A LETTER OF ADVICE TO A YOUNG POET:

A REAPPRAISAL

A Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet," long thought to have been written by Jonathan Swift, has become a problem piece. Critics have been uneasy about it for many different reasons. They notice its great similarity to A Tale of a Tub, yet its lack of brilliance and gusto in comparison to that work. They are confused about the strong appearance of Sir Philip Sidney in an 18th century satire. They are bothered by the Letter's apparent pointlessness, by its seeming disintegration at the end, and by some peculiar mannerisms of its style, which have been called un-Swiftian. Although no critic has put a name to it, we can infer that the critics' feelings of uneasiness really result from their uncertainty about the relation between form and idea in the satire.

In fact, this problem with form and idea so bothered Herbert Davis, that in his 1948 edition of Swift's Irish Tracts (1720-23) he consigns the Letter to an appendix because he strongly suspected that it was written by an imitator.[1] His action was not based on internal evidence alone; he also notes in his Introduction that there is no external evidence to prove that Swift actually wrote the Letter. However, a large part of his defense for his action is based both on his discovery in the Letter of what he thinks are un-Swiftian locutions and on his opinion that the last part of the Letter is uneven and unfinished.

Paul Fussell, in his article "Speaker and Style in 'A Letter

of Advice to a Young Poet (1721)' and the Problem of Attribution,"[2] challenges the validity of Davis' argument. Fussell's major objection to Davis' observations is that "it is dangerous to generalize about Swift's 'own' style" because with the exception of "his letters, some of his poems, the sermons, and the straight works like 'A Proposal for Correcting . . . the English Tongue,' Swift has no style at all; he commands instead a whole stable of dramatic styles, each employed by a specific spokesman (usually the primary butt of the satire) for a unique satiric occasion."[3] Since Fussell's observation is one which any student of Swift will accept, the part of Davis' argument which is based on un-Swiftian locutions is automatically in serious danger, even before the Letter itself is examined. As Fussell points out, to argue on the basis of Swift's "own" style is ". . . to argue wide of the point. For by now it has become a commonplace that Swift and his comic speakers are almost wholly distinct in both intention and style."[4]

Fussell then proposes that the speaker's style in the Letter "constitutes a parody of those turgidities and redundancies [of pre-Restoration prose style] excoriated both by Swift and the Royal Society."[5] On the basis of his interpretation, coupled with other internal evidence, he comes to the conclusion that the Letter was surely written by Swift, the master parodist. His argument seems convincing, and his theory inviting, for if the style is parodic many problems concerning the relationship between form and content in the satire disappear. However, after closer

investigation into his theory and its implications, I hesitate to embrace them fully.

There seems to be no doubt that the Letter contains much that is characteristic of 17th century prose; moreover, it seems very likely that the satirist does attempt to parody those characteristics through prose style. Of any theory to account for the stylistic mysteries in the Letter, I find Fussell's the most plausible. I differ with him on one major point, however. Whereas Fussell believes that the stylistic parody is successful, indeed "brilliant," I, on the contrary, believe that if stylistic parody does exist in the Letter, it is unsuccessful. The main purpose of this paper is to show why I think the parody fails and to indicate how my variance with Fussell's interpretation results in an attitude opposite to his with respect to the question of attribution.

Although my stated purpose in this paper is to show that the author does not successfully satirize stylistic mannerisms of pre-Restoration prose, I do not mean to give the impression that the satire fails as a whole. Quite to the contrary, the Letter contains some brilliant and quite effective pieces of satire. For the most part, the author succeeds well in ridiculing the poetic practices and notions of the Moderns, with particular aim at the work of both contemporary Dublin poets and the Metaphysical poets of the previous century. He even more successfully satirizes the utilitarian ideal that resulted from Bacon's new scientific method.

But despite the general effectiveness of the satire, the Letter is not a unified work of art. Point of view, tone, and

ironic method are all inconsistent in places. In addition, if the parody is unsuccessful, as I hope to demonstrate, the piece is even more an artistic failure. For the most part, Fussell skirts around the Letter's serious organic difficulties by resting too heavily on a notion that the Letter is unfinished. But there is no evidence to support such an idea, except that the Letter is badly written in places. We must conclude that Fussell is kindly giving the author the benefit of the doubt.

In this paper I will test Fussell's theory against the satire in order to demonstrate its inadequacy as a final solution to the stylistic difficulties of the Letter. I do not intend to neglect the positive value of his theory, however. Besides his insight about parody, which may prove to be of some real value, he has contributed much toward a better understanding of the satire, especially in regard to the satirist's mask or persona.

So that we may gain some perspective on the significance of Fussell's treatment of the Letter, I will first review what some other critics have said about the satire, with primary focus on Davis' argument in favor of the Letter having been written in whole or in part by an imitator. In part II I discuss Fussell's treatment of the persona. Part III, in which I set out the standards by which we are to judge whether or not the Letter is a successful stylistic parody, is in preparation for the main body of the paper. Parts IV-VII, then, are devoted to testing Fussell's theory by these standards, and to pointing out its strengths and

defects. To facilitate discussion of his theory, I divide what he calls "style" into three categories: form, stylistic mannerisms, and methods of argument. My conclusions are that the only successful parodic elements in the satire are the persona's loose, rambling, lengthy sentences, and his methods of argument, which are stock Swiftian parodic techniques.

In part VII I address myself to Fussell's suggestion that the appearance of Sir Philip Sidney in the satire is connected with Joseph Addison's ballad criticism. Finally, I discuss briefly the problem of attribution. My conjecture is that the Letter is too unskillfully written to have been created by Swift. Besides the fact that it appears to be an attempt at parody that fails, it presents so many organic problems that I find it hard to believe that Swift could have written it.

I.

Professor Herbert Davis, editing Swift's Irish Tracts (1720-23) in 1948, noted in his Introduction that there was no documentary proof that "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet" was actually written by Swift. The Letter, signed E. F. and dated December 1, 1720, was first published in Dublin in 1721. Shortly afterwards it was reprinted in London with the name "J. Swift" affixed to the title page. As far as Davis knows, no evidence or explanation was provided in support of this attribution of authorship, but the Letter has continued to be published under Swift's name. Davis himself reprints it in his IXth volume of Swift's Prose Works, but he assigns it to an appendix because of its questionable nature.

In defense of his suspicions concerning proper attribution, Davis points out that early in 1720 J. Hyde, the Dublin publisher of the Letter, had printed in Dublin a piece entitled "The Right of Precedence between Physicians and Civilians Enquir'd into." This piece, reprinted in London four times that year by Curll, was also attributed to Swift. It was accepted as Swift's work by later editors until the discovery of Swift's letters to Ford. In a letter of April 4, 1720, Swift writes that some "humersom Gentleman" is writing pieces that are being mistaken for his. "There is one about Precedence of Doctors, we do not know who writt it; it is a very crude Piece, though not quite so low as some others. This I hear is likewise a present of Curl to me."[6]

That Hyde printed the Letter in 1721 and that it was reprinted in London and included in the fourth edition of Swift's Miscellanies printed by Curll in 1722 is suspicious to Davis. Furthermore, he notices some slight similarities between the Letter and the piece known to be an imitation:

> There is no doubt that it is a better piece of work than the Right of Precedence. If it was not written by Swift it is in part a good if not brilliant imitation by a writer who has studied carefully the Letter to a Young Clergyman, and has read with attention and appreciation the Digressions in A Tale of a Tub. I cannot feel sure that the "humersom gentleman" could have done it, and yet a careful comparison of the Right of Precedence and the Letter to a Young Poet reveals certain trivial resemblances--e.g., the use of the phrase "But to proceed" to start a new paragraph, only one example of a number of various devices to hook his arguments together; a trick entirely unlike Swift of peppering his pages with parentheses such as "I will take upon me to say," "I will say this much," "as I was saying," "Now I say," "And truly," "Seriously then," "I say, these things considered," and finally a heavy use of adjectives and a tendency to overwork a figure or even indulge in such play as this--"To these devote your spare hours, or rather spare all your hours to them." The latter part of the Letter to a

> Young Poet is particularly uneven and unfinished; for instance, in the last dozen pages, in addition to the use of the phrases "Another point," "Once more," and "To conclude," the word "lastly" occurs five times. Many things have to be explained before we can accept the Letter to a Young Poet as authentic.[7]

Harold Williams, in his review of Davis' IXth volume, supports Davis' exclusion of the Letter from his edition proper. In fact, he seems even more convinced than Davis of the questionability of its authorship. Williams writes:

> Although witty, amusing, and brilliantly well written, a close examination fosters doubt. In the earlier part the resemblance to Swift's manner is remarkably close, but the imitation, if such it be, is not sustained. On external and internal evidence it is more than improbable that it came from Swift's hand. Possibly someone may have enjoyed the advantage of continuing an unfinished fragment; or may have set himself, certainly with unexcelled success, to imitate Swift, and then, wearying of his task, desisted.[8]

Davis' decision to exclude the Letter from his edition proper has obviously influenced commentaries on Swift written after the publication of the IXth volume, especially since Williams gave Davis his full support. Any critic concerned with Swift's poetics would naturally want to use the Letter as a basic source of

material for such a study, since it is by far the longest piece about poetry ever attributed to Swift. But many recent critics choose to ignore the Letter entirely and others speak of it hesitantly, uncertain whether what they say about it is meaningful in connection with Swift. Moreover, Davis' argument causes the reader of pre-1948 Swift criticism to approach with scepticism any comment made on Swift's poetics that is in any way based on the Letter.

