

## JONATHAN SWIFT AND FREEMASONRY

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The early eighteenth century was the formative period of modern, or "Speculative" Masonry.<sup>1</sup> In the Middle Ages a form of guild was organised by workers with stone or builders. Those masons formed "lodges" in local places and developed their own tenets and rituals the divulgence of which was strictly forbidden. The customs of these craftsmen, or "Operative" Masonry, continued well into the seventeenth century. Sometime in that century non-operative masons began to either join existing lodges or form new ones. As the proportion of gentleman members increased, there emerged "Speculative" Masonry, i.e. Freemasonry as we now know it. The age of Jonathan Swift, 1667-1754, saw the transition-- from "Operative" Masonry to "Speculative" Masonry-- and the rise of Freemasonry.

In seventeenth century literature there are only a few known references to Freemasonry. The first is by Henry Adamson, the master of a song school of Perth, in his poem entitled *The muses threnodie* which was published in Edinburgh in 1638. In the poem appear the following lines: "For we be brethren of the Rosie Crosse; / We have the Mason Word and second sight ..."<sup>2</sup> The second appearance is also from a Scotsman, Thomas Urquhart, an eccentric but learned man of letters and the famed translator of Rabelais. In his proposal for the "universal language" entitled *Logopandecteis* published in 1653, Urquhart tells of a man who was able "by virtue of the Masson word, to make a Masson, whom he had never seene before, without speaking, or any other apparent signe, come, and salute him."<sup>3</sup> In 1672 Andrew Marvell the poet referred to the "Masons Word" in *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*, a work which Jonathan Swift mentions with approval in the "Apology" of his *Tale of a Tub*. Marvell says that the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the Italian factions in medieval times, were so hostile to each other that they "took care to differ in the least circumstances of any humane action: and, as those that have the Masons Word, secretly discern one another."<sup>4</sup> In 1686 Robert Plot wrote an account about Freemasonry in his *Natural History of Staffordshire*. Plot was Secretary to the Royal Society in 1682, the first keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and Historiog-

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of Freemasonry see, for example, the following studies: Robert Freke Gould, *The History of Freemasonry*, 3 vols. (London, 1885), esp., Vol. II; David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's century, 1590-1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988); entry on "Freemasonry" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1964) by R. B. Harris; Lionel Vibert, *Freemasonry before the Existence of Grand Lodges* (London: Spencer, n.d.), esp. chs. X-XII; Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the Lodge* (1989; rpt. Corgi, 1993), Pt. 3; John Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry* (London: Crusible, 1986); Bernard E. Jones, *Freemason's Guide and Compendium*, 2nd ed. (1956; rpt. Orpington, Kent: Dobby, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Stevenson, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Stevenson, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> D. I. B. Smith, ed., *The Rehearsal Transpros'd* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 34-5.

rapher Royal in 1688. His account contains criticism, especially on Masons' secret signs, but it is highly valued as a precious document for the history of Freemasonry. And Randle Holme, the antiquarian and deputy for the Garter King of Arms, prided himself on being a Fellow Mason in his *Academie of Armory* published in 1688.

Reference to Freemasonry is also found in the private writings, in the form of diaries and memoranda, of such noted men as John Aubrey, George Hickes and Elias Ashmole, who was a Freemason. Other references occur in anonymous pamphlets and minutes of local lodges. In view of the low frequency of reference and of the nature of sources, most of them not accessible, it may be said that Freemasonry was still latent during the seventeenth century.

The measure of the popularity that Freemasonry had gained by the first decade of the eighteenth century may be indicated by references to it in two numbers of the *Tatler*, the first popular periodical in England. In 1709 Richard Steele, who was reputedly a Freemason, in an account of "Pretty Fellows," or fops, wrote: "You see them accost each other with effeminate Airs: they have their Sings and Tokens like Free-Masons ...." In 1710 Steele wrote about the "Order of the Insipids" or "a set of idle Fellows":

This Order has produced great Numbers of tolerable Copiers in Painting, good Rhimers in Poetry, and harmless Projectors in Politicks. You may see them at first Sight grow acquainted by Sympathy, in somuch that one who had not studied Nature, and did not know the true Cause of their sudden Familiarities, would think that they had some secret Intimation of each other, like the Free Masons.<sup>6</sup>

The beginnings of modern Freemasonry are marked by two incidents: the establishment of the Grand Lodge at London in 1717, and the publication in 1730 of the *Constitutions* by James Anderson, the Scottish divine and antiquary. The number of lodges in London increased from four in 1717 to fifty-two in 1723. Thus, Swift's lifetime was coterminous with the emergence of Freemasonry.

