Syntax and Rhythm

"First expostulate the Case, then plead the Necessity of the Rod, from great Provocations, and conclude every Period with a Lash."

"With his extraordinary sensitivity to the effect of the tone of voice in writing," says Kathleen Williams of Swift, "style is frequently the embodiment of a particular way of thinking which is being set before us for our contemplation." Thinking is in part caught in the syntax of Swift's sentences. It could be argued, of course, that to follow any writer's syntax is to follow his thoughts; but in Swift, where the actual thinking process is on many occasions more important than the thought itself, we must pay particularly close attention to the order of the words. "Much of the Augustan dance of syntax," says one critic, "is based on the stately counter-change of antithesis"; yet although in A Tale of a Tub it is often possible to make out a bold antithesis, such symmetry is simultaneously obscured by cumulative organization, unfinished antitheses, and unrelenting qualification. Many of the sentences in the text are little dramas between right and wrong ways of thinking.

To me it is often more appropriate, however, to speak not of syntax (the static structure of a completed thought) but of rhythm (the movement of a thought through the mind). Writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were well aware of prose rhythm, and Swift seems especially attentive to the subtle effects of sound. In the Tale he frequently manipulates syntax, along with stress pattern, alliteration, and even meaning, in order to set up a quasi-oratorical cadence, which he then breaks in order to suggest a more down-to-earth position. This struggle between one syntax or rhythm and another is an important aspect of Swift's irony.

Sometimes in the Tale the formality or informality implied in the syntax or rhythm clashes with the subject, diction, or tone; some-
times there is a sudden drop from a periodic, Ciceronian syntax to a loose, Senecan syntax; sometimes a certain prose rhythm is played off against a certain syntax, the rhythm suggesting one attitude toward the subject, the syntax another; and sometimes there is a shift from a formal, rounded rhythm to a shattered, more heavily stressed rhythm. Incongruity is at the root of all these devices. The Tale is poised precariously between what we might see as the Modern's rhetoric, which attempts all the techniques of balance, antithesis, and logic, and Swift's own loose, asymmetrical style of actual speech. And as with his juxtaposition of lexical field, Swift's juxtaposition of one syntax or rhythm and another implies a clash of two approaches to the world: the aloof and artificial, and the immediate and conversational.

As Morris Croll pointed out fifty years ago, the typical Ciceronian sentence represents the triumph of grammar and logic, whereas the typical Senecan sentence depicts the rhetoric of the mind: one style depicts a finished thought, the other a mind thinking. To somewhat overstate it, the difference is between the balanced, periodic, symmetrical prose of Bacon, Milton, and to some extent Temple, and the looser, more cumulative, asymmetrical prose of Burton, Browne, and Marvell. "They knew," says Croll of the Senecans, "that an idea separated from the act of experiencing it is not the idea that was experienced. The ardor of its conception in the mind is a necessary part of its truth; and unless it can be conveyed to another mind in something of the form of its occurrence, either it has changed into some other idea or it has ceased to be an idea, to have any existence whatever except a verbal one." Swift would agree wholeheartedly. Yet although he would seem to object more to the extremes of Ciceronianism than the extremes of Senecanism, he knew both styles well, and in A Tale of a Tub he exploits both in his subtle intermingling of symmetrical and asymmetrical syntax. The Modern's unsustained Ciceronian syntax represents his attempt at arranging his material in neat packages of ancient and modern, right and wrong, reasonable and unreasonable; but Swift makes his persona slip continually from balance and periodicity into a loose, absurdly cumulative rhythm that we ought to understand as his way of registering doubt concerning the Modern's proud categorizations.

A sentence or paragraph in the Tale often begins with a logical comparison or contrast but soon gets tangled in its own examples,
parentheses, and qualifications and either dwindles away into an absurdity or attempts toward the end to reestablish some order or point, which is in most cases perversely ironic: "The Conclusion of a Treatise, resembles the Conclusion of Human Life, which hath sometimes been compared to the End of a Feast; where few are satisfied to depart, ut plenus vitae conviva: For Men will sit down after the fullest Meal, tho' it be only to doze, or to sleep out the rest of the Day" (p. 208). This sentence attempts to say something about the conclusion of a literary work, gets sidetracked by a trite analogy to a human lifetime, and is then led from there into another analogy to large dinners and their soporific effects. The incongruous Latin phrase merely underscores the Modern's pretentious attempts at meaning. And the end of the sentence is shaped into a homey aphorism that seems anticlimactic at best, and in this context ridiculously pat. The form of the Modern's aphorism suggests an authoritativeness that does not fit the ordinariness of his subject; this discrepancy is stressed by the shift in the final clauses to monosyllables, by the similar rhythm of the last two phrases, and by the sequence of vowels in "tho,'" "only," and "doze," which rhymes with "Repose" in the next sentence. Here and elsewhere we could criticize the Modern for the same reason Swift criticizes Tindall: "He affecteth to form a few Words into the Shape and Size of a Maxim, then trieth it by his Ear, and according as he likes the Sound or Cadence, pronounceth it true." Thus what begins as the Modern's self-assured, seemingly definitive statement on literary conclusions has by the end of the sentence been reduced to a lamely definitive statement on the behavior of men after big meals. Swift implies that some literary works may put their readers to sleep and, in fact, that such works may be deadly. Although there are far more complex examples of this type of syntax, the regression in this short sentence—from the sublime to the trivial—is a sort of microcosm of the whole book.