Actually, not much criticism was written on the Letter until recently. Most editors simply describe it cursorily in their Introductions. William Alfred Eddy, for example, in his Introduction to the Letter, remarks that one need not "plough through the notes of the Dunciad, nor . . . exhume the bones of Bentley and Curll" in order to understand the Grub Street "commercial battle of the books" waged during the time of Swift and Pope. "In this amusing satire," he says, "Swift has sketched for us the tricks by which scribblers won publishers and readers without invoking the aid of the Muses."[9] Such a comment is more or less typical of descriptive introductory notes to the satire.

In more serious criticism, such as the 1936 edition of Ricardo Quintana's The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift, the author, interested in Swift's view of reason and the imagination, uses the Letter as evidence for Swift's poetics. "For all its ironical indirection," he suggests, "the Letter tells us a great deal about Swift's positive doctrines of poetry--more, in fact, than can be gathered from any one of his other compositions."[10] Quintana then

goes on to use the Letter as support for his earlier observations about Swift's hostility to poetic imagination and his quarrels with the Sidneyan school of thought over the meaning of artistic genius. About the Letter itself, Quintana remarks that ". . . the reader will find little which he has not already encountered in the author's earlier writings. The attack on poetic enthusiasm and the ridicule of those who would achieve unusual knowledge through the use of abstracts, summaries and indexes carry one back to A Tale of a Tub and The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, while the derisive treatment of irreligious wits and of writers in constant search of the eccentric calls to mind any number of earlier passages. Yet the Letter to a Young Poet is sui generis . . . it is . . . distinguished by the texture of its satire and irony, for it is a grave discourse, evenly modulated, but with crushing irony lurking in every phrase."[11]

I have quoted Quintana at some length in order to show how an important critic of Swift makes use of the Letter. Although he does not rely on it for his major discussion of Swift's view of reason and the imagination, he does use it to show how Swift applied his view to the theory of poetry. If the Letter is not Swift's, attempts to formulate Swift's poetics will have to depend much more on speculation.

In his 1953 revision of The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift, Quintana remarks in his introductory notes that Davis' introduction to his IXth volume raises a real question about the authorship of the Letter, and he directs the reader to take this into account.[12]

Immediately, then, Quintana's comments on the Letter in relation to Swift's poetics become suspect. In his next book on Swift, Swift, an Introduction, written in 1955, Quintana's only comment on the Letter is this: "A third Letter--this of Advice to a Young Poet--made its appearance in Dublin in 1721, and although signed with the initials E. F. has generally passed as Swift's work. There is now, however, considerable doubt as to its authorship. The irony is in the Dean's manner, and the narrowing of the term poetry to the productions of modern wits of questionable faith and morals seems to be an echo of A Tale of a Tub."[13] Quintana realizes that for the time being, at least, it is no longer wise to say much else about the satire.

Others of Swift's post-1948 critics, however, such as J. Middleton Murry and John Bullitt, seem ignorant of Davis' argument altogether. Murry finds the Letter ". . . an unsatisfactory piece . . . admirable in form, yet in substance surprisingly pointless."[14] He sees its main purpose--if, he says, that purpose is "to deride the empty facility of contemporary Dublin poetry"--"hopelessly entangled by constant ridicule of Sidney's Defense of Poesie." Moreover, he finds parts of it strongly reminiscent of A Tale of a Tub and of An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity, ". . . yet so lacking in the verve and gusto of the originals that they read like clever imitations of Swift. . . ." But, instead of acknowledging that they might very well be imitations, he accounts for the peculiarity of these parts by saying that perhaps ". . . Swift, after his years of silence, was engaged in writing himself in, and that

it was a detached exercise in an older manner." Thus Murry leads the reader away from any scepticism concerning the Letter's authorship. In view of the fact that Davis' IXth volume had been out for six years before the publication of Murry's book, I find Murry's ignorance of the matter inexcusable.

Similarly John Bullitt, in his book Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire, discusses the Letter as if there were no doubt that it was written by Swift.[15] Bullitt uses parts of the Letter for examples of Swift's various satiric techniques. Fortunately, he bases none of his theories on the Letter alone; he merely uses it along with other works known to be Swift's in his efforts to demonstrate satiric methods. The way Bullitt uses the Letter--a way which is neither interesting nor enlightening--is not my concern here. My criticism of him is the same as my criticism of Murry: by not recognizing that there is a question of attribution, both critics are misleading their readers. In view of Davis' arguments, it would have been more appropriate for them either to act as Quintana does and reserve comment until the question is in some way settled, or to act as does William Ewald and criticise the Letter with full awareness that if it is not in fact Swift's then the criticism is meaningless in relation to Swift.

Ewald, author of The Masks of Jonathan Swift, states early in his discussion of the Letter that "Dr. Herbert Davis has pointed out the very real difficulty of proving that Swift wrote the Letter."[16] He justifies his discussion of the Letter by saying: "But whether he wrote it or not, the handling of the persona in

it deserves some attention, either as an instance of Swift's own technique or as an example of the work of a contemporary who must have understood and imitated Swift's methods."[17] He then proceeds to discuss the persona, inferring Swift's positive views on poetry through the distortions of his persona. Ewald ends his comments on the Letter with this paragraph:

> All these conclusions about Swift's theory of poetry fall to the ground if he did not write the Letter. If he is the author of it, we have not only useful information about his attitude toward poetry but also evidence that he had not lost interest in his earlier ways of using a mask. If Swift is not the author, there was someone else--probably in Dublin--who had not only mastered some of the devices in A Tale of a Tub and An Argument Against Abolishing Christianity, but who could also anticipate (less skilfully, of course) some of those in A Modest Proposal.[18]

Thus he acknowledges that the value of his discussion of the Letter is uncertain until the question of attribution is settled.

II.

Concerning the problem of attribution, Fussell says only that the Letter is "the work of a consummately skilled dramatic parodist . . . so like Swift in every respect and in every technical habit that it is incredible that Swift was not the author of the piece."[19] Having no conclusive evidence with which to prove that the Letter was written by Swift, Fussell tries his best to weaken the part of Davis' argument which is based on internal evidence. The first point in his reply to Davis is well taken. He reminds Davis that ". . . by now it has become a commonplace that Swift and his comic speakers are almost wholly distinct in both intention and style."[20] So the presence of un-Swiftian elements in a satire thought to be written by Swift proves nothing, according to Fussell, except that there is a good chance that Swift is hiding behind a mask.

Fussell then suggests that even though the satire is imperfect in form, one can make a good case for the intentional use of those un-Swiftian elements pointed out by Davis. Focussing on the fictive speaker of the Letter, Fussell observes that the satirist takes pains to give us strong hints concerning the speaker's or persona's character. The speaker tells us that he is old and that he wears spectacles and composes with a shaking hand. His consciousness is full of Sidney's Defense of Poesie, which he treats reverentially--in fact, as quite the last word on the subject. By wistfully lamenting the present disuse of some "little plays" (e.g., Crambo, What is it like) in fashion when he was young, the

speaker "exhibits an almost pathetic awareness of being quite out of fashion."[21]

Fussell believes that these hints concerning the speaker's character are only the more obvious ones. He directs us to the speaker's style--to his "strained metaphors, his puns and turns, his breathless suspensions, his quaint rambling digressions, his repetitions, and his old-fashioned 'Forsooth'"--which he claims makes the speaker's character more real.[22] All these hints put together show us that the persona is designed by the satirist to be "a quaint and almost pitiful 'humorsome' survival from the pre-Restoration 17th century."[23] He is a sort of "literary Polonius of the Sir Thomas Browne and Robert Burton school."[24] Fussell's main point, though, is that the persona's style not only helps to define his character, but that it is intentionally constructed by the satirist as parody of some rhetorical practices of 17th century prose. "It is as if this quasi-Struldbrug has become peevish over the stylistic ideals of the new age and lusts to restore to writing all its old pre-Restoration luxuriance and disorder. And his style (like that of the 'author' of the Tale of a Tub digressions) provides ample illustration of his own ideals in action."[25]

Contrary to Williams' view that the gradual stylistic decay near the end of the Letter is evidence of the author's weariness with his task, Fussell suggests that the style at the end of the Letter contains perhaps the most brilliant element of parody. It goes to pieces because of the persona's "enthusiasm and warm conviction of his own brilliance."[26] The persona, he claims, is

"wrought to an O Altitudo" as he prepares to terminate his letter. Fussell goes on to discuss the Swiftian elements he finds in the satire, but I propose to defer consideration of this phase of his argument. At present I wish to comment on his ideas about the persona and about the Letter as a parody of style and form.