The subject of my essay has been a kind of blind spot in the history of Swift studies. Once, nearly a century ago, a historian of Freemasonry took an interest in this subject and wrote an article entitled "Early Irish Freemasonry and Dean Swift's Connection with the Craft." This article by Chetwode Crawley, as far as I am aware, remains to this day the only study which gives a full treatment of the subject.<sup>7</sup> Crawley's argument may be summarised as follows: that Swift may have been a Freemason; that Swift may have had a hand in writing a speech, which is itself a valuable document containing references to Freemasonry in its early history; and that Swift may have written another work, which is also an important document in the early history of Freemasonry. Since Crawley's thesis has never elicited serious attention from Swift scholars it might be worthwhile reopening the subject, giving it, I hope, a fresh importance.

<sup>5</sup> Donald F. Bond, ed., *The Tatler*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), I, p.200 (No.26, June 9, 1709).

<sup>6</sup> *The Tatler*, II, p.420 (No.166, May 2, 1710).

<sup>7</sup> W. J. Chetwode Crawley, "Early Irish Freemasonry and Dean Swift's Connection with the Craft" in Henry Sadler, *Masonic Reprints and Historical Revelations* (London: George Kenning, 1898), pp.vii-xxxvi. Among Swift critics only Ball, knowledgeable historian of Ireland and editor of the standard edition of Swift's correspondence before Harold Williams's, suggested the importance of the subject. See F. Elrington Ball, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, 6 vols. (London: George Bell, 1912-14), I, p.xxxii.

### *The List of 1730*

The first document we are concerned with is the list of membership in 1730 of the Lodge of Freemasons meeting at the Goat Tavern at the foot of the Haymarket. The list is among the minutes of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons of England 1723–1739 and was published by the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, the Masonic research lodge at London, in 1913. In the list appear the names of “M<sup>r</sup> Alex. Pope” and “M<sup>r</sup> John Swift.” In the 1723 list of the Bedford Head Lodge appears the name of “D<sup>r</sup> Arbuthnott”.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Pope and Arbuthnot the identity of the names has been considered almost certain. But in Swift’s case it is less easy to reach a firm conclusion because of the registrar’s ambiguous way of writing “John” instead of “Jon.,” which was Swift’s usual way of signing his name. Crawley made a case for identity, arguing that the unusual spelling was caused by an error on the part of the scribe in transcribing the original list with personal signatures. As to the epithet of “Mr” instead of “Dr,” Crawley argues, it was not an unusual practice as in the case of “Rev. Dr. Savage, of St. George’s, Hanover-square, a divine and scholar.”<sup>9</sup>

Crawley reminds us of the fact that Swift and Arbuthnot formed in 1714 the Martinus Scriblerus Club and “pointedly addressed each other as Brother.”<sup>10</sup> Crawley may have confused the Scriblerus Club, a literary club, with the Brothers Club, also called the Society, which was formed in 1711, three years before the Scriblerus Club, by Henry St. John, then the Secretary of State, and whose practice included calling members Brother.<sup>11</sup> The Brothers Club was a social club intended for “the improvement of friendship and the encouragement of letters”<sup>12</sup> but it was political, especially Tory, in character. Swift and Arbuthnot joined both clubs. In their correspondence they often address each other as “Dear Brother.”<sup>13</sup> It is doubtful whether the practice of calling each other Brother reflected their membership of Freemasonry

<sup>8</sup> *Quatuor Coronati Antigrapha: Masonic Reprints of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, No.2076, London* 10 (1913) reprints *The Minutes of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons of England, 1723–1739*. The name of Arbuthnot appears on p.27 and those of Pope and Swift on p.156. A photographic reproduction of those pages are on pp.438–9 of Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (London: Norton, 1985). A survey on the question of membership of literary men in Pope’s time is found in W. J. Williams, “Alexander Pope and Freemasonry,” *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 38 (1925), 111–31 with comments and criticism of the same article by several hands on pp.131–46. Among alleged members are Richard Steele, William Hogarth and Christopher Smart.

