



# Jonathan Swift's "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" re-examined

## Citation

Mayhew, Goerge P. 1971. Jonathan Swift's "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" re-examined. Harvard Library Bulletin XIX (4), October 1971: 399-411.

## Permanent link

<https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37364169>

## Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.  
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

Jonathan Swift's  
"On the burning of Whitehall in 1697"  
Re-examined  
*George P. Mayhew*

I

IN July 1814, as part of the "Memoirs of Jonathan Swift," which constituted the first volume of his new edition in nineteen volumes of the *Works* of the Dean of St. Patrick's, Sir Walter Scott first published (I, 46-49) as the unfinished work of Jonathan Swift a poem entitled "On The Burning of Whitehall, in 1697," along with the editor's brief introduction and his explanatory notes to it.<sup>1</sup> Scott regularized and repunctuated the text, according to his editorial principles, but in the transcription he was following, which is reproduced below, he did not always clearly distinguish (as I have done) between his own explanatory notes and those of others. As Scott mentions, there was a fire at Whitehall in April 1690/1, but the immediate historical occasion upon which Swift was writing was the disastrous fire on the night of 4-5 January 1697/8, during which Whitehall was all but totally destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

Except for some few changes in punctuation and spelling, perhaps the result of careless type-setting, Scott reprinted the poem in his second edition of 1824 (I, 46-48; reissue of 1883, I, 41-43). But since that time the poem has never been reprinted, and it has been — I think unjustly — rejected from the canon of Swift's poetry. Neither Dyce (1833-34) nor Roscoe (1841) reprinted it in their nineteenth-century collections. William E. Browning omitted it without comment in his Bohn Standard Library edition of the *Poems* in 1910. So did Joseph Horrell, in his Muscs' Library edition of 1958, as did Her-

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, references to volume and page number within the text are hereafter to Scott's 2nd edition of 1824 of Swift's *Works*.

<sup>2</sup> See George S. Dugdale, *Whitehall Through the Centuries* (London, 1950), p. 87, for the fire of 1690/1, and pp. 98-102, for an excellent account of the fire of 1697/8, of which Scott appears to have been ignorant.

bert Davis, in his Oxford Standard Authors edition of 1967. Most decisively, Sir Harold Williams, in his authoritative Clarendon Press edition of Swift's *Poems* in three volumes of 1937, and again, in his second edition of 1958, rejected the poem as the work of Swift with a brief argument (III, 1069), as part of his otherwise laudable plan to throw out of the canon such poetry as had, over the years, been attributed to Swift without much justification.

I believe that Sir Harold's reasons for rejecting the poem need re-examination, and, on the basis of new information supplied by manuscripts now at the Harvard University Library and at the National Library of Scotland, will assert that "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" (his own title) is an unfinished poem by Jonathan Swift which deserves a place in the canon of his works. In such a re-examination, it may be possible, as well, to show how the misunderstanding about its authorship came to be, and to provide, for the first time, a more accurate version of the original manuscript of the poem (now possibly lost forever)<sup>8</sup> from which Scott's amanuensis, probably Henry Weber, was transcribing. I am encouraged to do so by the work of such reputable critics and editors of the work of Swift as F. Elrington Ball, in his *Swift's Verse* of 1929 (pp. 39-41), and Ricardo Quintana, in the revised edition of 1953 of his *The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift* (pp. 47, 152), since both have accepted the poem as the work of Swift and have commented favorably upon it.