The syntax of the Tale may be profitably set against the typical symmetries of seventeenth-century Ciceronianism. Take as an example the following sentence from Milton's Areopagitica, which I have laid out spatially so as to make its structure more clear. My method is a modified version of Francis Christensen's "generative rhetoric," where the main clauses or phrases are lined up along the left margin, and where each step to the right indicates an increasing degree of specificity. "For," writes Milton,
as in a body,
when the blood is fresh,
the spirits pure and vigorous
not only to vital
but to rational faculties
and those in the acutest and pertest operations
of wit and subtlety
it argues
in what good plight and constitution the body is;
so [in a nation]
when the cheerfulness of the people is sprightly up,
as that it has
not only wherewith to guard well
its own freedom and safety,
but to spare, and to bestow
upon the soldest and sublimest points
of controversy and new invention
it betokens us
not degenerated nor drooping to a fatal decay,
but casting off the old and wrinkled skin of corruption
to outlive these pangs
and wax young again,
entering the glorious ways
of truth and prosperous virtue,
destined to become great and honorable
in these latter ages.  

Like other seventeenth-century prose writers, Milton has a keen sense of the weight and length of rhetorical members.\(^{11}\) The sentence is periodic. It moves forward steadily and carefully, each of its two main divisions perfectly balanced: "as in a body . . . it argues," "so [in a nation] . . . it betokens us." This parallelism is based on the familiar analogy between the human body and the body politic, and indeed this is only the largest parallelism in the sentence, which is based at every level on balance or opposition. The syntax here is the picture of a complete thought, orderly, logical, and building climactically to an eloquent appeal to the English people (all its urgency captured in that final phrase). The sentence is architecturally perfect, its elements balanced down to the smallest detail, even alliteration (e.g., "solidest and sublimest") fixing the items in pairs. Milton speaks here from a position of sincere assuredness, and the neat parallelisms that dominate the sentence, plus its overall periodic movement, are the form of that assuredness.

The following sentence from the *Tale* shows how Swift has effec-
tively reproduced much of the symmetry of Milton's Ciceronianism, while he is at the same time demonstrating the instability of such construction.

Thus furnish'd, and set out
with Gods,
 as well as Devils,
was the renowned Sect of Aeolists;
   which makes at this Day
         so illustrious a Figure in the World,
       and whereof, that Polite Nation of Laplanders,
         are beyond all doubt,
a most Authentic Branch;
  Of whom, I therefore cannot,
   without Injustice,
here omit to make honourable Mention;
   since they appear to be
         so closely allied
          in Point of Interest,
  as well as Inclinations,
with their Brother Aeolists among Us,
   as not only to buy their Winds
       by wholesale
         from the same Merchants,
but also to retail them
   after the same Rate and Method,
and to Customers much alike.

(P. 160)

Swift reveals the ruins of Ciceronian symmetry: the opening clause sounds deceptively complete in itself, the leadoff “Thus” making it appear to be a summary; there are numerous pairs of terms here, although they are not as neatly laid out as in Milton; paradoxically, although the sentence would seem to pivot on logical-sounding conjunctions such as “and whereof,” “since,” and “as not only,” the linkages are in fact quite loose and belie its logic and syntax;\(^\text{12}\) and though most of the sentence is based, like Milton’s, on a comparison, it is in this case difficult to tell exactly what is being compared. At first the Modern seems to want to discuss the Aeolists, but he then makes “honourable Mention” of the Laplanders, who are said to be “a most Authentick Branch” of the Aeolists; in mid sentence, however, he introduces a comparison between the Laplanders and “their Brother Aeolists among us,” and he ends with a list of their similar practices in the buying and selling
of winds. Swift means to make fun of the Aeolists as well as of the Modern himself (who is one of them), and this attempted classification is irrelevant to his argument. One thing seems clear: whereas Milton composes by large blocks of argument, Swift composes by clauses and phrases. The effect is to give the sentence from the Tale a rough, broken quality, a look of shattered unity.

Notice how Swift's sentence branches, to use Christensen's term, much more to the right than Milton's, each clause or phrase refining what was said immediately above. Whereas Milton keeps returning to, and indeed never gets too far away from, the main line of his argument, Swift permits himself to drift farther and farther to the right, and he never returns to his point of departure. Over and over Swift seems about to move back toward the left margin; after "so illustrious a Figure in the World," after "a most Authentic Branch," and again after "make honourable Mention," he would seem to be required by the conventions of syntax to touch base with his primary subject. But no. Here, as elsewhere, the reader of the Tale is frustrated. "A work has form," says Kenneth Burke, "in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence." Certainly much the same may be said of the structure of a sentence. In the sentence from the Tale, however, the logic, comparison, and classification attempted by the Modern will not hold, because his assuredness ("beyond all doubt") is only as deep as his phraseology. His mind works in an essentially paratactic fashion and fails to impose form on thought.

