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The Structure of *Gulliver's Travels*

by Robert P. Fitzgerald

It was read by the high and the low, the learned and illiterate. Criticism was for a while lost in wonder; no rules of judgement were applied to a book written in open defiance of truth and regularity. But when distinctions came to be made, the part which gave least pleasure was that which describes the *Flying Island.*

—Johnson's "Life of Swift"

THE phenomenal and continuing popularity of *Gulliver's Travels* raises the question that this essay will attempt to answer. In many ways a very private, very topical, very adult book, to be especially relished by Swift's fellow Scribblerians, it has become, in standard and abridged editions, translations, selections, continuations, films, versions for children, one of the most widely known, most public, most generally appreciated works in the history of literature. What accounts for this vitality? Certainly not such things as the subtleties of Swift's style, irony, or use of a *persona*, nor the satirical force of his presentation of particular men, events, and institutions. These contribute but they hardly explain the appeal of the book to those who read it in simplified or partial versions or who have never heard of Walpole, the Treaty of Utrecht, or the Royal Society.

The answer that will be developed here is that the vitality is the result of the use on Swift's part of a *structure* (a term preferable

in this case to *plot*) which has been compellingly relevant to central concerns in the lives of many generations of men. In this sense its appeal is comparable to that of a widely disseminated myth or folktale, whose different versions still express a fundamentally unchanging structure.[1] The argument is not that Swift himself consciously articulated the structure that will be described, or that it determined all of the concrete details of the *Travels*. The structure is comparable to the structure of a sentence, unconsciously but complexly grasped by both speaker and listener. It can be seen as a kind of model which inspired, guided, and limited Swift's imagination in the rendering of his work. The particular structure of the *Travels* follows, I believe, from the central problem that the work deals with and from the way Swift analysed this problem. The large central concern appears to be the equivocal value of society: to survive the individual must live in a society, must adapt to it, and yet the social order inevitably frustrates or disappoints him. A structure, a model, results from his treatment of this problem in terms of another problem—the equivocal value of knowledge. Man has a drive to perceive, to record, to evaluate, in general "to know," yet he can have little confidence in the truth or value of what he knows, nor is he necessarily happier in knowledge than in ignorance. The analogous intertwining of these two ideas is the structure which leads to the particular narratives of the *Travels*, each of which, in critically different circumstances (like laboratory experiments done under varied conditions), shows the fundamental truth: the individual cannot make a permanent, fulfilling, and harmonious adjustment to a social order because there will always be a failure in "knowing" on the part of the individual, the society, or both. In some cases the failure in knowledge is itself a result of the inadequacies of society. Thus the two problems are both parallel

[1] I have been inspired to use this term by the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, particularly his essay "The Structural Study of Myth" (reprinted in his collection *Structural Anthropology* [New York, 1963], pp. 206–31) and his study of some related South American myths, *Le Cru et le Cuit* (Paris, 1964). The original idea for this paper came from my feeling that the structuralist approach illustrated by these works might fruitfully be applied to *Gulliver's Travels*, at least as a beginning point.

and reciprocally causative.[2] Before we turn to a detailed examination of the *Travels* to test the validity of this formulation, we may note that certain general features of the book seem unquestionably consonant with it. Swift always presents us with Gulliver, the individual, the one, in the process of adapting to a society, to the many, with concomitant difficulties, successes, misunderstandings, and disappointments on both sides. The societies are not Gulliver's own or very similar to his own. There is always a "difference" to dramatize not only the problems of mutual adaptation but also the problems of knowing. By upsetting the assumptions of both the individual and the society, the "difference" gives the opportunity for exploring the theme of the reliability and usefulness of knowledge. And this theme is always related to the problem of social harmony.