Fussell has led us to a better understanding of the persona than has any other critic to date. He has taken up many hints given us by the author and with them he has sketched a dramatic figure. But he has not incorporated into the figure all the hints given to us. I find two additional ones, one of which embellishes our present image of the persona, and the other of which calls that image into doubt. The first is found near the end of the Letter where, in a rush of enthusiasm, the "author" shows his true hand: "Nor shall I ever be at ease, till this Project of mine (for which I am heartily thankful to myself) shall be reduced to practice."[27] We see that the "author" is throughout the satire an enthusiastic projector. This additional knowledge about the persona adds to his character all that we associate with the various projectors created by Swift, most of whom profess to be led to their extravagant and mechanical schemes by devotion to their country and concern for the improvement of mankind. To see the persona as a projector is still to see him as Fussell does--a "superannuated criticaster"[28] who is carried away by his enthusiasm over his own brilliant ideas.

What is not compatible with Fussell's view of the persona, however, is the persona's use of scurrilous imagery in section two of the Letter. In section one, that of advice to the young poet,

he proposes the use of anything the poet can get his hands on which will facilitate quick, easy, and profitable poetical composition, whether it be religion, classical learning, abridgements, indexes, parlor games, or old clothes. The author's naive and eager manner throughout this section is quite in keeping with Fussell's description of him as "quaint and almost pitiful." But with section two, the proposal for the encouragement of poetry in Ireland, the persona's character changes. His many scurrilous images and references make the adjectives "quaint" and "pitiful" quite inappropriate.

Fussell does not entirely ignore the change of tone that begins with section two, but he slights its importance with respect to the persona's character. Were the tone inconsistent in but a few places, perhaps it would be enough for Fussell to note (as he does in his concluding paragraph) that the tone is inconsistent probably because the satire is unfinished. Indeed, this does appear to be the case in section one, where the satirist removes his mask a few times to interject a sarcastic comment, quite out of keeping with his usual satiric method of inverted irony. Such brief and infrequent slips do little to damage our picture of the persona.

But the tone of the piece changes abruptly in section two, and the change is sustained throughout half of the section by the persona's references to such things as bum-fodder, corrupted air (caused by "poetical vapours"), filth and excrementious productions, the prostitutes of Rome and Amsterdam, and so forth. Such references are entirely out of keeping with our former image of a naive and foolish old man who speaks of parlor games and such.

In fact, the satirist seems to have consciously kept all degrading imagery out of section one. For example, the persona compares consulting an index to reading books Hebraically, to eating lobster tails, and to the robbing of men by cunning thieves, who "cut off the Portmanteau from behind, without staying to dive into the Pockets of the Owner" (p. 334). The reader will remember the first two of these metaphors from Swift's A Tale of a Tub and The Battle of the Books, both of which are sources for many ideas and images in the Letter. Accompanying these images in the Tale are others of a clearly scatological nature which, because of their witty effect, the satirist would certainly have incorporated in the Letter had he thought them appropriate. To attribute the definite change in tone in the Letter to the work's unfinished state is to obscure the real problems which this inconsistency presents.

That the character of the persona is as inconsistent as I have shown has no effect on Fussell's main thesis--that the Letter is a stylistic parody. Our awareness of the prolonged change of tone does, however, detract from the neatness and accuracy of Fussell's character sketch. Furthermore, it revives old suspicions that the Letter was not written by Swift alone or perhaps by Swift at all. For Fussell's opinion that the Letter was written by Swift depends on his claim that it is a successful stylistic parody. He is inclined to attribute it to Swift because he regards it as a piece so skillfully written that it is incredible to think that anyone other than Swift, the master of dramatic parody, could have created it. But the inconsistency I have suggested undermines Fussell's

evaluation of the Letter and the main basis for his attribution of it to Swift. For it means that the Letter does not enjoy organic unity, that its form and content are not compatible. And if the piece is seriously defective in this way, its perfection cannot be cited as evidence for Swift's authorship.

III.

I wish to address myself now to Fussell's theory that the Letter is a stylistic parody. In order to test this theory, I shall set forth certain generally accepted standards for parody, and in terms of these I shall consider whether or not the Letter is in fact a parody and, if so, whether or not it is successful.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines parody as follows:

> A composition in prose or verse in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as to make them appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects; an imitation of a work more or less closely modelled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect.

The first of these definitions characterises Pope's method of ridicule in "The Rape of the Lock" and Swift's in "A Meditation upon a Broomstick." Pope's poem parodies the epic by applying the form and diction of the epic to a trivial subject. Swift's short piece parodies the solemnity and gravity of Robert Boyle's "heavenly meditations" in the same manner. But the second of the OED's definitions is more to our purpose. Successful parody can also be achieved by faithful imitation of the object of ridicule, "but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect."

How does the parodist produce a ridiculous effect? We can best discover this by examining a successful parody of prose style. A good example of such a parody is Max Beerbohm's parody of Henry James, "The Mote in the Middle Distance." Into four pages, Beerbohm compresses just about all that is simultaneously lovable and irritating in James' style. He begins characteristically, in media res: the main character is in a state of introspection about his reaction to something which is not revealed to us until the end of the piece. Meanwhile we are left to wade through his endless questioning, modifying, qualifying probes into perceptions, actions, reactions and, of course, the motivations behind them. In a single paragraph, we find the essence of James' style:

> It occurred to him as befitting Eva's remoteness, which was a part of Eva's magnificence, that her voice emerged somewhat muffled by the bed clothes. She was ever, indeed, the most telephonic of her sex. In talking to Eva you always had, as it were, your lips to the receiver. If you didn't try to meet her fine eyes, it was that you simply couldn't hope to: there were too many dark, too many buzzing and bewildering and all frankly not negotiable leagues in between. Snatches of other voices seemed often to intertrude themselves in the parley; and your loyal effort not to overhear these was complicated by your fear of missing what Eva might be twittering. "Oh, you certainly haven't, my dear, the trick of

> propinquity!" was a thrust she had once parried by saying that, in that case, he hadn't--to which his unspoken rejoinder that she had caught her tone from the peevish young women at the Central seemed to him (if not perhaps in the last, certainly in the last but one, analysis) to lack finality. With Eva, he had found, it was always safest to "ring off." It was with a certain sense of his rashness in the matter, therefore, that he now, with an air of feverishly "holding the line," said, "Oh, as to that!"[29]

They are all present: the long and involved sentences, the extended metaphors, the constructions split by qualifiers, the abstract diction, the obscure references, and the more obscure speeches. No four of James' pages read like the four which comprise the parody. Not a sentence, or even a clause of Beerbohm's slips by without holding something peculiarly Jamesian in it. The key to Beerbohm's success is his skillful compression and exaggeration of James' stylistic mannerisms.

From this analysis of Beerbohm's parody arises a general standard for successful parody. If the parodist chooses to ridicule through style alone, rather than to apply a faithful imitation of the parodee's style to a ludicrously inappropriate subject, he must employ compression and quantitative exaggeration in his imitation. If he has an acute eye with which to catch the salient and peculiar characteristics of the parodee's style, and a skilled comic sense with which to judge what intensity of compression and exaggeration

is needed for ridicule, he has the makings of a successful parodist. I shall attempt to demonstrate that the author of "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet" does attempt to parody through his persona's style, as Fussell suggests, but that the parody fails, for the most part, to ridicule.

To facilitate the examination of Fussell's theory, I shall divide all that he calls "style" into three separate categories: form, stylistic mannerisms, and methods of argument. By "form" I shall mean the skeletal structure or organization of the Letter. In this category I place the order of topics discussed, transitions from topic to topic, and digressions. The category of stylistic mannerisms comprises, for the most part, Davis' list of un-Swiftian locutions. Included in this category are the "author's" puns and turns, his parentheses, and his loose sentence construction. In the category of methods of argument I include mock logic, strained metaphors, and distortions of classical metaphors and proverbs.

IV.

The parodic elements which Fussell finds in the form of the essay are (1) the quaint digressions and (2) the disintegration of the Letter near the end. Let us look into the structure of the Letter in order to determine the extent of its coherence and digressiveness. We can see by the opening paragraph that the persona proposes to cover two major topics: (1) the narrowness of the young man's present financial circumstances, and (2) the "great use of Poetry to Mankind and Society and in every Employment of life"(p. 327). Each topic makes up a section of the Letter. The persona's advice to the young poet, then, centers around his interest in improving the young man's financial condition. The advisor is not interested so much in what is good poetry as in what he thinks is financially successful poetry--i.e., what will sell in Grub Street. The point of section one of the Letter is that the poet will earn money by his compositions if he will follow the many practices and notions of the Moderns that the "author" lists and discusses for him.

