Gulliver and Other Monkeys

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Introduction

The distinctions between tragedy, satire and comedy, as with the lines severing madness from genius, are blurred and uncertain. The purpose of this essay is to further smudge, and where possible to erase, the artificial divisions within these two sets of notions, and thereby create more confusion.

Throughout I shall refer to the life and work of Swift, and in particular Gulliver's Travels , as neat examples of the chaos intrinsic in these diverse, yet related, concepts. As Aristotle exemplified the principle of the tragic, using Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannos , saying why it is sad or tragic in his opinion, so I hope to say why I feel Gulliver's Travels to be predominantly funny or comic, and attempt to explain the principle of the comic in a like manner, with digression upon other works as has seemed appropriate to the illustration of the subject. Throughout I shall use the term 'comedy' in its broader sense, as referring to the comic, rather than in its technical sense of comic drama.

Aristotle is generally acknowledged as a clever person, and I feel we should not only admire but also try to emulate the methodologies of those endowed with cleverness, for this is an attribute which is laudable. The trouble, of course, is that clever people such as Aristotle and Shakespeare are notoriously difficult to imitate, so that people generally abandon the attempt in frustration, settling for quotation instead, and I expect myself to be no

exception to this two and a half thousand year tradition of poor and frequently stupid imitators and epigones.

Another reason I expect my imitation of Aristotle to be a pale one, is that in this essay, I am playing the role of 'critic' rather than 'Aristotle'. As a critic, or like the Yahoos when they meet Gulliver for the first time, I shall sling as much mud at Swift and his works as I may in the hope that some of it sticks.

Swift's Gulliver's Travels [1] is, however, a monumental work; and, like many monuments, it may be slightly rusty with the passage of time and speckled with droppings from above, and yet its form is still clear and its heart is of the same metal that it was when it was unveiled to the public in 1726, and more fully in 1735.

The Travels is certainly one of the few books in the world that exemplifies as well as characterises the comic spirit. It uses the devices of comedy and examines their meanings as well, reflecting upon itself, which two processes, besides its aesthetic appeal, make it ideal as a model text. As rather more has been written on the subject of comedy and the comic than was extant in the time of Aristotle, I hope to include some of the more interesting comments upon the subject that have accumulated over the millennia. As the comic spirit is essentially timeless, anything comic or relating to the comic in all of the paltry time scale covered by the written word may be considered to be relevant, and I have applied this principle of relevance strictly to this essay.

It may be that this is a study in the prehistory of words, of dim and ancient rules and ideas. However, I make no apology for this: we live amongst words, swimming or floundering in a stream of discourse, and

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[1] Short title for Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, hereafter shortened still further to Travels. All quotations from this and other works of Swift refer to Ricardo Quintana's edition of Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings. (New York: Modern Library, 1958), with pagination and brackets.

words can, no more than a literal stream, be severed from their source, without the dire consequence of losing their depth and breadth. Also, the texts amongst which I have lived have tended to be other than modern, and this thesis inevitably reflects this reading history. I hope, however, that an examination of these concepts is not redundant in an age where insanity is overcome by chemicals, and sickeningly sweet and falsely saccharine sitcoms on TV are the dominant cultural expression of the comic.

1) Comic and satiric methods

"This is the sublime and refined Point of Felicity, called, *the possession of being well-deceived* ; The serene Peaceful state of being a Fool among Knaves." Swift, A Tale of a Tub.

1.1 Satire and Comedy.

In humorous writing the distinction is frequently made between the comic and the satiric. Each involves the attempt to presentat vice or absurdity in a manner that causes amusement rather than pain, yet while the satirist seeks to mend absurdity or vice, in a moral fashion, the comedian is content to merely report on these matters, with no overt didactic purpose. The comedian is wont to provoke playful laughter, whereas the satirist seeks to instigate a thoughtful amusement. The two genres are related, and this is seldom more lucidly demonstrated than in the works of Swift, whose work, and in particular in the twin triumphs of the Travels and A Tale of a Tub, which abound both in serious, moralistic and frequently caustic satire[1], and in delightfully subtle and varied comic digressions.

Satire is the use of ridicule to criticise folly or vice. This provides a good starting point from which to examine some of the complexities attendant upon these two concepts. This definition is clearly pregnant with ambiguous overtones, for the words "ridicule" and "criticise" imply a certain malignity, whereas the recognition of vice and folly as ridiculous seems benevolent. Further ambiguity arises from the fact that folly and the ridiculous belong

also to the field of the comic. Much of satire and comedy is generically indistinguishable from the other, for each uses absurdity and concerns folly.

The comic, in its purest form, such as the pun, tends towards the harmless (and pointless) end of the scale, whereas the satiric tends towards the threatening (and pointed) end. The relationship of the comic and satiric rests on the fulcrum of the absurd, between the extremities of raillery and nonsense.

1.2 Incongruity.

Humour derives from the use and context of the comic utterance, wherein coincidence or incongruity between either words and their object, or the internal relation of the words, cause the effect of humour. In Kierkegaard's words: "The category of the comic is essentially contradiction."[1] The technique of comedy is to portray incompatibility, for example, in a fool's unjustified pride. Paradox, incongruity and contradiction are, in effect, synonyms for things which are not as they should be. Yet however much we might wish the world to be reasonable and orderly, it persists in being absurdly chaotic. Lying *per se* would be intrinsically comic for the fact that it is at odds with the world, were it not for the harm that it so often causes, with its aim being to conceal, which contrasts with the comic aim of exposure. Comedy assumes the knowledge of a 'objective' reality, which the comic voice proceeds to undermine as ridiculous, whereas lying seeks to conceal 'objective' reality.

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[1] Kierkegaard (3), p 266.

Comedy forces the recognition of the presence of the ridiculous: it must be perceived intellectually, or, in the vernacular, one must 'get the joke'[1]. This is comic 'exposure', a revelation of absurdity, ugliness or folly where society and its values say that order, goodness or reason should predominate. The comic method is primarily comparative, as in, for example, parody, which undermines a given text, or scatological humour which may be said to contrast a private self and the facade of our public self.

A simple example of incongruity occurs in A Tale of a Tub, where Swift discusses the philosophical mores of the fictitious sect of Aeolists. The Aeolist's principle was:

> "...*Man* brings with him into the World a peculiar Portion or Grain of *Wind* which may be called a *Quinta Essentia*.... This *Quintessence*... is improvable into all Arts and Sciences and may be wonderfully refined, as well as enlarged by certain Methods in Education. This, when *blown* up to its Perfection, ought not to be covetously hoarded up, stifled or hid under a Bushel, but freely communicated to Mankind. Upon these Reasons, and others of equal Weight, the Wise *Aeolists*, affirm the gift of BELCHING, to be the noblest Act of a Rational Creature." (p331)

This is a fine example of the use of the incongruous in the form of a simple pun, dependent upon the possible double meaning of wind as either words or flatulence. Language abounds in such double meanings and ambiguities, because words have connotations as well as denotations, and to exploit this potential linguistic incongruity is to indulge in word play or punning.

Swift's technique is superbly controlled in this instance, for the passage is set in lofty, mock-philosophical tones, which Swift uses to build up the expectation of speech as the noblest act of a rational creature, for it is speech

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[1] Compare Love's Labours Lost : "A jest's prosperity lies in the ear / Of him that hears it, never in the tongue / Of him that makes it." (v.ii.847-9)

that might be improved and refined through education, and serves as a means for communication, yet he betrays his reader by the comic reduction of the expectation of the noble to "the gift of BELCHING".[1] The incongruity operates through the use of ornate verbiage, raising the reader's hopes, creating the anticipation of an ethereal and subtle philosophy, only to instantly return to earth and the earthy, by the substitution of 'belching' for 'speech' or 'words', and uses this mode of contradiction to create a comic effect. The sharp contrast between the words surrounding the comic climax, or punchline of 'the gift of BELCHING', with their surface rationality, and the reminder of humankind's animalistic aspects, is testament to Swift's skill at creating comic bathos.

The element of surprise in incongruity, the suddenness of the humorous contrast, is one of the central features in ensuring effective comedy, for it abruptly upsets our expectations and shifts our focus. This description of the Aeolist's practice is surely effective in this aspect. The 'punchline' is almost always brief, as this example shows. The mock resemblance or identity established between two overtly dissimilar objects is suddenly and unexpectedly exposed, in order to maximise the comic effect.

The passage creates an absurd logic through the use of philosophical forms of language, only to jolt us with a abrupt reminder of the fallacy of the syllogism, a fallacy reinforced in the Swift's next page: *"Words are but Wind; and Learning is nothing but Words;* Ergo, *Learning is nothing but Wind."* (p332) This logic is reminiscent of some speeches from Aristophanes' portrait in The Clouds of Socrates, whose gods are the air and the clouds, affirming the constancy of some objects of comedy through the ages. Satirists have often

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[1] Immanuel Kant asserts that laughter arises "from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing." (Abrams, p 103)

mocked the verbose sophistry of the philosopher, showing it as empty, nothing but wind.

