

RESOLUTIONS 1699

Commentary

[1] Not to marry a young Woman] A caution satirically enacted in “The Progress of Marriage” of 1722 (*Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 289-95). Similarly, in his self-deceiving macarism of the Struldbruggs, in which he becomes a victim of unintended consequences, Gulliver resolves “never [to] marry after Threescore” (*Prose Works*, XI, 209 [XI, x, 7]).

[3] Not to be peevish, or morose] This resolution notwithstanding, Swift admits to frequent fits of peevishness and morosity in his letters. “I have been for some days as spleenatick as ever you were in your life, which is a bold Word,” he wrote to Vanessa on 1 June 1722, for example, and on 11 May 1723, he told Robert Cope “you need not take so much pains to invite me to Loughgall. I am grown so peevish, that I can bear no other country-place in this kingdom; I quarrel every where else and sour the people I go to as well as myself” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 421, 454; see also II, 265, 326, 430, 477; III, 119 and n1, 360, and *passim*).

[4] Not to scorn present ... War, &c.] Given the moral soundness of Swift’s maxims throughout, this resolution seems obtuse at first sight: it not only disrupts the pattern but is also at variance with one fundamental of Swift’s, and his mentor’s, thinking, their condemnation of war, warfare, and warmongering. This criticism was rooted in Swift’s personal experience from an early stage, it was anticipated by a series of his favourite authors, such as Aristophanes, Erasmus, and Rabelais, and it became a motif running through many of Swift’s writings, from *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) to *The Examiner* (1710/1) and *The Conduct of the Allies* (1711), climaxing in his masterpiece, *Gulliver’s Travels* (see, in addition to Heinz-Joachim Müllenbrock, *The Culture of Contention: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Public Controversy about the Ending of the War of the Spanish Succession, 1710-1713* [München: Wilhelm Fink, 1997], *passim*, David McNeil, *The Grotesque Depiction of War and the Military in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* [Newark: University of Delaware Press, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990], pp. 54-83, Angus Ross, “‘The Grand Question Debated’: Swift on Peace and War,” *Swift, the Enigmatic Dean*, pp. 247-60, and Ian Simpson Ross, “Satire on Warmongers in *Gulliver’s Travels*, Books One and Two,” *The Perennial Satirist: Essays in Honour of Bernfried Nugel, Presented on*

the Occasion of his 65th Birthday, eds Peter E. Firchow and Hermann J. Real (Münster: LIT, 2005), pp. 49-65). A case in point is the fierce seventeenth-century controversy over Transubstantiation (for the details, see *A Tale of a Tub*, pp.).

However, the conclusion is not necessarily bound to be that Swift was being ironical when penning this maxim, saying the opposite of what he meant, but that he was picturing himself as an old man resigned, indifferent, and unwilling to muster the strength, or energy, to continue castigating warfare *going on around him*, that is, *present* wars. This view may be corroborated by Swift's increasing complaints in his letters about his decreasing concern for things in general as he grew older. "I grow so old," he assured Knightley Chetwode in 1727, "that I despond, and think nothing worth my Care except ease and indolence," and a few years later, he found himself in agreement with Pope about "the indifference ... that grow[s] upon men in years" (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 73, 663; see also III, 123-24, 145-46, 231). See also "A Digression on the nature usefulness & necessity of Wars & Quarels" (Additions to *A Tale of a Tub*, pp. QQ).

&c.] In Swift, this sign is hardly ever innocent, being generally shorthand for unpleasant attributes, both sexual and other (GORDON WILLIAMS I, 448-49), as well as Swift's secret code used in communications with his publisher, "to avoid specifically naming his master-work" (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 283n2; III, 526 and n11; *Journal to Stella*, ed. Williams, I, 47 and n50). See also Headnote on An Apology For the, &c. (pp. QQ). Here, by contrast, the "&c." simply indicates a (discontinued) catalogue, a device habitual with Swift (see Historical Introduction, p. Q).

