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Abstract

This article illuminates the technological underpinnings of Jonathan Swift's satire, "The Progress of Beauty" (1719), by exploring how eighteenth-century poetics of beauty and scientific progress pit human against automaton. This article ranges from the ego of masculine technological display to women's self-identification with the automaton to suggest that Swift's speaker blazons the aging prostitute's body with the hope that it might resurrect a lost ideal, the beautiful watch face. Instead, readers are confronted with the vision of Celia who, with her chipped paint, greasy joints, and faulty mechanisms, reminds them that humanity continues to break through its enamel. When readers commiserate with the speaker's final desire for "new Nymphs with each new Moon," Swift catches them in an affective trap that ridicules their ill-fated attempts to escape their own mortality.

Keywords

object studies, automaton, cosmetics, blazon, modernism, Jonathan Swift, eighteenth century, poetry, women, gender studies, astronomy, watch, technology, microscope, telescope, prostitution

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Cover Page Footnote

I wish to thank Dr. Eugenia Zuroski, who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the early research for this work.

Wishing for the Watch Face in Jonathan Swift's "The Progress of Beauty"

At face value, Jonathan Swift presents "The Progress of Beauty" (1719) as a tell-all tale that reveals women's beauty to be as fraudulent as that of the newly observed moon. Just as the invention of the telescope allowed astronomers to see the pocked face of heavenly Diana, so the speaker reveals the truth hidden behind Celia's cosmetics. With tongue in cheek, he warns women to guard their secrets carefully,

Take Pattern by your *sister* star;
Delude at once, and bless our sight;
When you are seen, be seen from far,
And chiefly choose to shine by night. (69-72)

Women, he concludes, must master the art of concealment if they want to sustain the perception of beauty; but women's waxing association with the moon is only a premonition of their similar wane.

With clinical indifference, the speaker records how Celia's cosmetics corrode her face to the point that she leaves her house only under cover of deep night. Mirroring the passing phases of the moon, her face falls away until even a skilled astronomer can only distinguish her forehead and chin. Unsympathetic to the end, the speaker in a rousing cry to "Ye, pow'rs who over love preside!" concludes,

Since mortal beauties drop so soon,
If you would have us well supplied,
Send us *new* nymphs with each *new* moon. (117-20)

The progress of beauty begins all over again, initiated and sustained by the cannibalistic desire for beautiful artificiality. In his final call, which dooms a procession of women to Celia's fate, the speaker portrays himself as an active participant in the systematic consumption of women; but, upon closer reading, even the speaker, who must invoke a higher power to intervene on behalf of the supply chain, seems incapable of changing the system to which he appeals. Like the women he preys upon, he is duped by the empty promises of the beautiful façade, which leaves Progress as the only fully invested participant in the poem's action.

The title clearly proclaims this truth, but the poem affirms the triumph of progress in a number of ways. Technological progress allows astronomers to observe the moon's flaws. Scientific progress teaches women to paint their cheeks with mercury and lead. The word progress can also refer to a stately procession, and this reference further colors the speaker's fantasy of a progression of fresh women seeking a better life (again, progress!) through transactional sex. Even the poem's repetitive rhyme and meter pull the reader, like the wheel of fortune that keeps on turning, to acquiesce to the inexorable progress of its verses.

As the title suggests, the progress that most concerns the speaker is the progress of beauty, a concern that the speaker addresses through his increasing obsession with the passing of time and its toll on women's appearances. The speaker jokes about the length of Celia's toilette.

Comparing her toilette to the moon's rise, he recounts how "by degrees" (5) the newly mounted moon illumines Celia's freshly painted face, but warns "If Celia should appear too soon, / Alas, the nymph would be undone!" (11-12). Celia's sleep ruins her complexion, but the speaker assures the reader,

Thus, after four important hours,
Celia's the wonder of her sex;
Say, which among the heav'nly pow'rs
Could cause such marvellous effects? (53-56)

When she runs on time, he proclaims her more wonderful than even the heavenly timepieces. But as time advances, Celia begins to show wear and tear. Her façade gives way to human realities of exhaustion, age, and personal hygiene and the speaker's descriptions reduce her to a dysfunctional machine that suffers greasy joints, misrun tracks, and worn-down gears. The speaker, too caught up in his lust and blind to the irony, only sees her humanity as a flaw in the means of production. He discards Celia in favor of a new model. However, the audience hopefully recognizes his calloused response as such and admits Swift's poem to be, not a celebration, but a critique of aesthetic artificiality and popular consumption.

