Swift, the Book, and the Irish Financial Revolution

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“God knows how we wretches came by that fashionable thing a national debt”

The Dublin Book Trade and the Irish Financial Revolution

Jonathan Swift’s *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* (1720) was the first major Irish-published political work he had composed since returning from England to Ireland in 1714. Like Daniel Defoe’s writings of the same years concerning calicos imported into England by the East India Company, this pamphlet spoke in defense of the domestic producers of cloth made from native materials; but unlike Defoe, Swift directed his animus towards British textiles, not Indian ones. Consequently, the work can be taken as an anticolonial text. Its discourse on cloth, however, also critiques Ireland’s appetite for British commodities in general, objecting to such imports both because they threatened the Irish economy and because they represented an imperial cultural identity that had ramifications for Ireland’s political sovereignty. On the literal level, *A Proposal* was certainly advocating a boycott of cloth, fashions, and other English products that were impoverishing Ireland’s weavers by depriving them of their share of the market. As this chapter will explain, however, this advocacy was also addressing the imbalance of trade in books, between “domestic” Irish and “foreign” English ones—a problem that compromised not only the health of Ireland’s publishing industry but that trade’s ability to mobilize anticolonial public opinion.

Weaving, as Clive Probyn has contended, had become a traditional metaphor for writing by Swift’s time, to the extent that the figure of the textile tradesman was often a “doubled sign” signifying both cloth and books of domestic manufacture. Swift’s repetition in other writings and
his explanation of this dual meaning of *A Proposal*’s textile advocacy, together with evidence of the reception of this and other pamphlets on commerce, suggest that some Irish readers understood this metaphor. Dublin’s book craftsmen may have been the target audience for the interpretation of this covert message, because the jargon of their trade closely resembled that of weavers. A contemporary handbook on the craft of bookmaking, *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing* by Joseph Moxon, a member of the London weaver’s guild, documents this shared terminology. It is known that Swift acquired a copy of this book during the years that he was living full-time in Ireland (1714–1745), so it is possible that *A Proposal* was exploiting this jargon as well as Moxon’s weaver-as-author and author-as-weaver status to make a case for the development of the Irish publishing industry and a national culture. The trades of bookmaking and weaving were allied so closely that the Dublin Company of Booksellers, established with the help of Swift’s Dublin printer, George Faulkner, required its members to buy a new suit of “native manufacture” every year.

*A Proposal*’s metadiscursive pairing of the cloth and book trades, accordingly, implies that textiles served colonial nationalists as both commodities representative of British political domination and as metaphors for the cultural imperialism of British texts. The consumption of imported cloth and books from the metropolis, anticolonial intellectuals argued, constructed schemes of cultural capital and identity that perpetuated imperial ideology and attenuated colonies’ claims for political autonomy. From early modern Scotland, where “clothing was an especially public sign of one’s Englishness or Scottishness,” to twentieth-century India’s homespun movement, textiles provided colonial figures for national texts and narratives, signifying allegiance to one set of cultural norms or another. By urging their readers to wear locally made fabrics, writers on the periphery of empire were not only supporting their domestic textile workers but also encouraging the production and consumption of colonial books and the alternative standards of taste that they represented. The economic threat that boycotts of the empire’s fashions posed, consequently, may have been primarily not to sales of finished and unfinished cloth but to the symbolic power of English identity as an advertisement for the benefits of membership in the empire. The aesthetic representation of this identity, manifest in the marketing of apparel, soap, and
other products, linked colonial subjects into the administrative, legal, and financial components of empire. English literature was the exemplary commodity in this scheme because it was a material import and a vehicle of ideology—a type of writing and an academic subject that originated in cultural imperialism.

Fashion served British nationalism “not simply to regulate costume but to institute modes of social relations as well,” and the study of mid-eighteenth-century discourse on textiles shows how the problem of taste stood at the center of the period’s “several related revolutions—socio-political, financial, commercial, and literary-cultural.” From its beginnings in the wake of seventeenth-century civil wars, British imperialists recognized that the empire’s power “could appear symbolically legitimate” through the arts. The proper functioning of the fiscal-military state—its ability to obtain war funding from taxpayers—depended on favorable representations of its actions. British philosophers theorizing about the relationship of public communication, emotion, and nation building realized that the English financial revolution could be furthered through cultural hegemony abroad, “the extension of the imagined community of the nation into the unimagined community of the empire.”

This extension was done in a manner that guaranteed that “Englishmen, as the true currency or standard of value in the empire, would and must always be able to control political and economic exchange, to their own benefit.” The “Englishness” of fashionable taste, in short, served as a “universal equivalent” that standardized the value of all commodities, identities, and behaviors in the empire.

Movements for decolonization from the eighteenth into the twentieth centuries therefore advocated not only challenges to Britain’s political power but also the dismantling of that standard of taste and the dissemination of new national symbolisms that could mobilize the population. Consequently, the critique of “Britishness” that emerged from England’s early modern dependent kingdoms, particularly from Ireland, may have served as a precedent for the critical ethics of postcolonialism. Anglo-Irish literature, a field of print culture emerging in the eighteenth century, provides an important example of this contrapuntal critique. It not only questioned political domination through art but also forged a distinct culture industry that produced the marketable fictions of “Irishness” necessary to secure colonial sovereignty.
Swift, already a major author in England before returning to live in Ireland in 1714, was the key literary figure who helped Ireland make this transition. His satires appropriated weaving as a metaphor for how the colonial book trade could spin Ireland’s sovereignty out of whole cloth, seizing the empire’s ideological machinery—the printing press—and reversing its trajectory. To steal the means of information control was to cut into what early modern political thought regarded as a part of the sovereign’s body politic—its rights of publication and censorship—and therefore to do violence to that body as a whole.

The Anglo-Irish colonials risked punishment for this breach of executive privilege to defend their own, provincial financial revolution, an action that was bred of their desire to enhance, yet regulate, their contribution to the British fiscal-military state and empire. The members of the Monti, which formed as a consequence of this Irish financial revolution, were worried that they might lose their investment in Ireland’s future tax funds. A Proposal, published in 1720 at the moment the Declaratory Act threatened to give the British Parliament control over these taxes, can be interpreted as the opening salvo of a patriotic press campaign defending the Monti. It literally would advocate for the Irish Parliament’s right to initiate and administer revenue matters and would metaphorically call for the production of the patriotic public opinion necessary to this political campaign, doing so through a newly nationalist press. Its publication was a “media event” that shaped public opinion and historical action and provides an important example of how colonial and postcolonial societies used cultural production to claim sovereignty.

When A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture is read from a postcolonial perspective that contextualizes its metaphors, then its discourse on textiles, trade restrictions, and boycotting can be seen as an allegorical call to literary arms. The pamphlet makes no clear separation between the economic remedies it prescribes and its anti-British political polemic, so the term “universal” in its title should be understood as a reference mainly to the Irish Protestant national community that Swift was trying to call into existence. It begins with the observation that Irish “Commodities, or Productions, lie under the greatest Discouragements
from *England*”—a reference to the protectionist Wool Act of 1699, which prohibited Irish weavers to weave, allowing them to export to England only and only in the form of raw wool, not spun and finished cloth (9:15). This situation, Swift suggests, was causing Britain to have a monopoly over the market for Irish wool, bringing down its price and forcing Irish landlords to produce more of it in order to compete, either legitimately or by smuggling (9:15, 9:18). Accordingly, Irish landlords reserve more land for grazing, leaving less for tenants to grow crops: “the politick Gentlemen of Ireland have depopulated vast Tracts of the best Land, for the feeding of Sheep” (9:15). The supply of domestic foodstuffs being thus diminished, there was a “prodigious Dearness of Corn,” which caused Ireland to import much food from England. Consequently, the supply of currency—that which was traded for food in lieu of commodities—was drained, causing a shortage of a medium of exchange with which to pay workers and do domestic business (9:15).

