THE ORIGINS OF *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*[1]

By Irvin Ehrenpreis

I

UNTIL the publication of *The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, literary scholars thought that Swift wrote *Gulliver's Travels* between 1715 and 1720, a period when he published almost nothing. His starting point was, they believed, sketches made up by the Scriblerus group—Pope, Swift, and others—in 1713 and 1714, and finally produced by Pope in 1741. Then D. Nichol Smith, in his edition of the Ford letters, proved that Swift wrote Part I of *Gulliver* in about 1721–22, Part II around 1722–23, Part IV in 1723, and Part III (after Pt. IV) in 1724–25.[2] Swift continued to revise it, probably until it was published in the autumn of 1726.

But if Smith's facts have long been accepted, very few implications have been drawn from them. It is still normal for critics discussing the composition of the book to begin with Scriblerus, as it is still normal for them to seek later sources in literature and in political or intellectual history.[3] If, however, the Scriblerus papers seemed a probable beginning for *Gulliver* precisely because Swift worked on them just before he composed *A Voyage to Lilliput* in 1715, surely the discovery of a six-year gap makes it less necessary to consider them. It may have seemed likely that Swift, after leaving both England and his friends of the Scriblerus Club in 1714, should in 1715 have projected a satire based on Scriblerian essays. It is less plausible that he should have waited six or seven years before hauling out sketches theretofore unused, and employing them as the frame for his greatest book.

Nevertheless, the original argument is useful: Ought one not to look at what Swift was indeed busy with, just before the genuine date of his start on *Lilliput*? For not only were the early biographers and critics mistaken as to that date, they were also wrong to suppose that, because Swift published nothing in the years preceding *Gulliver*, he wrote nothing. It

[1] Read, in a shortened form, before the International Association of University Professors of English (Jesus College, Cambridge, 23 Aug. 1956). I am indebted to Mr. Jonathan Wordsworth of Brasenose College, Oxford, for greatly improving the style of this paper. I have profited from the more general criticisms of Professor George Sherburn, who disagrees, however, with several of my conclusions.

[2] Oxford, 1935, pp. xxxviii–xlii and passim. Charles Firth used some of Smith's evidence (not quite correctly) in "The "Political Significance of *Gulliver's Travels*," *Proc. of the Brit. Acad.*, IX (1920), 237–259.

[3] For recent examples, see Ricardo Quintana, *Swift, An Introduction* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 145 ff., and Charles Kerby-Miller, ed. *Memoirs of . . . Martinus Scriblerus* (New Haven, 1950), pp. 315–320.

was during this period that he put together a succession of essays concerning English politics mainly from 1708 to 1715. Furthermore, these essays form stages in a long series of works and fragments dealing with the same subject but none of them innocent enough to be published at the time. Finally, one remembers that Part I of *Gulliver* is largely an allegory of English political history from 1708 to 1715, and that in this allegory Gulliver stands largely for Bolingbroke, the secretary of state from 1710 to 1714.

It seems to me more than a coincidence that Swift wrote essay after unprintable essay on English politics of the early eighteenth century, and then plunged into such an allegory. To ignore Swift's *History of the Four Last Years*, his *Some Free Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs*, his *Memoirs . . . 1710*, his various fragments on the same topics, and then to search for *Gulliver's* antecedents in a vague ur-*Scriblerus* is to contradict all we have learned of his literary method. What one knows of the *Memoirs of Scriblerus* belongs almost entirely to its form in 1741, fifteen years after the printing of *Gulliver*, a form which Pope had deliberately edited so as to connect the book with Swift's masterpiece (Kerby-Miller, pp. 61–65). Is it credible that an author should compose hundreds of poems practically all traceable to specific circumstances, and scores of essays or pamphlets which can hardly be understood except by reference to their occasions, and yet should compose his finest work in a library, referring to old drafts of hypothetical hoaxes?

I shall not only suggest that Swift created much of *Gulliver* out of his own memories, experiences, and reflections from 1714 to 1725; but moving from this position, I shall try to indicate some new meanings for certain parts of the book.[4]

II

Arthur E. Case, refining on Charles Firth, has already explained the political allusions in *A Voyage to Lilliput*, and there is not a great deal to alter in his foundations.[5] Both scholars went astray, however, in comparing Lilliput with the actual events of 1708–15 and not with Swift's versions of those events. If Case had looked into Swift instead of history, he would have found that the political allegory is both more detailed and less consistent than he believed; that references to Bolingbroke (rather than Oxford) control the fable; and that Swift tended to choose, for dramatization, those episodes in which he could identify his own feelings

[4] For convenience, I call Oxford and Bolingbroke by their titles even before they became peers. In using quotations, I ignore the original capitals and italics where they do not bear on the meaning; and I indicate omitted words only within a quotation, not before or after.

[5] *Four Essays on Gulliver's Travels* (Princeton, 1945), pp. 69–80.

with those of the ministry. There are many examples of these principles, though I shall limit myself to three.

In Chapter ii of *Lilliput*, although Gulliver is under a strong guard, he is unavoidably exposed to the "impertinence" and "malice" of the "rabble," some of whom shoot arrows at him. But "the Colonel" delivers six of the ringleaders into his hands. Gulliver frightens each one by pretending he will eat the man alive and then setting him free.[6] In the *Battle of the Books*, Swift calls journalists "a disorderly rout" of coatless "rogues and raggamuffins."[7] In his letters to Ford he calls Oxford "the Colonel" and Bolingbroke "the Captain." In the *Journal to Stella* he complains that Whig pamphleteers are busy against the government: "I have begged [Bolingbroke] to make examples of one or two of them; and he assures me he will. They are very bold and abusive" (21 Sept. 1711). The following month, he says that one journalist—Boyer—"has abused me in a pamphlet, and I have got him up in a messenger's hands: [Bolingbroke] promises me to swinge him. [Oxford] told me last night that he had the honour to be abused with me in a pamphlet. I must make that rogue an example for warning to others." A week later (24 Oct.), he reports that "every day some ballad comes out reflecting on the ministry," and Bolingbroke "has seized on a dozen booksellers and publishers."[8]

It was under Bolingbroke, as secretary of state, that "we first see" the government trying to stamp out journalistic opposition "by means of frequent arrests" rather than by court action. "Warrants were issued in large numbers. Arrests were made, and printers were required to furnish sureties for appearance." But the government's powers did not often permit anything more serious than such harrying and frightening maneuvers: "And yet of these thirteen [Swift's dozen] who were seized, Boyer, who would not be likely to ignore martyrs for the Whig cause, mentions not one as suffering punishment. And in 1712 Bolingbroke was compelled to order the Attorney-General to release a number of persons under prosecution for libel."[9] Swift, libeled like the government, has thus created an allegorical detail from Bolingbroke's method of dealing with the dart-throwing hack writers of 1710–14.

