The Snare in the Constitution
The Snare in the Constitution:
Defoe and Swift on Liberty

By

Zouheir Jamoussi

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING
DEDICATION

For Célia and Naël, my grandchildren
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. xii  
List of Abbreviations ........................................................................................................... xiii  

## INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1  

## CHAPTER ONE: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ............................................................ 17  

The Two Religious Foes ................................................................................................. 18  
  The Dissenters under the Restoration Kings  
  The Common Enemy: Popery  
  Collusion of the Two Enemies of the Church?  

Religious Tension after the Revolution ........................................................................ 29  
  Limited Toleration and Liberty of Conscience  
  The Controversy over Occasional Conformity  
  Attempts to Repeal the Test Act  
  The Perils of the Dissenters’ Political Alliances  
  Defoe’s Minimizing of the Dissenters’ Political Weight  
  Freethinkers  
  Religion, Education, and Liberty  
  Religion and Government  

Summary ......................................................................................................................... 56  

## CHAPTER TWO: CIVIL LIBERTY ........................................................................... 59  

The Debate on the Divine and Human Foundations of Government ................................ 59  
  The Drapier’s “Reversible” Book Chest  
  Jus Divinum  
    Royal Prerogative and the Law  
    Jure Divino Tyranny  
    The Doctrine of Passive Obedience and Non-resistance  
    Political Contradictions of the Church  
  Progress of Constitutionalism  
    Human Foundation of Government  
    Limited Monarchy  
    William III: The Liberator  


Post-revolution Encroachments on the Constitution................................. 89
   Snares in the Constitution?
   “Best” but Vulnerable Constitution
   The Foundations of Parliamentary Representation
   Elections
   The Party System
   The Mob
The Monarch, the Parliament and the Constitution
   The Kentish Petition Affair
   The Standing Army Issue
   The Hanoverian Succession
   Suspension of Laws
   Corruption, “the Last Deadly Symptom of Agonizing Liberty”
Summary ....................................................................................................... 143

CHAPTER THREE: SWIFT AND DEFOE ON IRELAND
AND SCOTLAND .......................................................................................... 147
Swift and Ireland .......................................................................................... 147
   Banished to “a Country of Slaves”
   Thwarted Career Ambitions
   Banishment
Constitutional Ambiguities
   Some Historical Landmarks
   The People of Ireland
   Legislative Dependence
   The Executive
   Employment
   Was Ireland an English Colony?
Economic Oppression
   Rural Oppression
   Absenteeism
   Trade
A Patriot in Spite of Himself
   The Copper Coin Crisis and The Drapier’s Letters
   Assessments of Swift’s Irish “Patriotism”
Defoe on Ireland
Defoe and the Union of England and Scotland......................................... 190
   Unsettled Relations since the Union of the Crowns (1603)
   Defoe’s Ill-disguised Secret Mission to Scotland
   Nationalists’ Objections to the Union
   The Question of Procedure
Opposition to an Incorporating Union  
The Church of Scotland and the Union  
Trade  
Defoe’s Response to the Scottish Nationalists  
Force of Argument or Argument of Force  
Diagnosis, Prognosis and Liberty on Prescription  
“Strange Way of Arguing”  
The Charge of Anglo-centricism  
Self-criticism: the Ideal and the Real  
Swift on Scotland

Summary ........................................................................................................... 224

CHAPTER FOUR: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS ........................................... 227
Introduction ........................................................................................................ 227
The Debate about Freedom of the Press ......................................................... 230
  Liberty of Writing and of Speech as Guardian of all Liberties  
  The Case of England  
  Consciousness of Abuse and of the Need for Limitation  
  “Inconveniencies arising from general Blessings”  
  Censorship and Repression as Obstacles to Truth, Learning  
  and Information  
  Censors and Judges  
  The Charge of Libel and Sedition  
  Anonymity
The State, the Church and the Press .............................................................. 243
  The Church and the Press  
  The State and the Press  
  The Parties and the Press
Defoe and Swift as Agents and Victims of Repression ............................... 256
  Defoe’s and Swift’s Calls for Censorship and Repression  
  Defoe and Swift as Victims of Repression
Summary ........................................................................................................... 265

CHAPTER FIVE: FREEDOM IN DEFOE’S FICTION ............................... 267
Crusoe’s Island and Liberty ........................................................................... 268
  Two Representations of Possession  
  Crusoe and Things  
  Crusoe and Territory  
  Liberty and Isolation
Liberty and Social Bonds ................................................................................. 274
  Liberty and Contract
Table of Contents

Moll, Roxana, and Women’s Liberty
Mobility and Confinement................................................................. 281
  Mobility and Liberty
  Mobility and Availability
  Geographical and Social Mobility
  Progress and Transgression
  Deprivation of Liberty
  Prison
  Contract Slavery
  Captivity
Mobility as a Religious Metaphor ..................................................... 297
  Wandering and Sinning
  Looseness and Freedom
  The Devil’s Clutches and God’s Guiding Hand
Liberty and the Structures of the Novels ........................................... 303
  The Pattern of the Fall
  Robinson Crusoe and the Quest for Liberty
  Liberty in the Other Novels
  Body and Soul: Imprisonment and Freedom
  Imagination and Liberty
    The False Promise of Liberty
    On Imagination
    Crusoe and Imagination
    Roxana, Imagination and Judgment