Section one deals with two subtopics: Some prescriptions for successful poetical composition, and advice on the manner of composing and choice of subjects. The first subtopic itself divides into several parts--all of those practices and notions of the Moderns which the young poet will find of use to his "Profession and Business." That is, if he will use religion and the Scriptures

as meat for his wit; if he will "produce only what he can find within himself" (p. 333) and turn to the ancients only to pick their pockets and to pillage them; if he will take advantage of abstracts, abridgements, summaries, indexes, etc.--all quick and easy methods for "being very learned with little or no Reading" (p. 334); if he will seriously play the parlor games in fashion during the pre-Restoration era--Crambo, Pictures and Mottos, What is it like, and others, in order to facilitate the ease of creating, respectively, rhyme, images and devices, and similes (which "bring things to a likeness, which have not the least possible conformity in Nature . . ." [p. 336])--if he will follow "these few and easy Prescriptions, [then] (with the help of a good Genius) 'tis possible he may in a short time arrive at the accomplishments of a Poet and Shine in that character" (p. 337).

From here he passes to the next topic: the manner of composing and choice of subjects, about which he gives the poet "some short Hints." He entreats the young man to write only in number and verse, to invoke the Muse at the beginning of his poem, and to introduce the poem by a "quaint motto" of Greek or Latin, in order to show off his learning and to bring him good luck. Finally, he recommends that the poet overflow with words and epithets, "contrary to the practice of some few out-of-the-way Writers who use a natural and concise Expression. . . ." (p. 339). He cautions the poet to wear his worst clothes, in the manner of other poets.

The persona's few hints on the choice of subjects begin with advising the young man to avoid writing his first poem in

panegyrick, since it is difficult to write and will make him unpopular.[30] He then recommends a piece of libel, lampoon, or satire for a starter, for "once kick the World and the World and you will live together at a reasonable good Understanding" (p. 339). With a final caution to the poet to "hire out [his] Pen, to a party which will afford [him] both Pay and Protection" (p. 340), and to publish his works modestly and only at a friend's violent persistence, the advisor ends his section of advice to the poet.

Section one is well ordered. The persona keeps to his general theme, and passes easily from one subtopic to another. His point of view is consistently utilitarian and his imagery is, accordingly, commercial and mechanical. I find only two digressions in this section, and they are brief and well controlled. The first follows the "author's" discussion of indexes, where he pauses to praise "a late painful and judicious Editor of the Classicks, who has labour'd in that new way with exceeding Felicity . . . for whoever shortens a Road is a Benefactor to the Publick, and to every Person who has Occasion to travel that Way" (p. 334). With the transition, "But to proceed," the "author" returns to the work at hand and takes up discussion of the "little plays" (parlor games) which the poet will find useful to his composition.

The second digression follows his recommendation that the poet engage in Crambo, a game "of extraordinary Use to good Rhiming, and Rhiming is what I have ever accounted the very essential of a good Poet" (p. 335). The persona stops to commend "a very

ingenious Youth of this Town [who] is now upon the useful Design of bestowing Rhime upon Milton's Paradise Lost" (p. 335).

Granted that the persona has digressed, do these digressions ridicule those frequent and lengthy digressions found in some 17th century prose works? Fussell suggests that the persona is of the school of Robert Burton and Thomas Browne.[31] If we look at Burton's "Democritus to the Reader" we see digressions so lengthy and rambling that they would better serve as parody of the persona's digressions than the other way around.[32] With the possible exception of the long digression in section two, yet to be discussed, the digressions in the Letter lack both quantitative and qualitative exaggeration. There are too few of them, and they are not long-winded expatiations on several subjects having little to do with the topic at hand, as are Burton's. The satirist gives the reader no special hint to look at the digressions in the Letter as anything other than short steps aside.

In his opening paragraph of section two, the persona proposes that poetry be encouraged in Ireland because of the great number of "Monstrous WITS" and "prodigious geniuses" in the poetic way in that country, and because of the many uses of poetry. To illustrate these uses, he observes that poetry is of great benefit to the country's trade, since "our Linnen-Manufacture is advanced by the great Waste of Paper made by our present set of Poets" (p. 341). In addition, poets keep the nation in bum-fodder. The "author" then proceeds to describe the following projects, all of which are

related to the main topic of the section--the encouragement of poetry in Ireland: 1) that a Grub-street be erected in Dublin; 2) that the Play-House be encouraged; 3) that poetry may be a sharer in the proposed Bank of Ireland; 4) that a Corporation of Poets be set up; 5) that there be a poet Laureate, a professor of poetry, a city bard, a poet in fee for every Corporation, Parish, and Ward, and lastly, a poet retained as a domestic in every household.

The exposition of these projects is ordered more by the author's increasing excitement over them, than by any logical device. As they are revealed, we see that the projects become more elaborate and less plausible. For example, it is reasonable (given the "author's" point of view) for him to propose that a Grub-street be erected in Dublin to serve as a "common Drain" for the "Poetical Vapours" infecting the air, as a housing place for "Authors, Supervisors, Presses, Printers, Hawkers, Shops . . . and every other Impliment and Circumstance of Wit . . ." (p. 342), and "as a safe Repository for our BEST Productions. . . ." (p. 342). But to propose that a poet be retained in every family as one of the domestics is extreme and out of proportion (p. 345).

To say that the projects are arranged in an order of increasing implausibility is still to say that they have an order. The only project which does not conform to this order is the one having to do with the Play-house, which is clearly digressive. The persona makes a weak attempt to tie it in with the rest of his material by saying that the encouragement of the Play-house has "an immediate

influence on the Poetry of the Kingdom; as a good Market improves the Tillage of the Neighboring Country and enriches the Ploughman. . . ." (p. 343). But he strays immediately to "the vast Benefit of a Play-House to our City and Nation, "which replaces poetry as the topic of the digression. The playhouse serves as a school for young people in which they "get rid of Natural Prejudices, especially Religion and Modesty." There they learn to swear, to curse, and to lie. Swearing, in turn, ". . . might with Management be of wonderful Advantage to the Nation, as a Projector of the Swearer's Bank has prov'd at large" (p. 343). (The reader will recall that in the Swearer's Bank proposal, a tract attributed to Swift and his friends, a projector suggests that a revenue be placed on swearing and that the proceeds from that revenue form Parliamentary security for the proposed Bank of Ireland.) Finally, the play-house, the seminary of the corruptions of the age, supports the pulpit, by providing topics for sermons. The "author" digresses further to commend the "original Genius" who has constructed a model for a new Play-House in Dublin. Perhaps, he suggests, if the government were to give this man money for his project, he might also improve "our Gaming Ordinaries . . . Lotteries . . . Bear-Gardens, Cock-Pits . . . and whatever else concerns the elegant Divertisements of this Town" (p. 343).

Now this digression is the only one in the satire which rings of the 17th century digression. Straying from the topic at hand, it wanders and meanders from the play-house to swearing, to the pulpit, and finally to various forms of entertainment. Were all

the digressions in the satire of this nature, I would be inclined to agree with Fussell that they are parodies of 17th century digressions. But, since this is the only faithful imitation of 17th century digressions, I do not regard the digressive nature of the Letter as a successful element of parody. In fact, I am not certain that the digressions are meant for parody at all.

Something else about these digressions supports my uncertainty. It is the digressions which account for much of the topical material in the satire. The satirist takes advantage of each one to refer to a particular person who is acting out something which the persona heartily recommends or praises to the young poet. For example, after recommending the use of indexes, the persona digresses to praise "a late painful and judicious Editor of the classics, who has laboured in that new way with exceeding Felicity." Similarly, after telling the young poet that ". . . Rhiming is . . . the very essential of a good Poet," he cites a young man who is in the process of bestowing rhyme upon Milton's Paradise Lost. Such personal references form the center of each digression.

Now, since the satirist uses his persona's digressions to insert attacks of a more topical and personal nature than those which compose most of the satire, the digressions (except for the playhouse digression) have a raison d'etre aside from that supposed by Fussell. Each digression narrows a broad attack down to a particular individual. Particularizing the object of satire lends it a quality of realism and a sense of immediacy. This is not to say that the satirist could not use the digressions both for

particularizing his attacks and for purposes of parody, but that he did not necessarily have parody in mind when he wrote in the digressions.

Let us turn now to the second element of parody which Fussell finds in the Letter. The Letter's disintegration at the end is, to Fussell, "one of the most masterly things about the work." He sees the persona "wrought to an O Altitudo" by his enthusiasm over the brilliance of his own words. In this way, Fussell accounts for the many uses of "lastly" and other phrases of conclusion near the end. He agrees with Davis that they give the latter part of the Letter a "particularly uneven and unfinished quality," but contrary to both Davis' and Williams' conclusion that the gradual stylistic decay is evidence of the author's weariness with his task, Fussell believes that the satirist's management of his speaker's style near the end is quite consciously and brilliantly designed.

