Vexations and Diversions: Three Problems in *Gulliver's Travels*

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Swift is dangerous to write about because he is cleverer than his readers; an analysis of *Gulliver's Travels* can cruelly expose the writer's intelligence and even character. It may be that *Gulliver* is not wholly decipherable,[1] but this possibility has seldom discouraged critics, who hover near the work like the moth about the candle. But the results are not commensurate with the efforts involved. Many arrive at the same conclusions through opposite procedures: either they find their insights so brilliant that the possibility of having been anticipated never occurs to them, or they read the critical literature to such effect that they appropriate without notice, presumably without malice and perhaps without thought at all, the ideas they like best. The result is that many critical studies of *Gulliver* belong to the category of pious good deeds: they are works of supererogation.

If repetition is the first characteristic of writing about *Gulliver*, the second is disregard for the rules of critical evidence. Are there rules of critical evidence? None seem generally agreed on. Each critic assumes his postulates, erects his conclusions, and defies all comers. Any approach is valid, any *aperçu* useful. Theorists have badly neglected the issue of what constitutes adequacy in critical argument,[2] and this essay offers no general approach to the problem. At most it suggests some tentative assumptions about approaches to *Gulliver*.

Whatever their theories, critics usually travel in schools, each with its illuminations and distortions. Formal criticism has the advantage, as everyone knows, of concentrating on the text. It tends to reduce the author to a set of moral standards which pleasingly conform to the critic's, and it assumes a normal or ideal and, as such, invisible reader. In the case of *Gulliver*, its attitude toward the eighteenth-century context is pragmatic or what some might call opportunistic: use the context when it supports the argument, and ignore it when it does not. Formalism with its emphasis on imagery, irony, and morality, is vulnerable to the charge that its patterns are all order and no energy; it avoids questions of intensity. R. C. Elliott's shrewd remark that, "when Swift fantasizes himself into the skin of one he hates, extraordinary energies are liberated" is difficult, though not impossible theoretically, to present in formal terms.[3]

Troubled by this weakness in formal analysis, the most visible of recent Swift critics have tried to account for the intensity, both of Swift's writing and of readers' reactions to it, largely in biographical-psychological terms. At the same time, this school relies on intuition and common sense. What, says J. C. Traugott, if "common sense whispers subversively that the speaker of the *Tale* [*of a Tub*] is

1/As Wayne Booth has suggested about the voyage to Houyhnhnmland in his *Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), p. 321.

2/E. D. Hirsch is an obvious exception, but his *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn., 1967) relies so heavily on generic criteria that it is not of much help with a work as difficult to classify generically as *Gulliver*.

3/R. C. Elliott, "Swift's 'I,'" *Yale Review* 62 (1973): 383. Many years ago Ricardo Quintana observed, "It is possible . . . to analyse [Swift's] controlling ideas with some accuracy, and yet to miss entirely that quality of the man which sets him apart from all of his contemporaries. There is in Swift a Dantesque intensity of apprehension which has little to do with his formal thought" (*The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift* [1936; reprint ed., London, 1953], p. 51).

Swift?" (Does common sense also whisper that Swift is Gulliver, as it has to so many critics?) "We cannot understand a creative work," Mr. Traugott continues, "unless we are willing to accept our *intuitive* experience of the cast of mind of the writer."[4] Improving on these general hints, another critic has discovered that the Tale Teller *is* an aspect of Swift and that the *Tale of a Tub* reveals all the anxieties of a fragmented personality, the point to such a view being that it "enables us to respond to Swift as a man."[5] Others may think that the *Journal to Stella* or his letters or even some of his poems might enable us to respond more clearly and directly to Swift as a man, if that is the point of reading his works. In any case, were this line of reasoning correct, then all satires would have to be read not as attacks on vice and folly but as projections of the satirist's inner conflicts. Kenneth Burke argued long ago that the satirist attacks in others his own weaknesses and temptations and so manages both to gratify and punish his own vices.[6] This may well be true, but it ignores the limited roles that literary convention allots to the satirist[7] and is of no help in defining the characteristics of specific satires.

To one disturbing point, Swift's entrapment of the reader in his satiric attack, recent criticism has provided a gratifying rebuttal. As soon as Swift was disentangled from Gulliver, the reader was in trouble. How was he to know when Swift's and Gulliver's views coincided or when they diverged? How was he to know what attitude he was supposed to take toward any issue? The reader was forced back on his own powers of differentiation, which was perplexing and uncomfortable. As early as the preface to the *Battle of the Books*, Swift had warned that "*Satyr is a sort of* Glass, *wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own*"; now the reader looking into the satiric mirror caught the resemblance. Fortunately, the biographical-psychological school, as represented by C. J. Rawson, has demonstrated that Swift's satire "finally devolves . . . from world to gentle reader and back to the satirist."[8] If the reader is a villain or a fool, Swift is more of one.

Despite such advances in critical perception, some interpretative disagreements about *Gulliver* persist. It may be proper to regard these disagreements as a virtue; we could speak, as many have, of the rich ambiguity of the literary work or, if a more modern vocabulary would smooth matters, look at *Gulliver* as "open," "writerly," more or less plural in meaning, a text with "a galaxy of signifiers," and insusceptible to closure.[9] Some of the greatest works, like *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*, do ask for multiple interpretations, since no one interpretation ever seems adequate. But problematic as *Gulliver*, especially part 4, is and will

4/J. C. Traugott, "The Professor as Nibelung," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 3 (1970): 534, 539.
5/G. D. Stout, "Satire and Self-Expression in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*," in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century II*, ed. R. F. Brissenden (Canberra, 1973), p. 339.
6/Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes toward History* (1937; 2d ed. rev., Los Altos, Calif., 1959), p. 49.
7/See A. B. Kernan, *The Cankered Muse* (New Haven, Conn., 1959), pp. 14–30.
8/C. J. Rawson, *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* (London, 1973), p. 59. This should help silence the complaints of critics like K. M. Swaim that, far from helping the reader, Swift "seems often to be going out of his way to interfere with him" (*A Reading of "Gulliver's Travels"* [The Hague, 1972], p. 200).
9/See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), pp. 3–16.

remain, most critics concur that it is a satire with both specific and general objects of attack, and satires seem unavoidably to entail some determinate points of view, even if only implicit ones. What at least we can do is to look at the specific clues to interpretation Swift provides and to narrow the range of possible meanings, though this approach runs counter to the present tendency to speak of *Gulliver* in profound generalizations.

The basic guide to interpretation is a tautology: the best interpretation must be that which most adequately accounts for the "facts" presented—language, events, details, and those agglomerations of "facts" called plot, character, and setting. This guide may seem too self-evident to be useful, but it eliminates interpretations that find little or no support in the text. To cite only recent examples, there is no justification for asserting that Swift holds the Yahoos, those poor, dear things, up for inspection so "that their true condition may be known, pitied, and possibly improved."[10] Or that the Houyhnhnms' exploitation of the Yahoos is an attack upon colonialism. Or that Gulliver went mad before landing in Houyhnhnm-land and only imagined, in delirium, his experiences there. Or that "nardac" is an anagram for French *canard* ("duck").[11] Perhaps less obviously, generalizations which resist verification are just about useless. It is of little help to be told that *Gulliver's Travels* "are insistently ironic at every crucial point," and even less when irony is defined as "the simultaneous assertion and denial of the existence of opposites."[12] Other critics have disposed of the amusing aspects of the Houyhnhnms by declaring that gentle Swift ever loves a joke, even at the expense of his ideal creatures,[13] an argument from despair (like the claim that the formlessness of part 3 parodies scientific formlessness). Nor is this view of the Houyhnhnms improved by asserting that Swift's jokes make them seem "engagingly awkward and 'human.'"[14] (If Swift wanted to make them seem human, why didn't he make them human?) To pursue this topic one further step, how could anyone untangle the complicated confusion behind the statement that "of course" the Houyhnhnms appear ridiculous at times "because they are horses acting as men"?[15]

To be adequate, an interpretation of *Gulliver* must account for two factors in particular: (1) it must explain "underlining," the use of repetition, contrast, or

10/M. W. Buckley, "Key to the Language of the Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels*," in *Fair Liberty Was All His Cry*, ed. A. N. Jeffares (London, 1967), p. 273.

11/Michael Wilding, "The Politics of *Gulliver's Travels*," in Brissenden, p. 318; N. A. Sturm, "Gulliver: The Benevolent Linguist," *University of Dayton Review* 4, no. 3 (1967): 46–48; and Eugène Canseliet, "L'Hermétisme dans la vie de Swift et dans ses 'Voyages,'" *Cahiers du sud* 44, no. 344 (1957): 24.

12/W. B. Carnochan, *Lemuel Gulliver's Mirror for Man* (Berkeley, Calif., 1968), p. 51, and see also p. 78; and "Swift's *Tale:* On Satire, Negation, and the Uses of Irony," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 5 (1971): 143.