## II

One reason that nineteenth-century editors may not have incorporated "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" in their editions of Swift's poems is that Sir Walter Scott, instead of including it among the established poems as he arranged or re-arranged them in various later volumes of his new editions, presented the poem instead in the introductory "Memoirs" of the first volume, and as an example of the new and hitherto unpublished material out of Ireland which justified the need for his new edition of 1814. In fact, as we know now, from evidence still at hand, Scott was cutting up and pasting together

<sup>8</sup>In 1852 "J.F.F." wrote from Dublin to say that "recently" some "letters and other MSS. of Dr. John Lyon" fell by chance into the hands of a local shopkeeper and "the most part" were "used as waste paper." The correspondent added that a few "originals" survived and were "now in my possession," of which he gives transcriptions. *Notes & Queries*, First Series, V, 126 (27 March 1852), 292-293.

volumes of John Nichols' edition of 1808 of Swift's *Works* as the backbone of his own work.<sup>4</sup> In truth, the amount of new and unpublished material that Scott had to offer in 1814 was limited, and, naturally, he wished to make the most of what he had discovered.

A far greater reason, and one that has evidently carried much weight with twentieth-century editors and critics of Swift's poems, and especially with Sir Harold Williams, was the fact that Swift's first really modern biographer, John Forster, in a note to page 64 of his "Volume the First: 1667-1711," of his unfinished *Life of Swift* (1875), rejected the poem as being by Swift on seemingly logical grounds, although he conceded that one part of the poem, at least, he would gladly have attributed to Swift on the strength of its descriptive vigor alone. Forster wrote:

Another poem 'On the Burning of Whitehall (1697),' alleged to have been written in his later time with Temple, I cannot bring myself implicitly to believe in. Scott received it from an executor of Dr. Lyon, Mr. Thomas Steele (O'Connell's friend), with some undoubtedly genuine letters and pieces by Swift, and printed it as found 'in his handwriting and with his corrections;' but he does not say that he saw the MS. himself, and its two allusions to Charles the First appear to me to be decisive against it. There is nothing in Swift's expressed opinions at any period of his life to render conceivably his a description of that king's death as 'fifty tyrants executing one' amid 'eternal acclamations.' I should otherwise have rejoiced to give Swift the credit of such vigorous verse as this —

'Down come the lofty roofs, the cedar burns,  
'The blended metal to a torrent turns.  
'The carvings crackle and the marbles rive,  
'The paintings shrink, vainly the Henries strive,  
'Propt by great Holbein's pencil, down they fall,  
'The fiery deluge sweeps and swallows all

By comparing what Forster quoted with what Scott printed, a reader notices that Forster misquoted Swift and then misinterpreted what he had thus misquoted. Swift nowhere wrote of "fifty tyrants executing one [tyrant]." And his "eternal acclamations" metaphorically refer to the noble manner in which Charles I accepted his death; in the context, they are not a sign of approval of that monarch's execution. In his misinterpretation of the latter part of the poem Forster may have been misled by Sir Walter Scott's headnote. Scott referred to "the tenor of the whole" poem as "being completely in unison with revolu-

<sup>4</sup> George P. Mayhew, *Rage or Raillery: The Swift Manuscripts at the Huntington Library* (San Marino, California, 1967), p. 17 and n. 31.

tion principles," by which two last words I understand Scott to mean the principles of the Revolution of 1688 ("Revolution," for example, is capitalized in Scott's draft manuscript, presented below), with which, of course, Swift agreed throughout his life. Such principles did not approve of the execution of Charles I. Or again, when Scott refers to "the applause of many determined Whigs" (once more a phrase he attempted to qualify, as in the draft, below), by the last two words I understand him to mean former Cromwellites and present Dissenters. Admittedly this is a loose use of the word "Whigs," which, like "Tories," in 1688 as in 1698, and since, has meant different things to different people. Whatever the case, Forster, by misreading and by misinterpreting the last five lines of the unfinished poem, therefore came to the mistaken conclusion that the poem's "two allusions to Charles the First appear to me to be decisive" against its being from the hand of Jonathan Swift. He also remarked that Scott "does not say that he saw the MS. himself," a quibble, perhaps, but still the first of the two and only reasons Forster gave for rejecting the poem from the canon of Swift's works. These two reasons do not seem to me to be altogether convincing.

