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**Two Studies in Restoration
and
Eighteenth-Century Literature**

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Imagery of Debasement in *Gulliver's Travels*

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Savoir Faire: Style and Substance in Restoration Comedy

by J. Karen Ray*

For heaven be thanked, 'tis not so wise an age
But your own folly may supply the stage.
Though often plowed, there's no great fear the soil
Should barren grow by the too frequent toil;
While at your doors are to be daily found
Such loads of dunghill to manure the ground,
'Tis by your follies that we players thrive,
As the physicians by diseases live;
And as each year some new distemper reigns,
Whose friendly poison helps to increase their gains,
So among you there starts up every day
Some new, unheard-of fool for us to play.
Then, for your own sakes be not too severe,
Nor what you all admire at home damn here;
Since each is fond of his own ugly face,
Why should you when you hold it, break the glass?¹

Thus observes Sir Car Scroope in the Prologue to Etherege's *Man of Mode*. Twenty-four years later in his Dedication to *The Way of the World*, Congreve likewise focuses his attention on the follies of the age; he says he has attempted to design "some characters, which should appear ridiculous, not so much through a natural folly (which is incorrigible, and therefore not appropriate for the stage) as though an affected wit; a wit, which at the same time that it is affected, is also false."² In the similarity of these two statements lies a key to the understanding, not only of these two plays, but of the genre they represent, Restoration Comedy. The condemnation of "acquired" follies implies a code of behavior which distinguishes between folly and wisdom; further, it implies a philosophy behind the code. If certain actions can be labeled foolish and others labeled wise, then reasons for justifying such distinctions must exist.

I would argue that one of the elements of the behavioral code implied in Restoration Comedy is civility, *savoir faire*, or the life well lived. Civility includes intellectual criteria as well as social

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¹Sir George Etherege, *The Man of Mode or Sir Fopling Flutter*, ed. W. B. Carnochan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1966). All future references to the text will be to this edition and will appear in the text with act, scene, and line number.

²William Congreve, *The Way of the World*, in *Congreve's Works*, ed. Charles Alexander Ewald (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956). All future reference to this play will be cited in the text and will refer by act, scene, and page number to this edition.

ones. The characters held up for our admiration make the right choices intellectually, socially, economically. These right choices stem from a character's knowledge of himself and of the world around him. That knowledge leads to control and control leads to success. Although this value system has many implications and ramifications within the plays, the focus in this essay is on the attitude toward vanities or petty vices. The foolish characters pay too much attention to dress, to equipage, to card games, cosmetics, or gossip. Their wiser companions, while no less fond of fashion or pleasure, know the proper places of such "vanities" in a hierarchy of values. In short, *savoir faire* is a question of substance as well as style.

Intriguingly, in the Restoration comic canon, the number of males absorbed by vanities and petty vices far exceeds the number of females. Though conventional wisdom decrees that women are most often fools to fashion and the commonplace books are full of maxims aimed at the vanities of women, the looking glass is reversed in Restoration comedy. In play after play, it is the male characters whose addiction to petty vices marks them as not only vain but empty as well. By this reversal of the audience's expectations, the playwrights indirectly intensify the satiric effect of the characterizations.

The male characters who most delightfully illustrate the preoccupation with external vanities are the fops, who are all pretenders to wit and fashion. Their failure is one of excess as they talk too much, dress too extravagantly, and overburden themselves with servants and equipment. The predominance of this character type, epitomized by Etherege's Sir Fopling Flutter, has led some critics to assess Restoration plays as superficial manners comedy, light artificial dramas depicting a delightful but meaningless society. William Hazlitt's description of the comedy as a fairyland where "beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies in giddy mazes,"³ clearly focuses on the fop type as the center of the comedy. And in a sense, Hazlitt and his more recent colleagues, George Nettleton and J. H. Wilson,⁴ are right; a great deal of emphasis is placed on superficial manners. Furthermore, the "gilded" fops do demand our attention

and afford us amusement. However, they also are ridiculed by the playwright's distinction between *savoir faire* and foppishness.

The fops misjudge the nature of the thing they imitate. They attempt to be—and think they are—fashionable gentlemen, but they mistake form for meaning. Because they have the outward appearance of gentlemen—the clothes, the carriages, refinements—they assume they are gentlemen. However, the most important requirement for a real man of mode is the inner control to manipulate these accouterments to his own advantage. To do so often requires a finely tuned sense of artifice to mask real motives or emotions. The fops cannot use artifice; they are used by it, thus becoming artificial and hence objects of ridicule for their "acquired" follies.

Etherege's Sir Fopling Flutter delightfully epitomizes this foppishness arising from an addiction to external vices. While Dale Underwood argues that *The Man of Mode* lacks an unequivocal set of values by which to judge the world of the play,⁵ and Robert D. Hume contends that Sir Fopling is "so extravagant that he is a figure of fun not the object of serious attack" and hence cannot provide a moral touchstone,⁶ I believe that the distinction between *savoir faire* and foppishness provides an ethical framework for *The Man of Mode* and other Restoration comedies as well. As *Man of Mode* opens, the other male characters expose Sir Fopling's own view of his status before the fop ever appears on stage. In Act I he is described as a great critic in matters of fashion, and Young Bellair declares that Sir Fopling "thinks himself the pattern of modern gallantry." Dorimant's reply, "he is indeed the pattern of modern foppery" (I.i.344-345), clearly establishes the ironic discrepancy between Sir Fopling's view of himself and the others' view of him. Because he has acquired the trappings of a man of mode, Sir Fopling assumes he is one. He defines a gentleman as one who "ought to dress well, dance well, fence well, have a genius for love letters, and agreeable voice for a chamber, be very amorous, something discreet, but not overconstant" (I.i.365-367). Although this description fits the exterior of the gentleman, it goes no deeper. Not only are the heroes accomplished, they are clever, penetrating, self-controlled, and their self-control allows them to control others. Sir Fopling both lacks and misunderstands these qualities.

³William Hazlitt, "On Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrough, and Farquhar," *Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. D. Howe, VI (London: J. M. Dent, 1931), 70.

⁴George H. Nettleton, *English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (1642-1780) (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1923), pp. 86-87, and J. H. Wilson, *The Court Wits of the Restoration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948).

⁵Dale Underwood, "The Comic Language," reprinted in *Restoration Dramatists*, ed. Earl Miner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 102.

⁶Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 93.

Sir Fopling reveals his lack of self-control by his excessive attention to dress and perfume. Medley describes Sir Fopling's periwig as "more exactly curled than a lady's head newly dressed for a ball" (I.i.347-348). Good grooming thus becomes effeminacy for Sir Fopling. The scene in which the witty ensemble at Lady Townley's unite in a grand mockery of the fop's dress provides the sharpest criticism of Sir Fopling's affection. Exquisite high comedy results as the victim remains blissfully unaware of his own slaughter:

Emil. He wears nothing but what are originals of the most famous hands in Paris.

Sir Fop. You are in the right, madam.

L. Town. The suit!

Sir Fop. Barroy.

Emil. The garniture!

Sir Fop. Le Gras.

Med. The shoes!

Sir Fop. Piccar

Dor. The Periwig!

Sir Fop. Chedreux.

L. Town.)

Emil.) *The gloves!*

Sir Fop. Orangerie—you know the smell, ladies.

(III.iii.203-215)

The staccato exchange develops a point/counterpoint quality as voice after voice chimes in to add to the chorus of ridicule aimed at Sir Fopling's impenetrable ignorance.

Furthermore, Sir Fopling's excesses highlight the accomplishments of Dorimant, who understands the advantages of dressing well but knows that a well-trimmed exterior should reflect a well-trimmed interior. The play opens in the rake's dressing room, and Dorimant proves to be far from in different to his own attire. The valet, Handy, reminds Dorimant, "[Y]ou love to have your clothes hang just, sir" (I.i.326), and Young Bellair observes, "[N]o man has a better fancy in his clothes than you have" (I.i.337). Dorimant epitomizes the well-dressed gentleman, but he understands the limitations of dress. His observation to his valet, "I love to be well-dressed and think it no scandal to my understanding (I.i.327-328), illustrates his awareness of the importance of intellectual accomplishments. Indeed, his ironic comment "That a man's excellency should lie in neatly tying of a riband or a cravat!" (I.i.332-333) reveals his ability to laugh at a society overly concern-

ed with externals. Part of this mockery must also be directed at himself since he is busily engaged in "tying his cravat" as he makes the comment, but the ability to laugh at himself reveals a self-knowledge wholly lacking in Sir Fopling.