[6] Swift's *Prose Works*, ed. Herbert Davis, xi (Oxford, 1941), 15. Until otherwise designated the *Prose Works* cited will be Davis' edition; page references to *Gulliver* will be found in the text.

[7] *A Tale of a Tub*, ed. D. Nichol Smith (Oxford, 1920), p. 238.

[8] Four months afterward, there was a rumor that Swift had been arrested. In an odd coincidence he mentions this and the pamphleteers together, thus joining the themes of the episode in *Gulliver's Travels:* "I doubt you have been in pain about the report of my being arrested. The pamphleteers have let me alone this month" (17, 18 Feb. 1712).

[9] Laurence Hanson, *Government and the Press 1695–1763* (Oxford, 1936), p. 62.

In Chapter v of *Lilliput*, there is the crisis about which Case and Firth disagreed, the fire in the palace, which Gulliver quenches with his urine. Firth supposed this to mean *A Tale of a Tub;* Case interpreted it as the Treaty of Utrecht, ending the War of the Spanish Succession. Case is undoubtedly correct. The meaning appears from a sentence in a pamphlet written in 1714 by an underling with Swift's assistance: "But the quarrelling with the peace, because it is not exactly to our mind, seems as if one that had put out a great fire should be sued by the neighbourhood for some lost goods, or damag'd houses; which happen'd (say they) by his making too much haste."[10] The figure of extinguishing a spreading blaze for stopping a tremendous military threat by allied action is ancient, natural, and ubiquitous. A few scattered modern instances are the Emperor Maximilian's declaration against the Venetians, 1509;[11] Samuel Daniel's *Breviary of the History of England*, ca. 1610;[12] the Italian satirist, Boccalini, writing about the Fronde;[13] and (most relevantly) the London *Flying-Post*, 25 October 1712, applying Boccalini to the War of the Spanish Succession: "A dreadful fire broke out in the palace of the French monarchy. . . . It raged so furiously, that the neighbouring monarchs, afraid that their own estates would be consumed by it, immediately ran one and all to quench it. The English . . . diligently carried thither the waters of their Thames."

Yet Case mistakes the implications when he relates them to Oxford's difficulties with Queen Anne (pp. 75–76). It was not the queen who felt ungrateful for the peace, but those who impeached the ministers. The treaty was Bolingbroke's peculiar responsibility; and Swift's emphasis on it—as well as his preoccupation, throughout the first voyage, with foreign rather than domestic affairs—betokens Bolingbroke's predominance in the Lilliputian allegory. After all, by 1721 it was not Oxford who wanted defending: he had been discharged from his impeachment in 1717, and he acted a free role in the House of Lords until his death in 1724—well before the completion of *Gulliver's Travels*. Bolingbroke, meanwhile, having fled to France in 1715, remained attainted and in exile until 1723; and he never regained his seat in the House of Lords.

The same inferences emerge again from my final illustration; and this will carry us to a point after which, Case himself says, Gulliver's story is

[10] *Prose Works*, VIII (1953), xvi–xvii, 194.

[11] Raynaldus, *Annales ecclesiastici*, XX (Rome, 1663), annus 1509, par. 2.

[12] Par. 27. R. B. Gottfried shows that it was written by Daniel, not Ralegh; and he dates it between 1605 and 1612 (*SP*, LIII [April, 1956], 172–190). Daniel uses the figure elsewhere as well: e.g., *Complete Works*, ed. A. B. Grosart (London, 1896), IV, 162–163.

[13] See Ch. iii of the *Politick Touchstone* in the 1704 translation of Boccalini's *Advertisements from Parnassus . . . [and] The Politick Touchstone*, III, 7–11 (following p. 256 of the same vol.).

based on Bolingbroke's adventures, with only minor references to Oxford (p. 77). In Chapter V of Part I, Swift mentions the displeasure of the Emperor of Lilliput when Gulliver made friends with the ambassadors from Blefuscu and agreed to visit their emperor, thus creating a suspicion of high treason. Certain ministers, says Gulliver, "represented my intercourse with those ambassadors, as a mark of disaffection, from which I am sure *my heart was wholly free*" (p. 38—my italics). Here, one already knows, Blefuscu stands for France. From evidence in Swift's letters and pamphlets, it seems that the proposed visit to the Emperor of Blefuscu stands for Bolingbroke's visit (while he was secretary of state) to the French court; and the suspicion of his disaffection would be due to Bolingbroke's having seen the Pretender during that visit.

In the *Enquiry into the Behavior of the Queen's Last Ministry*, Swift has a portrait of Bolingbroke. Here is a pamphlet defending Swift's ministerial acquaintances against the charg (among others) of planning to bring in the Pretender and so to commit high treason. Swift opens the portrait of Bolingbroke with a lament that three of his most exalted friends are either in exile or awaiting trial. Then he applies to himself the same expression that Gulliver was to use: "*As my own heart was free* from all treasonable thoughts, so I did little imagine my self to be perpetually in the company of traitors."[14]

This passage, written in 1715, has a further parallel in Swift's letter on the subject. The Archbishop of Dublin had suggested that Bolingbroke might turn informer, come back from France, and tell some "ill story" about Swift. In reply, the Archbishop received a furious defense of the exile:

> He was three or four days at the court of France, while he was secretary, and it is barely possible, he might then have entered into some deep negotiation with the Pretender; although I would not believe him, if he should swear it, because he protested to me, that he never saw him but once, and that was at a great distance, in public, at an opera. . . . But I am surprised to think your grace could talk, or act, or correspond with me for some years past, while you must needs believe me a most false and vile man; declaring to you on all occasions my abhorrence of the Pretender, and yet privately engaged with a ministry to bring him in.[15]

Finally, returning to *Lilliput*, one finds in Chapter VII the fourth article of the impeachment against Gulliver, that "contrary to the duty of a faithful subject, [he] is now preparing to make a voyage to the court and empire of Blefuscu . . . [and] doth falsely and traitorously intend to

[14] *Prose Works*, VIII, 134 (my italics).