Now the several uses of "lastly" do not concern me as much as they do Davis and Fussell. Each "lastly" is used to terminate a list the "author" has made. For example, the first use of the word appears early in the satire at the end of a string of metaphors used by the persona to convince the young poet of the worth of indexes (p. 334). The next terminates the "author's" "few and easy prescriptions" for poetical composition, and prepares the way for his discussion of manner of composing and choice of subjects (p. 337). The remaining two uses of "lastly" are located in section two, and serve the same function as the others: the first terminates the

play-house digression (p. 343), in which the persona gives several reasons for the encouragement of the play-house, and the final "lastly" brings to an end a series of questions pertaining to prospective civic and domestic positions for poets.

So, each use of "lastly" can be accounted for by its natural position at the end of a series. That there are so many is perhaps an unfavorable comment on the number of things discussed in the satire. But they are interspersed throughout the satire and not grouped together at the end (as the critics would have us believe). And since they can be accounted for in a natural way, they are not necessarily parodic elements or signs that the satire is falling to pieces. They lack the necessary element of quantitative exaggeration which must be present in order to consider them successfully parodic, especially since Swift is known to employ the term "lastly" often in his serious writing.[33]

Davis cites the phrases "another point," "once more," and "to conclude" as evidence for his conclusion that the Letter disintegrates at the end. Although he does not explicitly say so, we infer that he considers these phrases to be concluding phrases and that he is bothered by the unnecessary appearance of so many of them at the end.

Now, since I do not consider the persona's use of "lastly" to be a sign that he necessarily intends to conclude the Letter, I do not find in the Letter an overabundance of concluding phrases. "Another point" is neither an unnatural way to begin discussion of a subject, nor necessarily a concluding phrase (p. 342). I admit

that the use of "once more" (p. 344) and "to conclude" (p. 345) within a few hundred words of one another is unnecessarily reiterative, but such minor reiteration is not enough to warrant Davis' concern, and certainly not enough to create a ridiculous effect.

If all that I have said about the concluding pages of the satire is correct, then Fussell, Davis, and Williams are making too much of a little thing. Davis and Williams find what they think is the disintegrated state of the last part of the satire suggestive of an imitator at work. Fussell agrees that the satire falls apart at the end, but attributes its gradual disintegration, instead, to the hand of a master parodist who uses it to reveal the over-wrought intellectual state of the persona. I do not agree with either of these views. True, the satire is a bit rough at the end, but not to the extent of falling to pieces, and certainly not to the extent of rising to an O Altitudo.

As I understand the phrase, O Altitudo, it means a rising to lofty or sublime heights, usually associated with religious or mystical experiences.[34] Although I can imagine it applied figuratively to some secular experiences, they must be of extreme intensity or loftiness. Now the persona is excited by his utilitarian projects, and he does seem to show increasing enthusiasm over them as he reveals his various proposals. These become more elaborate and less plausible as he goes on, until a climax is reached in the suggestion that every political subdivision and finally every family keep a poet in fee. The persona's giddiness over his project is, indeed, a comment on his intellectual state and perhaps on the

state of all projectors. But it is no more; certainly it is not as transcendent as an O Altitudo. Unfortunately, I cannot produce an alternative theory to account for the state of section two, except to say that it is not as disheveled as it has been pictured. And what is disorderly about it cannot be accounted for by saying that the persona's state relieves him of the responsibility of writing in an orderly fashion.

V.

Let us now consider the persona's stylistic mannerisms. Davis notes that the Letter is peppered with such parentheses as "I will take upon me to say," "I will say thus much," "Now I say," and so on, which he believes is a "trick entirely unlike Swift" and thus evidence in favor of the Letter having been written by an imitator. My belief is that we can look at these parentheses as further attempts at stylistic parody, for they can be found in many 16th and 17th century prose works. But when we measure the parentheses against the standards for parody--exaggeration and distortion--we must conclude that they are not successfully parodic in the Letter. There are too few of them, and they are innocuous rather than ridiculous. My opinion of the plays and turns pointed out by Davis is the same. Besides the turn mentioned in his Introduction--"To these devote your Spare hours, or rather spare all your Hours to them" (p. 336)--I find one other: "Many are too Wise to be Poets, and others too much Poets to be Wise" (p. 332). The satire would have to abound with such mannerisms in order to ridicule them.

The "absurd and compulsive construction" which Fussell notes--"In a word, What I would be at (for I love to be plain in matters to my Country) is . . ."(p. 342)--is not so absurd in the light of the many split constructions scattered throughout Swift's body of work. What is humorous about the sentence is its reflection of the speaker's enthusiasm and loyalty to his country. But since

we know that he is a projector, we take this patriotic declaration as natural to his character.

What is absurd in the speaker's style is his loose, rambling sentence structure, reminiscent of the loose Senecan style popular in the early 17th century. For an example I have chosen the longest, most involved sentence in the text; one which I feel rises to successful parody:

> And surely, considering what Monstrous WITS in the Poetick way, do almost daily start up and surprize us in this Town; what prodigious Genius's we have here (of which I cou'd give Instances without number;) and withal of what great benefit it might be to our Trade to encourage that Science here, (for it is plain our Linnen-Manufacture is advanced by the great Waste of Paper made by our present set of Poets, not to mention other necessary Uses of the same to Shop-keepers, especially Grocers, Apothecaries, and Pastry-Cooks; and I might add, but for our Writers, the Nation wou'd in a little time, be utterly destitute of Bum-Fodder, and must of Necessity import the same from England and Holland, where they have it in great abundance, by the undefatigable Labour of their own Wits,) I say, these things consider'd, I am humbly of Opinion, it wou'd be worth the Care of our Governours to cherish Gentlemen of the Quill, and give them all proper Encouragement here (pp. 340, 41).

The piling up of clauses and the parenthetical insertions add up to that turgid, breathless quality which Fussell claims the speaker's style is meant to parody.

Such a sentence, and there are a few others of equal length and complexity, succeeds in ridiculing the loose sentence construction of some early 17th century writing.[35] It succeeds precisely because it exaggerates and compresses into a short space several characteristics of early 17th century prose which the 18th century found objectionable. Were the entire Letter composed of such ridiculous sentences, the parody might well have succeeded. But most of the stylistic mannerisms in the piece, viewed individually or as a body, fail to meet the standards of exaggeration and compression. They are not sufficiently heightened or intense to tell the reader that they are parodic.

Much of what I have to say about the persona's methods of argument has been said before by William B. Ewald. In The Masks of Jonathan Swift Ewald points out the use of mock-logic and ex-cathedra pronouncements, backed up by strained metaphors and often distorted classical quotations and proverbs in the "Tritical Essay," A Tale of a Tub, and "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet." When discussing these mannerisms with respect to the "Tritical Essay" and the Tale, Ewald observes that they are "mannerisms typical of whole groups of modern writers" and are used by the satirist to parody those writers.[36] In his discussion of the Letter, he observes that the same habit of mind characterizes both

the ridiculed author of the Tale and the ridiculed author of the Letter. Although he does not state explicitly that these mannerisms are parodic in the Letter, we can infer from his comparison that he considers them to be so.

Fussell, too, thinks of the strained metaphors, the mock-logic and the "mock-stupid literal interpretation of classical metaphors and proverbs" as parodic elements.[37] I agree that they are. In fact, they are stock Swiftian satiric methods for ridiculing the intellect of fools by imitating in an exaggerated manner the way a fool would develop an argument. Since the persona of the Letter is clearly characterized as a foolish old man who lectures on a subject for which he has no love and with which he has no skill, we fully expect him to argue in an elaborate and specious manner. Add to this the facts that his point of view is Modern, that his sympathies are entirely with Modern practices and notions, and that he is an enthusiastic projector, and his manner of argument seems quite appropriate.

That his manner of argument is a parody of foolish writing in general (Swift equates fools with Moderns) does not exclude the possibility of its being a parody of some particular mannerisms of pre-Restoration 17th century prose. We are told indirectly that the persona was a young boy during the age of the Metaphysical poets. In fact, he clearly advocates a return to the Metaphysical style when he encourages the young poet to play the game What is it Like, the chief end of which is "to supply the Fancy with a variety of Similes for all subjects [and to] teach you to bring things to

a likeness, which have not the least imaginable Conformity in Nature, which is properly Creation . . ." (p. 336).

As the persona continues, he illustrates his idea in practice by saying that a "good poet can no more be without a stock of Similes by him, than a Shoe-Maker without his Lasts." He shows a strong desire to extend the conceit further: "And here I cou'd more fully (and I long to do it) insist upon the wonderful Harmony and Resemblance between a Poet and a Shoe-Maker, in many circumstances common to both, such as . . ." (p. 336). Surely we are justified in calling this a parody both of Metaphysical conceits and of the conscious striving for conceits by the Metaphysical poets and by early 17th century writers in general. And by extension, we might call all of his elaborate conceits parodic, for the Letter abounds with them.

Here are a few examples:

> Of abstracts, abridgements, and summaries, etc.
> [They] have the same use with Burning-Glasses, to collect the diffused Rays of Wit and Learning in Authors, and make them point with Warmth and Quickness upon the Reader's Imagination (p. 334).
>
> Of Rhime:
> Wherefore, you are ever to try a good Poem as you would a sound Pipkin, and if it rings well upon the Knuckle, be sure there is no Flaw in it. Verse without Rhime is a Body without a Soul . . . or a Bell without a Clapper . . . (p. 335).