Sir Fopling's excessive preoccupation with externals in contrast to Dorimant's sensible approach is also revealed in their use of servants. Dorimant employs a valet, Handy, while the fop employs eight attendants, plus a page, and a *valet de chambre*. A convenience for Dorimant becomes an encumbrance for Sir Fopling as he is followed about by a veritable army. In addition, all of Sir Fopling's attendants but the odious John Trott, renamed Hampshire by his employer, have been imported from France. Sir Fopling's inordinant pride in this fact further reveals his pretentiousness—and his vanity.

The point of Etherege's ridicule of Sir Fopling focuses on the emptiness behind his overly fashionable facade. The fop exposes that emptiness most clearly in a conversation late in Act IV about the necessity for mirrors in a gentleman's chambers:

Sir Fop. Prithee, Dorimant, why hast not thou a glass hung up here? A room is the dullest thing without one.

Y. Bell. Here is company to entertain you.

Sir Fop. But I mean in case of being alone. In a glass a man may entertain himself—

Dor. The shadow of himself, indeed.

Sir Fop. —Correct the errors of his motions and his dress.

Med. I find, Sir Fopling, in your solitude you remember the saying on the wise man, and study yourself.

(IV.iii.83-91)

Medley's final comment seems to represent Etherege's judgement. When Sir Fopling studies himself, he can only study the reflection of his external appearance, because that's all there is. In contrast, Etherege implies that Dorimant, who lacks a mirror, can reflect upon his inner self. As Norman Holland observes, "for the men affectation is the negative value and the worst offender is, of course, Sir Fopling, who absurdly and magnificently incarnates the idea. He has no inner personality, only externals—clothes, attendants, mannerisms. Sir Fopling's self is totally outside; there is neither inner man nor inner desires."⁷

Sir Fopling is the most memorable of the Restoration fops characterized by a preoccupation with externals, and he provides

⁷Norman H. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) p. 87.

the prototype for numerous similar figures to follow, signifying the importance of this satirical focus in the context of Restoration comedy. He is not, however, the first character to be ridiculed for his addiction to fashion. Sir Fopling has a predecessor in Wycherley's Frenchified fool, Monsieur De Paris in *The Gentleman-Dancing Master*. Like Fopling, De Paris is a plain English blockhead turned fool by a smattering of French refinement. He assumes that his French clothes and manners make him a man of mode. The surest sign of his mistake comes in his condemnation of the hero Gerrard:

[H]e can't dance a step, nor sing a French Song, nor swear a French Oaté, nor use the polite French word in his conversation; and in fine, can't play at Hombre—but speaks base good Englis' with the commune homebred pronunciation, and, in fine, to say no more he ne're carries a Snuff-box about with him.⁸

De Paris substitutes conversation, games, and snuff boxes for the self-control and penetration of the rake-hero. Wycherley's point is confirmed by the outcome of the plot. In the end, De Paris, who has only the trappings of a gentleman, deceives none but the even more foolish Don Diego, while Gerrard, possessed of acumen and perception, deceives De Paris as well, winning the reward they both seek, Hippolyta's hand in marriage.

Indeed, it can be argued that *Gentleman Dancing-Master* is a play about fashion, since the plot turns upon De Paris's assumption of the French mode, Don Diego's assumption of the Spanish mode, and Gerrard's assumption of the dancing-master mode. The course of the play reveals the truth behind these facades. Gerrard plays dancing master to mask his manly self. The foreign roles of Don Diego and De Paris mask emptiness. As Virginia Birdsall declares, for Wycherley as for Etherege, "social . . . pretensions constitute a denial of one's basic human nature, and can turn life into a sterile, empty shell."⁹ Pursuing his analysis of outward forms, James Thompson observes of De Paris that, "having rejected his country, his language and his nature, it is as if there is nothing at all behind his words and dress: style is truly all there is to such a vacuous character. He is a characterless character."¹⁰ The same could be said of Don Diego and Etherege's Sir Fopling as well.

⁸William Wycherley, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master in The Complete Plays*, ed. Gerald Weales (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966). All future references to the play will be to this edition and will be noted in the text by act, scene, and page number.

⁹Virginia Ogden Birdsall, *Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 127.

¹⁰James Thompson, *Language in Wycherley's Play* (University, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 1984), p. 59.

However, the finest example of the fop built on Etherege's prototype is Lord Foppington in Vanbrugh's *Relapse*. Like Sir Fopling, Lord Foppington's excellence lies in his cravat, not in his cranium, and the Lord's chief concern is with his appearance. Also like Sir Fopling, we are introduced to Lord Foppington before we meet him. The servant Lory advises Foppington's brother, Young Fashion, who is in need of money, to "apply yourself to his favorites; speak to his periwig, his cravat, his feather, his snuffbox" (I, ii, pp. 24-25).¹¹ Thus the Lord's priorities are clearly established. When the gentleman actually appears in the subsequent scene, he is surrounded by a veritable army of merchants. "De shoemaker, de tailor, de hosier, de sempstress, de barber, be all ready if your lordship please to be dress," announces Lord Foppington's French servant, La Vérole (I, ii, p. 25). The fop seems to assume that if the King could make him a lord (he has just purchased a title), the tailor can make him a man. Vanbraugh's point that a full periwig is no substitute for perspicacity is made by Young Fashion, who has neither title, money, nor a snuff box, but who tricks Lord Foppington out of his bride, Hoyden, and her fortune.

Though Monsieur De Paris, Sir Fopling Flutter, and Lord Foppington are characterized almost exclusively through their reliance on external forms, Restoration comedies depict numerous other males who illustrate the same folly to a lesser extent. Sparkish, in Wycherley's *Country Wife*, equates his pride in his wife with his pleasure in showing off his fine clothes at the play house (III, ii, p. 304),¹² thus revealing his perverted sense of values. Congreve's Lord Froth in the *Double Dealer* is so enamoured of his gallantry that he kisses his own reflection in a pocket mirror (II, i, p. 133).¹³ The scene is reminiscent of Sir Fopling's ruminations on a looking glass and reveals Lord Froth as equally a reflection of a man. Witwoud in Congreve's *Way of the World* is more concerned with the sound of his voice than his physical appearance, but his excessive witticisms reflect his emptiness in the same way that the mirrored reflections of the other fools reveal theirs.

Thus the fops provide much of the laughter in Restoration com-

¹¹Sir John Vanbrugh, *The Relapse in the Works of Sir John Vanbrugh*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927).

¹²William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, in *The Complete Plays*, ed. Gerald Weales (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966). All future references to the play will be to this edition and will be noted in the text by act, scene, and page number.

¹³William Congreve, *The Double-Dealer*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. Charles Alexander Ewald (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956). All future references to this play will be cited in the text and will refer by act, scene and page number to this edition.

edy—both for the audience and for other characters. The key to the laughter is the fools' ironic self-ignorance as they perceive themselves to be one thing and demonstrate themselves to be another. Because they mistake outward form for inner meaning, they reveal themselves as shallow and without substance. Their emptiness is highlighted by the rake-heroes who use outward form to express inner meaning, thus establishing the value system of the plays. As R. C. Sharma observes, "the wits are to the manner born, and bear themselves with wit and grace. The fops are no aliens, but they are misfits in this society. The fops may be described as poor relations to the gallants—poor not in material resources so much as in wit and judgment. Being more or less caricatures, they provide laughter. Like all other caricatures, they help to confirm the value of the wits."¹⁴

Interestingly, this criticism of fashion's fools applies more directly to men than to women. Although conventional wisdom dictates that women are more subject to personal vanities than are men, such is not the case in Restoration comedy. Ursula Jantz in her categorizing study, *Targets of Satire in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve*, lists affectation and hypocrisy as the two main faults for which women are attacked in these plays.¹⁵ However, she offers no examples of women satirized for affectation other than whimsicality, and her illustration thereof is Congreve's Millamant. Probably few readers would disagree that Millamant is whimsical. One has only to remember her definitive rejection of Mirabell in Act II, "Well, I won't have you Mirabell—I'm resolved—I think,"¹⁶ or to imagine her pinning up her hair with verse letters to make it curl (II, ii, p. 318) to perceive her whimsicality. However, these fetches are but charming filigree atop the otherwise solid structure of her character. Indeed, rather than considering Millamant an object of satire for her affectation of whimsicality, one might be better served to consider her a touchstone of reason against which her foolish peers are measured.