[15] *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. F. E. Ball (London, 1910–14), II, 348–349—hereafter cited as "Ball" with volume and page numbers.

take the said voyage, and thereby to aid, comfort, and abet the Emperor of Blefuscu, so late an enemy, and in open war with his imperial majesty aforesaid" (p. 53). In other words, the treason charged against Gulliver corresponds to the charge against Bolingbroke, which touches Swift as well; and Gulliver's projected trip corresponds to Bolingbroke's actual trip.

These echoes and parallels hold a few of the many clues which bear out my principal argument. Swift did not wait six years after 1714 to prepare his reflections on the ministry of the Earl of Oxford and Viscount Bolingbroke. He went over the material in one form after another, from personal letters, through unpublishable essays, into the entertainment of an allegory. *Lilliput* is the sublimation of a series of unprintable pamphlets and fragments. The *Memoirs of Scriblerus* were an element in the allegory, but only an indeterminate element.

III

If the pigmies of Lilliput are dominated by a figure descended from Bolingbroke, the giants of Brobdingnag are ruled by one exactly the opposite in origin. This is the person to whom Swift immediately contrasted Bolingbroke the first time that he met the secretary. On the evening of that day, Swift wrote to Stella, "I am thinking what a veneration we used to have for Sir William Temple, because he might have been secretary of state at fifty; and here is a young fellow, hardly thirty, in that employment." A year later, he drew precisely the same contrast again, obviously forgetting that he had already noticed it. In fact, out of a total of seven times that Swift mentions Temple in the *Journal to Stella*, five are to link or contrast him with Bolingbroke.[16]

Indeed, between those two great men the similarities of interest and achievement and the differences of character are so startling that the image of one would naturally call up an image of the other. Bolingbroke talked too much, drank too much, systematically betrayed his wife, and sacrificed his integrity to political ambition. Temple spoke with reserve and formality, he lived with calculated moderation, he adored his wife, the brilliant Dorothy Osborne, and he withdrew from high office rather than injure his honor. Both men had their greatest successes in diplomacy. Temple arranged the Triple Alliance of England, Holland, and Sweden; he was largely responsible for the marriage of William of Orange to Princess Mary. Bolingbroke's supreme achievement was the Treaty of Utrecht. At forty-six Temple had refused to be made secretary of state; Bolingbroke at thirty-two had forced his way into that office.

If Swift's memory of Temple provided the outline for the King of

[16] 11 Nov. 1710; 3, 4, 15 April, 3 Nov. 1711.

Brobdingnag, certain other aspects of the second voyage slip into place. I have argued elsewhere that the child Stella, or Esther Johnson, has a similar relationship with the girl giantess, Glumdalclitch;[17] and of course Swift knew Stella as a child while they were both living with Temple. Lady Temple, or Dorothy Osborne, is naturally associated with a queen since she was the intimate friend of Queen Mary, whose death narrowly preceded her own. There is a further hint here; for in Brobdingnag the queen plays a far more dignified role, and has far more to do, than in any of the other courts which Gulliver visited. Yet the king remains emphatically in control of the monarchy. The reign of William and Mary duplicates this relationship, as did that of no other royal couple in Swift's lifetime before 1726; and that reign roughly coincides with the extent of Swift's residences at Moor Park. One might add, among Temple's links with kingship, that he bore the same name as William III, was a most esteemed friend of that ruler, and introduced Swift to him—the only king Swift met before 1726.

Gulliver's portrait of the King of Brobdingnag agrees in many essentials with the character of Temple. The giant had married a wife who, like Dorothy Osborne, possessed an "infinite deal of wit and humour" and, when Gulliver first met him, the king was "retired to his cabinet" (p. 87). Gulliver almost never describes him in society, almost always converses with him alone, and remarks that the geography of his country made him live in it "wholly secluded from the rest of the world" (p. 117). But he "delighted in musick," was "educated in the study of philosophy," was "as learned as any person in his dominions," and had an "excellent understanding" (pp. 110, 87, 111). In examining Gulliver's body, the king showed up the quackery of certain pedants who pretended to be wise men (pp. 87–88).

Temple's own sister says that immediately after his marriage he had for five years lived a domestic and retired life, spending much time "in his closet," studying history and philosophy. She comments on his excellent knowledge of Spanish, French, and Latin, and his regret at the decline of his Greek; and she says he was "a great lover of musick."[18] In an *Ode to Sir William Temple*, Swift has a stanza contrasting the baronet's polished but solid learning with the "ill-mannered pedantry" of professional scholars (st. 3). During the decade when Swift lived with Temple, the baronet's sister says her brother utterly withdrew from court and town life, living in rural seclusion with his family.[19] The King of Brobdingnag spoke at first in a cold manner and produced an im-

[17] *PMLA*, LXX (Sept., 1955), 715.

[18] *The Early Essays and Romances of Sir William Temple*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Oxford, 1930), pp. 8, 5, 6, 11, 28.

[19] Ibid., pp. 25, 28.

pression "of much gravity, and austere countenance" (p. 87). Temple's reserve and aloofness are perhaps the best-known traits of his character, and Swift mentions them in the *Journal to Stella* (e.g., 3–4 April 1711).

