

Gulliver, Travel, and Empire

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Recommended Citation

Rawson, Claude. "Gulliver, Travel, and Empire." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.5 (2012): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2140>>

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Volume 14 Issue 5 (December 2012) Article 7

**Claude Rawson,
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<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss5/7>>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 14.5 (2012)***
Special issue ***New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals***
Ed. I-Chun Wang

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss5/>>

Abstract: In his article "Gulliver, Travel, and Empire" Claude Rawson analyzes Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* as a central document of European intellectual history. Rawson focuses on the relationship between ethnicity and human identity asking what constitutes humanity and how individual groups qualify (or not) for human status. Posing as a "parody" of travel books, Rawson's article is both a series of voyages and an ethnically widening arc of moral exploration as Swift's Book Four at once expresses an ambivalent perception of the Irish under English rule and extends to what Swift/Gulliver calls "all Savage Nations" and ultimately takes in what Swift described in a letter as "that Animal called Man."

Claude RAWSON**Gulliver, Travel, and Empire**

Gulliver's Travels is not a travel book. Although it is formally a parody of travel writings, a species of book Swift referred to as "abundance of Trash," but read for pleasure, travel writing is hardly its main preoccupation (see Rawson, *God* 22-23, 312-13). The object of the parody, as often in Swift, is not the main target of the satire, but a vehicle for the expression of more central human concerns. This generic elusiveness or uncertainty contributes throughout to a certain unease in the reading experience, a product of a certain hostile edginess in Swift's relations with his readers. Such allegories are of course formally apparent throughout, but they are transcended in *Gulliver's Travels* by the fact that what is under scrutiny is not any particular society or group of societies, but all societies, and indeed the radical character of the human animal itself, independently of race, sex or geographical habitat.

From the beginning, *Gulliver's Travels* is a trap for innocent readers: "My Father had a small Estate in *Nottinghamshire*; I was the Third of five Sons. He sent me to *Emanuel-College* in *Cambridge*, at Fourteen Years old, where I resided three Years, and applied my self close to my Studies: But the Charge of maintaining me (although I had a very scanty Allowance) being too great for a narrow Fortune; I was bound Apprentice to Mr. *James Bates*, an eminent Surgeon in *London* ... When I left Mr. *Bates*, I went down to my Father; where, by the Assistance of him and my Uncle *John*, and some other Relations, I got Forty Pounds, and a Promise of Thirty Pounds a Year to maintain me at *Leyden*: There I studied Physick two Years and seven Months, knowing it would be useful in long Voyages" (*The Prose Writings* V. XI). This is how the narrative begins, and how, in the first edition of 1726, readers gain the main impression of the character at the outset. Swift appears at first sight as a classic example of the ingenuously "normal" observer, unlikely to be encumbered with dissident or antisocial prejudices and plain and matter of fact in his outlook and speech. There is a small indefinable crackle of uncertainty in "The Publisher to the Reader," signed by Gulliver's cousin Richard Sympson, of whom we know nothing yet, which precedes the narrative and that speaks without prior context of Gulliver's prolixity and his addiction to sailors' jargon of which the book has had to be pruned. Some references to Gulliver's reputation for "Veracity" and to his "good Esteem among his Neighbours" acquire their full piquancy in the light of later knowledge (and there is naturally no trace yet of later complaints about corruptions in the text of the first edition). The "Publisher" (here meaning "editor," i.e., Sympson) also refers to the family origins of the Gullivers in Banbury, home of the Banbury saints, a hotbed of Puritanism (*The Prose Writings* 184).

These references lead naturally to covertly intimated wrinkles in the bland surface of the opening narrative itself. A hint of anti-Puritan or anti-Dutch sentiment might be detected, by knowing readers, in the references to Emmanuel College or the University of Leyden. Some readers have latterly suspected that the Mr. in "Mr. Bates" might have been pronounced master, and Gulliver does refer to the death of "my good Master Bates," a pun that may or may not be accidental. It seems, on balance, doubtful to me, not because of its smuttiness, but because the sniggering has an un-Swiftian lack of focus and it is doubtful also on linguistic grounds (the latter, however, both as to the pronunciation of "Mr." and of the extent of currency of the word "masturbate" in 1726, non-conclusive) (see Laqueur 96-110, 442-45). These potential crackles of disturbance might be further compounded by the fact that the frontispiece portrait of Gulliver in 1726 gave him the same age as Swift and some resemblance of feature (see Rawson, "Introduction"). But the dominant initial impact of the opening narrative is to discourage rather than stimulate guardedness. The disconcerting subtexts are indefinite initially and of secondary force to be fully realized only at a later stage. The main satiric un-deceptions unfold only when we discover that the plain narrative is leading us to highly disingenuous territory, not only lacking in factual credibility but charged with a morally disturbing content inconsistent with the blandness of the narrative voice. A well-known aspect of the work's early history is that a number of readers were nevertheless taken in, or thought they were expected to be, by the "realism" of the manner, an old gentleman looking for Lilliput on the map, a sea captain claiming that the author had mistaken Gulliver's home address, and an Irish bishop who prided himself on not being deceived by this pack of "improbable lies" (*Correspondence* 45-46).