Sir Fopling and Lord Foppington have no real female counterparts. The closest is Lady Lovetoy in William Burnaby's *Ladies' Visiting Day* (a virtually unknown play written in 1701 and not reprinted since the eighteenth century). Lady Lovetoy, as her name indicates, is characterized by her love of trinkets, especially

¹⁴R. C. Sharma, *Theme and Conventions in the Comedy of Manners* (New York: Asia Publishing, 1965), pp. 116-117.

¹⁵Ursula Jantz, *Targets of Satire in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve*. Salzburg Studies in English Literature (Salzburg, 1978), p. 186.

¹⁶William Congreve, *The Way of the World*, ed. Charles Ewald (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956).

anything foreign. Act III opens with her besieged by vendors of foreign wares—particularly monkeys, parrots, and other exotic birds. So obsessed is she that she rejects Courtine's offer of marriage (he is a suitable match), but later accepts the hand of Prince Alexander, a Muscovite. Lady Lovetoy's affection is criticized by the plaindealing Fulvia and exploded by the fifth act revelation that the exotic Alexander is really Courtine in disguise.

The surface comparisons to the fops are clear. Like her male counterparts, Lady Lovetoy has an ill-conceived set of values. She overprizes anything foreign without evaluating its real merit in the same way that Sir Fopling, De Paris, and Lord Foppington overvalue anything French. However, unlike the males, Lady Lovetoy learns from her mistake. Her affectation reveals simply folly, not emptiness. Thus, though the ridicule aimed at her does illustrate the importance of good sense, it does not illustrate the lack of understanding as strongly as does that aimed at the men. Further, her presence in a minor, obscure play prevents her from functioning as a major philosophical index as do the more famous male fools.

Other female characters provide laughter because of their acquired follies, but none provide the central focus on externals that the three male fops provide. For example, Lady Wishfort in Congreve's *Way of the World* relies too heavily on cosmetics to conceal the ravages of age, and thus becomes a comic figure. The scene in which the lady attempts to conceal her defects while her maid persists in misunderstanding is fine comedy created by the two at cross purposes:

Lady Wish: Fetch me the red—the red, do you hear sweetheart?—an ar-rant ash color, as I am a person! Look you how this wench stirs! Dost thou not fetch me a little red? Dost thou not hear me, Mopus?

Peg. The red Ratafia does your ladyship mean, or the cherrybrandy?

Lady Wish. Ratafia, fool! No fool. Not the ratafia, fool—grant me patience!—I mean the Spanish paper, idiot—complexion, darling. Paint, paint, paint, dost thou understand that, changeling . . . ?

(III, i, p. 323)

However, the real criticism of Lady Wishfort focuses on her attempts to play the coquette long past retirement age. She is ridiculed for her inaccurate sense of self, but unlike the men, she does have a self to misconceive. Whereas the men's outward affectations conceal emptiness, Lady Wishfort's outward affectations reveal an inescapable inner reality to which she must, and does, adjust.

Lady Froth in Congreve's *Double Dealer* provides another example of what appears to be excessive affectation. Whereas Sir Fopling prides himself on a non-existent good taste, Lady Froth prides herself on a non-existent writing talent. When the would-be poetess unfolds her domestic epic starring herself, Lord Froth, and their former hackney coachman turned charioteer (III, ii, P. 154-155), her inadvertent revelation of her lack of talent recalls Sir Fopling's inadvertent revelations of his stupidity. Here the two characters seem to raise a similar point about the fools' lack of self-knowledge.

However, when Lady Froth uses her writing to conceal an affair with Brisk, Congreve moves into an entirely different realm. Lady Froth's pretensions cover not just emptiness but licentiousness; thus her vices seem less petty than Sir Fopling's or Lord Foppington's. Here Congreve explores a deeper, more serious level of the ethical system implied by the Restoration comedies—one beyond the scope of this paper.

Perhaps the most striking use of petty female vices does not function as a major tool of characterization as with the males, but it surfaces as an indirect criticism of the occupations of women. Numerous characters comment on women as inveterate card players, gossips, or animal keepers. The implication seems to be that the women have no more meaningful pursuits; they are consumed by the trivial.

In *Man of Mode*, Medley ridicules Lady Dealer as "so insatiable a carder, an old gleeker never loved to set to't like her. I have played with her now at least a dozen times till she 'as worn out all her fine complexion and her tour would keep in curl no longer" (II.i.126-130). Though the lady in question never appears in the play, Etherege is clearly aiming a barb at women who have nothing to do but play cards. In *The Country Wife*, Sir Jasper Fidget outlines a woman's occupations to Horner. "You must e'en fall to visiting our wives, . . . dealing cards to 'em, reading Plays and Gazets to 'em, picking fleas out of their shock for 'em, collecting Receipts, New Songs, Women, Pages, and Footmen for 'em" (II, ii, p. 288). Although Sir Jasper is hardly the most perceptive character in the play, if he would add cuckolding and drinking to his list, he would have a fair assessment of Lady Fidget's occupations.

As in the treatment of the fops, the criticism seems to be aimed not so much at the vices themselves, but at the ladies' preoccupation with them. Card-playing in itself may be a pleasant diversion, but to fill one's life with nothing else reveals one's shallowness.

This point becomes clearer when one looks at the women held up for our admiration—Harriet, Millamant, or Alithea for example. Each of these women is fond of what Alithea calls "the innocent liberty of the town," (II, i, p. 274); likewise each knows the importance of other things—particularly meaningful relationships, as demonstrated by the lengths to which each woman goes to secure such a relationship. Thus, like their counterparts the rake-heroes, the women do not disdain trivial occupations, but know their place in a hierarchy of values.

The culmination of this establishment of hierarchies comes in the proviso scene between Mirabell and Millamant in *Way of the World*. Millamant makes a number of demands which seem at first to be trivial—"To write and receive letters, . . . to wear what I please, . . . to come to dinner when I please, . . . to have my closet inviolate, . . . to be sole empress of my teatable" (IV, i, 345-46) are among her provisos. The apparently trivial provisions reveal Millamant's real sense of self. We already know she loves Mirabell greatly; she consents to marry him—but only if marriage will not diminish her selfhood or his affection for her. Thus, Millamant does not reject trifles, but she knows their place in relation to other values, and she knows their symbolic worth when they represent other, deeper values. Properly used, trifles can enhance lives and relationships in the same way that fashionable clothes can enhance the appeal of a sensible man.

Thus the trivial plays an important role in the establishment of a value system in Restoration comedy. At the center of this system is the concept of *savoir faire*. The characters strive to live their lives gracefully and well. To do so demands a sure sense of the role of forms. A life of civility includes the mastery of social graces such as dressing, dancing, card-playing, etc. However, *savoir faire* also includes the understanding that these pursuits are merely pleasant externals. They are no substitute for intelligence, wit, and perspicacity. Thus, characters who fail to comprehend the proper relation of external form to internal meaning are ridiculed within the context of the plays. This ridicule strikes a number of targets, some more serious than others. Men who mistake outer form for meaning are mocked. Women who fill their lives with meaningless pursuits are criticized. The specific nature of the target is varied, but the message is singular. The characters who possess *savoir faire* and are subsequently held up for our approval understand the limited function of the trivial; those who do not and who overvalue the trivial are held up for our laughter, thus implying a clear system of values, in which both style and substance are important.