In politics, the King of Brobdingnag "professed both to abominate and despise all *mystery*, *refinement*, and *intrigue*, either [of] a prince or a minister" (p. 119). In his *Ode* Swift devotes a stanza to Temple's destructive exposure of the deceits and frauds of ministers (st. 7). Temple's actual conduct as a diplomat was distinguished above all for its directness and its lack of intrigue or ceremony. The giant king feels overwhelmed by horror at Gulliver's description of human warfare, and cannot understand why the British in particular have engaged in "such chargeable and extensive wars" (pp. 117–119, 115). Swift in his *Ode* has two stanzas on Temple's repugnance for war (sts. 5, 6). Summing up the king's nature, Gulliver granted him "every quality which procures veneration, love and esteem" (p. 119). In his *Ode* Swift says that Temple is learned, good, and great all at once, and uniquely joins in himself the whole empire of virtue (sts. 1, 4). When Temple died, Swift wrote, "With him [died] all that was good and amiable among men."[20]

The King of Brobdingnag talks about government and politics in Chapter vi of the second voyage. After hearing Gulliver explain the constitution of England, he asks many questions. Though these are satiric, they involve certain arguments which continue into the next chapter; and at the end of the latter, Gulliver delivers a few sentences on the political history of Brobdingnag. Those closing sentences of Gulliver's sound very much like *A Discourse of the Contests and Dissensions*, a work which Swift published in 1701; and this relationship has a special meaning.

The link between Brobdingnagian political history and Swift's *Discourse* was noted by Case,[21] but another scholar, Robert J. Allen, had already shown what I consider to be the significance of this link. In a study of the *Discourse*, Allen demonstrated that Swift's book was founded upon certain works by Sir William Temple;[22] and it is in fact possible to trace themes back from *Brobdingnag* to Temple's essays either directly or through the intermediate stage of the *Discourse*.[23] I shall give only two of the simplest illustrations.

[20] Henry Craik, *Life of Jonathan Swift*, 2nd ed. (London, 1894), I, 95.

[21] See his edition of *Gulliver's Travels* (New York, 1938), p. 142, n.

[22] "Swift's Earliest Political Tract and Sir William Temple's Essays," *Harvard Stud. and Notes in Philol. and Lit.*, XIX (1937), 3–12. Myrddin Jones, in an unpublished B.Litt. thesis, adds further evidence to that of Allen; see his MS., "Swift's Views of History" (1953), in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

[23] To appreciate the connection of all this material with *Gulliver* one should first read Temple's essays, "On the Original and Nature of Government" and "Of Popular Discontents," then Chs. i and v of Swift's *Discourse*, and finally Chs. vi and vii of the *Voyage to Brobdingnag*.

There is a particularly neat triangular relationship among the following specimens: Gulliver gives the giant king a most flattering account of the House of Commons. The king asks "How it came to pass, that people were so violently bent upon getting into this assembly . . . often to the ruin of their families, without any salary or pension: because this appeared such an exalted strain of virtue and publick spirit, that his majesty seemed to doubt it might possibly not be always sincere: And he desired to know, whether such zealous gentlemen could have any views of refunding themselves for the charges and trouble they were at, by sacrificing the publick good to the designs of . . . a corrupted ministry" (pp. 113–114). Temple, writing on popular assemblies, had said, "The needy, the ambitious . . . the covetous, are ever restless to get into public employments. . . . I have found no talent of so much advantage among men, towards their growing great or rich, as a violent and restless passion and pursuit for one or the other. . . . Yet all these cover their ends with most worthy pretences, and those noble sayings, That men are not born for themselves, and must sacrifice their lives for the public, as well as their time and health."[24] The passage here quoted from Temple is part of a longer section picked out by Allen (pp. 9–10) as having influenced Swift's *Discourse*.

The King of Brobdingnag also asked Gulliver about the English army. The innuendo of his question is that a paid army in peacetime is needed only to maintain the power of a tyrant: "Above all, he was amazed to hear me talk of a mercenary standing army in the midst of peace, and among a free people. He said, if we were governed by our own consent in the persons of our representatives, he could not imagine of whom we were afraid, or against whom we were to fight; and would hear my opinion, whether a private man's house might not better be defended by himself, his children, and family; than by half a dozen rascals picked up at a venture in the streets, for small wages" (p. 115). Temple, in his essay on government, says that a king and his people are like a father and his family; so a just and careful parent is willingly followed and obeyed by all his children. But a tyrant thinks he cannot be safe among his children, except by putting arms into the hands of hired servants:

> For against a foreign enemy, and for defence of evident interest, all that can bear arms in a nation are soldiers . . . and these kind of forces [i.e., mercenaries] come to be used by good princes, only upon necessity of providing for their defence against great and armed neighbours or enemies; but by ill ones as a support of decayed authority, or as they lose the force of that which is natural and paternal. . . .
>
> Yet this seems a much weaker principle of government . . . [for] common pay is a faint principle of courage and action, in comparison of religion, liberty,

[24] *Works* (London, 1770), III, 42–43.

honour, revenge, or necessity . . . so as if the people come to unite by any strong passion, or general interest . . . they are masters of [mercenary] armies.[25]

Most of the giant king's discussion of politics has a similar parallel in Temple's essays on government.

Now there should really be nothing to surprise one in Swift's reviving for *Gulliver's Travels* the ideas of his earlier work. The situation of his three great friends—Bolingbroke, Oxford, and Ormonde—in 1715 seemed to repeat the circumstances which had provoked the *Discourse.* In 1701 four former ministers were most unfairly impeached by the House of Commons, but they were dismissed and acquitted by the Lords. Swift thought the impeachments outrageous, and wrote his *Discourse* to prove them so. In 1715, his own ministerial friends were impeached. Though he might write a book then, however, nobody would dare to print it, and even *his* head was not out of danger. When, in 1721–22, he sublimated all these memories in a satiric fantasy, the arguments remained the same, and their origin was still, ultimately, Sir William Temple.

IV

For Houyhnhnmland (the third part of *Gulliver* in order of composition) my reasoning depends on two related assumptions. The first is that although the Houyhnhnms embody traits which Swift admired, they do not represent his moral ideal for mankind. The other is that the Houyhnhnms represent in general (though not wholly) what he considered to be a deistic view of human nature—a view against which, as a devout Anglican, he fought. By "deistic" I mean the vague tradition in which men like Swift tended to lump freethinkers, deists, Socinians, and some Latitudinarians.[26]

Even a hasty reader might notice signs which support these assumptions. A rather light hint is the Houyhnhnms' ignorance of bodily shame: Gulliver says he asked his Houyhnhnm master's forgiveness "if I did not expose those parts that nature taught us to conceal. He said . . . he could not understand why nature should teach us to conceal what nature

[25] *Works*, I, 45. Professor H. W. Donner has kindly pointed out to me that this motif is one more sign of *Gulliver's* connection (often slighted) with More's *Utopia.* The explosive attack on mercenaries in Bk. II, Ch. viii, of the *Utopia* re-enforced the attitude which Swift had learned from Temple.

