Swift's Construction of War

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Swift was no stranger to war. Born in 1667, he was 21 when William 3rd ousted James 2nd in the defence of the Protestant succession. Leaving Ireland in search of preferment, Swift eventually achieved political fame as a pamphleteer on the side of the Tories at least partly because he was disgusted by the venality of Marlborough and the Whigs during the War of the Spanish Succession. The accession of George 1st in 1714 forced him into exile in Ireland, although he would have been aware of the Jacobite threat to the Hanoverians. Back in Dublin, he campaigned actively for the relief of Ireland, campaigns that frequently led to civil brawls. It could be said that he had a disputatious nature and he was certainly cantankerous, so it is hardly surprising that his writings contain frequent references to arguments and, more generally, war.

In this paper I intend to look at three representations of war in Swift's writings to see how they are constructed. In particular, I shall be arguing that these representations can be seen on a cline of metaphoricity and that the more metaphorical writings demand more 'work' from the reader. Finally, I shall be suggesting that literary metaphors can be distinguished from cognitive metaphors precisely because they demand this extra 'work'.

The concept of work that I am using here derives in part from ethnomethodology and conversational analysis. It recognises that utterances are not representative of a given 'state of affairs' but are active constructions which bring that state of affairs into being. In particular, it rejects at least some cognitivist positions by arguing that with the cognitive focus:

> representations tend to become separated from the practices in which they are used and start to be conceptualised as static entities which individuals carry around with them. Put another way, the cognitive focus draws attention away from what is being *done* with representations and descriptions in the settings in which they are produced (Potter, 103-4).

From this perspective, it can be argued that the work I am describing is largely undertaken by the speaker/writer. However, conversational analysis and ethnomethodology recognise that interlocutors typically orient to each other in the construction of shared meanings and that listeners also engage in work. In written language, the interlocutors are at a disadvantage since they cannot interrogate the text to ascertain whether their perceptions of 'states of affairs' are accurate. Nevertheless, they still engage in work to achieve an interpretation, and the amount of work required will vary from text to text and from genre to genre. I shall be suggesting that this variation depends on the 'literalness' of the text and that the more 'literal' the text the less work is required. However, contrary to conversation analysts, I will be agreeing with those cognitive linguists who argue that the ground of our language is ordered by cognitive metaphors, so that all interpretation requires some work.

The texts that I shall discuss come from *The Conduct of the Allies, Gulliver's Travels,* and *The Battle of the Books.* The first of these involves a description of war seen as a means of gaining personal advantage; the second as a sequence within a particular complex narrative which yields to allegorical interpretation; and the third as a metaphorical (and, possibly, allegorical) description of an academic argument.

The Conduct of the Allies is problematic since we know that Swift is discussing the ends of war. Taken literally such ends are likely to be either victory for one of the combatants or the avoidance of defeat (and presumably conquest). Both of these involve suffering and, possibly, death by those who are caught up in the fighting, and the fighting itself will be governed by strategic considerations. Thus, any cognitive representation of war will be highly complex. However, at its base will be the concepts of winning and losing and of pain and suffering.

If we look at some selections from *The Conduct of the Allies* (Ross & Woolley, 1984) we will notice that Swift has constructed his 'war' in a slightly different way:

THE *CONDUCT* OF THE ALLIES AND OF THE ̶L̶a̶t̶e̶ ̶M̶i̶n̶i̶s̶t̶r̶y̶ in Beginning and Carrying on the PRESENT WAR (1711)

[a] We have now for ten years together turned the whole force and expense of the war where the enemy was best able to hold us at bay; where we could propose no manner of advantage to ourselves; where it was highly impolitic to enlarge our conquests; utterly neglecting that part which would have saved and gained us many millions . . .(p.291)

[b] By an agreement subsequent to the grand alliance, we were to assist the Dutch with forty thousand men, all to be commanded by the D[uke] of M[arlborough]. So that whether this war were prudently begun or not, it is plain that the true spring or motive of it was the aggrandising of a particular family, and, in short, a war of the *general* and the *ministry* and not of the *prince* and *people*. . .(p.308)

[c] We have been fighting to raise the wealth and grandeur of a particular family; to enrich usurers and stockjobbers; and to cultivate the pernicious designs of a faction to destroy the landed interest. The nation begins now to think these *blessings* not worth fighting for any longer, and therefore desires a peace (p.321).