The humorous use of incongruity and coincidence can be illustrated from 'The Voyage to Brobdingnag', which abounds in examples of most types of comedy, from the lowest pun to the most subtle of parodies. Firstly, as an instance of coincidence used to evoke a humorous effect, Gulliver, in his discourse upon the state of England to the King of Brobdingnag, laments his oratorical incompetence by recourse to allusion to two of the legendary orators of antiquity: "IMAGINE with thy self, courteous Reader, how often I then wished for the Tongue of *Demosthenes* or *Cicero*, that might have enabled me to celebrate the Praise of my own dear native Country in a Style equal to its Merits and Felicity."(p 96) The crux of the joke lies in the allusion to the similarity between Cicero and his Greek predecessor, for not only were they renowned for their rhetorical abilities, but also for often paralleled polemics against despotism and corruption in their respective states, which were of such vehemence that the term used to describe Demosthenes' original diatribe against Philip of Macedon, a 'philippic', was later applied to Cicero's speeches against Mark Antony, from whence the word entered common parlance, applying to "any discourse of the nature of a bitter attack, invective or denunciation."(OED)[1] It is significant to note in passing that this subtle classical allusion contains the first hint of the nature of Swift's perspective on the innate nature of the political process. Gulliver, quite

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[1]It is not very common, but is in the OED, so it must be a real word. But it is also an imagined word, for someone invented it. This is the pattern of the evolution of words, phrases and idioms : they are invented, voiced, then finally mimicked in ever increasing circles. Swift is responsible for words like Lilliputian, Brobdingnagian and Yahoo in our dictionary. A fine humorous passage about the process of linguistic invention occurs in Knut Hamsun's first novel Hunger of 1890: "I suddenly imagined I had discovered a new word! I sat up in bed, and said: It is not in the language, I have discovered it- *kuboaa.* It has letters just like a real word, by sweet Jesus, man, you have discovered a word! ...*Kuboaa*.... of tremendous linguistic significance....But I had not yet come to a decision on what it did mean. 'That is a secondary matter', I said to myself."(p77)

unconsciously it seems, has anticipated his own change in opinion, for Swift has ironically given him the desire to praise his "dear, native Country", rather than polemicise against its corruptions. Thus, by the coincidental relation of these two orators, Swift evokes a comic effect, for Gulliver's 'praises' are discounted by the King of Brobdingnag, who sees through the surface of panegyric and finally concludes, with disgust: "'I cannot but conclude the Bulk of your Natives, to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth.'"(p 101). It will be noted that there exists incongruity between Gulliver's avowed intention of praise, and the actual consequences of his discourses, and thus this is not a pure example of the use of coincidence, for irony is involved also. The incongruity of irony is the disparity between the surface and the depths of words, namely a difference between what they say and what they mean. In this instance, Gulliver's 'words are but wind'.

A more simple example of the use of coincidence is encountered in the pun. A delightfully subtle example of this technique, which comes about as a result of a word having more than one denotation, occurs in Gulliver's recounting of a humorous encounter with the Queen's Dwarf: "I remember, before the Dwarf left the Queen, he followed us one Day into those Gardens; and my Nurse having set me down, he and I being close together, near some Dwarf Apple-trees, I must need shew my Wit by a silly Allusion between him and the Trees, which happens to hold in their Language as it doth in ours."(p 86) The stating of the coincidental similarity between the dwarf and the dwarf apple tree is, in Gulliver's opinion, a witticism, and therefore comic. It is said that puns are the lowest form of wit, yet Gulliver's 'wit' in this instance, as he expounds one of the weakest jokes since the dawn of time, is imbued with a genuine humour due to the vivacity and intelligence of Swift's prose, so that

the form is entirely at odds with the content. The stupidity of the joke is belied by the patent erudition of Swift's language.

1.3 Parody and Caricature.

Swift has an excellent summation of the elements of parody in A Tale of a Tub: *"There is one Thing that the judicious Reader cannot but have observed, that some of those Passages in this Discourse... are what they call Parodies, where the Author personates the Style and Manner of other Writers, whom he has a mind to expose."* (p251) This describes the blend of mimicry and mockery that characterises the art of parody, and emphasises that its efficacy is dependant on a knowing audience.

Parody is a means of creating comic effect, and for examples of this, we shall voyage, first to Laputa, and then Lilliput, from the Travels:

> "The Artist himself was at that Time busy upon two great Designs: the first, to sow Land with Chaff, wherein he affirmed the true seminal virtue to be contained, as he demonstrated by several Experiments which I was not skilful enough to comprehend. The other was, by a certain composition of Gums, Minerals, and Vegetables outwardly applied, to prevent the Growth of Wool upon two young Lambs; and he hoped, in a reasonable time to propagate the Breed of naked Sheep all over the Kingdom."(p145)

In a nice parody of scientific language, Swift creates comic effect by the technique of belying the surface credibility of the words by the presentation of two utterly ridiculous and pointless projects. In this account, Swift has as source material the Proceedings of the Royal Academy, whose scientific tone and diction (and in some cases, actual experiments, though slightly adapted) he imitates for the purpose of comic and satiric effect. The purpose of applied

science is to delve into the mysteries of nature, in order that it might be manipulated to the advantage of mankind, and to seek understanding of it as a means to the amelioration of aspects of survival. Swift has easily reduced this laudable aim to the point of the absurd, for the scientific bombast is revealed as consisting of pointless and esoteric non sequiturs. The pursuit of scientific knowledge is purportedly purposeful, not a end in itself. Swift's "Artist" in this instance is of similar ilk to Lewis Carroll's superbly comic White Knight, the dotty inventor and scientist, complete with anklets on his horse to protect from shark-attack. Each character is a symbol of learning applied to pointless goals. The evident methodology and jargon of the 'Artist' suggest competence and learning, which is surely testament to Swift's skill as a parodist. The scientific is made mock-scientific, a travesty or burlesque of erudition, through very precise mimicry of the scientific idiom. This is true to the nature of parody, the retention of the external form of a specialist type of language, be it the language of romance, science or philosophy, coupled with an anomalous content. Swift assumes our familiarity with the form of scientific language by the use of technical terms, such as 'experiment', a 'certain composition' and 'propagate', and proceeds to mock its pretentious and self-important ambience. This accords with Bergson's rule that "A comic meaning is invariably obtained when an absurd idea is fitted into a well-established phrase form."[1]

As parody involves the presentation of a distortion of a familiar phrase or style of speaking, caricature involves the presentation of a distortion of a familiar face or stereotype. The process of comic caricature which occurs in, for example, the description of the sycophancy and stupidity of the court in Lilliput assumes a foreknowledge of the contemporary English political

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[1]Sypher (ed), p134.

climate and views it through a distorted glass. The vices and failings of the English court are reflected in such a fashion in Lilliput that a concept such as courtly favour becomes visible in its true light: as the reward for flattery and duplicity rather than for merit or diplomatic skills. The visual caricaturist can mock politicians by drawing them with ridiculously large noses, bellies or similiar distortions; likewise Swift, in literary caricature, draws his politicians with ridiculous 'morals'. He mocks the courtier's desire to please the monarch in his description of rope-dancing:

> 'THIS Diversion is only practised by those Persons, who are Candidates for great Employments, and high Favour, at Court. They are trained in this Art from their Youth, and are not always of noble Birth, or liberal Education. When a great Office is vacant, either by Death or Disgrace, (which often happens) five or six of those Candidates petition the Emperor to entertain his Majesty and the Court with a Dance on the Rope; and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the Office." (p20)

The dance on the tight-rope is a metaphor of the precarious nature of political office, which is emphasised by the frequency of 'Death or Disgrace' among politicians. Yet the desire of politicians to please is so great, that they risk life and limb to 'divert' the monarch and the court, in order gain favour. This is a caricature of political sycophancy, a presentation of this vice in an absurd light.

1.4 Hyperbole.

Hyperbole, or exaggeration, is another simple form of humour. For example, one almost invariably gets a laugh if one describes a moderately tall person as being 'about twenty feet tall' or 'six foot forty', for this sits uneasily with our conceptions of human proportions, and therefore our reason

dismisses the claim as an absurdity. Swift uses this technique of hyperbole in 'The Voyage to Brobdingnag', with its gargantuan inhabitants. Yet he exaggerates with such remarkable consistency and precision throughout the voyage that it has a surface and mathematical plausibility to it, which obscures its absurdity.

The comic potential of describing the petty in terms of greatness is apparent in the Lilliputian King's grandiose titles: "...Delight and Terror of the Universe, whose Dominions extend five Thousand Blustrugs, (about twelve Miles in Circumference) to the Extremities of the Globe: Monarch of all Monarchs: Taller than the Sons of Men; whose Feet press down to the Center, and whose Head strikes against the Sun..." (p 24). Even the most guileless of readers must recognise the absurdity of describing one six inches tall in such terms. It is a form of contradiction, for mighty midgets and gentle giants are oxymoronic conceptions.