The pamphlet first recommends an Irish parliamentary sumptuary law, then proposes an extraparliamentary boycott that amounts to economic patriotism: “Upon the whole, and to crown all the rest, let a firm Resolution be taken, by Male and Female, never to appear with one single Shred that comes from England; and let all the People say, AMEN” (9:16). Its yet more subversive comment along these lines is to complain about English appointees to positions in Irish government and the church, who exacerbate the currency problem by drawing Irish government pay out of the country (9:19).

This call for a boycott was not novel in Irish history. For example, as early as 1682, *The Interest of Ireland in its Trade and Wealth Stated*, by Richard Lawrence, had recommended boycotts to remedy the loss of currency due to the unfavorable balance of trade. Lawrence responded to the issue of imports exceeding exports by advising sumptuary laws against foreign textiles, and he referred to an earlier proposal—“A general Subscription proposed against wearing foreign Manufactures”—that had been inserted into the minutes of an Irish Privy Council meeting that took place in 1664. In short, *A Proposal* was revisiting a long-standing problem in trade and currency flows.

In addition to reviving a much older Irish moral economic discourse on the role of consumption in the constitution of the Irish body politic, *A Proposal* echoed trends in economic thought in British Atlantic
colonies that were coping with the monetary problems associated with trade deficits. The anonymous Massachusetts pamphlet, *The Present Melancholy Circumstances of the Province Consider’d, and Methods for Redress Humbly Proposed, in a Letter from One in the Country to One in Boston* (1718/19), for instance, complains about the loss of silver coin from Massachusetts due to the colony’s consumption of foreign—particularly British—goods. It advocates a boycott of British imports, the encouragement of domestic industry, and popular consumption of Massachusetts-produced goods. The anonymous author was skeptical about paper credit, believing that only silver and gold constituted real money, and was dismissive of paper money practices current in Massachusetts. Given the similarity of these essays, it is important to characterize Swift’s economic argumentation as primarily monetary inasmuch as its recommendations are meant to resolve the outflow of precious metal currency from Ireland due to the unfavorable balance of trade. Yet this task could only be accomplished by promoting a favorable image of Ireland and its products, and that could only be done with the printing press, itself an industrial machine for manufacturing commodities: books.

The term “Irish Manufacture” in *A Proposal*’s title, consequently, may refer not only to products like textiles but also to texts. There is evidence that contemporaries had used the term “Manufactures” before to describe both cloth and books. For example, in 1719 Bishop William Nicolson of Londonderry, in a letter to Swift’s friend Charles Ford, called Bibles imported from London “English Manufactures.” So, before *A Proposal* was published, “Manufacture” may have been common parlance for products of the printing industry and for cloth.22 This dual usage was not unique to Ireland. As Lisa Maruca has documented, printing was referred to as a “branch of manufacture” in European economic discourse in general in this period.23 Swift’s use of the term “manufacture” may have been a deliberate attempt to blur the line between textiles and texts and convey the idea that the production and consumption of both of these commodities was necessary for the development of the Irish economy.

Similarly, when the pamphlet begins to discuss incinerating English commodities (9:17), it may be comparing the advancement of the wool trade to the production of public opinion through the printing press, suggesting that Swift is recommending burning not only imported clothes but also imported books. He blames Dublin’s shopkeepers for not pe-
tioning Parliament to “improve the Cloaths and Stuffs of the Nation” and intimates that the publication of such appeals will set into motion a patriotic press that will serve as the means of achieving the weaving industry’s goals. He signals this metadiscourse on printing by arguing that the merchant class, if it seeks to advocate for itself through the Dublin press, should “first be sure to get some Body who can write Sense, to put it into Form” (9:17). Over the course of a close reading of A Proposal and analysis of its reception, however, this metadiscourse comes to seem more central to the pamphlet’s effectiveness than its literal signification. As Mairead Dunlevy has contended, eighteenth-century Ireland did not witness a whole-scale embrace of domestically produced clothing, though the aristocracy would wear it at formal occasions to signal, however disingenuously, their allegiance to the Irish economy. There was no national dress as such until the late-nineteenth-century cultural revival, which suggests that Swift’s call to boycott foreign textiles and consume domestic ones was not pragmatically effective as an economic strategy in his era. Consequently, as Helen Burke has argued, A Proposal’s terms, like “stuffs of the nation,” should be taken to signify domestic cultural production, including paper itself. “Stuff,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is a term used in papermaking to describe pulp made from rags (OED “Stuff, n.1.” def. 4c). Burke writes, “this kind of Irish ‘stuff’ trope takes its meaning from the discourse and practice of Irish Protestant nationalism. . . . this figure, as it was reiterated in performance and discourse, represented a widening of the Irish imagined community that had sprung into existence in reaction to English oppression in the first decades of the century.” In Burke’s view, this community was more the product of print, drama, and other domestic cultural media than one brought into being by an economic expansion of the woolen industry.

The pamphlet’s reference to Ovid’s tale of the contest between Arachne and the goddess Pallas Athena further complicates readings that seek to limit its scope to the realm of textiles. By choosing to write about the character Arachne, a figure for a spider that is also a weaver, Swift revisits his use of Aesop’s fable of the spider and the bee in The Battle of the Books (1704). In using this image, as I argue in Chapter 3, he established that these spiders are to be taken as spinners of both threads and words, indicating that he was revisiting a figuration with which his readers would have been familiar. In A Proposal, Swift employs Ovid’s fable to allego-
rize the plight of Dublin’s Protestant weavers, who were his neighbors in the Liberties around St. Patrick’s Cathedral. It describes the economic relationship of Ireland to England, suggesting that England (Athena), another weaver, has struck down Ireland (Arachne), and has passed an unjust sentence on her by turning her into a spider: Swift writes,

I confess, that from a Boy, I always pitied poor Arachne, and could never heartily love the Goddess, on Account of so cruel and unjust a Sentence; which, however, is fully executed upon Us by England, with further Additions of Rigor and Severity. For the greatest Part of our Bowels and Vitals is extracted, without allowing us the Liberty of spinning and weaving them. (9:18)

On a first reading, it would appear that Swift is arguing that in the case of Ireland, the Wool Act of 1699 actually prevented the spinning and weaving of wool—the “bowels” of Ireland’s portable wealth or commodities. In this context, however, a third signification attaches to spiders and weaving; they also should be understood metaphorically as writers and texts, because spiders were a well-developed figure for the writer by Swift’s era. The “emphasis upon Arachne’s skill both as maker of the finest thread and upon her skill in weaving narratives of the gods” had been manifest in English literature since the early modern period; Swift’s use of Ovid’s fable to discuss writing was therefore a fairly canonical gesture.

Swift’s use of this text/textile homology may have been inspired by his reading of Moxon’s work on bookmaking. Though Moxon was a member of the Stationer’s Company of London, a guild in which members were bound to conceal how their craft was practiced, his status as a freeman of the city and mapmaker to the King gave him the ability to “freely give away ‘secrets’” of the print trade. Moxon, a weaver by profession, describes the parts and operations of the printing press as if it were a loom, arguing that there was a “Printers Dialect” used in the printing house by which the tools, materials, and processes of bookmaking were made to resemble other handicrafts such as weaving. He writes that the press is like a body, “a Machine consisting of many Members” such as “Hooks,” the “Spindle,” and the “Carriage”—all parts that one would also find in machines for spinning thread and yarn. The “Compositor” and the “Pressman,” craftsmen who, respectively, set metal type into a “Form” according to the author’s edited manuscript and print pages, are
also shown to be textile workers. The “Pressman” uses “Pelts” or “Sheepskins” stuffed with “wool” to make “Ball Leathers,” by which ink is applied to the type. When he is “[d]rawing the Tympans and Frisket,” he is preparing “Vellum, Forrells, or Parchment” to take the ink, cleaning it “as women wash Cloaths.” Paper runs like cloth through the press.

The link between textiles and texts in Joseph Moxon’s work may best be examined by comparing *Mechanick Exercises to Minerva, or, the Art of Weaving*, a book printed by his son James Moxon. The title page suggests that it was printed for the elder Moxon and that it was therefore his intellectual property, though the author is listed as “R.C.,” a person who has not yet been identified. Because Minerva is the Roman name for the goddess Athena, this book, written in verse, is an appropriate one to use in establishing that weaving is a metaphor for writing and printing in Swift’s *Proposal*.