<sup>9</sup> Crawley, p.xvii. There appears a certain John Swift (“Jn<sup>n</sup> Swift”), the Deputy Junior Warden, in the minute of the lodge held at the Castle and Lion, Norwich, dated May 10, 1787. This John Swift was the Master Warden of the Chequers Lodge, Norwich, in 1789, 1791 and 1796. See H. Le Strange, *History of Freemasonry in Norfolk 1724 to 1895* (Norwich, 1896), pp.88, 91.

It is unlikely that he was the same “John Swift” who belonged to the Bedford Head Lodge in 1725 but it seems possible that he was a son or a relative of the latter. Swift or Swifte was a fairly common surname in the Midlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Jonathan Swift belonged to an Irish branch of the family. Among Jonathan’s near relations, however, there seems to have been no one with the forename of John.

<sup>10</sup> Crawley, p.xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Kerby-Miller, ed., *The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus* (1950; rpt. N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1988), pp.5–7.

<sup>12</sup> Kerby-Miller, p.5.

<sup>13</sup> Harold Williams, ed., *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–5), II, pp.34, 35, 41, 57, 69, 81, 136, 143, 303. The only instance in which Swift addresses Arbuthnot as “Dear Brother” is found in his letter dated June 16, 1714. Arbuthnot continued the practice of addressing Swift as “Dear Brother” until December, 1718. The evidence from the extant correspondence suggests that the practice was inspired by their being members of the Brothers Club rather than of Freemasonry.

as Crawley wanted us to believe. There are no references to Freemasonry in the extant correspondence of Arbuthnot, Pope and Swift. Until corroborating evidence appears our conclusion must remain conjectural, though still leaving room for the possibility of Jonathan Swift having been a Mason.

### *The Tripos Speech of 1688 at Trinity College, Dublin*

The second document we are dealing with is the manuscript of the Tripos speech given at the Commencement of 1688 at Trinity College, Dublin. The manuscript was first published in 1808 by John Barrett, then Vice-Provost of TCD, comprising part of his *Essay on the Earlier Part of the Life of Swift*.<sup>14</sup> Sir Walter Scott was the first to include the *Tripos* in his edition of Swift's works but he noted his reservations about the theory of Swift's sole authorship which Barrett strongly claimed in his *Essay*.<sup>15</sup> As a result the *Tripos* has been dropped from the subsequent editions of Swift's works and the subject itself has largely been neglected by Swift scholars with the exception of George Mayhew's article thirty years ago.<sup>16</sup>

The question of the authorship of the *Tripos* has never been raised since Barrett. Harold Williams allows the possibility, though small, of Swift's collaboration but Irvin Ehrenpreis almost denies it.<sup>17</sup> What seems to concern us here is that the *Tripos* contains several references to Freemasonry, a fact first noticed by Crawley.

A Tripos was a custom, beginning at least from the earlier sixteenth century at Cambridge University (at the time of Erasmus's residence there), which allowed a representative of the undergraduates to make a satirical speech, often freely reflecting on dons, at the annual meeting for conferring degrees.<sup>18</sup> The speech took the form either of a mock oration parodying academic disputation or of a play with separate acts, sometimes mixing both. The custom had been well established by the seventeenth century at Oxford as well where the orator was called the *terrae filius*. Trinity College, Dublin, founded in 1592, developed the Tripos tradition and other customs after the model of its namesake at Cambridge during the seventeenth century. Swift matriculated at TCD in 1682 at the age of fourteen and resided there till 1689. It was John Jones who made the Tripos speech of 1688. Jones was three years older than Swift but entered TCD at about the same time, in the spring of 1682. Jones's tutor was St. George Ashe, the same tutor as Swift's, and he took B.A. in February 1686 with "special grace" together with Swift and three other classmates. According to Barrett, Jones was "an intimate of

<sup>14</sup> John Barrett, *An Essay on the Earlier Part of the Life of Swift* (London, 1808).

<sup>15</sup> Sir Walter Scott, ed., *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*. 2nd ed. 19 vols. (1824; rpt. 1893-4), Vol. VI, pp. 209-42.

<sup>16</sup> George Mayhew, "Swift and the Tripos Tradition," *PQ* 45 (1966), 85-101.

