

## *A Meditation upon a Broomstick*

### Running Commentary

A / MEDITATION] Mental prayer in discursive form, assumed appropriate to beginners. It starts with a reflection on a chosen, often biblical, theme, and is supposed to proceed to a deepening spiritual experience, stimulating both the will and the affections (ODCC, p. 898). Seventeenth-century writers and theologians distinguished between “the art of solemn meditation, requiring dedicated time and specific structural methods” and the “occasional meditation ... embrac[ing] the random occurrence” (Marie-Louise Coolahan, “Redeeming Parcels of Time: Aesthetics and Practice of Occasional Meditation,” *The Seventeenth Century*, 22 [2007], 124-43 [p. 124]). Out of a rich tradition of meditational manuals, Boyle repeatedly refers to Joseph Hall, Bishop of Norwich and author of two influential works, *The Arte of Divine Meditation* of 1606 and *Occasional Meditations* of 1630 (revised 1633), if only to distance himself from Hall: “Not to Prepossess or Byass my Fancy, I purposely (till of late) forbad my self, the perusing of that Eloquent Prælates devout Reflections” (“Introductory Preface” to *Occasional Reflections*, in *The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Michael Hunter and Edward B. Davis, 14 vols [London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2000], V, 10 and nb, see also 16 and n\*, 19n\*; on Hall’s understanding of the term ‘meditation,’ see Coolahan, “Redeeming Parcels of Time,” pp. 124-26; and *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, eds Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], p. 308). Swift was not the only author to poke fun at the far-fetched imagery and pathos of meditational practitioners (see, for example, John Eachard, *Some Observations upon the Answer to an Enquiry into the Grounds & Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy* [London: N. Brooke, 1671], pp. 105-8).

Broom-Stick] The broomstick as the occasion and subject of a meditation seems to be entirely Swift’s invention. It also figures prominently in *A Tale of a Tub*, climaxing in the three brothers’ misreading of their Father’s will, which does not allow wearing any sort of silver fringe upon their coats: “The Brother ... who was well skill’d in Criticisms, had found in a certain Author ... that the same Word which in the Will is called *Fringe*, does also signifie a *Broom-stick*” (pp. GG). Curl’s *Key*, abstrusely, takes this “Figure” to be an abuse of “the Distinctions of a literate and figurative Sense ... commanding an *implicit Faith*, and the Authority of God’s Commands lessen’d to increase the *Church’s*

Power” (Edmund Curll, *A Complete Key to the “Tale of a Tub”; With Some Account of the Authors, The Occasion and Design of Writing it, and Mr. Wotton’s “Remarks” Examin’d* [London: Edmund Curll, 1710], p. 9).

Given the frequency of occurrences, Swift seems to have had a ‘soft spot’ for broomsticks throughout his career as a writer. A broomstick appears as the traditional fairy-tale instrument of witches in *The Virtues of Sid Hamet the Magician’s Rod* (1710): “SO to Her Midnight Feasts the Hag, / Rides on a Broomstick for a Nag” (*Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 132, ll. 15-16); and it also occurs, in varying contexts, in *A Modest Defence of Punning* of 1716 and in *Directions to Servants* of 1745 (*Prose Works*, IV, 206-7; XIII, 61).

THIS single Stick, which you now behold Ingloriously lying in that neglected Corner, I once knew in a Flourishing State in a Forest, it was full of Sap, full of Leaves, and full of Boughs] The stylistic pomposity of this first sentence echoes Boyle’s long and unctuous description of an “instructive tree” in “A Discourse Touching Occasional Meditations,” which taught him several devout lessons: “Each Bough will afford [the Reflector] a lively Emblem of a true Believer. For, as the loaded Branch makes use of the moisture it attracts from the dirty ground, to recede as much as it can from the Earth, and spends its sap in shooting up towards Heaven, and bearing Fruit for Men: so the devout Christian improves the Blessings he receives of this inferiour World, to elevate his mind above it” (*The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 50, see also the Historical Introduction, p. G).

in vain does the busie Art of Man pretend to Vye with Nature, by tying that wither’d Bundle of Twigs to its sapless Trunk] By contrast, the Tale-teller praises the art of competing with Nature: “That whatever Philosopher or Projector can find out an Art to sodder and patch up the Flaws and Imperfections of Nature, will deserve much better of Mankind, and teach us a more useful Science, than that so much in present Esteem, of widening and exposing them (like him who held *Anatomy* to be the ultimate End of *Physick*)” (p. G).