The narrator of *Minerva* argues that the goddess invented the weaving of wool but that she learned her trade from silk weavers in China, a country where printing had been in use for “no man knows how long.” He sets out to establish how all other crafts and trades depend upon the weaver, noting that the mercer, draper, silkmaker, haberdasher, and upholsterer would have no work without the weaver. Printers and stationers were listed among these dealers in textiles because paper was made from cloth. He writes:

Nor let the Printer o’re the Weaver vapour,  
For without Cloath, what would he do for paper?  
The Stationer too would get but slender fees,  
If men did write on bark, or leaves of Trees  
As they have done: for if weaving were gone,  
Could skins be spar’d to write or Print upon?

This passage establishes that the production of texts is dependent upon textiles, again connecting the printing trade to the weaving trade, placing them in the same family of arts. Because linen weaving is said by the narrator to be the invention of Arachne, and because Swift was largely focused on promoting Ireland’s linen weavers, this connection is particularly relevant to the metaphorical meaning of his *Proposal*.

Swift reiterated the weaving/writing homology in further works. Perhaps feeling the need to explain *A Proposal*’s metadiscourse, he signaled
this connection in an epilogue that he wrote for a performance of *Hamlet* in 1721, staged as a charity event for Dublin's textile workers. It explicitly links weavers to writers:

> Perhaps, you wonder whence this Friendship Springs
> Between the *Weavers*, and Us Play-house Kings.
> But Wit and Weaving had the same Beginning,
> *Pallas* first taught us Poetry and Spinning;
> And next Observe how this Alliance fits,
> For *Weavers* now are just as poor as Wits,
> Their Brother Quill-Men Workers for the Stage,
> For sorry *Stuff*, can get a Crown a Page.36

By identifying Pallas Athena as the goddess of both “Poetry and Spinning” and comparing weavers to “Their Brother Quill-Men Workers for the Stage,” Swift makes explicit what had been implicit in *A Proposal*—the link between Dublin book production and the overall success of Ireland’s economy.

This metaphor is extended in *A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet; Together with a Proposal for the Encouragement of Poetry in this Kingdom*, a book sometimes attributed to Swift that was also published in 1721. If by Swift, the book can be taken as another signal to his readers to interpret *A Proposal* as advocating on behalf of domestic textiles and domestic texts. If not by Swift, clearly other Dublin writers, booksellers, and printers received that dual meaning and felt strongly enough about it to render the metaphor literal. A key passage provides evidence that *A Proposal* was taken to be an essay on behalf of both general Irish industry and the specific trades of writing and printing:

> Add to this, the Expediency of furnishing out your Shelves with a choice Collection . . . above all, those of our own Growth, printed by Subscription, in which Article of *Irish Manufacture*, I readily agree to the late Proposal, and am altogether for *rejecting and renouncing every Thing that comes from* England: To what Purpose should we go thither, either for *Coal* or *Poetry*, when we have a *Vein* within ourselves equally Good, and more Convenient. (9:337)
The author is asking readers to line their bookshelves with Irish-made books, telling them to interpret *A Proposal*—the “Article of Irish Manufacture” in question that exemplifies Irish printing—as a call for the encouragement of domestic textual commodities.

In addition, *A Letter*, following the logic of *Minerva*, links Ireland’s linen production to its publishing production, saying, “it is plain our Linnen-Manufacture is advanced by the great-Waste of Paper made by our present set of Poets.” Because paper was made from linen, Irish poets, by producing what the writer called “Bum-Fodder” or subpar literature, were retailers of cloth and therefore in the same industry as weavers. An edition of William Congreve’s comedy *Love for Love* that was published in Dublin the following year developed this link further, speaking of a writer “carrying her Linnen to the Paper-Mill, to be converted into Folio Books of Warning to all Young Maids.”

It is apparent, then, that *Minerva* and *A Letter* establish links between weaving and printing that Irish authors would continue to exploit in their efforts to encourage their country’s publishing industry.

When Swift appropriates Ovid’s fable, then, he is not only allegorizing textual production by reference to textiles but also calling for the “creation of social memory” crucial for reminding Ireland of the basis for its historical claims to its parliament’s legal sovereignty. As J. G. A. Pocock has written, “spinning” also was used during this period in discussing political legitimacy and its basis in history. Sir John Davies, a seventeenth-century English administrator in Ireland, complained that the natives insisted that their rights were based in “custom,” which was “recorded and registered nowhere but in the memory of the people.” Custom stressed the role of memory in the institutionalization of rights. This discourse was imagined in the ideology of the “ancient constitution,” the belief that the legitimacy of jurisprudence was “founded upon the individual’s ability to recall and summarize his own experience and to presume its continuity with the experience transmitted to him as that of his ancestors.”

When Davies wrote that this plea of customary title to possession resembled that by which “the silkworm spinneth all her web out of herself only,” he was rehearsing the long-standing allegory of weaving that saw society as a seamless web in time and space. This version of legal historicism united particular circumstance with precedent and formulated the origins of law and claims to sovereignty on its
The desire to ground such claims—and the transparency of linguistic signification that accompanies them—is always a proprietary search for a “nomos of the earth” that abolishes the play of doubt and skepticism about their legitimacy. The justificatory process expressed in the term “nomos,” according to Bruno Bosteels, is the product of an act of memory that establishes “land appropriation as the originary event of all human history.”

The ideology of the “ancient constitution” was an attempt to come to terms with the questionable legitimacy of the modern age by reconstructing an authorizing nomos in which “common law, and the constitution as it now stood, had been essentially the same . . . since time immemorial, or at least since an unrecorded beginning in the woods of Germany.” What Swift’s pamphlet was “weaving,” accordingly, was a traditional, rather than new, claim of ownership in Ireland’s land and the products it yielded.

Swift’s defense of Ireland’s textile workers, in this legal and administrative context, provided abundant opportunities to deploy this ideology of customary constitutional rights. His reference to Athena’s turning Arachne into a spider for besting her in a weaving competition encapsulated how England had used the Wool Act to punish Ireland for its success in the textile trade. But Ireland could not spin the interlocking web of sovereign prerogative—accomplished economically by giving birth to products and reproducing capital—because it had been eviscerated by having to sell raw wool instead. The story that Swift was spinning was a simulacrum of that work, one that does not materially reproduce capital, but rather “custom”—the key to provenance over the process of accumulation. The outflow of coin was the issue at the heart of the debate over the Irish Parliament’s sovereignty in economic matters, and Swift was exploiting the period’s homology between coining and signification to suggest that regardless of whether language or capital is the base or superstructure of society, the situation at hand is a rhetorical one. Ireland had to make legal claims before wealth could be created; its print culture had to develop a patriotic readership to realize those claims.

His discussion of the modes of print circulating in Dublin affirms that textiles are figures for texts and that the disposal of revenue for the Debt of the Nation is what is at issue in his resistance to the Declaratory Act. He ironizes the alienation of the country’s revenue to England in a paragraph on political patronage, ventriloquizing “a Person” with
“a great Estate in this Kingdom” who complains that governing Ireland “costs the Lord Lieutenant three Thousand six Hundred Pounds a Year, so much net Loss to POOR England” (9:19). This genus iudiciale attacks the claim that “the Revenues of the Post-Office here, so righteously belonging to the English Treasury... should be remitted to London” (9:19). He is also outraged at the “Pensions paid out of the Irish Revenues to English Favourites” and the appointments of English Bishops, Judges, and Revenue Commissioners to Ireland, who lament that the exchange rate diminishes their Irish salaries and that they should get yet more out of Ireland’s taxes (9:19).