Each one of these extracts contains two lexical sets drawn respectively from semantic fields associated with battle, finance and politics. In the first sentence of [a] these are firmly yoked together as in '*force and expence*'. The three parallel clauses introduced by *where* accumulate the lexis of battle with terms such as *enemy, at bay,* and *conquests*, but there is also the ambiguous use of *advantage* which can be seen as either connected to battle or to finance. The third of these clauses introduces the term *impolitic* which can be construed either as *unwise* or more literally as poor policy from a political perspective. The final clause reverts exclusively to the language of finance, although the use of the first person plural *us* hints at a political interpretation. The following two extracts reinforce this reading. In [b] we observe the use of *alliance, forty thousand men, commanded, general* and *war* coupled with *aggrandising* which can be interpreted as 'making richer' and followed by the openly political nature of the terms *ministry*, and *the prince and the people*. My third extract, which represents the culmination of Swift's argument, draws these themes together

in such a way as to indicate that the ground of the war is for the political and economic advantage of a faction which does not represent the *nation*. In this, Swift anticipates Clausewitz's famous observation that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means'. Indeed, Swift is quite explicit about the relationships between war, politics and finance. Nor does he strictly suggest that any one of them is being used as a metaphor for the other. To that extent, the reader is not being asked to do any more work than that required to reconstruct the surface meanings and follow the argument. As Johnson (n.d.) observes

> Yet, surely, whoever surveys this wonder-working pamphlet with cool perusal, will confess that its efficacy was supplied by the passions of its readers; that it operates by the mere weight of facts, with very little assistance from the hand that produced them (p.353).

Interestingly, Swift developed the same argument in another text, and here the readers are required to do more work:

[d]   From: *A Satirical Elegy*
       ON THE DEATH OF A LATE FAMOUS GENERAL (1722)

                   Behold his funeral appears,
                   Nor widow's sighs, nor orphan's tears,
                   Wont at such times each heart to pierce,
                   Attend the progress of his hearse.
                   But what of that? His friends may say
                   He had those honours in his day.
                   True to his profit and his pride
                   He made them weep before he died
                                               (Ross & Woolley, 1984:418).

The extra work derives in part from the form of the text as part of a poem, but also because Swift is far less explicit about the relationships that hold between death, war, cupidity and politics. The initial image is marked by the absence of *widow's sighs* and *orphan's tears*. The funeral schema is, therefore incomplete. However, the mention of the widows and orphans brings them to the readers' minds since whatever is mentioned is necessarily 'primed' in the imagination even though the mention is of an absence. Line two, therefore prepares readers for the final line. Lines three and four foreground the grieving associated with 'such times', while the remaining lines introduce the 'honours' (political?), the 'profit' and the 'pride' (or factionalism). Thus, the relationships between argument, finance and war

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are presented, but their effects depend on the reader noticing an identity between Marlborough's state funeral and the less grand funerals attended by the widows and orphans of his soldiers.

My second choice from Swift's writings engages the reader in yet more complex ways:

Gulliver's Travels (1726)

[a] For, *said he* [Redresal], as flourishing a Condition as we might appear to be in to Foreigners, we labour under two mighty Evils; a violent Faction at home, and the Danger of an Invasion by a most potent Enemy from abroad (p.43).

[b] Now the *Big-Endian* Exiles have found so much Credit in the Emperor of *Blefescu*'s Court. AND so much private Assistance and Encouragement from their Party here at home, that a bloody War hath been carryed on between the two Empires for six and thirty Moons with various Success; during which time we have lost forty Capital Ships, and a much greater number of smaller Vessels, together with thirty thousand of our best Seamen and Soldiers; and the Damage received by the enemy is reckoned to be somewhat greater than Ours (p.45).