The technique of hyperbole may also be applied to a particular aspect of behaviour, such as we find in Laputa:

> "Their Heads were all reclined either to the Right or the Left; one of their Eyes turned inward, and the other directly up to the Zenith.... I observed, here and there many in the Habit of Servants, with a blown Bladder fastned like a Flail to the End of a short Stick, which they carried in their Hands.... With these Bladders, they now and then flapped the Mouths and Ears of those who stood near them, of which Practice I could not then conceive the Meaning. It seems, the Minds of these People are so taken up with intense Speculations, that they neither can speak, or attend to the Discourses of others, without being rouzed by some external Taction upon the Organs of Speech and Hearing..."(p124)

This passage seizes upon aspects of the scholar and enlarging them to the point of absurdity, after the manner of the caricaturist. The scholar's tendency towards introspection and absent-mindedness takes on the aspect of a

consuming habit, and thereby, through this distortion in magnitude, becomes ludicrous. The basis of the humour contained herein is the contrast between the seeming intelligence and learning of the Laputans, and their failure to heed, in the slightest, the actualities of the world. Learning and insight are commonly consequent from observation and experience. Thus the Laputan's 'intense Speculations' on *de rerum naturae* become ridiculous, because of their distance from the worldly. Bergson comments on this theme of comedy:

> "How profound is the comic element in the over-romantic, Utopian bent of mind!....their absentmindedness is systematic and organised around one central idea, and that their mishaps are quite coherent, thanks to the inexorable logic which reality applies to the correction of dreams, so that they kindle in those around them, by a series of cumulative effects, a hilarity capable of unlimited expansion."[1]

In Swift's Laputa, the comic effect derives from the ostensibly impressive and systematic nature of the Laputans' erudition juxtaposed with their only too apparent absentmindedness and folly.

To some extent this may be a mockery of Plato's ideal state in The Republic, where philosophers are proposed as rulers.[2] Swift makes Plato's proposal an absurd one, by showing the unfounded nature of the Laputan philosophers' pride, thereby focusing on pride - one of the central themes of comedy. The pedant is one of the stock characters of comedy , for pedantry presupposes a presumption of superiority, which involves pride. Swift has said that pedantry is "properly the over-rating of any knowledge that we pretend to."[3] The scholar and the scientist are both prone to pedantry, in that the very language modes that they use display an exclusive pride, as they are

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[1] Sypher (ed), p69.

[2] See Riechert, J F. "Plato, Swift and the Houyhnhnms." Philological Quarterly, 47 (1968): 179-92.

[3] "A Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding", in Works, XI, p81.

opaque and esoteric to common people.[1] Swift, most notably in his description of the Laputans, reduces this pride in knowledge to the level of the ridiculous, by showing it as futile affectation, through his farcical and effective caricature of the pedant. Thoughtful "speculations" are mocked. The enlargement of the typical posturing of the thinker, that of quiet introspection, is cast into the realms of absurdity by the Laputans' total and affected alienation from the actual. The affectation of contemplation, the voluntary disguise of the scholar, has become habitual in the Laputans, and thus they have become at once impotent and absurd, therefore comic. Northrop Frye says in The Anatomy of Criticism that "philosophical pedantry becomes, as every object of satire eventually does, a form of romanticism or the imposing of over-simplified ideals on experience"[2], affirming the satiric technique of exposing the emptiness of ideals in the face of actualities.

Another related form of hyperbole that Swift uses is indecorum, for example, as Gulliver relates his encouter with the monkey in Brobdingnag to the Court:

> "...as for that Monstrous Animal with whom I was so lately engaged, (and it was indeed as large as an Elephant) if 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."(p93)

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[1] This essay is an example of this trend, for although I am no scholar, its language is scholarly, and hence esoteric.

[2] p 231.

Gulliver here resorts to the use of heroic and emotive terms, in an attempt to magnify his martial excellence in the eyes of the Brobdingnagian Court, and yet the superior jocularity which it incites from the listeners causes Gulliver to remember that his size alone is sufficient to reduce his deeds of valour to the level of the ridiculous in the eyes of the giant Brobdingnagians. Their laughter springs from Gulliver's use of language that is inappropriate to his lowly station, that is to say, his speech is indecorous given his percieved height. The very thought that a diminutive midget should be capable of deeds of courage and heroism instantly reduces his heroical boasting to the level of the mock heroic for his audience, and therefore becomes ludicrous or comic. The language used belies the situation by its inappropriateness, by being of too lofty a tone. When writing in a decorous fashion, the tone and the language are appropriate to the circumstances; indecorum, on the other hand, is a contradiction between the content and form of the words, and provides a useful tool for the comic author, as it is a form of incongruity and absurdity.

The opposite of hyperbole is litotes, deliberate understatement, an act of belittlement, which may be seen in the treatment of the physical size of the Lilliputians. It too is a potentially comic device, for implicit in the Lilliputian's diminutive physical size is the possibility of ethical or moral smallness. This possibility is realised in the pettiness and meanness of the political intrigue that the Lilliputians indulge in. A classic instance of litotes used in a humorous context occurs in A Tale of a Tub: "Last Week I saw a Woman *flay'd*, and you will hardly believe, how much it altered her Person for the worse." (p 343) The narrator adopts a tone of impersonal objectivity, understating the horror of flaying by the use of a deadpan and commonplace phrase. The effect of this is to create a sense of incongruity, of a mixing of the

horrific with the ordinary, which jolts the reader into a recognition of the immorality and inhumanity of flaying: a reaction against Swift's understatement. Thus, the passage has a surface humour to it, and a strong moral undercurrent. The understated tone of this phrase can provoke both laughter and outrage, through its mix of morality and incongruity.

Each of these devices, hyperbole and litotes, involves a sudden shift of perspective and change of tone, which can have the effect of unsettling the reader, as well as being useful in creating the element of surprise, thus providing punch-lines for the comic author.[1] These techniques are useful, for an unsure reader is more easily toppled into laughter.

1.5 Irony.

Irony is saying what we do not mean. It is the disguising of truth within falsity. In order to recognise irony, we must remove the disguise that the author has created to hide their opinion.

The use of irony is a frequent and favourite practice of Swift,[2] who is capable of using it to great comic effect. To speak ironically is to imply by one's words the contrary of that which the surface meaning of them indicates. Irony is a means of preaching to the converted, for it requires and assumes a knowing audience. Ironic comments, no less than jokes, are something that must be 'got' or understood to be effective, and thus excludes those in the audience unaware of the speaker's subtlety. The ironist creates a mask of

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1 William Gibson quotes Mark Twain's Following the Equator: "The function of humor is that of the screw in the opera glass- it adjusts one's focus." (p 176)

2 See, for example: F R Leavis' "The Irony of Swift" in The Common Pursuit; G Wilson Knight's "Swift and the Symbolism of Irony" in The Burning Oracle; A E Dyson's "Swift: the Metamorphosis of Irony" in The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony; and essays by Herbert Davies and Hugh Davies in Brian Vickers (ed) The World of Jonathan Swift.

baseness, prejudice or ignorance; consequently, the audience must recognise the mask to understand the irony. Literary irony frequently creates a credulous persona, in order to make the reader incredulous, and Gulliver's gullibility in the first two parts is an example of this trend: Gulliver is naive so that the reader need not be.

Akin to this is Socratic irony: the mask of ignorance adopted by the famous philosopher in order to draw his opponents into argument, and thereby advance knowledge. We all know that Socrates is a liar when he proclaims that he knows nothing, for his perception, learning and memory surpass those of virtually all that he meets. Rather, he argues to convince others of their ignorance: Socrates, knowing himself and his own abilities, and still deeming himself ignorant, seeks to impose this impression of ignorance upon others. But Socrates also teaches, by creating doubt.[1] The comic writer and the philosopher are both thinkers, yet differ, however, in this respect: that while the philosopher is content to report his own ignorance, the comic writer reports on that of others'.

Irony and the theme of ignorance can be found in the 'Voyage to Brobdingnag':

> "After much Debate, they concluded unanimously that I was only *Relplum Scalcath*, which is interpreted literally *Lusus Naturae*; a Determination exactly agreeable to the Modern Philosophy of *Europe*: whose Professors, disdaining the old Evasion of *occult Causes*, whereby the Followers of *Aristotle* endeavour in vain to disguise their Ignorance; have invented this wonderful Solution of all Difficulties, to the unspeakable Advancement of human Knowledge." (p77)

Again concentrating upon one of the major topics of satire and comedy, Swift here uses irony to convey the motif of the pall of folly and ignorance

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[1] Philosophers from Socrates onwards have echoed the necessity of doubt: witness Descartes reasoning from doubt and nothingness towards God and purpose, or Derrida's "We should doubt everything".

that suffocates the growth of knowledge. That, confronted with something beyond the compass of our learning and experience, something strange or foreign, our minds tend to recoil in disbelief and confusion, rather than embracing Hamlet's advice in responding to Horatio's "O, day and night, but this is wondrous strange", of "And therefore as a stranger give it welcome./There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio,/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."(Hamlet, I.v.172-4). As philosophy attempts to impose order, it becomes hesitant to accept anything that is external to this "order". Knowledge and credulity are intertwined, for to learn, one must believe and accept, rather than discount as a freak of nature or invoke the supernatural, by means of explanation. Swift's delightfully ironic "to the unspeakable Advancement of human Knowledge," is a pointed reminder of the limits of human wisdom, instantly reducing the pride and presumption of the philosopher to folly. As such, it is a subtle blend of irony and comedy: its theme is the great comic notion of ignorance, and its method is one of contradiction, between the pretension of knowledge and the actuality of ignorance. This is the strategy of the ironist: to confuse the audience by misdirection, and force a recognition of the inherent untruthfulness of words. Much that is said is not true, and the use of irony encourages doubt and unbelief, necessary steps on the path towards knowledge. Irony opens up a range of possibilities, and as we are forced to consider the limits of the possible, so we move towards accepting Hamlet's advice, moving away from "occult causes" or "lusus naturae". Credo eis absurdum.