We are first presented with an ordinary man in an ordinary world. A middle-class Englishman, Gulliver is educated for a profession, acquainted with the skills and learning useful in his world and in his travels. He has an almost obsessive interest in physical fact, as he records names, dates, sums of money, the exact duration of voyages, latitudes and longitudes. This interest is pointed up in Lilliput when we discover that he has retained from the shipwreck his watch, spectacles, pocket perspective and compass, devices for more accurately seeing or measuring. Like

[2] There is some direct evidence that both problems were on Swift's mind as he approached the conclusion of the writing of the *Travels*. In his letter to Pope of September 29, 1725 he made some famous remarks related to the *Travels*: "I have ever hated all Nations professions and Communityes and all my love is towards individualls for instance I hate the tribe of Lawyers, but I love Councellor such a one, Judge such a one for so with Physicians (I will not Speak of my own Trade) Soldiers, English, Scotch, French; and the rest but principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I hartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth. . . . I have got Materials Towards a Treatis proving the falsity of that Definition *animal rationale*; and to show it should be only *rationis capax*. Upon this great foundation of Misanthropy (though not Timons manner) The whole building of my Travells is erected." (*The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, III [Oxford, 1963], 103). Here we see Swift concerned with (1) the distinction between the individual and the group; and (2) seeing man as a creature who actively, if sometimes falsely, engages in the process of reasoning.

most men Gulliver takes his own society for granted. It is always in the background, always a society to which he can compare the strange ones of his travels. The travels themselves typically put him in a mediatory status, where, as elaborately worked out in the conclusions of Parts II and IV, his adaptation to different worlds makes it difficult to readjust to the old one. The opening frame also establishes a pattern for his attempts to thrive in the social order. He is at first successful in his medical practices and his voyaging but disappointment follows. The pattern of striving, comparative success, failure is one that Gulliver endures not only among his own people but also in the fantasy worlds.

The realistic tone is broken when the solitary Gulliver awakens to find himself among creatures who are one-twelfth his height. This, the first difference, introduces the truth/fantasy theme that will be developed so richly and wittily in the *Travels*. We know that in fact there are no little people, big people, or rational horses. Yet Gulliver, the master of fact, is always assertive about his veracity, most repetitiously in the last chapter of the book. "I have not been so studious of Ornament as of Truth. . . . I rather chose to relate plain Matter of Fact. . . . I imposed on myself as a Maxim, never to be swerved from, that I would *strictly adhere to Truth*" (pp. 291–2).[3] Whenever he returns to his own people he is anxious to be believed and brings forth his animals, artifacts, and arguments to convince the doubters. Ironically but just as assertively, Swift is telling what he took to be the most important kind of truth, moral truth about human nature and human history, for which the fantasy provides a vehicle. This truth-telling works on various levels. The Emperor of Lilliput's decision to blind Gulliver can be taken as an example. In the most general way the episode tells us that ingratitude is a common failing among men; in a more specific way it tells us that princes tend to turn upon great men who have served them; in a private, allegorical way it renders the truth of

[3] All quotations from the *Travels* are taken from the edition of Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1959).

an historical event, the treatment of the members of the Oxford-Bolingbroke ministry by the Whig government of George I. It is consistent with the moral truth/physical truth contrast that the chronological and geographical details of the *Travels*, though obsessively recorded by Gulliver, sometimes violate the possible. More broadly, this obsession can be seen as a kind of continuing irony, in that the facts of time and place are largely irrelevant to the real problems he is faced with.

The size difference is fantastic but the little people are in all other ways much like contemporary Europeans. They have an Emperor, ministers, learning, methods of education, palace intrigues, religious disputes, wars, and so on. Some of their concerns seem trivial but the point is clear that European countries have equally trivial concerns, if one contemplates them from the vantage point of a Gulliver. In addition, some of their legal and educational institutions, at least before they became corrupted, are superior to the comparable European ones. Swift begins, then, his exploration of social possibilities by presenting a very real, very possible world. His doing this makes reasonable his choice of a size difference to distinguish his hero. The Lilliputians are in a way still Gulliver's own people. He is not strikingly different from them in his psychology, intellectual powers, or physical configuration. It is also reasonable that he be larger than they. If he were smaller, his feelings of fear and insecurity (as in Part II) would make impossible the kind of detached, elevated, satiric view of an ordinary world that Swift presents in Part I.

