

## Logic and Illogic:

### The Concept of the Metaphysical Satire of Jonathan Swift and Wyndham Lewis

Toshikazu Nakamura (中村敏和)

#### Introduction

It has often been said, though with less and less effect, that ours is a satirical age. Almost nonsensically repeating the same commonplace over and over again, we are at the same time conscious of the emptiness of our "satirical age." We know that ours is not a satirical age in the sense that the eighteenth century was, even if we do not admit it outspokenly. At a superficial level, what has prevented our age from being truly satirical is, paradoxically enough, the fact that a satirical sensibility has become so prevalent that satire seems to have lost the intensity it once possessed. This is confirmed by one of the most skilful practitioners of aggressive satire of the twentieth century, Wyndham Lewis, who exclaims at one time: "Indeed it could be said without exaggeration that the present day is the Satirists' paradise!"<sup>(1)</sup> Lewis's ironical exclamation here is consistent with his insistent attack elsewhere on the "civilized" modern sensibility as opposed to his own "primitive" aggressive impulse.

However, if we impute the failure of our satirical age to our modern sensibility, we will necessarily ignore most of the problematics that are inherent in the form of satire itself. These are the problematics that tormented another more analytical mind of the eighteenth century, Jonathan Swift. Both Swift and Lewis were equally intent on exploiting the possibilities of the form of satire, which, as we will see later on, actually prevent the fulfilment of their satirical impulses. What follows is thus an attempt to examine the form of satire and the way it works rather than its content.

#### (i) The definition of satire

In ordinary discourse, we have little trouble with the definition of satire, and we have even less trouble employing its adjectival form, "satirical," to describe a certain kind of writing. We feel that the definition of the adjective is more pliable and therefore applicable to writings that are not properly called satire, but this fact implies that the definition of satire is not sufficiently circumscribed to designate a particular kind of writing. Lewis was well aware that no traditional definition was adequate to describe the new schools of satire of the modern period and undertook to redefine the term himself.

In fact, satire curiously resists precise definition. In the third essay of *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye deals with irony and satire together under the heading of "the mythos of winter." After loosely defining the central principle of ironic myth as a parody of romance, he makes a curious distinction between irony and satire:

The chief distinction between irony and satire is that satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured. Sheer invective or name-calling ("flyting") is satire in which there is relatively little irony: on the other hand, whenever a reader is not sure what the author's attitude is or what his own is supposed to be, we have irony with relatively little satire.<sup>(2)</sup>

Frye's distinction is obviously ambiguous. He defines satire merely as "militant irony" and is forced to employ the curious phrase, "satiric irony," in the following passage. According to him, satire is distinguished from irony in two respects: firstly, it involves relatively clear moral norms, and secondly, it allows less ambiguity in the author's attitude. In other words, satire is "direct"

irony with clear "moral" norms. But this definition is obviously defective, because both directness and morality are the two characteristics that are supposed to be excluded from irony. Therefore, it is more reasonable to suspect that satire is the negation of irony, and if it is, satire corresponds to what Frye associates with the *alazon* or an impostor, as opposed to the *eirone*.<sup>(5)</sup> The *alazon* is characterized by a lack of self-knowledge which is often pushed to the degree of obsession. His lack of self-knowledge prevents him from freely distancing himself from his own statements like the *eirone*, and therefore his statements are expected to involve his own moral judgements.

However, the analogy seems to become dubious here, because the *alazon* is not usually supposed to be endowed with a sense of morality that would support the authenticity of his judgements. He is rather similar to the tragic hero who ruins himself because of his own self-deception in the end:

The tragic hero usually belongs of course to the *alazon* group, an impostor in the sense that he is self-deceived or made dizzy by hubris. In many tragedies he begins as a semi-divine figure, at least in his own eyes, and then an inexorable dialectic sets to work which separates the divine pretence from the human actuality.<sup>(6)</sup>

The tragic hero is often endowed with supreme authority, but as the divine pretence is separated from the human actuality, he proves to be a burlesque figure in the end. Such a burlesque figure may seem to have little connection with satire, but it actually corresponds to the situation in which ancient satirists found themselves when satire was transformed from magic into art. In *The Power of Satire*, Robert C. Elliott argues that primitive satire was not at all moralistic. There was a popular belief that the words employed by primitive satirists could "kill." But magic is founded on belief, so once the magical power of satire was called into question, the gap between "their pretensions and their essential impotence" reduced them to objects of ridicule.<sup>(6)</sup> The satirist exposed to ridicule is what Elliott calls the "satirist satirized" in his discussion of the great

misanthropes, and it is obvious that it is a variation of the *alazon*.

Therefore, the *alazon* or the satirist satirized seems to neatly circumscribe the definition of satire. Though Frye deals with irony and satire under the same heading and considers them more or less similar to each other, they are completely different. While the ironist freely distances himself from his own statements, the satirist is not allowed to use the same prerogative, because he depends on the allegedly magical power of his statements. The ironist gains an advantage over others by his ironical self-consciousness, that is, by his distance from his own statements. In other words, his strength lies in the fact that he "knows" more than others, and his statements are mere pretexts he uses in order to gain an advantage over them. On the other hand, the satirist uses no pretext, and his statements are at once his means and his ends. However, the directness of his statements necessarily puts him in a curious situation from which he is not to escape as long as he remains a satirist. That is why the theme of the satirist satirized repeatedly appears in traditional as well as modern satire and constitutes a basic condition every satirist has to deal with in his own way.