More irony occurs in Gulliver's conversation with the dead in Glubbdubdrib:

> "But when some confessed, they owed their Greatness and Wealth to Sodomy and Incest; others to the prostituting of their own Wives and Daughters; others to the betraying of their Country or

> Prince; some to poisoning, more to the perverting of Justice to destroy the Innocent: I hope I may be pardoned if these Discoveries inclined me a little to abate of that profound Veneration which I am naturally apt to pay to Persons of high Rank, who ought to be treated with the utmost Respect due to their sublime Dignity, by us their Inferiors."(p161)

Here Swift again uses irony to emphasise his comic and satiric point: that the mighty are no less fallible than the common folk, and are just as much prey to the vices that haunt humankind like spectres of an animalistic past. It is a topsy-turvy world, where the ruling class, rather than being at the right hand of God, are exposed as disciples of the Devil. It is a portrait of vice and corruption, and Swift's masterly description of the nobility as people "who ought to be treated with the utmost Respect due to their sublime Dignity" is so pointedly ironic that it clashes violently with the text that precedes it, creating a sharp irony, that causes us to more than merely doubt the 'sublime Dignity' that the aristocracy is supposed to possess. It is a comic piece of irony by its exposure of vice and folly in the ostensibly noble, an unveiling of the ugly in its rarefied form, and again, it utilises contradiction, this time between the catalogue of vice and the pretence of dignity. This illustrates the destructive potential of irony. It exposes myths, stripping away the fair exterior to expose the seething corruption boiling beneath the surface.[1]

It will be evident throughout the Travels that Gulliver is an earnest fellow, who is very concerned that we take him seriously, even to the point of assuring us of his veracity and reliability: "I imposed on myself as a Maxim, never to be swerved from, that I would *strictly adhere to Truth.*"(p 239) This air of the detached and serious observer of facts that Gulliver would have us believe him to be, and which is a large part of his appeal as a comic figure,

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[1] Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, (V.ix.1): "Most putrefied core, so fair without"

confirms an axiom of Quintilian that "the gravity with which a jest is uttered increases its attraction."[1] Does not the comic grandeur of lying arise from the enormity of its hyperbole and deception? Rabelais' gargantuan statistics and Falstaff's grand pretensions reflect this tendency: the deadpan, serious delivery of the absurd or impossible imbues it with a comedy and irony. Swift is perhaps most noteworthy in this respect for his portrayal of the fantastic in precise mathematical proportion, giving the impossible a surface plausibility that his famous antecedents, such as Lucian's A True History or Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel, mostly lack. Gulliver's passionately scientific mode of observation almost has the gravity to convince us that he speaks the truth, and the comedy of his character is all the more endearing for this trait of gravity, of earnestness, for it generates added incongruity and irony.

In speech, irony is easily discernible by the almost invariable adoption of sarcastic or derogatory tones, which, of course, may not be communicated so explicitly through the medium of writing. This makes the ironic less easily discernible, and the recognition and interpretation of irony in writing more speculative. This provides the reader with a greater freedom of interpretation; for the ever-present possibility or threat of irony occurring in any given text (that every statement is capable of implying its equal and opposite) is a feature of Swift's writing that is capable of inspiring much thought and doubt; and through the use of this approach, the reader, no less than the author, is freed from the tyranny and narrowness of words. This is the encapsulation of reader- response theories of literature, that readers are independent entities, not only capable of, but compelled by their individuality, to the reading of discourse in their own idiosyncratic fashions. The possibility of irony is the key to the freedom of author and reader, wherein anything imaginable can be

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[1]Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria, Bk IV. iii. 26

implicit within the words. This is a emancipation much to be sought after, for words are and always have been slaves to limits of personal identity.[1] Each person may err, lie or misdirect in their choice of words, and the words may thus not be 'true': the presence of irony overcomes the fetters of words and reasoning that tie us, for as it provokes doubt, it promotes thought, and these are the twin cornerstones which form the foundation of reasoning and philosophy. As soon as we realise that words do not always mean what they say, we become free to create our own meanings.

I regard Book Four of the Travels as saying essentially: people can appear sometimes as filthy, greedy animals, yet this need not be so, for Swift uses irony to dispel this possibility. The joke that is on Gulliver in the end of Book Four is that people are not Yahoos. He is deliberately made an imperceptive and muddled being, a character who, despite his apparent precision, is guilty of grossly erroneous reasoning; the primary example of this error is Gulliver's failure to reconcile himself to any members of the human race at the close of the book, despite the patent benevolence of figures such as Mary Gulliver and Don Pedro. The naive Gulliver is an ironic mask adopted for the purpose of provoking thought, for his embracing of misanthropy at the close of the story is surely a posture which Swift wishes the reader to reject. Patrick Reilly comments that:

> "Knowledge and experience are euphemisms for a brainwashing process that teaches us to tolerate the humdrum atrocity, and the mature Gulliver mirrors our own hopelessly imprisoned state. But perhaps the ease of brainwashing in the Travels is meant to alert us to our own peril, a summons to vigilance rather than a wail of despair, with Gulliver as a cautionary example, behaving like a fool in Lilliput

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[1] Everyone has different connotations for words, simply because our experiences of words differ; and, as language is something that is acquired through experience, our language usages differ from those of our fellows no less than our expeiences do. To some extent, then, we each speak an idiolect, a personal language.

> so that we can stop being fools in England.... perhaps the Travels is the supreme example of literature as therapy, Gulliver so marvellously rendered in art to help us defeat the Gulliver in our lives. For, if after seeing his follies so fully exhibited, how absurdly he mistakes conditioning for truth, if, after all this, we persist in promoting the relative and conditional in our lives as absolutes, we have only ourselves to blame."[1]

The irony of Swift towards the end of the 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms' expresses itself through the creation of a mask or fragment that the 'civilised' reader should reject.

1.6 Comic Characterisation.

There appears, as a feature of New Comedy, such as that of Terence or Menander, a trend to portray characters as representative of types, rather than as individuals. Old Comedy, such as that of Aristophanes, points to figures, such as Cleon, literally, and proceeds to reduce them to the status of types, such as the avaricious politician. For not only is Cleon in The Knights displayed in all his personal corruption, but this venality is shown to be typical of politicians, *per se*. Thus does Aristophanes produce the moral precept that politicians *per se* are not to be trusted, with Cleon just one example of many. Swift's portrait of politicians in Lilliput owes something to each comic tradition. In the mad sycophantic antics of the High and Low-heeled factions of Lilliput, there is a portrayal not only of the 'type' of the politician, replete with such characteristics and traits as sycophancy, treachery and lust for power, but the portrayal of the court of Lilliput is also interpretable allegorically. This part is also a *roman a clef,* wherein the reader

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[1] Reilly, p153.

of the 1720's might recognise the portraits of particular politicians. Swift has thus fused personal satire, the object of which is the individual, and general satire, whose object is the trend, in these characterisations[1], and it is this fusion of accuracy in personal caricature, and the perceptiveness to convey traits that are common to many politicians, that provides Swift's Lilliputian politicians with their timeless appeal. Comic and satiric figures are to an extent universal and symbolic, cast in order that they might be recognisable as befitting their station or season in life. They usually appear as a depiction of the vices that certain 'types' are commonly prone to, with the didactic purpose that these vices might be avoided.

Henri Bergson generalises of character in comedy and satire: "[the] essential difference between tragedy and comedy, [is that] the former is concerned with individuals, the latter with classes."[2], and the Travels partly confirms this trend. In the compass of its pages are to be found a good many characters owing debts to their classical predecessors, although Swift, as a writer of genius, on occasion far exceeds the bounds of his antecedents. I will summarise briefly two of the major character-types present in the Travels, to illustrate the general trend.