In this ordinary world the equivocal nature of the social order turns on the difficult problem of Gulliver's size, that is, his greatness. In many ways the Lilliputians are good to him. At considerable inconvenience and expense they feed, clothe, house him, and teach him the language (his treatment here paralleling the way a new born member of any society is cared for). He is given his freedom and called upon to help against their enemies, his capturing of the Blefuscudian fleet bringing him honors and renown. Conversely the Lilliputians are often bad to him. He is

hurt by their arrows, kept in chains, led to agree to articles of behavior which he finds dishonorable. The decision of the Emperor and his council to blind Gulliver is an ironic result of his greatness. His refusal to destroy the Blefuscudians, his courtesy toward their embassy, his quenching of the fire in the Empress's apartment arouse fear and suspicion. When privately informed of the decision Gulliver quietly leaves, and his life in Lilliput is over.

A comparable kind of pattern applies to the problem of knowledge in Lilliput. The size difference itself provides occasion for exercising the faculty of comparison. Thus Gulliver delights in telling how large Lilliputian things are in the European scale. In the same way the Lilliputians are led to comparative reasoning to determine how much to feed him, how to fit his clothes, and so on. Some ambiguities of knowing are playfully and humorously worked out. In the catalogue they make of Gulliver's possessions Clefren and Marsi Frelock are delightfully baffled by the purpose of his watch. He himself can so lose sight of the truths of nature that he feels obliged to make a solemn protestation that he did not have an affair with Flimnap's wife. The Lilliputians find it difficult to believe that there are countries inhabited by peoples as large as Gulliver, and are convinced that he must have fallen from the moon. The significant failure, however, occurs in the realm of moral knowledge. Gulliver is right to be merciful to the Blefuscudians; he is right to put out the fire indecorously rather than let it burn. But he is not knowledgeable enough about courts and ministers to realize that these good acts will occasion betrayal. On the other hand the Lilliputian court is so obsessed with suspicion that it cannot simply trust Gulliver, and is so overconfident of its power to master him, that it drives away one who could continue to do great service to the state. The failure is metaphorically paralleled by the concern with "seeing." In comparison to the little people Gulliver has naturally telescopic sight. Thus he can see farther than they physically as well as morally, but not so finely (he cannot see their physical imperfections, they are alert to the

"fine" implications of his behavior). This is climaxed by the decision to blind him, a decision which, Gulliver notes, only ignorance made him think severe. "If I had then known the Nature of Princes and Ministers . . . I should with great Alacrity and Readiness have submitted to so *easy* a Punishment" (p. 73).

In Lilliput we see greatness rewarded by rejection. But only the naïve would expect anything else.

"When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest," said Johnson to Boswell. A simpler way to put it is that once you have thought of the little men, then of course you think of the big men. However, Part I generates Part II by a system of oppositions which reaches much beyond the reversal of size.

PART I	PART II
Two countries.	One country.
Lilliputians are like contemporary Europeans.	Brobdingnagians are better than contemporary Europeans; are upholders of "ancient" values.
The Lilliputians are at first good to to Gulliver, then bad.	The Brobdingnagians are at first bad to Gulliver (the farmer, the onerous performing), then good.
Things were better in Lilliput before (institutions have decayed).	Things are better now than they were (civil strife has been overcome).
Bad Emperor.	Good King.
Gulliver is active (ends the war, puts out the fire).	Things are done to him.
Gulliver, in being superior to the little people, acts better than Europeans.	In his dialogue with the King Gulliver is a defender of Europe.
Gulliver a peacemaker.	Gulliver offers gunpowder, i.e., war.
Gulliver deliberately leaves.	Gulliver is passively delivered when the eagle flies away with his box.

Some of our remarks about Lilliput have their obvious counterparts in a consideration of the land of the giants. We are still in a real world. Brobdingnag is a better society than

Lilliput-Europe, but it is not powerfully improbable, its virtues being ones that Swift and his age freely attributed to the great ages of classical civilization. The size difference again gives occasion for the exercise of comparison on the part of Gulliver and his hosts. Things are measured and recorded, the giants come to realize the humanity of Gulliver, he closely observes their customs. Accommodation takes place. Gulliver is fed, clothed, housed, learns the language. Because of his value as a curiosity he is preserved, survives the trials with the farmer, and is treated well at court. Special furniture, rooms, and boxes are designed for him, his nurse looks after him. But all of this is attended by a continuing insecurity and unhappiness. "I was indeed treated with much Kindness . . . but it was upon such a Foot as ill became the Dignity of human Kind" (p. 139).