CHAPTER SIX: LIBERTY IN GULLIVER’S TRAVELS ...................... 325
Liberty in Lilliput ............................................................................. 325
  Liberty and Food
  The Ironies of Gulliver’s Liberation
Gulliver and Liberty in Brobdingnag .............................................. 339
  The Ambiguity of Gulliver’s Cosy Boxes
  Truth about Liberty
Gulliver and Liberty in Book III...................................................... 345
  Looseness and Liberty
  Chains of the Mind
  Women and the Vulgar
  “The Mechanical Operation” of Tyranny
    Mass Indoctrination and Political Tyranny in Balnibarbi
  The Reversed Master/Servant Relationship
  Reason and Passion
An Ossified Social System and a Rigid Hierarchy
Intolerance and Prejudice: Gulliver *Persona Non Grata*
Reason or Reasons of State
Gulliver’s Belated Revolt: Aspects of the Overall Structure ................. 364
  The Submissive Character
  Gulliver’s Escapes back to Liberty and Congruence
  The Snare in Congruence

**CHAPTER SEVEN: IRRECONCILABLES** ...................................... 371
Civilisation versus Savagery .......................................................... 371
  Proud Travellers
  The Clothes Metaphor
    The Mark of the Civilised Man
    The Mask of Incurable Savagery
  Degeneration
Self-Conquest and Colonial Conquest........................................... 382
  A Way out of the Snare?
  The Dispositions of Providence
  Crusoe’s Worshipped Gun
  Gulliver’s Spurned Gunpowder: the Anti-war, Anti-colonial Stand

**GENERAL CONCLUSION** ............................................................ 397

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ........................................................................ 411

**AUTHOR INDEX** ....................................................................... 431

**SUBJECT INDEX** ....................................................................... 439
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am greatly indebted to Pr. Suzy Halimi and Pr. Serge Soupel of the University of Paris III for always graciously agreeing, despite their very busy timetables, to read various chapters of this book from the early stages of composition. Their comments, suggestions and encouragements have sustained me all along.

I am also grateful to Richard Webster for his readiness to help generously and promptly as soon as his assistance and advice were requested.

I am indebted more than I can express to Neila Attia Romdhane without whose immense technical know-how and her extraordinary dedication, this book would never have been completed. I shall ever be grateful to her and to Nouri Romdhane, who has much contributed to removing obstacles at every stage.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Jeffrey Oaks of the University of Indianapolis for providing large sections of the Mc Veagh edition of Defoe's Review, and to Mahdi Abdeljaoued who has been as supportive and helpful in the preparation of this book as an old friend can be. Sincere thanks are also due to my dear friends and colleagues Emna Moalla and Anouar Attia for their perceptive reading of some chapters, and their encouraging comments. I am also grateful to Habib Ajroud, Selima Lejri and Hajar Miladi for kindly facilitating indispensable access to libraries, and to Sonia Kallel Sethom for plying her fine talent for the illustration of the dust jacket.

Without my whole family's support and sacrifice, I would not have been able to persevere in this demanding project. My younger son Zyed has given me more support, moral and otherwise, than he is aware of. Mona and Thomas have very kindly provided irreproachable copy and post services.

Without my wife Souad this book could never have been written. She has been the early inspirer, daily adviser and untiring reader, besides taking on my share of the care and attention due to our elder son Jawhar.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C J: Colonel Jack
C S: Captain Singleton
F A: The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe
G T: Gulliver's Travels
M F: Moll Flanders
R C: Robinson Crusoe
R: Roxana
INTRODUCTION

Although the temptation to compare Defoe and Swift is not new, there have been few book-length comparative approaches to their works since John F. Ross’s *Swift and Defoe: A Study in Relationship* (1941). Large sections of J. A. Downie’s book *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (1979) have focused on essential aspects of the two authors’ journalistic careers. Paula R. Backscheider has included both authors in her book on the origins of the novel, *A Being More Intense: A Study of the Prose Works of Bunyan, Swift and Defoe* (1984). Carol Houlihan Flynn’s *The Body in Swift and Defoe* (1990) has placed special emphasis on “corporeality” as one fundamental aspect of the two authors’ lives and works. More recently, postcolonial criticism has shown increasing interest in comparing *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver’s Travels* as two early 18th century antithetical reactions to British colonialism, but no extensive comparative studies in that direction have so far been published.

While the few comparative approaches to Defoe and Swift have borne on specific aspects of the two authors’ works or relationships, the study attempted in this book has been designed as a more comprehensive undertaking. It has sought to encompass as much of the two authors’ vast, multifaceted output as the wide-ranging topic chosen required. One angle of approach indeed seemed to offer the broadest view of their writings, including pamphlets, tracts (plus Swift’s sermons), journals, correspondence, history books, conduct works, poetry and fiction: that angle was their treatments of the complex question of liberty.

