hill, 1994; Declan, 2000; Bloom & Daniel, 2009; Lynall, 2012). Numerous studies on *Gulliver's Travels* have been conducted, according to a review of the literature on Swift (Bentman, 1971; Belamy, 1992; Hawes, 2004; Rivero, 2004; Houston, 2007; Swan & Matthew, 2014; Al-Khawaldeh & Elayan, 2023). In contrast, Lorch (2006) conducted a study on the language and memory deficit exhibited by Jonathan Swift. This study provides an in-depth analysis of the critiques directed towards Swift. The primary basis for the critics' discoveries in our study may be attributed to an examination of Swift's perspectives as depicted in his literary works. To bolster the critique of Jonathan Swift, a comprehensive collection of perspectives was assembled for the purpose of this study. The present study aims to address the following research inquiry:

How do critics perceive Jonathan Swift, both favorably and unfavorably?

2. The Victorian Era

This period of British history, known as the Victorian Era, spans the 64 years (1837–1901) during which Queen Victoria was in power. The historical period under consideration is characterized by a multitude of significant social and historical transformations that had a profound impact on the nation, resulting in various alterations. The British Empire expanded during this time, becoming the first major industrial power on a worldwide scale. Slowly but surely, England was ascending to the position of Europe's most secure and rich nation. According to Allen (2008), the Victorian age can be characterized by three fundamental concepts: progress, expansion, and mobility. Following the conclusion of the prolonged conflict with France spanning from 1793 to 1815, Britain had successfully established itself as a prominent global force and emerged as the leading economy on the world stage.

The literature of this century exhibits a greater proximity to everyday life, thereby reflecting the practical issues and concerns of the time. It emerges as a potent tool for advancing human development. Victorian writing appears to assert a moral purpose. Pre-Raphaelite poetry encompasses a genre of realistic literature. The current era is frequently characterized as a period marked by uncertainty and the coexistence of conflicting belief systems and philosophical perspectives. The impact of science is evident in this context. However, despite the prevailing realistic and pragmatic nature of the times, many writers advocate for a life that is simply idealistic. The current era is characterized by an emphasis on high ideals throughout its literary works.

3. Kelly and Connery's Thoughts on Swift

Kelly (1999) explores the elements that led to Swift's acquisition of mythopoetic authority, resulting in his transformation into an enigmatic figure both prior to his demise and during the 19th and 20th centuries. Kelly (1999) asserts that the myth surrounding the authority of the individual in question originated from his lack of authority as an author, thereby contributing to the ongoing debate about his credibility (p. 17). According to Kelly (1999), the presence of contradictory ironies throughout Swift's writings is responsible for their inherent ambiguity. We assert that the essentiality of Swift's cryptic ironies is acknowledged as they have played a significant role in shaping his creative manner of presentation. According to Kelly (2002), the media has depicted Swift as volatile and unpredictable. These representations arise from the contradictory and disorganized nature of his speech, as well as his deliberate exclusion of any self-explanatory statements in his writings or historical records. Connery (2002) identified the unresolved questions pertaining to Swift. These questions are "Was he loyal to England or Ireland, she wonders? Had he ever been wed? Was he libidinous or frigid? What sort of religion did he practice? He was a Jacobite. How deep was his concern for the underclass?" (Connery, 2002, p. 150). It can be argued that these inquiries and others have been put forth in the absence of substantial empirical support.