The Physical Limitations of Human Reasoning: Imagery of Debasement in *Gulliver's Travels*

by Becky Hayes Walker*

Many scenes in *Gulliver's Travels* emphasize Swift's loathing of what Denis Donoghue describes as "man's arrogance in denying the primacy of the body. The tradition which [Swift] attacked with greatest persistence was that which affected to despise the body and to find value only in extremities of spirit."¹ By depicting humans as physical, and often debased, creatures, Swift shows that this side of human nature cannot be ignored. It is pride, one of the Seven Deadly Sins, which entices humans to consider themselves as purely rational beings with no physical limitations. In fact, the faculty of reason, which distinguishes humans from beasts, becomes the most flawed human faculty as a result of this pride, which, according to Angus Ross, Swift sees also as an innate characteristic of humankind.² Swift attempts to vex his readers into accepting their physical as well as rational natures as part of the divinely-planned order by shocking the readers with detailed and often unpleasant descriptions of the physical. At the same time, descriptions in *Gulliver's Travels* of humankind's debased, filthy, physical character reflect the spiritual state of the species.³ Through passages describing size, excrement, use of senses, the contrast between the yahoos and the Houyhnhnms, and clothing, Swift uses the physical body as a symbol of the limitations of the rational or spiritual capabilities of humans.

William Eddy points out that Swift uses variations in size to examine human nature from various perspectives and to demonstrate "that man's egotism is the result of his failure to see human life as a whole, in its proper relation to the universe."⁴ This failure is emphasized by Gulliver's two points of view in the first two voyages. Gulliver looks down on the Lilliputian world and has a more comprehensive view. Because of this, he realizes how petty and inconsequential many of their political concerns are. This view point

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¹Denis Donoghue, *Jonathan Swift: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 88.

²Angus Ross, *Swift: Gulliver's Travels* (London: Edward Arnold, 1968), p. 34.

³Donoghue, p. 65.

⁴William A. Eddy, *Gulliver's Travels: A Critical Study* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 109.

is immediately contrasted to his visit to the land of the giants in Brobdingnag where Gulliver only sees parts, not the whole. Because of Gulliver's different perspectives, his descriptions guide the reader to see the small Lilliputians as spiritually petty and the giants as "physically loathsome."⁵

The first size perspective shows humans as small, spiteful creatures in Lilliput. As the giant of the land, Gulliver has a more cosmic view of the kingdom and, thus, sees follies he would otherwise overlook. Gulliver seems most impressed by the mechanical ingenuity demonstrated by these pygmies, even in their political system. John Gill in *The Dress of Words* explains that Gulliver also finds the Lilliputians to be neat, orderly, and fastidiously precise.⁶ However, the natives also have their faults. Because of their size, their minds are limited. For instance, the Lilliputian tailors take great pains to measure and to calculate the required size of clothing for Gulliver, but after all this effort they still use his present clothing as patterns for the new, wasting all their efforts at calculation. As Gulliver learns more about the natives, he discovers that they have many of the faults found in his own species. They have petty disagreements over such inconsequential matters as the height of shoe heels and which end of a soft-boiled egg to break. These minor differences result in much bloodshed and violence. In fact, violence, jealousy, and vengeance abound in the kingdom. Because the Lord Treasurer fears that his wife is infatuated with Gulliver, he appeals to the Queen, who has also vowed vengeance on Gulliver for extinguishing the fire in her chambers. Their desire for revenge against Gulliver eventually leads to the vicious order that Gulliver be executed through a merciful blinding and starvation, emphasizing the unfeeling reasoning of their mechanical government, which Ross says is nearly tyrannical.⁷ Swift's technique of belittling the Lilliputian administration also exposes shortcomings in the English political systems to which Swift alludes.

The faults of the Lilliputian natives are based on their overblown pride. By satirizing their exaggerated pride, Swift strips "human affairs of their self-imposed grandeur," according to William Eddy.⁸ Throughout Book I, physical gestures emphasize vain human grandeur or pride. When the king first talks with

⁵Donoghue, p. 169.

⁶James Gill, "Man and Yahoo: Dialectic and Symbolism in Gulliver's 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms,'" in *The Dress of Words: Essays on Restoration and Eighteenth Century Literature in Honor of Richmond P. Bond*, ed. Robert B. White, Jr. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries Press, 1978), p. 74.

⁷Ross, p. 43.

⁸Eddy, p. 100.

Gulliver, he pulls his sword as a threat to prevent Gulliver from trying to harm him. Obviously, it is ridiculous for king to suppose he can overcome the tremendous physical advantage Gulliver has. Vanity causes the king to assume that his commandments and his power will keep Gulliver a docile prisoner. It is actually Gulliver's nature, gratitude for their hospitality, and dedication to keeping his word of honor—another form of pride—that keep him from rebelling. Jenny Mezciems points out that even the natives' proposals to dispose of Gulliver carry allusions to fabled giants of the past: Samson was blinded by the Philistines, and Hercules died in agony due to the poisoned blood of the Centaur Nessus.⁹ By linking the Lilliputians to ancient societies through their methods of victimizing giants, Swift shows that vain pride is a common human characteristic in all times and societies.

While in Lilliput, Gulliver towers as a moral giant compared to the petty, boasting natives. He uses his talents for the public good, not to better his own situation. He steals the enemy ships partially to prevent unnecessary violence between the countries. Then he persuades the Lilliputian king not to take undue advantage of the Blefuscu Empire but instead to make peace. Gulliver is gentle with the people and even condescends to "play" with them, as in the military maneuvers. Because he feels little threat due to his size, he can be what Jack Gilbert calls a fine example of docility, gentleness, and modesty.¹⁰ In this world he is the giant entertaining and being entertained by the petty creatures. Because of his relative size, Gulliver views the Lilliputian society as the king of Brobdingnag views England:

[H]ow contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects. . . . And yet . . . those creatures have their titles and distinctions of honour, they contrive little nests and burrows, that they call houses and cities; they make a figure in dress and equipage; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray.¹¹

These characteristics are obviously, then, common to all humans, regardless of size. In fact, the docile Gulliver of Lilliput becomes petty and vicious when he finds himself disadvantaged in size on his next voyage, the visit to Brobdingnag.

⁹Jenny Mezciems, "Gulliver and Other Heroes," in *The Art of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Clive Probyn (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 201.

¹⁰Jack Gilbert, *Jonathan Swift: Romantic and Cynic Moralizer* (New York: Haskell House, 1973), p. 98.

¹¹Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Louis A. Landa (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 86. All subsequent references to this source will be included in the text.

In the land of the Brobdingnagian giants, the overwhelming physical presence of the natives emphasizes that aspect of humanity.¹² Gulliver is overcome by the loud noises and strong smells. He is also appalled at how deformed and grotesque the natives are, a reflection of humanity's base physical form when closely examined. Gulliver is repelled during his first meal in the land by the sight of a breast when a child is nursed. He finds the magnification of the pimples and other skin imperfections to be nauseating and reflects that beauty is relative. His reaction is similar when the young Maids of Honour undress before him. In this scene, Gulliver is not only disgusted by their appearance; he is upset that they consider him to be so insignificant that they undress in front of him. Gulliver is ashamed that they do not consider him important enough to hide from him their physical flaws. Instead, the maids expose their natural, faulty selves. The scene which most reflects the repulsiveness of the physical nature of humanity occurs when Gulliver describes the beggars.

There was a woman with a cancer in her breast, swelled to a monstrous size, full of holes, in two or three of which I could have easily crept and covered my whole body. There was a fellow with a wen in his neck, larger than five woolpacks, and another with a couple of wooden legs, each about twenty foot high. But the most hateful sight of all was the lice crawling on their clothes. I could see distinctly the limbs of these vermin with my naked eye . . . and their snouts with which they rooted like swine. (pp. 90-91)

Through this magnification, all grace and beauty are lost. According to Eddy, this situation exemplifies Swift's concept that size, beauty, and all values based on physical appearance are false, relative values.¹³

At first glance, it seems that the giants' morality is as lofty compared to Gulliver's as is their size. It is Gulliver who seems low when his pride obviously exceeds his physical capabilities in this land. His actions mirror those of the king of Lilliput when he repeatedly whips out his sword in what the giants consider a comical show. Gulliver is quite proud of his courageous victory over the rats. However, the rats are trivial to the natives, most of whom are more concerned with Gulliver's health than with his heroism.