#### (ii) Satire and the satirist satirized

Elliott shows that the theme of the satirist satirized derives from the origin of satire. Since satire was separated from its magical origin, satirists have had to make up for their essential impotence by some other means that would replace the magical power of primitive satire. Satire became more strictly conditioned by the relationship between the satirist and society than it had been in the primitive world, and satirists were expected to write "apologies" by which they expressed their allegiance to society. However, their status in society remained essentially dubious and often approached that of the satirist satirized.

Elliott provides a valuable discussion on the ambivalent position of the satirist in society. On the basis of his examination of the history of satire, he claims that the satirist is basically "a true conservative" who "operates within the established framework of

society, accepting its norms, appealing to reason (or to what his society accepts as rational) as the standard against which to judge the folly he sees." However, he describes in the following passage the curiously alienated state of the satirist in society in spite of his apparent conformity:

Despite society's doubts about the character of the satirist, there may develop a feeling that in its general application his work has some truth in it — or the feeling that other people may think that it has some truth in it. Individuals who recognize characteristics of themselves in the objects of attack cannot afford to acknowledge the identity even privately. So they may reward the satirist as proof of piety, while inwardly they fear him.<sup>6</sup>

The status of the satirist may seem ambivalent, but the ambivalence is on the part of society towards the satirist. Though there is hostility to the satirist on the part of society, it is checked and suppressed by a kind of "ironical" self-consciousness. Those who "recognize" themselves in the object of satire do not actually "acknowledge" the fact of their recognition, because satire is a kind of "trap." But the harmful function of the trap remains merely insidious until they dare to acknowledge some truth in it. They know very well that it is dangerous to acknowledge the fact of their recognition, so they reward the satirist "as proof of their piety." When this false piety has become so general that nobody dare to dismiss his satire any more, the satirist finally establishes himself as a conservative.

Therefore, the satirist always turns out to be a conservative in the end, whether he actually conforms to the norms of society or not. As long as he remains a conservative in society, his satire merely appeals to what society accepts as rational and does no real harm to anybody. The way society suppresses and domesticates the power of satire here is essentially "ironical," because those who publicly reward the satirist privately distance themselves from their statements and even from their consciousness. In other words, society or the *eiron* alienates the satirist or the *alazon* and makes him impotent by ironical self-consciousness.

However, Elliott's interpretation is peculiarly at odds with the original passage from Swift on which it is obviously founded. His misinterpretation seems to be caused by a confusion between irony and satire, though Swift himself did not confuse them. In the preface to *The Battle of the Books*, Swift compares satire to a sort of glass:

*Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own; which is the chief reason for that kind of reception it meets in the world, and that so very few are offended with it.*<sup>7</sup>

As long as we read this passage literally, it is impossible to find even the slightest touch of irony in it. The literal meaning of this passage exactly corresponds to what Swift actually intends to convey, and therefore there is no superfluous self-consciousness preserved somewhere behind it. It is obvious that beholders who look into the glass simply do not "see" their own faces in it and do not pretend not to see them. The use of the glass is quite relevant here, because the two-dimensional images in the glass symbolize the "external" methods of satire as opposed to the internal ones of irony. However, the most subversive implication of the passage concerns the sheer externality of satire itself.

The meaning of the passage is twofold. At a superficial level, the beholders who discover everybody's face but their own are those who are satirized by the satirist, and they are doubly satirized by him because of their unawareness of being satirized. In this case, the satirist and the reader share the same perspective and can freely satirize anybody but themselves by tacit agreement. This is quite simple. However, is it not possible that the face missing in the glass is the face of the satirist himself who firmly believes in the truth of his satire? Is this passage not a further example of the theme of the satirist satirized?

As the perspective shared by the satirist and the reader is essentially harmless to both, we must take account of the possibility of another perspective which is completely different from the other perspectives involved in the passage. This perspective is hidden from

all the people in the passage including the satirist, because nobody actually looks from it. Everybody understands that other people are satirized by the satirist but curiously exempts himself from his attack. As a result, nobody is actually aware that he is satirized himself. In other words, though everybody believes in the truth of his satire, or, since everybody believes in it, his satire is completely lost on them. Therefore, his satire does no real harm to anybody in the end, but not in the way Elliott describes. According to his argument, those who are satirized by the satirist are not "publicly" offended but privately fear the satirist. However, we insist that they are not even "privately" offended, because they do not even know that they are satirized themselves. The difference here is greater than it might seem, for, in the latter case, the satirist is completely neglected. The perspective hidden even from the satirist is this, in which it is the satirist himself who is most relentlessly satirized. Those who are satirized by the satirist in fact satirize him, though they do not know that they do so. So this perspective does not finally belong either to the satirist or to those who are satirized by him. It is rather imposed on the satirist by the unawareness of others being satirized by him. In this perspective, the satirist is more relentlessly satirized than those who are satirized by him, because it is not he but they who actually embody the reason and justice of society.