Christensen makes the point that human thought is by nature cumulative and that the paratactic style is thus closest to the literal operation of the mind. But the weakened force of logic and periodicity in the Senecan style makes it less appropriate for certain subjects. "The extremely loose sentence," advises Virginia Tufte, "has given up enough of its controlled patterning to be troublesome when its function is to contain a complex, logical thought." Surely we could criticize the above sentence from the Tale on this ground. How can a complex, logical thought be conveyed adequately by means of a cumulative, one-plus-one syntax? I might make two observations here about Swift's style: it is less apt for projecting a fixed thought than it is for projecting a mind thinking (be it his own or his persona's); and, more importantly, it is precisely the failure of Swift's syntax to contain complex, logical thoughts that is one of his key devices for undermining the Modern's ideas. Swift's meaning
depends upon our picking up this collapse of logic and order. In a sense that collapse is his meaning.

Yet Swift's sentences can branch even more radically (and comically) to the right. In the following example, each subsequent clause or phrase is a modification of the item I have italicized in the clause or phrase immediately preceding.

I ought in Method,  
to have informed the Reader  
about fifty Pages ago,  
of a Fancy  
Lord Peter took, and infused  
into his Brothers,  
to wear on their Coats  
whatever Trimnings came up in Fashion;  
ever pulling off any,  
as they went out of the Mode,  
but keeping on all together;  
which amounted in time to a Medley,  
the most Antick  
you can possibly conceive;  
and this to a Degree,  
that upon the Time  
of their falling out  
there was hardly a Thread  
of the Original Coat to be seen,  
but an infinite Quantity of Lace, and Ribbands, and Fringe, and Embroidery, and Points;  
(I mean, only those tagg'd with Silver, for the rest fell off.)

(P. 135)

Characteristically, the Modern begins here with one single thought, but this leads him to another thought, and another, and another; at each syntactic crossroad the new direction to be taken is determined by some signpost near the end of the previous clause or phrase. The Modern ends up wandering some nine modifications to the right of his starting point. So far has he strayed from periodicity that he concludes the sentence with a parenthesis, a tiny postscript, an insignificant addendum to what would seem an already insignificant detail. Although some of the Modern's phraseology suggests a sensitive, responsible author ("I ought in Method," for example), this is misleading, for there is little method to the Modern's madness, and his syntax proves it. This sentence is a good example of what Tufte calls "syntactical symbolism," the order of words
suggesting a nonverbal analogue for meaning.\textsuperscript{17} In this particular sentence we have a sort of symbol—"demonstration" would be better—of the Modern's failure of method; it is likewise a syntactic imitation of the absurd accretion ("keeping on all together") that characterizes the brothers' coats. Swift seems to be interested not so much in what the Modern says as in how he says it, or, rather, in the incongruity between the two. Although in such works as Temple's \textit{Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning} or Swift's \textit{Conduct of the Allies} syntax is the backbone of meaning, in \textit{A Tale of a Tub} and Swift's other satires it is often ironically at odds with the persona's meaning and in keeping with Swift's.

Where did Swift find the model for his mock-Ciceronian syntax? Irvin Ehrenpreis argues credibly that for Swift Temple's style served as a kind of epitome.\textsuperscript{18} Certainly one of the chief influences was the syntax and rhythm of his mentor's prose, which for the most part exhibits the typical symmetries of Ciceronianism, although it occasionally drops into a loose, more colloquial style that Swift would have found more to his liking. Swift seems to have taken from Temple his pervasive syntactic symmetry, then intentionally shattered that balanced structure, or played that structure off against his own ironic meaning. Compare the two following paragraphs from \textit{An Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning} and \textit{A Tale of a Tub}:

Besides, few men or none excel in all faculties of mind. A great memory may fail of invention; both may want judgment to digest or apply what they remember or invent. Great courage may want caution; great prudence may want vigour; yet are all necessary to make a great commander. But how can a man hope to excel in all qualities, when some are produced by the heat, others by the coldness of brain and temper? The abilities of man must fall short on one side or other, like too scanty a blanket when you are a bed, if you pull it upon your shoulders, you leave your feet bare; if you thrust it down upon your feet, your shoulders are uncovered.\textsuperscript{19}

This will stand as an uncontestable Argument, that our Modern Wits are not to reckon upon the Infinity of Matter, for a constant Supply. What remains therefore, but that our last Recourse must be had to large Indexes, and little Compendiums; Quotations must be plentifully gathered, and bookt in Alphabet; To this End, tho' Authors need be little consulted, yet Criticks, and Commentators, and Lexicons carefully must. But above all, those judicious Collectors of bright Parts, and Flowers, and Observanda's, are to be nicely dwelt on; by some called the Sieves and Boulters of Learning; tho' it is left undetermined, whether they dealt in
Pearls or Meal; and consequently, whether we are more to value that which passed thro', or what staid behind. (Pp. 147-48)

Temple and Swift develop their paragraphs in similar ways. Each begins with a general assertion, which is then supported by a series of parallel clauses and tied up with a balanced, aphoristic, quite homey metaphor. Temple's parallelism is neater and more pervasive; speaking for the moment only of structure, however, the paragraphs have a comparable shape, and these shapes are typical. But what about the differences? For all his symmetry, Temple manages a fairly straightforward, natural-sounding appeal to his readers. On the other hand, with the exception of the first proud sentence, Swift breaks up the Modern's thoughts with numerous caesuras (twenty-three, compared to Temple's fifteen), so much so that the rhythm of the paragraph is not balanced at all, but uneven, halting. Swift's clausal and phrasal composition gives the paragraph an uncertain movement, and thus the Modern's symmetrical syntax is crossed by an opposing, broken sort of rhythm that discredits him. By the time we reach "and consequently," Swift's rhythm has destroyed the Modern's syntax altogether.