This appeared to be the most evident common denominator between not only the two authors but, within the bulky works of each, between non-fiction and fiction. It seemed all the more appropriate as the two authors never ceased to regard themselves as staunch defenders of liberty. Swift saw himself and wished to be remembered as a champion of liberty. In *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* (1731-32), he describes what was in his own view, a life-long devotion to liberty:

Fair LIBERTY was all his Cry;
For her he stood prepar’d to die;
For her he boldly stood alone;
For her he oft expos’d his own.¹

Moreover, the second part of the Dean’s epitaph at St Patrick’s, Dublin—written by Swift himself—confirms that representation of his own life as a continual struggle for liberty: “Go traveller, and imitate if you can one who strove with all his might to champion liberty.” Commenting on the epitaph, Joseph McMinn writes: “For the last time, Swift defiantly asserts the terms in which his life might be posthumously understood.”²

As for Defoe, he might have thought he had an even better claim in this respect than Swift, being on the social, political and religious side which was usually associated with urgent demands for more liberty. In his pamphlet And What If the Pretender Should Come?, one of his three, ill-advised 1713 pamphlets on the Hanoverian Succession, he writes in a clearly ironical tone: “All the Business forsooth is this Trifle we call Liberty.”³

At this point, one may wonder how it came that two men so fundamentally opposed to each other with regard to religious, social, political and educational backgrounds could serve the same cause, namely the defence of liberty. Indeed their relations, according to a critic, can be described as a kind of polar opposition. Biographically there was an antagonism between the two men; ideologically they were on opposite sides; and in terms of literary achievement and consequent reputation, they are in the important sense irreconcilable.⁴

In fact, although they did defend some common principles, they could not have been expected to fight for liberty on the same side, given the social, religious and political gap between them. Or was it that “liberty” then meant different things to different people with contrasting backgrounds?

Defoe was a middle-class man by his family origin, education and social ideology, with, one must add, a peculiar ambivalence in his attitude to landowning. Throughout his writing career, he defended the moneyed

³ Daniel Defoe, “And What If the Pretender Should Come?” (1713), in Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe, 1: 196.
⁴ Martin Green, Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 89.
interest, and firmly believed the merchant and the tradesman complementary to the ancient land-owning gentleman. Swift, for his part, was descended from an ancient Yorkshire gentry family and was to remain all his life faithful to the ideology of the long-established landed gentlemen. These were fiercely opposed to the wars which they claimed overburdened them with land tax, and deeply hostile to the moneyed men and the commercial middle class. The latter they accused of making fortunes at the landowners’ expense as moneylenders of the state during the expensive wars. They also denounced the same moneyed men for using their newly acquired wealth, as well as their credit with the great Whig landowners, to buy or bribe their way, or their candidates’ way, into the House of Commons.

A passage in *Journal to Stella* presents the interesting peculiarity of showing Swift eagerly probing into his family history and coats of arms:

Oh, pray now I think of it, be so kind to step to my Aunt, and take notice of my great Grandfathers Picture. You know has a Ring on his finger with a Seal of an Anchor and Dolphin about it; but I think there is besides at the Bottom of the Picture the same Coat of Arms quartered with another, which I suppose was my great Grandmothers.5

Swift, of course, never confused the ancient landed gentry families with moneyed upstarts risen from Defoe’s middle-class through land purchase. In *Journal to Stella* again, he approvingly refers to his friend Congreve’s writing for the *Tatler* about “a scoundrel that was grown rich, and went and bought a Coat of Arms at the Herald’s, and a set of ancestors at Fleet-Ditch.”6

The contrast between Defoe and Swift was no less striking from the religious point of view. Defoe was a Presbyterian Dissenter, precisely what Swift, the Church of England man, (particularly the High Church side of him) hated most heartily, persistently and unrelentingly throughout his life. Defoe, not inflexible in his dissenting views and ready for political compromise, sometimes even at the expense of his coreligionists, was never fully trusted by the latter, as we will attempt to show further on. Swift, a staunch Church of England man, was a strong, though not an unconditional, supporter of High Church political views. With them he at any rate shared that constant hostility towards Dissenters. Indeed from the Restoration (1660, corresponding to Defoe’s birth) to the Glorious

---

6 Swift, Ibid., 115.
Revolution (1688), the Church of England submitted the Dissenters to the harshest treatment. In *Jonathan Swift Political Writer*, J. A. Downie ascribes to Swift’s Irish experience his somewhat paranoid and uncompromising defence of the Anglican Church, emphasizing Swift’s “awareness of the vulnerability of the Anglican Establishment, particularly in Ireland.” In *Jonathan Swift Political Writer*, J. A. Downie ascribes to Swift’s Irish experience his somewhat paranoid and uncompromising defence of the Anglican Church, emphasizing Swift’s “awareness of the vulnerability of the Anglican Establishment, particularly in Ireland.”7 Downie states that “Swift saw the maintenance of the Church of Ireland as a battle, and his advocacy of a militant Anglicanism was a legacy of his student days.”8 Downie further points out that “Trinity College was, after all, the bastion of Protestant culture in Ireland.”9