[6] Not to tell the same story over & over to th[e] same People] This resolution notwithstanding, Swift confessed to Bolingbroke as early as December 1719 that talkativeness was an effect 'old age' was having on him: "I have gone the round of all my stories three or four times with the younger people, and begin them again" (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 317).

[7] Not to be covetous] In resolving not to succumb to covetousness, the sibling of avarice and, like it, one of the seven deadly sins, Swift may have been heeding a biblical warning (St Luke 12:15; see also St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians 5:5). In his writings, avarice, the excessive love of riches, is difficult, if not impossible to demarcate from covetousness, the inordinate desire for what one does not possess, and it is usually associated with old age (see *Thoughts on Various Subjects*, Aphorism [56], p. Q).

[8] Not to neglect decency, or cleenlyness] As his most eminent biographer has noted, Swift was “obsess[ed] with filth” and worried about standards of cleanliness throughout his life (Ehrenpreis, *Dean Swift*, pp. 141, 106-7, 326), not only in himself (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 219; III, 90) but also in others: “The Capacities of a Lady,” he warned in *A Letter to a Young Lady, on Her Marriage* of 1723, “are sometimes apt to fall short in cultivating Cleanliness and Finery together” (*Prose Works*, IX, 87), a point also driven home later by early biographers, such as Patrick Delany and John Hawkesworth (*Observations upon Lord Orrery’s Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* [Dublin: Robert Main, 1754], p. 119; “An Account of the Life of the Reverend Jonathan Swift, D. D., Dean of St Patrick’s, Dublin,” *The Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. John Hawkesworth, 12 vols [London: C. Bathurst *et al.*, 1755], I, 74). The Dean was unrelenting in driving this point home in the spate of ‘scatological’ poems which originated in the 1730s and of which *The Lady’s Dressing Room* is perhaps the prime, and most notorious, example (*Poems*, ed. Williams, II, 524-30). At about the same time, he told Mrs Whiteway in a letter that he was “drawing [Sheridan] into a little cleanliness about his house” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 213).

[9] Not to be over severe with young People, but give Allowances for their youthfull follyes, and Weaknesses] A commonplace argument which Swift was to claim for himself in the Apology preceding the fifth edition of *A Tale of a Tub* of 1710 and based on the conviction that the young, while being gifted with adventurously ‘creative’ faculties, such as ‘imagination’ and ‘invention,’ nonetheless lacked those giving control and direction, such as ‘judgement’ and ‘counsel’ (see the gloss on “*The Author was then young*,” pp. QQ).

[10] Not to be influenced by, or give ear to knavish tatling Servants] In his unfinished *Directions to Servants*, which Swift may have begun around c.1704 if a 1732 letter to Pope is to be relied on (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 490n9), but which was first published as late as November 1745 (*Prose Works*, XIII, x), the Dean ironically “recommend[ed] the habits which he detested most” (Ehrenpreis, *Dean Swift*, p. 834), with “knavish tatling Servants” figuring prominently. In fact, the whole treatise is nothing but an assortment of servants’ “*Villanies and Frauds*,” linguistic and otherwise (*Prose Works*, XIII, 5 [pp. 5-65]).

[11] Not to be too free of advise, nor trouble any but those that desire it] It seems that Swift knew this weakness only too well. In fact, the Dean would frequently offer unsolicited advice to many of his friends. “While you continue to be

spleenatick, count upon it I will always preach,” he lectured Vanessa in July 1722, and a few weeks later, he snapped: “When you are melancholy, read diverting or amusing books; it is my Receipt, and seldom fails.” His letter of 28 June 1725 to Sheridan is nothing but a long list of instructions, climaxing in an imploring “Pray take my Advice for once,” and an uneasy friend like Knightley Chetwode is also reminded, and in a tone of impatience, too: “What I would do in such a Case I have told more than once” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 425, 429, 562, 542; see also II, 543, 545, 564-65, and *passim*).