Making Gulliver small and insecure and the Brobdingnagians large and wise gives direction to the theme of knowing. Gulliver's evaluation of their learning is obviously meant by Swift to be ironic. "The Learning of this People is very defective; consisting only in Morality, History, Poetry and Mathematicks; wherein they must be allowed to excel. But, the last of these is wholly applied to what may be useful in Life . . . so that among us it would be little esteemed" (p. 136). In contrast the modern technology that Gulliver has mastered is deflated. His microscopic vision, paralleling the use of microscopes in Europe, and unnaturally fine for the land of the giants, only emphasizes and exaggerates ugliness. He sees skin defects that are invisible to the giants, is overwhelmed by a close view of a breast cancer, can see in too much detail "the most hateful Sight of . . . the Lice" (p. 113). The arts of sailing and navigation were often brought forward by the moderns as evidence of superiority to the ancients. The giants are not seafarers, Gulliver is. But these arts are only ironically displayed when, subject to many mishaps, he rows and sails his little vessel in a trough. Gunpowder, a modern invention, is contemptuously refused by the King. However, moral knowledge is again the critical issue. We may

focus here on the King, who is the epitome of the wisdom of his people. He is a master of practical and moral truth, a shrewd observer (he sees through Gulliver's presentation of Europe), a leader who strives for peace and justice. It is one mark of his wisdom that he is convinced by Gulliver's arguments that there are races of little people and that Gulliver himself, being rational, should be treated with respect. Gulliver can accept and admire much of the wisdom of the giants. However, at critical points he rejects it. An instance is provided by the famous remark of the King that the bulk of Europeans appear to be from Gulliver's account "the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth" (p. 132). It is reasonable for the King to believe this; it would be reasonable for a European not to accept his evaluation. But Gulliver's reaction is petty and unrealistic, inspired by vanity and pride. In the same way he rejects the moral of the sacred book of the giants, which teaches, like the Bible (or at least so Swift thought), that man is mean and contemptible and full of pride. However, the ultimate failure of knowledge in Brobdingnag is both reciprocal and inevitable. The King can move beyond his own speculations that Gulliver is a small native animal or a piece of clockwork, beyond the meaningless conclusion of his scholars that he is a *lusus naturae*, to see Gulliver as a man; but even he can not completely accept Gulliver as an equal in humanity, and thus, for example, he hopes to mate and breed him; or is simply entertained by Gulliver's terrifying experience with the monkey. Lesser Brobdingnagians are more insensitive. The maids of honor scandalously ignore him in their undressing. Even the kind nurse Glumdalclitch is only amused at some of his misadventures, painful enough to him. The giants can see that Gulliver is in all significant respects a man, but his stature makes it impossible for them to feel this as truth. Gulliver has to accept the fact of his stature but he reacts to this fact with either self-pity or vain praise of the accomplishments of his own people. His delivery from this impossible situation gives Swift one final opportunity for the ironic. Gulliver has yearned for

liberty and deliverance, but when he returns he finds adjustment difficult. Having lived with the giants one cannot easily return to the human scale.

In Part II we have been presented with another general reason for frustration. Those who are not powerful, who do not command respect, are subject, no matter what their intrinsic worth, to the whim and misjudgment of "the great." Furthermore, social good and individual good cannot be equated. Brobdingnag is a better world than Lilliput. But Gulliver was more secure, more free, less threatened in the lesser world. He found a wisdom in Brobdingnag that his social position made it impossible for him to practice.

The scheme of Parts I and II leads by opposition to the scheme of Parts III and IV. Having explored the possibilities of physical differentiation in real worlds, Swift moves on to a differentiation based on mind in fantasy worlds. Physical congruence will be preserved. The people of Part III are physically not distinguishable from Europeans. The Yahoos, if clothed and cleaned up, would pass for men; the Houyhnhnms look like horses. Concomitantly, the nature of the fantasy is changed. The Flying Island, spirits called up from the dead, Immortals, Yahoos, horses with reason, all these make demands upon our belief that are different from the demands of Parts I and II, where everything is normal except for size.