The contrast between the types of educational training received by Defoe and Swift reflected the difference between their religious backgrounds. It is no wonder therefore that education, still largely under the control of the Church of England, should have been one of the controversial issues raised during the debate about religious and civil liberty. While Swift studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aristotelian philosophy and logic at Trinity College, Dublin and at the University of Oxford, Defoe went to Charles Morton’s dissenting academy where he received a more “modern” training with strong emphasis on modern languages, sciences, geography and the mechanical arts and with decreasing emphasis on the classics. Paula R. Backscheider states that “to the end of his life he spoke of his education there […] with pride, and many of his interests, abilities, and opinions show the influence of Morton’s school.”10 Yet there was in Defoe the kind of cultural ambivalence that explains his extreme vulnerability to the accusation of being “illiterate” flung at him by Swift on one of those rare occasions when the latter deigned to “honour” him “with [his] contempt.”11

In a sense the opposition between Defoe and Swift symbolized the war two parts of England were waging against each other. On one side there was the Church of England, established by law and traditionally allied to a conservative landed gentry jealous of its political domination through landownership. On the other, there were the Dissenters, and the moneyed...

---

8 Ibid., 24.
9 Ibid., 23.
11 Swift, *Correspondence*, ed. Harold Williams, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–65), 3: 368. Swift’s own words from a letter to Robert Percival dated Jan. 3rd, 1730, in which the squire was the target and not Defoe. Most subsequent references to Swift’s poems will be to this edition.
interest, conscious of their increasing economic weight and claiming a
greater participation in political life. As was suggested above, it would be
no oversimplification therefore to place Defoe roughly among those who
demanded more liberties, both as a Dissenter and a middle-class man, and
Swift among those who defended old privileges and were suspicious of
new claims to liberty as threats to the Constitution and the existing
liberties. Indeed, by opposing Defoe and Swift on so many questions
pertaining to liberty, some deeper insight has been gained into their
respective socio-economic, political and religious views, as well as into
the spirit of the whole period covered by this study.

As far as their literary achievements and reputation are concerned,
there may be some exaggeration in Martin Green’s assertion that “they are
in the important sense irreconcilable.” Indeed the works they are and will
long be remembered for, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Gulliver’s Travels*
(1726) are both universally known and, to some significant extent, akin,
though on antagonistic terms with each other. John F. Ross asserts that,
despite “so much difference in character, environment, and purpose,”¹²
there are affinities between the two authors’ masterpieces. Those
“affinities” will come under close scrutiny in the last chapter of this book.

At one point in her book, Flynn very briefly describes, within the
framework of her own specific approach to the two authors, the
complexity of the task involved: “I concentrate here on Defoe and Swift,
both writing about the same subject at the same time, to emphasize the
interactions between two writers viewed as dissimilar in their vision.”¹³
This seems a reasonable description of the difficulties and challenges
involved in any comparative approach to two authors in many ways so
strikingly dissimilar.

Having said that, however, one is also forced to recognize that Defoe
and Swift do have a few important elements in common which, besides
their exploitable oppositions and the universal fame of their masterpieces,
may further justify the comparative approach.

• Both came to fiction proper at about the same age after long careers
  as pamphleteers and journalists. It is interesting to note that Crusoe and
  Gulliver were born when their respective creators were about 59 years of
  age.

• Both wrote a great deal of poetry, but perhaps equally tended,
  according to traditionalists, to overestimate their talent in that art. As they

¹² John F. Ross, *Swift and Defoe: A Study in Relationship* (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1941), 3.
¹³ Carol Houlihan Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge, New York,
wrote poems almost exclusively in the context of political debate and satire, they did antagonise some devotees of more “elevated” poetry. While admitting that “Swift was an admirable writer of comic verse,” George Orwell argues that “the kind of poetry he thought valuable would probably be didactic poetry.” 14 Backscheider rightly remarks that “Poets writing in this form ruthlessly subordinated beauty to clarity and argument.”15 To John Dryden, for example, has been ascribed this notoriously cruel verdict on Swift’s early compositions: “Cousin Jonathan, you will never be a poet.” In fact, for many of his contemporaries, Defoe would have no doubt deserved the same sentence. However, be that as it may, it will not be our concern in the present study to assess Swift’s and Defoe’s merits as poets.

Conversely, both were more readily acknowledged as great prose writers, with a keen awareness of the pedagogic and polemical force of their pens. This, they knew, would be the key to the success of their careers, and to the fulfilment of their ambitions, political and otherwise.