13/Milton Voigt (*Swift and the Twentieth Century* [Detroit, 1964]) cites W. E. H. Lecky's remark that Swift's "unrivalled power of ludicrous combination seldom failed to get the better of his prudence" (p. 6). For the Houyhnhnms specifically, see George Sherburn, "Errors concerning the Houyhnhnms," *Modern Philology* 56 (1958): 93; and Irvin Ehrenpreis, *The Personality of Jonathan Swift* (1958; reprint ed., New York, 1969), p. 165.

14/Rawson, p. 14.

15/Philip Pinkus, ed., *Jonathan Swift: A Selection of his Works* (Toronto, 1965), p. xxix. In contrast, the pigs in *1984* do act like men.

emphasis on a "fact"; (2) it must consider with special care any seemingly irrelevant reference or detail, though the critic has to remember that some details will remain inconsequential and that one man's pattern is another's coincidence. It seems reasonable to guess, however, that Swift expected his reader to look *very* closely at *Gulliver*. The hardest job for every reader is to be careful, flexible, and responsive, yet not to be literal-minded. And the line between close attention to the text and literal-mindedness can get blurry. When a careful reader like K. M. Swaim, eager to demonstrate Gulliver's ignoble standing in Brobdingnag, remarks that his audiences with the king are relatively rare,[16] she has strayed over the line. The reader is not expected to tot up the number of hours Gulliver spends with the king and compare that with the number of days he spends in Brobdingnag; what counts is the significance of Gulliver's conversations with the king, which is as plain as can be. If any quantitative measure is relevant, the reader might count the number of pages Swift gives to these interviews.

Also tricky is a necessary reliance on common sense, the name given to judgmental processes that we cannot categorize in more specific ways. We have already noted where common sense, in its intuitional form, has led some critics, and if they seem particularly Modern in their belief in the inner light they have the precedent of Coleridge, who was sure that "the feelings of the reader will be his faithful guide in the reperusal" of *Gulliver*, only to point out with indignation that the hand is more versatile than the hoof.[17] In theory, the normal or ideal reader would be a member of the audience the author projects, if we knew what that audience was; it is that reader's common sense which should guide us.[18] In practice, the projected reader notoriously turns out, though sometimes quite innocently, to be identical with any particular critic discussing *Gulliver*. The ways in which the critic to some extent can check his biases are self-evident, but the history of *Gulliver* criticism shows it will do no harm to recall them. The critic must allow for (1) his own eccentricities, (2) certain attitudes and techniques characteristic of Swift, (3) some general eighteenth-century attitudes. Our critic is a foot fetishist but has looked in vain for a fellow admirer in Swift; even high heels and low heels cannot be forced to carry a sexual implication. On the other hand, our critic does not care for scatological jokes, but he realizes that Swift often uses them. Finally, he will not make the mistake one of my students did when she reprimanded Swift (or Gulliver—she hardly cared) for approving a caste system among the Houyhnhnms, since the critic knows that "subordination" was almost universally accepted as a desirable form of social organization in the early eighteenth century.

So much for general principles to be kept in mind while examining three problems of interpretation, each related to a different aspect of *Gulliver:* (1) the

16/Swaim (n. 8 above), p. 94.

17/*Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (London, 1936), p. 130.

18/I pass over the relevant and important problem that Swift may have misjudged even his ideal audience's reaction, quite apart from the widespread misconstructions of his meaning he could have anticipated. A further problem, the relation between Swift's reader and the reader Gulliver addresses, is explored by Alain Bony ("Call Me Gulliver," *Poétique* 4 [1973]: 197–209).

use of jokes, especially those involving matter-of-fact detail in Lilliput; (2) the topic of degeneration, which appears in all four parts; and (3) Swift's techniques in part 4 and what they imply about his attitudes.

It is easy to find jokes (errors? misstatements?) in *Gulliver;* what is difficult in some instances is to determine whether they are (1) accidental, (2) incidental (local, restricted), or (3) significant. In any case, my premise is that Gulliver never makes a joke; all of them are Swift's. Swift said as much to his egregious translator, the Abbé des Fontaines: "Vous serez sans doute surpris de scavoir qu'ils [English admirers of *Gulliver*] regardent ce chirurgien de vaisseau comme un Auteur grave, qui ne sort jamais de son serieux, qui n'emprunte aucun fard, qui ne se pique point d'avoir de l'esprit, et qui se contente de communiquer au public, dans une Narration simple et naive, les avantures qui luy sont arrivées, et les choses qu'il a vû ou entendu dire pendant ses voyages" (July 1727).[19] Beyond this premise, the problem lies partly in the relation of wit to the conscious. When Gulliver translates what one critic has pleasantly called the "Hanoverian" of Luggnagg,[20] "*Fluft drin Yalerick Dwuldum prastrad mirplush,*" as "*My Tongue is in the Mouth of my Friend*" (3.9.205),[21] the joke seems accidental (always a shaky presumption, however, to make in the case of Swift). But when "a Sink" is deciphered as "a C——t" (3.5.191), the original filler "court" may be insufficient, since another common English word fits equally well, and Swift could easily be suggesting the equivalence of all three terms.[22]

The most difficult joke of this kind to place is the first joke to occur in *Gulliver*, that on "Master *Bates*" (1.1.20). There it is, apparently gratuitous but inescapable,[23] in the midst of the humdrum detail that establishes Gulliver's background and character. Most critics have hurried past it with averted eyes, but Dr. Phyllis Greenacre pounced with psychoanalytic vigor: *Gulliver* represents the "acting out of Lemuel's masturbatory fantasies."[24] Here, as often in criticism of *Gulliver*, levels of reality get confused. But the best explanation I can give of this joke is that Swift is warning the reader that this story is as unreal as most masturbatory fantasies, or simply, "Be sure to read with care, and you'll find some very odd things here." Certainly the reader must be expected to notice, almost immediately after this pun, that Gulliver washes up on Lilliput on Guy Fawkes Day (1.1.20–21),[25] the day on which Tristram Shandy is born.

19/*Correspondence of Jonathan Swift* (hereafter cited as *Correspondence*), ed. Harold Williams (Oxford, 1963–65), 3:226. This is external evidence which I accept as truth, if not the whole truth.

20/J. S. Lawry, "Dr. Lemuel Gulliver and 'The Thing Which Was Not,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67 (1968): 226.

21/References are to part, chapter, and page of Herbert Davis's revised edition of *Gulliver's Travels* (1959; reprint ed., Oxford, 1965).

22/"Court" is written out in the editions of 1726 and 1727; Swift may have noted the flexibility of the dash later. The same joke was made at the expense of David Hamilton, man-midwife to Queen Anne, who when knighted was satirized as a "c——t knight."

23/The manipulation of Bates's name is unique in *Gulliver*. The *OED* first cites "masturbation" as of 1766, but it occurs in Florio's translation of Montaigne (1603) (London, 1910), 2:303.

24/Phyllis Greenacre, *Swift and Carroll* (New York, 1955), p. 115. Greenacre makes little distinction between Gulliver and Swift.

25/Noted in Swaim (n. 8 above), p. 2.

But most readers are quickly taken in by small marvels. Critic after critic has praised that "extraordinary illusion of verisimilitude,"[26] that shower of circumstantial detail in which Gulliver arrives in Lilliput. The illusion is indeed extraordinary. Long ago I myself was much impressed by Swift's precision, and when my engineering students complained that the measurements in Lilliput were inaccurate, I considered their remarks as the miserable effects of a confined education. "How is it," I asked them, "that Hamlet seems about eighteen at the beginning of the play and about thirty at the end?" They didn't know. "It doesn't matter," I said. They were silenced. Still, it was annoying to discover that so many Lilliputian details were haywire. Some might pass with a generous reader: Gulliver picks up six Lilliputians in his right hand (1.2.31); his hair is "long and thick" (1.1.21) enough for the children to play hide-and-seek in (1.3.38); the Lilliputians march twenty-four abreast through his legs as he stands "like a *Colossus*" (1.3.42); his handkerchief stretches to an exercise field for a Lilliputian troop of twenty-four horse (1.3.40–41). When fantasy acts as the literal level of a work, the only sure test of unreliability is internal contradiction: "As the common Size of the Natives is somewhat under six Inches, so there is an exact Proportion in all other Animals, as well as Plants and Trees: For Instance, the tallest Horses and Oxen are between four and five Inches in Height, the Sheep an Inch and a half, more or less; their Geese, about the Bigness of a Sparrow" (1.6.57). These are very small sheep and very large geese.