As introduction, one might first notice, with Bergson, the tendency to name dramatic comedies after some type of character, as for example, in Terence's The Mother-in-law , Moliere's Le Misanthrope or Plautus' The Swaggering Soldier, which contrast sharply with tragic titles, commonly

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1 Swift describes his fusion of satiric techniques in the "Verses on the Death of Doctor Swift", an autobiographical piece where he initially claims that he writes only general satire:"Yet Malice never was his Aim; / He lashed the Vice, but spared the Name. / No Individual could resent, / Where Thousands equally were meant" only to contradict himself a few lines later, where he admits to personal satire: "He spared a Hump or crooked Nose, / Whose owners set not up for Beaux." (p 540)

2 in Sypher (ed), p67.

named after an individual, for example, Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannos or Shakespeare's Macbeth.

Swift uses the stock figures of comedy to some degree, and it is not difficult to recognise in Swift's courtesans, clowns, scholars, matrons, sycophants and parasites, features in common with other comic figures. In the casting of a 'type' character by a comic or satiric author, one particular type of vice or folly is often being ridiculed. Gulliver himself recites a list of vicious character types, while espousing the virtues of Houyhnhnmland, which could well serve as a catalogue of character types for aspiring comic authors, though it should be noted that most commentators on comedy content themselves with a dozen or so:

> "I did not feel the Treachery or Inconstancy of a Friend, nor the Injuries of a secret or open Enemy. I had no Occasion of bribing, flattering or pimping to procure the Favour of any Great Man, or his Minion. I wanted no Fence against Fraud or Oppression: here was neither Physician to destroy my Body, nor Lawyer to ruin my Fortune: No Informer to watch my Words and Actions, or forge Accusations against me for Hire: Here were no Gibers, Censurers, Backbiters, Pickpockets, Highwaymen, House-breakers, Attorneys, Bawds, Buffoons, Gamesters, Politicians, Wits, Spleneticks, tedious Talkers, Controvertists, Ravishers, Murderers, Robbers, Virtuoso's; no Leaders or Followers of Party and Faction; no encouragers of Vice, by Seducement or Examples: no Dungeon, Axes, Gibbets, Whipping-posts or Pillories; no cheating Shopkeepers or Mechanicks: no Pride, Vanity or Affectation: no Fops, Bullies, Drunkards, strolling Whores or Poxes: No ranting, lewd, expensive Wives: no stupid, proud Pedants: No importunate, overbearing, quarrelsome, noisy, roaring, empty, conceited, swearing Companions: no Scoundrels raised from the Dust upon the Merit of their Vices: or Nobility thrown into it on account of their Virtues: No Lords, Fidlers, Judges or Dancing-masters." (p226)

The random, rambling and occasionally surprising nature of this passage is suggestive of the overwhelming prevalence of vices and their vast number,

and it is a testament to the acuteness of Swift's perceptions that he could be so extensive in his listing. The imposing magnitude of this list implies that none of us fail to fit into one or more of these categories of vice, that none of us is without sin or stain, and this feature moves Swift's writing on vice beyond the range of the comic: the sheer weight of the number of unflattering personal characteristics and types becomes oppressive and pathetic.

It has been observed, from Aristotle onwards, that the figures of the comic or satiric tend to be 'common' characters, by contrast with the tragic which concerns the lofty or noble. The concept of the commonalty of comic characters is an interesting one. Firstly, the common is something that we all share, thus to a certain extent, we must be able to identify with it, or to relate comic characters to our own experience of people. Secondly, comic portraiture is frequently conceived by the process of selecting common attributes of a particular group of people, such as lawyers or politicians (both of whom have been particularly favoured by the attention of comic authors), and presenting a caricature of them.

The people of comedy are often personalities characterised by the common dispositions of their occupations or roles in society, and who are driven by an amalgam of the typical desires of this group, so these figures may be flat and lacking in individuality. Swift uses a number of these 'stock' figures, but according to the bent of his genius, surpasses the stereotypes in a number of ways. I shall illustrate this with reference to the 'types' of the young and the old man.

1. Young Man. Swift's Gulliver begins as a typical, impetuous, naive young man. He is hopeful, patriotic and idealistic because he does not know the ways of the world, which are revealed to him through the course of the book. We notice throughout the course of the first two parts that Gulliver is a

footloose and fickle young man, such as is evinced by his constantly abandoning his wife, Mary, to satisfy his own desires to see the world. Further, he is invariably positive and idealistic in his outlook, and even when confronted with the King of Brobdingnag's discourses on the failures of English politics, he remains proud of the merits of his own nation, displaying the blind and foolish jingoism of the ignorant and unscarred.

His naive and playful outlook, particularly in Brobdingnag, as demonstrated by his musical, nautical or athletic feats, surely endear us to his child-like vigour, and yet, one becomes slowly aware that the bliss of naivety is short-lived at best, and as such is a form of folly, appropriate matter for comedy. This is characteristic of the comic type of the young man, who is commonly shown as enthusiastic but empty-headed. One need turn no further than Voltaire's delightful portraits of the Ingenu or Candide, for confirmation.

Aristotle (Rhetoric 2.12) has described the young man 'type' as 'ambitious for honour, good natured, confiding, hopeful, brave, sociable and fond of laughter'[1]. All of these may be ascribed to the younger Gulliver to some extent. And yet Gulliver is more than this, for contrary to the comic tradition of having happy endings or some sort of reconciliation, Gulliver ends up miserable and mad, disillusioned with humanity, and haunted by the image of the Yahoo. In this respect he more resembles the tragic hero: doomed, through the recognition of some fatal truth, the truth of his all too human weakness.

2. Old Man. In his creation of the Struldbruggs,[2] Swift has endowed them with all the infirmities of old age, showing with accuracy the dotage of

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[1] Herrick, p150.

[2] See Barroll, J L. "Gulliver and the Struldbruggs" PMLA, 73 (1958): 43-50.

senility, the bodily enervation, the enfeeblement of the will and the decay of memory and abilities. This accords with the tradition in comedy of the old man, and yet Swift surpasses his model, for rather than exploiting these frailties for the purpose of comic mileage, he at first has Gulliver spellbound and hopeful at the prospect of the immortality possessed by the Struldbruggs. This presents us, too, with the prospect of eternal wisdom and happiness, only to have to accept the cruel revelation of the living hell that the Struldbruggs must endure for all of eternity. Thus has he taken a potentially humorous situation, that of the whimsy and infirmity of age, and imbued it with a positive sense of dread and horror at the palsy of age. This is surely within the scope of the tragic, for it has specifically aroused our hopes of the possibility of fulfilling one of humanity's great dreams, to become gods and overcome death, only to expose the actual pain and suffering of the 'infirmity' which is inflicted upon the hapless Struldbruggs for ever. Such a realisation, an awareness and sympathy with the icy breath of advancing years, forces upon the reader a recognition of the inevitability of the passage of time, and as such arouses both our fear and our pity: fear for ourselves when we reach the sad state of the Struldbruggs, and pity for the terrible doom that awaits those star-crossed immortals, to whose lot it has fallen to suffer in perpetuity.

It is a mark of Swift's compassion and regard for the pain of his fellows that he could produce such a sensitive portrait of the aged, and one can feel the poignancy and disappointment in Gulliver's wistful reverie of immortality as he dreams:

> "These *Struldbruggs* and I would mutually communicate our Observations and Memorials through the Course of Time; remark the several Gradations by which Corruption steals into the World, and oppose it in every Step, by giving perpetual Warning and Instruction to

> Mankind; which, added to the strong Influence of our own Example, would probably prevent that continual Degeneracy of human Nature, so justly complained of in all Ages." (p 168)

Gulliver believes he has found a grail, a panacea, a physic whereby he might cure the malaise of the ages, only to be shocked back to reality by the chill actuality of decline and age. The Struldbruggs turn out to exhibit a rather unflattering set of characteristics: "opinionative, peevish, covetous, morose, vain, talkative... uncapable of Friendship, and dead to all natural Affection." (p170) Hence they have within them the potential of comic exploitation, for these attributes are forms of the ugly, and yet Swift's sensibilities prevent him from exploiting them. One recalls his "Resolutions When I Come to be Old" of 1699, and must note that twenty-odd years later, during the composition of the Travels, such matters had become devoid of humour for him. It is a very human thing to fear dotage, and as with all fears, it requires a great deal of courage to face them unflinchingly and honestly. Swift has earned my undying admiration for the strength and honesty of these sad passages. The Struldbruggs echo the fate of Tithonus and the Sibyl, and as such serve as a symbolic reminder of human limitations, and withered hopes and dreams, and are an emblem of the folly of our insatiable desires.

Swift echoes the preference for death before decrepitude voiced repeatedly by the Sibyl, dangling in a bottle at Cumae in Petronius' Satyricon: "'I want to die.'"[1] as Gulliver reflects that "no Tyrant could invent a Death into which I would not run with Pleasure from such a Life." (p172) Swift's sensitive realisation that life can be fraught with such intense suffering that it is scarcely to be preferred to death, is an intense and emotive reflection of a sixty-year old man's dismay at the advance of years.

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[1]Petronius (48,8), p63.