Swift's poem is not a denigration of progress as a whole, but he does strongly critique its means and motives. By painting Celia as a disruption of the idealized automaton, Swift diagnoses the speaker's disgust as a misplaced lust for the developing aesthetic of mechanical efficiency. He also casts aspersions on Celia's attempts to grasp at self-control through self-erasure. Further, readers' commiseration with both the speaker's and Celia's disregard for humanity educates them about their unrealistic idealization of mechanical bodies. By deploying Celia's essential humanity against the automaton, Swift reasserts the fallibility of the artificial and satirizes early modernism's attempts to conquer human mortality by enameling over its affect. The effectiveness of the poem's critique lies in its subtlety. The speaker's final request for "new nymphs with each new moon" seems calloused, but until that point, his descriptions paint Celia as someone, or even some thing, deserving of our critique. Readers' visceral disgust, induced by the male speaker's descriptions, lend credence to his perspective. When readers finally realize the speaker's callousness, they also implicate themselves.

Swift lays a trap for his readers by using their rhetorical expectations and scientific assumptions against them. Opening the poem with a reference to Diana rising from her bed, Swift invokes centuries of classical poetry filled with musings on the loveliness of women;¹ but instead of delivering on this promise, he employs scientific discourse to de-mystify women's beauty. The speaker suggests that women, like the moon, are better viewed from a distance. Until Galileo invented a strong enough telescope with which to view the moon, philosophers had suggested that the moon's heavenly nature was mirrored in the beauty of her perfect sphere. When Galileo's discoveries revealed the surface of the moon to be jagged and cratered, discussions of Diana's pock-marked face, like the one Swift constructs here, became commonplace.² Swift draws a comparison between the astronomer's disenchantment and his speaker's experience viewing Celia to argue that, like the moon viewed up close, women's bodies cannot help but to brandish their flaws. Swift proves his hypothesis by blazoning Celia when she wakes:

To see her from her pillow rise,
 All reeking in a cloudy steam,
 Crack'd lips, foul teeth, and gummy eyes,
 Poor Strephon, how would he blaspheme! (13-16)

Swift increases the magnification until Celia's parts become disassociated from the whole. Her lips, teeth, and gummy eyes fill the entire field of vision, and the "mingled mass of dirt and sweat" (20) are displayed in sharp relief. Rather than collecting her beauty into a unified whole, the microscopic view demonstrates that Celia is much less than the sum of her parts and the readers, confronted with Celia's ugliness, are disillusioned by their disgust.

The potency of satirical blazons' descriptions revel in contemporary theories which posited that the observed object had a material impact on its observer. Rivka Swenson explains that intromittist optical theories allowed one to blame the object of observation for its affect by arguing that to see was to be acted upon by rays sent out by the object being observed (196). Newton provided the theoretical impetus for the seen object's affect, but Robert Hooke, in his beautifully illustrated *Micrographia* (1665), demonstrated the rhetorical potential of these optical theories through his attempts to recreate the awe-inspiring experience of scientific observation for his readers.³ In his preface, Hooke suggests that a reformation in natural philosophy requires little more than "a sincere Hand, and a Faithful eye, to examine, and to record, the things themselves as they appear" (4v). Hooke believed that new technologies such as optical glasses and microscopes would serve as the artificial organs humans require to perfect their sense of sight and, thus, their reason. He demonstrates the promise of these new technologies by publishing his beautiful illustrations of things observed through the microscope.

But, Cynthia Wall suggests that the affective potential of his illustrations is only activated by reading the observational notes which accompany Hooke's illustrations. Wall observes, "The flea and the louse may drape themselves as magnificent still lifes across a creamy page, but in the text, they scuttle and scud and lurk and intrude and trample and spring, generating a visualized, inhabited space in the reader's mind" (76). By attempting to directly represent the real experience of observation in his written descriptions, Hooke initiates a form of writing in which an author may harness the affective abilities of the observed object. *Micrographia's* demonstration of the evocative potential of a steady hand and careful eye revolutionized science, but also the arts. The blazon, which exposes the reader's mind's eye to a deluge of affective objects, became a newly powerful tool which granted authors the means to act upon their readers via vivid descriptions. Taken to its furthest extent, these theories led natural philosophers to the belief that everything, including literature and its effects, might be reduced to and quantified according to their material components.