Yet in 1937, when Sir Harold Williams came to review the question of authorship, he referred approvingly to Forster's dismissal (*Poems*, III, 1069) and added a third reason of his own for rejecting the poem: that Scott "was not altogether a trustworthy guide in vouching for Swift's handwriting." And there the matter has stood since 1937, or rather since 1958, the date of publication of the second edition of Williams' *Poems* and of Joseph Horrell's edition in two volumes. Horrell did not mention "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697," but he went to some trouble to print another poem of about 1693, which had been rejected from the canon by Williams, "A Description of Mother Ludwell's Cave" (I, xl, 34-36, 381). As was noted above, Herbert Davis did not mention the poem in his edition of 1967 either. It would appear, then, that all twentieth-century editions of Swift's poetry, and most commentary about it, intend to exclude "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" from the canon of Swift's poetry upon the arguments of John Forster and with the authority of Sir Harold Williams.

### III

In order to overcome the objections raised by Forster and Williams

one must therefore produce new evidence to show that in fact Sir Walter Scott in 1814 or earlier had before him a poetic manuscript in the hand of Jonathan Swift, and show also that the manuscript had been identified as such by someone other than Scott who knew Swift's handwriting well. One must also show that, however unfinished the poem may be, and from whatever Swift may have written there, he in no way approved of that monarch's execution, nor called him a "tyrant," nor in any way departed from what was Swift's constant approval of King Charles as a devoted martyr to the Established Church, of which Swift was a priest in 1698,<sup>5</sup> and from his habitual characterization of the more peaceable times of Charles I as a high-water mark of English history and culture.<sup>6</sup> That evidence, I believe, is now at hand.

Matthew Weld Hartstonge of Molesworth Street, Dublin, a cultivated gentleman, a minor poet, and a most voluminous letter writer, was Sir Walter Scott's chief agent in Ireland for gathering up Swiftiana and all unpublished Swift material for Scott's projected edition of the *Works* of Swift published in 1814. Hartstonge also supplied some few things for the second edition of 1824, to which Theophilus Swift was the greatest contributor. Many of Hartstonge's letters to Scott, some of them still unpublished, discussing or enclosing Swift material for the new edition are preserved now in the National Library of Scotland, with whose permission I am allowed to reproduce the correspondence which follows. From about 1809 or 1810, until 1813 or 1814, Hartstonge worked very hard for Scott, unearthing in Ireland a surprising amount of Swift material which was then still extant, some of it of great value, some of it less so. The Reverend Edward Berwick, vicar of Leixlip, who tantalizingly controlled the unpublished Vanessa correspondence, was another such Irish contributor at about this same time. Hartstonge's greatest single coup, however, was the discovery of a square box of Swift manuscripts and documents which had been preserved at Peter Street, Dublin, by Dr. John Lyon (whom Scott persisted in calling "Lyons"), Swift's keeper in old age. The box, rarely if ever opened since Lyon's death in 1790, had passed into the possession of Thomas Steele, Senior, of Cullane Castle, County Clare, an

<sup>5</sup> See Swift's anniversary sermon of 30 January 1725/6, "A Sermon Upon the Martyrdom of K. Charles I.," *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, 14 vols. (Oxford, 1939-1968), hereafter referred to as *Prose Writings*, IX (1948), 219-231.

<sup>6</sup> *Prose Writings*, IV, 94 ("Hints Towards An Essay on Conversation").

Irish patriot, the nephew and heir-at-law of the childless Dr. Lyon. His nephew, Thomas Steele, Junior, was somewhat younger than Hartstonge and was afflicted with tuberculosis, but he was a good friend to Hartstonge and to literature.<sup>7</sup> Through him Hartstonge

<sup>7</sup> Young Steele also sent Scott Swift's annotated folio copy of Davila's *Historie of the Civill Warres of France* (London, 1647) but too late for inclusion in his edition of 1814 (National Library of Scotland MS 3385, fols. 174-175). It is preserved now at Abbotsford, and I hope soon to have permission to publish the annotations.