These comic misprisions are an early index of the frustrating and indeterminate generic character of the writing: travel book? Parody of travel book? Fictional travel narrative? Otherworldly fantasy, story or satire? And if some or all of these, in what mixture or proportion from one sentence or paragraph to the next? The stylistic indicators are unstable, and an innocent reading is never properly allowed to gain a foothold. But no one is likely to escape the teasing invitation to such a reading contained in the opening. That some readers were fully taken in was a not entirely accidental victory of hoaxmanship. However, it would have been completely counterproductive of the work's whole satiric design if most readers fell into that trap. Accordingly, Swift took measures in a subsequent set of revisions to ensure that innocent readers were more emphatically disabused from the start. The atmosphere of elusive and self-undermining uncertainty was reinforced in the finalised text, which was included in George Faulkner's four-volume edition of Swift's *Works* in 1735, with changes to text and front matter which could only compound the effect of destabilizing everything the book subsequently says not only about travel or empire, but all human affairs. Whatever other purposes may have led to these changes, there is no doubting the determination to neutralize all possibility of a naïve untroubled reading of the kind apparently encouraged by the original opening narrative, which nevertheless still survives to tease us. To begin with, the frontispiece portrait, which once gave Gulliver's name and age, now stands over the rubric "Splendide Mendax," announcing that the narrative is a lie. A resemblance to known portraits of Swift may still be detected by unusually informed readers, reinforced by comparison with the portrait of Swift himself in the first volume of the 1735 *Works* of which the revised *Gulliver's Travels* occupies volume 3, where it still appears nominally as the work of Gulliver, within a collected edition of Swift's writings (*Gulliver's Travels* xvi-xviii). An uneasy subtextual traffic between "real" author and fictional narrator is continued even as the unreliable mendacity of the latter is being advertised.

Second, inserted among the paratexts between the frontispiece and the narrative, is the cantankerous letter to Gulliver's cousin Sympson, first published in the 1735 edition, but fictively dated "April 2, 1727," i.e., six months or so after the first publication of the work on 28 October 1726, in which Gulliver expresses exasperation that the world has not mended "after above six Months Warning," despite the fact that his book has drawn attention to its many failings:

Behold, after above six Months Warning, I cannot learn that my Book hath produced one single Effect according to mine Intentions: I desired you would let me know by a Letter, when Party and Faction were extinguished; Judges learned and upright; Pleaders honest and modest, with some small Tincture of common Sense; and *Smithfield* blazing with Pyramids of Law-Books; the young Nobility's Education entirely changed; the Physicians banished; the female *Yahoos* abounding in Virtue, Honour, Truth and good Sense: Courts and Levees of great Ministers thoroughly weeded and swept; Wit, Merit and Learning rewarded ... I find likewise, that the Writers of those Bundles are not agreed among themselves; for some of them will not allow me to be Author of mine own Travels; and others make me an Author of Books to which I am wholly a Stranger. ("A Letter" 6-7)

The list of complaints goes on to quarrel with factual accuracy (including times and dates) and textual integrity of the work as published. It makes shrill professions of veracity in contrast with the sober confidence of the opening narrative itself. It offers an initially opaque intimation of his preference for the company of his horses over that of his family after his final return. Finally, after having noted indignantly the book's failure, after six months, to bring any halt "to all Abuses and Corruptions, at least in this little Island, as I had Reason to expect," it concludes with a disavowal of any hope of mending the human race, though at the same time speaking of "some Corrections, which you may insert, if ever there should be a second Edition":