Contrast the conclusions of the paragraphs. Whereas Temple's analogy serves as a charming, human summary of his argument, Swift's rings false. The rhythm of Temple's paragraph gradually builds to the analogy; the rhythm of Swift's breaks up, splinters, and at last arouses our interest more in the analogy than in the thought it is supposed to illustrate. The Modern cites both sieves and boulters (fishing lines with several hooks) as metaphors for learning, drops the latter, alludes to sieves used in straining seawater for pearls, then to sieves used in straining meal, and finally tantalizes us (see the italics) into speculating on the relative value of "that which passed thro', or what staid behind." Paradoxically, though Swift, who in the Tale defends Temple, models his own syntax on his mentor's, he uses it for diametrically opposed purposes. Temple's syntax is the basis of a calm, orderly, carefully reasoned argument. Swift's syntax in the end functions ironically as a faint reminder of order, and thus as a way of highlighting the unreason of his persona.

Temple's prose rises at times to a high, formal pitch, and at other times settles into an easy style approximating real speech; but in either vein his writing is powerfully and consciously rhythmical. As early as 1698 John Hughes contrasted Temple with L'Estrange this
way: "There is the same Difference in the Styles of the two, as in those of Cicero and Terence in the Latin; in the first you find more of the Orator, and in the latter more of the Englishman." Sir William Temple," remarked Johnson to Boswell, "was the first writer who gave cadence to English prose. Before his time they were careless of arrangement, and did not mind whether a sentence ended with an important word or an insignificant word, or with what part of speech it was concluded." The question of what Swift culled from the rhythm of Temple's prose is a difficult one, but it would seem that he learned from it the effects of rhythmical clauses at the ends of paragraphs, the role of parallelism and alliteration in establishing a rhythm, and the possibilities inherent in shifting stress patterns. Of course, as he did with every other element of Temple's style, Swift gave his mentor's cadences an ironic turn: whereas in Temple rhythm always echoes sense, in A Tale of a Tub they often contradict one another ironically.

Temple's style is almost as symmetrical as Milton's. Although he is perfectly willing to break out of his formal syntax, and although in spite of the frequent symmetry he never achieves the neat profile of the more formal Ciceronians, it is clear that Temple's mind skips forward, typically, from one to another set of paired terms. Consider the following sentence, which I have set out spatially, so as to draw attention to its balances.

Such,
I am sure,
Lucretius esteems
and describes
    Epicurus to have been,
    and to have risen,
like a prodigy of invention
    and knowledge,
such as had not been before,
nor was like to be again;
and I know not why others of the ancients may not be allowed
to have been as great in their kinds,
    and to have built as high,
though upon different schemes
    or foundations.

The sentence is structured around a parallel between Epicurus, who is esteemed as a prodigy, and other ancients, whom Temple believes to be prodigies of different sorts. Every part of the sentence dwells on
a pair of terms; every major noun, verb, or preposition calls forth a second term parallel to it. Interestingly, not one of these terms is in opposition to its sister term, which suggests that Temple is in his pairs amplifying ideas, not qualifying them. Three of the pairs move from an initial literal statement to a subsequent figurative one; "to have risen," "to have built as high," and "foundations" develop a single metaphor that serves to unify this architecturally structured sentence around an unobtrusive architectural image. The heavy use of parallelism gives the sentence a click-clack, click-clack rhythm, which is emphasized by like stress ("been before"/"be again") and slant rhyme ("been"/"risen," "kinds"/"high"). As with Milton, the overriding impression of order is the form of an apparent assuredness, and this is implied in Temple's "I am sure" and "I know not why others."

Swift's sentences are in his satires never as balanced as this one of Temple's. Yet it is often possible to discern a leaning toward balance and antithesis that is subtly knocked askew by the presence of certain asymmetrical elements—what Croll calls the "baroque"—in the same sentence.

I hold myself obliged
to give as much Light as is possible,
into the Beauties and Excellencies of what I am writing,
because it is become the Fashion and Humor
most applauded among the first Authors of this Polite and Learned Age,
when they would correct the ill Nature of Critical, or inform the Ignorance of Courteous Readers.

(P. 130)

Like Temple, Swift would seem to display a predilection for balance and antithesis. But we must not forget that this is the Modern speaking. His coupled terms are just as redundant as Temple's (" Beauties"/"Excellencies"), just as rhythmical and alliterative (" Critical"/"Courteous"), and perhaps more trite and expected. The most notable difference between Temple's and Swift's sentences is that whereas in the former balance and antithesis form the rhetorical pattern on which the sentence is built, in the latter these devices are
in effect mere rhetorical flourishes. In fact, Swift works just as hard to topple his balance and antithesis as he does to set it up. This is clearest in the neat parallelism that ends the sentence. Superficially, the last two phrases almost fall into the form of a couplet; Swift emphasizes his syntactic parallelism by means of rhythm, alliteration, and capital letters. On the other hand, notice how the parallelism does not here reinforce the Modern's meaning so much as it underscores the pride of the Modern and his put-down of the reader. The concluding syntax works ironically: although the sentence ends with a seemingly minor point, a mere dependent clause, this point is expressed in a neat parallelism that gives unwarranted emphasis to the idea. As it turns out, the Modern is not so much interested in his "obligation" or "the fashion" as he is in belittling the ill-natured or ignorant reader of *A Tale of a Tub*. Swift's sensitive readers, on the other hand, hate the Modern for his pride, resent his put-down, and generally see through his pat assertion at the end of the sentence. As in one of Pope's neat couplets, order is formally affirmed, only to be denied by some rhetorical incongruity.