According to Kelly (1999), Swift's utilization of a pseudonym for his published works demonstrates a lack of attentiveness towards the content of his statements. Kelly (2002) encounters difficulty in determining the nature of his association with the spokespersons featured in his literary compositions. While Swift's decision to have Gulliver address the publisher in the introduction to the novel may lead to confusion among readers, it would be incorrect to assume that Gulliver represents Swift's perspective. According to Kelly, irrespective of the derogatory labels such as 'clown,' 'atheist,' and 'barbarian' attributed to the Dean during his lifetime, any literary piece associated with him attains canonical status, serving as a source of inspiration for writers. We concur entirely with Connery's assertion that Swift's literary works have achieved canonical status. In contrast, Connery (2002) asserts that Swift's writings, characterized by their ambiguity and the debates surrounding the author, have given rise to a multitude of interpretations and analyses. We assume that the presence of multiple interpretations in Swift's writings might be seen as indicative of his sophisticated creative sensibility in terms of literary presentation.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the biographers of Swift, such as Lord Orrery, who established a friendship with Swift during the latter years preceding his demise, exerted a substantial impact on the evaluations of most critics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lord Orrery authored a collection of personal correspondence that he subsequently released as *Remarks on the Life and Writing of Dr. Jonathan Swift*. Within this publication, Lord Orrery engaged in discussions pertaining to the works of Swift as well as other notable authors. In addition to the accusations he presented, Orrery's aristocratic sense of superiority contributed to the widespread popularity of his work. Orrery made attempts to propagate speculations on the alleged paternity of Swift as the clandestine offspring of

Sir William Temple. Furthermore, they propagated the notion that Swift was married to Stella and insinuated a familial relationship between Swift and Stella. In a scholarly critique, Kelly (2002) has raised objections to the claims that Swift's works are devoid of moral values, appropriateness, and grandiosity. We argue that the dissemination of such stories by Lord Orrery just reflects his subjective and impressionistic assessment of Swift.

4. *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift and the Interpretations of the Critics

One of the books that has been read, translated, adapted, rendered, and given new lifetime after time is *Gulliver's Travels*. Though it was thought that Swift's designation of *Gulliver's Travels* as a children's book was his Victorian retaliation (Real, 1984), we believe it adds to the novel's worth. From our point of view, there are several factors that contribute to this work's everlasting quality. It can be a suitable material for kids. It also depicts a period with its citizens and politicians, as well as a distinct, but brutal method of communicating thoughts and ideas without using words explicitly. Another thing that gives the text worth and makes it a magnificent work of art for centuries after its release is the fact that it has been read by many people without a consensus on one interpretation. Swift uses odd and new realms to represent each chapter in a way that is completely unique from the other. It displays what it never narrates. It is a text that may be interpreted in multi ways.

Gulliver's Travels is a literary work that has undergone extensive readership, translation, adaptation, interpretation, and continued relevance over the passage of time. While some scholars argue that Swift's categorization of *Gulliver's Travels* as a children's book was a response to the Victorian era (Real, 1984), we contend that this classification enhances the novel's value. From a subjective perspective, there exist multiple aspects that contribute to the enduring quality of this piece of work. This resource exhibits suitability for children. Additionally, it portrays a specific era by illustrating the interactions between its inhabitants and political figures, while also highlighting a unique and harsh kind of non-verbal communication for expressing thoughts and concepts. Another aspect that confers value to the text and renders it a remarkable piece of art for generations to come is its extensive readership, which has failed to reach a unanimous agreement on a single interpretation. Swift used unconventional and innovative realms to symbolize each chapter, so establishing a distinctiveness that sets them apart from one another. The visual representation in this book conveys information that is not explicitly described. This text possesses the potential for multiple interpretations.

The eighteenth-century critics also had influence on the interpretations of Swift's works. In accordance with Williams' (1995) findings, it has been observed that James Harris (1781) offers a critique of Swift, characterizing him as a misanthrope. According to Harris (1781), the inclusion of *Gulliver's Travels* on the list of prohibited works is warranted due to its perceived subversion of religious and moral values. As asserted by Harris (1781), the concluding segment of the literary work poses a considerable challenge to readers due to the portrayal of the Hohnms and Yahoos. We hold the impression that the readings of Swift's works during the eighteenth century were influential in fostering a more pronounced misinterpretation of his texts.