I find likewise, that your Printer hath been so careless as to confound the Times, and mistake the Dates of my several Voyages and Returns; neither assigning the true Year, or the true Month, or Day of the Month: And I hear the original Manuscript is all destroyed, since the Publication of my Book. Neither have I any Copy left; however, I have sent you some Corrections, which you may insert, if ever there should be a second Edition ... Indeed I must confess, that as to the People of *Lilliput*, *Brobdingrag*, (for so the Word should have been spelt, and not erroneously *Brobdingnag*) and *Laputa*; I have never yet heard of any *Yahoo* so presumptuous as to dispute their Being, or the Facts I have related concerning them; because the Truth immediately strikes every Reader with Conviction. And, is there less Probability in my Account of the *Houyhnhnms* or *Yahoos*, when it is manifest as to the latter, there are so many Thousands in this City, who only differ from their Brother Brutes in *Houyhnhnmland*, because they use a sort of *Jabber*, and do not go naked. I wrote for their Amendment, and not their Approbation. I

must freely confess, that since my last Return, some corruptions of my *Yahoo* Nature have revived in me by Conversing with a few of your Species, and particularly those of mine own Family, by an unavoidable Necessity; else I should never have attempted so absurd a Project as that of reforming the *Yahoo* Race in this Kingdom; but, I have now done with all such visionary Schemes for ever. ("A Letter" 6-7)

The Letter to Sympson runs to six pages in the edition of 1735 (I quote less than half). It is intended to be lingered on in all its disconcerting and not always self-explanatory bad temper. After a brief "Advertisement," addressing the matter of textual corruptions and adding mystifications of its own, and which itself draws attention to the ensuing Letter, the Letter to Sympson is, in the final version of 1735, the reader's first introduction to Lemuel Gulliver's *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*. The angry and irrational outburst is itself unsettling to encounter at the beginning of any work of fiction (or fact). Its effect on a reading of the narrative proper, when we reach its opening paragraph in I.i, is to enforce a discordant adjustment whose exact nature, in advance of the various undeceptions which unfold in the course of the narrative, cannot be satisfactorily stabilized. The voice of the Letter to Sympson is that of the disenchanting and misanthropic Gulliver whom we do not meet until the later chapters of Book 4, a fact of which we become aware only in hindsight, or on a subsequent reading. In this sense, *Gulliver's Travels* resembles modern novels with dislocated chronologies whose time-sequences are functions of a character's or narrator's knowledge or memory not of linear succession and whose full local flavor can only be apprehended after a full exposure to the fiction as a whole (see Rawson, "Swift's"; *The Essential*). The effect of such intimate fictive immediacies, of the kind we encounter in Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, or William Faulkner, is foreign to the whole conception of Swift's work, which has no more interest in, or awareness of, such sophisticated forms of fictional illusion than it has with the simpler forms of verism we have seen Swift seeking to guard against, and which the Letter to Sympson was in fact an effort to counteract. The Letter is an afterthought brought in to regulate an unexpected side effect of the species of rudimentary narratorial perspective, which resembles the "historic present" in grammar, in which Gulliver recounts his voyages in the style of the person he was at the various times of the given experience, rather than as the *ex post facto* coordinator of the composition as a whole. The Letter's bewilderingly angry accents generate defenses against the fiction, not collaborative sympathy, and as the work develops we can see them as part of a continuing quarrelsome intimacy. This note comes fully into its own in the opening paragraph of the final chapter: "Thus, gentle Reader, I have given thee a faithful History of my Travels for Sixteen Years, and above Seven Months; wherein I have not been so studious of Ornament as of Truth. I could perhaps like others have astonished thee with strange improbable Tales; but I rather chose to relate plain Matter of Fact in the simplest Manner and Style; because my principal Design was to inform, and not to amuse thee" (*Gulliver's Travels* Vol. 4, xii).

This brings full circle a relationship with the reader that has in reality existed under the surface throughout, and which the revised opening including the Letter to Sympson formalized in 1735 with a revived and explicit aggressiveness. Formally too, this opening of the last chapter of the last book is a mirror of the first chapter of the first, both in their way mimicking the "plain Matter of Fact in the simplest Manner and Style" of travel writers and of expressing a dim view of the pretension. The mock disavowal of "strange improbable Tales" anticipates the bishop who preened himself on finding the book "full of improbable lies." It comes in the teeth of stories of six-inch and twelve-foot human societies, flying islands, otherworldly communities, senile immortals, bestial humanoids and rational horses. "My principal Design was to inform, and not to amuse thee" is a stinging variation on the Letter to Sympson's remark that "I wrote for their Amendment, and not their Approbation," which, since the Letter is a prefatory afterthought and written for a later edition is actually in this as in other ways an echo of the final chapter and not the other way round. It is, moreover, unlikely to be an accident that, whichever was written first, the sentence from the final chapter echoes, or is echoed by, the remark to Pope on 29 September 1725, just when Swift has finished and was amending and transcribing his "Travells, in four Parts Compleat," that his intention was "to vex the world rather th[a]n divert it" (*Correspondance* 2, 606). The variation has a peculiar sting, "vex" expressing authorial purpose outside the text, while "inform" is a poker-faced affirmation of something the reader cannot possibly take at face value, but whose factual impossibility is transcended by the moral truth of