’tis now at best but the Reverse of what it was, a Tree turn’d upside down, the Branches on the Earth, and the Root in the Air] The equation of a broomstick with a tree turned upside down evokes the topos of ‘the world upside down,’ preparing for the *Meditation’s* main argument of Man as a “Topsy-turvy Creature” (ll. GG). It is unknown whether Swift ever came across a pamphlet by John Taylor, entitled *Mad Fashions, Od Fashions, All out of Fashions: or, The Emblems of these Distracted Times* (London: by John Hammond for Thomas

Banks, 1642), which lamented the state of England during the Civil Wars: “To *Brittaine* back againe my Muse repaires: / Where I perceive a Metamorphosis, / Is most preposterous, as the Picture is, / The world’s turn’d upside downe, from bad to worse” (*Works of John Taylor, the Water Poet* [New York: Burt Franklin, 1967 {1870}], p. 5). A drawing inserted into the title page shows, among other things, a man wearing breeches on his shoulders and gloves upon his feet, a church overturned and a candlestick on its head, a rabbit hunting a dog and a rat hunting a cat, a horse whipping the cart, and a wheelbarrow driving a man. In a reprint of four years later, the title was changed to *The World Turn’d Upside Down: or, A Briefe Description of the Ridiculous Fashions of these Distracted Times* (London: John Smith, 1646/7). Similar ground is covered by *The World Turned Upside Down: or, The Folly of Man Exemplified in Twelve Comical Relations upon Uncommon Subjects* [London, c.1750], which seems to have been chapbook material of unknown chronological provenance (John Ashton, *Chap-Books of the Eighteenth Century* [New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1966 {1882}], pp. 265-72). One of the illustrations shows parents turned children and children turned parents. While one child whips the father’s behind with a birch, another nurses its mother in bed (see p. 265).

’tis now handled by every Dirty Wench, condemn’d to do her Drudgery] Echoed in *Directions to Servants*, where Swift ironically instructs the house maid how to clean with a vengeance: “Brush down the Cobwebs with a Broom that is wet and dirty, which will make them stick the faster to it, and bring them down more effectually” (*Prose Works*, XIII, 61). “Cleanliness and decency of dress were necessary accompaniments of service which ought to be taken for granted; moral cleanliness, however, took pride of place before personal cleanliness, understandably perhaps in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries before the coming of cheap soap” (R. C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* [Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010], p. 129).

by a Capricious kind of Fate, destin’d to make other Things Clean, and be Nasty it self] ‘Uncleanliness,’ both physical and moral, is one of the most prominent motifs in Swift’s humorous *Directions to Servants*. 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; a point routinely emphasized by almost all his biographers, early and later (Patrick Delany, *Observations upon Lord Orrery’s Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift* [London:

W. Reeve and A. Linde, 1754], pp. 173-74; HAWKESWORTH, “An Account of the Life of the Reverend Jonathan Swift, D. D., Dean of St Patrick’s, Dublin,” I, 74). “The Capacities of a Lady,” the Dean 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). He 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; see also Hermann J. Real and Heinz J. Vienken, “Disciplining on the Sly: Swift’s *The Lady’s Dressing Room*,” *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 13 [1988], 39-50). 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). See also *Resolutions 1699* (pp. GG).

worn to the Stumps in the Service of the Maids] Swift reiterated his critique that servants were not in the habit of keeping their working tools in order in “A Description of the Morning”: “The Youth with Broomy Stumps began to trace” (*Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 124, l. 9).

’tis either thrown out of Doors] Swift twice resumed this aggressive image in *A Tale of Tub*; on one occasion, when he criticized the Catholic clergy’s obligation to celibacy as arbitrary, and on another when he described two turning points in the history of the Reformation, the excommunication of Luther and of Henry VIII (pp. GG). See also “he’s either kickt out of Doors,” l. G.

or condemn’d to its last use of kindling Fires] *Double entendre*, connoting either the “burning effects of venereal disease” or “sexual passion” (GORDON WILLIAMS I, 486-88; see also the gloss on “he’s either kickt out of Doors, or made use of to kindle Flames, for others to warm Themselves by,” ll. GG). In his adaptation of Ovid’s *Baucis and Philemon*, published along with the *Meditation* and probably written about the same time, Swift transforms the old couple into yews: Baucis is cut down by a parson who intends “to mend his Barn,” whereupon Philemon grows “Scrubby” and is “stub’d and burnt” by “the next Parson” (*Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 117, ll. 173-78). This has been interpreted as a jest on “cuckoldry” (Nora Crow Jaffe, *The Poet Swift* [Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1977], p. 68): Swift’s poem and his *Meditation* not only equate the destinies of men and trees, they also explore the bawdy potential of the tree imagery.