[12] To desire some good Friends to inform me w^{ch} of these Resolutions I break, or neglect, & wherein; and reform accordingly] This is an echo of a maxim from Temple’s “Heads, Designed for an Essay on Conversation”: “The great Happiness is to have a Friend to observe and tell one of ones Faults, whom one has Reason to esteem, and is apt to believe” (published by Swift in *Miscellanea: The Third Part* [London: Benjamin Tooke, 1701], p. 332).

[13] Not to talk much] The testimonies of Swift’s biographers are self-contradictory on this point. According to Hawkesworth, the Dean did not engross “the conversation by perpetual and overbearing loquacity,” keeping to the rule “never to speak more than a minute at a time” (“An Account of the Life of the Reverend Jonathan Swift, D.D., Dean of St Patrick’s, Dublin,” *The Works*, ed. Hawkesworth, I, 60). Others emphasize that he did not live up to his promise. In 1733, one of his female admirers, Mary Delany (Pendarves), in a letter to her sister describing the protocol of her husband’s Thursday evening gatherings, called him “a very odd companion ... [who] talks a great deal and does not require a great many answers,” lovingly mitigating this mild criticism with the addendum that “he has infinite spirits, and says abundance of good things in his common way of discourse” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 649n4). Two years later, in a letter to Pope, Swift cut himself short by a self-admonition, “I have a thousand things more to say, *longævitæ est garrula*,” translated by Faulkner in 1741: “*Old Age is talkative*” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, IV, 204 and n7).

[15] Not to hearken to Flatteryes] Swift may have remembered here Sir William Temple’s exhortation that “humility [was] the onely fortresse able to hold out seige against the force of flatterys and insinuations” (*The Early Essays and Romances of Sir William Temple, Bt.*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930], p. 148). In a letter to Gay of 8 January 1723, Swift explained why poets were usually not successful with patrons: “Poets have such ill Success in Making their Courts since they are allowed to be the greatest and best

of all Flatterers; The Defect is that they flatter onely in Print or in writing, but not by word of Mouth” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 442).

[15] Et eos qui hereditatem captant odisse ac vitare] “To hate and avoid those who angle for an inheritance” (*Oxford Authors*, p. 611). Although this warning against legacy-hunters smells of a literary source, as Ehrenpreis has noted (*Mr Swift*, p. 259), none has been discovered yet. Therefore, it seems plausible to assume that the Latin sentence was Swift’s own creation. Of course, he would remember Horace’s celebrated satire on legacy hunters, *Satires II*, v (*Quinti Horatii Flacci Opera*, ed. James Talbot [Cambridge: Jacob Tonson, 1699], pp. 308-13 [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN II, 905-6]), which he studied at Moor Park during his great reading period in 1697/8 (REAL [1978], pp. 128-29), and which has been called the most satirical of all of Horace’s satires, “full of vigour and brilliant wit, but acid and cynical throughout” (Eduard Fraenkel, *Horace* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966 {1957}], pp. 144-45). Probably, Swift would have likewise remembered Cicero’s critique of legacy-hunting, a widespread practice in the Rome of the first-century BC: “Mihi quidem etiam veræ hæreditates non honestæ videntur, si sint malitiosis blanditiis, officiorum, non veritate, sed simulatione quæsitæ” (Cicero, *De Officiis*, III, 18, 74, in *Opera*, 4 vols [in two] [Paris: Charles Estienne, 1555], IV, 399 [III, 98] [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN I, 408-11]).

[16] opiniatre] “Opinionated, obstinate, stubborn, willful”; a modish French word (BOYER, s.v.; see also JOHNSON II, s.v.). Clarendon’s *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* provides an example: “They were both of them great *opiniatres*” (ed. W. Dunn Macray, 6 vols [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969], IV, 270 [X, 134]).

[18] Not to sett up for observing all these Rules] “[The list] culminates with an admonition of terse and snappish anticlimax” (Elias, *Swift at Moor Park*, p. 121).