the allegory contained within it, which Gulliver's Letter to Sympson referred to as his defeated call for the world's "Amendment." If parody of mere travel-writings becomes a wholly subsidiary object of interest, it is the carrier for intense charges of inculpation against the "Remote Nations" portrayed, as these come to encompass the whole of humankind, including "thee," its hapless representative, the "gentle Reader," who, as far as the work can reveal, has committed no particular offense, only the absolute offense of being Yahoo, which implies all others, and which, in a characteristic Swiftian turn, equally encompasses the author.

So the travel, truthful or mendacious, which describes foreign lands, is not what it appears to be, an exposure of how other races behave, or even of the shortcomings of such exposures. Alien groups traduced by European invaders remain as despicable as the despisers claim, but also no different from anyone else. Humanity's despised subgroups, Indians, Irish, women, beggars, are correctly seen for what they are by people who, when the truth is known, are precisely as despicable for the same reasons. It is thus that the Yahoos, that stereotype of "all savage Nations" (*Gulliver's Travels* Vol. 4, ii), embodying generic features of outlandish "Indians," and widely understood to refer specifically to the Irish "natives," are revealed to be biologically identical with the rest of us, ostensibly rather worse than we are, though, as is sometimes hinted, actually not quite so bad. The idea, sometimes entertained in the Ph.D. era in whose twilight we are now living, that the identity of Yahoo with Gulliver and ourselves is a crazed emanation of Gulliver's addled brain, is neutralized by the graphic episode in IV. viii in which a young Yahoo female demonstrates biological kinship by desiring to mate with him.

The process of widening inculpation, from despised subgroup to the rest of the human race, is replicated with almost schematic emphasis three years later, in *A Modest Proposal*, whose fictional argument is based on a traditional notion among European (not just English) writers that the Irish were by nature cannibal, like American Indians, to whom they were commonly assimilated (see Rawson, *God* 79-91, 324-28). Contrary to traditional misapprehensions, *A Modest Proposal* is neither a Dickensian protest at the conditions of the poor, nor a diatribe against English exploitation of Ireland, but an "economic" tract by a profiteering do-gooder who thinks the economy might be improved by exploiting the anthropophagous proclivities of the Irish natives. Swift is not friendly to these natives. He portrays them as a beggarly, thieving, adulterous riff-raff, who, if they could be taught that their bastard offspring were a cashable asset, might take better care to preserve and nourish them in infancy, and also refrain from beating their wives when they are pregnant for fear of a miscarriage (*A Modest Proposal*, *The Prose Writings* Vol. 12, 107-18).

The target of the satire is the failure of these settler groups to manage their own economic interest. The proposer, like Swift himself, had once advocated curbing the ruinous behavior of absentee landlords or the wasteful preference for fashionable English clothes over goods of Irish manufacture, and hoped in general to encourage commercial probity and patriotic good sense in his fellow citizens. As in *Gulliver's Travels*, an unstable symbiosis exists between an unSwiftian (and in this case especially outlandish) speaker, and an authorial Swift, who, in the proposer's list of virtuous but unimplemented "other Expedients" (XII. 116-7), is placing on record his own polemical activism, from *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufacture* (1720) to the *Drapier's Letters* (1724) and *The Short View of the State of Ireland* (1728) (all these prose works were published separately but collected in *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*). Swift's own pamphleteering continued indeed beyond *A Modest Proposal*, culminating in the non-ironic (and, unusually, signed) *Proposal for Giving Badges to the Beggars* (1737), which establishes Swift's attitude to Irish beggars with an explicitness which will seem unsettling to those modern readers who may detect a frisson of analogy with nazi practices (although "badging" has a long history) (see Berenbaum and Slotnik Vol. 3, 45-48). As in *Gulliver's Travels* again, the speaker in *A Modest Proposal* can neither be identified with Swift nor safely uncoupled from him and many misreadings of both works are caused by critics who attempt one or the other.