[26] The term "deist" was seldom used with any precision in the 18th century. Bolingbroke would not have admitted to the title, although his works were normally received as subversive of Christianity; cf. Boswell's *Johnson*, ed. Hill-Powell (Oxford, 1934–50) I, 268–269. Avowed deists were extremely rare, but Swift threw the label about with great freedom; cf. his *Prose Works*, III (1940), 71, 79, 92, 122. For Swift's considered view of the deists, see Louis Landa's "Introduction to the Sermons" in the *Prose Works*, IX (1948), 108–116.

had given" (pp. 220–221). Here, Gulliver's error resides in his logic rather than his modesty. It was not nature that taught us to conceal our genitalia; it was a supernatural moral law.

A more serious clue is a saying of Gulliver's master that "*Reason* alone is sufficient to govern a *rational* creature" (p. 243). This maxim runs contrary to the spirit of Christianity: except by removing men from the category of "rational creatures," no sincere Anglican could agree with the wise Houyhnhnm. Swift devotes two of his extant sermons to annihilating such doctrines, and these sermons are the best of all commentaries on Houyhnhnmland. He excludes the possibility of virtue without Christianity except through rare "personal merit," as in Socrates and Cato, who happened to be blessed with a disposition (not reason) naturally good.[27] "There is no solid, firm foundation for virtue, but in a conscience directed by the principles of religion."[28]

Deistic philosophers run in another direction. William Wollaston, whom Swift detested, writes, "To act according to right reason, and to act according to truth are in effect the same thing. . . . To be governed by reason is the general law imposed by the author of nature upon them, whose uppermost faculty is reason."[29] Similarly, the inexhaustible benevolence of the Houyhnhnms sounds, even prima facie, like a parody of such antecedents of deism as the Earl of Shaftesbury, who says, "To deserve the name of good or virtuous, a creature must have all his inclinations and affections, his dispositions of mind and temper, suitable, and agreeing with the good of his kind. . . . this affection of a creature toward the good of the species or common nature is . . . proper and natural to him."[30] Shaftesbury is at pains to show that the Christian doctrine of rewards and punishments can be inconsistent with virtue. It is also suggestive that William Godwin, one of the fullest flowers of the deistic tradition, should have been infatuated with the Houyhnhnms, calling them a description of "men in their highest improvement,"[31] and finding in Swift's exposition of their government "a more profound insight into the true principles of political justice, than [in] any preceding or contemporary author."[32]

Swift, for more than fifty years, was a priest in the Church of England.

[27] Sermon, "Upon the Excellency of Christianity," *Prose Works*, IX (1948), 249.

[28] Sermon, "On the Testimony of Conscience," *Prose Works*, IX, 154.

[29] *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London, 1722), p. 36.

[30] *Characteristicks*, ed. J. M. Robertson (London, 1900), I, 280. Of course, Shaftesbury, in spite of his influence, was a sound Christian.

[31] *The Inquirer* (London, 1797), p. 134.

[32] *Political Justice*, ed. F. E. L. Priestley (Toronto, 1946), II, 209, n. For detailed evidence, see James Preu, "Swift's Influence on Godwin's Doctrine of Anarchism," *JHI*, XV (June 1954), 371–383.

There is no doubt that he took his responsibilities as a pastor more seriously than most of his clerical colleagues took theirs. He reformed the worship in his cathedral to make it more regular and fuller than it had been for many years. He prayed in secret, went to church early so as not to be seen, wrote for his dearest friend some prayers which are models of intense but traditional religious expression. He gave a third of his income to charity and saved half the remainder to leave a fortune to charity. His sermons, the remarks of his intimates, his own private papers, all confirm Swift's devotion to his faith and his calling. Nevertheless, he had suffered so many accusations of impiety—from misinterpreters of *A Tale of a Tub* and other works—that he would not bring religion openly into a satire like *Gulliver.*

In providing the Houyhnhnms with good qualities, he was therefore duplicating the method of More's *Utopia;* and only to this extent is R. W. Chambers correct in writing, "Just as More scored a point against the wickedness of Christian Europe, by making his philosophers heathen, so Jonathan Swift scored a point against the wickedness of mankind by representing *his* philosophers, the Houyhnhnms, as having the bodies of horses."[33] So in his sermon "Upon the Excellency of Christianity," Swift argues that although there were "great examples of wisdom and virtue among the heathen wise men," nevertheless, "Christian philosophy is in all things preferable to heathen wisdom" (p. 243). As admirable creatures, the Houyhnhnms represent what could be accomplished by beings (neither horses nor men) capable of pursuing the natural virtues summed up in reason and given us by nature at one remove from God; in their way—which is not the human way—they are perfect, and do not want religion. As absurd creatures, they represent the deistic presumption that mankind has no need of the specifically Christian virtues. Gulliver is misled as, in *Joseph Andrews,* Mr. Wilson is ruined by a club of "philosophers" who "governed themselves only by the infallible guide of human reason," but who reveal their immorality when one of them withdraws, "taking with him the wife of one of his most intimate friends," and another refuses to pay back a loan which Mr. Wilson had made to him. While under the spell, the victim says, "I began now to esteem myself a being of a higher order than I had ever before conceived; and was the more charmed with this rule of right, as I really found in my own nature nothing repugnant to it. I held in utter contempt all persons who wanted any other inducement to virtue besides her intrinsic beauty and excellence."[34] Gulliver is not defrauded by the Houyhnhnms, for they are not human (or equine); but the rule of nothing-but-reason leads him

[33] *Sir Thomas More* (London, 1935), p. 128.

[34] Fielding's *Works,* ed. W. E. Henley (London, 1903), I, 240–241 (Bk. III, Ch. iii).

to repudiate all human obligations and to detest his wife. Swift wished men to be as rational as possible; he believed that religion helps them to become so, and that reason leads them toward revelation. But the deistic effort to build a rational system of morals outside revelation he regarded as evil and absurd.