In Swift's satire the complexity of relationship between form and meaning is connected to his characteristic complexity of point of view. We may read the above sentence as if a persona were speaking: though we are perhaps seduced by the sound of what the Modern says, we end up admiring the beauties and excellencies not of his rhetoric but of Swift's, which successfully undermines his persona's pretentiousness. Or we may read the sentence as if Swift himself were speaking: while agreeing with his ridicule of ill-natured or ignorant readers, we must at the same time remember that he did not write *A Tale of a Tub* for them anyway, but for attentive readers like ourselves.

Swift's ear was throughout his life attuned to the sound and rhythm of language. He is in all of his works attentive to alliteration, to the pattern of stressed syllables in a sentence, and, more generally, to the relationship between such sound devices and his intended meaning. Swift's little language in the *Journal to Stella* is based on the sound of words: "Do you know that every syllable I write I hold my lips for all the world as if I were talking in our own little language to MD." In *The Publick Spirit of the Whigs* Swift says of Steele: "He hath a confused Remembrance of Words since he left the University, but hath lost half their Meaning, and puts them together with no Regard, except to their Cadence." Similarly, in
The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit he complains that "in Spiritual Harangues, the Disposition of the Words according to the Art of Grammar, hath not the least Use, but the Skill and Influence wholly lye in the Choice and Cadence of the Syllables." And in A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue Swift speaks of "that Roughness of our Language," which he traces to its numerous monosyllables, the modern tendency toward contractions, and the absence of feminine softness from the professional, political, and business affairs of men. And finally, perhaps most telling, is Faulkner's account that in 1735 Swift required that "the Editor should attend him every Morning, or when most convenient, to read to him, that the Sounds might strike the Ear, as well as the Sense the Understanding." As we can see from these comments, Swift objected to the empty cadence, the cadence dissociated from meaning, and found the frequent harshness of the language disturbing. Yet it is not surprising that the Modern, like Steele, frequently slides into a cadence devoid of meaning, nor that Swift uses the abruptness of his native language as a way of interrupting the rounded tones of the Modern. As in most other matters, what Swift mocks in one place is what in another becomes for him a powerful satiric technique.

Swift's fascination with sound as an echo of sense is felt throughout A Tale of a Tub. Of Fame, the Modern says that "her Trumpet sounds best and farthest, when she stands on a Tomb, by the Advantage of a rising Ground, and the Echo of a hollow Vault" (p. 186), and the balanced phrases and assonance at the end of the sentence set up an echo of their own. Swift's keen sensitivity to rhythm is clear from this wonderful instance: "Or, whether Fancy, flying up to the Imagination of what is Highest and Best, becomes over-shot, and spent, and weary, and suddenly falls like a dead Bird of Paradise, to the Ground" (p. 158). Swift here manipulates rhythm, as well as the sound of words, so as to match them to his meaning. Beginning hesitantly, the sentence speeds up after the word "Fancy" and runs on for a number of words without a caesura, then itself becomes overshot, wavers, and drops down with a series of heavy stresses, coming to rest on the word "Ground."

A further example of Swift's careful handling of sound occurs in the passage on Restoration theaters: "The whining Passions, and little starved Conceits, are gently wafted up by their own extreme Levity, to the middle Region, and there fix and are frozen by the
frigid Understandings of the Inhabitants. Bombastry and Buffoonry, by Nature lofty and light, soar highest of all, and would be lost in the Roof, if the prudent Architect had not with much Fore­sight contrived for them a fourth Place, called the Twelve-Peny Gallery, and there planted a suitable Colony, who greedily intercept them in their Passage" (p. 61). First, note in a general way how in these two sentences heavy "b" sounds are made to mingle with liquid "l" sounds, and how, more specifically, the paradox of "Bombastry and Buffoonry, by Nature lofty and light" is a phonetic demonstration of Swift's ironic meaning. Second, note how the alliteration of "fix" (active verb), "frozen" (passive verb), and "frigid" (adjective) suggests the freezing action itself. And third, note how the second sentence seems to escape the demanding caesuras for one longish clause, but is slowed down again, and intercepted at last by the insistent near-rhyme of "Gallery," "Colony," and "greedily." In the Tale Swift's imitative rhythms and sounds are fully as effective as Pope's in Winds­or Forest and The Rape of the Lock.