As pamphleteers, both served simultaneously the same statesman, Robert Harley (Lord Oxford from May 1711) and his Tory government. However, the two men were not held in equal esteem by the statesman. As is often alleged, “Harley received Swift at his front door, and saw him occasionally at the Scriblerius Club… Defoe went to Harley’s back door.”16 Defoe’s moaning letters to his employer, lamenting his financial difficulties, and Harley’s apparent procrastinations are indeed consistent with the alleged “back-door” admittance to the employer’s.

Accused of disloyalty to the Whig party, both were aware of what they saw as the dangers of party politics and faction, but played, when called upon to do so, the game of party politics to the full.

Attached to the principles of the Revolution, both celebrated William III as a liberator, though with increasingly divergent views about his reign and achievements.

As Englishmen, they were each personally involved in heated debates about the constitutions and liberties of Scotland (Defoe) and of Ireland (Swift). Due allowance must of course be made at once for fundamental differences in the nature and scale of their involvement in the politics of the two neighbouring kingdoms. One could, however, assert that Defoe’s participation in the campaign in favour of the Union between England and

15 Backscheider, 163.
16 Green, 90.
Scotland in 1706-07, and the leading role Swift played in the Irish nationalists’ attempts from 1720 to 1725 to shake off what they regarded as England’s arbitrary policies, cannot be left out of a comparative approach to their positions with regard to liberty in the broader sense.

- Both were attached to a free press, but were, as we shall see, undoubtedly ambivalent and changeable in that respect.

- On a more personal basis but with obvious relevance to their respective careers, Defoe and Swift shared the belief that personal liberty required real financial independence and security. Yet neither managed to attain the level of financial security to which he aspired. In a letter to Lord Bolingbroke and Pope dated April 5, 1729, Swift makes this important confession: “All my endeavours from a boy to distinguish myself, were only for want of a Title and Fortune.”\(^{17}\) In the same letter he writes: “I have no other notion of Oeconomy than that it is the parent of Liberty and Ease.”\(^{18}\) Another reference to the link between wealth and liberty occurs in a letter to Pope dated December 5, 1726: “I do agree that riches are Liberty.”\(^{19}\) Moreover, the idea that lack of financial security may compromise the liberty of the artist is touched on in a letter sent to his friend Pope in July 16, 1728. Here Swift refers to the situation of their common friend John Gay: “But God bless you, whose great genius has not transported you as to leave you to the courtesy of Mankind; for wealth is liberty, and liberty a blessing fittest for a philosopher… and Gay is a slave just by two thousand pounds too little.”\(^{20}\) As for Defoe, he was, like many of his characters, constantly moved all his life by a desperate craving for wealth, convinced as he also was that money was necessary to personal liberty. His bankruptcies testify to his frantic and somewhat reckless endeavour to secure financial independence.

- Finally, as Flynn has emphasized in her book, *The Body in Swift and Defoe*, the two men have problematic (though, in our opinion, different) relationships with their bodies and share a “vision of bodily confinement and bodily need.”\(^{21}\) Flynn refers to “Defoe’s horror of appetite, his abhorrence of a body personal and political, bloated and vile,”\(^{22}\) and to Swift’s representation of “the paralyzing discovery of the body.”\(^{23}\) What

\(^{17}\) Swift, *Correspondence*, 3: 330.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 3: 328.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 3: 193.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 3: 294.
\(^{21}\) Flynn, 6.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 45.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 88.
she calls “the trap of the body” in relation to the two authors corresponds to Defoe’s “prison of the body” and “the jayl of flesh and blood” used in a different context. Obviously this peculiarity is interesting, not only because it is common to the two men but also because it relates to liberty. For example, Swift’s regular fits of giddiness and deafness from his early adulthood, in addition to what must have been an acute problem of unfitness for normal sexual relationship, probably influenced his perception of liberty in a broad sense.

One of the other questions to be addressed in the introduction pertains to the meanings of liberty for Defoe, Swift and their contemporaries. To begin with, and on mature consideration, we have thought it preferable not to bother too much about differences between the meanings of the words “liberty” and “freedom”, since neither of the two authors appears to pay scrupulous attention to the distinction. The following lines from Defoe’s *Jure Divino* may be proposed as evidence in that regard:

“For Liberty is Nature’s Gift to Men,
Born in their Blood, and runs in every Vein.”

and

“Freedom is the native Right of all Mankind.”

As for Swift, he also easily substitutes “freedom” for “liberty”, as in “I thought I had only changed one Country of Freedom for another,” or “in those countries that pretend to Freedom, Princes are subjects to those Laws which their People have chosen.” Indeed the word “liberty” alone poses so many problems as it is that the idea of dwelling on that distinction, with no assurance of convincing results, seemed almost irrelevant. We have therefore proceeded as if the two terms were mostly interchangeable.

---

24 Ibid., 185.
27 Ibid., bk. 6, 8.
As was suggested above, “liberty” did not, could not always mean the same thing for the two writers. Neither did their respective perceptions of liberty (particularly in Swift’s case) remain unaltered throughout their writing careers. Swift’s conception of liberty in 1720-26 and beyond was not exactly the same as in 1710-1714. That too needs to be taken into consideration.