The dogmatism with which the Royal Society attempted to universally apply their epistemologies frequently fed Swift's satire.⁴ In *Swift and Science*, Gregory Lynall argues that Swift's target is not the Royal Society's science, but rather their "diminution of creativity through narrow modes of discourse" (20). Robert Boyle, one of the original members of the Royal Society, makes a particularly apt target for Swift's satire because his meditations, which married the high-minded pursuit of knowledge to observations of mundanities, are frequently ridiculous in their execution. As proof of Swift's disdain for Boyle as a writer, Lynall cites

Swift's marginal note—"Boyle was a very silly writer" (Swift qtd. in Lynall 18)—left beside a description of Boyle in a borrowed copy of Gilbert Burnet's *History of His Own Time* (1724-34).⁵ By rendering his critique of Boyle in terms of literary quality, he does not challenge his science, but rather his poorly executed attempt to reduce even art to its lowest common denominator.

In "The Progress of Beauty," Swift satirizes the speaker's obsession with the science of seeing well and its scientific instruments by acerbically translating his descriptions of Celia's physical deterioration into a lament upon the inopportune discoveries of a peeping Tom. The lens hovers in the background as the speaker is overwhelmed by the sights offered by his microscopic blazon. It also features when he chides Celia to "[k]eep up the glasses of your chair" (74) to transport the "fop" (75) who sees her carriage riding through London's streets. The speaker best demonstrates his scientific aspirations when he suggests that the study of the lunar-like Celia warrants the level of discussion usually reserved for the mysteries of the stars. The speaker allies himself with the newest discoveries of the scientific revolution by dismissing the research of two of the foremost seventeenth-century astrologers, John Partridge (1644-1715) and John Gadbury (1627-1704). He mockingly suggests that they might have attributed Celia's flaws to "Cancer with his pois'nous Claws" (91), "[t]hat swain Endymion" (95) or "Mercury . . . her foe" (96) and argues that their astrological reasoning is a poor match for his real observational skills.

The speaker further demonstrates his assurance of his own importance when he claims that the topic of his study might also flout the skill of John Flamsteed (1646-1719). Flamsteed emerged as an astronomer after the surveyor-general of the ordnance, Jonas Moore, presented him with a Gascoigne-Towneley micrometer, the device that enables telescopes to be precision instruments, in 1670. Inspired by this gift, Flamsteed gathered the materials to create a telescope and proceeded to contribute to several works on astronomy including early lunar theories and a treatise on the equation of time. Flamsteed was also instrumental in the construction of the Royal Observatory, alongside the architect Robert Hooke.⁶ Yet the speaker claims,

But let the cause be what it will,
In half a month she looks so thin
That Flamsteed can, with all his skill,
See but her forehead and her chin. (97-100)

The speaker's attempt to dispute Flamsteed's skill is closely linked to a comparison of their instruments. He seems to suggest that his powers of observation and the literary tools he uses to communicate his findings perform at a much more reliable level than any of the tools Flamsteed had at his disposal. Though his attempt to present himself as a more accomplished John Flamsteed is ill-conceived, it clearly demonstrates how scientific and technological mastery are central to his sense of self.

As the speaker's obsession with parsing the meaning of the phases of the moon gestures towards, he equates his ability to tell time with the ability to assert masculine control over his surroundings. Eighteenth-century post-colonial studies have traced the intersections of the construction of masculinity and colonization fueled by technological mastery.⁷ Improvements in clock mechanisms in the late seventeenth century led William Derham, author of the watch

manual *The Artificial Clock-maker* (1696), to conclude that the primary benefits of the pendulum clock were its ability to “measure the time more exactly, equally to the Sun” and to serve as “a perpetual, and universal Measure, and Standard, to which all Lengths may be reduced, and by which they may be judged, in all ages, and countries” (97). In other words, the evolution of the clock provided man with universal power over natural time and standards. Clocks were also commonly exchanged as diplomatic gifts, providing the further expansion of the originating country’s cultural standards.⁸