A final, rather specialized but nonetheless very important phonetic device used by Swift in A Tale of a Tub is his intentional creation of and subsequent destruction of the cadences of classical and biblical oratory. It would be impossible here to summarize the difficult theory of cadence, its influence on seventeenth-century writers such as Browne and Milton, and the method of scansion used by Saintsbury, Tempest, Croll, and others. Suffice it to say that the theory evolved from the practice of orators like Cicero, who, for emphasis, followed a certain few rhythmical patterns at the end of a large percentage of their clauses or phrases. It has been shown that the general effect of the cursus forms was closely adhered to in the Book of Common Prayer and the Authorized Version, although English cadences are somewhat less rigid than Latin. The three major cadences, counting stressed syllables from the end of the clause or phrase, are as follows:

Planus: 5-2 ("help and defend us")
        6-2 ("supplications of thy people")
Tardus: 6-3 ("governed and sanctified")
        7-3 ("acknowledging our wretchedness")
Velox:  7-4-2 ("punished for our offences")
        8-4-2 ("defended by thy mighty power")
Not coincidentally, Swift in *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* cites the Prayer Book and Bible as paragons of simple native eloquence, which, "being perpetually read in Churches, have proved a Kind of Standard for Language, especially to the common People." Although Temple at times displays an awareness of the cursus, Swift's sensitivity to the oratorical cadences must have come to him more directly, through the rhythms of the two books he read every day and read aloud every Sunday morning. Cadencing in Swift's work is found where we would expect it—in passages of his sermons, in his three prayers for Stella, and in parts of *The Conduct of the Allies*. I have discovered little cadencing in *Gulliver's Travels*. But Swift's sensitivity to rhythm and sound led him to see the potential effects of following the cursus forms in especially formal, pseudoserious passages of *A Tale of a Tub*; such cadencing is never sustained, but does for the moment prop up the Modern's swelling oratory, setting him up for a fall.

In a paragraph of the "Epistle Dedicatory" to the *Tale*, Saintsbury finds "a sort of grave oratorical rhythm—or a quiet caricature thereof." I hope to show, as Saintsbury does not, just how Swift manages to create such a caricature. I give here only the first part of a paragraph, which I have set out clause by clause or phrase by phrase, marking with an asterisk each sentence member that contains a cursus and italicizing the phrases where Swift has jammed two or more emphatic stresses up against one another.

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•I profess to your Highness, (5-2)
in the Integrity of my Heart, (6-1)
that what I am going to say (4-1)
•is literally true this Minute I am writing: (6-2)
•What Revolutions may happen (5-2)
•before it shall be ready for your Perusal, (7-4-2)
I can by no means warrant: (4-3-2)
•However I beg You, (5-2)
to accept it as a Specimen of our Learning, (7-3-2)
our Politeness and our Wit. (5-1)
I do therefore affirm (4-1)
upon the Word of a sincere Man, (6-2-1)
•that there is now actually in being, (6-2)
a certain Poet called John Dryden, (4-3-2)
•whose Translation of Virgil (5-2)
was lately printed in a large Folio, (4-3)
well bound, (2-1)
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and if diligent search were made,  
for ought I know,  
is yet to be seen.  

Swift plays here with the Latin cadences. He opens the paragraph with a seeming commitment to the cursus (five out of the first eight endings); but he soon shows a preference for the stronger endings (4-1, 5-1, 6-1) that Norton Tempest calls “native cadences”; and he turns increasingly toward compounded stresses like “no means warrant,” “called John Dryden,” and “ought I know.” This shift in rhythm very subtly supports the intended effect of the passage, dropping it rather suddenly from the Modern’s high-blown rhetoric down to Swift’s commonsense meaning. “I profess to Your Highness,” the Modern begins, in a phrase reminiscent of “Most merciful Father,” which starts one of his prayers for Stella. But this supplicating cadence, though never completely abandoned, becomes more and more clogged with proper names, initials, parentheses, caesuras, and a large number of compounded stresses. Although near the end of the paragraph there is a return to cadencing in the phrases “I vow to Your Highness” (5-2), “Friend of Your Governor” (6-3), and “utmost Politeness and Civility” (7-3)—it comes far too late to recover much of the Modern’s previous formality. Swift’s intentional undermining of his persona’s oratorical cadences by means of his own arhythmical elements proves the Modern’s supplicating tones to be only the polite conventions of a very proud man. Like the subtle shifts in lexical field discussed in another chapter (note “Rheams” and “Squable” in this very proper paragraph), the subtle intermingling of knee-bent, trochaic cadences and self-assured, demanding spondees is an important element in the stylistic incongruity of A Tale of a Tub.

With the exception of the “Epistle Dedicatory” and perhaps the “Dedication to Lord Somers,” however, Swift depends upon the cursus in the Tale for purely local effects. Thus in section 4, where the subject is Peter’s proud politeness, Swift mixes the formal rhythms of the Latin cursus with the abrupt rhythms of English monosyllables in order to expose the pretentiousness of Peter as well as of the Modern.