Often, during the period from the Restoration to the advent of the House of Hanover (1714) and even beyond, liberty had dissimilar if not contradictory meanings for the various political, religious or social sides or groups. From the point of view of the High Church Tories, divine right monarchy was inseparable from true liberty, and all liberties outside that framework were dismissed as misconceptions and perversions. From the point of view of their opponents among the Whigs, Dissenters, Low Churchmen and freethinkers, divine right monarchy was totally incompatible with civil liberties. To some, the Act of Settlement (1701) establishing the succession to the throne of England in the Protestant line, was the foundation of English liberties; to others, with the Jacobites at their head, it was an unconstitutional law passed in violation of the sacred right of succession to the throne. Some regarded a standing army in time of peace as the hateful instrument of tyranny, while others argued that the liberties of England and Europe could not be protected against foreign aggression by hegemonic states without a standing army. Religious toleration undoubtedly meant more liberty for Dissenters, Catholics and free-thinkers, but for the Church of England, particularly the High Churchmen, it was synonymous with danger to “liberties”. For the latter, the Test Act (1672-1828/9) was the guardian of liberties; for their adversaries, a tyrannical law and a measure of exclusion. About the word “liberty” used in connection with Ireland, one is reminded of the Drapier thus addressing Lord Middleton in his sixth letter: “I know very well, that you and I did many years ago in Discourse differ much, in the Presence of Lord Wharton, about the Meaning of that Word Liberty with Relation to Ireland,” etc.

There is on the other hand the question of the necessary gap between what Swift’s and Defoe’s contemporaries meant and what we today mean by “liberty”. This is also to be taken into account in our approach, if we want to avoid being misled into anachronism and error. It would seem to us unreasonable indeed to assess Defoe’s and Swift’s treatments of liberty by applying twenty-first century standards. And that is precisely what some critics and historians, we believe, have done. Of course, our own awareness of the evolution of the concept of liberty since their time affords

---

30 Swift, The Drapier’s Letters (Letter VI), 100.
us a comfortable distance from which to appraise their positions with regard to liberty. Indeed it is always good to remember where we come from in that respect. For example, some statements which sound incredibly racist, reactionary and absurd to most people today were made with indubitable solemnity and self-righteousness and must not have aroused indignation in that many contemporaries. In his Memorial of the Church of England (1705), James Drake declares: “He that takes away the Privileges that distinguish between a Vassal or Slave, and a Freeman, takes away Freedom it self, which consists in the Sovereign or unrestrained Exercise of certain Privileges…” 31 Liberty could not only coexist with slavery but was somewhat dependent on it. In other words there was liberty for some only by comparison with, if not owing to, the slavery of many.

Let us consider, for example, Swift’s remarks on slavery during the last years of Queen Anne’s reign. In the preliminary articles laying down British conditions for a peace treaty with France, to which Swift refers in The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen, there is much emphasis laid on “the Assiento” (or “Liberty” of selling Negro slaves to the Spanish West Indies). This concession was to be made by Spain to the English, “in as full a manner as the French possess it at present.” 32 In The History, Swift further states: “The Queen was determined never to allow the States any share in the Assiento.” 33 Now, Swift’s comment, as a historian, on this last condition is worth examining:

It will have an odd Sound in History, and appear hardly credible, that in several petty Republics of single Towns, which make up the States General, it should be formally debated, whether the Queen of Great Britain who preserved the Commonwealth at the Charge of so many Millions, should be suffered to enjoy, after a Peace, the Liberty granted her by Spain of selling African Slaves in the Spanish Dominions of America! 34

What would have “an odd Sound in History” from Swift’s point of view was that the Queen should be begrudged “the Liberty of selling African Slaves.” But, from the point of view of most readers of our time, what does “have an odd Sound” is that Queen Anne should have “enjoyed” at all “the liberty of selling African slaves.” However, almost

31 James Drake, Memorial of the Church of England, Humbly Offer’d to the Consideration of all True Lovers of our Church and Constitution (London: 1705), 41.
32 Swift, The History of the Four Last Years of the Queen (London: printed for A. Millar, 1758), bk. 2, 72.
33 Ibid., 4: 177.
34 Ibid., 4: 184.
three centuries have elapsed since then, which accounts for differences in points of view. After all, what sensible historian today will dare pledge that the present handling of liberty in this our twenty-first century will not “have an odd sound in History” for future generations? There is at any rate obvious danger for a historian of falling into the trap of judging wrongly or anachronistically by applying the criteria of his/her own time to long historical processes still under way but considered in earlier stages of their evolution.