<sup>17</sup> Harold Williams et al, eds., *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, 16 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939-74), I, p.x; Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works, and the Age*, 3 vols. (London: Methuen, 1962-83), I, pp. 66-7.

<sup>18</sup> On the history of the Tripos see Mayhew, esp. pp.86-90, 97-101. For contemporary references to the Tripos at Oxford (or the *terrae filius* as it was called there), not included in Mayhew's account, see for example: *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, 10 vols(Oxford, 1885-1915), entry on February 20, 1706; *Letters of Humphrey Prideaux Sometime Dean of Norwich to John Ellis Sometime Under-Secretary of State 1674-1722*, ed. E. M. Thompson (London,1875), entry on August 6, 1684; and *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. John Bowle (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), entry on July 10, 1669.

Swift.<sup>19</sup> Jones was suspended “for false and scandalous reflections” on the fellows and officers of the college but the suspension was remitted as was often the case with speechmakers in the Tripos.<sup>20</sup> Later, Jones took a D.D. but did not take holy orders. He became a successful schoolmaster in Dublin and some of Swift’s relatives studied under him.

The Tripos speech of 1688 consists of three acts. The style is a mixture of dog Latin and bad English with farcical dialogues and doggerel rhymes. The first reference to Freemasonry occurs near the end of Act II. The speaker says:

It was lately ordered, that, for the honour and dignity of the University, there should be introduced a society of Freemasons, consisting of gentlemen, mechanics, porters, parsons, ragmen, hucksters, bailiffs, divines, tinkers, knights, thatchers, cobblers, poets, justices, drawers, beggars, aldermen, paviours, sculls, freshmen, bachelors, scavengers, masters, sowgelders, doctors, ditchers, pimps, lords, butchers, and tailors, who shall bind themselves by an oath, never to discover their mighty no-secret; and to relieve whatsoever strolling distressed brethren they meet with, after the example of the fraternity of Freemasons in and about Trinity College; by whom a collection was lately made for, and the purse of charity well stuffed for, a reduced brother, who received their charity ....<sup>21</sup>

The “reduced brother” then meets with Cooper, “the most brotherly of brothers,” and they go to the Library “with the object of viewing Ridley among the other wonders of the place.”<sup>22</sup> According to Barrett, “Ridley” was the name of a man who was reputed to have been an informer against priests under the notorious Penal Laws.<sup>23</sup> He was hanged and his body, after having been dissected and stuffed, was displayed in the Library together with the other “wonders” such as the Book of Kells.<sup>24</sup> The “reduced brother” or “*frater scoundrellus*” finds upon the remains of Ridley the Freemason’s Mark. There follows a poem “An Elegy upon Ridley” written in Hudibrastic. After the episode of Ridley, the speaker goes on to tell, a lodge meeting was held and it was decided that “no one deserving the extreme penalty of the law, or sure to be hanged, shall be admitted into the Society of Freemasons.”<sup>25</sup>

Near the end of Act III, in a concluding passage, are other references to Freemasonry. In a tone ostensibly lamenting what he has spoken with so much freedom, the speaker says: “If I betake myself to the library, Ridley’s ghost will haunt me, for scandalizing him with the name of freemason.” Shortly afterwards he says: “The freemasons will banish me their lodge, and

<sup>19</sup> Barrett, p.10.

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, p.20.

<sup>21</sup> Scott, VI, p.227. I have used Scott’s version as the text of the 1688 Tripos speech. The Latin portion was partly translated into English by Crawley, which I have also used and indicated as such in the notes below.

<sup>22</sup> Translation by Crawley, p.xxiii; Scott, p.228.

<sup>23</sup> Crawley, p.xix.

<sup>24</sup> Regarding the curious object in the library of TCD there is an interesting account by John Dunton, the London bookseller and writer who visited there in 1699:

We were next shew’d by Mr. *Griffith*, a Master of Art ... the Skin of one Ridley, a *notorious Tory*, which had been long ago Executed; he had been bagg’d for an *Anatomy*, and being flea’d, his Skin was tann’d, and stuff’d with Straw; in this passive state he was assaulted by some Mice and Rats, not *sneakingly* behind his Back, but boldly before his Face, which they so much *further Mortified*, even after Death, as to eat it up; which loss has since been supply’d by tanning the Face of one *Geoghagan*, a Popish Priest, executed about six years ago, for stealing; which said Face is put in the place of *Ridley’s*. (*The Dublin Scuffle* [London, 1699], p. 411)