When I beheld this, I sigh'd] “Swift imitates the several ejaculatory and personal declarations in the *Occasional Reflections*” (Gregory Lynall, “Talking Flowers and Topsy-Turvy Trees: Swift, Shadwell, and Robert Boyle’s Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects,” *Swift Studies*, 26 [2011], 7-21 [p. 13]).

Surely Man is a Broom-stick] Swift emended the line by adding the alliterative “Mortal” in 1711, recalling a quotation from the first part of SHAKESPEARE’S *Henry IV*: “tush man, mortall men, mortal men” (p. 534 [xiii, 2327-28]; see *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 481 and n4).

Nature sent him into the World Strong and Lusty] Swift may have come across this formula in the English translation of Pierre Charron’s *De la sagesse*, which he owned: “[Man] is *strong and lusty*” (*Of Wisdom ... Made English by George Stanhope*, 2 vols [London: M. Gillyflower, *et al.*, 1697], I, 331 [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN I, 395-96]).

Reasoning Vegetable] This image was current in seventeenth-century poetry, as these lines from a poem by Faithful Teate, Nahum Tate’s father, prove: “A Rationall Plant-Animal was [Man]; / Could vegetate, / Could Move and walk, / Could contemplate, / Discourse and talk” (*Ter Tria: or, The Doctrine of the Three Sacred Persons, Father, Son & Spirit*, ed. Angelina Lynch [Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007], p. 58, ll. 475-79). By contrast, the “oxymoronic epithet” has been taken for a satirical deflation of “man’s proud status as a ‘rational Creature,’” which makes Swift’s *Meditation* “a precursor to the Fourth Voyage of *Gulliver’s Travels*” and its essential discussion about the rationality of man (Lynall, “Talking Flowers and Topsy-Turvy Trees,” pp. 17-18).

till the Axe of Intemperance has lopt off his Green Boughs] A homophonic pun transforming Boyle’s “acts of Intemperance” into the parodic metaphor “Axe of Intemperance” (Lynall, “Talking Flowers and Topsy-Turvy Trees,” p. 13): “When I think too, how many evitable Mischiefs our own Appetites, or Vices, expose us to, by acts of Intemperance, that necessitate the Creatures to offend us, and practices of Sin, whereby we provoke the Creator to punish us” (*The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 64).

He then flies unto Art] “Conduct or action which seeks to attain its ends by artificial ... means” (OED, s.v. “art”).

puts on a *Peruque*] “L’Angleterre a ... de ces sortes d’Animaux en assez bonne quantité, & la Ville de Londres sur tout, en est extrêmement garnie,” a Continental visitor to London reported with some amusement, adding this comment on their fashionable follies: “Ce sont des coureurs de nouvelles modes; des Perruques & des habits chargez de poudre” (Henri Misson de Valbourg, *Mémoires et observations faites par un voyageur en Angleterre* [The Hague: Henri van Bulderen, 1698], p. 28). This description was echoed by many contemporary observers: “[Beaux] are easie to be known by their full Periwigs and empty Skulls,” Tom Brown scoffed in *Letters from the Dead to the Living* ([London, 1702], p. 36), and Abel Boyer chimed in, characterizing beaux as “well-bred People, that never quarrel with any Body, except their Taylors, and Perriwig-makers” (*Letters of Wit, Politicks, and Morality* [London: J. Hartley, *et al.*, 1701], p. 223; see also the gloss on “like a shrivled Beau from within the Pent-house of a modern Perewig,” *The Battle of the Books*, p. 46, ll. 33-34).

Perukes, or periwigs or simply wigs, had replaced natural hair almost universally by the first half of the eighteenth century. The most expensive ones were made of human hair; other materials were horsehair and goat’s hair. Wigs were usually powdered white or grey, customary with gentlemen especially on ‘dress’ occasions when barbers would envelop customers’ heads in powder with a bellows or large powder puff. In order to protect themselves from the dust, customers would wear a powdering jacket and protect their faces and eyes with a paper mask or funnel-shaped ‘nosebag’ (C. Willet and Phillis Cunningham, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* [London: Faber and Faber, 1957], pp. 89, 95, 96).