Recently, Prof. Samuel Holt Monk, in a note to his edition of Sir William Temple's *Miscellaneous Essays* (University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. viii, has raised the question of the authenticity of Swift's "character" of Temple as published in Scott's "Memoirs" (I, 43). Three unpublished letters to Scott from Thomas Steele, Junior, dated 13 July 1811; 24 Nov. 1811; and 11 Dec. 1812 (National Library of Scotland MS 881, fols. 57-58, 124-125, 70-71) supply an answer. Steele was transcribing three successive entries from the fly-leaf of Swift's quarto Bible (one of two then in Steele's possession) which Swift appears to have acquired on St. Valentine's Day, 1697, for on that date he signed his name to the volume. Scott first received the two Latin inscriptions, and next, two successive versions of the intervening "character." But he did not heed his own warning about the former, written in the Harvard manuscript of the "Memoirs" (unnumbered fol. intended for "Vol. I 465"), "Be sure when this is copied to correct proof." And so he published Latin accounts of the two "Meteorological Memoranda" as a note (I, 467), but separated by a considerable distance in the "Memoirs" from their accompanying "character" (I, 43), a corrected transcript of which Steele supplied to Scott in his letter of 11 Dec. 1812. For in his first partial transcription of 24 Nov. 1811 Steele had experienced difficulty in deciphering Temple's "character," because Swift had afterwards "effaced the entire of it (except for the date)" of Temple's death with the same circular cancellations he later used for parts of the *Journal to Stella*.

During the last year of his master's life Swift kept a "*Journal d'Etat*" of Temple's failing health (I, 42). He seems also to have noted down, here in his Bible, such cosmological omens and portents as traditionally accompany the death of a great man. Although there may be some doubt about the positioning of Swift's name and the date, yet, by putting together Steele's transcriptions from his three letters to Scott, one might conclude that the following was the way that the fly-leaf of Swift's quarto Bible once looked:

Maii [die?] 3<sup>mo</sup>. 1698. nix multa decidit, ab hora vesper 6<sup>ta</sup> ad 9<sup>am</sup> fere cedens, ac non solum nocte, verum etiam ad crastini diei partem meridianam, confesta humi jacuit, arborisq(ue) spississime inhaerebat, hoc vidi prope vicum dict. Farnham in comitatu de Surrey. [MS 881, fol. 58.]

8

Jan<sup>ry</sup>. 27. 169- Dyed Sr. W<sup>m</sup>. Temple Bart. at one O Clock in the Morning aged

9

71 years —

He was a Person of the greatest Wisdom, Justice, Liberality Politeness, Eloquence, of his age or Nation; the truest Lover of his Country, and one that deserved more from it by his eminent publick services, than any Man before or since: Besides his great deserving from the Commonwealth of Learning; having been universally esteemed the most accomplisht writer of his time — [MS 881, fol. 70b.]

finally acquired the loan of the box and its somewhat disappointing contents and was allowed to send them off to Scott at Abbotsford. When he had finished with them Scott returned the box and contents to Hartstonge at Dublin, and he, presumably, to the Steeles at Cullane Castle, where they may still be.<sup>8</sup> The progress of the box and its contents may be followed in the following excerpts from Hartstonge's letters to Scott, from MSS 881, 3882, 3885, and others from the National Library of Scotland.

[Thomas Steele, Jr., to Matthew Weld Hartstonge, Cullane Castle, Co. Clare, 13 July 1811. MS 881, fol. 57:]

I was not mistaken when I assured you I had no doubt of obtaining [Steele's uncle's] permission to have the papers & which you saw at Peter Street sent to M<sup>r</sup> Scott. . . . [The uncle] said he would give me all the Writings of Swift in his possession, (of which he has a small square box full) and that I might make any use of them I pleased. [But the uncle has the key still.]

[Hartstonge to Scott, Dublin, 7 January 1812. MS 3882, fol. 24:]

M<sup>r</sup> Steele's uncle has not yet arrived in Dublin, but is shortly expected.