While Gulliver may exaggerate or just be "a little too circumstantial" ("Publisher to the Reader," p. 9) in these details, others admit of no debate. The largest warships in the Lilliputian world are nine feet long (1.1.26), but Gulliver "with great Ease" draws "fifty of the [Blefuscudian] Enemy's largest Men of War" after him (1.5.52), an accomplishment sharply contrasted with Gulliver's struggle to beach the "real Boat" he later comes upon (1.8.75–76). Readers have long smiled at his gallant denial of an intrigue with the treasurer's wife, and talked of his loss of perspective. But when in the same passage Gulliver defies the treasurer and his informers, Clustril and Drumlo ("I will name them, and let them make their best of it"—1.6.65), to prove that anyone except Reldresal ever visited him incognito, then three paragraphs later describes an incognito visit in detail, surely the reader is meant to spot the contradiction—and to conclude that Gulliver is no more to be trusted than the speakers in *A Tale of a Tub*, *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity*, or *A Modest Proposal*. At the end of the work his allusion to Sinon (4.12.292) warns the reader that Gulliver is a liar, but he has been an "unreliable narrator" from the beginning and handsomely deserves the legend, *splendide mendax*, with which his picture is adorned in Faulkner's edition of 1735. Indeed, Gulliver's repeated assertion that he tells nothing but the truth is suspicious in itself.[27]

26/R. C. Elliott's phrase in *The Power of Satire* (Princeton, N.J., 1960), p. 197. Here and elsewhere, I have borrowed points from my introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Gulliver's Travels"* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968).

27/For the sake of completeness, I note other suspicious details: the size of Gulliver's handkerchief (1.2.34), the number of fowl he could hold on the end of his knife (1.6.64), his three-minute urination (1.5.56), and the size and capacity of Mildendo—only 500 feet square but

These details are an embarrassment. They argue either a slipshod Swift or a reader abandoned to credulity and "ever impatient to see the End of an Adventure" (*A Tale of a Tub*, sec. 6). In practice, the reactions of critics illustrate in how many ways a point can be misinterpreted. Despite this orgy of misstatement, one large group continues to insist there is "little question but that [Gulliver] observes accurately."[28] Another group admits certain problems but explains them away: Swift, Charles Peake asserts, "depends on his rapidity of wit to sweep the reader over minor inconsistencies."[29] The explanation is too complicated for the problem: why didn't Swift merely eliminate the inconsistencies? On the contrary, he insists on them; he writes to Motte (December 28, 1727) urging more illustrations, and his comments show his interest in proportion.[30] How can he suggest the handkerchief parade ground or Gulliver with the fleet in tow as illustrations when he knows the proportions involved will not bear examination? For the same reason he provided *Gulliver* with those impossible maps that A. E. Case labored hard and in vain to justify.[31] Irvin Ehrenpreis observes that Swift "can enchant us endlessly with his imaginary observations";[32] he clearly enchants those who, like Gulliver, are characterized by "much Curiosity and easy Belief" (3.4.178). It seems plain that the mind which could imagine little men and big men could calculate the proportionate size of Lilliputian ships or sheep. It is the reader who cannot be trusted to count up to ten or to measure anything. We have reason to feel, in Gulliver's phrase, "some Indignation to see the Credulity of Mankind so impudently abused" by travel writers (4.12.291).

A third group of critics comes down hard on specific inconsistencies, but often to no useful conclusion. Among some shrewd notations of discrepancies, Augustus De Morgan, the spiritual ancestor of my engineers, points out that the laws of gravitation make the Lilliputians "mechanical impossibilities."[33] But Swift would hardly have been aware of, or cared about, these laws. Another

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capable of holding 500,000 Lilliputians (1.4.46–47). These and some other details noted here are discussed in W. B. Ewald, *The Masks of Jonathan Swift* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 134–35. Others appear in A. De Morgan, "Swift: *Gulliver's Travels*," *Notes and Queries*, 2d ser., 6 (1858): 123–26; W. D. Taylor, *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Essay* (London, 1933), p. 215; and David Novarr, "Swift's Relation with Dryden, and Gulliver's *Annus Mirabilis*," *English Studies* 74 (1966): 354.

28/Merritt Lawlis, "Swift's Uses of Narrative: The Third Chapter of the Voyage to Lilliput," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 72 (1973): 9.

29/Charles Peake, "The Coherence of *Gulliver's Travels*," in *Swift*, ed. C. J. Rawson (London, 1971), p. 192.

30/*Correspondence* (n. 19 above), 3:257–58.

31/A. E. Case, *Four Essays on "Gulliver's Travels"* (Princeton, N.J., 1945), pp. 50–68. The question of the credibility of these maps had been disposed of fully and amusingly by J. R. Moore in "The Geography of *Gulliver's Travels*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 40 (1941). All Gulliver's adventures take place in that part of the world which Sir William Temple found geographically bewildering in his "Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning" (*Five Miscellaneous Essays by Sir William Temple*, ed. S. H. Monk [Ann Arbor, Mich., 1963], pp. 59–60).

32/Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Literary Meanings and Augustan Values* (Charlottesville, Va., 1974), p. 103.

33/De Morgan (n. 27 above), p. 124. De Morgan argues that Swift can be accurate, as shown by his placement of the then undiscovered satellites of Mars "so as to have the squares of the times as the cubes of the distances." He concludes that Swift must have had help with this detail (p. 125).

critic, one of the few to note Gulliver's lie about the incognito visit, seriously infers that "we can only suppose the worst in the affair" with the treasurer's wife.[34] A third, explaining some time discrepancies in part 1, suggests that Gulliver lost track of time because the Lilliputians measured it differently.[35] More to the point, Florence Moog remarks that "an unlettered stableboy would snort at the notion of a horse threading a needle—even if the limbs could do the trick, both eyes would be looking the wrong way!"[36]

Like his assertions that he is telling the truth, Gulliver's circumstantiality is a priori questionable. Referring to the "mock-explicitness" of parts 1 and 2, Mr. Ehrenpreis argues that concrete particularity, for the Augustans, is "a form of over-explicitness that marked the description of vicious, low, or comic characters."[37] It must be admitted, however, that such particularity is a characteristic of comedy or satire of any age. Still, it seems odd that only one critic has ever bothered to discuss the discrepancies in Gulliver's narrative at any length. W. B. Ewald details Gulliver's "definite tendency to exaggerate" but concludes, "Gulliver, though imperfect himself, is capable of having an idea of goodness or even perfection. He is not an impeccable hero; yet he can sincerely express some of Swift's ideals. He can criticize as well as illustrate the faults of travel-writers, Englishmen, and human beings generally."[38]

No one could object to this general position, yet it hardly seems to follow from the evidence Mr. Ewald has just reviewed. A comparable approach is simply to minimize the matter of discrepancy. Milton Voigt says that Ewald labors the obvious in demonstrating that Gulliver is a liar, since Gulliver is in the tradition of the lying traveler which goes back at least to the narrator of Lucian's *True History*.[39] But Lucian's narrator brags about his fantastic story, full of "lies," and asks to be admired for his inventive powers, while Gulliver insists that he is telling only the plain, literal truth; it is left to the reader to figure out when he is "lying" or, strictly speaking, when Gulliver's story contradicts its own assumptions. The contrast between these attitudes points, I think, to the significance of Swift's jokes at the expense of the reader's carelessness and credulity, a significance related to the reader's empathy with Gulliver. (I am ignoring the much more obvious jokes on Gulliver and the natives.) Swift creates a tension between Gulliver's plausibility and his untrustworthiness, even on the literal level of fantasy, which warns the reader that none of Gulliver's assertions or judgments is to be accepted without being verified. Of course, physical fantasy can be verified only on its own terms,

34/Allan Bloom, "An Outline of *Gulliver's Travels*," in *Ancients and Moderns*, ed. Joseph Cropsey (New York, 1964), p. 238.

35/W. A. Speck, *Swift* (London, 1969), p. 111.

36/Florence Moog, "Gulliver Was a Bad Biologist," *Scientific American* 179 (November 1948): 54–55. Gulliver reports that his Houyhnhnm master "began to find fault with other Parts of my Body . . . mine Eyes placed directly in Front, so that I could not look on either Side without turning my Head" (4.4.242). Ms. Moog also points out that the Brobdingnagians as well as the Lilliputians are scientifically "impossible" (pp. 52–53).

37/Ehrenpreis, *Literary Meanings*, p. 46. Dick Taylor, Jr., commented earlier on Swift's parody of circumstantial detail, in "Gulliver's Pleasing Visions: Self-Deception as Major Theme in *Gulliver's Travels*," *Tulane Studies in English* 12 (1962): 39–41.

38/Ewald (n. 27 above), pp. 134, 138–39.