At home, pocket watches became a manifestation of the British male’s civilizing mandate by concentrating the finest of artistic and technological craftsmanship into one tiny package. For example, David Bouquet exquisitely enamelled a gold case, less than two inches in diameter, with life-like flowers on a black background, which he then encrusted with 92 foil-wrapped diamonds. The clock mechanism was then custom fit to the case.⁹ Concern for a watch’s aesthetic was not limited to the wealthy, however; John Styles suggests that “[t]he particular importance of display is emphasized by the aesthetics of watch design and the ways in which watches were personalized by means of cheap, expressive accessories” (n.p.). He asserts the continuity between scientific discovery and aesthetics by concluding, “Silver watches signaled enviable affluence combined with a suitably masculine command of technology, of the kind richer men manifested through purchases of scientific instruments and the like” (n.p.). Highly decorated and precise, the ideal clock affirmed the singularity of British male civility.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the time-piece became a lode stone for eighteenth-century imagination, not only because it satisfied the English ego, but also because it provided a new way to figure subjectivity. In “Pains and Pleasures of Automaton,” Julie Park describes how conduct literature written for young women relied on the rhetoric of clock-work to regulate women’s behavior. For example, in *Adam and Eve Stript of their Furbelows* (1714), Ned Ward describes the “Devout Lady” as “so precise in her Deportment, and so mathematically regular in all her Actions, that you would think every Motion of her Limbs, were the Effects of Art, and not of Nature, and that her whole Composition was but a Machine of Clock-work” (7).¹⁰ Thus, when the speaker describes Celia’s toilette as more precise than an observable lunar event, we should understand that he equates her to a time-piece which has artificially mastered the mysteries of nature.

Of course, Swift thwarts the speaker’s desire for a beautiful clockwork woman by allowing him to discover all of the ways that Celia fails to meet his expectations. Making a mockery of his heightened observational skills, as well as his high-minded aesthetics, Swift notes that the speaker’s new sight reveals how Celia’s face whitener “cracks, / And falls” (37-38) and mixes the features of Celia’s face. He sees her barely concealed pit stains. Her luxurious black hair leaves soot stains mixed with dirt and sweat on her pillow. Observed together, “they form a frightful hideous face” (24), an ironic contrast to the transported fop’s cry “G—d—n me, Jack, she’s wondrous fair!” (76).

Coincidentally, many of the speaker’s aesthetic complaints might also be mistaken for descriptions of technological defects that were commonly observed in cheap pocket watches. For example, due to improvements in the process of enameling around 1630, enameled trinkets, especially miniature watch faces, became a very popular commodity. The enameling process

entails the painting of a glass paste onto a prepared metal surface and then firing it in a kiln to set the color. Each color must be painted and fired separately.¹¹ If the colors run together, flake, or rub off, the piece displays its own inferiority. Likewise, the speaker's descriptions of sweat dripping from her armpits as "brown meanders" that "come / In trickling streams betwixt her joints" (43-44) suggests the overworked joints of a machine seeping used oil. Thus, the speaker's observational prowess reveals Celia to be a cheap replica and her ability to dupe him demonstrates his taste to be unrefined.

The speaker's discovery of the eventual failure of Celia's toilette also bares similarities to common mechanical flaws in pocket watches. Though Celia enjoys her beauty for a time, the speaker portends the limits of her craft. He laments,

But, art no longer can prevail,
 When the materials all are gone;
 The best mechanic hand must fail,
 Where nothing's left to work upon. (77-80)

Clockwork mechanisms of the time were susceptible to wear because they relied on friction to maintain their momentum. Over time, the verge escapement, which is the teeth on the wheel that moves the hour hand forward, wore down or bent and the watch became less and less accurate (Fig. 1).¹² The speaker's conclusion that "The best mechanic hand must fail / Where nothing's left to work upon" (79-80) also might imply a sexual pun suggesting that, like a verge escapement eroded by years of friction, Celia's orifices, similarly worn by age and use, are beyond salvage. Thus, Swift turns the speaker's misogynist pageantry against him by demonstrating the ways that the woman observed countermands his attempts to reckon with her.