[Scott to Rev. Edward Berwick, Edinburgh, 16 January 1812. MS 854, fol. 283:]

I have great expectations from a certain square box of letters & papers which have descended to M<sup>r</sup> Steele from one of Swift's Exōrs and have it is said been inspected by no one since the Dean's death.

[Hartstonge to Scott, Dublin, 28 February 1812. MS 3882, fol. 85:]

[Mr. Thomas Steele, Sr., who has the keys, will not be back in Dublin until the last week in March.]

[Hartstonge to Scott, Dublin, 5 May 1812. MS 3882, fol. 156:]

The Box which has been so long promised by M<sup>r</sup> Steele J<sup>r</sup> you may rely upon ultimately possessing . . . altho' some time may possibly clapse before you will receive it. M<sup>r</sup> S. J<sup>r</sup> is at present in London attending his terms at the Inns of Court.

---

Mensa Martio A.D. 169<sup>8</sup>/<sub>9</sub> saevit, pestis inter equos, Non solum per Insulas Britannicas, sed fere ominam Europam grassata — [MS 881, fol. 58.]

Jonathan Swift

Febr. 14. 1697

g[?] [MS 881, fol. 58.]

<sup>8</sup> According to *DNB*, later in his life the fortunes of Thomas Steele, Senior, declined, and in 1848, penniless and broken in spirit, he attempted to commit suicide by throwing himself into the Thames at London and died a few days after. It is unclear to me whether the papers of Dr. Lyon, mentioned above, in note 3, were from Cullane Castle, or whether they remain there, in their square box.



[Hartstonge to Scott, Dublin, 16 July 1812. MS 3653, fol. 155:]

By last friday's mail (10th inst.) I sent you off through favour of M<sup>r</sup> Freeling, a Box containing a good many of the Writings of Swift; account Books, account of the receipts of his livings &c &c and the Letters of Orders for a Deacon and a Priest from the Bishop of Kildare. . . . I grieve to say the Steele manuscripts are not as numerous, nor as important as I had fondly hoped. . . . The most Curious I have enclosed to you, in the same packet along with this Letter.

. . .  
[fol. 156:]

I enclose you an evening prayer by Dean Swift and in his own hand Writing . . . and some admirable poems likewise of his. . . . I am not sure whether the Poem enclosed you, "on the burning of White Hall in 1697" was published or not?

[Hartstonge to Scott, Cork, 20 November 1814. MS 3885, fol. 209:]

My father informs me that a Box has arrived from Scotland containing the Swift MSS. . . .

[Hartstonge to Scott, Dublin, 21 November 1815. MS 3886, fol. 235b:]

[Hartstonge denied the box and its contents to William Monck Mason, then at work upon his *History of St. Patrick*['s] (1819), on the grounds that he was untrustworthy. Scott disapproved.]

. . . young Steele however has now returned [from Europe] . . . [and] upon his return I handed him the Box of MSS. & told him what I had done . . . of which he entirely approved. [Scott eventually persuaded Steele to loan the MSS to W. Monck Mason. See MS 866, fol. 52.]

The two main conclusions to be drawn from all this, however, concern the manuscript of "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697." For by the time that Matthew Weld Hartstonge came to withdraw the manuscript of that poem from the square box, in order to send it off separately in a letter to Scott as one of his most valuable discoveries, Hartstonge had become enough familiar with Swift's handwriting to be certain of its authenticity. Even more to the point, the provenance of the manuscript is another guarantee of its authenticity. Dr. John Lyon had piously preserved the manuscript believing it to be an unpublished and unfinished but corrected poem in the hand of Swift and had so identified it. And perhaps there has never been a better judge of Swift's hand than Dr. John Lyon. He had been trained as a literary scholar and librarian, as well as a divine, and during Swift's lifetime he had many occasions to decipher Swift's handwriting, in his capacity as treasurer of Swift's so-called "Industrious Money," as the dispenser of the Dean's personal charities, as a priest-helper in the