In terms of our interests the significance of the comparative unpopularity of Part III should not be overlooked. Johnson's observation that "the part which gave least pleasure was that which describes the *Flying Island*" has always been true for the general reader. The reasons for this can, I believe, be related to the particular way Swift worked out the model for this section. The knowledge theme is here fully and richly developed. The Laputa-Balnibarbi-Lagado section shows us once again Gulliver being saved by a foreign people, adjusting, being clothed and fed, learning the language. The leaders of this society use their minds in obsessive, destructive, or impractical ways. In contrast, Gulliver is the commonsensical man. A suit of clothes should fit

(his, designed by mathematical calculation, do not). Theories of agriculture must be tested by whether or not they produce more fruitful crops. The Laputans' knowledge of music and mathematics may be true, but their obsession with it turns them from the task of governing wisely, and the whole society is debilitated by a destructive theorizing. The Flying Island is an appropriate symbol. It is in itself a remarkable achievement of technological truth; but the leaders who reside on it are superstitious and tyrannical, using the Island itself to terrorize their people. The Academy of Lagado is another instance of the perversion: what should be a center of learning is an institution most of whose members pursue fantastic, vile, or insane projects. Some incidents in the Glubbdubdrib and Luggnagg sections also explore the theme of knowledge. Through calling up the dead, Gulliver discovers that much of what men take for historical fact is untrue. And true art and true philosophy, as represented by Homer and Aristotle, have only been distorted by the squabbling and triviality of their commentators. Gulliver's discovery that there are some Luggnaggians with the gift of immortality is also thematic. In his ignorance he envies their state, rhapsodizes about its possibilities for the accumulation of wisdom, finds out the truth—that their immortality is accompanied by senility. Part III often is concerned with allegorical truth. The Flying Island is probably a representation of the court of George I. And the Academy is probably a metaphorical use of the Royal Society to represent the follies of the Whig government. But one does not have to know these particular truths to get the general point, which is consistent with the views of the King of Brobdingnag. Knowledge must be judged by its relevance to the common concerns of life.

What makes Part III significantly different from the other parts is that the social theme is relatively undeveloped. There is little interaction between Gulliver and the various peoples he encounters. In Laputa he is treated as a guest rather than as a new member of the society. The Laputans are bored by him; he eventually is bored by them; and he leaves. In Glubbdubdrib and

Luggnagg Gulliver is a tourist making observations on his journey home. In Parts I, II, and IV he has to live with the peoples he encounters. They are always of intense interest to him, and he to them. However, one appreciates Swift's problem. The scheme calls for the presentation of debased and perverted minds. If Gulliver were forced to accommodate to them, the effect would be disturbing. In a small way this happens in Chapter Six, where Gulliver enters into the spirit of the Academy of Lagado, dismisses with contempt the Political Projectors who celebrate wisdom and goodness, and makes sympathetic recommendations to the professor who discovers plots by examining the excrement of suspected persons. This chapter can be worked in through irony and allegorical implications, but an extended section of the *Travels* presented in these terms would destroy Gulliver's general role as the basically good man trying to find his way, to endure, in difficult circumstances. Swift's solution, then, was to present in Part III the possibilities of tyrannical, grotesque, evil worlds, but to preserve Gulliver as Gulliver by making him an observer of, rather than a participant in, the world he encounters. This scheme also has the effect of preparing for a contrast in Part IV. In Parts I and II Gulliver had to accept the strange worlds he found himself in; in Part III he can simply observe as he passes through; in Part IV he will find a world which he will passionately want to continue to live in.

Schematically, Part III can be seen to generate Part IV by another process of oppositions.

PART III	PART IV
Various societies.	One society (with the Yahoos society subordinated to it).
The societies are complex (elaborate technology, learning, social organization, indulgence in the occult).	A simple society (no technology, no letters, no religion, simple social organization).
Gulliver usually shows common sense.	Gulliver loses common sense when he tries to become a Houyhnhnm.

Gulliver a non-involved observer, guest, tourist.	Gulliver wants to live the rest of his life as a member of the society.
Allegorical.	Non-allegorical (at least none has been convincingly argued).