4.1 Hermann J. Real and *Gulliver's Travels*

Real (2013) highlights the significant reception and widespread popularity of *Gulliver's Travels* in Europe throughout the nineteenth century. He demonstrates the complete overshadowing of Swift during the nineteenth century. Real (2013) provides an explanation for this phenomenon by referencing the prevailing mindset of the population during that period, which exhibited a general lack of interest in satire. According to his assertion, the French language was utilized as the primary basis for all translations. The only translation available from Desfontaines' original French can be found in Maximo Spartal's version. The remaining versions should be considered as modifications and rewrites of the original text. However, Swift expressed disagreement with Desfontaines' French translation. In this discourse, we contend that Swift's dissent is well-founded, as the aesthetic elements inherent in the original language of *Gulliver's Travels* could not be entirely rendered in translation. Throughout the nineteenth century, the sole comprehensive rendition of *Gulliver's Travels* available was Spartal's translation, which was finalized in the year 1824. In the year 1874, Villaverde successfully concluded the third edition of the book. The translations provided exclusively encompass the narrative of the voyages to the lands of Brobdingnag and Lilliput. According to Real (2013), the widespread admiration of this piece of art among European nations can be attributed to the authors' perception of its suitability for young readers.

4.2 William Makepeace Thackeray, *Swift and Gulliver's Travels*

In his essay titled *Jonathan Swift*, Thackeray (1909), a prominent Victorian critic, articulates his disdain towards Swift and his literary works. Thackeray (1909) provides a description of Swift's life, which serves as supporting evidence for evaluations of his character and achievements. Jonathan Swift, a renowned figure, can be considered a tragic hero who, despite his notable achievements, ultimately perceived himself as having fallen short of his own expectations. As per certain proponents of panegyric discourse, Swift is attributed with harboring bitterness, scorn, fury, and subsequently developing misanthropic tendencies. These traits are believed to stem from a purposeful conviction regarding the inherent unworthiness of humanity, along with a desire to rectify this condition by the act of castigation (Thackeray, 1909, para. 8). Thackeray (1909) alludes to the youthful, embittered, and vulnerable existence of Swift, which exemplified the prevailing conditions of the era in which he resided. According to Thackeray's (1909) analysis, it may be inferred that both the Queen and the bishops harbored doubts regarding Swift's religious beliefs, as depicted in his discourse on religion. Swift's disposition is characterized by skepticism, which ultimately resulted in his state of unhappiness (Thackeray, 1909, para. 24). Drawing upon Thackeray's analysis and considering the perspectives of the Queen, we think that Swift's skepticism is an integral aspect of his intellectual prowess, serving as a means through which he astutely comments on the nature of reality.

Thackeray's (1909) primary preoccupation revolved around Swift's Irish lineage. Jonathan Swift, a native of Dublin, Ireland, did not identify himself as an Irishman, despite being born to English parents. Thackeray (1909) contends that Swift's heart, manners, sense of humor, and logic exhibit English characteristics rather than Irish, thereby distinguishing him from individuals such as Goldsmith and Dick Steele, who are unequivocally regarded as Irish. Thackeray does not deny the discouragement of Swift's utilization of his lyrical talent as depicted in this representation. However, Swift opts to communicate in a straightforward manner and with a loud volume. Thackeray portrays Swift's depiction as being severe and unappealing, substantiating this viewpoint by referencing certain occurrences in Dean's life that resulted in a woman's distress and the disparagement of a friend. According to Thackeray (1909), Swift's lack of gentle words and kind-heartedness, attributes generally associated with Irishmen, led him to conclude that Swift cannot be considered an Irishman. From our perspective, we have a differing opinion about Thackeray's assertion that Swift cannot be considered Irish due to his perceived absence of gentle language and benevolence. These characteristics are inherent to the individual and may not necessarily indicate their Irish heritage.