39/Voigt (n. 13 above), p. 116.

but intellectual, moral, and social judgments are verified by past and present readers' standards. All of Swift's major personae are given varying degrees of speciousness that takes in readers, from the student who thinks that *A Modest Proposal* is straightforward to the critic who finds a good deal of resemblance between Swift and his Tale Teller. Swift's technique widens the number of targets to include his narrators, but the technique is dangerous because it is so easily misunderstood. Just the same, the critic who claims that Swift (or, equally, Defoe in *Moll Flanders*) didn't know what he was saying differs only in degree from the student who asks whether Shakespeare "meant" all that. "Go, go you're bit" would be an appropriate epigraph to *Gulliver*. It not only undermines its own certainties but, like *Don Quixote*, forces the reader to question the "reality" from which lesser fantastic fiction provides an escape.

Even if this hypothesis is more adequate than others to explain the "facts" of *Gulliver*, a more general theoretical problem about detail persists: How can the reader recognize when it is significant? Naturally we can spot many incidental jokes (to stick to this area of detail), like Reldresal's title "principal Secretary for private Affairs" (1.3.39, 1.4.48, 1.7.70) which reflects the gossipy, personal world of Augustan politics. Or the law that forbids "any Person, of what Quality soever, to make water within the Precincts of the Palace" (1.5.56; see 1.7.68), which leads one to wonder where the unfortunate courtiers urinated. Sometimes these jokes form a little pattern, like Gulliver's excremental "adventures" in Lilliput and Brobdingnag (1.2.29, 2.1.93–94), the account of which not only satisfies the vanity of the traveler in his own productions and the curiosity of the reader but "will certainly help a Philosopher to enlarge his Thoughts and Imagination" (2.1.94). Other details, like the itemizing of Quinbus Flestrin's belongings (1.2.34–37), fit the game or puzzle aspect of *Gulliver*.[40]

But some remarks and brief incidents are not easy to account for even under that catchall function, verisimilitude, especially when they are "underlined" or "irrelevant." The apparent rule is that the more irrelevant they seem, the more likely it is they are significant. Yet this rule does not always hold. Look at two examples. Gulliver says of Captain Pocock, "He was an honest Man, and a good Sailor, but a little too positive in his own Opinions, which was the Cause of his Destruction, as it hath been of several others. For if he had followed my Advice, he might at this Time have been safe at home with his Family as well as my self" (4.1.221). If this passage is considered at all—and for many critics it doesn't exist—it unavoidably reflects on Gulliver. The extent of irrelevance is itself significant: What "Advice" did Gulliver give Pocock? None is mentioned. And unmistakable irony appears in "safe at home with his Family as well as my self."[41]

In contrast, the Lilliputian recovery of Gulliver's hat is underlined by taking up a long if mildly amusing paragraph (1.2.41–42). Here he might invoke veri-

40/See Martin Price, "The Fictional Contract," in *Literary Theory and Structure*, ed. Frank Brady, John Palmer, and Martin Price (New Haven, Conn., 1973), pp. 152–58. Ms. Swaim (n. 8 above) instances some language jokes, in the use of "fundamental" and "open Breach" (p. 51).

41/Of those who do notice this passage, Dick Taylor, Jr., comments on it with particular clarity (p. 56).

similitude, if verisimilitude did not already appear in profusion. The best claim in terms of pattern that I can make for the passage is that it extends the Lilliputians' comic incomprehension of Gulliver.[42] Perhaps all one can say is that not all discernible patterns in a literary work are utilized fully[43] or, as Martin Price remarks, that to try to find significance in every pattern is paranoid; details or incidents may serve the rest of a work like the "rougher texture at the lower part of the statue or the building."[44]

But whatever degree of attention detail demands, it cannot be isolated from its context. Isolation takes at least two forms. The first deviates into that literal-mindedness already noted. The second takes the high priori road: it consists in a series of deductive generalizations that too often heads in one direction while the work heads in another. Shakespeare was a Christian; *Hamlet* is a Christian play; Hamlet is generally admirable if mixed up; Hamlet refrains from killing Claudius at prayer because of Christian scruples. Never mind what Hamlet says or does. Similarly, any deductions about *Gulliver* which start from Swift's Christianity or fragmented personality or anal retentiveness (or expulsiveness) or whatever must be extremely modest in their claims, since they are inherently suspect.

The most common form of literary "underlining" is repetition: one topic that appears in all four parts of *Gulliver* and to which most critics grant varying degrees of significance is deterioration. Whether the references to deterioration are linked[45] or treated by piecemeal comment, they illustrate how flexibly *Gulliver* must be read and how willfully critics have read it. Discussion of these references can start by taking into account the sharpness with which they differ in clarity and significance. In describing the "ideal" laws of Lilliput, Gulliver says he is referring to "the original Institutions, and not the most scandalous Corruptions into which these People are fallen by the degenerate Nature of Man" (1.6.60). Between the past institutions and present system of Lilliput no serious connection exists. Similarly, when Gulliver's ideal England is reduced to something worse than its imperfect actual state by the king of Brobdingnag, he remarks, "I observe among you some Lines of an Institution, which in its Original might have been tolerable; but these half erased, and the rest wholly blurred and blotted by Corruptions" (2.6.132). In both instances, Swift has added a further device, the perfect state, to Gulliver and the natives as a means of satirizing European society.

The significance of other remarks on deterioration depends on general interpretive views. In part 4, Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master tells him that, according to tradition, the Yahoos are degenerate descendants of Gulliver's own species (4.9.272), and Gulliver (in the edition of 1726) suspects that the original pair were

42/Greenacre (n. 24 above) finds the hat psychoanalytically significant (p. 25, n. 5), but I cannot recall another critic who discusses this incident.

43/See Michel Riffaterre, "Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's *les Chats*," in *Structuralism*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (Garden City, N.Y., 1970), p. 191 and passim.

44/Martin Price, "The Irrelevant Detail and the Emergence of Form," in *Aspects of Narrative*, ed. J. Hillis Miller (New York, 1971), pp. 82, 89–91. Swaim picks out a number of "curiously tangential" patterns: "female caprice, the wild tales of nurses to children, the activities of footmen, the evils of beggary" (p. 38, n. 1).

45/See in particular Z. S. Fink, "Political Theory in *Gulliver's Travels*," *ELH* 14 (1947).

English (4.12.322). Gulliver says he hopes to live in solitude after his exile from Houyhnhnmland in order to avoid "degenerating into the Vices and Corruptions of my own Species" (4.11.283) and afterward laments in his letter to his cousin Sympson, "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" (p. 8). Explanation of such remarks cannot be separated from a general view of Gulliver's stay in Houyhnhnmland.

But certain statements about deterioration in parts 2 and 3 are more important and even harder to assess. In Brobdingnag, Gulliver is "much diverted with a little old Treatise . . . of Morality and Devotion. . . . [It] treats of the Weakness of Human kind; and is in little Esteem except among Women and the Vulgar." Again, the narrative irrelevance and long summary of this book underline its significance. Its author, writes Gulliver,

> went through all the usual Topicks of *European* Moralists; shewing how diminutive, contemptible, and helpless an Animal was Man in his own Nature; how unable to defend himself from the Inclemencies of the Air, or the Fury of wild Beasts. . . . He added, that Nature was degenerated in these latter declining Ages of the World, and could now produce only small abortive Births in Comparison of those in ancient Times. . . . There must have been Giants in former Ages . . . as . . . asserted by History and Tradition. . . . He argued, that the very Laws of Nature absolutely required we should have been made in the Beginning, of a Size more large and robust, not so liable to Destruction from every little Accident of a Tile falling from an House, or a Stone cast from the Hand of a Boy, or of being drowned in a little Brook. From this Way of Reasoning the Author drew several moral Applications useful in the Conduct of Life, but needless here to repeat. For my own Part, I could not avoid reflecting, how universally this Talent was spread of drawing Lectures in Morality, or indeed rather Matter of Discontent and repining, from the Quarrels we raise with Nature. And, I believe upon a strict Enquiry, those Quarrels might be shewn as ill-grounded among us, as they are among that People. [2.7.137–38]

This passage has provoked commentators—many of whom seem unacquainted with any previous discussion of it—to highly diverse views. Some of these views are opaque: one critic speaks of the treatise as "muffled orthodoxy"; a second, talking of Gulliver's ridicule of the universal habit of drawing lectures in morality, remarks, "Swift is not engaged in that kind of senseless complaint"; a third takes the passage's meaning for granted: "Of course [Swift] also satirises his own work, in an obvious way, when he talks about the 'little old Treatise.' "[46] Those whose opinions I can construe divide into two groups. Kathleen Williams speaks for one when she comments,

> Gulliver's condescending attitude towards this "little old Treatise" warns us we are to take the passage seriously. . . . But though the ideas are trite, and naively expressed, the writer's intention, to bring down man's pride by showing him as, "in his own Nature," a weak and helpless animal, is a serious matter. Montaigne is an obvious source, and

46/Lawlis (n. 28 above), p. 14; Peake (n. 29 above), p. 183; and Angus Ross, *Swift: "Gulliver's Travels"* (London, 1968), p. 52. I am unable to penetrate Martin Kallich's view in *The Other End of the Egg* (Bridgeport, Conn., 1970), but he does cite John Hawkesworth's useful reminder: to quarrel with nature is to quarrel with God (p. 40).