Knowing that Swift wrote Part IV before Part III, and having the intuitive feeling that there would be no strong sense of incompleteness if Part III had been omitted, we can, from another point of view, see Part IV as a development from Parts I and II. They present realistic and therefore mixed societies. The Lilliputians are not all bad, the Brobdingnagians not all good. Part IV presents extremes, with a consequent movement into a different kind of fantasy, a presentation in the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos of a world which cannot easily be compared to ordinary and possible human societies.

When Gulliver first encounters the Yahoos he does not in his antipathy see their human configuration. When he first encounters the Houyhnhnms he sees them as ordinary horses, then as horses brought to a remarkable level of domestication, then perhaps as conjurers who have magically assumed the form of horses. His seeing is of course false. The Yahoos turn out to be men without reason, the discovery being traumatically made by Gulliver when his master, trying to understand his nature, diligently compares his countenance to that of a Yahoo. The Yahoos are horrible not because they are animals but because they show what the basic, instinctual nature of man is—a point developed in detail when the Houyhnhnm master, using the account of Europe given him by Gulliver, is able to demonstrate the Yahoo drive behind European institutions and customs. The Houyhnhnms are rational creatures whose society reflects the particular kind of reason that is their gift—simple, intuitive, not affected by emotion. The differentiation in this Part is two-sided. Gulliver is physically the same as the Yahoos, mentally different. As a man, he is physically and mentally different from the Houyhnhnms. However, he has the ability to admire and imitate their gift of reason and from them learns what he takes

to be the most significant kind of knowledge. "I FREELY confess, that all the little Knowledge I have of any Value, was acquired by the Lectures I received from my Master, and from hearing the Discourses of him and his Friends" (p. 278).

In making an accommodation Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms are in a position of theoretical choice. Is he Houyhnhnm or Yahoo? Should they treat him as a Yahoo or as one of their own? His status is in fact mediatory. He is neither one, as metaphorically indicated by his concern with clothing, which distinguishes him from both. But the social reality of the land of the horses demands that he be one or the other. The choice is not a real one for Gulliver, and he makes the funny, grotesque, but curiously rewarding attempt to become one of the Houyhnhnms. He learns the language, finds a native diet, observes the customs, habits, learning, and domestic economy of the horses, tries to be like them in all ways, even to the point of adopting their gait. He accepts his master's evaluation of Europe, in this sense turning away from the old world to accept a new. The acknowledgement of the wisdom of his master drives Gulliver to try to rise above his own nature. And for a time he is as happy as he ever will be in this life. As always, however, the accommodation breaks down. When the Houyhnhnm Assembly makes its choice and decides that Gulliver, being Yahoo, must leave, our themes come forcefully together. The Assembly is not seeing clearly when it argues that Gulliver is a Yahoo and should be treated as one. In his contentment he has lost sight of the fact that his very nature makes it forever impossible for him to be one of the Houyhnhnms, or for them to accept him completely as one of their own. The break from the society is paralleled by a failure of knowledge on both sides. The story is the extreme presentation of the dynamic that Swift has been working out. Gulliver had found his greatest happiness by denying a fundamental truth. The perfect society is the one that in the end makes him most unhappy. The point is ironically developed by his trip home. The knowledge that he had found in the land of the horses makes it painful and difficult

for him to accept his own people and to find a place among them. Parts I and II showed us the disadvantages of being either too big or too small. Part IV shows us the disadvantages of knowing too little, and thus being Yahoo, and of knowing too much, and thus being unable to accept or overlook the Yahooness of the human race.