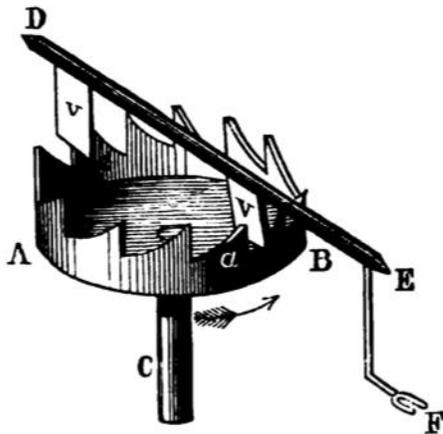


Fig. 58.

Fig. 1. Henry Evers, "99. The Verge or Crown Wheel Escapement, Fig. 58," *A Handbook of Applied Mechanics*. London, 1874, pp. 153. (Photo courtesy of HathiTrust.)

In a similar vein, Swift does not allow Celia to be only a passive participant in her objectification. Her attempts to subjugate her body to her things becomes an obvious grasp at self-control as she attempts to mask her ill-health via cosmetics. Park argues that depictions of women as automatons often painted women's objectification as the product of self-indulgence:

“[T]he woman afflicted by vanity and affectation only becomes a machine through the force of her own vices” (25). Further, Park argues that these narratives suggest that women disastrously submitted themselves to automated subjectivities out of a dislike for their natural selves; yet, as Celia’s example demonstrates, in equating themselves with various fashionable objects, women risk their subjectivity by diluting their claim to essential personhood.

In her study of the poetic logic of eighteenth-century beautification rituals, Eugenia Zuroski examines how women become interchangeable with their objects of display.¹³ Quoting the list of potential “dire Disaster[s]” in Alexander Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock” (1712), Zuroski notes how Pope’s zeugmatic descriptions democratize the value of Belinda and her things. That both “her heart, or Necklace” can be casually lost at a ball makes light of her reputation, but the poetic coupling of item and virtue also elevates the preservation of her new Brocade to an expression of her honor. Zuroski concludes, “Bedecked in imported things, the well-born woman is not a façade but an aesthetic expression of who she is. She is, in fact, an image of the very power of beautiful objects to express nature” (83). What this also means is that, when done right, the aesthetic presentation of oneself becomes the ultimate form of self-knowledge.

Belinda hazards her objective control once she steps into the coffee house, a place of ambiguous meaning, and eventually suffers the consequences when her lock of hair, a metonymic extension of herself, is cut off.¹⁴ Belinda’s hallucinatory vision, in which her tea things come alive, demonstrates her failure as a woman who, by her mastery of her object’s signification, is supposed to provide social semiotic order. If well-born Belinda eventually fails in her role as semiotic master, then Swift’s prostitute never has a chance of success. Where Belinda’s toilette allows her to become “an image of the very power of beautiful objects to express nature” (Zuroski 83) in which her outer and inner persona are entirely merged, Celia’s toilette is described consistently as a deconstructive event. She must “with ease reduce, / By help of pencil, paint and brush, / Each colour to its place and use” (45-48). Her struggle to “reduce” the colors to their rightful place speaks of an abundance that she struggles to contain.

Thus, as the speaker catalogs how easily Celia’s beautification regimen comes undone, he pities her not only because she is ugly, but also because of her failure to master the art of aesthetic reprisal.¹⁵ She is at the mercy of her objects. Swift highlights this power reversal when Celia almost disappears from the speaker’s descriptions of her face. Following a six-stanza list of the ways that Celia’s cosmetics retaliate while she sleeps, the speaker finally concludes his review with a close-up of her face:

The paint by perspiration cracks,
And falls in rivulets of sweat,
On either side you see the tracks
While at her chin the confluents met. (37-40)

Her paint becomes the subject of the verse’s sentence, and the only evidence of Celia’s presence is the reference to “her” in the stanza’s last line; however, the trochaic rhythm of “While at,” which precedes the iamb “her chin,” de-emphasizes the word “her” such that even the rhythm of the line attempts to write her out of the description. The ascendance of the objects in these lines demonstrates their growing control over Celia’s subjectivity.