[c] And so unmeasurable is the Ambition of Princes, that he seemed to think of nothing less than reducing the whole Empire of *Blefescu* into a Province, and governing it by a Vice-Roy; of destroying the *Big-Endian* Exiles, and compelling that People to break the smaller end of their Eggs, by which he would remain the sole Monarch of the whole World (p.48).

While it is possible to treat this representation of war as part of the continuing narrative of Lemuel Gulliver's travels (and this presumably is what happens when it is read as a children's book), contrary to Johnson's view that 'When once you have thought of the big men and the little men, it is very easy to do all the rest' (Boswell, 1968; p.511), the *Travels* is a highly complex set of observations on mankind. My particular extracts refer indirectly to the Jacobite threat and also to the position of Ireland *vis-a-vis* England. Again, the relationship between war and politics is stressed in the first extract. Interestingly, Redresal

observes that Lilliput is in a flourishing condition, thus suggesting that war has not impoverished the country. This is continued in the second extract, but the causes of war and the outcomes of the various battles are made more explicit. The accumulation of detail concerning the losses, and particularly the use of figures, suggests an accounting book in which credit and loss are entered up. It is for this reason that Swift's use of the term *Credit* is ambiguous. It could merely refer to the esteem in which the Emperor holds the Big-Endians, or it could also refer to financial credit, the latter sense being one that, according to the OED, started appearing in the mid-seventeenth century. What is difficult to decide is the extent to which the situation of Lilliput is supposed to act as a metaphor for the condition of England. Strictly speaking it cannot be read allegorically because there is no one-to-one correspondence between the events and characters in Lilliput and Blefescu and those of the United Kingdom. A metaphorical reading, though, allows us to trace various correspondences between the wars that afflicted Lilliput and the political machinations of the Jacobites. In this sense, we can argue that Swift was drawing on the cognitive metaphor that argument is war.

In this reading, the Big-Endians represent those followers of James who were welcomed by the French court and who helped ferment the Jacobite rising of 1715. However, Swift would probably not have wished us to take such a reading too literally since a number of his Tory friends fled the country following the accession of George 1 in 1714 and the triumph of Walpole and the whigs. It could also be objected that the dispute between the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians was over a matter too trivial to mirror the disputes between the Pretender and the Hanoverian court (which, by extension, can be regarded as a continuation of the religious wars fought during the reformation). However, when we remember that in the *Tale of the Tub* he satirises the papists and the more extreme Calvinists by using an overcoat to represent the true faith, it seems perfectly possible to read the dispute over which end one should open eggs as representing the arguments between the Jacobite Tories and the Whigs. Further, it reinforces the metaphor of argument as war because by focusing our attention on the triviality of the matter Swift is able to reflect on the foolishness of man. However the length of the war suggests that he also anticipates Foucault's re-writing of Clausewitz when he comments 'shouldn't we turn the expression around then, and say that politics is war pursued by other means' (1984:93).

The same theme is at work in the third of these extracts. Yet again, I think it would be unwise to read it allegorically, although it is possible to do so. A more comfortable reading is to take the Emperor of Lilliput as loosely based on Walpole and to consider the Empire of Blefescu as representing Ireland. This contradicts the earlier reading of Lilliput and Blefescu as metaphors of Britain and France and a strict allegory would not allow such changes of identity. On a more metaphorical reading of this passage, we can interpret Blefescu as Ireland since it was treated as a province of England and governed by a viceroy. The dispute over which end eggs should be broken, on this reading, becomes a comment on Wood's halfpence which led to Swift producing the *Drapier Letters*.

So far, then, I have argued that the *Conduct* should be read as a straight political pamphlet which is relatively free of figures of speech or, indeed, of metaphor. *Gulliver's Travels*, on the other hand, yields itself to a much richer kind of reading. On the one hand, we have the ground metaphor of argument equalling war. On the other, we have the use of a complex interweaving of constructed metaphors which equate fictional characters and places with actual characters and places, and which further comment on the stupidity of man.