V

In the fourth voyage, Swift was aiming at a particular exponent of deistic thought, a correspondent with whom he was in argument about such doctrines while he was writing *Gulliver's Travels*. To identify the person, I shall limit myself at first to the most striking attributes of the Houyhnhnms: their emotionless serenity, their benevolence, and their reliance on reason.

Of the Houyhnhnms' indifference to such feelings as fear of death or filial love, one needs no reminding; this superiority to human passions appears throughout the fourth voyage. In Chapter viii Gulliver surveys some of their other felicities. "*Friendship* and *benevolence*," he says, "are the two principal virtues among the Houyhnhnms; and these not confined to particular objects, but universal to the whole race. For, a stranger from the remotest part, is equally treated with the nearest neighbour, and where-ever he goes, looks upon himself as at home. . . . They will have it that *nature* teaches them to love the whole species, and it is *reason* only that makes a distinction of persons, where there is a superior degree of virtue" (p. 252). In 1719 Swift reopened a correspondence with Bolingbroke which had been suspended for more than two years. In his answer Bolingbroke has a long passage on friendship, to which Swift replied in detail. After another exchange, the correspondence once more lapsed. When Swift wrote again, Bolingbroke sent him a very long letter which included further and extended reflections on friendship, such as, "Believe me, there is more pleasure, and more merit too, in cultivating friendship, than in taking care of the state . . . none but men of sense and virtue are capable of [it]."[35] It was Bolingbroke who wrote a whole treatise to prove that compassion, or kindness to strangers, depends on reason and nothing else; and in it he made such remarks as, "An habit of making good use of our reason, and such an education as trains up the mind in true morality, will never fail to inspire us with sentiments of benevolence for all mankind." In another essay he has declarations like, "Sociability is the great instinct, and benevolence the great law, of human nature."[36]

[35] Ball, III, 24–28, 25, 30, 89.

[36] *Reflections concerning Innate Moral Principles* (London, 1752), p. 55; *Philosophical Works* (London, 1754), IV, 256.

In Bolingbroke's next letter, he placed Swift on the opposite side of a quarrel about the Christian religion and ancient morality. He harps on the theme that "a man of sense and virtue may be unfortunate, but can never be unhappy." Almost two years later (Aug. 1723), Swift received a double letter from Pope and Bolingbroke, both dilating on friendship; Pope's has so many maxims relating to this subject that it is more an essay than a letter. The two men emphasize their contentment, their indifference to ordinary vicissitudes, their philosophical serenity. They preach a cool moderation remote from the ordeals of Swift's preceding year. "Reflection and habit," wrote Bolingbroke, "have rendered the world so indifferent to me, that I am neither afflicted nor rejoiced, angry nor pleased, at what happens in it. . . . Perfect tranquillity is the general tenor of my life." While Swift may have envied such complacency, he could not imitate it. He sent a sarcastic riposte ridiculing their pretensions to detached and philosophic calm. "Your notions of friendship are new to me," Swift says; "I believe every man is born with his *quantum*, and he cannot give to one without robbing another." As for their nonchalance, he told Pope, "I who am sunk under the prejudices of another education . . . can never arrive at the serenity of mind you possess." It was their sort of vapidity that Swift meant to deride, two years later, when he jeered at how Bolingbroke in 1723 had been "full of philosophy and talked *de contemptu mundi*."[37]

The next development of the correspondence is related to Gulliver's most often quoted comment on the Houyhnhnms, his praise of their devotion to reason (i.e., to reason alone): "As these noble Houyhnhnms are endowed by nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions . . . of what is evil in a rational creature; so their grand maxim is, to cultivate *reason*, and to be wholly governed by it. Neither is *reason* among them a point problematical as with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of a question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs do where it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by passion and interest" (p. 251). In the autumn of 1724, the undercurrent of Swift's quarrel with his friend becomes traceable; and it flows about this very problem of what reason unaided can do. Bolingbroke sent a long defense of deistic thought and an attack on Christianity (by implication), to rebut a letter that is now lost, from Swift. The dean had directly accused him of being an *esprit fort*, or free-thinker.[38] In a tremendous harangue, Bolingbroke first takes the word to mean atheist, and repudiates that title; then he says:

If indeed by *esprit fort*, or free-thinker, you only mean a man who makes a free

[37] Ball, III, 111, 172, 175, 291.

[38] *Letters to Ford*, pp. 100–101.

use of his reason, who searches after truth without passion or prejudice, and adheres inviolably to it, you mean a wise and honest man, and such a one as I labour to be. The faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong, true and false, which we call reason or common sense, which is given to every man by our bountiful creator, and which most men lose by neglect, is the light of the mind, and ought to guide all the operations of it. To abandon this rule, and to guide our thoughts by any other [Bolingbroke means Christian revelation], is full as absurd as it would be, if you should put out your eyes, and borrow even the best staff . . . when you set out upon one of your dirty journeys. . . . The peace and happiness of mankind is the great aim of these free-thinkers.[39]

In Bolingbroke's philosophical works there are many other similarities to the teachings of the Houyhnhnms. In fact, Gulliver's list of the subjects which generally come up in their conversation could serve almost as well for those works: friendship and benevolence, order and "oeconomy," the visible operations of nature, ancient traditions, the bounds and limits of virtue, the unerring rules of reason, and so on (p. 261). Of course, however, Swift omits the purpose of Bolingbroke's philosophizing, which (according to his eighteenth-century critics) was the destruction of Christianity. Swift believed that a good Christian is a rational person, that reason leads one to Christian faith, that these two gifts are in harmony, and that man must strive to enlarge them both.

One final touch is that Bolingbroke's editor calls his philosophical writings for the most part "nothing more than repetitions of conversations often interrupted, [and] often renewed."[40] For I have assumed that the letters from Bolingbroke had the effect of reminding Swift of topics more freely canvassed when the two men had talked together.[41]

Although my observations pause here, there is a humorous postscript to the Houyhnhnms. Viscount Bolingbroke was no horse, and it would have been convenient to discover one which was not only a deistic thinker but also a master of human beings. By a helpful chance, it happens that Swift once described such an animal in a letter. The episode may be no more than an odd coincidence, but it seems worth reporting. For on this occasion Swift's horse behaved more rationally than his servant, and the master treated the man like an animal.