Celia's struggle to master the semiotic order comes to a head when her paints become the force that will "teach her cheeks again to blush" (48), after which Celia stands in front of a mirror and "knows her *early* self no more" (49). The implication that beauty comes at the price of self-recognition draws attention to the ways that Celia attempts to sacrifice her humanity in her pursuit of an aesthetic ideal. The speaker specifically mocks Celia's use of "[w]hite lead" (60) and mercury (96) in his homage to women's cosmetics. White lead, made from a compound of lead salts, was a frequent ingredient in women's cosmetics and mercury was frequently used in compounds to treat venereal disease. The use of either is cumulatively poisonous.¹⁶ Angus Ross and David Woolley note that Swift's reference to "Cancer . . . in the *milky way*" (91-92) suggests that Celia might also suffer from cancer of the breast, a reference that contributes to a "network of conceits on wasting or venereal diseases, visible tokens that break apart illusions, reveal secret misbehaviour, and command human obedience" (663). As Celia's natural body deteriorates under a corrosive blanket of cosmetics and sexually transmitted diseases, her inability to limit their gangrenous impact only strengthens her association with cheap replicas and semiotic villainy. Even the poetic logic that had been advocating on behalf of cosmetic Progress begins to stutter as the rhyme scheme links the opposing ideals of "prevail" and "fail" in a redundant loop that emphasizes the futility of her idealistic pursuits.

Ironically, eighteenth-century ephemera suggests that, within the lived experience of the English populace, the pocket watch imitated the vagaries of human corporeality much more than an automatic ideal. Newspapers are littered with eulogies for lost watches. In a typical advertisement published in the *Daily Courant* on Saturday, April 6, 1717, the displaced owner attempts to recoup his loss:

March 12: 1716-17. Lost between Ludgate and Cheapside, a Gold repeating Watch, without the outside Case made by Joseph Williamson London, No. 151. with a Gold Chain and Hook, and some Gold Seals, one being an Amathill engraved with a Demy-Swan out of a Duke's Coronet set in Gold, and a large antique set like a Picture, set in Gold and enamel'd on the back-side, and 3 or 4 more Seals engraved with Heads, the Stones being of several Colours. If they that have them, will bring them to Mr. Thomas Palkingham, Goldsmith, at the Golden-Ball in St. Swithen's lane by Lombard-Street, shall receive 15 Guineas for the whole, or proportionable for any part, and no Questions asked. Or if any person have bought the said Goods, or any of them, and will bring them as beforesaid, shall have their Money again, with reasonable Profit. (Classifieds, n.p.)

Like poets of old, the owner blazons the pocket watch to demonstrate his intimacy with an unattainable object. His precise description of the seals, one with a demi-swan and a ducal coronet, others enameled, and still others set with jewels, attests to their dual significance as objects *and* symbols of affluence. Yet in the very act of description, he accentuates the object's ability to flout his desires.¹⁷

But where the lost watch ad seems to hold out hope of reunion between the owner and his property, Celia's symbolic association with the moon dooms the speaker's blazon to perpetual failure. Literary allusions inspired by Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1607) describe the moon as a vast archive of lost things. In "The Rape of the Lock," Pope suggests that while

searching for the lost lock, “Some thought it mounted to the lunar sphere / Since all things lost on earth are treasured there” (V. 113-114). Its evacuation to the moon underscores the absolute permanence of its loss.

While Pope describes the lost item as a glorious addition to the “shining sphere” (V. 142), Swift offers no such promise. In “The Progress of Beauty,” Swift correlates the woman’s deterioration with the waning of the moon. The speaker suggests,

For sure, if this be Luna’s fate,
 Poor Celia, but of mortal race,
 In vain expects a longer date
 To the Materials of *her* face (105-08)

Here, blazoning Celia in terms of the moon adds a Sisyphean element to her toilette by illuminating the inevitability of decline. Swift’s entreaty to the “pow’rs who over love preside” (117) that they “Send us *new* nymphs with each *new* moon” (120) is an ironic acknowledgement of the futility of the speaker’s desire: the moon, which suffers its own cyclical deterioration, is no better equipped than the speaker to recuperate Celia.

According to a modernist worldview, one of the most enduring obstacles to human subjectivity is its inevitable end. The speaker spends more than one hundred lines of poetry attempting to delay the evidence of the aging process. At one point, the speaker begs the woman to “Delude at once, and bless our sight” (70). He would love nothing better than to ignore the real progress of beauty; yet, the inscription of these sentiments in writing suggests that while the speaker may not be willing to engage mortality, the poet certainly is. Swift’s poems frequently flaunt the ephemerality of both himself and his text.