> Of the advantages of delivering a sermon in Blank verse:
>
> . . . When the matter of such Discourses is but meer Clay, or, as we usually call it, Sad Stuff, the Preacher, who can afford no better, wisely Molds, and Polishes, and Drys, and Washes this piece of Earthen-Ware, and then Bakes it with Poetick Fire; After which it will Ring like any Pancrock, and is a good Dish to set before common Guests . . . (p. 338).

Such elaborate figures constitute "proofs" of ex cathedra pronouncements made by the persona. Elsewhere he argues by literally interpreting classical quotations. For example, he misquotes Horace's "Vertaque provisam rem non invita sequentur" (When one has thought thoroughly on a subject, the words will follow.). The "author" quotes the line as "Verba non invita sequentur" (p. 338) and uses it for support of his argument for extravagant superfluity of words.[38] To clinch the argument, he supports it further with a conceit: "Words are but lackeys to sense and will dance attendance without wages or compulsion" (p. 338).

We have only to glance through Burton's "Democritus to the Reader" to see a similar manner of argument. Here is a typical passage from Burton:

> For the matter itself or method [of his writing], if it be faulty, consider I pray you that of Columella, Nihil perfectum, aut a singulari consummatum industria

> [nothing can be perfected or completed by the efforts of a single individual], no man can observe all, much is defective no doubt, may be justly taxed, altered, and avoided in Galen, Aristotle, those great masters. Boni venatoris (one holds) plures feras capere, non omnes, he is a good huntsman who can catch some, not all: I have done my endeavor. Besides, I dwell not in this study, Non hic sulcos ducimus, non hoc pulvere desudamus [I am not driving a furrow here, this is not my field of labor], I am but a smatterer, I confess, a stranger, here and there I pull a flower; I do easily grant, if a rigid censurer should criticise on this which I have writ, he should not find three sole faults, as Scaliger in Terence, but three hundred. . . . And although this be a sixth edition, in which I should have been more accurate, corrected all those former escapes, yet it was magni laboris opus, so difficult and tedious, that as carpenters do find out of experience, 'tis much better build a new sometimes than repair an old house. . . .[39]

In places, the persona of the Letter almost manages to out-Burton Burton. There is a strong possibility that the satirist had Burton or a writer of a similar style in mind when he constructed his persona's arguments, although the persona's style is not in direct imitation of Burton.

These methods of argument have an additional effect on the Letter. The author is continually taking off in flights of conceits, whose very movement up and out give the Letter an air of instability. Because each page contains many different metaphors, the persona seems to be speaking of a hundred different things at once, even though the skeletal structure of the Letter is relatively sound. Its loose, flighty, disordered quality seems to be due more to the methods of argument than to any other rhetorical element. Certainly this is one reason why Swift and the Royal Society, among others, rebelled against the use of so many metaphors and quotations in both prose and poetry.

Let me review briefly what supports the view that the methods of argument are parodic. Because there is an overabundance of classical quotations and strained metaphors in the Letter, and because the use of them is often absurd, they easily meet the standards of exaggeration and compression. Moreover, this element of parody arises naturally from the persona's ideas. He recommends that the poet "bring things to a likeness, which have not the least imaginable conformity in nature. . . ." The persona's conceits, therefore, provide illustration of his own ideas in action.

VI.

If the other stylistic elements discussed in the last section also arise out of the persona's ideas, the Letter will have more organic unity than has been supposed by Davis or Williams. We see that the persona "exhorts his reader not to 'stint your Self in Words and Epithets (which cost you nothing) contrary to the practice of some few out-of-the-way Writers, who use a natural and concise Expression. . . .'" (p. 338). Certainly one of the characteristics of the Letter is its loose, wordy style. As I remarked before, this effect is brought about both by the speaker's rambling sentence construction and by the multitude of metaphors scattered throughout the piece.

Some other ideas in the text which the persona puts into stylistic practice are his recommendations to the poet to improve upon the ancients and to keep a commonplace book. The persona's distortions of classical quotations to support ideas antithetical to them is, in a manner, a modern improvement on the ancients. I have already pointed out his misuse of Horace's phrase to support his argument for lavish fluency of words. Another example is his use of Lucretius' "religio pedibus subjecta" to defend his argument that a writer improves his reputation by trampling on religion (p. 329). In Lucretius the phrase means that those who have conquered religion have progressed spiritually, not in personal reputation. That the persona keeps a full commonplace book

is evident from his references to Sidney, Horace, Lucretius, and Petronius Arbiter.

The difficulty of relating the stylistic elements of parody to the ideas in the text is that the text is about poetry, not prose. Thus we must pass over those ideas concerned with poetry alone, such as rhyme, blank verse, and dedication to the Muse, and do what we can to apply to prose writing what the speaker says with respect to poetry. However, since the satirist has created a persona who was most probably educated during the time of the metaphysical poets and still clings to their literary standards, there is a good chance that he intended his persona's style to serve as an illustration of his (the persona's) ideas about writing. Had the persona written about prose instead of poetry, the piece might have had a tighter organic structure and it might have been possible to draw a clearer correlation between form and idea. But since the persona is so thoroughly metaphysical in his point of view, and since style, even though it is poetic style, is discussed in the Letter, we must accept this as reason enough for the persona's stylistic mannerisms.

The real question is: if the persona's style was created for purposes of parody, why have the critics not recognised it as such? Why did Davis not try his best to accept the Letter as Swift's before deciding to consign it to an appendix, especially since Davis is quite aware that Swift often engages in parody? Of A Tale of a Tub Davis remarks:

> . . . in its outward shape and form it obviously resembles the work of those writers whom Swift repudiates, rather than the work of those . . . whose style he admired. And it is equally unlike himself, as Dr. Johnson pointed out, going so far as to question indeed whether Swift could have written it. . . . This impression that the Tale is unlike Swift in having more color, more evidence of his reading and knowledge of literature, is due to the fact that he has put into it so much material from the world of letters in order to make play with it and to shake himself free from it. It is also due to the element of parody in its whole design, a feature indeed constant in Swift's satire and he would say inevitably so, because he believed that it would be impossible for any satirist to imagine or create affectations which could serve his purpose so well as those plentifully to be found in life or literature. And parody to be perfect should be as close to the original as possible.[40]

Davis continues in this vein a few pages later:

> . . . [The Tale] is so much concerned with an examination of the books of the previous generation that inevitably it preserves . . . many of their tricks and mannerisms.[41]

Now since every critic who has written at any length on the Letter, Davis included, has noticed the great similarity of the Letter to the Tale, why did the critics (and Davis most of all) not

look at the Letter as a parody? Perhaps the parody in the Letter fails so badly that it throws most readers off. We have no trouble identifying most of the stylistic mannerisms as pre-Restoration ones. The satirist creates a dramatic persona who would naturally write in such a style. The subject matter of the satire is concerned with writing, and often with style in particular. Yet something is amiss. What is lacking, as I have said all along, is exaggeration and compression, and a certain heightening of tone--qualities essential for successful parody.

VII.

There are several aspects of the Letter which are not accounted for by the theory that the Letter is a stylistic parody, successful or no. Still puzzling are the many quotations from and references to Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesie, and the minor attack on Addison near the end. Fussell attempts to account for the attacks on Sidney by suggesting that perhaps the tone toward Sidney in the satire is influenced, indirectly, by the numerous parodies of Addison's ballad criticism which appeared after 1711. He suggests further that perhaps the author of the Letter began with the intention of satirizing Addison's defense of ballad poetry and then changed his mind once the Letter got under way.[42]

In order to understand Fussell's conjectures and evaluate them properly, we should be familiar with Addison's ballad criticism and its connection with the work of Sidney. Addison's defense of the ballad, contained in Spectator papers 70, 74, and 85, centers on two ballads: "Chevy Chase" and "Two Children in the Wood." His purpose in defending the ballads was to show "the essential and inherent perfection of simplicity of thought . . ." and to praise the taste of the multitude as the finest indication of true wit in poetry.[43] He begins Spectator 70 with this statement: ". . . it is impossible that anything should be universally tasted and approved by a multitude though they are only the rabble of a nation, which hath not in it some peculiar aptness to please and

gratify the mind of man. Human nature is the same in all reasonable creatures; and whatever falls in with it will meet with admirers amongst readers of all qualities and conditions."[44]

To illustrate the truth of the above statement, he chooses to discuss "the favourite ballad of the common people of England"--the old ballad "Chevy Chase." In order to give authority to his choice, he notes that Ben Jonson used to say that he would rather have been the author of it than of all his works, and that Sir Philip Sidney remarked in his Defense of Poesie that the old ballad moved his heart like the sound of a trumpet whenever he heard it sung. Having substantiated to his satisfaction the right to praise "Chevy Chase," he proceeds to compare it with the heroic poetry of Homer and Virgil in order to show that it lies well within the realm of the great heroic poems. He singles out for particular comparison Virgil's Aeneid and devotes the remainder of Spectator 70 and the whole of Spectator 74 to a detailed comparison of the two poems. His intention, as stated in Spectator 74, is to show that "The sentiments in ["Chevy Chase"] are extremely natural and poetical, and full of the majestic simplicity which we admire in the greatest of the ancient poets."[45]

In Spectator 85 Addison takes up another old ballad, "Two Children in the Wood." He illustrates its beauty as "A plain, simple copy of nature" and praises its genuine and unaffected sentiments, which he claims, ". . . are able to move the mind of the most polite reader with inward meltings of humanity and compassion."[46]

With Addison's criticism in mind, let us return to Fussell's conjectures that 1) the tone toward Sidney in the Letter is influenced by the numerous parodies of Addison's ballad criticism which appeared after 1711, and 2) that the author of the Letter began with the intention of satirizing Addison's defense of ballad poetry and then changed his mind once the Letter got under way.

