

# Jonathan Swift: Irish Blow-In

Eugene Hammond



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### Jonathan Swift: Irish Blow-In Eugene Hammond

Jonathan Swift: Irish Blow-in covers the arc of the first half of Jonathan Swift's life, offering fresh details of the contentment and exuberance of his childhood, of the support he received from his grandmother, of his striking affection for Esther Johnson from the time she was ten years old (his pet name for her in her twenties was "saucebox"), of his precocious entry into English politics with his Contests and Dissensions pamphlet, of his brilliant and much misunderstood Tale of a Tub, and of his naive determination to do well both as a vicar of the small parish of Laracor in Ireland and as a writer for the Tory administration trying to pull England out of debt by ending the war England was engaged in with France.

I do not share with past biographers the sense that Swift had a deprived childhood. I do not share the suspicion that most of Swift's enmities were politically motivated. I do not feel critical of him because he was often fastidious with his money. I do not think he was insincere about his religious faith. His pride, his sexual interests, his often shocking or uninhibited language, his instinct for revenge – emphasized by many previous biographers – were all fundamental elements of his being, but elements that he either used for rhetorical effect, or that he tried to keep in check, and that he felt that religion helped him to keep in check. Swift had as firm a conviction as did Freud that we are born with wayward tendencies; unlike Freud, though, he saw both religion and civil society as necessary and helpful checks on those wayward tendencies, and he (frequently, but certainly not always) acknowledged that he shared those tendencies with the rest of us. This biography, in two books, *Jonathan Swift: Irish Blow-in* and *Jonathan Swift:Our Dean*, will differ from most literary biographies in that it does not aim to show how Swift's life illuminates his writings, but rather how and why Swift wrote in order to live the life he wanted to live. I have liberally quoted Swift's own words in this biography because his inventive expression of ideas, both in his public works and in his private letters, was what has made him a unique and compelling figure in the history of literature. I hope in these two books to come closer than past biographies to capturing how it felt to Swift himself to live his life.



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