Elliott insists on the ambivalent position of the satirist in society, but the passage quoted above shows that the satirist is finally neglected and alienated from society. Even if the satirist believes that reason and justice are on his side, that means nothing, because social reason and social justice are always on the side of society. But what is even more perplexing than that is the fact that the reason and justice of the satirist and those of his society are apparently finally identical in every respect. This identity makes him confront a curious dilemma: the more the satirist appeals to the sense of reason and justice of society, the more alienated he finds himself from it. In other words, his whole effort results in making him appear even more alienated from society than those who are actually excluded from it. Probably, what Swift implicitly

satirizes is the curiously alienated state of the satirist who is inescapably caught up in a perspective imposed on him by the uncomprehending lack of awareness of society.

For these reasons, then, it seems reasonable to read the passage quoted above as the most extreme example of the theme of the satirist satirized. In a sense, the satirist caught up in the dilemma is more relentlessly satirized than the primitive satirist deprived of the magical power of satire, and moreover, he is not to escape from it as long as he remains a satirist. In fact, this dilemma is inherent in the form of satire itself, and that is why the satirist satirized has remained such a privileged theme of satire. The dilemma has weakened and deteriorated the power of satire in most cases, to be sure, but in some rare cases, it has urged some satirists to invent an even more aggressive satire whose lack of morality makes it comparable to primitive magic.

### (iii) Wyndham Lewis's theory of satire

In spite of the great amount of satirical writings produced in the twentieth century, satire as an independent mode of literature has not received much attention. This is partly because an ironical sensibility has obscured almost everything that is inconsistent with the indirect methods of irony. Swift once wrote in his letter to Alexander Pope that the chief end of his writings was "to vex the world rather than to divert it."<sup>68</sup> Many attempts have been made to read these words ironically by distinguishing their ironical implication from their literal meaning, but if we try to be faithful to the definition of satire, it is obvious that we should read them literally. As a matter of fact, what has embarrassed those who have attempted to theorize satire is the ineradicable negativity inherent in a certain kind of satire. In "The Irony of Swift," F. R. Leavis reaches one of those peculiarly paradoxical conclusions in which such attempts have resulted:

We have, then, in his writings probably the most remarkable expression of negative feelings and attitudes that literature can offer—the spectacle of creative powers (the paradoxical description seems

right) exhibited consistently in negation and rejection.<sup>(9)</sup>

For Leavis, Swift's writings are nothing more than a "spectacle of creative powers" without positive content. However, the spectacle of negativity exactly corresponds to what Lewis considers the basic condition of the greatest satire, that is, the negation of morality.

Because of the underestimation of satire in general, Lewis also has long been an obscure figure, especially compared with his contemporary modernists. But in fact he possessed an exceptionally original view of literature and elaborated a radically new theory of satire. Rejecting the moralistic aspect of traditional satire, he insists that the greatest satire is "non-moral." As he often emphasizes the outside as opposed to the inside of things, his satire deprived of morality necessarily assumes that it is imitating the objective methods of natural science: "Satire in reality often is nothing else but *the truth* — the truth, in fact, of Natural Science."<sup>(10)</sup> Such external, "scientific" methods are consistent with his obsessional insistence on personality, which is particularly opposed to the theory of "depersonalization" elaborated by T. S. Eliot and his followers. In his discussion on Eliot, he quotes a famous passage from Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.

What happens is a continuous surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.<sup>(11)</sup>

Eliot insists that the poet must develop the historical sense of the tradition to which he belongs and sacrifice his personality in order to make his mind a depersonalized receptacle for feelings. However, Lewis argues that Eliot's depersonalization is in fact an inverted theory of "pseudo-belief" which takes the place of belief. In other words, the depersonalized subject of the poet devoid of personal emotions is a perfect

pseudo-believer who serves nothing but his own practical ends.<sup>(12)</sup>

Lewis's depreciation of pseudo-belief shows that his theory of satire is particularly opposed to the disguise of personality, that is, irony. For him, personality has nothing to do with the free choice that allows the pseudo-believer to become everything but himself. While every choice is essentially arbitrary for the pseudo-believer, the external, "scientific" methods of satire led Lewis to invent a paradoxical notion of personality, where every choice is "inevitable." This notion is ingeniously formulated in his theory of "satire for its own sake":

But how can satire stand without the moral sanction? you may ask. For satire can only exist *in contrast* to something else — it is a shadow, and an ugly shadow at that, of some perfection. . . . it is my belief that "satire" *for its own sake* — as much as anything else for its own sake — is possible: and that even the most virtuous and well-proportioned of men is only a shadow, after all, of some perfection; a shadow of an imperfect, and hence an "ugly," sort.<sup>(13)</sup>