1.7 Comic structure.

Comedy moves from tumult to resolution; as opposed to tragedy, which goes from tranquillity to chaos. As such, comedy represents the triumph of humanity over fortune. A prime example of this is Shakespeare's The Tempest, where the symbolic storm represents adversity and ill-fortune, ultimately overcome through miraculous devices to end happily (except for Prospero's pathetic "every third thought shall my grave" V.i.314) Swift's comic books of the Travels are no exception to this rule of thumb, and indeed, Gulliver's 'Voyage to Lilliput' mirrors The Tempest to a large degree, in that he is ship-wrecked on to Lilliput, passes through impotence into triumph, and overcomes adversity through his super-human abilities. Fortune frequently plays a significant role in the happy resolution of the comic plot, and the near-miraculous appearance of a row boat at the appropriate juncture is an apt conclusion to Swift's first, pre-eminently comic, book of the Travels.

The traditional elements of comic plot are three-fold: protasis, epitasis and catastrophe, and derive from the practice of Terence. Protasis is essentially the introduction and development of the characters and setting. Epitasis, according to the commentator Evanthius, is "the rising of the forward progress of turmoils, or...the knot of the uncertainty."[1] Catastrophe is the overturning or reversal that produces the denouement, or outcome of the play. Thus, the movements of comedy might be characterised as introduction, complication and resolution. Swift uses this model to a large extent, for even in the 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms', a reversal occurs in that Gulliver's topsy-turvy world of horses and Yahoos is replaced by his native

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[1] quoted in Herrick, p118.

and familiar England, and it is a resolution of sorts: Gulliver, unable to stomach the evident vices and foibles of humanity, deludes himself into some sort of reconcilement by spending time in his stable with his 'degenerate Houyhnhnms'. Yet this part is too problematic to use as an exemple of the application of the standard comic plot, so I will illustrate it with reference to the 'Voyage to Brobdingnag'.

As with 'Lilliput', the 'Voyage to Brobdingnag' opens with the calamity of a storm and the threat of dying of thirst leads the sailors to land in Brobdingnag in search of water, only to abandon Gulliver at the approach of one of the giant Brobdingnagians. The next chapters, much indebted to de Bergerac's Histoire Comique de la Lune, involve the setting of the scene, a description of the countryside, and Gulliver's sale to the Queen of Brobdingnag, all the while accompanied by his faithful nurse, Glumḍalclitch. These chapters perform the role of the protasis.

The epitasis, or development of conflicts and complications, in this instance are of a varied nature: Gulliver is beset by dangers both physical and moral, as he is confronted by the dwarf, the monkey, a hail-storm, as well as entering into a spirited exchange of views with the King, as to the diverse merits of each others' countries. The physical threats that he encounters are strongly reminiscent of physical comedy, called slapstick, in which he proves his indestructibility before a number of physical challenges, all enough to "kill an Animal of ten times my Strength."(p75) Yet the most significant part of the Voyage are his interviews with the King of Brobdingnag, which resemble nothing so much as the *agon* of Aristophanic comedy, where two principal disputants debate an issue. The themes discussed are important, crucial to an understanding of the Travels, for Gulliver and the King examine the merits (or otherwise) of so-called European civilisation. It will be

apparent, despite Gulliver's spirited defence, that the King is an overwhelming opponent, who takes a points victory in the *agon*. Yet the contest is not done, for it is rejoined with more vigour in the land of the Houyhnhnms, and the outcome is even more overwhelming.

The catastrophe (overturning, or reversal) occurs when Gulliver's box is seized by an eagle or some such large predatory bird, which takes him far out to sea, and drops him, after which he quickly becomes reconciled with normal sized humans again. The world of Brobdingnag is gone and vanished (actually, lost, for we would not presume to doubt the Author's veracity), and things have returned to normality. The threats have passed, the conflict has been resolved, and Gulliver is once more his happy self. But not for long.

Thus we may see how Swift uses the classic Terentian model of comic drama for its aptness to his purpose, though whether consciously or not, is arguable. Suffice to say that this is the frequent pattern of comic tales, and Swift's adherence to the classical exemplar demonstrates its general validity.

2) Comic meanings

"Man alone suffers so excruciatingly in the world that he was compelled to invent laughter." Nietzsche, The Will to Power , #990.

In this chapter I intend to comment upon the relationship between the nature of human thought, passions and actions, and the literary devices and artifices used by Swift, referring to the genres of tragedy, satire and comedy .

2.1 Humour with a Purpose.

In Sigmund Freud's early work on humour, translated as Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious (1905), a distinction between the joke lacking purpose or made simply to amuse and divert, and the joke with either didactic or tendentious purpose is made, and it is useful to consider the works of a satirist like Swift in the light of it. We may consider Gulliver's avowal in his prefatory 'Letter to Sympson' to be indirect evidence of the magnitude of Swift's didactic intent in the Travels, for, whilst admitting that the return of some of the vices and follies of the Yahoo is inevitable within him, he emphasises the original good intention of his writing as a "Project" no less than that "of reforming the *Yahoo* Race in this Kingdom..."(p xxiv)[1] Thus the voice of Gulliver proclaims the tendentious nature of his Travels, nothing less grandiose than the reformation of all human faults. Swift here mocks the

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[1] Compare this with Swift's "Verses on the Death of Doctor Swift": [Swift] "with a moral View design'd / To cure the Vices of Mankind" (p 535)

reformative aim of satire, using hyperbole to reduce this satiric goal to the level of the ridiculous, by the contrast between its absurdly inflated hopes of solving the world's ills and the sheer futility of such an attempt. It ironically inflates the magnitude of his own corrective aims as a preacher and a satirist, and it is an acknowledgment, acquired through experience, of the forlorn and frustrating nature of the attempt to ameliorate the faults inherent in people. As a work of comedy, then, it appears to fit neatly within Freud's category of tendentious jokes, albeit on a scale beyond anything considered by Freud, who explains the frequently hostile critical reaction to them tersely: "Only jokes that have a purpose run the risk of running into people who do not want to listen to them."[1] Given that the target of Part Four of the Travels is nothing less than the entire human race, it is unsurprising that people such as Samuel Johnson and Aldous Huxley should take offence,[2] as members of this group.

It is in the nature of satire and comedy to focus upon that which is flawed. Kuno Fischer in Uber den Witz (1889), has a good summation: "If it [what is ugly] is concealed, it must be uncovered in the light of the comic way of looking at things."[3] It is surely undeniable that ugliness and faults exist in human nature, and to deny this is an instance of repression, analogous to the action of a child denying anything that is not advantageous to his current whims and needs, despite evidence. To quote Freud again: "It is our belief that civilisation and higher education have a large influence in the development of repression....The repressive activity of civilisation brings it about that primary possibilities of enjoyment, which have now, however,

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[1]Freud (1), p 90.

[2] See Johnson's study of Swift in The Lives of the English Poets or Huxley's essay "Swift" in Do What You Will.

[3]quoted in Freud, (1), p10. Compare also Aristotle, p 37 : " For the ridiculous consists in some form of error or ugliness that is not painful or injurious; the comic mask, for example, is ugly and distorted but causes no pain."

been repudiated by the censorship in us, are lost to us. But to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost."[1] Swift confirms this tendency of censorship being unable to suppress that which is essential to human nature: the polite facade is a sham and one deals not with facades, but with flesh and blood people, subject to the laws of our sometimes unfortunate nature.

This is dealt with strikingly in Houyhnhnmland, in the description of the Yahoo leaders' favourites:

> "In most herds there was a Sort of ruling *Yahoo*...who was always more *deformed* in Body, and *mischievous in Disposition*, than any of the rest...[who] had usually a Favourite as *like himself* as he could get, whose Employment was to *lick his Master's Feet and Posteriors, and drive the female* Yahoos *to his Kennel;* for which he was now and then rewarded with a Piece of Ass's Flesh. This *Favourite* is hated by the whole Herd; and therefore to protect himself, keeps always *near the Person of his Leader.* He usually continues in Office till a worse can be found; but the very Moment he is discarded, his Successor, at the Head of all the *Yahoos* in that District, Young and Old, Male and Female, come in a Body, and discharge their Excrements upon him from Head to Foot. But how far this might be applicable to our *Courts* and *Favourites,* and *Ministers of State,* my Master said I could best determine." (p 214)

This is a brutal degradation of the character-type of the sycophant, common to comedy, yet seldom so directly maligned. Swift is here generalising in the light of the ill luck of previous favourites in England, yet also commenting on the relations between King George I and Robert Walpole, his Chancellor of the Exchequer. We find there are still expressions used frequently today of the leader's or boss's favourite, which are of this ilk,

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[1] ibid, p 101.

although you will not find them all in a thesaurus or dictionary (the repressive activity of civilisation again): that he or she is a pander, boot-licker, butt-kisser or brown-noser, which confirms the timeless accuracy of Swift's description. Also, one cannot help but notice that the treatment of the discarded favourite is not too far removed from the realistic world of Machiavelli's The Prince. Swift tells of the Court with shocking vividness, and it is born of his intimate involvement in politics from 1708-14 and his experience as M.B., Drapier. It is all very well to be idealistic and romantic about politics and the merits of the Court, yet inevitably the stage is reached where the ideal collapses and disillusionment occurs, through the very nature of our political institutions. Thus, there is a blunt, straightforward honesty present in Swift's writings, which while it may offend, is nonetheless an attempt to enunciate the 'truth' as he sees it.