The narrator of A Proposal further encourages the Dublin publishing industry by discussing the Anglo-Irish community’s aesthetic tastes. In a note of irony, he attacks their preference for English cultural production: “It is wonderful to observe the Bias among our People in favour of Things, Persons, and Wares of all Kinds that come from England. The Printer tells his Hawkers, that he has got an excellent new Song just brought from London” (9:19). He caricatures several figures in the English printing industry who had come to Ireland, two of whom are identifiable as Martin Bladen and William Luckyn Grimston. Of the former, he writes:

I remember a Person who, by his Style and Literature, seems to have been Corrector of a Hedge-Press, in some Blind-Alley about Little-Britain, proceed gradually to be an Author, at least a Translator of a lower Rate, although somewhat of a larger Bulk, than any that now flourishes in Grub-street; and, upon the Strength of this Foundation, came over here; erect himself up into an Orator and Politician, and lead a Kingdom after him. (9:20)

Because the translation has been identified as Caesar’s Commentaries, published in London, this figure seems to be a relative of the William Bladen who had held the king’s license to monopolize printing in Ireland from 1641 to 1660. Swift is suggesting that there is a relationship between spinning public opinion for the state and elevation to political office, considering that Martin Bladen had become an important figure in the Irish government. Similarly, Grimston, already a gentleman, had started in the literary, rather than political, world and was elevated to the Irish peerage: “This, I am told, was the very Motive that prevailed on
the author of a play called, *Love in a Hollow-Tree*, to do us the honour of a visit; presuming, with very good reason, *that he was a writer of a superior class* (Dictionary of National Biography, 9:20). As a younger man, the author had written this play, admitting his pursuit of patronage by stating in the preface, “he that writes faction is certain of obliging a party, and hopes preferment.” Taking this accusation of the mercenary motives of bladen and grimston’s writing further, swift claimed that, in addition to their printed work, their speeches were “contemptuous” and in “high style.” he argued that this style suggested that they “look[ed] down upon this kingdom, as if it had been one of their colonies of outcasts in America” (9:21). this divisive rhetoric about language, power, and opinion, by linking the success of england’s writing to its government’s appropriation of Ireland’s wealth through revenue and patronage, calls for the Dublin press to counterattack. it also implicitly promises similar patronage rewards to those domestic writers who spin opinion well.

the question over which register took precedence in establishing provincial sovereignty—*A proposal*’s metaphorical inculcation of patriotic opinion or its literal advocacy for an economic boycott—was not so important: one would lead to the other interchangeably. people responded by dressing in clothing produced in Ireland, but the economic impact of such consumption of domestic woolens might not have been as significant as its aesthetic gesture of national solidarity among classes. textiles, as such, became a symbol of cultural production to the extent that one poet referred to the domestic writers emerging in Dublin’s print industry as “wool gathering sonneteers” and “home-spun witlings.” a major reason that swift was more successful in this effort than william molyneux in the 1690s was the development of the book trade after 1699. another was that the advent of the debt of the nation had raised the stakes of constitutional debate. important figures in Irish politics were not only threatened by their country’s loss of public revenue in this constitutional crisis, as they had been in 1699 when the Wool Act was introduced, but also worried that they would lose their personal investments in Ireland’s future taxes.
A Proposal’s linkage of Ireland’s printing presses to the conjoined problems of its political sovereignty and fiscal control, however, was derived from Swift’s experience as what Victoria Glendinning has called a “spin doctor” in England for the Tory political administration of 1710–1714.

His writings from that period, particularly his contributions to the Examiner newspaper and his pamphlet The Conduct of the Allies, reflect his views of the financial revolution and its impact on political decision making. He was concerned about how the evolution of the fiscal-military state was affecting English liberties. He believed that private financial institutions and foreign governments were making increasingly expensive claims upon English public funds. After the Glorious Revolution, the Bank of England was founded for the express purpose of lending money to the government in a time of foreign wars and domestic instability, and the English Treasury began to issue promissory notes to it and its investors that promised scheduled repayment. That contracted debt was secured not only by current government revenues but by anticipated taxes. Because of these developments, Swift began to imply that Britain had become a colony of finance capitalists—the “moneyed interest.” He suggested that the revenues of the Treasury, funds largely raised in small amounts from common people, but increasingly on the “landed interest” (agrarian capitalists), were being spent to pay a debt contracted from a domestic and international community of financiers. These were “men with no stake in the land but what they could take away,” as one contemporary pamphlet complained, and they were said to be controlling public policy. Their commercial ventures required the support of Britain’s military forces, which were directly paid by taxation and indirectly funded by such loans. As a partisan pamphleteer, Swift claimed that Whig publishers were enabling these sovereignty-eroding developments and that it was actually the Tory press that was more capable of constructing a public that could make economic policy in the interest of the nation. As in his later observations about Ireland, he saw the press as an integral part of maintaining political sovereignty and fiscal control and represented his position as that of an English patriot. This position is inextricable from his views, however problematic, of the political economy of the Glorious Revolution of 1688.
Swift’s political biographers have attempted to ascertain his attitude towards the revolution and its significance to his writings. F. P. Lock contends that early in his life, Swift accepted “the commonplace idea of a necessary ‘balance of power’ within the state and a ‘mixed government . . . combining monarchic, aristocratic, and popular elements.’ ” Marginal notations in his copies of works of philosophy suggest that in theory, he opposed the absolute monarchoism outlined in Jean Bodin’s *The Six Books of the Commonwealth*, which would not be unusual for a supporter of the revolution that overthrew James II. Because of this evidence, Lock argues that Swift might have preferred, in keeping with John Locke’s views, that ultimate power be in the legislature. Lock, however, admits that this assumption is dubious because Swift “makes absolute submission to constituted authority the rule,” which places him “much closer to Hobbes than . . . to Locke.” Swift is said to have been very conservative in exceptional circumstances such as national security crises, for he believed in loyalty to existing institutions and in granting the king or queen, not Parliament, sweeping authority. Because of the powers Swift thought the executive branch should have in such states of exception, Ian Higgins contends, he most likely was a “‘naturalized’ Tory of the Queen Anne and Hanoverian period,” who had “political and ecclesiastical attitudes with identifiable Tory party-political positions.” Notations that Swift made late in life to a copy of Gilbert Burnet’s *History of His Own Time* suggest that the author sometimes supported a compromise between the contractualist position of Locke and the absolutist argument of Bodin, by regarding the monarch as custodian of a multigenerational sacred trust leading back to the *nomos* of the English nation. He had become disaffected with some Whigs’ dismissal of arguments for the necessity of preserving the continuity of this responsibility: “Against Burnet’s account of a ‘party . . . made up of those who thought that there was an original contract between the kings and the people of England’, Swift wrote: ‘I am of this party, and yet I would have been for a regency’” at the time of the crisis in the reign of James II. In short, he accepted part of the spirit of arguments concerning the importance of the doctrine of divine right yet recognized that political circumstances often required changes in leadership incompatible with that doctrine. J. A. Downie has stressed that this position—his acceptance of the Revolution Settlement—politically identified him as an “Old Whig,” even when he worked for the Tories, whom
Swift considered “Old Whigs” as well. That ideology, for David Oakleaf, meant that Swift opposed absolutism in politics while remaining authoritarian regarding the relationship of church and state, believing in the mixed, balanced government expressed in the idea of the crown-in-Parliament. Oakleaf, concurring with observations that I made in an earlier essay, has gone so far as to suggest that Swift’s most consistent political concern was with how war and the rise of the fiscal-military state were compromising that settlement.

These political biographers, however, have not accounted for how his growing awareness of the role of finance in war and government affected his political thought. As Steven Pincus has contended, the 1688 revolution was partly a transformation in economic theory and policy that had partisan overtones. There was “a fierce debate between a land-based Tory political economy and a labor-centered Whig one” both before and after 1688. Though the revolution was, as W. A. Speck has suggested, more the product of religious controversies, such as the Exclusion Crisis and James II’s appointment of Catholic military officers and professors, this debate also played a role. Though the emergence of the fiscal-military state certainly was not among the initial plans of the revolutionaries, 1688 “produced, and by many was intended to produce, a revolution in political economy.” Before the Glorious Revolution, James II had consolidated the monopolies of the East India Company and Royal Africa Company, alienating many merchants, financiers, and manufacturers who sought to compete with those monopolies and who labored under a tax system favoring the landed interest. After the revolution, the tax structure became more favorable to the moneyed interest, and financial policy became amenable to the material and ideological concerns of the Whigs. As John Brewer has noted, this moneyed interest was “overwhelmingly whig in politics and disproportionately Dissenting in religion,” and it was clearly gaining the upper hand in politics and economics. Following this line of argument, Pincus contends that “the Bank of England was a Whig creation against Tory resistance” when it was originally formed in 1694 and that Tories were constantly defending the East India Company against it. In short, there is substantial historical evidence that the political conflict between Whigs and Tories in the twenty years after the revolution was an economic one—one largely
waged over the Bank’s role in the financial revolution and the formation of the fiscal-military state.