Lewis compares satire to an ugly shadow of some perfection, and if so, satire is only a disagreeable option for artistic expression. But his argument does not stop there and proceeds to suggest the most extreme vision of the world. If even the most perfect men are only shadows of some superior kind of perfection, that is, if all men are only shadows, then satire is no longer a disagreeable option, but it is the only possible choice. In other words, even the most perfect men can become objects of a certain kind of satire that has reached the most extreme degree of "scientific" perfection. Traditional satire is only an ugly shadow of some perfection and exposes the discrepancy between the perfect image and the shadow in order to correct a deviation from perfection. In such cases, the perfection in contrast to which the shadow exists is seen as morally justifiable and the shadow is only relatively inferior to the perfect image. In Lewis's satire, however, everything is finally reduced to a shadow, and the perfection in contrast to which it exists is never

attained, because the shadow is infinitely inferior to the imagined perfect image. Since the perfection is not justifiable either morally or otherwise, satire for its own sake has nothing but its own impulse to sustain itself. The choice made by the satirist at the outset is inevitable, and once the choice is made, his satire is restricted by nothing but its own insatiable impulse which infinitely tries to regress from the perfection set up at the outset.<sup>(44)</sup>

Therefore, personality finally seems to be replaced by the infinitely regressive impulse of satire which is absolutized and externalized to the utmost degree. This apparently anonymous impulse is, however, paradoxically enough, what Lewis calls personality. Therefore, the insistence on personality and the external, "scientific" methods of satire finally seem to be fused into the infinitely regressive impulse of satire for its own sake. The regressive impulse pushed to the ultimate degree of externality is embodied in "tragic laughter" which Lewis regards as the medium of true satire:

*Laughter* is the medium employed, certainly, but there is laughter and laughter. That of true satire is as it were *tragic* laughter. It is not a genial guffaw nor the titillations provoked by a harmless entertainer. It is tragic, if a thing can be "tragic" without pity and terror, and it seems to me it can.<sup>(45)</sup>

Tragic laughter is its own incentive, and laughter is always succeeded by nothing but laughter. We usually apply the word "tragic" to the object that is laughed at, but it is laughter that is said to be tragic here. While a tragic object causes pity and terror in the minds of those who look at it, tragic laughter merely causes the infinite sense of the tragic. It is the nihilistic impulse which made Swift write that his chief end was to vex the world, and therefore it is also the embodiment of the negativity which embarrassed Leavis.

In fact, the nihilistic impulse of tragic laughter exactly corresponds to the curiously alienated state of the satirist in society described above, and that is why Lewis's dilemma is actually inherent in the form of satire itself. Lewis himself was obviously aware of the

paradoxical nature of satire for its own sake or what he also called "a metaphysical satire":

It is a time, evidently, in which *homo animal ridens* is accentuating — for his deep purposes no doubt, and in response to adverse conditions — his dangerous, philosophic, "god-like" prerogative — that wild nihilism that is a function of reason and of which his laughter is the characteristic expression. . . . And that is why, by stretching a point, no more, we can without exaggeration write *satire* for *art* — not the moralist satire directed at a given society, but a metaphysical satire occupied with mankind.<sup>(46)</sup>

It is doubtful whether satire is really a "god-like" prerogative, for, as Lewis himself admits, it is a function of essentially paradoxical reason. Though he insists that satire should be non-moral, the external, "scientific" methods of satire for its own sake curiously depend on reason, for, according to him, tragic laughter is nothing but a function of reason. Traditional satire also appeals to reason, but what marks his departure from traditional satire is the fact that he considers reason essentially paradoxical. In other words, laughter is not based on merely illogical chaos, but it is in fact firmly based on paradoxical reason which is strictly "logical" in appearance. Therefore, reason is greatly to be laughed at by itself, because the sense of the absurd is increased by the absurdity of reason itself. In this sense, it is quite reasonable to say that laughter is reason.

#### (iv) Satire is reason.

Frye's superb definition of irony shows that it essentially depends on the deliberate manipulation of consciousness, which Lewis simply calls pseudo-belief. On the other hand, satire has more to do with reason and its primary attribute, that is, logic, and Lewis even confidently declares that "*where there is truth to life there is satire.*"<sup>(47)</sup> His reference to the word "metaphysical" suggests that his satire deals with something like the abstract notions of logic. In *The Apes of God*, he makes one of the characters say:

“. . . the world created by Art — Fiction, Drama, Poetry etc. — must be sufficiently removed from the real world so that no character from the one could under any circumstances enter the other (the situation imagined by Pirandello), without the anomaly being apparent at once. . . .”<sup>(18)</sup>

For Lewis, characters created by art are no more than pure abstractions and therefore rigorously governed by reason, even if reason itself is paradoxical. We usually consider reason the most abstract ability of mankind, and if so, these external, “scientific” methods of satire may seem inconsistent with such an abstract ability. However, reason as opposed to consciousness is in a sense the most external, “scientific” aspect of mankind, and the abstract notions of logic are comparable to what Lewis calls the “ossature”:

To put this matter in a nutshell, it is *the shell* of the animal that the plastically-minded artist will prefer. The ossature is my favourite part of a living animal organism, not its intestines.<sup>(19)</sup>

The ossature is obviously different from mere external appearance. It rather suggests something rigid and inflexible that sustains and articulates the squashy content, but in fact it is even more than that. The ossature actually represents something negative that cannot be fully articulated, just as reason and logic represent something essentially paradoxical for Lewis.