Church and at St. Patrick's in Swift's later days, as an assistant to Swift's legal guardians and his keeper in old age, and as the compiler of a sale catalogue of Swift's library, after the latter's death. There can be no doubt that if Lyon preserved the manuscript of "On the burning of Whitchall in 1697" as being by Swift and as written in his hand, it was in Swift's handwriting. There can also be no doubt about whether Scott actually saw that manuscript, given the way in which Hartstonge singled it out, mentioned it particularly, and sent it off directly to Scott, in a personal letter to him. To be sure, Scott probably had his amanuensis, Henry Weber, copy out the poem before it was returned to Ireland. At any rate, the transcription below is *not* in the hand of Scott, and it appears to me to be in the hand of Weber, like some of the other insertions in Scott's manuscript of the "Memoirs." But there can be little doubt but that Scott read the poem first from Swift's own manuscript, and he may even have checked Weber's transcription against the original when he came to write his own headnote and annotations. Thus, Forster's and Williams' objections — that Scott did not have the manuscript before him, that it may not have been in the hand of Swift, and that Scott was not a sure judge of Swift's handwriting — seem to me to be sufficiently answered.

## IV

The best way I know to answer the remaining objection, and to allow each reader to make up his mind about an interpretation of the last five lines of the poem, on the question of whether or not they contain uncharacteristic and unSwiftian views of the execution and martyrdom of Charles I, is to reproduce as exactly as possible, and with permission, that part of the Harvard manuscript of Scott's "Memoirs" (fols. 33-35) in which he introduces and annotates the poem, and the transcription of it, in another hand, that is tipped in. Line numbers have been added for convenience of reference. Deletions are enclosed in angular brackets; my editorial comments are in square brackets. Insertions above and to the side have been brought to the line. Assuming that the transcription was a faithful one, we have, in what follows, in the diction, the spelling (some of it characteristically Swiftian, such as "compleat," l. 8), the capitalization, and in the punctuation a poem which, for the first time, approximates what Swift wrote in his original manuscript of 1698.

Harvard MS of Scott "Memoirs," fol. 35a.

During this period Swifts Muse did not remain (unemployed) entirely idle. The following nervous verses on the burning of Whitehall (in 1697) occur in his handwriting and with his corrections, among the papers of Mr Lyons [Dr. John Lyon]. It is remarkable that while the first couplet(s) breathes that zeal for the property of the Church which afterwards dictated so many of Swift publications the tenor of the whole is completely in unison with Revolution principles, & perhaps (is) they are more violently expressed respecting the (finish?) execution of Charles the First than would have received the applause of many (who (are) were in other respects) determined Whigs. The rough satirical force of the lines somewhat resembles the poetry of Churchill.

P. A. [Put After] On the Burning & c.

Fol. 34a.

On the burning of Whitehall in 1697.\*

1. This pile was raised by Wolsey's impious hands  
Built with the church's patrimonial lands.  
Here bloody Henry kept his cruel court,  
Hence sprung the martyrdoms of every sort.
5. Weak Edward here, & Mary the bigot,  
Did both their holy innovations plot.  
A fiercer Tudor filled the churchman's seat  
In all her father's attributes compleat.  
Dudley's lewd life doth the white mansion stain
10. And a slain guest obscures a glorious reign.<sup>z</sup>  
Then Northern James dishonoured every room  
With filth & palliardisme brought from home.<sup>x</sup>  
Next the French consort dignified the Stews,  
Employing males to their first proper use.
15. A bold usurper next did domineer,  
Whirl'd hence by th' angry demons of the air.  
When sauntering Charles returned, a fulsome crew  
Of parasites, buffoons, he with him drew;

Note.

x Beheading  
of Queen  
Mary. [J.S.]