Such seems to have been the case with some recent authors. In Julian Hoppit’s *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727* (2000), for example, there is this unexpected and somewhat puzzling assertion: “Moreover, given so many contemporaries, including foreigners, cried up England as a land of liberty her involvement in the slave trade cannot but give rise to charges of hypocrisy.” 35 This would mean that those “contemporaries” objected to the slave trade on moral grounds and that therefore their official praise of English liberties was insincere. This assertion, however, seems ill-founded, for in all probability “the contemporaries” saw no contradiction where Hoppit has seen one. Even more recently, and more closely to our discussion, John Richardson, in his *Slavery and Augustan Literature: Swift, Pope, Gay* (2003), writes: “Britain’s involvement in the slave trade and in plantation slavery was increasing and pervasive during the writing careers of Swift, Pope and Gay.” 36 Richardson sees a contradiction between two sets of facts:

On the one hand, we have a country involved in the slave trade, and the country leaders, with whom an important group of writers was closely associated, eager to increase the involvement. On the other, we have the same writers producing works which are centrally concerned with the behaviour of people and of peoples, and which are committed to an idea of freedom. The contradiction here invites questions about the interaction between Slavery and Scriblerian writings. 37

Richardson admits, though he says that he disagrees with them, that “historians have generally assumed that early eighteenth-century Englishmen, whatever they knew, felt no discomfort about slavery in general or the slave trade in particular.” 38 On the same page he quotes

37 Ibid., 1-2.
38 Ibid., 22.
Linda Colley as affirming that no inconsistency was seen “between trumpeting their freedom at home and buying men, women and children from trading posts in Africa to sell into slavery abroad.” John Richardson is confident that the “knowledge that Africans were fellow human beings and the belief that liberty was a universal human right also made possible a different perception of slavery and the slave trade.”

That “perception” based on “the belief that liberty was a universal human right” can only have been the privilege of a handful of isolated idealists entirely at odds with the overwhelming majority of their contemporaries. Let it be remembered that, according to Drake’s above assertion, danger for liberty lay in abolishing “the Privileges that distinguish between Vassal or Slave, and a Freeman.”

Let us take just one example among many: if civil liberty can be assumed to depend on the right to vote, then what a huge gap appears between the 18th century electoral system under which the vast majority of Englishmen were excluded and the twenty-first century with universal suffrage officially established nearly everywhere. It may be worth recalling that the earliest improvements in the electoral system only came about one whole century after Defoe’s death (1832). As we saw above, the eighteenth century was a time when liberty went hand in hand with massive exclusion.

As for the title of the book, ‘The Snare in the Constitution,’ it is derived from arguments developed by Defoe’s devil in A Vision of the Angelick World (1720), in order to infuse Notions of Liberty into the Minds of Men: that it is hard they should be born into the World with Inclinations, and then be forbidden to gratify them, […] that to place an Appetite in the Man, and a strong powerful Gust to these Delights, and then declare them fatal to him, would be laying a Snare to Mankind in his very Constitution.

Natural freedom for man would consist in following those inclinations and in indulging those passions, but such freedom would all too often be inconsistent with human laws and the law of God. As a result, outlaws and sinners are everywhere in Defoe’s novels: their ensnarement is the main focus of the first person narrator in those pseudo-autobiographies. On the other hand, Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels can also be said to be centred on the “snare” in the human constitution, though in ways fundamentally different.

---

39 Ibid., 29.
from those described in Defoe’s novels. The last three chapters of the present book will be much concerned with the contrasting ways in which Defoe’s and Swift’s characters struggle to wrench themselves free from their ensnarement.

Obviously, the title of this book cannot be meant to refer solely to the human constitution: in fact it also concerns the state’s constitution. The analogy between the human constitution, that is to say the natural body, to which is annexed the mental and psychological make-up, and the constitution of the state, or body politic, is recurrent in the writings of political thinkers from the middle of the seventeenth century to the 1730s. It is equally recurrent in Defoe’s and Swift’s. “Swift was fond of comparing the human body and the body politic,” notes J. A. Downie. 41 In A Discourse of the Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome, with the Consequences they had upon those States, Swift writes:

Some Physicians have thought, that if it were practicable to keep the several Humours of the Body in an exact equal Ballance of each with its Opposite, it might be immortal; and so perhaps would a political Body, if the Balance of Power could be always held exactly even. But I doubt, this is as almost impossible in the Practice as the other.42

The same analogy occurs in The Conduct of the Allies (1711) in which Swift writes: “We have hitherto lived upon expedients, which in time will certainly destroy any constitution, whether civil or natural.” At the beginning of his fourth Letter, the Drapier finds that “Cordials must frequently be applied to weak constitutions, Political as well as Natural.” The idea of medical prescription for both the natural and political constitutions is also underlined in Gulliver’s Travels: “Whereas all writers have agreed, that there is a strict universal Resemblance between the natural and the political Body, can there be anything more evident, than that the Health of both must be preserved, and the diseases cured by the same Prescriptions?” (179-80).