Godfrey Goodman's *The Fall of Man, or the Corruption of Nature* (1616). . . . Gulliver . . . shows how ill he has learned the lesson of relativity when he assumes that the large size of the giants, and of their stones and their brooks, invalidates the author's arguments and so, by implication, the view of European moralists that fallen man is insecure, weak, a stranger on the earth.[47]

As if in refutation of this comment, J. W. Johnson writes that Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* "elaborately scorned the postulations of Godfrey Goodman's *The Fall of Man* (1616) in the episode of Gulliver's visit to the library of the King in Brobdingnag where he finds a treatise that argues as proof of the age of the world the decline in size from their ancestors by the modern Brobdingnagian giants." And Mr. Johnson asserts that the work is mocked by being held in little esteem "except among Women and the Vulgar."[48]

The first problem with these comments is inaccuracy. Gulliver does not argue that the size of the giants or their stones or their brooks invalidates the author's assertions. Nor does he try to demonstrate anything about the age of the world from the decline in Brobdingnagian size. (For that matter, Gulliver found the treatise in Glumdalclitch's bedchamber, not in the king's library.) Also, arguments based on unattested "sources" like Goodman or Montaigne prove nothing; that there were "Giants in former Ages . . . as . . . asserted by History and Tradition" is a view derived easily enough from Genesis and Sir William Temple's "Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning," if sources are indispensable.

More important, *Gulliver* provides enough evidence in itself to determine the proper attitude toward the treatise. To start from some general points. Gulliver himself indicates two attitudes: (1) the moral applications to be drawn from the treatise are useful "but needless here to repeat" presumably because they are platitudes; (2) the quarrels we raise with nature which lead to these moral precepts are "ill-grounded" and, in fact, represent forms of "Discontent and repining." Gulliver seems to be saying, "This is all old-fashioned cant." I assume the passage would not be included at all unless Swift thought the point it made important, and if he agrees with Gulliver he must take a "Modern" view, which is a priori unlikely. Next, to pick up Ms. Williams's point, Gulliver learns from experience, but usually he learns the wrong lessons. As the physical common term between the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnagians, he discovers in vain that size is relative. In Brobdingnag he alternates between ludicrous assertiveness (up to

47/Kathleen Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise* (Lawrence, Kans., 1958), pp. 159–60. In "Swift's Alazon" (*Studia Neuphilogica*, vol. 30 [1958]), J. R. Wilson makes the important point that Gulliver here reveals himself as a "philosopher" and accepter of the progressive tendencies of the time (pp. 158–59); in "The Frailty of Lemuel Gulliver" (in *Essays in Literary History*, ed. Rudolf Kirk and C. F. Main [1960; reprint ed., New York, 1965]), Paul Fussell, Jr., remarks shrewdly that we can associate this treatise with the Bible (p. 124).

48/J. W. Johnson, "Swift's Historical Outlook," *Journal of British Studies* 4, no. 2 (1965): 61–62. The intuitionist approach appears in Sheldon Sacks's *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (Berkeley, Calif., 1964): "We immediately apprehend that Gulliver is to be believed in the following passage [about the treatise] . . . though immediately before and immediately after this comment he is the butt of ridicule" (pp. 42–43). More doubtfully in this camp is George Sherburn, who remarks that Swift playfully burlesques his own belief in the decay of nature ("Methods in Books about Swift," *Studies in Philology* 35 [1938]: 656). See also R. C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia* (Chicago, 1970), p. 64, n. 7.

his knees in a cow pat—2.5.124) or belittling defensiveness ("*narrow Principles* and *short Views*"—2.7.135), just as in Lilliput he alternated between awe at the Lilliputians' self-importance and vanity in his own.

This general context is focused by Gulliver's reluctant admission three paragraphs earlier than the passage quoted: "The Learning of this People is very defective; consisting only in Morality, History, Poetry, and Mathematicks; wherein they must be allowed to excel" (2.7.136). That the work is in little esteem "except among Women and the Vulgar" counts in its favor. In Laputa, things would have been substituted for words "if the Women in Conjunction with the Vulgar and Illiterate had not threatned to raise a Rebellion" (3.5.185).[49] The treatise may be too old-fashioned for those Brobdingnagian philosophers who determined, after much inquiry, that Gulliver was a *lusus naturae*, but it remains a trustworthy guide for ordinary people.

The strongest proof that Swift does not share Gulliver's contempt for the treatise emerges when its statements are juxtaposed with Gulliver's own experiences in Brobdingnag. He has suffered from "the Inclemencies of the Air" (hailstones) and "the Fury of wild Beasts" (rats, flies, wasps, a frog, a monkey). The more unusual specifics, "a Tile falling from an House, or a Stone cast from the Hand of a Boy, or of being drowned in a little Brook," also bear resemblances to some of Gulliver's recent experiences. When the monkey drops him on a "Ridge-Tyle . . . five Hundred Yards from the Ground" (2.5.123), Gulliver is afraid of falling to his death; earlier a schoolboy almost knocks out his brains with a hazelnut (2.2.98); and he nearly drowns in a bowl of cream (2.3.108).[50] Gulliver's hairbreadth scapes show we are subject to physical as well as moral evil, from which even Brobdingnagian size would not save us.

In part 3, Gulliver recurs to the topic of deterioration in bewildering ways, and here the old method of moving from the more to the less certain is a useful procedure. Caught up in Struldbruggian vision, Gulliver thinks he and his companions "would probably prevent that continual Degeneracy of human Nature, so justly complained of in all Ages" (3.10.210). In this instance, the immediate context of Gulliver's folly and the overdone rhetoric of "continual" and "so justly complained of" imply that Gulliver's statement is to be understood satirically. The other references to deterioration in part 3 run into trouble when approached from general positions, because Swift speaks, at least once, of the daily degeneracy of man ("Further Thoughts on Religion")[51] yet also writes as if he believes in the cyclic theory of the state (and culture) commonly held at the

49/See also Gulliver's attack on those "grovelling vulgar Minds" which would find the particulars about his excretions "insignificant" (2.1.94).

50/A. M. Taylor made the essential point twenty years ago: the treatise "only emphasizes a thesis which each of [Gulliver's] adventures in Brobdingnag has now demonstrated fully" ("Cyrano de Bergerac and Gulliver's 'Voyage to Brobdingnag,'" *Tulane Studies in English* 5 [1955]: 92; see also A. M. Taylor, "Sights and Monsters and Gulliver's 'Voyage to Brobdingnag,'" ibid. 7 [1957]: 51). But some critics, like Congreve's Petulant, are enemies to learning; they prefer to rely on their parts.

51/Stressed by Ernest Tuveson in "Swift: The Dean as Satirist," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 22 (1953): 370. Other critics invoke Temple's views in "Upon the Ancient and Modern Learning."

time.[52] Perhaps Swift combined these theories: history is a series of descending spirals. A more commonplace hypothesis is that Swift held both views without worrying over any theoretical inconsistency between them.

Certainly part 3 provides support for both theories and, as many have argued, shows that Swift, especially in this part, sacrificed consistency to local effect. The apparitions evoked on Glubbdubdrib (3.7–8) demonstrate any lesson that Swift requires: Gulliver's inclination "to be entertained with Scenes of Pomp and Magnificence" (3.7.195) and the trivial revelations he fishes up from the past; the heroic virtues of the sextumvirate; the nonadvancement of learning; the unexpected lineage of royalty; the disgusting nature of modern history. At this point, Gulliver manages to contradict himself in parallel constructions within a single paragraph: "Here I discovered the Roguery and Ignorance of those who pretend to write *Anecdotes*, or secret History.... Here I discovered the true Causes of many great Events that have surprized the World: How a Whore can govern the Back-stairs, the Back-stairs a Council, and the Council a Senate" (3.8.199). And Gulliver sails on, propelled by moral indignation, to provide an extensive secret, if unspecific, history of his own.

The two final incidents in Glubbdubdrib provide the sharpest apparent contradiction between deteriorationist and cyclic views of history. Gulliver is surprised to find "Corruption grown so high" under Augustus, while he also discovers in his contemporaries a sad decline from "some *English* Yeomen of the old Stamp" (3.8.201). If simple deterioration were Swift's simple view, then the Roman senate contrasted with its modern counterpart—"Heroes and Demy-Gods" versus "Pedlars, Pick-pockets, Highwaymen and Bullies" (3.7.196)—had made his point clearly enough. But the juxtaposition of the Roman Empire under Augustus and the modern English state suggests that England was "declining in the style of Rome"[53] or, more generally, that Swift was "prepared to see a disheartening cyclical pattern in history."[54] Whatever Swift's attitudes, it becomes evident that the reader must take each reference to deterioration in terms of its immediate context.[55] No theory about Swift's view of deterioration which relies on its consistency will be adequate.