Logic as well as reason also plays an extremely problematic role in Swift’s writings. In “The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas,” R. S. Crane describes Swift’s attitude towards orthodox logic by picking up the apparently trivial names in his letter and tracing them to the logic textbooks of his time. In his famous letter to Pope, Swift writes:

But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth. This is the system upon which I have governed myself many years (but do not tell) and so I shall go on till I have done with them. I have got

materials towards a treatise proving the falsity of that definition *animal rationale*; and to show it should be only *rationis capax*. Upon this great foundation of misanthropy (though not Timon’s manner) the whole building of my travels is erected: And I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion: by consequence you are to embrace it immediately and procure that all who deserve my esteem may do so too. The matter is so clear that it will admit little dispute. Nay I will hold a hundred pounds that you and I agree in the point.<sup>(20)</sup>

According to Crane, the three names Swift mentions in this letter appear in the same order as individual specimens of man in the logic textbook composed by Narcissus Marsh. On the ground of this discovery, he insists that the definition *animal rationale* which Swift disapproves here is the “sacred definition” of the orthodox logic textbooks.<sup>(21)</sup> However, if he does actually disapprove it, the latter part of the letter becomes almost incomprehensible. If he considers man merely *rationis capax*, then how can he expect that all honest men will immediately agree with him on the matter? He seems to disapprove the sacred definition of man, but the logic of the letter implicitly presupposes the same definition. In other words, though he seems to replace one definition with another, he actually confuses the logic itself which sustains his argument.

As a matter of fact, Swift’s writings often seem to end up foregrounding their logic at the expense of their content. For him, style was obviously a matter of paramount importance. Samuel Johnson ironically describes Swift’s plain style in *Lives of the English Poets*:

The easy and safe conveyance of meaning it was Swift’s desire to attain, and for having attained he deserves praise, though perhaps not the highest praise. For purposes merely didactick, when something is to be told that was not known before, it is the best mode, but against that inattention by which known truths are suffered to lie neglected it makes no provision; it instructs, but does not persuade.<sup>(22)</sup>

Distinguishing between instruction and persuasion, Johnson suggests that Swift's plain style is double-edged. He emphasizes the "easy and safe conveyance of meaning" which Swift has admirably attained, but such a style necessarily tends to be didactic. Swift always deals with his subject matter as if it were evident to his readers as well as to himself, and the easy conveyance of meaning, which requires no commentary, allows him safely to neglect the content of his subject matter. In other words, instruction always falls short of persuasion. What we can expect from Swift is merely the rigorously didactic style which governs the meaningful content of his writings, and identifying himself with his own style, he finally relinquishes even the small residue of his own consciousness which is involved in the attempt to instruct. What is left is not the ironical self-consciousness which the ironist retains behind his own statements, but the pure logic which sustains and finally undermines the argument of the letter quoted above.

However, how is it possible that pure logic, which is considered the most abstract thing of all, can in fact be illogical? We tend to believe that we can safely abstract logic from the meaningful content it governs, but what is really problematic is in fact the false relationship between logic and content which we presuppose in our consciousness. Logic is usually considered the governing principle or, if we use Lewis's favourite term, the "ossature" which sustains the content of our thoughts, and in the same way, we usually suppose that the rules of a game regulate and circumscribe the violence of instinctive aggression. In this sense, it is interesting that those who consider satire "controlled aggression" often compare it to a game. In "Aggression and Satire: Art Considered as a Form of Biological Adaptation," Alvin B. Kernan says that satire is "a combination of an irrational emotion, hostility, which is normally repressed, and of a certain flashing, brilliant play of rationality." Though the combination of the rational and the irrational may seem similar to Lewis's definition of satire, it is in fact no more than a variation of the traditional definition. He continues:

The situation would be much like that in a game in which violent and potentially destructive energies are released, but released in the reassuringly controlled circumstances of game — rules, boundaries, referees, time limit — which prevent any disastrous killing outcome.<sup>(23)</sup>

When Kernan says that rules and so forth "prevent any disastrous killing outcome," he implicitly assumes that they are something external to the consciousness of those who release "violent and potentially destructive energies." However, he neglects the fact that the rules can assert themselves only when those who release these energies "voluntarily" obey them, and he expects that those who release their energies, which are essentially destructive in themselves, simultaneously obey the rules. In other words, he presupposes a kind of ironical self-consciousness in those who play the game.