Badging, incidentally, is not the only nazi "analogy" that returns to haunt us in either *Gulliver's Travels* or *A Modest Proposal*. Sails, clothes and other objects are manufactured from the skins of Yahoos (*Gulliver's Travels*, *The Prose Writings* Vol. 4, x) or of Irish infants (*The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, Vol. 12, 112) (see Rawson, *God* 275-87). These too have a long ancestry in the

annals of human behavior. Swift's sources would have included Herodotus and Strabo on Scythians, often described as ancestors of the Irish as well as of Amerindians (see Rawson, *God* 79). Swift was not proposing a revival of atavistic technologies, but he was, as André Breton understood in 1939 (13-14), contemplating a species of human "cruelty" in a spirit of macabre fantasy. As Breton perceived, it is in some ways idle to ascribe approval or disapproval to a macabre jokerie designed to disturb and to shock rather than to engage moral responses. At the same time, moral concerns are inevitably activated at some level of cruel play and, in so far as punitive cruelties are the issue, the joke disparages victims and castigators alike.

Since, in *A Modest Proposal*, it is evident that society cannot be expected to behave in its own rational interest by adopting the "other Expedients" Swift himself had advocated, the proposer concludes that the only economically workable alternative is the cannibal-scheme, in which the natives ostensibly revert to type by producing the home-grown commodity, while it is the rulers who will actually consume it. In this unexpected displacement, the eating is done not by the presumed cannibal group, but, as I have mentioned, by those most likely to call the cannibals cannibals. The cannibal slur has tacitly referred to a commonplace political *tu quoque*, in which the colonist behaves as badly as the colonized are accused of doing (or worse). The English oppressors (i.e., the remote rulers from London who are the ultimate enemy) are for once largely not implicated in the equation, until, in a final twist, the proposer acknowledges that he knows "*a Country which would be glad to eat up our whole Nation, without [Salt]*" (*A Modest Proposal*, *The Prose Writings* Vol. 12, 117; emphasis in the original). The scenario is a variation on an ancient idea in which tyranny is compared to cannibalism, as in the "people-devouring king" (*demoboros basileus*) of the *Iliad* (I. 231), an analogy developed by Plato, Aristotle, Thomas More, Erasmus, and others (see Rawson, *Satire* 192-93). Although often a figure of speech, this formula has variously flirted with literal connotations. Early forms of the "postcolonial" argument that European invaders are more cannibal than the cannibal "natives," as in Michel de Montaigne's essays "Of Cannibals" and "Of Coaches" (I. xxxi, III. vi) and in *A Modest Proposal* itself, hint teasingly at literal meanings while simultaneously shrinking from them (on this, see in more detail Rawson, *God* 24-33, 69-91). The *Modest Proposal*'s extension of the cannibal imputation to the English oppressor is metaphorical and one supposes that the cannibalistic local purchasers of the Irish infants — while purported to be "literal" consumers in the terms of the fiction — are intended as an allegorical figuration of Ireland's self-destructive condition, seen as self-consuming, like Stephen Dedalus's "old sow that eats her farrow," a phrase mindful of Swift's pamphlet (Joyce 203). Since the joke relies on the traditional imputation that Irish natives *are* literally cannibal, the fact that they don't themselves eat their babies acquires an additional piquancy, leaving them with the disrepute without the guilt of the deed.

This figurative fantasy, however, builds on a literal mythology and backed by recorded incidents of famine cannibalism concerning Irish natives. The irony is redirected, in something like Montaigne's way, to the Anglo-Irish settlers, although its further extension to the English themselves is secondary to Swift's attack on the intermediate or settler caste, which is the pamphlet's principal political target. This attack by no means exculpates the "natives," who are no more "harmless" than those of *Gulliver's Travels*, a beggarly riff-raff whose fitness for a Biblical extermination from "the Face of the Earth" is the subject of a "non-ironic" outburst in *A Proposal for Giving Badges to the Beggars*, a work which provides an essential background to the earlier ironic pamphlet (*The Prose Writings* Vol. 13, 139). The English of London, whose menace to eat "our whole Nation" hovers on the perimeter, appear as an incremental afterthought to the prior surprise that it is not the natives but the settlers who are supposedly to perform the act. If they are not for once the main villains, they play their part in a widening satirical embrace, whose implication is that no one, as in *Gulliver's Travels*, escapes whipping. Their inclusion parallels the Gulliverian demography in which an inculcation, initially attached to the despised group, spreads in widening circles to all others, including the despisers and exploiters, without ever disavowing the initial inculcation. *A Modest Proposal* is a variation of the Gulliverian formula, in which what begins as a satire on Irish Yahoos, encompasses not only "all savage Nations," but their conquerors, and all intermediate groups as well, except that in the pamphlet the intermediate group is the main culprit.