The structure that has been argued shows, I believe, why selections from, or versions of, the *Travels* have such an independent vitality. Except for the anomalous Part III, each Part works out, in varied ways the same scheme—the equivocal value of society parallels the equivocal value of knowledge—and even the most simplified re-writings retain it. Swift's model would theoretically lead to endless possibilities, to endless Parts, but such continuations would seem to have little new to say, after the broad possibilities of physical and mental difference, and of scientific, theoretical, practical, and moral truth, have been explored. Thus the tone of finality of Part IV is structurally justified. I think it enlightening, however, to regard much of the critical debate over Part IV as an evidence of the natural impulse to continue the model in different directions, to rewrite the myth. Thus the Houyhnhnms have been seen as creatures different from, and inferior to, man because of their lack of feeling. In the same way the Yahoos have been presented as creatures who fully represent the human race as Swift conceived it. Some of these efforts are driven by impulse to find something in the *Travels* that is not there, a simple argument or moral. In the end the work within itself asserts only the nature of the problem that it has explored. It is reasonable, though not right, for the Lilliputians to be suspicious of Gulliver. It is reasonable for the King of Brobdingnag to see the human race as odious vermin, though difficult to believe that a human being should simply accept this view. To the horses Gulliver must look like a Yahoo, though it is impossible for him to accept this with equanimity. When all is said and done, the Yahoos seem happy enough themselves to live in their own nature. It all depends upon how one

looks at it; and there is no one single right way to look at it. Man has to live and to know, but the process is not necessarily rewarding.

It would, of course, be a mistake to attribute to the *Travels* an expression of existential uncertainty or despair. There is no uncertainty in the book about what a good man or a good society should be. The problem is that the possibilities presented are always disappointing. The good giant Gulliver is not appreciated; the tiny Gulliver cannot be integrated into the society of the giants; the non-equine Gulliver cannot continue to enjoy the goodness of the society of horses. The reader may well ask himself why these are the only possibilities. Why not get the good man and the good society together? And the sophisticated reader may attempt to find through the ironies and through the manipulation of the *persona* some kind of resolution on the part of Swift, a resolution which might be stated in this way: Gulliver's problem is that he is too naïve, that he expects too much. The right reaction to the imperfections of the world and of men is not to retreat to the stables but to try to do what good can be done and to contemplate with wit, humor, and indignation the follies and evils of the world. Something like this, in fact, would seem to be the attitude of Swift toward the events that he records through his *persona*. But this is beyond the narrative, above it. It is easy enough to give advice to the troubled, to be amused by the problems of others, to argue the value of the coherent and the rational to those whose lives are incoherent and irrational. But perhaps only the saint (and certainly not Gulliver, or Swift, or the common reader) can deal with his own problems and desperate choices in a detached and elevated way when they are happening. We can know what goodness and right conduct are, but this knowledge is of little immediate value in the face of ingratitude, humiliation, or rejection, which are always going to be suffered in any real society, no matter how good. Gulliver will recover from his extreme misanthropy, but only because with the passage of time he will be able to view with detachment those experiences which have so powerfully affected him.

Finally, we may return to our original concern, with the argument that the popularity of *Gulliver's Travels* is to be attributed to the significance of its structure, taking for granted Swift's brilliant realization of the potentialities of the structure. It is my conviction that Swift wrote his book as a kind of indirect, playful, resigned, bitterly humorous account of his own attempt to find a place in the world. But the detachment and insight with which he could view what he had learned emphasized the perennial and general. The concerns with the social and the true are not idle, or trivial, or topical, or individual. One knows that a great man is subject to resentment and envy; that to be little and uninfluential is always precarious; that to adjust at all to a society necessarily brings some kind of frustration (Swift might not appreciate the parallel with Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*); that the individual has to judge his world in terms of his own well-being. Beyond this, certainly every individual must feel his own difference—that he is unique and thus his situation is comparable to the uniqueness of Gulliver in each of his travels. One also knows that he has to know, to act by knowledge, and that the process of reasoning itself can give great pleasure; yet any reasonable person also knows the limitations, frustrations, falsity, or uselessness of much that he does know; or that the drive for knowledge can be obsessively channelled or perversely applied; or that knowledge itself can bring pain. It would be gratuitous to supply examples. This line of thought gives a clue to why the *Travels* has become a classic of children's literature. Children are more sensitive than adults to the truth of Swift's social theme. They are more dependent on society for survival than adults and yet not as habituated or insensitive to the powerful demands that society makes upon them. They also must learn—a language, customs, moral values, skills—the delight in so doing paralleling the passion of Gulliver to know and measure—but the process also inevitably involves some kind of rebellion or frustration or questioning or waste.

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