As the industrialization of print ushered in a new era of lexical proliferation, authors’ agency in directing the progress of their books appeared to be frequently overwhelmed by the deluge of cheap reproductions. Swift acknowledges his concerns about the waning relevance of the author in “The Tale of the Tub” (1704). Writing in the voice of a hack, Swift laments how quickly title pages posted on gates and street corners are torn down or papered over, leaving no trace of their former presence. His persona’s long winded and poorly executed lament hyperbolically exhibits how eighteenth-century texts evaded the desires of authors.¹⁸ Swift’s capitulation to his speaker’s dismay in “The Progress of Beauty” portends their mutual submission to the whims of mortality.

But Swift’s satires are more than just a simulacrum of bad form. They reintroduce the human element into the consumption of art by overwhelming the reader with their literary and emotive excesses. In a study entitled “Swift and Mimetic Sickness,” Erin Mackie singles out Swift’s habit of overwhelming his readers with a dizzying array of words and objects as a critique of early modernism; but, as Mackie explains, his “epistemological disruptions” are more than cerebral. Mackie writes, “Swift’s satire is visceral, its effects induce through mimicry states of being that are at once mentally dizzying and corporeally sickening. This is one way in which Swift’s satire refuses the Cartesian mind-body split and the deadening abstractions attendant on it” (361-62). Just as “The Tale of the Tub” villainizes mass market consumption, Swift’s “Progress of Beauty” protests gradual dehumanization for the sake of mechanical progress.

His meticulous recitation of the decay of Celia's face and readers' consequent revulsion demonstrates more than just his and our appetite for sideshow spectacles; instead, Swift combines the human tendency towards rubbernecking with a belief in the object's ability to affect the observer to counteract the psychologically numbing effects of modernism's hyper-rationalism.¹⁹ The absence of possessive pronouns allows the penultimate stanza of the poem to read as an acknowledgment of our own corporeality:

Two balls of glass may serve for eyes,
White lead can plaister up a cleft;
But these alas, are poor supplies
If neither cheeks nor lips be left. (113-16)

Swift's speaker hoped to escape the travails of time by identifying with an ideal automaton, but in the memorialization of the mechanism's face, her mortal decay signifies his own.

The aging process that haunts the poem demonstrates that the progress of time subjects us all. Swift relies on the text's poetic devices to affirm time's passing. The poem's rhyme scheme acts as a pendulum swinging back and forth between alternate rhymes; the meter, one iamb short of iambic pentameter, adds urgency while bearing witness to how time falls short. Ultimately, the futility of both the speaker and Celia's idealization of the mechanical aesthetic demonstrates the success of Swift's critique. Progress in itself is not the villain, but an evolution in aesthetics that finds beauty only in the eradication of everything that makes us human—in the erasure of not only our bodies, but also mutual compassion—cannot be sustained because it erodes us all.

By situating his aesthetic critique within a poem that substitutes an overtly stylized form in place of the object of desire, Swift resists the natural philosopher's reductionistic attempts to convey "Real Knowledge" through choice anecdotes borrowed haphazardly from "concrete" reality. The "Sincere Hand" accomplishes more than Hooke predicts: the continuing success of Swift's affect in "The Progress of Beauty" demonstrates that the literary creativity animating his poetic enterprise preserves something more enduringly human than the anatomies accessed through new empirical methods.

The narrator's disgust stems from his disappointed expectation of an automaton, and the audience participates in the fantasy by sharing his disgust. Hence, they also share in his disgrace. The text, on the whole, affects horror because it re-iterates on almost every level of its functioning—grammatical, poetic, rhetorical, and imaginative—that it is a lively and enduring object that will hold human subjectivity accountable to the mortality of objectified materiality. By inviting readers to invest themselves in "The Progress of Beauty," the text contains and feeds off their vulnerability until the hierarchy of subject and object becomes destabilized. Through the infusion of our temporal anxiety, the poem endures.