2.2 Play and Laughter.

We all know that "When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools"(King Lear, iv. 5. 178-9), but soon after we laugh as well. The original laughter of the baby arises from tickling; that is to say, the child perceives the possibility of a physical threat, which is shown to be empty, through the perception of its gentleness, or the recognition of the 'assailant'. Tickling arouses our play instinct.[1] Tickling, joking, and other forms of humour are modes of play, games wherein the rules of decorum are relaxed, and no ill intent is present. This is supported by the stock excuse of humorists when their comedy cuts too deep and offence is caused: they may say they

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[1]For discussions of this, see Johann Huizinga's Homo Ludens or Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle".

were 'only joking', which amounts to a disavowal of any desire to cause serious or lasting pain or hurt.

A certain vulnerability is caused by the play of humour, with its mock-agressivity, for it must first touch a nerve (cause pain, doubt, resentment, disgust, indignation, or some such emotion) and then, quickly, soothe it. The contrast that is the source of humour is this movement from hot to cold, from the emotions to the intellect. The satiric humorist is in a precarious position, should he fail to soothe the ire that he has provoked in the comic butt. Swift had an acute awareness of this vulnerability, as we may see from the elaborate precautions that he took in the publication of the Travels, the Drapier's Letters and other works. It seems that a pseudonym is an asset for a writer of satire, and Swift worked hard to ensure the anonymity of both these works. It is no wonder that Swift is worried, for some passages, particularly in Lilliput, are very thinly veiled allegories, with recognisable and powerful men such as Robert Walpole, who is clearly represented in the character of Flimnap. Most people, in fact, could find something to offend their sensibilities in the Travels. So, Swift, having been wise of the need for the protection of anonymity since his experience of threats and persecution as writer of the Drapier's Letters, engages in an elaborate subterfuge in the publication of the book, even going so far as to negotiate with the printer, Benjamin Motte, while playing the role of 'Richard Sympson'. It will also be noted that Voltaire, Moliere, Plautus, and Mark Twain are all adopted names. One cannot always offend the mighty with impunity when writing satire, for it is frequently overtly politically undesirable. Satire seeks to smash the idols that we have made for ourselves, to expose their corruption, an act very threatening to the politician or regent, whose livelihood may depend on the idolatry of the people. The powerful are not always inclined to play.

Similarly, adults who are able to laugh do so as a result of the recognition of the vacuity of an apparent threat, of, for example, a fantasy or absurdity that threatens their conception of the possible, or an insult that laughers feels themselves to be superior to. Laughter here arises from the perception of a benign or harmless current beneath the apparently frightening. This is simply because humour occurs within the rules and framework of the comic, which implicitly means that no ill is intended, that incongruity or hypocrisy is present, and is revealed with the wish to make sport of it, to ridicule it for the sake of amusement. Thus we may laugh playfully at the comic. This contrasts, however, with the satiric, which, when it arouses laughter, is seldom devoid of some taint of the malicious. In this case the threat has been perceived as actual, though safe, for it refers to another, and is not harmful to us.

Laughter is often a release of nervous energy: we may laugh when we become nervous, or feel threatened. Genial laughter, at the purely comic, occurs when we can dismiss our unease intellectually. Yet we also laugh when pain breaks our mask of reserve, when hysterical laughter arises: our sorrow exceeds our limits of emotional expression, and a pained laugh occurs as the intellect seeks to assuage it. It is a grim and helpless laughter, 'mad' in the sense that it is uncontrolled, and yet the hysterical or nervous laugh relieves us in some manner, expending and purging us of psychic or nervous energy. It is a break, a freedom, a fleeing and escaping from the pain of the moment. Thus, we might see its closeness to madness, for each occurs as a result of a similar mechanism, a retreat from, and release of pain. People laugh to avoid suffering and painful emotions, by dismissing the sad and ugly with an invulnerable mask of laughter; and yet, nothing is invulnerable: the mask conceals the heart, which suffers in silence.

2.3 Laughter and Superiority.

All forms of satire evoke a feeling of superiority in the knowing audience, who may laugh at foibles that they lack or pretend to lack. The phrase 'to make fun of' implies inferiority and is thus inevitably derogatory to the object of its humour. Satire degrades to the point of the ridiculous either an individual, for example the various thinly disguised politicians of the voyage to Lilliput, or a type of person, such as the scientists of Laputa, or an aspect of humanity that we affect to lack, which is exemplified by the scatology and bestial lust that emerge in the Country of the Houyhnhnms. By focusing on the ugly, often in an exaggerated fashion, the comic emancipates us of our fears of baseness, for by witnessing the 'low' or 'base' we feel purged of our fear, thus comedy and satire can apparently ennoble us through our imagined contrast with and triumph over the ugly. Enid Welsford sums this up well in The Fool : "It is...by gratifying the sense of superiority, and fostering the delusion of freedom, that the jest-books provoke the laughter of simple people"[1]

Baudelaire, in his interesting essay "On the Essence of Laughter", comments upon the relation of this imagined superiority to the comic vision:

> "Laughter comes from the idea of one's own superiority. A satanic idea if ever there was one. And what pride and delusion. For it is a notorious fact that all madmen in asylums have an excessively overdeveloped idea of their own superiority. I hardly know of anyone who suffers from the madness of humility...Laughter is satanic: it is thus profoundly human."[2]

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[1] Welsford, p51.
[2] Baudelaire, pp145-8.

Swift's comic vision surpasses such proud 'madness', as he develops Gulliver from the proud and all-powerful giant of Lilliput into the confused and deluded isolate at the close of the story. He is able, by the use of irony, to surmount this 'satanic' element of pride, and in the end, does in fact have his hero suffer the madness of humility, as Gulliver has come, in a moment of tragic recognition, to understand the commonness of human nature, that beneath his clothes and his affectation of equine characteristics, there lurks a Yahoo.

Also implicit in Baudelaire's words is the possibility that we can delude ourselves through laughter, that our defence of laughing at something that frightens us can give us an entirely false sense of control. This is aptly shown by the example of the 'madman', for madness commonly involves the loss of control in the face of horror. The madman's laughter can thus provide a false sense of security, a delusion of superiority or control.

2.4 Comic Identification.

To laugh is effectively to identify with the comic hero, the buffoon, fool,*eiron* or naif, who exposes the absurdity and pretension of those around him through his absolute disregard for the serious. We wish absurdity and idiocy exploded as degrading to the human nature, yet we may never quite forget that the absurd or idiotic individual is human as well. Shakespeare abounds in figures that exploit this discrepancy, including Feste, Touchstone and Lear's Fool, who highlight the vanities and foibles of humanity in such a fashion so as to render them absurd, and therefore either harmless or at least manageable to the psyche. Their wit renders them superior to the complication or conflict about them.

In contrast, Swift's Gulliver has a vulnerability about him, a pride and a vanity that is founded on all too fragile foundations, and this vulnerability makes his character all the more endearing, for frailties are a universal human attribute. As his absurdities are exposed through his interaction with, for example the King of Brobdingnag, or his Master in Houyhnhnmland, his pride is eroded, and his vanities are exposed as hollow. As Gulliver learns, he overcomes his naivety. The reader learns as well, by reason of the efforts Swift has made to make him a figure of empathy before he becomes a figure of fun. Gulliver must progress through ignorance before he can be a fool in the Shakespearean manner.

These are great comic characters, whose preposterous posturings and pretences would surely be ridiculous or even misanthropic, were they but delivered in genuinely serious tones. Crucial to the comic perspective is the ability to feign unconcern for the victim of the joke[1], to ally oneself with the patent intellectual superiority of, for example, Falstaff rather than to lament the loss suffered by Mistress Quickly. For this it is necessary that one immerse oneself in the fiction, for the fact of loss is alarmingly unfunny. The butt of the joke must be seen to be invulnerable, for we should not be amused at all at Falstaff's antics if the Bard had included a scene of Mistress Quickly weeping at her loss and coming to ruin. An emotional distance between the object of mirth and the audience is necessary for the appreciation of comedy. Were we to see Mistress Quickly a destitute mendicant as a result of Falstaff's fiscal infidelities, we should empathise with her and thus resent the lovable

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[1]Compare this with Enid Welsford's treatment of the often vicious comic figure of Til Eulenspiegel: "To identify with Eulenspiegel is to feel for a moment invulnerable. True, one must regard other men as puppets of sawdust, but then identification with Eulenspiegel does, for the time being, delude one into the intoxocating fancy that men are made of sawdust, that sensation is not real, that fact is not inexorable, and that pain itself is comic. This momentary relief from the pressures of fear and sympathy is surely one of the secrets of comedy." (pp 50-1)

fat slob that is Falstaff.[1] Yet Falstaff's antics seem merely to provoke her ire without creating injury; therefore, we may laugh.