¹²Kathleen Williams, "'Animal Rationis Capax.' A Study of Certain Aspects of Swift's Imagery," in *Fair Liberty Was All His Cry: A Tercentenary Tribute to Jonathan Swift*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: MacMillan, 1967), p. 134.

¹³Eddy, p. 150.

Gulliver continues his comical heroic posturing throughout his stay. Even though the reader is aware of his fears when he is threatened physically, he boasts of his intended courage to the citizens of Brobdingnag. The entire court is amused with his vain pride when he boasts of how he might have dealt with the monkey which painfully adopts him:

[I]f my fears had suffered me to think so far as to make use of my hanger (looking fiercely and clapping my hand upon the hilt as I spoke) when he poked his paw into my chamber, perhaps I should have given him such a wound as would have made him glad to withdraw it with more haste than he put it in. This I delivered in a firm tone, like a person who was jealous lest his courage should be called in question. However, my speech produced nothing else besides a loud laughter. . . . This made me reflect how vain an attempt it is for a man to endeavour doing himself honour among those who are out of all degree of equality or comparison with him. (p. 99)

Gulliver goes on to point out that this vain pride is typical of humans, even in his native land of England. Ross comments that because of Gulliver's size compared to even the insignificant vermin of Brobdingnag, he is forced to look at himself from a position of physical inferiority.¹⁴

Swift continues to expose the native as moral giants compared to Gulliver when the social and political habits of Gulliver's England are satirically compared to life in Brobdingnag. Gulliver, in his usual ostentatious manner, gives an idealized account of the English systems, and through asking a few appropriate questions, the king exposes the greatest faults in each of them. Perhaps the most memorable scene satirizing English life is that in which Gulliver, out of gratitude, offers to teach the king about destructive weapons. The king, who is surprised that England keeps an army during times of peace, is horrified at the thought of such destruction. The king "was amazed how so impotent an insect as I . . . could entertain such inhuman ideas, and in so familiar a manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and desolation . . ." (pp. 108-9). Again, the minute size is equated with such a "low" morality that would produce such suggestions.

However magnificent the Brobdingnagian morals may seem compared to Gulliver's, the reader realizes that the natives' morals are not perfect. The sixteen-year-old Maid of Honour embarrasses Gulliver with her indiscreet use of him. The amplification of the ex-

¹⁴Ross, p. 38.

ecution's grossness exposes the insensitivity of the people's justice. These are among many passages suggesting that the moral nature of humans, regardless of their size, is much the same. Eddy explains the symbolic value of the Brobdingnagians:

Swift represents in this race of giants the human race in its better mood, a mixture of good and bad, of attractive and undesirable qualities, inconsistent only as man himself is an inconsistency. The qualities of the race are exaggerated, but that is all. Morally, the giants are better than the best men, and personally they are coarser and more forbidding than the worst.¹⁵

The use of size, therefore, provides different perspectives from which to view human systems and nature. Since Gulliver, towering above it, can take in almost all of the Lilliputian world, he sees the Lilliputians as mechanically ingenious, yet petty, cruel, and proud. Once he enters Brobdingnag, he becomes a posturing, vain, and petty creature among moral giants. However, he discovers here the loathsome physical nature of humankind. He also becomes aware that values based on appearance or beauty are false. Humanity from any perspective, even in its magnified or exalted position, is far from perfect.

Swift extends this discussion of the flaws of humanity by emphasizing scatological imagery to stress the debased, physical nature of humanity. Nearly twenty separate passages describe or mention excrement or the organs used in excreting. Through these passages, Swift shocks readers into acknowledging and accepting their own natural, physical needs, often viewed as being base. The scatological imagery in the first two voyages primarily pertains to Gulliver's own excremental experiences. By the time Gulliver reaches the last two books, he refrains from admitting to having these needs. The progression adds to the unity and overall meaning of *Gulliver's Travels*. By including scenes where nature demands that Gulliver relieve himself, the reader is reminded that the hero has the same natural needs that he abhors in the yahoos of Book IV. Excrement, then, becomes a symbol of humanness and reflects the inward battle between man's natural urges and his attempts to deny those needs through reason and civilization. Human shame at having physical needs is emphasized when Gulliver defecates in the Temple: "I was under great difficulties between urgency and shame" (p. 23). Humans cannot ignore the basic needs of the animal side of their natures, yet social conditioning encourages

¹⁵Eddy, p. 147.

humans to be embarrassed by these symbols of that corrupted nature.

Since the accounts of the first two voyages discuss Gulliver as a human both in his most grand state and in his most belittled position, they both appropriately include discussions of the base but natural need to excrete. These discussions reflect Gulliver's status in the kingdoms as well as attitudes toward the natural, in this case animal-like, state of humanity. Within the first five pages of *Voyage I*, an account of Gulliver's urinating is given. He has been captured by the Lilliputians and has just agreed to be their prisoner. As soon as the king's ambassador leaves, the people loosen the cords restraining Gulliver on one side and he is able to "ease himself with making water" (p. 20). While urinating may relieve Gulliver, the Lilliputians fearfully and chaotically must run to "avoid the torrent which fell with such noise and violence" (p. 20). The scene represents the confusion Gulliver's presence in the kingdom causes throughout his stay. Although the king welcomes Gulliver's services against Blefuscu, he also recognizes that Gulliver, simply because of his size, is a physical hazard to the country's crops, cities, people, and economy.

The next excremental passage reflects the extensive efforts required of the Lilliputians to host Gulliver. Gulliver, embarrassed by his natural need, hides in the Temple and defecates at the end of his chain's length. The feces must then be hauled away in wheelbarrows by servants. From this time on, the clean-up ritual is repeated daily as part of the many services required for Gulliver's stay. Gulliver's embarrassment at having this natural need symbolizes human shame associated with most natural, basic needs. The need to excrete is equated with the animal-like or debased side of human nature. Therefore, it is appropriate for Gulliver to be ashamed of having such "low" needs when he is the moral giant of the land. Gulliver's attempt to handle this matter discreetly is absurd, considering the relative size of the feces—as absurd as the notion that humans should be ashamed of or deny their natural needs, Swift seems to suggest.

After describing his manner of relieving himself in the Temple, Gulliver apologizes, "But this is the only time I was ever guilty of so uncleanly an action; for which I cannot but hope the candid reader will give some allowance, after he hath maturely and impartially considered my case, and the distress I was in" (p. 23). This passage implies that if persons release themselves from social demands and view their natural needs "maturely and impartially,"

they will realize that these physical needs are healthy, as long as done in a "clean" or inoffensive manner. Also, Gulliver sets up a pattern of claiming a superior degree of cleanliness, an assertion he continues in the last voyage when he prides himself on being cleaner than the yahoos.

Natives find Gulliver's next mentioned elimination disgusting, even though he regards it as a natural way of assisting the Lilliputians while relieving himself. When Gulliver urinates on the fire in the Queen's chambers, he is proud of his ingenious manner of saving the palace. However, the Queen and others are appalled by his blatant indiscretion. While this scene alludes to Queen Anne's reaction to Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*, it also reflects the more universal abhorrence of society toward any indiscreet indulgence of base urges. The Lilliputian Queen reacts to the symbolism of Gulliver's urinating, while he sees the urine simply as an object to be used.¹⁶ Because of this action, Gulliver is eventually found guilty of treason. His act is considered to have been done "maliciously, traitorously and devilishly" (p. 54), words echoing views held by much of society regarding human passions.

Interestingly enough, in the subsequent voyage to Brobdingnag, it is Gulliver who considers excretion a vile act, and he assumes a bashfulness reminiscent of his experience in the Lilliputian Temple. After killing the rat, he asks the mistress to set him down and allow him to go outside. Only after Gulliver is certain she will not intrude on his modesty is he able to relieve himself. This attitude contrasts greatly with the unabashed view of the natives about excrement. Gulliver is revolted when the Maids of Honour indiscreetly urinate in front of him. Likewise, he is nauseated by the flies which "leave their loathsome excrement or spawn behind" (p. 88) in his food. From his perspective the filth is abominable. On the other hand, the natives either do not notice or readily accept the flies' actions as part of the natural order of things. Usually, if the natives do notice excrement, it is at Gulliver's expense. While trying to jump across a pile of cow manure, Gulliver falls in and is covered with the filth, much to the court's entertainment. This passage again emphasizes man's refusal, due to his own pride, to accept his natural limits. Gulliver ignores his physical limitations, in this case his size, and thus falls in the manure. Swift suggests that it is human pride, or a desire to be better than one can be, that leads to a sense of shame for

¹⁶Donoghue, p. 182.

physical needs and limitations, necessary components of being human.