Swift utilized the fashion of wearing perukes for his satirical purposes in *A Tale of a Tub* on several occasions. In outlining the religious system of Sartorism, for example, the Tale-teller points out five “subaltern Doctrines,” among which “a huge long *Perewig* was *Humor*, and a *Coat full of Powder* was very good *Raillery*” (see pp. GG).

valuing himself upon an Unnatural Bundle of Hairs] Not only a reference to loss of hair as the result of ageing, but more commonly an allusion to hair-shedding, a symptom of chronic syphilis as well as the effects of mercury treatment, recognized already by the late 1530s (GORDON WILLIAMS II, 639-41; John Marten, *A Treatise of All the Degrees and Symptoms of the Venereal Disease, in Both Sexes* [1708] [New York and London: Garland, 1985], p. 304).

Partial Judges that we are! of Our own Excellencies, and other Men’s Faults] A self-assessment to which the Grub Street Hack confesses almost *verbatim* in the

*Tale*, too, “forcing into the Light, with much Pains and Dexterity, my own Excellencies and other Mens Defaults, with great Justice to my self, and Candor to them” (p. G), and which is reiterated, with variations, in *The Battle of the Books* (p. 32, ll. 1-3) and *A Tritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind* (p. G). Given the fact that the thought draws on a long and well-documented intellectual matrix, it seems redundant to adduce additional sources from Boyle’s *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects*, all the more so if the passages only provide the wording but not the idea (see Lynall, “Talking Flowers and Topsy-Turvy Trees,” p. 14 and n31, referring to *The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 29, 117).

Emblem] “A drawing or picture expressing a moral fable or allegory” (OED; see also BAILEY [1730], s.v.; JOHNSON I, s.v.). Swift’s use of the word resembles that of Boyle in “Discourse Touching Occasional Meditations”: “Each Bough will afford [the Reflector] a lively Emblem of a true Believer” (*The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 50).

what is Man, but a Topsy-turvy Creature ... His Head where his Heels should be; groveling on the Earth] The (proverbial) image of man as a ‘topsy-turvy creature’ elaborates, and reshapes, the topos of the *mundus inversus*, “the world upside down” (see TILLEY T165 and W903), a striking example of which occurs in Dryden’s *An Evening’s Love*: “Let the order of all things be turn’d topsy-turvy; let the Goose devour the Fox; let the Infants preach to their Great-Grandsires; let the tender Lamb pursue the Woolfe, and the Sick prescribe to the Physician. Let Fishes live upon dry-land, and the Beasts of the Earth inhabit in the Water” (*The Works of John Dryden, X: Plays*, ed. Maximillian E. Novak [Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1970], p. 260 [III, i, 374-79]); see also Thomas Shadwell, *The Scowrers*, where Lady Maggot exclaims: “The World, this House, and my Brains, are turn’d topsy turvy” (*The Complete Works*, ed. Montague Summers, 5 vols [London: The Fortune Press, 1927], V, 124 [IV, i]). Swift seems to have been fond of the phrase ‘topsy-turvy,’ reanimating it in the Additions to *A Tale of a Tub* (p. G) as well as several poems (*Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 126, ll. 9-10; I, 283, ll. 127-28).

The age-old topos of Man as an inverted tree (*homo arbor inversa*) is not confined to any one culture, tradition, and discipline, finding its way even into alchemy (Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 {1998}], p. 108). Three basic versions of it may be distinguished: the Platonic, the Aristotelian, and the topsy-turvy (A. B. Chambers, “‘I Was But an Inverted Tree’: Notes toward the History of an Idea,”

*Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 [1961], 291-99 [p. 298]; *Thesaurus proverbiorum*, VIII, 202 [7.3]).