<sup>25</sup> Trans. by Crawley, p.xxiv; Scott, p.230.

bar me the happiness of kissing long Lawrence.”<sup>26</sup>

From the evidence we have seen in the 1688 *Tripes* speech and from its character as a public speech, counting on at least some knowledge on the part of the audience about what is being said, it may safely be inferred that a lodge of Freemasons existed in or around TCD well before its official history began in 1725 with the foundation of the Grand Lodge of Ireland in Dublin. Building upon Crawley's study a Masonic researcher offers a fuller picture of the historical backgrounds of the *Tripes* speech of 1688.<sup>27</sup> According to R. E. Parkinson a considerable number of TCD personnel mentioned in Jones's speech were blood relations of those who are known to have been Freemasons around and after 1725. And there is good reason to believe that there was a group of people who were or had been members of the Craft in 1688 and that Swift was acquainted with the fact if only because he was present at the College event.

I would suggest that the theory of Swift's collaboration in the *Tripes* deserves a wider recognition than has hitherto been given. The parallels between the *Tripes* and *A Tale of a Tub*, which reputedly had its origins in the period when Swift was at TCD, are too conspicuous to let us think otherwise.

The character of Tommy Weaver, “the prettiest spark about the town,” in Act I of the *Tripes* resembles that of the three brothers in *A Tale of a Tub* when they come to town. The three brothers, like Tommy, take snuff, see plays, rhyme and visit coffee-houses.<sup>28</sup> The Latin prescription for an “elixir,” which is actually “a mixture of ale and mum” invented by the College Butler, reminds us of the prescription with Latin terms of chemistry for a “universal System in a small portable Volume” in Section V of the *Tale*.<sup>29</sup> Other parallels include mock-syllogism, use of digression, and parody of will.<sup>30</sup> Mention of a civet cat and transubstantiation may be further verbal echoes.<sup>31</sup> The use of false analogy in a passage in Act III where a woman is compared to a book is one of the features of Swift's later style, as in the passage in Section II of the *Tale* where man is compared to clothes.<sup>32</sup> Also, the reference to eclipses in the conversation between St. George Ashe and Samuel Foley in Act III constitutes a satire on science, a distant echo of which can be traced, nearly forty years later, in the *Voyage to Laputa*.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Scott, p.242.

<sup>27</sup> R. E. Parkinson, “The Lodge in Trinity College, Dublin, 1688,” *A.Q.C.* 54 (1941), 96–107.

<sup>28</sup> Scott, p.216; *A Tale of a Tub*, ed. A. C. Guthkelch and David Nichol Smith, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.74–5.

<sup>29</sup> Scott, p.218; *Tale*, pp.123–4.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, pp.219–20, 222, 221–2; *Tale*, pp.153 and Section II.

<sup>31</sup> Scott, pp.216, 224; *Tale*, pp.165, 116–8.

<sup>32</sup> Scott, pp.241–2; *Tale*, p.78.

<sup>33</sup> Scott, pp.231–2; *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Paul Turner (1971; rpt. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), pp.161–2. It may be noted here that the satire on science in the *Voyage to Laputa* needs to be considered against the history of the Dublin Philosophical Society, many of whose members, including Ashe and Foley, were connected with TCD and whose heyday was coterminous with Swift's residence there. There is an excellent study of the Society by K. Theodore Hoppen. See *The Common Scientist in the Seventeenth Century: A Study of the Dublin Philosophical Society 1683–1708* (1970; rpt. Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1989). The minutes of the Dublin Philosophical Society and relevant materials are now available in microform edited and annotated by Hoppen. A useful introduction to the collection, with an index to it, is Hoppen, *The Papers of the Dublin Philosophical Society 1683–1708* in *Analecta Hibernica* 30 (1982), 151–248.