It is in this context that Swift’s publicity work for the Tory government of the Earl of Oxford (Robert Harley, first lord of the Treasury) and Viscount Bolingbroke (Henry St. John, secretary of state) should be understood. He argued that the War of the Spanish Succession, the national debt, and taxation to pay interest on it not only impoverished the British people but also impinged upon their sovereignty. By the time he was writing *The Examiner* in 1710, it seemed to him that the country was hopelessly bound down, like Gulliver by the Lilliputians: treaties, loans, foreign wars, and colonial expeditions had forever eliminated the revolution’s promise for a restoration of good government with the return of a Protestant monarchy. As a clergyman, he had envisioned the revolution as an instrument in the reestablishment of the Church of England, and his career stood to benefit from the confiscation of lands as well as government and ecclesiastical posts from James’s followers. But the income of those patronage positions, and the growth of the church, was being undermined. As an institution dependent upon property, the church’s fate was tied to that of the landed interest, which was suffering under the weight of the fiscal-military state’s tax structure.

Given these conditions, his critique of the corruption of the previous Whig regime was more than what Isaac Kramnick called the “politics of nostalgia”; it was propaganda for a specific economic program for the landed class and the established church. When he wrote, in his first contribution to the *Examiner*, that “the Country Gentleman is in the Condition of a young Heir, out of whose Estate a Scrivener receives half the Rents for Interest, and hath a Mortgage on the Whole,” he was citing the new taxes that had been placed upon land. These taxes had been established in 1689, replacing the hearth tax of the pre-1688 era, as a means of paying for war and accounted for as much as 52 percent of England’s revenues during the reigns of King William and Queen Anne. Some of these revenues had been earmarked to pay interest on the national debt, which, in his view, was really paying the moneyed interest at the expense of the landed interest, “So that if the War continue some Years longer, a landed Man will be little better than a Farmer at a rack Rent, to the Army, and to the public Funds.” Consequently, political
authority followed the transfer of money from the agrarian capitalists to
the commercial capitalists, “So that Power, which, according to the old
Maxim, was used to follow Land, is now gone over to Money” (3:5). This
argument was not new, as it had been articulated by John Briscoe and
others when the founding of the Bank of England was debated in 1694.62
Thus, the Examiner may be said to have been participating in a Tory
polemic reaching back to the earliest years after the revolution.

The problem for Swift, the clergy, and the landed interest was one of
lost agency—how could a government that had beholden itself so heavily
to domestic and foreign creditors, their trade interests, and the conse-
quent military alliances and expeditions be considered sovereign? This
question was explored most thoroughly in Swift’s pamphlet The Conduct
of the Allies. It was published in 1711 to help the Tories bring about the
Treaty of Utrecht, an arrangement that not only ceded North American
and other territories to Britain but also advanced the interests of the
South Sea Company by awarding it the “asiento,” the right to trade slaves
from Africa to Spanish colonies in the Americas. The pamphlet made
the dangerous, nearly Jacobite assertion that before 1688 England’s wars
had not required the kingdom to carry permanent debt and perpetual
taxation. The War of the League of Augsburg (1688–1697) and the War
of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713), on the other hand, had involved
Britain in its allies’ conflicts to the extent that it bore far more than its
share of the military and financial burden. The pamphlet claimed that
Holland, against whom Britain had been fighting only a few years earlier
but was now supporting, was the cause of this international engagement.
The Dutch Republic was having trouble with French incursions into its
own political sovereignty and physical territory, and through the Par-
tition Treaty (1698) and Barrier Treaty (1709) had obliged its allies to
defend its frontier. Swift contended that England had joined the Grand
Alliance of the League of Augsburg (a group composed of the Holy Ro-
man Empire, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Bavaria, Saxony, and the
Palatinate) only because England’s King William III (William of Orange)
“was a Native of Holland” and to “make France acknowledge” William’s
right to the English throne (6:11). The pamphlet details how loans for
the costs of the wars had undermined Britain’s autonomy and protests
about “what Opinion Foreigners have of our Easiness, and how much
they reckon themselves Masters of our Mony, whenever they think fit to
call for it”—a claim repeated in his later pamphlet Some Remarks on the Barrier Treaty (6:33, 6:97). His point is both prudent and xenophobic, as he blamed the sale of the government on both domestic and international factors. He saw greed in the Duke of Marlborough, (commander of British forces), Sidney Godolphin (Queen Anne’s lord high treasurer), the Duke of Sunderland (secretary of state for the Southern Department), and other Whigs as perpetuating this corruption. The pressure applied by allies, creditors, and corrupt officials, he wrote, had so restrained the power of the queen that she could not rid herself of these men (6:33–34). This seeming conspiracy, Swift implied, had effectively made Britain’s monarch and ministry puppets of the moneyed interest and external governments. The history of the first twenty postrevolutionary years, which Swift outlined in these pamphlets, proved to the Tories that the country had indeed become a colony of domestic and foreign commercial capitalism.

The Whig press, in Swift’s view, was partly to blame. Contrary to our current idea, promoted by Jürgen Habermas, that the rise of coffeehouse culture and journalism in eighteenth-century Britain was bringing about a disinterested public sphere, Swift contended that this arena for debate was partisan and complicit in exacerbating England’s fiscal problems.63 He was not alone; some contemporaries regarded even The Tatler and Spectator of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, generally remembered for developing an apolitical concept of British civility, as organs of Whig propaganda.64 The Conduct of the Allies linked this Whig coffeehouse public sphere to the moneyed interest: “It is the Folly of too many, to mistake the Eccho of a London Coffee-house for the Voice of the Kingdom. The City Coffee-houses have been for some years filled with People, whose Fortunes depend upon the Bank, East-India, or some other Stock: Every new Fund to these, is like a new Mortgage to an Usurer” (6:53). As he did later in his Irish writings on behalf of the Monti (itself representative of the Irish landed interest), Swift envisioned an alternative public sphere that would produce public opinion that would help protect British sovereignty and, consequently, the British public funds. His contribution to the history of the English book, accordingly, was to link the importance of a sovereign, national print media to the problem of public finance and political agency.
Analysis of Swift’s mobilization of the Irish print industry for a similar project of producing patriot opinion clarifies connections between the history of the Irish book and contemporary legal and fiscal matters—links that are less obvious in studies of British print culture. Colonialism, and various documented acts of censorship related to it, seems to account for this relative visibility of the relationship of Ireland’s press to the country’s problems of authority, law, and economics. Ireland’s political agency and cultural identity were affected by the fact that the Irish publishing industry had from its origins been a governmental exercise in the production of a favorable image of England through the spread of Protestantism, the dissemination of the English language, and the licensing of printers and other specialists, who also stood to gain from the development of literacy and sales. Ireland’s print culture thereby partook of the early modern period’s absolutist concept, articulated in Bodin’s vision of a commonwealth, of the sovereign’s responsibility to standardize all aspects of society. Raymond Gillespie has argued that England was trying to apply this concept in its colonization efforts in Ireland: “The early modern Irish ‘political experiment’ was principally concerned with creating a uniform commonwealth within the country with one king, one religion, and one set of cultural attributes.” The very introduction of printing technology in Ireland may be regarded as the first English attempt at what Edward Said has called cultural imperialism, propaganda that follows upon a colonizing power’s military acquisitions in an effort to consolidate them. Mary Pollard says that the English were even using Irish-language Bibles and other texts to convert the Irish to following English culture: “In the sixteenth century the press was introduced into Ireland specifically as an instrument of propaganda to win the natives over to Protestantism through the Irish language.” Ireland served as a model for later acts of cultural imperialism elsewhere because it reflects how the new technology was used to recolonize the country for a new regime and religion. In many European kingdoms, as Benedict Anderson has argued, “the coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism . . . quickly created large new reading publics . . . and simultaneously mobilized them for politico-religious purposes.” This effort failed, however, in Ireland, and the publishing trade began to focus mainly on works writ-
ten in the English language, though there was a significant increase in French titles published in Ireland and imported from France, the latter being mainly literary and scholarly journals, classic drama, and religious works. Universities were the principal means by which readers were produced, books sold, and ideology disseminated; and with the chartering of Trinity College Dublin by Queen Elizabeth I in 1592, the foundation was established for a regional English-language literary market. The first regular newspaper, Robert Thornton’s *The News-letter*, ran from 1685 to 1688, and more papers soon followed; a “proliferation” of them began in Dublin in 1700. Many were retailed in coffeehouses and spread the genre to the extent that there was a thriving provincial journalism by the middle of the eighteenth century. When Swift began to publish in Ireland in earnest after 1720, then, domestic print culture was able to sustain his intervention in public opinion, although it was clear that the majority of printed materials were for, by, and about the ruling Anglo-Irish Protestant minority.