Plato, whose works Swift owned in two editions, resorted to the comparison to account for Man's exalted, divinely sanctioned status within the Creation, which becomes outwardly manifest, among other things, in Humankind's upright walk. In his *Timaeus*, he writes: "De præstantissima igitur animæ nostræ specie ita est sentiendum: hanc dues, vt dæmonem nostrum, cuique tribuit: hanc in summa corporis arce sedem habere dicimus, atque ad cœli cognationem à terra nos tollere, tanquam animalia cœlesti potius quàm terreno semine nata. Quod quidem rectè admodum dicitur. Vnde enim primus animæ datus est ortus, inde diuina vis caput radicémque & originem nostram aptans atque deducens totum dirigit corpus [And as regards the most lordly kind of our soul, we must conceive of it in this wise: we declare that God has given to each of us, as his daemon, that kind of soul which is housed in the top of our body and which raises us – seeing that we are not an earthly but a heavenly plant – up from earth towards our kindred in the heaven. And herein we speak most truly; for it is by suspending our head and root from that region whence the substance of our soul first came that the Divine Power keeps upright our whole body]" (*Platonis opera quæ extant omnia*, ed. Jean de Serres, 3 vols [Paris: Henricus Stephanus, 1578], I, 90A [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN II, 1438-40]; for Swift's knowledge of Plato, see also Irene Samuel, "Swift's Reading of Plato," *Studies in Philology*, 73 [1976], 440-62). In *De Exsvlio*, as well as elsewhere, Plutarch, whose works were also in Swift's library, agreed with Plato's idea of Man as a heavenly plant: "Quippe homo, si Platoni credimus, planta est non terræ infixæ aut immobilis, sed cœlestis, cuius tanquam è radice caput sursum erectum in cœlum dirigatur [For man, as Plato says, is 'no earthly' or immovable 'plant,' but a 'celestial' one – the head like a root, keeping the body erect – inverted to point to heaven" (*Plvtarchi Chæronensis Omnium quæ extant operum [tomi II]*, ed. Jean Ruault, 2 vols [Paris: A. Estienne, 1624], II, 600F [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN II, 1467-69 {2}]; reiterated in *De Pythiæ oraculis*, in *Plvtarchi Chæronensis Omnium quæ extant operum*, ed. Ruault, II, 400B).

By contrast, Aristotle's version of the topos is less theologically interpretative and more descriptively naturalistic: "Sensimque procedendo ita degeneret, vt principium vitale, capûtque infrà habeat: ad postremum immobile fit, & sensu vacuum, plantaque est, vice mutata, vt superiora infrà, inferiora suprà habeat. Radix enim plantarum, vim obtinet oris, & capitis: semen contrà, supra, extremisque ramis consistit [Proceeding a little further in this way, they actually have their principal part down below, and finally the part which answers to a head comes to have neither motion nor sensation; at this stage the



creature becomes a plant, and has its upper parts below and its nether parts aloft; for in plants the roots have the character and value of mouth and head, whereas the seed counts as the opposite, being produced in the upper part of the plant on the ends of the twigs]” (*De partibus animalium*, in *Opera omnia quæ extant, Græcè et Latinè ... authore Gvillielmo Dv Val*, 2 vols [in four] [Paris: Typis Regiis, 1629], I, 1033E [IV, x] [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN I, 85-86 {686b}]; see also *De anima*, in *Opera omnia*, I, 635B [II, iv]).

The Jesuit scholar Thomas Compton [Carleton], whose *Philosophia vniversa* Swift equally owned, is only one example among many to show how popular Aristotle’s plant comparison had become by the middle of the seventeenth-century: “Quorum opinioni suffragari passim videntur Philosophi, à quibus homo *Arbor* appellatur *inuersa*, quippe qui, non sicut aliæ arbores terræ infixam, sed cœlum versus radicem (hoc est caput) erectam habeat [The philosophers seem to agree with this view everywhere, calling Man an ‘inverted tree’ in as much as he is not like other trees fixed in the earth, but holds his root (which is the head) erect towards the sky]” (*Philosophia vniversa* [Antwerp: Jacob Meursius, 1649], p. 417 [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN I, 449-50]). As Compton insists again somewhat later, this view had been proved by “common consent of philosophers and physicians [ex communi Philosophorum & medicorum consensu]” (p. 512). It was still being endorsed, if occasionally modified, by contemporaries and near contemporaries, such as Sir Thomas Browne (*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ed. Robin Robbins, 2 vols [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981], I, 307; II, 912), Joseph Glanvill, whose *Scepsis Scientifica* Swift read at some stage in the 1690s, and threatened to burn “for a fustian piece of abominable curious Virtuoso Stuff” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 137 and n1; *Scepsis Scientifica: or, Confest Ignorance, the Way to Science* [1665] [New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1978], p. 178), and Lord Chancellor Francis Bacon, who, in the *Novum Organum*, found “the comparison of Man as an inverted tree not at all absurd [item non absurda est Similitudo et Conformitas illa, ut homo sit tanquam planta inversa],” only to add an elaborate, if conventional, explanation: “Nam radix nervorum et facultatum animalium est caput; partes autem seminales sunt infimæ, non computatis extremitatibus tiliarum et brachiorum. At in planta, radix (quæ instar capitis est) regulariter infimo loco collocatur; semina autem supremo [For the root of the nerves and faculties in animals is the head, while the seminal parts are the lowest, – the extremities of the legs and arms not reckoned. In a plant on the other hand, the root (which answers to the head) is regularly placed in the lowest part, and the seeds in the highest]” (*The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, 14 vols [Stuttgart-Bad

Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1961-63 {1858-74}}, I, 279; IV, 166 [II, Aphorism 27]; and Brian Vickers, “Swift and the Baconian Idol,” *The World of Jonathan Swift: Essays for the Tercentenary*, ed. Brian Vickers [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968], pp. 87-128 [124]). It comes as no surprise, then, that the poets eventually responded to the idea, too, among them, Andrew Marvell in “Upon Appleton House” (*The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 3rd ed., 2 vols [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], I, 80, ll. 567-68), and Samuel Butler, who, in his humorous “Speech Made at the Rota,” poked fun at it: “The Philosophers say, that a Man is a Tree inverted, and that his Head is the Root, by which he takes in his Nourishment, and his Arms and Legs the Branches – If that be true, it must follow that his Rump is the Head” (*Satires and Miscellaneous Poetry and Prose*, ed. René Lamar [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928], p. 325; see also *Prose Observations*, ed. Hugh de Quehen [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], pp. 95-96, 335). On further authors interested in this topos, not necessarily known to Swift, see Chambers, “‘I Was But an Inverted Tree’: Notes toward the History of an Idea,” pp. 291-99, and Theodor W. Köhler, *Grundlagen des philosophisch-anthropologischen Diskurses im dreizehnten Jahrhundert: die Erkenntnisbemühung um den Menschen im zeitgenössischen Verständnis* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000), p. 112n279. For how to account for this in the understanding of *A Meditation upon a Broomstick*, see the Historical Introduction (pp. GG).

his Animal Faculties perpetually a Cock-Horse and Rational] Joseph Glanvill warned his readers against the dangers of inverting the hierarchy of man’s passions and reason: “But where the *Will*, or *Passion* hath the casting voyce, the case of *Truth* is *desperate*. And yet this is the miserable disorder, into which we are laps’d: The lower Powers are gotten uppermost; and we *see* like men on our *heads*” (*Scepsis Scientifica*, pp. 86-87). Both Glanvill and Swift argue in line with seventeenth-century models of faculty psychology (Michael V. DePorte, *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses: Swift, Sterne, and Augustan Ideas of Madness* [San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1974], pp. 12-53), according to which mental health depends upon the harmonious interplay of the rational faculties (the will and the understanding) on the one hand, and the sensitive faculties (imagination, memory, the senses, and the passions) on the other. Since the passions often tend to follow the senses instead of reason, a permanent conflict between sensual drives and virtuous conduct arises. In this conflict, the Imagination, or Fancy, plays an important role. First, as “an *Agent*, or *Nuntius*,” the Imagination is necessary for the more generalizing function of reason before

a decision can be taken, or “[a] *Decree* can be acted”; second, it is inferior to Reason, “beeing not tyed to the Lawes of Matter,” and being, thus, able to create compound images, such as chimeras or centaurs, not occurring in nature. While the Imagination is unable to ‘create’ the individual components of any fictitious compound, it “may at pleasure ioyned that which Nature hath seuered: & seuer that which Nature hath ioyned” (*The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Michael Kiernan [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000], pp. 106, 73 [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN I, 126]), thus constituting “a potential obstacle to understanding of nature” (Lisa Jardine, *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974], pp. 88-94 [92]).

However, the Imagination is not only a messenger, or intermediary between the world of experience and that of the mind. “In matters of *Faith & Religion*,” Bacon explains, “we raise our *Imagination* aboue our *Reason*.” Consequently, the Imagination “vsurpeth no small authoritie in it selfe” (*The Advancement of Learning*, ed. Kiernan, p. 106), eventually enabling mad and confused minds to sell acts of non-reason, or even of unreason, as acts of faith. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes, among others, thought out the logical implications of this position. Defining dreams as “the reverse of our waking Imaginations” and prophetic visions as a man’s “waking thoughts,” he embedded the origin of religion, and superstition, in men’s inability to keep their imaginations under control (*Leviathan: or, The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* ([London: Andrew Crooke, 1651], p. 6 [I, ii] [PASSMANN AND VIENKEN II, 870]). At the same time, this very inability of keeping them in check made every man’s religion a whim of his fancy. “I see not ... why every Christian should not be also a Prophet,” Hobbes noted dryly (p. 169 [II, xxix]). That, as a perceptive critic has noted, posed the insoluble dilemma “of convincing a second person that one was really inspired” (Truman Guy Steffan, “The Social Argument against Enthusiasm, 1650-1660,” [*University of Texas*] *Studies in English*, 21 [1941], 39-63 [p. 58]), but revelatory inspiration, “genuine intimations of the proximity of the divine,” remained part and parcel of the radicals’ ‘experience’ nonetheless (Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], pp. 73-103 [102]). Henry More believed “*the enormous strength of Imagination the Cause of Enthusiasme*” and “suspect[ed] every high-flown & forward Fancy ... which testifies nothing of the *Truth* or *Existence* of any thing, and therefore ought not, nor cannot be assented to by any but mad men or fools” (*Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* [1662], ed. M. V. DePorte, The Augustan Reprint Society, no 118 [Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1966], pp. 4, 38; see also Dennis

Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995], pp. 94-96).