This pattern of universalizing inculcation underlies all aspects of *Gulliver's Travels* itself, including the topics of travel and empire. Much heat has been expended on the question of whether Swift is an anti-imperialist or a supporter of colonial oppression, but the issue as posed is transcended by larger perspectives. He is no friend of the Irish "natives," but denounces the English tyranny over Ireland, allegorized in the balance of terror of the Flying Island of Book III and in various other ways. Nor is he a promoter of final solutions by genocidal extermination of the kind contemplated by the Houyhnhnm Assembly, which he nevertheless does not disavow: "The Question to be debated was, Whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the Face of the Earth" (IV. ix). This detail has been used to align the Houyhnhnms with nazi totalitarianism with the implication either that Swift is in sympathy with such things or that Swift is signaling his antipathy for the Houyhnhnms. The Houyhnhnms' language, however, echoes God's declaration, on the eve of the Flood, that "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth" (Genesis 6.7). Swift is conscious of the allusion (Book IV, without being a religious allegory, has many allusions to Genesis). It would be difficult to argue that the book of Genesis intends god to appear as a genocidal maniac and one must assume that the implication there, as presumably in Swift, is that humankind deserves the punishment. That the nazis invoked the same phrase, apparently in Luther's translation, in their own extermination plans may tell us various things about our relation to killspeak (including that of Genesis) (see Rawson, *God* 287, 372).

The issue resists schematic solutions of the sort that appeal to interpreters, especially those who like to portray Swift as a politically correct university chaplain. But Yahoo equals human, and if the suggestion that humans deserve the punishment has Biblical authority, the idea of exterminating the human race, as a matter of secular advocacy in a modern fiction, remains starkly shocking. On the other hand, in the terms of that fiction, the Yahoos are, in Houyhnhnm society, not fellow creatures but a species of noxious brute, like rats or insects, whom human societies exterminate for health and security reasons without traditionally raising the specter of culpable genocide. And yet, to the "reader," Yahoos remain human or humanoid (that is indeed the main point of the fiction), and uneasiness is generated even as the allegorical terms of the fiction are allowed for. The shock remains, and the idea of human punishability is never unsaid. At the same time, the plan, while never disavowed, is never executed, and remains in an indefinite limbo in which the discredit of culpability coexists with a shrinking from the discredit of enforcing punishment, while the Houyhnhnms continue to enact unsettling analogues of future nazi scenarios: they even consider whether they should sterilise the Yahoos instead of exterminating them, achieving the same result in a "humanely" gradualist way while benefiting from the Yahoos' labor for a generation (see Rawson, *God* 256-66, 287-98).

Swift did not know these analogues, but they are potentials of the human imagination at the level of what Breton called "black humor," a cruel play with forbidden concepts, unrestrained, as Breton puts it, by the restrictions of morality and satire (9-21). Breton saw Swift as the *véritable initiateur* of such black humor. It cannot literally be dissociated from morality or satire, certainly not in Swift's case. But it exists in a penumbral zone of inculcation and elusiveness, in which dangerous moral points are intimated in a mode of partial non-commitment, disturbing to the reader without implicating the author in unacceptable allegiances. An either-way-you-lose irony holds on to Yahoo culpability without permitting the shocking enactment of a punishment nevertheless conceded to be due. It is one of the resources of the novel-resembling yet non-novelistic fiction of *Gulliver's Travels* to release such charged indeterminacies, which have less to do with the impersonal caprices of a post-structuralist verbal sign than with the highly focused and personal quarrel which Swift conducts with his readers through a style of uniquely intimate and slippery aggressiveness. When the narrative revisits empire for the last time, in that final chapter in which Gulliver reminds the gentle reader that his "principal Design was to inform, and not to amuse thee," this aggressiveness is filtered through an elaborate orchestration of narrative voices, in which the character Gulliver and the controlling voice of the satirist, while pointedly and necessarily distinct, interpenetrate one another unremittingly.

A few paragraphs later, in a fit of citizenly responsibility, Gulliver considers his obligation "as a Subject of England, to have given in a Memorial to a Secretary of State, at my first coming over; because, whatever Lands are discovered by a Subject, belong to the Crown" (*Gulliver's Travels* Vol. 4, xii). The reader is evidently being set up for an anti-imperialist diatribe and will not be disappointed.