Having said this, it is worth remembering that *Gulliver's Travels* can be read as a simple narrative. On either reading, we are constructing a literary discourse since the events described are purely fictional. However, the simple reading fails to indicate the ways in which the text world corresponds to the world we experience. I would argue, therefore, that the metaphorical reading is more likely to represent the kind of reading intended by Swift. And I would further argue that this kind of reading hints at the ways in which cognitive metaphors may underlie surface metaphors, but that such surface metaphors contribute to our reading of a text as 'literary'.

My third set of extracts should serve to make the point more clearly:

3. A Full and True Account of the BATTEL Fought last FRIDAY, Between the *Antient* and the *Modern* BOOKS in St. JAMES's LIBRARY (1697).

[a] At length, there appearing no end of the quarrel, our author tells us that the BOOKS in St.James's Library, looking upon themselves as parties principally concerned, took up the controversy and came to a decisive battle. But the manuscript by the injury of fortune or weather being in several places imperfect, we cannot learn to which side the victory fell.

[b] I must warn the reader to beware of applying to persons what is here meant only of books, in the most literal sense. So, when Virgil is mentioned, we are not to understand the person of a famous poet called by that name, but only certain sheets of paper, bound up in leather, containing in print the works of the said poet; and so of the rest (p.1).

[c] (After a detailed account of the disposition of the Moderns and their various commanders)

The army of the Ancients was much fewer in number. Homer led the horse, and Pindar the light horse; Euclid was chief engineer; Plato and Aristotle commanded the bowmen, Herodotus and Livy the foot; Hippocrates the dragoons. The allies, led by Vossius and Temple, brought up the rear (p.11).

[d] Then Pindar slew -, and -, and Oldham, and - and Afra the Amazon, light of foot. Never advancing in a direct line but wheeling with incredible agility and force, he made a terrible slaughter among the enemy's light horse. Him when Cowley observed, his generous heart burnt within him and he advanced against the fierce Ancient, imitating his address, and pace, and career, as well as the vigour of his horse and his own skill would allow. When the two cavaliers had approached within the length of three javelins, first Cowley threw a lance which missed Pindar, and passing into the enemy's ranks, fell ineffectual to the ground. Then Pindar darted a javelin so large and weighty that scarce a dozen cavaliers, as cavaliers are in our degenerate days, could raise it from the ground; yet he threw it with ease. And it went by an unerring hand singing through the air . . . (pp.16-17).

The work was occasioned by the disputes over the provenance of various classical forgeries. Swift's patron Sir William Temple, although relatively open-minded, was on the side of the Ancients, and Swift's pamphlet was produced as a counterblast to the attacks made by Richard Bentley, a leading classical scholar. Interestingly, Angus Ross, the editor of my version of the text, refers to the exchanges as 'a pamphlet war' (p. 605) helping to reinforce the underlying metaphor of argument as war.

But Swift employs far more complex methods than the use of a cognitive metaphor to develop his message, and thus produces a text which is rich in further potential meanings. For example, he plays with his readers in a number of different ways. Although [a] and [b] are from the section headed *The Bookseller to the Reader*, there are convincing reasons for believing that Swift wrote them himself. The pamphlet, thus, holds the reader away from the author by at least two removes. Swift as narrator disappears.

The opening indicates how the dispute led to a battle but covers itself by withholding the outcome. At this stage, we have every reason to believe that the marred manuscript is an inanimate object damaged by the weather, etc., and which describes a battle between 'real' people. However, Swift undermines this assumption in the second section where the books engaged in the dispute are treated as animate warriors. The books are no longer records of an argument but become principals in such a way that the metaphor Argument is War ceases to be a metaphor becoming literally (or at least, metonymically) true. This sleight of hand allows Swift to deflect criticism that his arguments are in any sense *ad hominem* while allowing the reader to consider the battle as something more than a metaphor. In some ways, it is as though the reader is in one of those fairground halls of distorting mirrors where the distinction between the reality and the reflection is totally confused. And in this sense, the reader is obliged to engage in more work than is the case in straightforward narration.