1. See Nancy J. Vickers's "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme" in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, pp. 95-108 for a discussion of Petrarch's influence on the perception of beauty in poetry. See also Rivka

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- Swenson's discussion of the role of the blazon in the development of eighteenth-century poetry in her chapter "The Poet as a Man of Feeling" in *The Oxford Handbook British Poetry, 1660-1800*, pp. 195-209.
2. See Galileo Galilei's *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610) for his description of the invention of the telescope and the discoveries he made through its lenses.
 3. For more on Newton's influence on the arts see Marjorie Hope Nicholson's newly updated *Newton Demands the Muse: Newton's Opticks and the 18th Century Poets*. For a discussion of the development of description in the eighteenth century, see Cynthia Wall's *The Prose of Things*. Hooke's influence on the development of narrative is also discussed in Barbara Benedict's *Curiosity*.
 4. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Experiment and the Royal Society* explores the development of experimentation as a methodology. See also *Establishing the New Science: The Experience of the Early Royal Society* by Michael Cyril William Hunter.
 5. In "Meditations and Mechanisms: Swift and Robert Boyle's *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects*," Lynall develops an extended discussion of Swift's satire of natural philosophy's literary aspirations by suggesting a comparison between the Royal Society and the Academy of Lagado in *Gulliver's Travels*. See Lynall's *Swift and Science*, pp. 17-49.
 6. See "Flamsteed, John (1646–1719)," by Frances Willmoth in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. David Cannadine, January 2008.
 7. See Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*.
 8. Carina L. Johnson's explores the clock's diplomatic significance in "Imperial Authority in an Era of Confessions" in *Cultural Hierarchy in Sixteenth Century Europe: The Ottomans and the Mexicans*, pp. 197-230.
 9. See "Watch-case/watch made by David Bouguet," in the *British Museum Collections Database*, Registration Number: 1888,1201.219.
 10. See also Brandy Lain Schillace's "'Reproducing' Custom: Mechanical Habits and Female Machines in Augustan Women's Education" in *Feminist Formations* 25.1 (2013), pp. 111-137.
 11. For more information see the *Encyclopædia Britannica* entry "enamelwork."
 12. See "Verge Escapements" in Laurie Penman's *The Clockrepairer's Handbook*, pp. 79-85.
 13. See also Laura Brown's "Capitalizing on Women: Dress, Aesthetics, and Alexander Pope" in *Ends of Empire* in which she argues, "the figure of the woman is the discursive means to the connection of imperialism and aesthetic theory" (104).
 14. For further discussion of the role that consumption plays in eighteenth-century self-representation see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace's *Consuming Subject: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, Marcia Pointon's *Strategies for Showing: Women, Possession, and Representation in English Visual Culture* and Anne Bermingham's "Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth Century England" in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800*, pp. 489-513.
 15. For a discussion of the symbolic role of cosmetics in the eighteenth century, see Tassie Gwiliam's "Cosmetic Poetics: Coloring Faces in the Eighteenth Century" in *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 144-162, and Tita Chico's "The Arts of Beauty: Women's Cosmetics and Pope's Ekphrasis" in *Eighteenth Century Life* 26.1 (2002), pp. 1-23.
 16. See Angus Ross and David Woolley's notes on Lusitania, Cancer, and Mercury in their edition of "The Progress of Beauty" in *Jonathan Swift: Major Works*, pp. 663.
 17. Jonathan Lamb's "The Crying of Lost Things" suggests that peculiarities in the British legal system had the effect that advertising the object's loss and attempting to recuperate it "No questions asked" essentially releases the thing from the legal constraints that had held it as property. See also *Secret Life of Things*, edited by Mark Blackwell for a discussion of the ways that objects grasped at subjectivity in eighteenth-century literature.
 18. Scholars continue to puzzle over the textual complexity of *A Tale of a Tub*. For an overview of the theoretical disagreements, see Marcus Walsh's "Text, 'text,' and Swift's 'A Tale of a Tub,'" *The Modern Language Review* 85.2 (1990), pp. 290-303. More recently, Katie Lanning discusses the text's tension between alteration and obsolescence in "'Fitted to the Humour of the Age': Alteration and Print in Swift's A Tale of a Tub," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 26.4 (2014), pp. 515-536.
 19. Baudot makes a similar argument in her treatment of Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room" in "What Not to Avoid in Swift's 'The Lady's Dressing Room,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 49.3 (2009), pp. 637-666, suggesting that Swift highlights the costs of philosophical materialism by choking his reader on the poem's simultaneous material vacuity.

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