



# Jonathan Swift: His Life and His World

*Leo Damrosch*

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Jonathan Swift is best remembered today as the author of *Gulliver's Travels*, the satiric fantasy that quickly became a classic and has remained in print for nearly three centuries. Yet Swift also wrote many other influential works, was a major political and religious figure in his time, and became a national hero, beloved for his fierce protest against English exploitation of his native Ireland. What is really known today about the enigmatic man behind these accomplishments? Can the facts of his life be separated from the fictions?

In this deeply researched biography, Leo Damrosch draws on discoveries made over the past thirty years to tell the story of Swift's life anew. Probing holes in the existing evidence, he takes seriously some daring speculations about Swift's parentage, love life, and various personal relationships and shows how Swift's public version of his life—the one accepted until recently—was deliberately misleading. Swift concealed aspects of himself and his relationships, and other people in his life helped to keep his secrets.

Assembling suggestive clues, Damrosch re-narrates the events of Swift's life while making vivid the sights, sounds, and smells of his English and Irish surroundings. Through his own words and those of a wide circle of friends, a complex Swift emerges: a restless, combative, empathetic figure, a man of biting wit and powerful mind, and a major figure in the history of world letters.

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