In relation to Dean's creative oeuvre, Thackeray (1909) further exemplifies the concerns that Swift finds deeply troubling, namely the institution of marriage and procreation. In the literary work titled *The Modest Proposal*, Swift presents a provocative notion involving the consumption of children through various culinary methods such as stewing, roasting, baking, and boiling. This proposal, according to Swift's perspective, serves as a manifestation of his strong aversion for children. It is our assertion that the depiction of Swift in this context exposes Thackeray's misapprehension of the proposition as a form of Juvenalian satire aimed at scrutinizing the treatment of the Irish populace during the era in which he lived. Swift's statement, which may appear terrifying on the surface, serves as a literary device aimed at revealing the moral corruption prevalent in his contemporary society and the harsh treatment endured by the Irish population. We think that the utilization of exaggeration in Swift's work serves as a manifestation of his deep-seated hatred towards the children in question, so shedding light on the compassionate nature of a man whose anger was greatly provoked by the plight endured by the Irish populace. Thackeray (1909) drew inspiration from this incident, leading him to formulate a proposal aimed at provoking the audience's sensibilities, with the intention of prompting contemplation on the indifferent treatment of the Irish populace at large, and more specifically, Irish children.

Thackeray (1909) explores *Gulliver's Travels* to get further insights into Jonathan Swift's perspectives on love and marriage. Thackeray (1909) asserts that Swift expresses concern with the Lilliputian Kingdom's governmental policy of separating children from their parents for the purpose of education. In addition to Swift's inclination towards equine companionship rather than human interaction, Thackeray (1909) posits that these excerpts serve as substantiation for Swift's classification as the "most wretched being among God's creatures" (para. 27). According to Thackeray (1909), the introduction of morally repugnant, degrading, and inhumane themes in Swift's works renders them incapable of being enjoyed by any individual. The manifestation of Swift's sense of masculinity and shame can be observed in his work *Gulliver's Travels*, which has been characterized as "filthy in words, filthy in thought, furious, raging, and obscene" (Thackeray, 1909, para. 32). According to Thackeray's (1909) assessment, the moral implications of *Gulliver's Travels* are deemed abhorrent, disgraceful, effeminate, sacrilegious, and he strongly recommends people who have not yet perused Part IV to abstain from doing so. Indeed, it is evident that Thackeray's interpretation of Swift was flawed in this case. Our contention is that Thackeray demonstrated a lack of comprehension regarding the distinction between Swift's literary work and his personal convictions. It is important to recognize that Swift's book serves as a depiction of the treatment of English citizens by their government, rather than a direct representation of his own values. In our opinion, the Lilliputian Kingdom can be interpreted as a manifestation of the efforts made by English politicians and authorities to uphold their colonial discourse. This was achieved through the education of children and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes surrounding Yahoos, portraying them as unclean, uncivilized beings, while neglecting any endeavors to support their plight.

Real (2013) states that Eurico Nencioni, an Italian critic from the late 19th century, drew influence from Thackeray's writings for his essay titled *I 'umorismo e gli Umoristi* or *On Humor and Humorists*. Numerous pundits and writers have found inspiration in Thackeray's assessment of Swift and his literary works, regardless of their personal agreement or disagreement with his perspective. However, Real (2013) argues that Nencioni's claim on Swift's use of "cold and cruel sarcasm," which Nencioni seems to admire, can be traced to the societal influences that were widespread in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, Giorgio Arcoleo, an Italian critic of the late 19th century, expounded upon Thackeray's critique of Swift in his essay titled *L'umorismo nell' arte moderna* or *Humorism in Modern Art*. Real (2013) posited that Arcoleo perceived Swift's humor as exclusive to his persona and as intricate as his turbulent life. Real (2013) states that Arcoleo noted the significant influence of Swift's humor when it is expressed through metaphorical and fantastical methods. This suggests that Swift's growing animosity towards others eventually transformed into feelings of disdain and apathy. According to Real (2013), Arcoleo described Swift's final period of poetry composition as being devoid of emotion, exhibiting a cold and harsh tone. This portrayal is said to mirror the themes of fate and the condition of Swift's inner being. The persuasiveness of Arcoleo's argument regarding the absence of emotions in Swift's poetry is subject to skepticism. The development of Swift's ideas and his increasing maturity are also significant factors that may account for the absence of emotional depth in his poetry. A considerable proportion of literary critics demonstrated a predilection for Swift's aptitude as a novelist and essayist, in contrast to his skills as a poet.