In Laputa, the natives not only accept excrement as natural, as did the Brobdingnagians, but the Laputians handle excrement simply as an object with no connotations, since the scientists virtually deny their physical nature. The bladder, in a likely reference to the urinary bladder, is used by flappers to stir the scientists to reality. No doubt Swift uses this image tongue-in-cheek, recognizing that eventually the bladder's dominant urge will take priority. In experiments in the Grand Academy of Lagado, excrement repeatedly appears as neutral matter. Hogs plow fields, at the same time fertilizing them with manure. Anal experiments, because they counter nature's intentions, cause death. One scientist attempts to reduce human excrement to its original food while another studies human wastes to find potential criminals. This latter experiment would be appropriate to one who considered the physical filth and deformities as embodiments of spiritual corruption. To the scientists of Lagado, however, excrement is only material. They disregard the connotations of excrement, just as Gulliver does when he extinguishes the fire in Lilliput.

Contrasting with the view of excrement found in Laputa is the view given in Houyhnhnmland where excrement is primarily seen as a symbol of man's filthy, vile, corrupt nature. Here the yahoos, even described as "execrable" (p. 192), repeatedly discharge on Gulliver and on each other. They lick the ruler's posterior as a sign of submission. They even force excretion as a relief when their gluttony becomes painful to them. The yahoos' habits involving excrement represent their debased nature. Swift's portrayal of the yahoos leads Kathleen Williams to say, "[T]he Yahoos, with their brutish parodies of human appearance and behavior, do not simply represent, but *are* that part of our nature which arises from the physical; they embody the invisible shape of animal passions of man."¹⁷ Gulliver's comments make it evident that Swift includes passages on excrement not merely to shock the reader but for their symbolic value:

I hope the gentle reader will excuse me for dwelling on these and the like particulars, which, however insignificant they may appear to grovelling vulgar minds, yet will certainly help a philosopher to enlarge his thoughts and imagination, and apply them to the benefit of public as well private life, which was my sole design in presenting this. . . . (p. 78)

¹⁷Williams, p. 123.

While Gulliver's obvious tongue-in-cheek tone mocks what philosophers might make of his passages, Swift includes descriptions of excrement as a continuation of his theme of the debased nature of humanity and the folly of attempting to deny its physical nature.

In addition to using scatological imagery, Swift stresses the physicalness of humanity, a symbol for the debased nature of humans, by accentuating Gulliver's use of the five senses. Gulliver's perceptions of the worlds he visits are stimulated and often determined by his body's sensory experiences. His sight becomes a symbol for his intellectual "vision," or his rational capabilities. Because animals are not credited with having reasoning abilities, Swift associates the four senses other than sight with the more base or animal side of human physicalness. In the first and third books, Gulliver's vision is emphasized. In Lilliput, his "vision" or intellect seems above that of the natives because his vantage point gives him a more complete view of the world. Sight is also primary in the Laputian world of scientists, because they have ignored their other senses, their physical nature, in an attempt to be purely intellectual or rational. The other four senses are stressed in Brobdingnag, where Gulliver has only a limited view of humanity, one emphasizing the physical. In Book IV the obsessions of the Houyhnhnms with sight are contrasted with the more base senses of the yahoos. This difference in the use of senses parallels the contrasts between humans' rational characteristics and the physical or sensory levels. The sensory descriptions in all four books further depict the physical limitations on the capability of human reasoning.

When Gulliver first lands in the Lilliputian kingdom, he is suffering from an overindulgence of his physical nature. The effects of an intoxicant and of exhaustion from swimming and the heat cause Gulliver to sleep so soundly that when he awakens, he is a prisoner. Since Gulliver begins his stay in Lilliput as a prisoner, his initial impressions of the country are based on his sense of touch, primarily pain. Until he is unbound by the natives, Gulliver concentrates on his feelings—his hunger, pain from being bound and from the arrows, and relief from pain. The next sense, hearing, involves noises which are usually unpleasant, such as shouting, screaming, a gunshot, and Gulliver's loud voice. Generally, these noises are also accompanied by confusion or chaos.

In fact, only the senses of smell and taste seem to provide primarily pleasant stimuli for Gulliver. He notices that the oint-

ment which soothes his arrow wounds has a very pleasant smell. Likewise, he is impressed with the excellent meats and with the delicious, though drugged, wine. While these two senses are most favorable for Gulliver on this voyage, they constitute the largest problems for the natives. First, the sense of taste is connoted when Gulliver pretends he will eat the men who have hurt him, initially causing great fear among the witnesses. Gulliver's dietary requirements also inconvenience the Lilliputians both in the quantity of food and in the number of individuals needed to prepare the meals. Therefore, it is logical for the Lilliputians to choose starvation as a means of eliminating the problem posed by Gulliver. Not only will this method save their economy and supplies; it will also decrease the size of Gulliver's corpse and, thus, its inevitable great stench. It is likely that in this voyage, Swift is accentuating the four senses of taste, smell, hearing, and touch as necessary but neglected parts of being human because they are the most animal-like of the senses, contrasted with sight, which stimulates and symbolizes the reasoning faculty. Therefore, passages describing the use of the first four senses reflect Swift's intention to depict the nonrational aspects of the natives.

Gulliver's sight provides a vision of Lilliput which parallels England. In the first account relating to sight once Gulliver awakens in Lilliput the light offends his eyes. This account parallels the offense Swift anticipated many of his English readers would feel toward the vision of England in this voyage. The Lilliputians, or Englishmen, even try twice to destroy Gulliver's eyesight, his vision. First, a peasant almost shoots out Gulliver's left eye. Later, the Council votes to blind Gulliver for his act of treason. Even Gulliver's tremendous advantage in size is not sufficient alone to rescue him from dangers. Instead, he depends on assistance from natives, such as the official who warns him of the Council's decisions. Likewise, Gulliver is no more free from physical limitations, as the passages on senses suggest, than are the Lilliputians. Even though he is a moral giant in this diminutive land, he also is limited by his physicalness. His perceptions are governed by the five senses, which therefore limit his reasoning ability. He only seems to be more rational and moral because his senses perceive a more comprehensive picture of the Lilliputian world.

As soon as Gulliver enters the world of Brobdingnag, readers discover that Gulliver is limited by his sensory perceptions. Again in this country, the four senses excluding sight are used to stress Gulliver's perception of the massive physicalness of the Brob-

dingnagians. As he did in Lilliput, Gulliver enters the kingdom of Brobdingnag in pain. The corn beards pierce him, and the farm laborer pinches his sides. Throughout, he is threatened or hurt by various animals. The noises and smells of the land are also offensive to Gulliver. The talking, laughing, and music almost deafen him, and the smells of the natives' bodies almost overwhelm him. In this land, Gulliver is forced to overindulge in sensory stimuli. His meals are plentiful. In fact, he even initially hides in a corn field. Later, he trips on a crust. When he is on show with the farmer, he is required to drink as part of each performance. When the dwarf dumps him in the cream pitcher, he almost drowns, symbolizing his near drowning in the overindulgence of physical stimuli in Brobdingnag. Later, the monkey again tries to cram his mouth full. (Incidentally, this scene foreshadows the projectors' attempts to feed information to their students.) The emphasis on the senses in this book is necessary as part of its theme of the physicalness of the Brobdingnagians, as representatives of humanity. It also prepares the reader for the physical debasement of humanity in the form of the yahoos.