Swift’s defense of Ireland’s constitutional rights via the transformation of the Irish press into an anti-British publicity machine was necessary. The century had begun with a convergence of problems in each major aspect of Ireland’s sovereignty. The Irish parliamentary session of 1698–99 found itself constitutionally undercut legislatively by its English counterpart, and Dublin’s publishing industry was attempting to assert hegemony in publication of opposition opinion. The bills in question concerned trade, especially the market in wool. The Wool Act was intended to bolster England’s wool trade, so as to increase its inland tax receipts as well as its income from exports to other colonies in the empire and to Europe. The crown needed to raise additional revenues for the salaries of the standing army of twelve thousand men that had been sent to Ireland, but it also owed back pay to the disbanded regiments from King William’s War. Anticipating the wool legislation, William Molyneux had protested these measures in *The Case for Ireland’s Being Bound by Acts of Parliament in England, Stated* (1698). He claimed that by five hundred years of custom, the king of England had defended Ireland’s “Rights and Liberties” and he argued that Ireland was a kingdom of its own, established as such by the elevation of King John to the lordship of Ireland in 1192, and that therefore the Irish Parliament was answerable to the English crown only, not to the English Parliament. In
a further complication, a legal case about the rights over the fisheries in the Diocese of Derry had posed questions as to the location and jurisdiction of the final court of appeals for Irish cases. After a stand-off between the Irish and English Houses of Lords on this issue, a bill was passed in 1704 to resolve the case and defer the question of appellate jurisdiction. Meanwhile, because the British government’s currency problems jeopardized its ability to provide security within the empire, there being no funds with which to pay the army, England sent soldiers to be barracked in Ireland and asked the Irish legislature to pay for them.\textsuperscript{73} One way the Irish Parliament contended with these inroads into its political rights and revenues was to supply its government with only one year’s revenue, an approach initiated in 1699.\textsuperscript{74} This arrangement was altered in 1703 to provide two years’ revenue, a system that was to endure until the abolishment of the Irish Parliament with the Act of Union in 1800.\textsuperscript{75} This incremental budgeting gave Ireland a check against English interests.

This legislative dueling suggests that, while the Anglo-Irish Protestant community may have finally consolidated its dominance in Ireland in the 1690s, it had begun to face an issue that had confronted previous regimes: the relationship of the Irish legislature to the crown. The traditional reason for the Irish Parliament’s existence was to discover and approve ways and means of providing the crown’s Treasury with revenue. The revenue systems that emerged in both England and Ireland during the eighteenth century were more advantageous to the legislatures than they had ever been, because both parliaments no longer met only at the king’s pleasure (before the Triennial Act of 1694, English kings had often ruled without holding parliaments at all). Nonetheless, the Anglo-Irish Protestant leadership found itself facing the same issue that had vexed Ireland’s relationship with England for centuries: the English crown’s and English Parliament’s encroachments upon their economic rights. The Irish legislature had consistently asserted loyalty to the crown, insisting that it was constitutionally dependent upon it but also claiming that it had equal rights with the English Parliament. With the destruction of personal monarchy at the end of the Restoration, however, the emergent Whig parliamentary ministerial apparatus proved less favorable to Ireland; the Irish were no longer appealing to a personal monarch but to a crown more heavily controlled by the ministers derived from the legislature. The ever-increasing funding required for imperial wars
heated the conventional debate over revenue control, and the beginnings of the Monti complicated the situation further. In these circumstances, the identity and status of Ireland within the empire was receiving scrutiny from all sides—scrutiny that recent historians have revisited.

There has been much historiographical debate as to whether Ireland, administratively an English-style kingdom, can be considered to have been a colony in this period, the difference primarily being whether the polity was governed by civil legal code or by a more martial law recommended for territories in a “state of nature.” Historians such as T. B. Barry, V. G. Kiernan, Roy Foster, Aidan Clarke, Jane Ohlmeyer, Patrick Kelly, and Nicholas Canny have been willing to use terms such as “established Protestant colony” or “Anglo-Irish colonists”; some of them have contended that English colonial administrators such as Edmund Spenser wrote tracts that were “a blueprint for the continued colonisation of Ireland.” For the most part, however, these scholars have been careful to distinguish their own current consideration of Ireland as a colony from the contemporary discourse used by those living in Ireland in the period. From the point of view of administrative history, Swift and others in authority in Ireland, in the words of Joseph McMinn, “resented and rejected any suggestion that Ireland was a colony.” They claimed that they were indeed subjects of the same crown as Englishmen but that their parliament was autonomous. They felt that no legislation enacted in the English Parliament was binding on them without their consent. Such arguments had been formulated by “Old English,” Catholic descendants of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman settlers since the passage of “Poynings Law” (an English law asserting authority over the Irish legislature) in the later fifteenth century and the establishment of Ireland as a kingdom in 1541. When “New English,” Protestant settlers of the late sixteenth century and beyond found themselves in authority and thought of as “Irish” by the English government, they appropriated those older, Catholic claims of legislative autonomy and kingdom status in self-defense. New settlers in Ireland and the Americas occasionally shared the vocabulary of colonization, as Canny has written, though local authorities in Ireland claimed the rights of subjects of an independent kingdom. Irish residents feared that, if their country were indeed a colony like those English settlements in the Americas, they would have less control of their lives, property, and rights. In reality, because of the difficulty
of travel and communication, American legislative assemblies were far more autonomous than the Irish Parliament.\textsuperscript{77} Ireland’s situation might be considered to have been similar to that of Scotland, another kingdom under control of the English crown, but for the fact, which Swift wryly allegorized in \textit{The Story of an Injured Lady}, that Scotland formed a union with England in 1707 that made its partnership in the empire superior to Ireland’s (9:1–12).

The question of whether Ireland was a kingdom, like England and Scotland, or a colony, like Massachusetts, ultimately depends on point of view. That perspective depends on whether the commentator had appropriated territory and authority, lost it, or was promoting or contesting the term “colonisation” for political gain; to use or oppose the term was to “take sides in a long and bitter intellectual conflict, which has accompanied, derived from and also itself shaped the recurrent political violence of modern Irish history.”\textsuperscript{78} The identity of Ireland and the Irish, as an old saying goes, is determined by whether one has been mauled by the Irish situation.