Though Kernan's argument is defective, it provides a valuable insight into the nature of logic. Just as the rules of a game are sustained by the self-consciousness of those who play the game, logic is also sustained by self-consciousness, because logic safely asserts itself only when it is sufficiently distanced from the rigorous, absolute function of purely abstract logic. In fact, what makes Swift's letter quoted above such a bewildering piece of writing is the lack of self-consciousness, and when logic is no longer sustained by self-consciousness, it begins to assert itself more and more rigorously.<sup>(24)</sup> However, even such purely abstract logic seems to find a peculiarly paradoxical solution in Lewis's notion of art as pure game. While Kernan emphasizes the control of aggression, Lewis merely insists on entering into "the spirit of the side-taking":

Enter into the spirit of the game — such, under correction, is what I recommend; enter fully into the spirit of the side-taking and it will become *a game* for you (in the sense indicated above) — a game in which there is only one rule: namely, that you must place yourself on the side to which you belong — and *not* romantically masquerade as a black if you are a white (as D. H. Lawrence did). . . . You play at being yourself — and so you *are* yourself; it is quite



unnecessary to play at being anybody else to be completely the artist.<sup>(25)</sup>

Since the game is no more than side-taking, there is no right side or wrong side in the game, and it does not matter on which side we place ourselves. However, the only rule, which Lewis obviously considers essential to the game, is extremely paradoxical. According to this rule, though both sides are equally right, there is a right side and a wrong side for each of us, and therefore we must place ourselves on the side to which each of us "belong." In other words, the spirit of the side-taking is preceded by our "identity." However, identity is a particularly problematic matter with Lewis, for it is firmly based on a peculiarly logical procedure. For him, identity has nothing to do with essence or anything preserved in our consciousness. It is rather comparable to a game, and our identity can assert itself only when we "play at being ourselves." But his logic is obviously paradoxical, because we will never become ourselves until we play at being ourselves, while we cannot play at being ourselves until we have become ourselves. Therefore, we become ourselves only when we are sufficiently conscious of our identity while at the same time we are unconscious of it when we play at being ourselves. In other words, our identity is at once "real" and "unreal."

Such a paradoxical situation reminds us of what George Orwell calls *doublethink* in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is described in the imaginary book entitled *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*:

*Doublethink* means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of *doublethink* he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring with it a feeling of falsity and hence of guilt.<sup>(26)</sup>

It is obviously impossible to exercise *doublethink* actually in our consciousness. The book finally turns out to be written by the Party intellectuals, and O'Brien, one of the Party intellectuals who collaborated in writing it, tells Winston, who was arrested for thoughtcrime, that what the book says is true as description but essentially all nonsense.<sup>(27)</sup> In other words, the logic of the book is true, but its content is nonsense. *Doublethink* can be described with sufficiently reassuring logic, but it cannot be actually exercised. Lewis's notion of identity drives us to the same dilemma, and by his train of logic, we can never become ourselves. In both cases, logic seems sufficiently reassuring, but it does not actually sustain the content it governs. This fact implies that logic is actually sustained by a self-consciousness which distances itself from it, and therefore logic turns into the most perverse "illogic" when it is no longer sustained by self-consciousness.

However, such perverse illogic is, paradoxically enough, the privileged means of satire. Swift's "A Digression concerning the Original, the Use, and Improvement of Madness in a Commonwealth" provides another illustrative example in this respect. In a well-known passage, he gives an obviously paradoxical definition of happiness:

For, if we take an examination of what is generally understood by happiness, as it has respect either to the understanding or the senses, we shall find all its properties and adjuncts will herd under this short definition: that *it is a perpetual possession of being well deceived*.<sup>(28)</sup>

Swift ingeniously equates happiness with what is generally supposed to be its opposite. According to this definition, the essential condition of happiness is that the definition is never revealed to those who enjoy it, and when it is revealed to them, their happiness will be completely destroyed. In other words, as long as they enjoy happiness, they can never understand that they are happy, and therefore the definition is useless to those who try to attain the state of happiness. It is as if it were a

“sacred definition of happiness” which serves nothing but always remains true as description. If we try to put it to use in order to attain the state of happiness, we must simultaneously exercise *doublethink* and erase the knowledge of it after we have successfully attained the state of happiness, but it is obviously impossible. The definition is not necessarily illogical in itself, but when we try to put it to use, the sacred logic that sustains it turns into the most perverse illogic.<sup>(29)</sup>

Swift depreciates the sacred definition *animal rationale* of the orthodox logic textbooks in the letter quoted above. Probably, this is because he knew that such a sacred definition could not successfully define anything, much less human beings, who are governed by the most illogical thing of all, that is, reason. He considered reason essentially illogical, but at the same time he freely exploited all the possibilities of the illogic on which reason is founded. For both Swift and Lewis, reason was a matter of paramount importance on which they believed the whole “metaphysical” existence of human beings was founded, and in this sense, we can safely conclude that their satire was reason.