At Christmas time 1714, the dean rode out of Dublin, planning to collect his groom and his valet on the way. When he met them, they

[39] Ball, III, 208–209. That Bolingbroke means Christian revelation is clear from his parallel with Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, Ch. xix, pars. 4, 8.

[40] *Philosophical Works*, III, 334.

[41] D. G. James saw the connection between the Houyhnhnms and Bolingbroke, but he quite misunderstood it; see his *Life of Reason* (London, 1949), pp. 256–261. Miss Kathleen Williams, whose book on Swift will soon be ready, has reached conclusions similar to my own.

were drunkenly incapable; and he found that the groom could not travel. Swift nevertheless rode on, but noticed that Tom, the valet, who usually rode behind him, failed to keep up. He waited, and Tom galloped up to him. Swift scolded him, and Tom answered foolishly. "He was as drunk as a dog," Swift wrote, "tottered on his horse, could not keep the way, sometimes into the sea, then back to me; swore he was not drunk. I bid him keep on, lashed him as well as I could; then he vowed he was drunk, fell a crying, came back every moment to me. I bid him keep on." At last, from the galloping and turning backwards and forwards, Tom's horse "grew mad" and threw the valet down. Then Swift came up and called a boy and man to get the horse from him; but "he resisted us all three, was stark mad with drink. At last we got the bridle from him, the boy mounted and away we rode, Tom following after us. What became of him I know not" (Ball, II, 263).

The episode has a peculiar interest, not only because the horse was English and the servants Irish, but because the name of the horse which "grew mad" and threw Tom down was Bolingbroke. The editor of Swift's correspondence says that the horse Bolingbroke was a gift and that Swift named him; but we do not know who the donor was. In June 1713, Vanessa asked Swift, "How does Bolingbroke perform?" Swift, en route to Ireland, said the horse fell under him; and in the end it was shipped over to its new country. Swift mentions Bolingbroke several times again, but after three years he exchanged him with a friend for another horse.[42] We never hear of him again, unless perhaps in *Gulliver's Travels*.

VI

Swift began to write the third voyage (last in order of composition) around January 1724, and he returned to Dublin, that month, from a visit which he had made to Quilca, the country home of his young and very dear friend, the Reverend Thomas Sheridan. Swift may have visited Quilca again the following April.[43] Meanwhile, the *Drapier's Letters* interrupted the writing of *Gulliver*, and Swift only finished the third voyage some time in 1725. At Quilca again the whole book was perfected and rewritten when Swift stayed there from April to the end of September 1725.[44]

Sheridan provided Swift with more than a holiday. He gave him a model for the king and people of the flying island. Swift had met him in 1718, and their twenty-year friendship was perhaps never stronger than during the period when *Gulliver* was being written and they were meeting

[42] Ball, II, 44 and n., 45 and n., 242, 280–281, 305–306.

[43] *Letters to Ford*, p. 101; Swift's *Poems*, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford, 1937), III, 1034.

[44] Ball, III, 235, 276; *Letters to Ford*, p. 122.

constantly in Dublin. Yet Swift found fault with his friend almost from the start. In letters, poems, and other papers, Swift continually bewailed Sheridan's absent-mindedness, his inability to listen carefully during conversations, his irresponsibility and forgetfulness, his neglect of the essential business of life in favor of peripheral occupations.

"Too much advertency is not your talent," Swift told Sheridan. And, "I believe you value your temporal interest as much as anybody, but you have not the arts of pursuing it." And again, "The two devils of inadvertency and forgetfulness have got fast hold on you." Describing him at the same time to another acquaintance, Swift wrote, "He hath not overmuch advertency. His books, his mathematics, the pressures of his fortune, his laborious calling, and some natural disposition or indisposition, give him an *egarement d'esprit*, as you cannot but observe."[45]

In brief, Sheridan possessed to an extreme degree the characteristic on which Gulliver builds his portrait of the Laputans—that their minds are "so taken up with intense speculations, that they neither can speak, [nor] attend to the discourses of others, without being rouzed" (p. 143).

Instead of caring for their common affairs, the Laputans and their king occupy themselves with three obsessions: music, mathematics, and abstract speculation. Swift described Sheridan as "a man of intent and abstracted thinking, enslaved by mathematics" (Ball, III, 268). Sheridan's own son Thomas writes, "As he was an adept in music both in the scientific and practical part, he had frequent private concerts at his house at no small cost."[46] The King of Laputa was "distinguished above all his predecessors for his hospitality to strangers" (pp. 144–145). Sheridan's son says his father was recklessly hospitable and generous: "[He] set no bounds to his prodigality. . . . [He had a] large income . . . but not equal to the profuseness of his spirit. He was . . . the greatest dupe in the world and a constant prey to all the indigent of his acquaintance, as well as those who were recommended to him by others" (p. 384). Swift used to berate Sheridan for wasting money on the entertainment of false friends and random acquaintances (Ball, III, 246, 248).

Sheridan also shared the Laputans' fecklessness in the management of his property. "It is [his] great happiness," Swift once observed of him, "that, when he acts in the common concerns of life against common sense and reason, he values himself thereupon, as if it were the mark of great genius, above little regards or arts, and that his thoughts are too exalted to descend into the knowledge of vulgar management; and you cannot make him a greater compliment than by telling instances to the company, before his face, how careless he was in any affair that related

[45] Ball, III, 267, 268, 275, 271.

[46] *Life of Jonathan Swift* (London, 1784), pp. 384–385.

to his interest and fortune."[47] Gulliver blames the same defects in the Laputans: "Although they are dextrous enough upon a piece of paper . . . yet in the common actions and behaviour of life, I have not seen a more clumsy, awkward, and unhandy people, nor so slow and perplexed in their conceptions upon all other subjects, except those of mathematics and music" (p. 147). In the same portrait in which he analyzed Sheridan's pride at being incompetent, Swift also described him as proud, captious, quarrelsome, and argumentative (*Prose Works*, XI, 156–158). After remarking that the Laputans are hopeless fumblers in practical affairs, Gulliver says, "They are very bad reasoners, and vehemently given to opposition, unless when they happen to be of the right opinion" (p. 147).