The contemporary reader already knew from Swift's analysis in the *Tale's* Section IX, which contains the closest link between the *Meditation* and the *Tale*, that he considered this belief to be madness: "But when a Man's Fancy gets *astride* on his Reason, when Imagination is at Cuffs with the Senses, and common Understanding, as well as common Sense, is kickt out of Doors; the first Proselyte he makes, is Himself, and when that is once compass'd, the Difficulty is not so great in bringing over others" (p. G). A similar thought occurs in the *Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, where the virtuoso-persona tries to explain the psycho-physiological reasons for the Dissenters' 'mad' and dangerous enthusiasm: "It manifestly appears, that the Reasoning Faculties are all suspended and superseded, that Imagination hath usurped the Seat, scattering a thousand Deliriums over the Brain" (p. G).

Animal Faculties] One critic refers to Robert Burton's explanation of the division of the soul "into three principal faculties – vegetal, sensitive, and rational, which make three distinct kinds of living creatures: vegetal plants, sensible beasts, rational men" (*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson, 3 vols [London: J. M. Dent, and New York: E. P. Dutton, 1932], I, 155 [I, i, ii, 5]; see Maurice Johnson, "A Note on Swift's *Meditation upon a Broom-Stick* and *A Tale of a Tub*," *The Library Chronicle*, 37 [1972], 136-42 [pp. 139, 142]). However, it is impossible to state with confidence that Swift was acquainted with Burton (Angus Ross, "The Anatomy of Melancholy and Swift," *Swift and his Contexts*, eds John Irwin Fischer, Hermann J. Real, and James Woolley [New York: AMS Press, 1989], pp. 133-58 [133]).

More generally, Swift refers to the commonplace dichotomy between rational and irrational animals (*homo* and *brutum*), which he later was to explore in the Fourth Book of *Gulliver's Travels*. Remarkably, this notion was often captured in the form of a tree diagram, the *arbor porphyriana*, or Porphyry's tree (see R. S. Crane, "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," *Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600-1800*, ed. J. A. Mazzeo [New York: Columbia University Press, and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962], pp. 231-53 [247-53]; Hermann J. Real and Heinz J. Vienen, "Vistas of Porphyry's Tree," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 8 [1983], 92-94; Nic Panagopoulos, "Gulliver and the Horse: An Enquiry into Equine Ethics," *Swift Studies*, 21 [2006], 56-75 [pp. 59-60]).

Cock-Horse] “[Originally] a nursery term, applied to anything a child rides astride upon ... a hobby-horse (OED); here, in adjectival use, “on horseback; triumphant; exulting” (JOHNSON I, s.v.).

And yet, with all his Faults, he sets up to be an universal Reformer and Corrector of Abuses, a Remover of Grievances, rakes into every Slut’s Corner of Nature] “Swift obviously finds deeply obnoxious man’s pretense at universal reform and correction of abuses. He adds weight to his condemnation by explicitly suggesting that man’s hypocritical campaign for purity takes the form of indulgence in sexual intercourse” (Johnson, “A Note on Swift’s *Meditation upon a Broom-Stick* and *A Tale of a Tub*,” p. 140).

Corrector of Abuses] In the *Tale*’s “Digression concerning Criticks,” Pausanias is credited with the “Opinion, that the Perfection of Writing correct was entirely owing to the Institution of *Criticks*; and, that he can possibly mean no other than the *True Critick*, is, I think, manifest enough” (p. G).

bringing hidden Corruptions to the Light, and raises a mighty Dust where there was none before, sharing deeply all the while, in the very same Pollutions he pretends to sweep away] In his *Occasional Reflections*, Boyle shows himself concerned about men’s sinful nature: “He shall scarce ever judge himself Guilty, whom the sight of a Guiltier will absolve: Nor will that Man (till ’tis perhaps too late) be apt to attempt an *Escape from the Pollutions of the World* [2 Peter 2: 20], that stays till he can see none more inextricably intangl’d in them than himself” (*The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 58).