There are faint echoes of Addison off and on throughout the Letter, but I doubt if the parodies that arose from Addison's ballad papers had much to do with them. The most stringent attack on Addison, Dennis' letter to Cromwell, written immediately after Spectator 74, was not published until 1721, a year after the Letter was written. Actually the only parody published before 1720 was William Wagstaff's A Comment upon the History of "Tom Thumb" (1711).[47] The next was an essay in Mist's Weekly Journal (No. 144, September 2, 1721).[48]

Although the Letter could conceivably have been influenced by Wagstaff's parody, I find no evidence to support such an idea. The Wagstaff parody burlesqued the manner in which Addison argued for the worth of ballad poetry. To many learned readers of the Spectator, a comparison of "Chevy Chase" to Virgil's Aeneid was not only preposterous, but something akin to blasphemy. One might just as well compare "Tom Thumb" to Homer's poetry, which is exactly what Wagstaff did in his parody. No such particular attack on Addison occurs in the Letter. My conjecture is that the Letter was influenced by the effect of Addison's criticism on the literary taste of the times. I refer not only to Addison's ballad

criticism, but to his democratic theory of taste in general. The ballad criticism itself lent encouragement to a liberal attitude toward ancient and popular songs. Addison's anachronistic theories of the imagination and of original genius, logical extensions of his ballad criticism, were to an acute ear predictions of a literary revolution to come.[49]

When we go to the Letter for evidence of Addison's influence, we find only vague and elusive echoes of it. There are but two direct references to Addison in the Letter. One is in praise of his use of the Bible (p. 330), inconsistent with later ironic allusions to Addison; and the other, more important for our purposes, is an attack on his taste in poetry:

> One of these last [the reference is to either imitators, translators, or familiar letter writers] has entertained the Town with an original Piece, and such a one, as I dare say, the late British Spectator, in his Decline, would have call'd an excellent Specimen of the true Sublime, or a Noble Poem, or a fine Copy of Verses on a Subject perfectly New, (the Author himself) and had given it a Place amongst his latest Lucubrations (p. 344).

Neither of these references has anything to do with Addison's ballad criticism. The first does not concern the matter at hand; and the second seems to refer to Addison's later work, in which he set out his theories of taste and of the imagination. In fact, the only statements in the Letter which ring of ballad criticism,

and then only slightly, are the quotations from Sidney's Defense.

Because Addison rested on Sidney's authority twice in his ballad papers, Sidney is generally thought of in connection with the papers.[50] It should be noted, however, that Addison only referred to one sentence of Sidney's:

> Sir Philip Sidney, in his Discourse of Poetry, speaks of it ["Chevy Chase"] in the following words: "I never heard the old song of Piercy and Douglas that I found not my heart more moved than with a trumpet; and yet it is sung by some blind Crowder with no rougher voice than rude style; which being so evil apparelled in the dust and cobweb of that uncivil age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar?"[51]

In Spectator 74, Addison refers in review to Sidney's statement, and then pauses to disagree with part of it: "I must, however beg leave to dissent from so great an authority as that of Sir Philip Sidney, in the judgement which he has passed as to the rude style and evil apparel of this antiquated song; . . ."[52]

It seems strange that the author of the Letter should choose to ridicule Addison by focusing almost all of his attention on Sidney, and then not even quote the passage from the Defense quoted by Addison. But the satirist is not concerned with ballad poetry per se. He does not refer to it once in the Letter. I have suggested that what does seem to bother him, enough perhaps to provoke him to write the satire, is Addison's democratic theory of taste.

Yet, the satirist does not direct his attack at any specific theory of Addison's. Actually, the attack is felt more than seen. We have to read between the lines and even then we will catch only faint glimmerings.

If we examine some of the quotations from Sidney's Defense and the references to it in the Letter we see that they build to a democratic theory of taste. For instance, the first reference to Sidney is to his historical justification of the worth of poetry:

> It may be your justification and further encouragement to consider that History, Ancient or Modern, cannot furnish you an instance of one Person, Eminent in any Station, who was not in some measure vers'd in Poetry, or at least, a well-wisher to the Professors of it; neither would I dispair to prove, if legally call'd thereto, that it is impossible to be a good Soldier, Divine, or Lawyer, or even so much as an Eminent Bell-man or Ballad-singer, without some taste of Poetry and a competent Skill in Versification . . . [p. 327].

Here the satirist puts into the mouth of his persona a summary of Sidney's argument for poetry as the "first light-giver to ignorance." Sidney goes back through history and cites famous philosophers, historiographers, soldiers, rulers, bards, even barbarous Indians and unlearned peoples, all of whom, he claims, were poets or held poets in "devout reverence." The satirist's attitude toward Sidney's historical defense of poetry is made clear by the

persona's comment which follows:

> But I say the less of this, because the renowned Sir P. Sidney has exhausted the Subject before me, in his Defence of Poesie, on which I shall make no other Remark but this, that he argues there as if he really believed himself [p. 327].

Certainly no English man of letters in the Augustan age could tolerate such an idea. In 18th century England, poetry was created by the learned for the learned. The thought that the common people could write or appreciate real poetry was intolerable to most of the literati. Thus it does not surprise us to see the persona quote a comment of Sidney's: "In our Neighbor-Country (Ireland); where true Learning goes very bare, yet are their Poets held in devout Reverence" (p. 332), and then proceed to ridicule it:

> . . . [this] shows that Learning is no way necessary either to the making a Poet, or judging of him. And further, to see the Fate of things notwithstanding our Learning here, is as bare as ever, yet are our Poets not held as formerly, in devout Reverence, but are, perhaps, the most contemptible Race of Mortals now in this Kingdom, which is no less to be wonder'd at, than lamented [p. 332].

To follow this, the persona remarks, "Neither do I think a late most judicious critick so much mistaken, as others do in advancing this Opinion, that Shakespear had been a worse Poet had he been a better Scholar . . ." (p. 332). That "late most judicious

critick" could well be Addison, who expresses this view, although not in these very words, in a Spectator paper.[53] Addison often expressed admiration for the untutored or original genius. The entire tone of the Letter is against this notion. The direct reference to Addison (discussed earlier) is certainly an attack on his admiration for the original in poetry and on his taste in poetry in general.

Now, a very plausible question at this time is this: if the satirist is out to get Addison, why is he not more forthright and more detailed in his attack? I find no clear answer to this problem. My conjecture is that the satirist found Addison's potential influence disturbing. But, for some reason, perhaps a personal one, he declined to attack Addison openly. Since Addison used Sidney to add authority to his own views in the "Chevy Chase" papers, and since many of Sidney's ideas support Addison's democratic theory of taste, perhaps the satirist thought to undermine Addison's influence by attacking Sidney instead. The covert references to Addison, then, would hint to the reader that the real object of attack is Addison. The satirist, of course, would be reliant on his reader's knowledge and memory of the "Chevy Chase" papers, and of Sidney's part in them.[54] That the persona writes as a pre-Restoration 17th century figure makes his obsession with Sidney's Defense more plausible than if he were a contemporary Modern. I am aware that my attempt at explaining Sidney's appearance in the satire does not make it any the less a problem.

The reason behind the satirist's attack and the exact object of attack are still unclear.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this paper I stated that "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet" is a problem piece. My investigation was designed not to remove its problematic character but to refocus it. Thus I have concentrated mostly on Herbert Davis' discussion of the Letter and Paul Fussell's reply to Davis, the most recent commentaries on the Letter. Both men take extreme positions on the problem of style and on the question of attribution. I have tried to indicate the flaws in their interpretations and to make a case for a new interpretation, which is essentially a compromise of the extreme positions.

Herbert Davis was certainly correct in consigning the Letter to an appendix until some of its mysteries are solved, and his presentation of external evidence concerning the question of attribution may prove to be quite valuable to future scholars interested in the Letter. But his internal evidence in favor of the Letter's having been written by an imitator is unfounded. Whatever conclusions Davis makes on the basis of what he considers to be un-Swiftian locutions cannot be taken seriously, for Fussell has accurately observed that one cannot speak of Swift's "own" style, since one of Swift's most brilliant satiric techniques lies in his creation of the dramatic persona, who often writes in a style peculiar to his character or his age, as is the case of the personae in the Tale of a Tub and the Letter.

