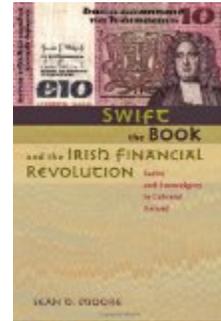


Sean D. Moore. *Swift, the Book, and the Irish Financial Revolution: Satire and Sovereignty in Colonial Ireland*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xi + 268 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-9507-4.

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Jonathan Swift's Contributions to the Irish Financial Revolution and Anglo-Irish Print Culture

This concise monograph manages the difficult task of interpreting Jonathan Swift's corpus in new contexts, while contributing to existing themes in Swift scholarship. Taking a new economic criticism approach, Sean D. Moore examines Swift's engagement with and contributions to the development of Irish financial institutions. Moore's study profits from existing studies on the English financial revolution, in particular on the representational issues posed by new financial instruments and on the structural overlap between public and private credit. But he adds a new and important dimension by bringing the colonial context of the Irish situation to bear and by extending the homology between paper forms of money and print to the concurrent development of the Irish financial and book markets. While Moore's study makes novel contributions to these different lines of scholarship, it could benefit from further elaboration of certain elements, along with more extensive use of scholarship in economic history and the history of economic thought.

Moore dates the beginnings of the Irish financial revolution to 1716, when a small group of Anglo-Irish landowners loaned the Irish treasury funds for national security. The interest on this first national debt was to be paid in perpetuity from future tax revenues, thus giving investors a strong incentive to resist any attempt by the British Parliament to regulate taxation in Ireland or to restructure the debt. Following George Berkeley, Moore terms this coterie "the Monti" and argues that the political and economic community it formed was the origin

of Anglo-Irish national identity. While not a member of the Monti, Swift supported the political and socioeconomic values it represented. Moore views Swift's pamphlets on the national bank, Wood's halfpence, and other financial and commercial issues as successful attempts to mobilize a domestic publishing industry to sway public opinion and policymakers to act in the Monti's interests, which were depicted as those of the Irish nation in general. Moore argues that Anglo-Irish political thought thus originates in this discourse on the national debt, which is at the same time a discourse on a national print culture. Swift's writings on trade and currency, in particular, suggest the potential of an Anglo-Irish publishing industry to counteract British political, economic, and cultural imperialism.

Moore anchors his conjoint reading of the national debt and the national book trade by tracing the motif of weaving in *The Battle of the Books*, *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) and *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufactures* (1720). Through this traditional metaphor for writing, Swift attacks the cultural hegemony of British standards of taste in both sartorial and intellectual fashions. This metadiscourse on textiles as a symbol for cultural production appears in several of Swift's tracts on Irish economic issues, as well as in those of other Anglo-Irish writers. Moore also demonstrates how financial issues and print culture were connected in Swift's critique of British colonialism through analysis of scatological imagery, the homology between minting/printing, and the metaphors

of cannibalism. His analysis of the major works thus connects to central issues in recent Swift scholarship, but his argument is most compelling when focused on the shorter pamphlets and unpublished tracts.

Swift, the Book, and the Irish Financial Revolution offers a fresh and engaging reading of familiar material, but some aspects of Moore's argument need further development. Reception issues, in particular, are touched on, but not well explored. More evidence could have been presented that Swift's readers understood his pamphlets to be about both financial issues and the need for a national book trade. The influence of Swift's writings on the actions of both publishers and politicians are similarly gestured at, but not convincingly detailed. The compressed epilogue on the "branding" of Irish identity introduces an entirely new topic and theoretical perspective that would be better unpacked in another study.

Moore's project also displays the tendency of the "literary" new economic criticism to slight economic history and the history of economic thought. His discussion of the Irish financial revolution cites only a few primary texts, while his foundational concept of the fiscal-military imperial state draws largely, if not entirely, from John Brewer's *The Sinews of Power* (1990). The financial revolution and its contribution to British imperialism has been the subject of extensive research by economic historians, however, and Moore's study would have been strengthened had it incorporated (or even undertaken) more of this work. For example, further background on the composition of the Monti, its self-recognition as such, and the extent to which it did indeed encompass the "Protestant Interest" could have been provided. For scholarship on the history of economic thought, Moore relies on the work of literary critics Clifford Siskin (1998) and James Thompson (1996), rather than studies by economists. This perhaps accounts for Moore's misleading use of "political economy," as in his opening comment that "The first arena of argument chosen for the Monti's publicity campaign was political economy, a discipline of study and genre of print" (p. 6). While some degree of anachronism inheres in historical argument, this usage is particularly unsuited to the period Moore is describing. "Political economy" was first used in print by Antoine de Montchrétien in 1615, but it was not commonly used to refer to the state's harnessing of economic development and policies for political ends until the 1760s and 1770s. It did not come into being as a discipline of study and a genre of print until the nineteenth century. Moore's synoptic use of this term suggests a level of theoretical sophistication and discursive self-awareness that

did not exist during the 1720s and 1730s (Moore himself recognizes this at a later point, but handles the intellectual development of economic discourse inconsistently). One could furthermore argue that Swift's works are not representative of the "political economy," such as it was, of the period. Finally, Moore might have benefited from including the economic literature on the social aspects of finance, in addition to the literary studies by Catherine Ingrassia (*Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit* [1998]), Colin Nicholson (*Writing and the Rise of Finance: Capital Satires of the Early Eighteenth Century* [1994]), and Sandra Sherman (*Finance and Fictionality in the Early Eighteenth Century: Accounting for Defoe* [1996]).

A final weakness appears in Moore's use of an orthodox Marxist base/superstructure-material/ideological dichotomy that is at odds with elements of his argument and with the body of literary-financial criticism within which he situates his study. In their studies of the financial revolution, Ingrassia, Nicholson, Sherman and others stress the representational consequences of new credit instruments. Paper money, joint stock company shares, and forms of public credit such as the national debt problematized the assumption of a "real" basis of value and undermined clear distinctions such as material/imaginative or referent/sign. At various points, Moore incorporates this representational "crisis" into his readings of Swift's works, as when he writes, "Property, for Swift, was no longer prior to money; the maintenance of the 'real' that land ownership represented was now codependent with the 'imaginary' realm of discourse and commodity exchange" (p. 156). Yet comments sprinkled throughout his study frame the overall analysis in terms of a distinction between the economic and the ideological: e.g., "The Debt of the Nation thus came to be the material basis for eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish political thought" (p. 4); "Ireland's debt was the economic foundation of the ideology of Anglo-Irish Protestant nationalism" (p. 15); "The manifest gap between the economic base and the ideology of this new imagined community" (p. 136); and "The Anglo-Irish elite had established the economic base of their fledgling state with the founding of the Debt of the Nation in 1716, and that base required a superstructure of ideology to sustain it" (p.149). All of these statements beg the question of how debt, a form of wealth that exists in a textual/fictional medium, could function as a material ground for this base/economic-superstructure/ideology framework.

To sum up, Moore's study is thought-provoking and makes a number of important interventions in both the

literary scholarship on the financial revolution and in the argument is weak in several important respects and Swift scholarship more generally. But the execution of readers will find much to argue with in the details.

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