The problem of determining Swift's views of deterioration seems minor compared with that of trying to choose between, or reconcile, radically conflicting interpretations of part 4 of *Gulliver*. As R. S. Crane remarked, "diversity of interpretation" may indicate that "interpreters have been working on a false assumption about [Swift's] technique,"[56] and it may well be that certain incorrect

52/See in particular *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissentions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome*, ed. F. H. Ellis (Oxford, 1967), where Swift argues that a proper balance of power in the state prolongs its life (p. 117).

53/J. W. Johnson, *The Formation of Neo-classical Thought* (Princeton, N.J., 1967), p. 65; see also p. 24. For Swift's dislike of Augustus, see *Contests and Dissentions*, p. 111. An extensive consideration of Swift's attitude toward deteriorationist and cyclic views of history appears in Johnson, "Swift's Historical Outlook" (n. 48 above).

54/Martin Price, *To the Palace of Wisdom* (Garden City, N.Y., 1964), p. 186.

55/For the theoretical weight of wider and narrower contexts, see Hirsch (n. 2 above), chap. 5.

56/R. S. Crane, "The Rationale of the Fourth Voyage," in *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. R. A. Greenberg (New York, 1961), p. 302.

assumptions have misled readers for a long time. Of course a few critics have rejected the common either/or approach to the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos,[57] but a both/and approach does not solve problems automatically. To say, for example, that Swift's "misanthropy is and is not misanthropic"[58] resolves discordant interpretations into a muddle, the question of Swift's general "misanthropy" being in any case a critical *ignis fatuus*. More useful is the comment that the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos serve both solemn and burlesque functions,[59] but this observation in itself does not explain how or why they do. And those critics who are still at an either/or stage tend to illustrate M. D. Clubb's happy echo of the Tale Teller, that the "wisdom" of part 4 "has proved to be a nut which has cost the critics many a tooth and paid the majority of them with nothing but a worm."[60]

To offer a new elucidation of Swift's technique, however, requires covering some tediously familiar ground. The Houyhnhnms are "ideal" in certain respects: many of us, some of the time anyway, would like to be known for our rationality, moderation, and life in accordance with nature, whatever that last phrase means. To write the Houyhnhnms off as deists or cold fish ignores too much that is admirable about them. And the Yahoos are undeniably unpleasant. Also, if Brobdingnag represents the more or less ideal state, why describe Houyhnhnmland at all? But it remains hard to accept the extreme view that Gulliver, under beneficent Houyhnhnm influence, is about to embark on a Christian program of rehabilitation of others at the end of the work.[61] Gulliver was not unusual among eighteenth-century squires in preferring his horses to his family, but his reasons for doing so seem unique.

Admirers of the Houyhnhnms often argue that readers for 200 years agreed that the Houyhnhnms represent goodness and the Yahoos evil and that modern views to the contrary are exercises in perverse ingenuity.[62] But readers have not so agreed, as Clubb's informative sketch of criticism of part 4 demonstrates. Many early references to Gulliver, the Lilliputians, the Houyhnhnms, and so forth show that the initial reaction to Swift's work was largely delight in his comic and satiric exuberance. Lord Peterborough caught some sense of what Swift was up to when he addressed him as a "notorious scribbling Magitian" (November 29,

57/Specifically Martin Price, who concludes that the Houyhnhnms offer a standard, not a pattern (*Swift's Rhetorical Art* [1953; reprint ed., Hamden, Conn., 1963], pp. 101–2). In his edition of *Gulliver's Travels* (Indianapolis, 1963), Mr. Price remarks, "A creature that is like man may throw light on man without being either a model or a caricature" (p. xx).

58/Carnochan, *Gulliver's Mirror* (n. 12 above), p. 88.

59/W. E. Yeomans, "The Houyhnhnm as Menippean Horse," *College English* 27 (1966): 451. Similarly, Arthur Clayborough asserts that Houyhnhnmland must be (1) "a burlesque of the serious 'Utopian Commonwealth'"; (2) "a vision of perfection which will have a serious import for the reader" (*The Grotesque in English Literature* [1965; reprint ed., Oxford, 1967], p. 142).

60/M. D. Clubb, "The Criticism of Gulliver's 'Voyage to the Houyhnhnms,' 1726–1914," in *Stanford Studies in Language and Literature*, ed. Hardin Craig (Stanford, Calif., 1941), p. 207.

61/Donald Greene, "The Sin of Pride," *New Mexico Quarterly* 34 (1964): 26. That this view was no momentary aberration is shown by its repetition: see Mr. Greene's "The Education of Lemuel Gulliver," in *The Varied Pattern: Studies in the 18th Century*, ed. Peter Hughes and David Williams (Toronto, 1971), p. 13.

62/E.g., C. A. Zimansky, "Gulliver, Yahoos, and Critics," *College English* 27 (1965): 45–49.

1726).[63] Perhaps the cleverest riposte to *Gulliver* ever made, because it is made in the same vein, is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's famous comment on the supposed authors (Swift, Arbuthnot, Pope): "Great Eloquence have they employ'd to prove themselves Beasts, and show such a veneration for Horses, that since the Essex Quaker [accused of sodomy with a mare] no body has appear'd so passionately devoted to that species; and to say truth, they talk of a stable with so much warmth and Affection I can't help suspecting some very powerfull Motive at the bottom of it" (to Lady Mar [November 1726]).[64]

In the course of the eighteenth century, Houyhnhnms and Yahoos became weapons for expressing views of human nature, without much attention paid to whatever Swift's views had been. Orrery, in accord with the deepening sentimentalism of the period, called part 4 "a real insult to mankind,"[65] while Wesley saw Gulliver's description of humanity as a just reflection of its fallen condition.[66] More shrewdly, perhaps, Thomas Sheridan remarked on Swift's "supposed satire" of human nature in his description of the Yahoos.[67] In modern times Orwell speaks for a small minority that, over the years, has thought men more like Houyhnhnms than Yahoos,[68] while Hugh Kenner summarizes the majority reaction: "The Yahoos are themselves, are ourselves, [readers] decide, but how dreadful of Swift to say so!"[69] The Yahoos touch that spring of guilt Hamlet expresses: "Use every man after his desert, and who should scape whipping?" Such differences of opinion make for admirable studies of readers' characters and attitudes, but in themselves they prove little about Swift's thinking.

Another common and equally useful approach to part 4 has been through sources and analogues. The sources—hints or details Swift might have picked up from Lucian, Rabelais, Cyrano de Bergerac, Foigny, etc.—have never been shown to amount to much; the analogues to everything and anything sometimes appear impressive before they are closely examined. Even Traugott's ingenious comparison of part 4 with *Utopia* ends, at best, in suggesting parallel attitudes between Swift and More toward the discrepancy between an impossible ideal and the actual world.[70] The most strongly pressed, and incessantly rediscovered, analogue has been between Plato's guardians and the Houyhnhnms, but the "perfection"

63/*Correspondence* (n. 19 above), 3:191.

64/*Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband (Oxford, 1965–67), 2:71–72.

65/See Clubb, p. 214; and A. O. Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature* (1961; reprint ed., Baltimore, 1968), pp. 14–21.

66/John Wesley, *Doctrine of Original Sin*, pt. 1, sec. 2, subsecs. 9–10.

67/Clubb, p. 207.

68/George Orwell, "Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of *Gulliver's Travels*" (1946), reprinted in *Shooting an Elephant* (London, 1950), p. 75.

69/Hugh Kenner, *The Counterfeiters* (Bloomington, Ind., 1968), p. 141. And the reader fills out Gulliver's attack (John Morris, "Wishes as Horses: A Word for the Houyhnhnms," *Yale Review* 62 [1973]: 356, 370).

70/J. C. Traugott, "A Voyage to Nowhere with Thomas More and Jonathan Swift: *Utopia* and 'The Voyage to the Houyhnhnms,'" *Sewanee Review* 69 (1961): 564 and passim. Northrop Frye's view of *Utopia*, which might well apply to part 4 of *Gulliver*, takes the same line: "The implication seems clear that the ideal state to More, as to Plato, is not a future ideal but a hypothetical one, an informing power and not a goal of action" ("Varieties of Literary Utopias," in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. F. E. Manuel [Boston, 1966], p. 36).

that inheres in the Houyhnhnms, as an arm or leg belongs to a man (4.12.296), is the product of strenuous effort in Plato's ideal state and must be constantly safeguarded. Looked at in context, the parallels between part 4 and the *Republic* hardly extend beyond the utopian coincidences one might expect. Finally, the history-of-ideas approach has produced one famous instance of triumph and misapplication, Crane's discovery that the distinction between rational and irrational animals in logic books of the time found its classic examples in man and horse: *Homo est animal rationale; equus est animal hinnibile.* From this, Crane concluded that Swift made the horse the rational animal and man the irrational one.[71] But as many critics have replied, to find a source for this aspect of part 4 proves nothing about Swift's use of that source.