### “A Letter from the Grand Mistress”

The third document we shall consider in connection with Swift and Freemasonry is a work often attributed to Swift. The title of the work is *A Letter from the Grand Mistress of the Female Free-Masons, to Mr. Harding the Printer*.<sup>34</sup> The exact date of publication of this work is unknown but the original imprint of “Printed by John Harding in Molesworth’s Court in Fishamble-Street, 1724” shows that it belongs to the same period as the famous *Drapier’s Letters*.<sup>35</sup> In later editions of Swift’s works such as Faulkner’s *Miscellanies* (London, 1745–8), Hawkesworth’s *Works* (London, 1755) and Faulkner’s *Works* (Dublin, 1760–9) the addressee of the *Letter* was changed from John Harding to George Faulkner. The change must have been inevitable in view of the fact that Harding died on 19 April, 1725 during his imprisonment for publishing the seditious *Drapier’s Letters*.<sup>36</sup> The real relationship between Swift and Faulkner from 1725 to 1729 is obscure but from 1729 onwards Faulkner acted as Swift’s printer.<sup>37</sup>

The *Letter* was probably written as a comical answer to *The Grand Mystery of the Free Masons Discover’d*, an anonymous pamphlet published in 1724 in London.<sup>38</sup> The full title of the *Grand Mystery* will explain its content: “*THE GRAND MYSTERY OF THE FREE MASONS DISCOVER’D. WHEREIN Are the several QUESTIONS put to them at their Meetings and Installations. As also, Their OATH, HEALTH, SIGNS, and POINTS, to know each other by. As they were found in the Custody of a FREE-MASON who Dyed suddenly and now publish’d for the Information of the PUBLICK.... To which are ANNEXED, Two LETTERS to a FRIEND; The First, Concerning the Society of FREE-MASONS. The SECOND, Giving an Account of the Most Ancient Society of G O R M O G O N S, in its Original, Institution, Excellency, and Design: Its Rules and Orders, and the Manner of its Introduction into Great Britain. With an intire Collection of all that has been made Publick on that Occasion. Together with the supposed Reason of their Excluding the Free-Masons, without they previously undergo the Form of Degradation, Ec. Now first set forth for the Satisfaction and Emolument of the Publick.*”

There are a number of parallels between the *Letter* and the *Grand Mystery*. The “Grand Mistress” in the title of the *Letter* makes a perfect assonance with the “Grand Mystery”. “*Boas, Nimrod, Jakins, Pectoral, Guttural*” which the *Letter* alludes to are words which also appear in the *Grand Mystery*.<sup>39</sup> The simile of Ixion and the cloud in the same verse is used by Swift on two occasions, in *A Tritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind* and “An Answer to Dr. Sheridan’s New Simile for the Ladies.”<sup>40</sup> The *Letter* has a number of Swiftian satirical devices. The source of the opening verse quotation is given as “a.b.c.Lib.6th.” False etymology is one

<sup>34</sup> The *Letter* is reprinted in *PW*, V, pp.323–33, which I used as the text. For minor differences in the text I have also consulted another reprinted version included in the Appendix of Sadler, *Masonic Reprints*. As to the authenticity of the work Ball observes it is “tolerably certain” that the *Letter* is “a genuine production of Swift’s pen.” See Ball, I, p.xxxii.

<sup>35</sup> *PW*, V, p.358.

<sup>36</sup> *Corr.*, III, p.93.

<sup>37</sup> Ehrenpreis, III, p.779–80.

<sup>38</sup> The *Grand Mystery* is reprinted in the Appendix of Gould, *The History of Freemasonry*.

<sup>39</sup> *PW*, V, p.326; Gould, III, p.476.

<sup>40</sup> *PW*, I, p.247; Pat Rogers, ed., *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 503.

of the main literary devices of the *Letter*. The following passage is a good example:

When one says *Gimel*, the other answers *Nun*; then the first again joyning both Letters together repeats Three Times, *Gimel-Nun, Gimel-Nun, Gimel-Nun*, by which they mean that they are united as one in Interests, Secresy, and Affection. This Last Word has in Time been depraved in the Pronunciation from *Gimel-Nun* to *Gimelun*, and at last into *Giblun*; and sometimes *Giblin*, which Word being by some Accident discover'd, they now adays pretend its but a *Mock Word*.<sup>41</sup>

A comparable passage is found in the *Voyage to Laputa* where Lemuel Gulliver tells about the etymology of the name of the land:

The Word, which I interpret the *Flying* or *Floating Island*, is in the Original *Laputa*; whereof I could never learn the true Etymology. Lap in the old obsolete Language signifieth *High*, and *Untuh* a Governor; from which they say by Corruption was derived *Laputa* from *Lapuntuh*. But I do not approve of this Derivation, which seems to be a little strained. I ventured to offer to the Learned among them a Conjecture of my own, that *Laputa* was *quasi Lap outed*; *Lap* signifying properly the dancing of the Sun Beams in the Sea; and *outed* a Wing, which however I shall not obtrude, but submit to the judicious Reader.<sup>42</sup>

A greater part of the *Letter* is devoted to the genealogy of English Freemasonry. The genealogy has an air of truth when the author derives Freemasonry from the Lodge of Solomon's Temple, whose tradition, it is supposed, had survived via the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem or the Knights of Malta down to "the famous Lodge of *Killwinnin*."<sup>43</sup> But it is clear that the author mingles fact with fiction when he gives as an authority "the venerable *Chinese Brachman*, whose History of the Rise, Progress, and Decay of *Free-Masonry*, writ in the *Chinese Tongue*, is lately Translated into a Certain *European Language*."<sup>44</sup> In the *Grand Mystery* also appears Chin-Quaw-Ky-Po, the "first Chief Monarch, or Emperor" of China and the institutor of the Order of Gormogons which came to be known as Freemasonry after its introduction to Europe.<sup>45</sup>

A point which the author of the *Letter* repeatedly makes is that Freemasonry has associations with the occult philosophies of all kinds and ages. Thus, the history of Freemason-

<sup>41</sup> *PW*, V, pp.325-6.

<sup>42</sup> *Gulliver's Travels*, p.158. Interestingly, the account of Gormogons in the "Postscript" of the *Grand Mystery* is written in a similar vein of humour:

Since the closing this Letter, I have had the Pleasure to receive an Account, which I much desir'd, of the *Derivation of the Word GORMOGON*; and, as it is very Curious and Significant, and is not made a Secret of, I could not but inform you of it. It is, it seems, a Compound Word in the *Chinese Tongue*, signifying, A Person made Illustrious by Social Love, by the Excellency of his Genius, and by the Antiquity of his Descent: For GOR, in that most expressive Language, signifies *Brother*, or *Friend*, the most valuable Title on Earth; MO is a Word of Eminence, prefix'd to a Name or Thing, to distinguish its Excellency; and GON, signifies *Antiquity* or *Length of Continuance*: And it is observable, That the Province of MO-GON in *China*, which was formerly the Residence, Birth-place, and Paternal Inheritance of the Great Chin-Quaw-Ky-Po (as its Name [MO-GON] denotes *The most Excellent and most Ancient Kingdom*) is one of the most plentiful and flourishing Provinces of that vast Empire. (Gould, III, p.486)

<sup>43</sup> *PW*, V, p.329.

<sup>44</sup> *PW*, V, p.328.

<sup>45</sup> Gould, III, pp.482-6.

ry is made to have had connections with "the *Pythagorian* Lodge of *Free-Masons*," "*Raymundus Lullius*," the natural Magick, and the Caballistical Philosophy," and "*Conjurors* or *Magitians*" like "*Merlin* and *Fryar Bacon*."<sup>46</sup> In fact, historians of Freemasonry have often claimed its connections with pagan and occult philosophies. The ostensibly learned but comical approach of the author of the *Letter* amounts to a parody of Freemasons' zeal and seriousness in their endeavours concerning the historical derivation of their society. The use of exaggeration, distortion and random association in the pseudo-history of Freemasonry in the *Letter* is characteristic of Swift's satirical methods as in the section on the Aeolists in *A Tale of a Tub*, a work, among few other of his, in which the occult traditions are given full treatment.

Popular interest in Freemasonry in Swift's time chiefly concerned the idea of secret communication among members using passwords and a particular kind of gestures. The former is known as the Mason Words, and the latter as "grips" or tokens.<sup>47</sup> In the *Letter* the notion of Masons' secret communication being based upon the Hebrew alphabet is described thus:

Now, as to the secret Words and Signals used among *Free Masons*, it is to be observ'd that in the *Hebrew* Alphabet ... there are Four Pair of Letters, of which each Pair is so like, that at first View they seem to be the same, *Beth* and *Caph*, *Gimel* and *Nun*, *Cheth* and *Thau*, *Daleth* and *Resch*, and on these Depend all their Signals and Grips.<sup>48</sup>