Fussell, in an attempt to refute Davis' hypothesis that the

Letter was written by someone other than Swift, goes to the opposite extreme when he claims that all those un-Swiftian locutions are actually part of a brilliant stylistic parody of some mannerisms of pre-Restoration prose. Now Fussell's theory that the Letter is a stylistic parody brings many problematic elements of the piece together under one roof. But his theory creates too many difficulties of its own. Mainly, it speaks ill of Swift, whom Fussell believes is the author of the Letter. For, contrary to Fussell's claim that the Letter is "the work of a consummately skilled dramatic parodist," it is at best a parody that fails and thus the work of an unskilled dramatic parodist.

We have seen that many parodic elements of the satire are weak and disjointed. It is almost as if the satirist constructed the persona's style from a slight familiarity or hazy memory of pre-Restoration 17th century prose style. When we think of Swift as parodist, we think of a master of parody. We have only to glance at his parody of Dryden and Bentley in the Tale, and of Boyle in "A Meditation Upon a Broomstick," to see the high quality of parody of which Swift was capable. It is almost impossible to suppose that Swift, even in a first draft, could create the weak stylistic parody that we find in the Letter.

There is more internal evidence to support a view that the Letter was not written by Swift: the strange and somewhat pointless concentration on Sir Philip Sidney, the severe inconsistency in tone, the heavy-handed irony so unlike the subtle wit that characterizes Swift's work, and the heavy borrowing of images,

phrases, and ideas from A Tale of a Tub and from other works by Swift, which gives the satire a scissors-and-paste character.

Fussell defends his belief that Swift is the author of the Letter by noting that in addition to its skillful dramatic parody the Letter contains many other Swiftian elements. But since the parody is not very skillfully executed, as I have tried to show, for Fussell to adduce as relevant to attribution that various Swiftian techniques are at work in the Letter is to argue wide of the point. Obviously, an imitator of Swift would be certain to imitate faithfully as many Swiftian techniques as he could.

If the author of"A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet" is someone other than Swift, as I maintain, we must commend his skill at imitation, for he has fooled readers of the Letter for over two centuries. If the author is Swift, as Fussell maintains, he is Swift at his worst. It is hard to believe that a writer's skill could vary so much as to allow him to produce in a span of two years the excellent "Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture" (1720), the lucid and forthright "Letter to a Young Clergyman" (1721), and the unskillful "Letter of Advice to a Young Poet." Moreover, when we read the Drapier's Letters and "A Modest Proposal," two later testimonies to Swift's satirical brilliance and skill at creating dramatic personae, we are even more impressed with the implausibility of the suggestion that he was responsible for the incoherence and unsuccessful parody in "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet."

NOTES

[1] Herbert Davis, ed., The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, vol. IX, Irish Tracts and Sermons (Oxford, 1948), xxiv, xxvii.

[2] Paul Fussell, "Speaker and Style in 'A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet (1721)' and the Problem of Attribution," RES, X (1959), 63-67.

[3] Ibid., p. 64.

[4] Ibid., p. 65.

[5] Ibid., p. 66.

[6] The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford, ed. David Nichol Smith (Oxford, 1935), p. 87.

[7] Davis, xxvi-xxvii.

[8] Harold Williams, review of The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, RES, XXV (1949), 276.

[9] William Alfred Eddy, ed., Satires and Personal Writings by Jonathan Swift (London, 1958), p. 34.

[10] Ricardo Quintana, The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift (London, 1936), p. 275.

[11] Ibid., p. 274.

[12] Ricardo Quintana, The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift (London, 1953), p.

[13] Ricardo Quintana, Swift: An Introduction (London, 1955), p. 140.

[14] J. Middleton Murry, Jonathan Swift: A Critical Biography (London, 1954), p. 323. All references to Murry can be found on this page.

[15] John Bullitt, Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire (Cambridge, Mass., 1953).

[16] William Ewald, The Masks of Jonathan Swift (Oxford, 1954), p. 92.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ewald, p. 98.

[19] Fussell, p. 65.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Fussell, p. 66.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., n.

[27] "A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet," Irish Tracts, p. 345--hereafter cited in the text.

[28] Fussell, p. 66.

[29] Max Beerbohm, "The Mote in the Middle Distance," in 20th Century Parody, ed. Burling Lowrey (New York, 1960), p. 13.

[30] In the Letter the persona warns the poet against panegyric, ". . . for a particular Encomium is ever attended with more ill Will, than any general Invective, for which I need give no Reasons . . ." (p. 339). The reader will not know why the satirist advises against panegyric unless he knows the Tale of a Tub. See A Tale of a Tub to which is added The Battle of the Books and the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, eds. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith (Oxford, 1920), pp. 50, 51 for Swift's satirical reasons for preferring satire to panegyric. It is very curious that the satirist depends on the reader's knowledge of the Tale for an explanation of a satirical point in the Letter. I do not know the significance of this.

[31] Fussell, p. 66.

[32] Robert Burton, "Democritus to the Reader," preface to The Anatomy of Melancholy, vol. I, Everyman's Library, ed. Ernest Rhys (New York, 1932). See, for example, pp. 34-38, in which Burton apologizes for having "meddled with Physic." He ends his digression with "But I am over-tedious, I proceed" (p. 38).

[33] See Swift's Sermons in Irish Tracts. For example, "On the Testimony of Conscience," p. 155; "On the Trinity," p. 167; "On Brotherly Love," pp. 172, 179; "On False Witness," pp. 181, 184; "On a Poor Man's Contentment," p. 197.

[34] See Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici and other Writings, Everyman's Library, ed. Ernest Rhys (New York, 1951), p. 9. In Religio Medici Browne says, "Methinks there be not impossibilities enough in Religion for an active faith; the deepest Mysteries ours contains have not only been illustrated, but maintained, by Syllogism and the rule of Reason. I love to lose my self in a mystery, to pursue my Reason to an O altitudo!"

[35] See Miriam Starkman, Swift's Satire on Learning in 'A Tale of a Tub' (Princeton, 1950), pp. 119, 20. Here the author points out that the "Epistle" to Prince Posterity in the Tale of a Tub is a parody of "the heavy, digressive, asyntactical morass" of the "baroque" or "anti-Ciceronian" style when in the hands of writers less skillful than Thomas Browne and John Milton. She finds this element of parody in the loose sentence structure of the "Epistle."

[36] Ewald, p. 18.

[37] Fussell, pp. 66-67.

[38] See Ewald, pp. 96-97.

[39] Burton, pp. 32-33.

[40] Herbert Davis, The Satire of Jonathan Swift (New York, 1947), p. 28.

[41] Ibid., p. 34.

[42] Fussell, p. 65, n. 4.

[43] The Works of Joseph Addison, vol. II, Bohn's Standard Library, ed. Henry G. Bohn, Spectator 70, p. 374.

[44] Ibid., pp. 373-4.

[45] Addison, Spectator 74, p. 384.

[46] Ibid., Spectator 85, p. 397.

[47] There are several arguments in favor of Swift's having written the Wagstaffian parody. See Charles Dilke, Papers of a Critic, I (London, 1875), 369; Edward Reed, "Two Notes on Addison," MP, vol. VI (October, 1908). For an argument against Swift as author see Nicholas Moore, letter to the Athenaeum, "Swift and the Wagstaff Papers," Notes and Queries, 175 (1938), 79. My opinion on the matter is that the irony in the parody is much too broad for the piece to be attributed to Swift alone.

[48] Albert B. Friedman, The Ballad Revival (Chicago, 1961), pp. 105-106.

[49] For a discussion of Addison's literary criticism see Clarence D. Thorpe, "Addison's Contribution to Criticism" in The Seventeenth Century, by Richard Foster Jones and others (Stanford, 1951), pp. 316-329. Thorpe discusses Addison as a "new critic" and points out the effect of his anachronistic literary theories on the Augustan age. Thorpe sees Addison as a precursor of the Romantic age and a strong influence on literary thought in his own time.

[50] Sidney was mentioned in connection with ballad poetry prior to Addison's papers. In the Muse's Mercury for June, 1717, occurs an essay "Of Old English Poets and Poetry," which introduces a reprint of "The Nut Browne Maid." In the essay the author praises "Chevy Chase," after which follows the quotation from Sidney which Addison uses. Perhaps the author of the Letter realizes that Sidney could be a real threat to established neo-Classic literary taste unless ridiculed in the eyes of the public.

[51] Addison, Spectator 70, p. 374.

[52] Ibid., Spectator 74, pp. 384-5.

[53] Ibid., Spectator 160, pp. 504-507.

[54] That a parody of Addison's ballad criticism in Mist's Weekly Journal appeared as late as 1721 shows that ten years after their publication, Addison's arguments were still sufficiently familiar to be the topic of burlesque. See McCutcheon, "Another Burlesque of Addison's Ballad Criticism," SP, XXIII (1926), 451-56.