Having entered this text world, we are obliged to view the various books engaged in appropriate activities as genuine warriors. The assignment of particular duties to the Ancients is not random, but represents the values they upheld, although such values are treated metonymically. Thus Homer and Pindar are regarded as being responsible for the

major onslaught on the Moderns by virtue of the 'weight' of their compositions. Euclid's position clearly relates to his reputation as a mathematician. Plato and Aristotle are rather more difficult to decipher. I assume that they are treated as bowmen because of the far-reaching effects of their philosophies. Herodotus and Livy, as writers of prose, become the 'plodding' foot soldiers and Vossius and Temple are at the rear since historically, they come a long way after the Ancients. I must admit that the significance of Hippocrates as leader of the dragoons escapes me since dragoons are mounted soldiers who use a particular kind of musket. Nevertheless, the effort required to ascertain how these military activities are treated as metonymic indices of the named authors indicates the kind of work the reader has to engage in.

A similar kind of work is necessary to decipher the intended meanings of my fourth section. Oldham and Aphra Behn are mentioned because of their attempts at writing Pindaric Odes, a style which was fashionable in the late 17th century. Cowley is treated at some length because he is considered to have been a master of the style. The mention of Cowley's 'imitating his address and pace, and career as well as the vigour of his horse and his own skill would allow' indicates the respect in which Swift held him. More interesting is the reference to cavaliers 'in our degenerate days'. Cavaliers can refer either to horsemen or to supporters of Charles 1st. It is unlikely that Swift believed strictly that cavalrymen were significantly weaker than they were in 5th century Greece. The reference, then, is almost certainly to the Royalists, and particularly those who had adopted the Jacobite cause, but also to those poets such as Herrick and Lovelace who became known as the cavalier poets.

In unpacking these references and their associated meanings, I am suggesting that Swift is treating them as metonyms (rather than allegories) of the qualities associated with the writers mentioned. As a reader, then, I am placed in a peculiar text-world. Swift continuously shifts the readers' positions away from himself as author. He appears initially as the Bookseller who comments on a manuscript which has no author but which treats a contemporary dispute as though it were a war. This war is then described as a war of actual books, although the combatants behave in the same way as human combatants would. Finally, these books are endowed with actual military qualities which correspond to their literary qualities. Such shiftings leave the readers in an uncomfortable position since they

are continually having to reassess which particular text world they are being invited to inhabit.

It is this kind of assessment that the term 'work' refers to, and I hope to have demonstrated the different kinds of work that are demanded of the readers of these texts. If I am right, then I believe it is possible to draw some more general conclusions from this analysis. I suggested that in the first set of texts readers are invited into a text world which corresponds fairly precisely to the experienced world. In the second set, because it is a fictional text, readers are invited into a fantasy world where they can follow the narration as though it were a genuine account of Lemuel Gulliver's travels. However, a deeper reading reveals that much of what Gulliver describes has counterparts in the historical period of Swift's lifetime. To understand these references, readers are required to understand the descriptions as metaphors and then trace the characters and events which are metaphoricised. The central metaphor is that argument is war and because that can be treated as a cognitive metaphor (i.e. one that is likely to be commonly held by a majority of the readers) the primary work has to be that involving the detailed unravelling of the other references. My final set of texts involves even more complex work. The metaphor of argument as war is foregrounded such that argument becomes war. However, this particular war is not one that is fought by people, rather it is fought by real books. The shift involved here requires readers to abandon the idea that a real war is being described and reconsider war as a metaphor for the disputes that are taking place in the real world between real people. Thus, the cognitive background has to be resituated in a specific foreground in which nothing can be treated as purely straightforward.

From this perspective it can be argued that cognitive metaphors and literary metaphors are distinguished by the amount of work they demand from the reader. Cognitive metaphors, because they are rooted in our everyday experience of life, require little work. The more literary a metaphor or metonymy becomes correspondingly more work is demanded of readers. I would suggest that this is borne out by my readings of the three Swiftian texts. In particular, from the extracts offered here, it would tend to privilege the *Battle of the Books* as the most literary text, a position with which I concur.

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