

CALL FOR PAPERS:

“SWIFT TODAY: HIS LEGACY FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT TO MODERN-DAY POLITICS”

Sofia University (“St. Kliment Ohridski”)

30th November to 1st December 2017

“Swift Today: His Legacy from the Enlightenment to Modern-Day Politics” is a conference commemorating the 350th anniversary of the birth of Jonathan Swift: the acclaimed Irish author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, poet, national hero, and master satirist. Such an event is a cause for great celebration. However, in these challenging political times, Swift’s *oeuvre* is (for better or for worse) more relevant than ever. On occasion, commentators have expressed (tongue-in-cheek) a longing that he could be reincarnated and assist the world in a manner which he did throughout his own life: for instance, bringing about the withdrawal of Wood’s “half-pence” in Ireland (*Drapier’s Letters*), exposing economic corruption at the highest levels in Westminster, and delivering devastating satirical blows in horrifying pamphlets such as *A Modest Proposal* – startling apathetic politicians into taking notice of Ireland’s unacknowledged famine woes. The contemporary Irish author Colm Toibin has mused upon how a “contemporary” Swift would publish his political pamphlets via a “blog”, and Noah Charney has imagined him acting as a “grumpy pundit on CNN, slinging pithy wisecracks and moonlighting as a writer on “Saturday Night Live”, as well as ripping people up on Twitter.

History has co-incidentally brought us full circle back, face to face, with many of the issues which Swift fought against in his own time. Some identical, worryingly, and others being variations on themes concerning human folly which he encountered on a regular basis. Turbulent political events during 2016/2017, including Brexit and the swearing in of Donald Trump as US President, the elections in Turkey concerning Erdogan’s increased presidential powers, the world-wide rise of support for far-right groups (amongst countless others), have arguably, collectively brought instability and unease to the world in a manner unheard of for more than a generation.

Swift’s literary legacy, which will be the analytical focus of our conference, is put into new perspective bearing in mind that today we live in a “post-truth” society, comprising “fake news”, “alternative facts” and a distrust of the media on a global scale. Our collective aim is to create a forum whereupon the reading of his works, with their timeless and universal satirical vision, can serve as a means of cutting through said cynicism so as to elevate once more his beloved concept of “truth” (today embodied in the form of “fact-checking”). Swift’s satirical censures open up a wide range of moral, philosophical and religious questions. Disconcerting at their core, they address the cultural legacy of humanity, whilst the twenty-first century finds its problems germane to unanswered ethical questions from the eighteenth century through to modern-day politics. Intolerance, xenophobia, and extermination are themes that resonate in analogous ways in the news media today which project political anxieties about the imperfect social system.

Suggested topics for presentations include (but are not restricted to) discussions of the following:

- Brexit: (Topics include):

The fragmentation of the United Kingdom

Anglo-Irish relations post-Brexit

Trade and economic matters

Immigration (relations with the “Other”)

Modern day British conservatism and liberalism

- The “Post-Truth” era (Topics include):

“Fake News” and “Alternative Facts”

Swift’s legacy within modern political satire (for instance, in: *The Onion*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Colbert Report*)

Terrorism, insurrection and rebellion

Political censorship and state sanctioned media

Religious and Political fanaticism

- Migration, refugees and immigration

- Post-colonialism, ethnicity and national identity

- Literary critical receptions and influence on posterity

- Translations and receptions

- Film adaptations of *Gulliver’s Travels*

Please send abstracts (300 words) to the conference website: swifttodaysofia@gmail.com by the 1st August, 2017.

The conference shall be conducted in English.

Conference organisers:

Alexandra Glavanakova: a_glavanakova@hotmail.com

Jonathan McCreedy: jonathan.mccreedy84@gmail.com

Vesselin Budakov: vescobudakov@yahoo.com