\* Such is the date upon the Manuscript. But Whitehall was burned in (17) (1690) April 1690-1. The date therefore must be that of the year in which the verses were composed, not that on which the accident took place. (The Banqueting House alone escaped the con) [W.S. from facing fol. 33b. I am indebted to Miss Nora Crow of Cambridge, Mass., for help in deciphering this MS.]

<sup>z</sup> After this a line (delete in the original piece [?]) scratched out.  
And here did under the black plaster groan. [H.W.]

- Nay worse than these fill the polluted hall, }  
 20. Bawds, pimps & pandars the detested squaul }  
 Of riots, fancy'd rapes, the devil and all.<sup>x</sup> }  
 This pious prince here too did breathe his last,  
 His certain death on different persons cast.  
 His wise successor brought a motley throng,  
 25. Despising right, strongly protecting wrong.  
 To

## Fol. 34b.

- To these assistant herds of preaching cows  
 And troops of noisy senseless fighting fools.  
 Guerdon for this: he heard the dread command,  
 "Embark & leave your crown & native land —"  
 30. He gone, the rank infection still remains,  
 Which to repel requires (immortal) eternal pains.  
 No force to cleanse it can a river draw,  
 Nor Hercules could do't, nor great Nassau.  
 Most greedy financiers, and lavish too,  
 35. Swarm in, in spite of all that Prince could do,  
 Projectors, peculats the palace hold, }  
 Patriots exchanging liberty for gold, }  
 Monsters unknown to this blest land of old. }  
 Heaven takes the cure in hand, caelestial ire  
 40. Applies the oft-tried remedy of fire;  
 The purging flames were better far employ'd,  
 Than when old Sodom was, or Troynovant destroy'd.  
 The nest obscene of every pampered vice,  
 Sinks down of this infernal paradise,  
 45. Down come the lofty roofs, the cedar burns,  
 The blended metal to a torrent turns.  
 The carvings crackle and the marbles rive,  
 The paintings shrink, vainly the Henry's strive,  
 Propt by great Holbein's pencil, down they fall,  
 50. The fiery deluge sweeps & swallows all.

But mark how providence with watchfull care,<sup>x</sup>  
 Did Inigo's famed building spare,

---

<sup>x</sup> Originally thus —

Of spurious brats abhorr'd by all. [H. W.]

<sup>x</sup>  
<sup>2</sup> The Banqueting House built upon a plan by the celebrated Inigo Jones alone escaped the conflagration. It is unnecessary to add that in front of this structure Charles I was beheaded. [W.S. Note on fol. 33b.]

That theatre produced an action truly great,  
 On which eternal acclamations wait,  
 55. Of Kings deposed, most faithfull annals tell,  
 And slaughtered monarchs would a volume swell.  
 Our happy chronicle can shew alone  
 (On this day tyrants executed — One.)  
 ----- tyrants executed, *One*\*

\* Note. The last line originally ran

On this day tyrants executed one.

But the first three words are blotted out & the word Memorand d written below them [W.S.]

## V

My own belief is that "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" is a poem by Jonathan Swift and that it has been unjustly removed from the canon of Swift's poetry. Should it be accepted as Swift's, it needs to be reconsidered, for example, in relation to the religious allegory of the then unpublished *Tale of a Tub*, Swift's earlier *Odes*, and the more private and personal poetry of a satirical nature composed by Swift after the death of Temple in 1699. The unfinished "On the burning of Whitehall" seems to me to be a transitional poem in all respects. As in the religious allegory of *A Tale*, Swift here traces the course of the English Reformation from the era of the hated Henry VIII to his own time, the reign of William III, "great Nassau" (l. 33). It may be, as Ball in his *Swift's Verse* (p. 41) has suggested, that the poem was to be a recommendation to some new patron and was to appear upon 30 January 1697/8, the anniversary of the martyred king's death, the "this day" of the corrected last line.