The author goes on to say that the play with the Hebrew alphabet which forms the basis of the Mason Words is "very anciently call'd the MANABOLETH."<sup>49</sup> The fictitious notion of the Manaboeth is apparently derived by analogy with "shibboleth," a word of Hebrew origin, which is said to have been used as a kind of testword by Gileadites in order to detect Ephraimites, their contending faction, who could not pronounce the sound *sh*. After the suppression of Freemasonry by Elizabeth I, the author tells us, Freemasons, imitating ancient practice, invented a kind of Manaboeth in English such as: "I.O.U.H. a Gold Key, that is, *I owe you each a Gold Key*; H CCCC his Ruin. *Each foresees his Ruin*. I.C.U.B.YY for me. *I see you be too wise for me*."<sup>50</sup> Swift's love of word-play made him find in Dillon Ashe and Thomas Delaney fellow-punsters and even write *A Modest Defence of Punning*.<sup>51</sup>

The use of hiatus in the middle of the author's explanation of the origin of punning practice is reminiscent of several passages of *A Tale of a Tub* and the *Battle of the Books* where Swift employs the same satirical device.<sup>52</sup> Having denounced play on letters or words as "foolish Stuff," the author, a page later, indulges himself in punning. The topic here is the bee as an emblem of the long-standing of Freemasonry. The author says:

What *Modern Masons* call a Lodge was for the above Reasons by Antiquity call'd a HIVE of *Free-Masons*, and for the same Reasons when a Dissention happens in a *Lodge*

<sup>46</sup> *PW*, V, pp.327, 328, 329, 330.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, p.281.

<sup>48</sup> *PW*, V, p.325.

<sup>49</sup> *PW*, V, p.326.

<sup>50</sup> *PW*, V, p.326.

<sup>51</sup> *PW*, IV, pp.203-10.

<sup>52</sup> *Tale*, pp.170, 179, 276.

the going off and forming another *Lodge* is to this Day call'd SWARMING.<sup>53</sup>

Is it further evidence, though circumstantial, of Swift's authorship of the *Letter* that the bee is one of his favourite images as in the famous episode of the spider and the bee in the *Battle of the Books*?<sup>54</sup> The mention of "Drapier" in the "Postscript" to the *Letter* may not necessarily indicate that Swift wrote the piece but parallels between the *Letter* and other works of his own seem clear enough to show that he did.

Whether Swift was a Freemason or not is a question which cannot at the moment be answered with any certainty. But I have shown that he was in a position to be interested in the emerging fraternity when he was at TCD. His motives in writing the *Letter* are not clear. It is a comical exposé rather than a straight-forward defence or apology for Freemasonry. Being a Freemason, however, would not have prevented Swift from producing such an unclassifiable work. Affiliation to an institution and literary creation *in reference to* that institution were different things for Swift. He wrote a highly misleading satire on religion called *A Tale of a Tub in order to defend Anglicanism*, with the result that he could not obtain a prelacy in England as he wished.

Swift's ambiguous attitude to Freemasonry must have been a problem to Sir Walter Scott. Scott, as editor of Swift's works, included for the first time the *Tripes* in his edition but omitted the *Letter* presumably because he was himself a Freemason. At the time when Scott was working on a new edition of Swift's works the *Tripes* was fresh material recently discovered by Barrett from the muniment room of TCD. Attribution was doubtful, it is true, but the piece of puerile wit contained precious testimony to the existence of Freemasonry long before it came to public notice in the 1720's. By associating the name of a literary celebrity with a previously unknown fact about Freemasonry, Scott authorised, perhaps inadvertently, the history of his Craft. However, the case was different with the *Letter*, for unlike the *Tripes* it is a more mature work and its authorship is much less questionable. If Scott had attributed the *Letter* to Swift, by including it in his edition, it would have ranked Swift in the history of anti-Masonic literature. A solution to this dilemma was simply to omit the *Letter* from a new edition of Swift. The *Letter* has since been restored to Swift's canon but in the awkward place of an appendix to the current standard edition without any commentary by the editors.

My purpose in this essay has been to raise questions rather than give answers. It may be permissible to ask a further question in concluding this essay. Is it a coincidence that Swift wrote a memorable parable of three "brothers" in the *Tale* to preach against schism in religion, and a sermon called "Brotherly Love"?

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<sup>53</sup> *PW*, V, p.328.

<sup>54</sup> *Tale*, p.277.