### Conclusion

After satire was deprived of its role as primitive magic, there was nothing that could prevent the satirist from being satirized in society. Gulliver’s misanthropy is not merely a caricature of a deranged mind, but it is in fact a reflection of the potential fate which awaits every satirist. Many conventional satirists have appealed to reason in order to escape from this fate, but for those satirists who have discovered that reason is essentially illogical, it is nothing but folly to appeal to it. Swift and Lewis found completely different solutions to the problem, which led them to invent what we may think of as “metaphysical” satire. However, their metaphysical solution does not imply that they finally accepted misanthropy as their inevitable fate and confine themselves to metaphysical speculation. Foregrounding the illogical mechanism of reason, they rather show how rigorously it governs the physical as well as metaphysical existence of human beings. The impeccable reason of the Houyhnhnms, who are wholly

governed by reason, is described as follows:

Neither is Reason among them a Point problematical as with us, where Men can argue with Plausibility on both Sides of a Question; but strikes you with immediate Conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by Passion and Interest.<sup>(30)</sup>

Orwell considers the fourth voyage of *Gulliver’s Travels* “a picture of an anarchistic society, not governed by law in the ordinary sense, but by the dictates of ‘Reason’, which are voluntarily accepted by everyone.”<sup>(31)</sup> But Swift seems to have believed that anarchy was the potential destination of the illogical mechanism of reason, which blindly drives itself to its own destruction. As Leavis points out, Swift’s satire is “conditioned by frustration and constriction.”<sup>(32)</sup> But the frustrated and constricted impulses of the metaphysical satirists paradoxically enabled them to produce the most discerning pictures of the essentially perverse existence of human beings.<sup>(33)</sup>

### Notes

- (1) Wyndham Lewis, *Enemy Salvoes: Selected Literary Criticism by Wyndham Lewis*, ed. C. J. Fox (London: Vision, 1975), 43–44.
- (2) Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 223.
- (3) Frye, 39–40.
- (4) Frye, 217.
- (5) Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 14–15, 97–98.
- (6) Elliott, 266.
- (7) Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books*, in *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 104. In *The Apes of God*, Lewis implicitly refers to this passage when he makes one of the characters say: “‘How is it that no one ever sees *himself* in

- the public mirror — in official Fiction? That is the essential point of my argument with Li. Everybody gazes into the public mirror. No one sees himself! What is the use of a mirror then if it reflects a World, always without the principal person — the Me? . . .” (*The Apes of God*, Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1992, 255)
- (8) Swift, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), vol. 3, 103.
- (9) F. R. Leavis, “The Irony of Swift,” in *Fair Liberty Was All His Cry: A Tercentenary Tribute to Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1967), 129. Leavis obviously confuses satire with irony, but his argument focuses on Swift’s negative logic. In this sense, he more faithfully follows the mechanism of Swift’s satire than Frye, who finally reduces everything to irony.
- (10) Lewis, *Men Without Art* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1987), 99.
- (11) T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1975), 40.
- (12) *Men Without Art*, 55-75. Lewis’s insistence on personality is inseparable from his attack on the “time-cult” which reduces life to the inanimate flux of time. Against such an alienating tendency, he insists: “For our only terra firma in a boiling and shifting world is, after all, our “self.” That must cohere for us to be capable at all of behaving in any way but as mirror-images of alien realities, or as the most helpless and lowest organisms, as worms or as sponges.” (*Time and Western Man*, Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993, 132) However, his self cannot serve him as “terra firma” in his satirical world, because it is forcibly driven to its own destruction by the anarchistic impulse of his satire.
- (13) *Men Without Art*, 89.
- (14) Fredric Jameson points out that satire becomes the “inner dynamic” of Lewis’s satirical world: “Thus absolutized, satire recovers something of its primitive power and its most archaic vocation: it is no longer a choice or stylistic option within the world, but the latter’s overriding law and inner dynamic. Laughter and aggressivity are thereby no longer functions of the individual subject, but rather terrifying and impersonal forces which sweep the surface of a two-dimensional planet.” (*Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979, 136-137) The perfection in contrast to which Lewis’s satire for its own sake exists is never attained, but nevertheless the impersonal forces provoked by the absolute image of perfection rigorously govern his satire. The dynamic which produces these forces and overwhelms even the satirist himself is what we call the “metaphysical.”
- (15) *Men Without Art*, 92.
- (16) *Men Without Art*, 232.
- (17) Lewis, *Rude Assignment: An Intellectual Autobiography* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), 50.
- (18) *The Apes of God*, 265-266.
- (19) *Men Without Art*, 99.
- (20) *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, vol. 3, 103.
- (21) R. S. Crane, “The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas,” in *Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600-1800*, ed. J. A. Mazzeo (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 243-253.
- (22) Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), vol. 3, 52. In the preceding passage, Johnson says that Swift’s style is “well suited to his thoughts.” He implicitly takes it for granted that Swift’s own thoughts are somewhere behind his style and rigorously govern it, but the extreme smoothness of his style practically leaves no room for such underlying thoughts. It does not mean that even his thoughts are stylized, but it rather means that they are “impossible.” Thoughts assert themselves only when they are slightly different

from their stylized counterparts, and therefore they will dissolve when they are completely identical with the style through which they are expressed.