But the payoff is characteristically not what we expect, although it is not in every way unexpected either. In his principled way, Gulliver will not perform this particular "Duty." The Lilliputians are hardly worth the expense, while conquest of the other nations would not "be as easy as those of Ferdinando Cortez over the naked Americans." Gulliver doubts "whether an English Army would be much at their Ease with the Flying Island over their Heads" (*Gulliver's Travels* Vol. 4, xii), which gains piquancy from the fact that this Island is itself the instrument of English tyranny over Ireland. As to the Brobdingnagians and Houyhnhnms, we would stand no chance. Even the peace-loving Houyhnhnms, for all their incomprehension of war, would inflict a crushing defeat on any invader: "Imagine twenty Thousand of them breaking into the Midst of a *European Army*, confounding the Ranks, overturning the Carriages, battering the Warriors Faces into Mummy, by terrible Yerks from their hinder Hoofs" (*Gulliver's Travels* Vol. 4, xii). The gloating of the detail is very unHouyhnhnm-like. It has something of that "great Diversion of all the Spectators" which Gulliver identified as a nasty feature of the European conduct of war in his description to the Master Houyhnhnm (Vol 2, v). There, and in his parallel rhapsody on gunpowder to the King of Brobdingnag (Vol. 2, vii), Gulliver himself is gloating too, but to his discredit rather than (as we clearly sense in Vol. 4, xii) with some complicit participation from his author, one of many signs of Swift's overt participation in the things he satirizes.

The anti-imperial irony remains broadly on message throughout these local wrinkles and disturbances. The gloating at the warriors' faces battered into mummy may be put down to Gulliver's misanthropy, by now a bit unhinged, but it crackles with a serves-them-right satisfaction that is consistent with the words about destroying the Yahoos from the face of the earth, and there is a clear sense that Swift is adjusting the distance between himself and his speaker to take account of this. An even more significant disturbance occurs within, and just after, Gulliver's most eloquent and impassioned diatribe against colonial conquest, as he concludes his reasons for not reporting his discovered territories to the government:

To say the Truth, I had conceived a few Scruples with relation to the distributive Justice of Princes upon those Occasions. For Instance, A Crew of Pyrates are driven by a Storm they know not whither; at length a Boy discovers Land from the Top-mast; they go on Shore to rob and plunder; they see an harmless People, are entertained with Kindness, they give the Country a new Name, they take formal Possession of it for the King, they set up a rotten Plank or a Stone for a Memorial, they murder two or three Dozen of the Natives, bring away a Couple more by Force for a Sample, return home, and get their Pardon. Here commences a new Dominion acquired with a Title by *Divine Right*. Ships are sent with the first Opportunity; the Natives driven out or destroyed, their Princes tortured to discover their Gold; a free Licence given to all Acts of Inhumanity and Lust; the Earth reeking with the Blood of its Inhabitants: And this execrable Crew of Butchers employed in so pious an Expedition, is a *modern Colony* sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous People. (Vol.4, xii)

This is one of the great denunciations of imperial conquest, in the tradition of Bartolomé de las Casas and Montaigne. It may be commensurate with Gulliver's anger, but seems wholly outside his normal powers of eloquence, which clearly derive from authorial endorsement, except that that endorsement is itself undermined by the description of the conquered natives as "an harmless People." This is consistent with nothing that we have been shown in the rest of the work, and is stridently at odds both with the Yahoos, the representatives of "all savage Nations," and the real-life savages of New Holland who had recently harassed Gulliver on his expulsion from Houyhnhnmland. The phrase corresponds to no reality offered anywhere in the text, and seems to exist solely to highlight the even greater barbarity of the European conquerors. The whole passage, far from being an expression either of Gulliver's character, or some Swiftian compassion for oppressed peoples, exists in a twilight zone between both, without being either. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the "harmless People" no more invite compassion than the beggarly rabble of *A Modest Proposal*, and that the satire is telling us mainly that while the rabble we despise is no better than it should be, "our" own conduct is no better and probably worse. And this brings us to a further turn in the irony, when, in the immediately succeeding paragraph, Gulliver voices another disconcerting redirection: "But this Description, I confess, doth by no means affect the *British Nation*, who may be an Example to the whole World for their Wisdom, Care, and Justice in planting Colonies; their liberal Endowments for the Advancement of Religion and Learning; their Choice of devout and able Pastors to propagat *Christianity* ... in supplying the Civil Administration through all their Colonies with Officers of the greatest Abilities, utter Strangers to Corruption: And to crown all, by sending the most vigilant and virtuous Governors, who have no

other Views than the Happiness of the People over whom they preside, and the Honour of the King their Master" (Vol 4, xii; emphases in the original).