Still Crane's approach does focus, if momentarily, on a central question: Why does Swift make his ideal creatures—if that is what they are—horses? Or animals which resemble horses in appearance, since it is clear that the Houyhnhnms can no more be identified with horses than Yahoos with men. (How many talking horses have you met recently?) Yet why insist on this resemblance, while at the same time making the Houyhnhnms quasi-human? (It could be argued that, instead of Gulliver being a middle term between Houyhnhnm and Yahoo, the Houyhnhnm is a middle term between horse and human.) Part of the answer, I think, has been asserted many times: Swift intended to confront man, with his claim to be a rational animal, with a literally rational animal. But to extend this conclusion to account for some of the more puzzling features of this voyage, it is helpful to review certain of Gulliver's expectations and experiences in Houyhnhnmland, especially on arrival, and the ways in which Swift lays out his satire.

As he opens his account of part 4, Gulliver stresses the story of Captain Pocock and the mutiny which strands him in another unknown country. But this time he has brought along trinkets for the savages, though he fails to see initially in the Yahoos any resemblance to man, savage or otherwise. When he meets his first Houyhnhnms, he decides they are magicians and observes erroneously "that their Language expressed the Passions very well" (4.1.226; cf. 4.4.242). He also decides they examine him like a "philosopher,"[72] a term which seems always used satirically in *Gulliver.*

On arrival at the Houyhnhnm dwelling, Gulliver wonders to see some of the animals "sitting down upon their Hams" and "more to see the rest employed in domestick Business." Though prepared to offer the master of the house his knives, bracelets, looking glass, and bead necklace, he is already convinced that any people "who could so far civilize brute Animals, must needs excel in wisdom all the Nations of the World" (4.2.228). But Gulliver is so dismayed by the discrep-

71/R. S. Crane, "The Houyhnhnms, the Yahoos, and the History of Ideas," in *Reason and the Imagination,* ed. J. A. Mazzeo (New York, 1962), esp. p. 248. Perhaps Crane might better have recalled Locke's "ass with reason," which would be "a species of an animal between, or distinct from," man and beast (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* bk. 4, chap. 4, par. 13).

72/See R. J. Dircks, "Gulliver's Tragic Rationalism," *Criticism* 2 (1960): 136. Like the Lilliputian and Brobdingnagian philosophers, the Houyhnhnms find Gulliver a *lusus naturae.* Joe Horrell, in "What Gulliver Knew," *Sewanee Review,* vol. 51 (1943), also insists on the importance of detail at the beginning of part 4 (p. 498) but reaches different conclusions from it.

ancy between expectation and experience that he fears his brain is disturbed, rubs his eyes, pinches himself to make sure he is not dreaming, and remarks, "I then absolutely concluded, that all these Appearances could be nothing else but Necromancy and Magick" (4.2.229). Gulliver is wrong about almost everything so far, but what is unusual is that he doubts his senses, since he has never before been surprised by facts. The repeated mention of magic, however, suggests a basic point: the Houyhnhnms are to turn Gulliver into a Yahoo, as Circe turned Odysseus's men into swine.

It is unnecessary to drag the reader, detail by detail, through the rest of part 4. What becomes plain is that, for all their admirable qualities, the Houyhnhnms are odd at the edges, so to speak. And it is their imitation of human actions which largely accounts for this effect. As James Beattie, with his sure grasp of the obvious, concluded long ago, the Houyhnhnms "are represented with attributes inconsistent with their natural structure."[73] Their language resembles German more than any other European one, possibly in compliment to George I; as Mr. Kenner points out, its real analogue is FORTRAN.[74] Nor do they suffer from lack of confidence: "The word *Houyhnhnm*, in their Tongue, signifies *a Horse;* and in its Etymology, *the Perfection of Nature*" (4.3.235).[75] (Perhaps in emulation, nineteenth-century biologists named us *Homo sapiens.*) But while their amusing aspects arise from the discrepancy between equine structure and human activity, their faintly repellent qualities are all their own. Their austerity may be admirable, but it is hard to accept their complacency and dogmatism. Gulliver's master spends a good deal of time congratulating himself that he is not like a Yahoo or human. Gulliver reinforces this pride by exaggerating human evil; he tells his master, for example, "that about a Million of *Yahoos*" had been killed so far (Gulliver left England in 1710) in the English wars against Louis XIV (4.5.245). And he makes human motivation meaningless by reducing the symbolic to the literal, as in the quarrel over "whether *Whistling* be a Vice or a Virtue" (4.5.246).[76] Mankind is conceded no redeeming qualities whatever. As has been often remarked, Gulliver has simply reversed his procedure in Brobdingnag, where with the "laudable Partiality" he falsely attributes to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2.7.133)[77] he idealized England. Now he vilifies it. Gulliver justifies his giving so "free a Representation" of his own species because "the many Virtues of those excellent *Quadrupeds* placed in opposite View to human Corruptions, had so far opened mine Eyes, and enlarged my Understanding, that I began to view the Actions and Passions of Man in a very different Light . . . " (4.7.258). His eyes now opened and his mind now darkened.[78]

73/Sir Walter Scott's concise summary of Beattie's position, cited in *Swift: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Kathleen Williams (London, 1970), p. 313. For Beattie's original remarks, see ibid., pp. 194–97.

74/Kenner, pp. 137–38.

75/J. F. Ross, *The Final Comedy of Lemuel Gulliver*, University of California Publications in English, vol. 8, no. 2 (Berkeley, Calif., 1941), pp. 188–89.

76/Price, *Swift's Rhetorical Art* (n. 57 above), pp. 98–99; see also H. D. Kelling, "*Gulliver's Travels*: A Comedy of Humours," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 21 (1952): 373.

77/Price, *Gulliver's Travels* (n. 57 above), p. 131, n. 1.

78/Kelling, p. 371.

From this recital and his knowledge of the Yahoos, Gulliver's master draws ready conclusions, some painfully appropriate to human nature and others which indicate a rationality heavily refracted through a nonhuman nature and experience. He finds the human form divine distinctly inferior to that of either Houyhnhnm or Yahoo; certain parts of Gulliver's story which the reader knows to be true either he cannot believe or cannot comprehend; and he makes simple errors, as in thinking one Yahoo could drive a dozen men before it (4.5.247), when Gulliver after landing had kept off forty Yahoos with his sword.[79]

Having satirized mankind through Gulliver's description and his master's comments, Swift turns to the parallels between men and Yahoos; their likeness (but not identity) is brought home in Gulliver's near rape by the female Yahoo, whose youth makes her seem not altogether so hideous as the rest of her kind—a fine touch (4.8.267). Then the reader is treated to a recitation of Houyhnhnm cardinal virtues, more appropriate to horses than to humans, "TEMPERANCE, *Industry*, *Exercise* and *Cleanliness*" (4.8.269), though one critic assures us these are virtues that Swift highly admired.[80] Their poetry, too, excels not only in "the Justness of their Similes" but in "the Minuteness, as well as Exactness of their Descriptions" (4.9.273); this is strange praise from an age addicted to generalization (apart from satire), just as their poems, with such subjects as "Praises of those who were Victors in Races, and other bodily Exercises" (4.9.274), suggest a curious resemblance to Pindar's odes.[81]

The climax of Gulliver's narrative comes with his expulsion from Houyhnhnm-land. The passage in which he takes leave of his master is too familiar to need quotation, and Swift could hardly underline it more heavily than through the device of making Gulliver fear that the reader will misunderstand the incident's significance, which emphasizes its absurdity even further. This leave-taking staggers even the strongest advocates of the "hard" view of part 4, Ehrenpreis suggesting that Swift's occasional use of the "high style" backfires in Gulliver's kissing the horse's hoof.[82] Others adopt the simpler explanation that Gulliver worships a beast idol[83] and one who looks coldly on his worshiper; only the inferior sorrel nag shows much emotion as Gulliver departs. Nature and reason, in the Houyhnhnm mode, exclude human feelings of love or affection. Seeking solitude, Gulliver encounters the savages he had originally anticipated and then,

79/Swaim (n. 8 above) comments on this last point (p. 182).

80/Yeomans (n. 59 above), p. 452. Of course, Swift did admire these virtues.

81/Kenner (n. 69 above), p. 140. Did Swift recall his early Pindaric odes? Occasionally the Houyhnhnms have been maligned; a French commentator remarks, "Il est difficile de concevoir des chevaux absorbés dans l'acte d'écrire" (Nelly Stéphane, "Nous ne sommes pas Gulliver," *Europe* 45, no. 463 [1967]: 22). It is impossible, since the Houyhnhnms "have not the least Idea of Books or Literature" (4.3.235, also 4.9.273).