The physicalness of humanity as portrayed in Brobdingnag is contrasted to the human attempt to deny the physical in the third voyage. In Book III Gulliver reaches the land of the flying island, where the physical nature of humanity is ignored or at best considered an object for scientific use. Very little sensory imagery is included in this book. When it is used, it often shows that the projectors confuse their senses, as in the experiment where paint colors are mixed by smell, not by sight. The inhabitants have so disregarded their senses that they have to be reminded by flappers when to talk, listen, or eat. Much of the imagery in this voyage concerns obstructed taste. Gulliver's meals are carefully molded into geometric shapes, with little regard for their taste. Later, scientists are shown trying to extract sunbeams from cucumbers. Here, the food value of the vegetable is unimportant. The rulers of the flying island threaten eventual famine to maintain control over the colonies. This attempt to control is similar to the demands of the ruler of Traldragdubh that his visitors lick the dust off his floor. Later, Gulliver is disappointed when the cooks of the past cannot prepare their famous dishes for lack of appropriate food. Gulliver's attempts to titillate his sense of taste are repeatedly frustrated. In a world where so little attention is given to senses, it is not surprising that the Struldbruggs lose their sense of taste at age ninety.

Because the sole interest in Laputa is in the rational capabilities of humans, it is not surprising that the physical world is in decay. The experiments on land produce only shaky buildings and general decay and chaos. Therefore, the primary objection with the projectors, according to Ross, is that they have swindled their fellow men into denying natural laws and replacing them with manmade concepts that do not work.¹⁸ Swift implies that erroneous pride causes humans to try to ignore nature's law and their own position within nature's order. This denial of the laws of nature can create only destruction. Humans must recognize their intellectual limits and follow what hints are available in nature.

Angus Ross points out that the Struldbruggs represent the historical decay of humans into bestial, feeble, and senile creatures with an unreliable reasoning ability.¹⁹ They show the deterioration of the body and memory in a land where scientists govern and dictate that only the powers of human reason deserve attention, at the expense of physical abilities. The decay of the Struldbruggs' memory and the appearance of the ghosts seem to suggest Swift's concern with the decay of both language and history, man's recording faculties. By having the dead heroes appear to Gulliver in Glubdubdrib, Swift emphasizes that in a world of ignored physicalness, the dead are as welcome as those living who insist on denying half of their nature. In this voyage, Swift repeatedly expounds on the folly, based on pride, of ignoring the physical and on the danger of trying to be purely intellectual creatures which humans were not designed to be.

In the next voyage, the Houyhnhms also tend to deny some of their senses. By showing this denial of the senses which limits their knowledge of truth, Swift is able to establish the contrast between the Houyhnhms and the yahoos. The Houyhnhms deny their senses while the yahoos overindulge theirs. Swift uses the contrast between the natives' reactions toward their senses to show how unacceptable either of these extreme reflections of human characteristics is. First to be examined here is the denial of the senses by the Houyhnhms and their resulting faulty reasoning. When Gulliver is first being scrutinized by what will be his master horse, he tries to touch the horse's neck caressingly. The horse refuses to let him. Even when the Houyhnhms eat, they do so in a clean, regimented manner. The horses rely primarily on their sight

¹⁸Ross, p. 45.

¹⁹Ross, p. 48.

to inform them about the world. Therefore, by denying their other physical senses, they have faulty reasoning. For example, they assume, based on appearances, that Gulliver's clothing is part of his body. Clearly the Houyhnhms are not, as they claim to be, perfectly rational creatures. Because they continuously base their reasoning on appearance, the Houyhnhms make repeated misjudgments. They feel, as Clive Probyn says, that their truths are self-evident and universal.²⁰ Gulliver explains, "Neither is reason among them a point problematical as it is with us, where men can argue with plausibility on both sides of a question; but strikes you with immediate conviction; as it must needs to where it is not mingled, obscured, or discoloured by passion and interest" (p. 216). Even though Gulliver is sincerely impressed by this characteristic of the horses, readers are aware that the Houyhnhm's intellect is limited by its lack of versatility. When Gulliver describes how he came to their land in a ship, his master insists that Gulliver says "a thing which is not" (p. 193). The horse refuses to discuss the matter since he is certain, based on his limited experience, that he is right. Ross distinguishes the type of reason used by the Houyhnhms from that used by humans when he says, "The horse has no experience or knowledge and in this case reason is useless, so he holds a wrong opinion. Gulliver has experience and knowledge but often reason fails him and he comes to wrong conclusions."²¹ Since the horses base their rationale on what they consider to be absolute truths, they are not creative thinkers. Humans, on the other hand, can perceive varying points of view or opinions on any given topic. This variety seems chaotic to the horses, whose reason is stifling to humans. Therefore, human reasoning powers would be strengthened by adopting some of the Houyhnhms' rational techniques while maintaining the human flexibility.

Just as the Houyhnhms' reasoning power seems perfect but is actually limited, their perfect morals are ideal only on the surface. Because, as Gulliver observes, they "are endowed by nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature" (pp. 215-216), their goodness is diminished. W. B. Carnochan concludes that the Houyhnhms are virtuous by instinct and habit, not from a sense of rule or

²⁰Clive Probyn, "Swift and the Human Predicament," in *The Art of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Clive Probyn (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 68.

²¹Ross, p. 28.

duty.²² Since the Houyhnhnms never experience temptation, their proper behavior is of little value. The fact that they abstain from sex after two offspring are born is no longer impressive when one discovers that they have no lust. Their high morals reflect what human morals would have been had the original Fall of Adam and Eve not occurred. Humans could then have been in a perfect moral state. At the same time, this perfection seems lessened by the fact that it is not a conscious morality; no choice has been made. Only instinctive behavior is followed.

While Gulliver may insist that the Houyhnhnms have a general disposition to all virtues valued by their society, he does not say they are all virtuous. In fact, they lack characteristics considered virtuous in humans. They have little compassion and no deep emotion. When a close relative dies, the death is treated as a matter of little consequence to the living. Their marriages are based on rational designs to preserve the race, not on love. Parents feel no more fondness for their own children than they do for any other colts. Because of the noncompassionate natures of the horses, they do not represent an attractive model, at least for the modern reader, in spite of their many virtues.

While the rational Houyhnhnm with his stifling reasoning powers, his untested morals, and his lack of compassion is obviously not the model of perfection for humans, few readers would readily embrace the example set by the brutish yahoos. The Yahoos represent human nature totally devoid of reasoning powers and totally governed by physical urges and passions. Their filthy nature embodies the corruption of their spiritual and rational natures, so they become the epitome of the evil, bestial side of humans.

The yahoos embody all seven deadly sins: sloth, lust, avarice, gluttony, envy, wrath, and pride. Sloth is reflected when a yahoo howls and groans in the corner with no apparent illness and is cured with hard work. When Gulliver hears about the yahoo's sloth, he immediately recognizes "the true seeds of spleen, which only seizeth on the lazy, the luxurious, and the rich" (p. 213). The next sins described involve lust. The scene where the eleven-year-old attempts to rape Gulliver shows the brute's sexual lust. The lust is repeatedly mentioned by the horses when they discuss controlling the yahoo population. The master horse is shocked by the fact that "the she-yahoo would admit the male while she was pregnant"

²²W. B. Carnochan, *Lemuel Gulliver's Mirror for Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 67.

(p. 212) and at the coquetry displayed by the lustful females. He attributes this sexual lust to only the women, so Gulliver concludes that "unnatural appetites in both sexes . . . are entirely the productions of art and reason" (p. 213). Therefore, he suggests that civilization increases human lust, at least in males.

To demonstrate the yahoos' avarice, the master horse describes their greed for shining stones, a totally irrational desire from the horse's perspective. Yahoos hide the stones, fight over them, steal them, and even pine away if they lose them. Because of this greed, much potentially productive energy is wasted. The fourth sin, gluttony, is simply another form of lust. The horse describes how five yahoos given enough for fifty will fight each other to have it all. Of their unnatural appetite we further learn that "if their prey held out, they would eat till they were ready to burst" (p. 211). Gluttony and avarice lead to most of the envy and wrath among the beasts. If two yahoos are arguing over a shining stone, a third out of envy and greed will often steal the stone. Envy also causes the creatures to steal food: "[T]hey were fonder of what they could get by rapine or stealth at a greater distance, than much better food provided for them at home" (p. 211). Greedy competition brings out the wrathful, vicious natures of the yahoos. Herds quarrel for a dead cow:

[A]nd then would ensue such a battle . . . with terrible wounds made by their claws on both sides, although they seldom were able to kill one another, for want of such convenient instruments of death as [civilized humans] had invented. At other times the like battles have been fought between the yahoos of several neighborhoods without any visible cause; those of one district watching all opportunities to surprise the next before they had prepared. But if they find their project hath miscarried, they return home, and, for want of enemies, engage in . . . a civil war among themselves (p. 211).