By the eighteenth century, however, “New English Protestants,” who have been continuously renamed—the “Anglo-Irish,” the “Ascendancy,” or more recently the “Anglo-Irish kleptocracy”—could claim to have finally consolidated military and bureaucratic control over the whole of the country.\textsuperscript{79} S. J. Connolly, citing Molyneux’s \textit{Case for Ireland’s Being Bound}, has written that “Irish Protestants of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries indignantly rejected the suggestion that they lived in a colony,” for the reasons mentioned above.\textsuperscript{80} Yet there had been some augmentation to Ireland’s authority because the Irish Parliament began to meet on a regular two-year cycle to approve a supply of revenue to the crown. “For the first time . . . the Irish parliament . . . became a regular and essential part of the machinery of government.”\textsuperscript{81} The vocabulary of the period spoke of the governing community as the “Protestant Nation” or “protestant Interest.”\textsuperscript{82} This community, in the works of Molyneux and Swift in particular, began to display “colonial nationalism,” a term J. G. Simms borrowed from American history to describe the rise of notions of sovereignty in the discourse of political economy.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, Neil Longley York has shifted the conversation back towards notions of sovereignty to problematize comparisons with other Atlantic settlements: “Eighteenth-century Ireland was distinct from the American
colonies in the sense that it was called a ‘kingdom’ rather than a colony, with a parliament theoretically more powerful than any legislative body in the colonies. Kingdom or not, Ireland was, like the American colonies, still caught up in a dispute over sovereignty that plagued the empire."84 David Lloyd has developed this question into a broader epistemological conundrum, arguing that the kingdom/colony debate is “immaterial” and that “the function of the modern state” in creating the definitions of sovereignty and colonialism is part and parcel of the process of cultural imperialism. Because “colonialism is . . . always a forged concept,” its meaning is “predicated on materially embedded political and cultural struggles.”85 The rules of engagement and conduct in those conflicts, accordingly, seem central to Ireland’s claim to have “a shared solidarity and history of oppression” with other postcolonial nations.86

The Irish book trade was central to this dispute because the desire to influence public opinion through the press, especially in the wake of the changes in the government of the British Isles in the 1690s, was deeply connected to the questions of fiscal control over Ireland’s revenues that had provoked the political arguments of Molyneux and others. As Andrew Carpenter has discussed in his edition of John Dunton’s The Dublin Scuffle (1699), a narrative of an English bookseller’s tour in Ireland and his confrontation with his competitors, Ireland’s print industry was emerging as a threat to its English rival in the year of Molyneux’s publication.87 Dublin’s book trade had certain advantages because it was more loosely organized and made no fine distinctions between its branches: “Many of the booksellers were also printers and binders, most of the printers published and sold books, and there were not many specialist binders.”88 This lack of regulation led not only to significant reprinting and pirating of London titles but also to less control over public opinion than one would expect in a colony.

From the time of the first printing of a book in Ireland in 1551, the first publishers in Dublin, Humphrey Powell and William Kearney, were considered official printers to the crown and were given government loans to start their business.89 In 1604, John Franckton was given a monopoly on all printing and selling of books to such an extent that he was allowed to seize and levy a 10 shilling fine on any book owned by anyone, a right that existed in law until 1732, though not always in practice.90 The Stationer’s Company of London, which had invested in a project for
the colonization of northern Ireland sponsored by the Company for the Plantation of Ireland in 1611, hoped that the Scots-Irish Presbyterian settlers would create “a rapidly growing market” for publications there. They took over the book publishing monopoly from Franckton in 1618 and held it until 1641. William Bladen was granted the patent as the “King’s printer,” with a license for government printing only, from 1641 to 1660, an uncertain business during the Civil War era due to the collapse of central authority and the rival propaganda presses of various factions. This limited monopoly was transferred to John Crooke by King Charles II when he was restored in 1660. He was challenged by rivals and “made a clear and plain statement of the state’s reasons for granting a monopoly to one person, and in a politic fashion underlined the fact that the King’s Printer, as licenser, was responsible to the government for preventing the publication of seditious matter.” 91 Like Charles II’s advocates in London, Crooke and the viceregal administrative branch of government considered censorship an important component of royal sovereignty in that it suppressed “false doctrines” threatening to the state. By the eighteenth century it was well known that “the single greatest beneficiary of that culture of print was the Dublin Administration.” 92

Meanwhile, Dublin’s Guild of St. Luke, a strangely mixed fraternity of stationers, cutlers, and painter-stainers that had incorporated in 1670, began to seek the right to print. Due to the lapsing of the Irish version of the Licensing act in 1695, as well as the admission of the King’s Printer (then Crooke) into the guild, the guild took effective control of the patent. The guild asserted their ownership of the patent in a prosecution of the printer of some illegally printed “popish” Bibles, but they had less success controlling booksellers. Though in law they technically had a monopoly on printing, in practice it seems to have applied only to official printing of Bibles and to acts, statutes, proclamations, and other government publications. There was “little or no restraint on the printing of such privileged books as almanacs, primers, and school books,” so rival printers and booksellers had, in all practical senses, the right to compete with the guild until 1732, when a new patent officially liberated them by giving only a very restricted monopoly to its holder. 93

The 1709 Copyright act was enacted in England but not in Ireland. The corresponding lack of an Irish intellectual property law was in many ways profitable for Dublin’s industry because it meant that it could re-
print English editions without any fees. That legal advantage was enhanced by the fact that the 1712 Stamp Act did not apply in Ireland until 1774, which meant that there was no tax on printed matter in Ireland. The lack of copyright and taxes on printing or paper, and lower cost of living and lower production costs made Ireland’s printing industry much more profitable than England’s over time. Though Dublin continued to import from London more books than it exported there, it nonetheless engaged in piracy and reimportation to England. This activity led to the English Parliament’s protectionist Importation Act of 1739, which provided for fines on sellers of pirated books and destruction of Irish reprints arriving on its shores.94

The lack of intellectual property rights for Irish authors deprived the domestic industry of homegrown writers. They were not only unprotected from piracy if they published in Dublin, but they could not sell their copyright to a bookseller for a fair price. Irish booksellers “could not afford to outbid London in tempting Irish writers,” though they did, as with the compositions of English writers, reprint English editions of Irish writers’ works for sale at much lower prices. Most of the Anglo-Irish readership considered London the center of culture, so “even before the passing of the Copyright Act most writers preferred to publish in London—for the sake of reputation and the better circulation of their work amongst the discerning.”95 Consequently, they wrote for English tastes, an economic decision that also bonded Ireland’s readership too tightly to the values of Englishness, at least in the eyes of Swift and others who were attempting to attenuate that connection for political and economic reasons.

One major advantage Ireland had in weakening Irish people’s loyalty to English booksellers and encouraging the Irish values being disseminated by Dublin booksellers, at least by the eighteenth century, was censorship conditions more favorable to the liberty of the press. By Swift’s era, Andrew Crooke II had been dubbed King’s Printer, and the Guild of St. Luke’s was rarely exercising its right to censor works that violated its monopoly, so censorship was less a matter of private license than public law. In these circumstances, the government relied on libel and sedition prosecutions in Parliament and in law courts. Consequently, Irish trials for libel and sedition, unlike those in England, were governed mostly by common law, meaning that they were often jury trials. This practice
favored Swift’s printers; most of the prosecutions in the period involved Tory printers, and though various branches of the government could arrest and detain the accused in prison for limited amounts of time, many juries refused to convict them. These conditions were favorable to the production of patriotic Irish public opinion and the formation of nationalist attitudes, and Irish writers like Swift and printers like John Harding exploited them.96

IV

The emergent eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish Protestant identity that these writers and printers articulated was derived from their leadership’s expectations of returns on their investment in national security—expectations that shaped contemporary Irish political thought. The Monti banking system differed from the Bank of England, a more bourgeois institution of financiers who were not necessarily land owners; the Debt of the Nation structured Irish finance in such a way as to make a more broadly “public” form of government borrowing impossible, or at least unfavorable, for interested lenders. Instead, the Debt of the Nation arose as a form of “private” national debt, or more specifically, private governmental debt. This arrangement ensured that only established Anglo-Irishmen would hold a financial interest in the policies of the Irish executive and the Irish Parliament. It also created a public sphere, but one of a particularly “private” Anglican kind. Because the Irish Parliament controlled the crown’s supply of revenue, the Debt of the Nation may be seen as a crucial pillar of Anglo-Irish identity in the eighteenth century.97

The founding of the Monti established legal bonds between subjects, conforming them to its law and oversight under the sign of economic interest—the components most often associated with the signing of a national constitution.