5. 19th Century Critics and Swift's Writings in Victorian Era

Swift's works during the Victorian Era have been extensively examined and analyzed by a multitude of critics and authors. Gerace (1967) posits that during the nineteenth century, *Gulliver's Travels* was commonly perceived as a literary creation authored by a man of

questionable moral character. In addition, Melanie (2002) demonstrates the Victorian-era critics' tendency to attribute Swift's personal adversities and deteriorating health to the austere portrayal depicted in *Gulliver's Travels*. According to Gerace (1967), the Victorian critics' inability to differentiate between Swift as an author and his literary works is the primary factor that contributes to a negative interpretation of Swift's writings. Our perspective aligns with Gerace's view in that the unfavorable perception of Swift's writings stems from a failure to distinguish between the author and his literary creations.

Macaulay (1846) has offered a critical analysis of Swift's ideas and literary works, with the intention of emphasizing the less desirable parts of Swift's character through a comparative examination of his views against those of other individuals. Macaulay (1846) refers to a particular incident involving Addison and Swift, whereby a conflict arose due to their contrasting political ideas. This altercation subsequently led to a strained atmosphere in their friendship. According to Macaulay's (1846) observation, it is noteworthy that Swift, who did not hold genius or virtue in high regard and appeared to derive a particular satisfaction from criticizing former acquaintances, displayed a significant degree of reverence and affection towards Addison. The negative characteristics of Swift were brought to attention by expressing admiration for Addison, whose "kindness was soothing to the proud and cruelly wounded spirit of Swift" (Macaulay, 1846, p. 138). It is our contention that Macaulay presents a very negative portrayal of Swift, employing language that conveys a sense of anger. This utilization of emotive language is deemed unsuitable for a reviewer who aspires to maintain a neutral stance. These judgments appear to be somewhat subjective and may reflect Macaulay's personal hostility towards the Dean.

Ulman (1972) asserts that an understanding of Swift's writings hinges upon an examination of his communication, hence underscoring the significance of his letters in garnering attention towards Swift. According to Ulman (1972), the absence of humor, fancy, politics, and satire in Swift's works has led his biographers to construct an inaccurate depiction of his character. In his work *The Life of Jonathan Swift*, Graik (1882), a biographer of the nineteenth century, expressed criticism towards Swift for his tendency to interpret his own actions in an unconventional and negative manner, sometimes replacing motives rooted in sound judgment with those driven by mischief. Graik accomplished this by referencing a letter written by Swift to Bolingbroke. Furthermore, as stated by Graik (1882), "his clear logic had dwindled into the loose and broken peevishness of insanity" (p. 124). According to Graik's (1882) observations, Swift had signs of mental instability following his sickness. It is apparent that Graik has established a connection between Swift as an individual and his literary output, a perspective that we believe may not be the most appropriate approach for comprehending his body of work or his true persona.

Fox (1995) sheds light on the perception of Jonathan Swift's alleged insanity and its influence on the interpretation of his literary works. In the scholarly work by Fox (2003), it is noted that Bucknill (1882) published a medical article entitled *Dean Swift's Disease*. In this piece, Bucknill argues that Swift's condition was mostly of a physical nature, contrary to the prevailing belief that it was primarily a mental ailment. The condition that Swift diagnoses as Meniere's syndrome is a disease affecting the inner ear. Bucknill's (1882) essay was formulated as a response to a preceding investigation conducted by Dr. W. R. Wilde, which posits that Swift experienced a prolonged period of mental instability after the release of *Gulliver's Travels* in 1849. According to Fox (1995), critics have employed several assumptions as evidence while analyzing Swift's literary works. It is our contention that critics ought to distinguish between the critical analysis of a literary work and the author responsible for said work. According to Amil (2022), Barthe's perspective on the separation between the author and the interpretation of literary texts suggests that attributing an author to a piece imposes a constraint on its meaning, as it provides a definitive signified and brings the writing to a conclusion.