The yahoos are a species totally indulgent in their physical urges and passions. As a group, they are usually described as being extravagant, wasteful, vicious, vulgar, filthy, cowardly, mischievous, idle, lazy, and uncontrolled. James Gill goes even further, saying, "In short, almost every conceivable human evil is concentrated in the figure of the yahoo-evil which he embodies in his hideous physical deformities and wild, virtually ungovernable behavior."²³ Swift uses physical deformities to emphasize the spiritual debasement of the creature. Gulliver reminds readers of this when he

²³Gill, p. 83.

describes the English nobility, in whom "the imperfections of [the] mind run parallel with those of [the] body" (p. 207).

Because of the yahoos' physical and spiritual grotesqueness, Gulliver as first refuses to recognize them as his own species. He only sees the yahoos' "filthiness and deformity become the external signs of that brute's vices."²⁴ Because of his revulsion, Gulliver tries to distinguish himself from the brutes, even though he can only use superficial techniques such as cleanliness and clothing. The Houyhnhnms soon discover that he is indeed a yahoo. After his clothes wear out and after the female yahoo attacks him, he can no longer deny his identity with the group. Emotional and sexual human responses of others will not allow Gulliver to ignore what his intellect tries to ignore, the fact that he and all other humans have the yahoo faults in varying degrees. In fact, the Houyhnhnms find Gulliver's society to be worse than the yahoos', since civilized humans use their political and social systems and their reasoning powers to the advantage of evil impulses. Certainly the description Gulliver gives of the English institutions places the English at no higher level than the brutes. The master horse uses physical examples to show how civilized humans have further perverted what nature has given them. He discusses the clipping of claws and facial hair, the weak forefeet and hindfeet and the shape of the mouth, to name just a few. When the horse describes the weakness of the feet, he seems to question the very foundations of human life. These foundations represent the social values, which have already been shown to lead to vice, as with the desire for shining stones. The distortions humans make of their physical attributes, such as trimming nails, represent human misuse of other gifts, particularly the reasoning power. This reasoning is used for vices, as in surprising the enemy or indulging in unnatural appetites. Eventually, Gullivers must agree with his master and concede that humans everywhere are base. When he hears the yahoo sins described, he is aware that all humans are guilty of them. He has found humans indulging in these sins in England, on the Continent (the Dutch pirate), in Lilliput, and to a lesser degree in Brobdingnag. When he mentions the yahoo wars, he matter-of-factly reports that civilized humans have more convenient methods for killing, which are socially acceptable expressions of vicious human natures. This realization strengthens Gulliver's revulsion for his own species, civilized or not.

²⁴Gill, p. 70.

The only deadly sin not emphasized, though implied, in the descriptions of yahoos is the sin most attributed to civilized humans: pride. Swift suggests that this pride is the source of human corruption of the natural gift of reasoning. This pride leads humans to ignore their bestial, physical selves and to aspire to the Houyhnhnm level they were not meant to achieve. What humans do not realize is that the perfection of the Houyhnhnm rational state comes at the expense of other human characteristics, such as love. However, all that the Gullivers of the world see is the more simple and calm lives of the horses, and that is attractive. Many movements in Swift's time tried to deny human physical nature with its subsequent temptations and to embrace only the pure rational nature of the Houyhnhnms. Swift rejects this denial of part of the God-given human nature. Through extensive clothing imagery he points out that any attempt to ignore the physical is at best a superficial effort based on vain pride.

Three basic concepts are stressed through clothes imagery, which appears over thirty-five times in the voyages. First, the methods of making clothes depict the general attitudes of the societies. The Lilliputians have two hundred seamstresses make calculations before using Gulliver's own shirt as a pattern. As previously mentioned, this shows their mechanical but short-sighted reasoning abilities. Gulliver's clothing in Book II is ordered like birdseed. It is considered necessary yet inconsequential, and so given little thought. In Book III, clothes are made using calculations and impractical science, so they naturally do not fit. This passage emphasizes that the scientists, while trying to abstract everything, ignore the reality of their own physicalness. In Houyhnhnmland, Gulliver makes his own crude clothing from yahoo skins, implying a cannibal-like behavior. In fact, it is Gulliver who suggests castration as a method of genocide for his own species. By doing so, he totally alienates himself from the physical nature of his species, as the scientists and the Houyhnhnms have done.

The second notion of the clothing image shows that the humans try to be better or more attractive than nature intended by wearing clothes. Because of vain pride, humans substitute appearance for reality. Gulliver denies his heritage with the yahoos by disguising his physical appearance with clothing, thus deceiving the Houyhnhnms. Pride makes Gulliver assume he is superior to the yahoos, when actually he is as physically and spiritually deformed as the beasts. Likewise, Gulliver uses spectacles to overcome his natural physical limitations. Gulliver is careful to protect his spec-

tacles in all his voyages, thus demonstrating his fear of being vulnerable if he must accept his physical limitations. As a civilized person, he hopes to extend his physical capabilities, in this case with the spectacles. Again, rational man denies physical man's limitations.

The third clothing concept closely follows human denial of human nature. Because of pride, humans attempt to hide the corrupt nature they see embodied in their physical deformities or limitations. Not only are they trying to aspire to a level higher than was intended for humanity; they are also hiding a sense of guilt from the original sin. Only after the Fall did humans hide their shame with clothing. Gulliver continues this tradition of wearing clothes to hide his resemblance to the yahoos, which he considers to be the embodiment of human sin, including the original Fall. Even Gulliver's spectacles represent, among other things, human blindness after the Fall and pride in thinking humans can conquer the physical limits resulting as a curse from the Fall. As the master horse points out, wearing clothes may be restrictive—just as carrying the guilt of the Fall may be—but it is best for humans to hide their deformities. However, the horse also recognizes that hiding the deformities, or spiritual uncleanness, has not made it easier for civilized humans to live together. Therefore, wearing clothing to hide the deformed physicalness is ineffective and vain. Disguising the appearance has not altered the underlying sinful human nature.

None of the methods humans use to deny their physical or corrupt natures, as presented in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, is effective. The Lilliputians' pride and gesticulating does not disguise their petty, inconsequential existence. When the scientists in Book III try to ignore the natural laws, all their experiments fail. Even Gulliver's attempt to live only with the rational Houyhnhnms does not work. He is forced back to his own species because the Houyhnhnms and later other humans refuse to recognize his insistence that he is superior to the rest of humankind. At the end of *Gulliver's Travels*, it is obvious that even Gulliver is not content with staying only with his horses in the stable. After all, he is trying to reconcile himself with members of his own species. So, if humans are not allowed to deny their physical nature, is Swift suggesting that rationality is an impossible, and therefore vain, aspiration for humans? Probably not. Most likely, Swift simply wishes to point out that the physical, corrupt side of human nature does exist and cannot be usurped. Therefore, it must be recognized and dealt

with. It is undesirable for humans to achieve a purely rational, Houyhnhnm-like state. First, that state does not allow for certain favorable human characteristics, such as the positive sides of passion. Second, it does not allow for the fact that the physical side of humanity is a limitation to the rational capabilities of humans. The physical limits the rational by subjecting humans to temptations of the flesh that often counter reason. Only by first recognizing these physical limitations can humans properly react to them. Swift implies that the human who deals with temptations in an appropriate manner demonstrates a greater virtue than the Houyhnhnm whose morality is never tested. Therefore, Swift would have humans accept the fact that we are no better than we were intended to be. The grotesquely repulsive human is the one who ignores the corrupted, filthy, bestial side of his or her nature and proudly boasts to be better than he or she possibly can be. It is pride that most deforms humans. Therefore, Gulliver mirrors Swift's contempt of the proud when he says:

[W]hen I behold a lump of deformity and diseases both in body and mind, smitten with pride, it immediately breaks all the measures of my patience; neither shall I be ever able to comprehend how such an animal and such a vice could tally together. (p. 239)