More generally, the passage has been interpreted as a description of the satirist’s predicament, which, paradoxically, makes him share the faults of his victims. For one thing, while pretending to lash the follies and vices of others, the satirist may be guilty of proliferating the sins he intends to root out. For another, his position of superiority makes him incline to pride, turning himself into the primary target of attack (Lynall, “Talking Flowers and Topsy-Turvy Trees,” p. 18; and Gardner D. Stout, Jr, “Speaker and Satiric Vision in Swift’s *Tale of a Tub*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 3 [1969], 175-99 [p. 189]).

hidden Corruptions] “[These] we may take to be venereal diseases” (Johnson, “A Note on Swift’s *Meditation upon a Broom-Stick* and *A Tale of a Tub*,” p. 140).

His last Days are spent in Slavery to Women] Swift’s French translator, Justus van Effen, sees here, as in ll. GG, “a satire on old dotards in love, who, as the saying is, provide the violins for others to dance [une satyre des vieillards

amoureux, qui, comme on dit, donne les violons, pour faire danser les autres]” (VAN EFFEN II, 129n\*). Georg Christian Wolf, the German translator, followed suit, even if he failed to hit van Effen’s delightful idiom: “Dieses ist eine Satyre der alten Leute, welche in ihrem Alter noch verliebt sind, und offtmahls die jüngsten Mädgen heyrathen” (“Betrachtungen über einen Besen-Stiel,” *Des berühmten Herrn D. Swifts Märghen von der Tonne*, 2 vols [in one] [Altona: auf Kosten guter Freunde, 1729], II, 107n\*). Earlier, Sir George Etherege, when reflecting on the fact that “death on all lays his impartial hand / And all resign at his command,” had come to a different conclusion: “When we are sapless, old and impotent, / Then we shall grieve for youth misspent: / Wine and woman only can / Cherish the drooping heart of man” (*The Fruit of that Forbidden Tree: Restoration Poems, Songs, and Jests on the Subject of Sensual Love*, ed. John Adlard [Cheadle, Cheshire: Carcanet Press, 1975], p. 20).

’till worn to the Stumps ... he’s either kickt out of Doors, or made use of to kindle Flames, for others to warm Themselves by] Reminiscent of St John: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned” (15:6), which Boyle used as the occasion of his long reflection on the pruning of fruit trees in “A Discourse touching Occasional Meditations” (*The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 45-50; see also the Historical Introduction, pp. GG, and II. GG). In the Reflection “*Upon his making of a Fire*,” Boyle interpreted the blaze of a fire as an emblem of Hell: “These Blocks may represent our Necessary, these Sticks our less important, Religious practices, and this aspiring Flame, the subtile Inhabitor of that of Hell,” and in “*Upon the making of a Fire with Charcoal*,” he warns his readers against “the pernicious Flames of Lust” (*The Works of Robert Boyle*, eds Hunter and Davis, V, 85, 91). Similarly, TOOKE warned his readers against the “impure and dangerous Flames of *Venus*”: “When Impudence has blown the Coals, so that Modesty can put no further Stop to the Rage and Violence of this Flame: When this hellish Off-spring breaks forth, and by degrees gathers Strength; Good God!” (pp. 194, 186-87).

‘Flame’ may connote not only sexual passion, but also venereal infection (GORDON WILLIAMS I, 499). Likewise, in Swift’s time, ‘stump’ is evocative of “a penis drastically shortened by overuse” (GORDON WILLIAMS III, 1337). These examples of *double entendre* belong to the *Meditation*’s matrix of suggestive language prepared earlier in words, such as ‘sap’ (semen), and ‘root’ and ‘stick’ as in broomstick, both representing the male member (see, in addition to GORDON WILLIAMS III, 1195, 1168, 1315, Johnson, “A Note on Swift’s *Meditation upon a Broom-Stick* and *A Tale of a Tub*,” p. 140, and Gene

Washington, “Swift’s *A Meditation upon a Broomstick*,” *American Notes and Queries*, n. s. 3, no 4 [1990], 163-64 [p. 164]). See also the glosses on “’tis either thrown out of Doors” and “or condemn’d to its last use of kindling Fires” (ll. GG).

he’s either kickt out of Doors] See the gloss on “’tis either thrown out of Doors” (l. G).

like his Brother *Bezom*] Synonym for broom; figuratively “any agent that cleanses, purifies, or sweeps away things material or immaterial” (OED, s.v. “besom”), as, for example, in Isaiah 14:23: “I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts.”