- (23) Alvin B. Kernan, "Aggression and Satire: Art Considered as a Form of Biological Adaptation," in *Literary Theory and Structure: Essays in Honor of William K. Wimsatt*, ed. Frank Brady, John Palmer, and Martin Price (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), 124. Following Kernan's definition of satire as controlled aggression, W. B. Carnochan argues that satire enables the satirist to "come to terms with loss." ("The Consolations of Satire," in *The Art of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Clive T. Probyn, London: Vision, 1978, 27) According to him, Swift's frustrated feelings are finally reconciled with his sense of loss in the image of death: "In death, that is to say, there is no death. Impotence . . . has the force of suspended potency and carries an implication of possibility and power." (39) In other words, the image of death is hypostatized and enables Swift to discount all loss and even death itself. However, death always remains imaginary in fact and leaves his reconciliation incomplete. Therefore, the incomplete reconciliation forced on him by imaginary death inevitably renews his aggressive impulses. For a discussion on the unimaginable nature of death and the forcible dialectic it causes, see *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, 160-177.
- (24) In his essay on metacommentary, Jameson says: "All thinking about interpretation must sink itself in the strangeness, the unnaturalness, of the hermeneutic situation; or to put it another way, every individual interpretation must include an interpretation of its own existence, must show its own credentials and justify itself: every commentary must be at the same time a metacommentary as well." (*The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, London: Routledge, 1988, vol. 1, 5) Every statement that appears sufficiently reassuring is necessarily a
- metastatement as well, and therefore it is sustained by self-consciousness. However, it is such metastatements that Swift's negative logic abolishes.
- (25) *Enemy Salvoes: Selected Literary Criticism by Wyndham Lewis*, 264-265.
- (26) George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 223.
- (27) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 274. Though *doublethink* may seem similar to irony, they are completely different from each other: "Even in using the word *doublethink* it is necessary to exercise *doublethink*. For by using the word one admits that one is tampering with reality; by a fresh act of *doublethink* one erases this knowledge; and so on indefinitely, with the lie always one leap ahead of the truth." (223) In other words, to exercise *doublethink* requires erasing even ironical consciousness. Towards the end of the novel, an unexpected truth is revealed to Winston. The rule of the Party is not, as he has believed, based on the control of matter, but on that of the mind. O'Brien says: "We control matter because we control the mind. Reality is inside the skull. . . ." (277) The mind is no longer the thinking mind that reflects on reality, but the mind which is alienated from itself as well as from reality and forced to reflect on its own alienation. In this sense, reality is the result of self-alienation: "He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother." (311) This passage, which is comparable to the description of the Gulliver after the fourth voyage, shows how faithfully both novels follow the same formal requirements of satire.
- (28) *A Tale of a Tub*, in *A Tale of a Tub and Other*

*Works*, 83.

- (29) Satire has a peculiar relationship to the sacred.

In *Mr. Collins's Discourse of Free-Thinking*, Swift takes up the theme of free-thinking and extends it to the most subversive extremism. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, those who refused to conform to the accepted dogmas of Christianity were called "free-thinkers." They relied on the guidance of their own reason in order to reach the true interpretation of the Scriptures, but Swift's version of free-thinking seems nothing but sheer atheism. According to him, free-thinking destroys all kinds of authority, and even Christ himself is the embodiment of anarchistic reason: "Christ himself commands us to be *Free-Thinkers*, for he bids us search the Scriptures, and take heed what and whom we hear; by which he plainly warns us, not to believe our Bishops and Clergy; for *Jesus Christ*, when he consider'd that all the *Jewish* and *Heathen* Priests, whose Religion he came to abolish, were his Enemies, rightly concluded that those appointed by him to preach his own Gospel, would probably be so too; and could not be secure, that any Sett of Priests, of the Faith he deliver'd, would ever be otherwise; therefore it is fully demonstrated that the Clergy of the Church of *England* are mortal Enemies to Christ, and ought not to be believ'd." (*The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957, vol. 4, 31 - 32) The Scriptures are not something that all interpretations converge in, but something that abolishes them. In this sense, the sacred truth embodied in Christ seems peculiarly similar to Swift's anarchy. As Jameson points out, satire is "the negative expression of the sacred." (*Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, 137)

- (30) Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 273.

- (31) Orwell, "Politics vs Literature," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Penguin Books, 1970),

vol. 4, 252.

- (32) Leavis, 130.

- (33) Metaphysical satire is in fact double-edged and inevitably involves the satirist himself in it. Jameson says: "[The satirist] is indeed the only one in an adequate position to measure the whole range and potency of the destructive impulses he bears within himself; he alone recoils before the insatiable and unmotivated force of the aggressivity of which he is the vehicle. The satirist is in this sense his own first victim; and his misanthropy is accompanied with an ineradicable sense of guilt no less intense for all the purely symbolic or imaginary nature of his gestures." (*Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, 140-141) The metaphysical cannot be reduced either to subjectivity or to objectivity, because it practically abolishes the distinction between them. That is why the impeccable reason of the Houyhnhnms rigorously asserts itself and forcibly drives them to sheer anarchy. The same anarchistic impulses govern the spasmodic behaviour of René Harding, the principal character of Lewis's semi-autobiographical novel, *Self Condemned*: "'Stop!' René panted in the *bass-de profundis* — an involuntary command. He dropped back upon the sofa, where he had been sitting, as if dropped by somebody who just now had violently snatched him up, as if a supernatural being had whipped him up into the standing position, forced his terror-struck 'Stop!' out of him: and now had dropped him back on the sofa with a gravitational thud." (*Self Condemned*, Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1983, 404)