Another scholarly work that addresses the prevailing beliefs of Swift is Fox's (2003) *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, wherein it posits that Swift's writings exhibit clear indications of his mental illness. According to Fox (2003), *Gulliver's Travels*, along with Swift's other literary works, might be interpreted as a manifestation of his psychological condition. According to Fox (2003), Sir Walter Scott also conducted an analysis of *Gulliver's Travels*. Due to Scott's idiosyncrasies and the contextual factors related to his age, he ostensibly provided a defense of Swift's novel. In Fox's (2003) study, it is noted that Scott placed significant emphasis on Swift's cynicism and self-centeredness, factors that played a role in his negative depiction of human nature. It is deemed significant to refrain from establishing a causal relationship between Swift's psychological state and his creative output in literature.

Wilde's (1849) *The Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life* is an additional literary work that offers a critical perspective on Swift. Wilde's portrayal effectively exemplifies the psychological factors that contributed to Swift's mental instability. According to Wilde's (1849), it can be inferred that Swift's ailment was precipitated by the exceptionally hot weather of that particular year. Conversely, Swift's depressive state was exacerbated by the socio-political occurrences that transpired in the year 1720. The citation of Swift's 1719 speech to Lord Bolingbroke, wherein he expresses that his health has improved slightly but he still suffers from a troubled mind and emotional distress, is utilized to bolster Wilde's stance. It is posited that those who navigated the arduous circumstances of the eighteenth century may exhibit indications of emotional distress and physical ailment, namely aching and sick hearts, which should not be automatically equated with mental derangement.

6. Andrea LoForte-Rand, Hippolyte Taine, and Swift's Unfavorable Image

Real (2013) has underscored the viewpoint of Andrea LoForte-Rand, who regards Swift as a modern writer with a pessimistic inclination, as expounded through a philosophical framework in his extensive article titled *I Pessimist*, which was published in 1902. Real (2013) asserts that LoForte-Rand's evaluation of Swift's writings posits that they emanate from a peculiar and volatile psyche, which endeavors to impose satirical punishment upon mankind. Swift's profound dearth of ideas and subsequent absence of enthusiasm rendered him a profoundly despondent individual (Real, 2013). According to Real (2013), LoForte-Rand's article titled *I Pessimist* highlights Swift's

deficiency in attaining a complete sense of self, leading to his personal anguish, and intensifying his animosity towards others. Swift experienced discontentment because of his social marginalization. It is our contention that the defenses implemented by LoForte-Rand exhibit basic flaws. The assertion that Swift is a misanthrope is an interpretation that lacks fairness, as his literary works primarily aim to highlight the injustices perpetrated by politicians and religious figures in eighteenth-century England towards marginalized communities. Swift is widely regarded as a prominent representative of his generation, particularly known for his advocacy on behalf of marginalized populations and his staunch opposition to human rights violations.

Real (2013) asserts that LoForte-Rand has provided a comprehensive analysis of the reasons behind Swift's pessimistic outlook to support Swift's perspective. Although LoForte-Rand perceived *The Modest Proposal* as a depiction of cannibalism, he did not possess any intention to advocate for it. According to Real (2013), LoForte-Rand provided an explanation by arguing that the acts of violence described are so extreme that an ordinary man who is destined to become a father would never contemplate such brutality. We are convinced that LoForte-Rand's statement exemplifies a lack of comprehension of Swift's work as a kind of satirical commentary during its time. Additionally, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that according to LoForte-Rand, *Gulliver's Travels* is Swift's magnum opus, serving as a counterpoint to *Dante's Divine Comedy*, rather than being classified solely as literature intended for children (Real, 2013).