82/Ehrenpreis, *Literary Meanings* (n. 32, above), p. 103. What "high style"? Perhaps Swift is not explicit enough for Ehrenpreis.

83/E.g., Price, *Swift's Rhetorical Art* (n. 57 above), p. 100. Calhoun Winton, in "Conversion on the Road to Houyhnhnmland," *Sewanee Review*, vol. 68 (1960), suggests that Gulliver's leave-taking parodies the Catholic custom of kissing the ring of a pope or bishop (p. 30). But Gulliver's action recalls the scene in *A Tale of a Tub* (sec. 4) in which Peter forces his brothers to kiss his foot—equivalent to the pope's slipper.

in quick contrast, the civilized and human Pedro de Mendez,[84] who at first thinks Gulliver's story "a Dream or a Vision" (4.11.287). If part 4 is a dream vision, much of it is a nightmare. And so to the conclusion, with the reference to Sinon, Gulliver's revulsion from his family, his conversations in the stable, attack on pride, and complaints to his cousin Sympson.

I have intended to stress in this sketch of part 4 some of the bases for conflicting views of it; as one summary runs, "the Houyhnhnms are at once grotesque and ideal; Gulliver is both crazed and ennobled by contact with them."[85] Given the lack of what Wayne Booth calls "stable ironies"[86] (Swift would have admired that phrase), violent arguments about the meaning of part 4 seem inevitable. But such arguments in themselves suggest how Swift succeeded in vexing as well as diverting his readers,[87] who demand a degree of simplification in literature that they would resist in ordinary life.

To see what Swift has accomplished in *Gulliver*, it is useful to recall certain of his recurrent satiric techniques. The basic premise of nearly all Swift's major satires is "What would happen if?" "What would happen if a Modern discoursed on religion and learning?" "What would happen if Christianity were abolished?" "What would happen if that self-styled rational animal, man, confronted wholly rational and irrational animals?" To this premise, Swift brings the device he noticed in Stella: the more someone defended an erroneous opinion, the more she encouraged him in it.[88] The narrator is central and always suspect in these satires, although Swift interposes an authorial voice from time to time.[89] Within this framework appear typical techniques: the interchange of inside and outside, of organic and mechanical, of literal and metaphorical. Literalization, the reduction of the mental or symbolic to the physical, or the treatment of the metaphorical as if it were literal, is especially significant, being to *Gulliver* what allegory is to *Pilgrim's Progress*. But literal can also turn into metaphorical: Gulliver expects to encounter savages and, instead, meets the Yahoos, who are "so savage by Nature" (4.9.271). Through these devices, Swift habitually attacks two or three objects at the same time: Gulliver waves his scimitar and dazzles the eyes of the Lilliputians, while failing to observe the 3,000 men drawn up to guard him (1.2.36). And of course the eventual target is human ostentatiousness and lack of perception.

What makes part 4 so puzzling is that Swift is not juxtaposing the usual two elements (Gulliver, Lilliputians) but three (Gulliver, Houyhnhnms, Yahoos), which creates much more complex satiric possibilities. And in themselves these elements have several aspects. The Houyhnhnms, for example, are simultaneously rational quadrupeds, horselike animals, representatives of certain human ideals,

84/Mr. Tuveson (n. 51 above) brings out the significance of the savages-sailors contrast (p. 374).
85/Clayborough (n. 59 above) p. 153.
86/Wayne Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago, 1974), pt. 1.
87/As Mr. Carnochan neatly observes, vexation and diversion are Swift's versions of the *utile* and *dulce* (*Gulliver's Mirror*, n. 12 above, p. 59).
88/"On the Death of Mrs. Johnson," in *Works*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1962), 5:235.
89/The early and most notable exception to this common pattern is *The Battle of the Books*, in which Swift experimented with a reliable, inconsequential narrator and a restless series of allegories: the hills of Parnassus, the spider and the bee, and the battle itself.

and mixtures of human and nonhuman characteristics. Swift demands that the reader approach part 4 as he would a multilevel allegory like *The Faerie Queene*, where the Red Cross Knight can represent at the same time a brash young man, Protestantism, St. George (England), the soul seeking holiness, and holiness itself. In the case of Spenser, the reader accustoms himself to intermittent awareness, to paying attention at a particular time to perhaps only one or two of the poem's allegorical possibilities. And so he must in part 4 of *Gulliver;* to try to reduce it to one dimension leads to ingenious conclusions which strike the reader with an immediate lack of conviction, like the view that the combination of ideal and ridiculous in the Houyhnhnms merely indicates Swift's pessimism.[90]

Yet Swift goes beyond Spenser in one important respect: his techniques do not carry inherent meanings. To the critic of Swift who has learned—to shift examples—that in *King Lear* blindness leads to insight or that in *Paradise Lost* the moral is always superior to the physical, the assumption of fixed significance is equally natural and fatal. We cannot arrive at a consistent meaning of part 4 by drawing general conclusions from reading it as a "whole." In fact, its meanings (it has no *one* meaning) derive not from giving its elements fixed attributes but only from viewing these elements in a series of relations.[91]

Swift established three major contrasts: Houyhnhnm-Yahoo, Houyhnhnm-Gulliver, Yahoo-Gulliver. To these he adds, as subordinate analogies, Houyhnhnm-horses and Yahoos–unpleasant animals, while Gulliver represents, to a significantly varying extent, humanity. By manipulating these contrasts, Swift builds up an extensive range of satiric effects, which can only be touched on here. To pair Houyhnhnm and Yahoo contrasts pure reason with pure animality. To pair Houyhnhnm and Gulliver makes the Houyhnhnm seem physically awkward, emotionless, and morally superior. To pair Yahoo and Gulliver stresses, among other effects, human irrationality and sinfulness.[92] But many effects are much more complicated. For example, when Gulliver's master illuminates human avarice by citing the Yahoo habit of picking up "*shining Stones*" (4.7.260), he is satirizing human and Yahoo greed. But this account also satirizes the credulous Gulliver and his master, since they fail to recognize that money has been reduced from a unit of exchange to a physical object.

These juxtapositions defy reduction. Henry Craik asked whether "the picture of the Houyhnhnms is not simply another side of the satire on humanity?"[93] It may be, if the reader shares Gulliver's disgust at our inability to achieve Houyhnhnm perfection after more than six months' warning (Gulliver to Sympson, p. 6). Or to think that such perfection is possible or suitable to man at all.

Repeatedly, those who most admire the Houyhnhnms have been quick to recall Swift's vocation and beliefs as arguments for his total condemnation of human depravity. Surely there is much to condemn in human behaviour, and surely

90/M. M. Kelsall, "*Iterum* Houyhnhnm: Swift's Sextumvirate and the Horses," *Essays in Criticism* 19 (1969): 43–45.

91/See Horrell (n. 72 above), p. 500.

92/On sin, see R. M. Frye's well-known article, "Swift's Yahoo and the Christian Symbols for Sin," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (1954): 201–17.

93/ So summarized by Clubb (n. 60 above), p. 225.

Swift condemns it. As he told des Fontaines, *Gulliver* "ne tire pas son merite de certaines modes ou manieres de penser et de parler, mais d'une suite d'observations sur les imperfections, les folies, et les vices de l'homme."[94] But Swift's dislike of Calvinism is clear enough in *A Tale of a Tub;* why attribute a Calvinist bearing to *Gulliver*? It is more useful to recall Swift's remark that one should not expect more reason and virtue from human nature than it is capable of.[95]

In part 4 of *Gulliver*, the road of excess leads to a stable. The proud misanthropy with which Gulliver regards the world at the end of his story warns the reader how cautiously he, in his turn, must judge the juxtapositions it presents. Each has its own effect and its own significance. As A. E. Dyson has remarked, Swift relates man not to angel and beast but to Houyhnhnm and Yahoo.[96] The angel-man-beast hierarchy is appropriate to Pope's didacticism in the *Essay on Man;* complicated as Pope's uses of it can be, it would have been too simple for Swift's satiric purposes in *Gulliver*. As "an Author perfectly blameless," Gulliver writes "for the noblest End, to inform and instruct Mankind" (4.12.293). He does so, indeed, but behind Gulliver's sober narrative lie the shifting riddles of Erasmus's Folly. Gulliver leaves "the judicious Reader to his own Remarks and Applications" (4.12.292).[97] And Swift laughs in his face.

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94/*Correspondence* (n. 19 above), 3:226.

95/"Of Public Absurdities in England," cited in B. C. Harlow, "Houyhnhnmland: A Utopian Satire," *McNeese Review* 13 (1962): 58.

96/A. E. Dyson, *The Crazy Fabric* (London, 1965), p. 11; and also Tuveson (n. 51 above): "The culminating irony of *Gulliver* is that when we finally arrive in a utopia, we find it is the land of another species" (p. 375).

97/Cf. Kelling (n. 76 above), pp. 374–75.