For like the early *Odes*, this poem was composed upon a public occasion and treats of public figures. Like the verses to Congreve and Temple of 1693 it is composed in heroic couplets, and, like the latter, it breaks off abruptly, for what reasons we do not know. Here are inversions, Latinate and poetic diction, and allusions, such as the paradoxical reference to "this infernal paradise" (l. 44), which recall the influence of Milton. "Palliardisme" (l. 12) is a Frenchified word also used by Dryden in Part II of *The Hind and the Panther* (l. 563), and the use of triplets, twice pointed up by marginal braces in the transcription, is another poetic device of Dryden which Swift came later to detest. The cancelled line to follow line 10, "And here did under

the black plaster groan," suggests that to Swift the old Whitehall, in the Biblical sense, was a whited sepulcher.

And yet the poem looks ahead as much as it looks back. Its skillful use of meter and rhyme and the much-praised passage of description (ll. 45-50), as vivid as an actual eye-witness account, look forward to similar passages, for example, in "Baucis and Philemon" (1709), and to the kind of poetry Swift composed after 1700, for example, "Van Brug's House, Built from the burnt Ruins of Whitehall" (1703), and "The History of Vanbrug's House" (1706). Such sarcastic epithets as "pious" (l. 22), for Charles II, and "wise" (l. 24), for James II, point ahead to the irony and satire of Swift's later manner. So also with "Patriots" (l. 37) for the bribery of Sir Christopher Musgrave and his bursting bag of back-stairs gold, which recalls the "Patriots" of Section IX of *A Tale*, and Pope's recollection of the same event in lines 35-38 of his *Moral Essay* III, "To Bathurst. Of the Use of Riches" (1733). Another favorite historical notion of Swift, that Charles II was poisoned, is alluded to here, in "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" (l. 23), but Swift was repeating it still, as late as his annotations to Burnet's *History* of about 1734-36.<sup>9</sup> The most Swiftian passage (ll. 377-385) of Pope's *Windsor Forest* (1713) prophetically foresaw, under the Peace of Utrecht, "a new Whitehall ascend" (l. 380) amid the spires of the fifty new London churches, which Swift is said to have been instrumental in getting built. But perhaps the greatest recollection of "On the burning of Whitehall in 1697" may be found in the first chapter of *Gulliver's Travels*, when Gulliver is confined in "an ancient Temple," "which [had] been polluted some Years before by an unnatural Murder" and so was reduced to profane and common use.<sup>10</sup> Such was the fate of Whitehall, too, after its destruction in 1698 by what Swift saw as the purging fire of a divine retribution.

<sup>9</sup> *Prose Writings*, V, 283.

<sup>10</sup> *Prose Writings*, XI, 26.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

CHARLES BERLIN is Lee M. Friedman Bibliographer in Judaica in the Harvard College Library and heads the Library's Hebrew Division. His Harvard dissertation (1963) was an edition of *Seder Eliyyahu Zuta*, by Elijah ben Elkanah Capsali.

DUNCAN ISLES teaches at Birkbeck College of the University of London; his "Johnson, Richardson, and *The Female Quixote*" appears in the new edition of *The Female Quixote* (ed. M. Dabzel) that was published in the *Oxford English Novels* series during 1970.

JAMES R. MCGOVERN is Acting Chairman of the History Department of the University of West Florida, Pensacola.

GEORGE P. MAYHEW, Professor of English at the California Institute of Technology, is the author of *Rage or Raillery: the Swift Manuscripts at the Huntington Library* (1967). His Harvard dissertation (1953) was on "Jonathan Swift's Games with Language."

ROGER W. PEATTIE is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Calgary.

LAURENCE SENELICK is Assistant Professor of English at Emerson College in Boston, Artistic Director of the Harvard Producing Organization, and Editor of *Dickens Studies*.

MRS. MILADA SOUČKOVÁ continues a part-time association with the Slavic Division of the Harvard College Library despite retirement and a recent appointment as Visiting Professor of Czech and Slovak Literature at the University of Chicago. She is the author of several volumes of poetry and of literary history, including *A Literary Satellite; Czechoslovak-Russian Literary Relations*, which was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1970.