The history of the Irish national debt begins with the Hanoverian ascension in 1715–1716. At that time, both a nonfunded debt and a funded debt were established. The nonfunded debt initially consisted of £16,107 of military pay arrears. The funded debt consisted of a £50,000 emergency loan that the Treasury was permitted to take out by private subscription in 1716 in order to pay for the military costs of combatting the Jacobite uprising in Scotland in those years. In this way, Irish money
contributed to the British fiscal-military state, supporting armies all over the empire, a situation which persisted well into the twentieth century. The loan, initially, strengthened British regiments already supported by Irish revenues and barracked in Ireland and shipped them over the Irish Sea for the defense of Scotland. It also paid for the formation of several new regiments for this purpose. It is significant that the subscribers to this initial loan, which promised eight percent interest in return, were members of the Anglo-Irish Protestant establishment. These well-established Anglican people, I argue, were the founding members of the Monti, making a private subscription to fund the government that both sustained their positions and provided for the general security of the Protestant interest in Ireland. Their pressing concern, however, was not only for the maintenance of security but also for the preservation of the legal regime that had established their fortunes at the “Glorious Revolution.”

The use of Ireland as a barracks for a large portion of the British army controlled rebellion in that country and established that army pay would come from Irish revenues and borrowing by the Irish Treasury. When these regiments were deployed abroad in Britain’s military ventures, Irish revenues played a role in the growth of the British Empire. Anglo-Irishmen’s loans to the Irish Treasury—the establishment of a national debt separate from Britain’s—were thus crucial to the maintenance of empire both in Ireland and across the world. The Debt of the Nation not only founded Anglo-Irish identity as that of a proto-republican cartel committed to the future of Anglican hegemony on Ireland’s domestic front, but also provided for the hidden costs of Britain’s empire, costs that thus did not register on Britain’s own Treasury.

Swift’s call, in *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture*, for a general boycott of British commodities, in this context, is more figural; the Anglo-Irish Monti needed to divide itself from Britain by censoring English-made texts and the opinions advocated in them. The consequence of publishing this pamphlet—the prosecution of its printer, Edward Waters—suggests how threatening this mobilization of colonial opinion for the retention of revenue control was to the empire’s military
expansion. The pamphlet’s message about the loss of coinage due to an imbalance in trade was clear. For the country to possess legislative authority over its own revenues and economic policy, it had to exploit and amplify economic resentment of Britain. If England had dominance but not hegemony over the country in the eighteenth century, it was because the Irish press waged a constant culture war defending Irish authority and Ireland’s distinction as an autonomous society.

The pamphlet can be read as a literary text that brings together the history of the book in Ireland and Irish economic history, an unexpected convergence rendered visible in the study of Dublin’s print culture in the decades following the founding of the Monti. As I discuss in the final chapter of this book, a distinct literary sphere parasitical on colonial politics—one that nonetheless underwrote political activity—was emerging from this process. The discourse on Irish political thought provoked by the crisis in political sovereignty, fiscal control, and public opinion in 1720, consequently, was an interdisciplinary one.

Despite the publishing campaign’s inclusive rhetoric and the enthusiasm of a diverse group of readers, the limitation of membership in the Monti to the ranks of established Anglo-Irishmen came to define what truly constituted the “public” in Ireland. The willingness of established Anglo-Irishmen to contribute to the maintenance of the Irish government was born of self-preservation: defense of their property and their profit from investment in government futures and assurance that the Irish executive, and its policy, would remain under the influence of Anglo-Irishmen. The private nature of borrowing by Ireland’s Treasury thus kept the Irish economy in a primitive state, yet one that pleased Swift because it put control over the system of public finance in the hands of the landed class, rather than professional financiers as in England. The threat that the Declaratory Act posed, however, derived not only from its assertion of control over their revenues but from the fact that it was passed within weeks of the South Sea Act, which attempted to convert shares in England’s national debt into shares in the South Sea Company. In short, the Declaratory Act was assuring investors that those shares would be backed by Irish revenues. This arrangement was something that Swift understood, as is reflected in a letter that he wrote in the weeks following the passage of both acts.

A Proposal’s brief discourse on political thought reacts to the Declara-
tory Act not with the complex legal historicism that characterized Mo-
lyneux’s *Case* but with a less intellectual approach that eschews theory
in favor of pragmatism. S. J. Connolly has argued that such pragmatism
characterized Anglo-Irishmen’s political thought throughout this pe-
riod. This pragmatic attitude may have reflected what David Berman
has identified as the antitheoretical orientation of the Church of Ireland’s
particular brand of Anglican theology. A Proposal first indulges aca-
demic questions about whether the Declaratory Act is consistent with
existing philosophy of sovereignty, then says that those questions are not
so relevant as matters of common sense (9:19). By dismissing theoretical
assertions about whether men can in good conscience follow laws made
without their consent, the pamphlet reflects the era’s idea that public
opinion often trumped academic legal discourse. In the Declaratory Act,
the English Parliament had produced a legislative fiat—its opinion was
the only significant one—yet members of the Irish Parliament were able
to harness the local press to rally domestic opinion and help nullify the
statute as a practical reality. The legislative sessions of 1721, 1723, and
1725, all of which roused furious controversy over who had final author-
ity over the Irish economy, forced the British crown and Parliament to
retreat, in practical terms, from their formal legal claims of 1720. “Eng-
lish ministers took care to avoid giving unnecessary offence to Irish opin-
ion,” writes Connolly; “proposals for legislation coming from the [Irish]
House of Commons were treated with respect, and sparing use was made
of London’s extensive powers to veto Irish bills or to impose legislation
on Ireland from Westminster.”

A Proposal’s interior economic argumentation envisions a self-suffi-
cient Ireland consuming its own products and boycotting imports. Its
political polemic—particularly that against the Declaratory Act—thus
generated an “exterior” force and created the “Other” that defined the
Anglo-Irish political subject. Given the epistolary evidence of Swift’s un-
derstanding of the British courtly causes of the Declaratory Act, we must
regard his handling of the act in this pamphlet as calculated purely for
rhetorical effect, to inclucate a political Anglo-Irish Protestant identity
in his readers. This identity was coming to be organized along newly eco-
nomic lines. It was reiterated in later works of his, like *A Short View of the
State of Ireland* and *Maxims Controlled in Ireland*, both of which com-
plain of trade restrictions and recommend boycotting to resolve Ireland’s
problems (12:8, 12:132). The dearth of coin in Ireland in this period was attenuating the link between Ireland and Britain; the “coin of the realm” was in short supply, so its practical ideological effects in innumerable acts of exchange no longer fostered a practical loyalty. The very development of an Irish printed discourse on this problem, regardless of the positions taken in it, functioned to constitute a distinct Irishness that was of economic and cultural value.

A few Anglo-Irishmen, observing their peers’ rush to buy South Sea Company stocks in 1720, were concerned that members of their caste might move their money, divesting from the Monti and investing instead in the South Sea Company. Because Ireland did not have its own central provincial finance company, this group began a project for a national bank of Ireland, to pull investment towards an institution that would be connected to the Monti. Swift’s rhetorical division of an “Irish” economic body politic distinct from the British one cannot be separated from the bank project, because he closes A Proposal with a reflection upon it. The last paragraph of the pamphlet derides the national bank idea, especially for its proposals to circulate what Swift described as “altogether imaginary” money, or paper currency (9:21–22). By insisting on a firm division between “real” and “imaginary” money in the context of this pamphlet, he not only constructed a heuristic device that lends a putative materiality to coin—a materiality of value about which he personally had doubts—but links the Irish national interest to a belief in the intrinsic value of gold and silver money. If the goal of mobilizing the press was to manufacture an Irish imagined community from which claims to sovereignty would issue, however, Swift’s skepticism of “imaginary” money—the paper currency promised by the bank—is perplexing. It suggests that part of his agenda was the direction of that “real” money to only some members of that nation—the vested interests of the Monti. By revising the history of the Irish book and that of the Irish financial revolution, this reading of Swift’s Irish pamphlets reflects the “tendency of recent research . . . to emphasize the extent to which patriot rhetoric could mask vested interests and the pursuit of political power.” Nonetheless, Swift’s encouragement of the Irish printing industry to support the Monti had broader significance in Irish history in that it may be taken as the founding moment of a distinctly modern form of nationalism created first in the discourse of political economy.