Taine (1871) likewise offers scathing criticism of Swift's poetry. According to Taine's analysis in 1871, Jonathan Swift is regarded as a poet lacking in imagination and occupying a marginalized position within the literary canon. According to Taine's (1871) analysis, Swift's poetry lacks magnificence and fails to provide pleasure due to several factors, notably the absence of artistic rapture. As viewed by Taine (1871), Swift's poetry is characterized by an unappealing auditory quality, a lack of aesthetic appeal, a nebulous and illogical nature, and a difficulty in comprehension, resulting in a lack of popular affection towards it. Taine (1871) presents a significant critique of Swift's poetry, contending that his poem lacks the presence of a true poet. Taine's analysis places significant emphasis on Swift's notable absence of the fundamental attributes commonly associated with genuine poets. The assertion made by Taine regarding Swift's status as a marginalized poet lacks a solid foundation, in our opinion. Taine's assessment of Swift's poetry is evidently influenced mostly by the impact of the poetry, rather than the poetry itself.

7. Conclusion

In recent years, scholars have shown a growing interest in examining diverse perspectives on Jonathan Swift's literary works within the context of the Victorian Era. Prior scholarly investigations have identified a dearth of scholarly inquiry pertaining to the reception of Jonathan Swift throughout the Victorian Era and the viewpoints of critics. Prior research on Swift has mostly concentrated on thematic or philosophical matters (e.g., Barnett, 2007; Lynall, 2012; Alff, 2014; Lázaro-Lafuente, 2020). In contrast, the present study sheds light on the diverse perspectives and interpretations of Swift's writings throughout the Victorian Era. This study conducted an analysis of different viewpoints regarding the literary works of Swift, as articulated by several critics including Ann Cline Kelly, Lord Orrery, H. J. Real, William Makepeace Thackeray, Andrea LoForte-Rand, Hippolyte Taine, Mary Gerace, Melanie Maria, Ricardo Quintana, Thomas Barbington, Macualay, Craig Hawkins Ulman, Henry Graik, J. C. Bucknill, and Sir William Wilde.

This study has yielded certain data that indicate the perception of Swift as being mentally unstable by certain critics. This perception arises from the perceived lack of logical coherence in the ideas provided within his writings, such as *Gulliver's Travels*. Some scholars observed within his literary works a humanistic sensibility and a potential for instigating social transformation. Irrespective of the selected methodology for analyzing Swift's literary works, we contend that a critical interpretation lacks justification. Upon careful examination of Swift's comprehensive repertoire, it becomes apparent that he exhibits a great proficiency in championing the well-being of individuals, particularly those who are excluded, while also illuminating the challenges they face. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that Swift's method primarily centers on increasing consciousness rather than offering concrete solutions.

Within the framework of writing during the eighteenth century, the act of conveying truth to individuals occupying positions of authority and influence held considerable importance for writers. This endeavor encompassed illuminating the less desirable facets of human nature, with the intention of inciting readers to contemplate their own circumstances and delve into themes that had previously been disregarded. Swift utilized a deliberate methodology with the objective of fostering critical thinking within his audience through the implementation of provocative techniques. It is our contention that in the absence of a comprehensive examination of the challenges posed by Swift, the potential for further transformation would have been non-existent. Despite the passage of significant time, it is evident that the lasting impact of this esteemed advocate of humanism continues to be widely acknowledged, carefully examined, and highly valued by society.

However, it is important to note that this study has two limitations. This study incorporated several critics; but, due to constraints in terms of time and space, numerous other critics were not included. Another constraint is the narrow emphasis on the reception of Swift during the Victorian Era. There exists a possibility for future scholarly inquiry to investigate the beliefs and critical perspectives about Jonathan's views, encompassing not only the Victorian era but also other historical periods. The investigation of Swift's reception throughout various global regions is a promising avenue for scholarly inquiry. A recent study undertaken by Al-Khawaldeh and Elayan (2023) examined the reception of Jonathan Swift's works in the Arab world.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Shireen Alkurdi was responsible for data collection and initial draft. Dr. Abdelhameed Al Awabdeh was responsible for study design and revising. Dr. Raed Al-Ramahi drafted the manuscript and revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study.

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