Interestingly, the idea of cure for the natural and the political bodies also occurs in Defoe’s Reasons against the Succession of the House of

41 Downie, Jonathan Swift Political Writer, 287.
42 Jonathan Swift, “A Discourse of the Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome, with the Consequences they had upon those States” (1701), in The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift, 1: 228.
44 Swift, The Drapier’s Letters (Letter IV), 53.
Hanover (1713): “for the Corruption of Politick Constitution are as Gross and as Fatal as those of Human Bodies, and require an immediate Application of Medicines.” In *The Original Power of the Collective Body of the People of England, Examined and Asserted* (1702), Defoe uses the same metaphor:

For as in the natural Body, if a Member, either by Contraction of the Organ, Dislocation, or other Accident, fails in the Performance of its proper Duty, the Locomotive Faculty is either interrupted, and the Body distorted, or at least the regularity of the Natural Motion is invaded: so in the Body Politick, if one Branch of the general Union err, and that error is not Corrected, the whole Constitution suffers a shock, and there is an Infraction of the general Order.

Of course, Defoe’s and Swift’s interest in the analogy between the natural and political constitutions was far from original. James Harrington had in the late 1650s summed up this analogical approach in *A Model of Popular Government*: “Corruption in Government is to be read and considered in Machiavel, as Diseases in a man’s Body are to be read and considered in Hippocrates.” In his preface to *An Account of Denmark, As it Was in the Year 1692* (1694), Robert Lord Viscount Molesworth, the addressee of the fifth Drapier’s letter points out that “want of liberty is a disease in any society or body politic, like want of health in a particular person.” In *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698), Algernon Sidney devotes a few pages to the analogy between “the head in the body politic” and “the head in the body natural.” As for Charles Davenant, he writes in his *Essays* (1701): “This State Lethargy is such an Apocalipticks Symptom, as is commonly the Forerunner of Death to the Body

---

45 Defoe, “Reasons against the Succession of the House of Hanover, with an Enquiry How far the Abdication of King James, Supposing it to be Legal, Ought to Affect the Person of the Pretender” (1713), in *Political and Economic Writings of Daniel Defoe*, 1: 177.
Politick.\footnote{50} Henry Sacheverell, who was unlikely to be left out of this brief review of analogical approaches, asserts in “The Political Union” (1702):

But to carry on the Allegory, as the Body Natural may be overcharged with Blood and Spirits, Glutted with Food, and Burthen’d with Plenty, so that what should Tend to Its Nourishment may turn into a Disease: so in the Body Politick, Wealth and Treasure are doubtless the Instruments of the Welfare and Prosperity of Government.\footnote{51}

Bernard Mandeville asserts in \textit{The Fable of the Bees} (1714): “The fickle breath of never Stable Fortune is to the Body Politick, the same as floating Air to a living Creature.”\footnote{52} And in \textit{The State-Anatomy of Great Britain} (1717), with its particularly relevant title, John Toland writes: “’Tis certain that the body politick may, no less than the body natural, languish of an internal and wasting disease, when sometimes the external looks and countenance seem very florid, when every thing promises health and long life.”\footnote{53} Closer even to Swift’s narrow cultural circle and to our concern in this book, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke warns: “The best instituted governments, like the best constituted animal bodies, carry in them the seeds of their destruction.”\footnote{54}

Thus the above review, with the clear emphasis laid almost in all the quotations on disease in the body politic and the need to provide remedies, seems to point to a real concern about the vulnerability of the constitution. This concurrence of statements on “the seeds of destruction,” “weak constitutions, Political as well as Natural,” the “internal and wasting disease,” “the forerunner of Death in the Body politick,” cannot be ascribed to coincidence. It testifies to a shared awareness of the dangers threatening the constitution. It is no wonder, for all those comments came at a time of momentous political change and conflicting interests, a time of turbulence, uncertainty, and adjustment.

\footnotetext[50]{Charles Davenant, \textit{Essays upon: I- The Ballance of Power; II The Right of Making War, Peace, and Alliances; III- Universal Monarchy} (London: printed for James Knapton, 1701), 1.}
\footnotetext[52]{Bernard Mandeville, \textit{The Fable of the Bees} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 258.}
One of the most intricate problems to address in the present book will therefore be to identify the “snares” in the political constitution, not of England alone but also of Ireland and Scotland, in addition to the snares in the human constitution, which the fictional works of the two authors are assumed to illustrate. One further step will lead to determining whether and to what extent links exist between the snares in the human and political constitutions.

The book has been divided into seven chapters centred respectively and in the following order on religious liberty, civil liberties, Ireland and Scotland, freedom of the press, Defoe’s fiction, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, plus a concluding chapter. The first four chapters are thus mostly concerned with the body politic, the last three more with Swift’s and Defoe’s fiction and the human constitution. The last chapter is, however, meant to reach beyond the fictions.

The method adopted in the following approach is simple: in all the subdivisions of each chapter, whenever possible, Defoe’s and Swift’s opinions have been juxtaposed and made to respond to each other, as well as to those of the most outspoken representatives of the various sides in the corresponding national debates. This seemed natural, as it reflected the pamphlet war and the disputes that were taking place in their time over the various issues. Wherever it was deemed appropriate, the two authors have been made to speak for themselves, as it were. Hence the prominent place the authors’ texts have been deliberately given throughout the book, the purpose being to offer as wide a range of their moods and styles as possible.