In which Guise,  
whoever went to take him by the Hand  
in the way of Salutation,
Peter with much Grace, (3-2-1)
*like a well educated Spaniel, (6-2)
would present them with his Foot, (5-1)
*and if they refused his Civility, (6-3)
then he would raise it as high as their Chops, (4-1)
and give them a damn'd Kick on the Mouth, (4-1)
which hath ever since been call'd a Salute. (4-1)
Whoever walkt by, (4-2-1)
*without paying him their Compliments, (7-3)
having a wonderful strong Breath, (5-2-1)
he would blow their Hats off into the Dirt. (5-1)

(P. 115)

It is no accident that the cadences here all occur in phrases that refer to Peter's civility; though Swift employs the cursus sparingly in this passage, he uses it where it will have the most satirical force. What we hear are really two rhythms, each struggling for dominance: on the one hand, the polite cadences of "in the way of Salutation," and "paying him their Compliments"; on the other, the more heavily stressed, monosyllabic "damn'd Kick on the Mouth," and "would blow their Hats off into the Dirt." Swift is again juggling lexical fields (e.g., "Salutation" is equated with "Kick on the Mouth"), but the ironic juxtaposition of vocabularies is strengthened by the similarly ironic juxtaposition of prose rhythms. Simultaneously, Swift devotes his rhetorical energies to creating, if only for this moment, two styles, credible down to their quite different pacings and stress patterns. In documenting Peter's—and the Modern's—extreme civility, he employs a higher percentage of polysyllables, uses less emphatic endings, and depends upon a fairly slow, rounded sort of clausal and phrasal rhythm; in pointing up the superficiality of Peter's—and the Modern's—civility, he favors monosyllables, uses more emphatic endings, and lets the more frequent stresses break the longer rhythmic patterns. Swift's spondaic rhythms—what Albert Clark calls "hammer-stroke rhythm"—throw the cadenced politeness into question. Shifting from one rhythm to another effectively jars our expectations (one of Swift's favorite games), sets up an ironic tension, and makes us catch the full impact of the deflating monosyllables.

Although in the above passage the emphatic rhythms of real speech win out, typically, over the stilted cadences of social graces, both have been felt by the reader. The compression Swift achieves here and elsewhere is remarkable: two rhythms, cleverly inter-
mingled so as to suggest not just two ways of talking, but two approaches to life—the aloof, pseudopolite and the physical, impolite. Swift’s ironic meaning is neither of these, and his peculiar sense of the absurd is what results from the incongruous mixing of these two styles as well as these two value systems, as in the simile “like a well educated Spaniel.” The simile refers to Peter, but is just as apt for Swift himself, who under the “Guise” (the word is his) of civility presents us with his foot.

Let me end with a more general point. Don Cameron Allen suggests a direct connection between an author’s rejection of periodicity and his philosophical uncertainty. Not that I mean to use Swift’s loose style as evidence of his skepticism. In his case the fragmentation of syntax and crisscrossing of rhythms are not signs of a personal lack of confidence but rather techniques for creating a voice separate from his own. Whereas a formal, balanced, periodic style—such as Milton’s or to some extent Temple’s—reminds us constantly of the author’s aesthetic triumph over real life, Swift’s style tells us that the putative author has been unable either to sort out his experience or to control his literary form. The proud, authoritative tone of most Swiftian narrators is belied by their casual, drastically loose style; Swift’s seemingly cavalier attitude toward form is his way of calling into question his assumed roles. Thus the giddy, incongruous rhythms of A Tale of a Tub contradict the Modern’s attempts at logical and syntactic order, his know-it-all tone, and his staunch belief in the absolute efficacy of his masterpiece. The uncertainty implied in the style of the Tale is one of Swift’s best devices for exposing the pretentiousness of his persona. But we can go further. What for the Modern is unclear thinking is for Swift a means of exploring complex ideas from several points of view. By contradicting the Modern’s formal, pseudological style with the abrupt, broken style of real speech, Swift is able to look at the same idea, simultaneously, from at least two points of view. The Modern’s uncertainty is Swift’s complexity.


2. Cf. Winifred Nowottny, The Language Poets Use (London, 1962), p. 9: “Of all the elements necessary to make an utterance meaningful, the most powerful is syntax, controlling as it does the order in which impressions are received and conveying the mental relations ‘behind’ the sequences of words.”

4. The writers I am thinking of are Browne, Milton, Temple, Addison, and Johnson. In the eighteenth century John Mason published An Essay on the Power and Harmony of Number (1749). Joshua Steele published Prosodia Rationalis (1775), and Hugh Blair said a good deal about prose rhythm in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783).


8. I have borrowed Phyllis Joyce Guskin's term from her Ph.D. dissertation, entitled "The Microcosm of the Sentence: Syntax and Tone in Swift's Prose" (Vanderbilt University, 1968).


12. Louis T. Milic, in chap. 5 of A Quantitative Approach to the Style of Jonathan Swift (The Hague, 1967), pp. 122-36, cites numerous examples of Swift's pleonastic connectives and his use of them in a neutral sense, without their usual significance. But Milic's deduction (p. 136), that these connectives are nonetheless clear and persuasive, scarcely applies to A Tale of a Tub.


16. I have discussed this aspect of Swift's style in my article entitled "Swift's Correspondence: The 'Dramatic' Style and the Assumption of Roles," Studies in
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*English Literature* 16 (Summer 1974): 357-71. Cf. Edward P. J. Corbett, "A Method of Analyzing Prose Style, with a Demonstration Analysis of Swift's *A Modest Proposal,*" from *Reflections on High School English: NDEA Institute Lectures 1965,* ed. Gary Tate (Tulsa, Okla., 1966), rpt. in *Contemporary Essays on Style: Rhetoric, Linguistics, and Criticism,* ed. Glen A. Love and Michael Payne (Glenview, Ill., 1969), p. 89: "This tendency to ramify, qualify, or refine statements is evident too in the proposer's habit of compounding elements. I am referring not so much to the common eighteenth-century practice of using doublets and triplets, of which there are a conspicuous number in *A Modest Proposal,* as to the proposer's habit of stringing out words and phrases beyond the common triad, so that we get the effect almost of an exhaustive cataloguing of details or qualifiers."