Finally, there is the famous description by Gulliver of the desolation on the mainland subject to the King of Laputa: "I never knew a soil so unhappily cultivated, houses so ill contrived and so ruinous," and so on (p. 159). While Swift was writing *Gulliver's Travels*, he also composed verses ridiculing the miserable condition of agriculture and buildings at Quilca:

> A rotten cabbin, dropping rain . . .
> Stools, tables, chairs, and bed-steds broke . . .
> Here elements have lost their uses,
> Air ripens not, nor earth produces.

Or, in another poem of the same time on the same subject:

> A church without pews.
> Our horses astray,
> No straw, oats, or hay;
> December in May.[48]

There is as well a prose diatribe dated April 1724, *The Blunders, Deficiencies, Distresses, and Misfortunes of Quilca.* Here Swift denounces the crazy state of the house and all its furniture, the lack of food, heat, and comfort, the savage behavior of the servants, the barbaric manners of the natives: "The new house all going to ruin before it is finished. . . . The kitchen perpetually crowded with savages. . . . Not a bit of mutton to be had in the country. . . . An egregious want of all the most common necessary utensils. . . . [The servants] growing fast into the manners and thieveries of the natives" (*Prose Works*, VII, 75–77). In Balnibarbi, "the whole country lies miserably waste, the houses in ruins, and the people without food or cloaths" (p. 161).[49]

[47] Swift's *Prose Works*, ed. Temple Scott (London, 1897–1908), XI, 156. Hereafter the *Prose Works* cited will be this edition.

[48] *Poems*, III, 1035, 1036.

[49] Thomas Sheridan himself was no kinder when he put Quilca into verse, and he also wrote mercilessly concerning his house in Dublin; see Swift's *Poems*, III, 1043–1047.

There are many additional hints and clues to demonstrate the conclusion. Swift was not thinking *only* of Sheridan when he described the Laputans, but he was thinking more deeply of him than of anyone else.

VII

I am far from supposing that persons in *Gulliver's Travels* are portraits of men whom Swift knew. The King of Brobdingnag is not Sir William Temple; nor is Thomas Sheridan the King of Laputa. In all the characters there are elements inconsistent with the originals that I have put forward. I suggest merely that the framework of the Houyhnhnms' character, for instance, goes back to Bolingbroke; that the giant king is derived from Swift's recollections of Temple, though with many additions and alterations; and so forth.

The most important question is how these observations alter one's reading of *Gulliver's Travels*. But to this the answers are so ramified that I shall no more than list a few implications. My analysis of the second voyage may go far to account for its *relative* placidity and its success, in comparison with the contemptuous tone of the first, the disjointedness of the third, and the harshness of the fourth; Swift had returned to the mood of his satisfying and fruitful years with Temple at Moor Park. The third voyage is one which has often been related to Scriblerian sketches; and an explanation for its inadequacy has been that here Swift was stitching up ill-connected fragments.[50] My association of the Laputan king with Thomas Sheridan weakens that theory. Other scholars have shown that the political references and much of the satire on experimental science belong to the latter part of the reign of George I;[51] so does the connection with Sheridan. My commentary on the fourth voyage helps to destroy the misconceptions of innumerable scholars and critics who identify the author, through Gulliver, with the values of the Houyhnhnms. Swift was himself saying, in the fourth voyage, that anyone who believes in the adequacy of reason without Christianity must see himself as a Houyhnhnm and the rest of mankind as Yahoos. By innuendo, he argues that the deists cannot, with any consistency, believe their own doctrines.[52]

Finally, I suggest that the common approaches to Swift's satire, with an emphasis on manipulation of ideas, or else in terms of the technique of fiction, usually mislead one. Swift's imagination worked in terms of people. He did not invent a set of values to defend, or objects to attack;

[50] E.g., Kerby-Miller, pp. 319–320.

[51] E.g., Case, *Four Essays*, passim; also Marjorie Nicolson and N. M. Mohler, "The Scientific Background of Swift's *Voyage to Laputa*," *Annals of Science*, II (1937), 299–334.

[52] I am indebted to Dr. Theodore Redpath for a discussion clarifying this statement.

he started from human embodiments of those values or vices, and he addressed himself to people whom he wished to encourage, refute, or annihilate.

To consider *Gulliver's Travels* as a novel, to present it in language evolved for the criticism of prose fiction, and to study Swift's personae as people, is to misunderstand this book. *Gulliver* is admittedly an ancestor of stories like *Erewhon* and *Brave New World*. Swift, however, was writing a prose satire according to another pattern, curiously static and didactic but not narrative as an epic or novel is. Its structure and its repetitive pattern help to explain both why it succeeds as a children's book and why it cannot be made into a satisfactory film or drama. Very little of the life in *Gulliver* belongs to its large "story" or "plot" line, or to the evolution of character. The life comes from the detached characterizations of individuals who otherwise exist as flat masks or as spokesmen and mouthpieces; from separate episodes loosely strung together; and, most of all, from the operations of Swift's irony. If Swift had unconscious models for his apparently narrative plan, they were books like the *Pilgrim's Progress* and not a foetal *Erewhon* or *Brave New World*.

Gulliver's characterizations are like the portraits in Swift's *History of the Four Last Years*, where he analyzes statesmen in order to account for actions which the reader has already learned about outside the book: the motives, one might say, are revealed after the action is over and not through it—to explain and not to initiate it. So in *Gulliver* most episodes move independently of the characterizations and of one another. What if the King of Brobdingnag did dislike armies and had no use for them? He nevertheless possessed a militia of two hundred thousand men; and all of Gulliver's apologizing does not convince me that Swift put that army in for any other reason than to enhance the giant king's awfulness at the expense of his coherence. One finds consistency in neither the chronology, the geography, the persons, nor the points of view of this fable, although, like La Fontaine's poems, it has the coherence of the author's morality. If *Gulliver* were a novel, the scores of such contradictions would ruin it. Yet if Swift had been consistent in his technique, and built his characters a posteriori around the ideas they stood for, the book would have lost much of its life. But he portrayed them after sketches drawn from living creatures, and they possess a vividness and strength which have made them immortal.

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