The passage also belongs to a long line of self-approving compliments to British imperial prowess, superior in its Protestant probity and civic decency to the inhumane doings of the Spanish Black Legend and the murderous extortions of the other Catholic powers. Such celebrations go back at least as far as Hakluyt and continue, long after Swift, not only in jingoist effusions but from the un-demagogically fastidious pens of Edward Gibbon and Joseph Conrad, with his "red" places on the map, where "real work is done" (see Rawson, *God* 22-23, 312-13). One can imagine circumstances in which Swift, in a mood to preserve law and order among Irish natives or a Dissenting mob, might have spoken to similar effect. But he here treats the words with stinging irony, as a fatuous complacency which only a Gulliver might be expected to express. And yet, whatever we may say about Gulliver at the present moment in the story, he is anything but fatuously complacent. It seems inconceivable from all his surrounding utterances that he would now speak in such accents, though in the work's earlier sections, including the opening chapter of Book I, the speech would be quite in character with his loyal affection for his own dear country.

The above example brings up once again the difficulty of reading Gulliver as a "character." Just as it seems unlikely that he would be capable of the fervid eloquence of denunciation in the preceding paragraph, so the "Swiftian" irony of his praise of British doings would seem outside the range either of his outlook or his verbal skills. If the ascription of both passages to "Swift" is not without complications, it is from Swift, not Gulliver, that they emanate, though their formal processing through Gulliver's narrative voice is part of their elusive force. The unbalanced and anti-social behaviour of Gulliver at the end of Book IV is sometimes taken as a change of "character" suggestive of a new distance between him and his author. One inference from this is sometimes alleged to be that Swift is disowning Gulliver's misanthropy, and, like a good modern community leader, insinuating a more tolerant and less rejectionist perspective. The truth seems to be that the distance is not "new" and that Gulliver has no "character" to change anyway. Swift is just as separate from the early naïve Gulliver as he is from the late disenchanting one. The rhetorical eloquence of Gulliver's late alienation contains the traditional satirist's irony that the world is so incurably wicked that it will drive people of ordinary decency to madness. The satirist virtuously crazed by an unmendable world becomes open to derision not in a way that neutralizes his perceptions, but as a means for the author to concede the excessive reaction without denying the facts which provoked it. Gulliver's madness is not a psychological study of mental disintegration, but a means for Swift to say that while Gulliver is mad but not wrong, Swift can endorse his rightness without being mad. The situation is the product of a continuous elusive interplay between narrative and authorial voices, not of a character's point of view or an explicit authorial statement of doctrine.

Gulliver's view of humanity is presented as unhinged but not untrue. It is, indeed, unhinged by the truth inherent in it. Gulliver's treatment of the Portuguese captain or his predilection for the company of his horses rather than his family are comically insulting reminders that even good, or more or less "harmless," Yahoos are nevertheless Yahoos, as the biologically objective fact of the Yahoo girl's sexual passion for Gulliver also reminds us, independently of Gulliver's state of mind or point of view. The unfolding structure of the work is a process of progressive inculcation, from the ironic escalations of Books I and II to the absolute categorization of human depravities in Book IV. The first three books offer the traditional satirical castigation of specific vices and follies, personal, social and political. The culprits are blamed for what they do. In Book IV, they are blamed for what they are. The transition to this absolute perspective occurs towards the end of Book III, in the episode of the Struldbruggs: "When they came to Fourscore Years, which is reckoned the Extremity of living in this Country, they had not only all the Follies and Infirmities of other old Men ... At Ninety they lose their Teeth and Hair; they have at that Age no Distinction of Taste, but eat and drink whatever they can get, without Relish or Appetite. The Diseases they were subject to, still continue without encreasing or diminishing. In talking, they forget the common Appellation of Things, and the Names of Persons, even of those who are their nearest Friends and Relations. ... They were the most mortifying Sight I ever beheld; and the Women more horrible than the Men. Besides the usual Deformities in extreme old Age, they acquired an additional Ghastliness in Proportion to their Number of Years, which is not to be described" (Vol 3,

x). The place of this episode in the overall rhythm of the work is not that of a mere *fait divers* in the apparently episodic miscellany of Book III. Its placing changes the tone to one which expresses disgust and contempt not for behaviors that can or should be changed, but for behaviors that are inescapable to the nature of the creatures in question. It is after this that the reader's experience has to adjust itself to the more absolute definitional realities of Book IV, to which all human activity, not least travel and imperial dominion, ineluctably conform.

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