17. Tufte, pp. 233-54.
20. Note how here, as elsewhere in the *Tale,* Swift's italics contribute to such fragmentation by focusing our attention on individual words.
24. Again I have used a modified version of Christensen's "generative rhetoric," here taking care to group each of the paired terms together.
26. Very little has been written on this subject. But see Hugh Sykes Davies, "Irony and the English Tongue," in *The World of Jonathan Swift,* ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford, 1968), p. 155: "It seems to me very probable that Swift wished to indicate special intonations and stresses to the 'inner voice' of his readers by means of italic." And see A. Sanford Limouze, "A Note on Vergil and *The Battle of the Books,*" *Philological Quarterly* 27 (January 1948), who points to several passages of what he describes as "limping blank verse" in *The Battle.* Finally, although (as will be seen) I disagree with her in part, I must quote Barbara Strang, "Swift and the English Language," in *To Honor Roman Jakobson: Essays on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (The Hague, 1967), p. 1950: "Euphony, especially in a rhythmical sense, is the only area in which he sees phonology as relevant to his concern; and although he was strikingly ignorant of phonology, synchronic or historical, he has, in rhythm, hit upon the most durable element in the organization of English sounds."
29. Guthkelch and Smith, p. 278.

32. In An Essay on Criticism (1711), Pope argues that "The Sound must seem an Eccho to the Sense," and gives a series of classic examples: e.g., "That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow length along," "Soft is the Strain when Zephyr gently blows," and "The hoarse, rough Verse shou'd like the Torrent roar."

33. I have restored the reading of the fifth edition. See Glossary under "Bombastry."


35. One of Croll's major contributions to the study of cadence is his demonstration of the English liberalization of the classical cursus patterns.

36. My examples are all from Croll, who has taken them from the Book of Common Prayer.

37. In A Proposal, p. 15. Interestingly enough, Swift in The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit (Guthkelch and Smith, p. 279) seems to draw a distinction between the music of classical and modern prose, the former based on syntax and rhythm, the latter on the sound of words or letters: "Now, the Art of Canting consists in skilfully adapting the Voice, to whatever Words the Spirit delivers, that each may strike the Ears of the Audience, with its most significant Cadence. The Force, or Energy of this Eloquence, is not to be found, as among antient Orators, in the disposition of words to a Sentence, or the turning of long Periods; but agreeable to the Modern Refinements in Musick, is taken up wholly in dwelling, and dilating upon Syllables and Letters. Thus it is frequent for a single Vowel to draw Sighs from a Multitude; and for a whole Assembly of Saints to sob at the Musick of one solitary Liquid."

38. Croll asserts that 40 percent of the endings in the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer fall into one of the three cursus forms. For what it is worth, my own rough count reveals the following percentages of cursus endings: five communion prayers in the Book of Common Prayer, 42 percent; Isaiah, chap. 40, in the Authorized Version, 22 percent; the first three paragraphs of chap. 5 of Browne's Urn-Burial, 32 percent; the first four paragraphs of Temple's Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning, 28 percent; the first two Prayers for Stella, 42 percent; the entire sermon On the Trinity, 27 percent; the first four paragraphs of The Conduct of the Allies, 26 percent; book 4, chap. 4 of Gulliver's Travels, 18 percent; the first four paragraphs of the "Apology" to A Tale of a Tub, 36 percent; the "Epistle Deductive" to the Tale, 36 percent; and the "Conclusion" to the Tale, 23 percent. Although not too much weight should be put on these brief samplings, there are a couple of surprises. One is the high percentage of cursus endings in the "Apology"; the serious tone here must have led Swift into a serious use of the same cadences he elsewhere uses ironically.


41. Tempest, pp. 83-86. Swift is peculiarly sensitive to the final word of a clause; no better example can be found than his paragraph on reading books index first, where subsequent clauses conclude with "Tail," "Gate," "Back-Door," "Rear," "Behind," "Tails," "End," "Backwards," "Stockings," and "Foot" (p. 145).

42. It is perhaps not coincidental that the only italicization in the sentence is "Your Highness," "John Dryden," and "Virgil."
43. Paull Franklin Baum, in "Rhythm and A-Rhythm," chap. 7 of *The Other Harmony of Prose: An Essay in English Prose Rhythm* (Durham, N.C., 1952), gives an account of this phenomenon.


46. I echo Sheridan Baker, "Fielding and the Irony of Form," p. 140: "In the eighteenth century, indeed, form tends to be comically ironic, at least potentially so, as when the couplet constantly reminds us of the artist's triumph over matters actual and conceptual." Cf. Ian Watt, "The Ironic Voice," *The Augustan Age* (New York, 1968), p. 108: "In both the heroic couplet and the periodic sentence, broadly speaking, the effort is for the speaker or writer to constrain or stabilize order, in some way to impose pattern, on the miscellaneous multifariousness of experience and individual attitudes."