The individual when faced with the world is sure to seem insignificant. None of us have had such simple lives as to be devoid of some crisis, and thus we can all readily identify or empathise with the comic hero, struggling against adversity, and overcoming it through wit or chance. The comic hero is, for the duration of the comedy, unconquerable, despite the odds. This is something that most wish: that we might survive the struggle of living and not let the weight of the world crush us. The comic hero is a symbol of this common determination, to emerge triumphant, or at least not beaten, from the conflict.

Humour comes from an attitude that has seen adversity or conflict, encountered vice or ugliness, and feigns that it is not affected by these mournful aspects of existence. And yet it is a mask, for although the humorist seeks to cast off the burden of pain that the recognition of the ugly causes, it reflects the inner preoccupation, the dwelling upon imperfection or evil.

No offence intended, but it will be admitted that there is something ridiculous about the human race: that, for all our pretence of loftiness, if one seeks after the vices in humanity, one can invariably find them. If an author like Swift is wont to point some few of them out in the spirit of laughter or perhaps even correction, then surely it ill behoves us to upbraid him like self-righteous, immaculate moralisers, like the Pharisees; none of us lacks sins or stains, and Swift surely meant well in that he sought to diminish the follies of mankind, through the special gift of laughter. Through his use of humour, he teaches that adversity may indeed be overcome.

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[1] In this paragraph I am indebted to A C Bradley's "The Rejection of Falstaff", which displays a good deal of insight concerning the nature of the comic hero.

2.5 The Ugly.

Comic and satiric discourse often concerns the recognition of the bestial and animalistic in mankind, as aspects of ugliness. This is the case in the Travels, yet also occurs in other classic texts, such as Shakespeare's The Tempest (V.i.278-9), where Prospero comments upon his relationship to the bestial Caliban: "This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" and it will be apparent that these lines are equally applicable to Gulliver, who is unable to reconcile himself to the vision of animality that he has witnessed in the Yahoos. Gulliver is unable to accept his inner darkness, and the result is a sort of madness.

There are similarities between the Yahoos and Caliban, for each archetype has in common a tendency towards unbridled greed and lust, and in each case the association of the elements of earth and water with the animalistic is very strong, for example, in the figure of Caliban being mistaken for a fish, or the Yahoos' grubbing around in the dirt for jewels, or flinging dung at Gulliver. The interpretation of bestiality as insanity was common in Swift's time, and probably a consequence of the inhuman treatment suffered by the insane in Bedlam, where they were reduced to the level of human animals.[1] Foucault quotes Heinroth on madness, who affirms its liquid and disordered nature: "[Madness is] the manifestation in man of an obscure and aquatic element, a dark disorder, a moving chaos, the seed and death of all things, which opposes the mind's luminous and adult

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[1] See Foucault (1), p 81.

stability."[1] The water symbol in the Travels is one of chaos, as for example, when Gulliver is shipwrecked in Lilliput, as well as one of animalism, when Gulliver is molested by the female Yahoo while bathing. Gulliver recognises his own resemblance to the Yahoos, through her expression of animal attraction, and goes 'mad' as a result. The association of water and earth with the bestial is probably consequent upon the fact of our passing of water and faeces, which are an intimation of our animal selves and our mortality, for we know all animals die, and the earth recalls the grave for us. Bodily functions are emblematic of man's animality and hence mortality, and thus have unpleasant connotations for us. This perceived ugliness is at the origin of swearing or cursing in scatological terms, for along with sex, the scatological is one of the great reminders of human nearness to the animals. A reasonable proportion of all humour and jokes involve matters of excrement or sex, and this has probably remained consistent throughout history, if the evidence provided by Aristophanes or Petronius is anything to go by. Scatological or sexually derived swearing has seems to have predominated the course of humanity's 'intellectual' history, and this suggests that there is a primal uneasiness with these aspects of existence. Hazlitt has said, regarding the humorous pleasure to be obtained in smutty comedy, "that it arises because anything we must not think of makes us laugh, by its coming on us by stealth and unawares, and from the very effort we make to exclude it."[2] Such humour suddenly upsets our inhibitions and repressions, and we laugh at the shock of the discovery that it is harmless.

Jokes and humour associated with the scatological or sexual are attempts to present a façade of unconcern with regard to these bodily functions, and

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1 ibid, p 13.

2 "On Wit and Humour" in Hazlitt, p 417.

thereby disperse some of the angst deriving from them. With regard to swearing, it has been an observation of mine that nothing is so likely to provoke laughter as inappropriate and understated obscenity, for this belies the fact that the use of obscenity is commonly born of stress or anger, that is to say, in moments when the veneer of civilisation is stripped away and the naked animal is revealed. Observations of monkey behaviour have tended to demonstrate that mooning, the displaying of the buttocks, is both a sign of aggressivity and an indication of sexual vigour; and, in human behaviour, can be a sign of scorn or derision, as well as having sexual connotations. A similar, though slightly more decorous, mechanism is at work in human verbal displays of this kind, and this closeness is surely what Swift is talking about as he portrays Yahoos hurting excrement at Gulliver. As a corollary of this, the phrase 'to give someone shit' is still a current term descriptive of either physical or verbal aggression. Freud concurs that some similar psychological process is at work in jokes and humour of this kind: an assertion of either physical or sexual mastery.

For all the human pretence of superiority, a good case could be argued for our inferiority, and this is the subject of much satire, including portions of the Travels. As Gulliver is talking with his Master, the Houyhnhnm makes an observation of our species: "That, he looked upon us as a Sort of Animals to whose Share... some small Pittance of *Reason* had fallen, whereof we made no other Use than by its Assistance to aggravate our *natural* Corruptions, and to acquire new ones which Nature had not given us." (p 211) This is a long held lament of humanity, that we promise so much, yet deliver so little, and even that is often corrupt. Swift is saying that our reason is misapplied to the attainment of our lusts, which are vices in excess. A classic commentary on the Book of Job (vi.5) reiterates this, and is equally moral: "The nature of

brute beasts condemns you, for they are satisfied with common food, yet your evil has originated from excess."[1]

Laughter in satire arises from the embarrassment of being human when confronted with human vices. This humour reminds us of human failings and pretensions, in order that we might recognise them, and thereby avoid them. The satirist seeks to instruct and teach, commonly in the field of ethics and morality. Satire passes beyond the comic when it confronts us with aspects that are common and inescapable for us all, and presents them as vices. Swift confronts us with the "poor, bare, forked animal" (King Lear, iii. 3. 101-2) that is humanity in the 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms', which arouses our shame and guilt, and therefore antipathy for some. This is something which our culture instils in us, following the Judeo-Christian tradition of inculcating a sense of sin, vice and ugliness associated with our bodies and desires, provoking a shame at the bestiality of the flesh.[2] And yet, we can no more deny this reminder of our animalistic origins than Gulliver: thus, some people find Part Four of the Travels unfunny, for they lack the gift of laughing at one's self. Watkins' excellent essay "Absent Thee from Felicity", compares the preoccupation of Hamlet, with the "chasm between spirit and flesh [which] he cannot bridge, for flesh has become for him unclean"[3], with Swift's similar concerns, as demonstrated in Houyhnhnmland, or in poems such as "Cassinus and Peter" and the "Progress of Beauty".

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1 Langland, Piers Plowman p 187 (xv.317a). "Brutorum animalium natura te condempnat, quia cum eis pabulum commune sufficiat; ex prodiit inquitas tua."

2 Witness the exile from Eden, the Sermon on the Mount, or the association of the Whore of Babylon with the Beast and Antichrist. From Eden we came, no longer naked and innocent, but clothed and aware of evil.

3 Watkins, p14.

This concept of uncleanliness and consequent inferiority associated with excrement is clearly shown in Brobdingnag, where Gulliver, once more unsuccessfully, attempts to assert his physical prowess:

> "There was a Cow-dung in the Path, and I must needs try my Activity by attempting a leap over it. I took a Run, but unfortunately jumped short, and found myself just in the Middle up to my Knees.... the Queen was soon informed of what had passed, and the Footmen spread it about the Court; so that all the Mirth, for some Days, was at my Expence."(p 93-4)

This is an interesting passage, for it shows up a number of features of comedy, centrally that shit and scatology commonly result in mirth, provided that one is not the 'victim'; which brings Swift to the next point, that of humour springing from the recognition of someone else's ill luck, that laughter is at someone's 'Expence', and by laughing, superiority is asserted.

It is undeniable that humans do bear a startling resemblance to monkeys and other animals, and if it is not polite to say so, it is at least honest. Swift's portrait of the Yahoo is primarily comic because of the unerringly deft and contrived resemblance of the Yahoo to the human, a likeness too close for comfort for many, yet this semblance is a caricature. It is funny precisely because of its closeness. As Bergson states, "You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression"[1], and Swift has certainly given his creation the Yahoo some very human attitudes and expressions. Juxtaposing the animal and the person, the person comes off the worse for the comparison, simply because Swift, as a comic or satiric author has focused upon our 'ugliness'.

2.6 The Limits of Satire.

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[1]Sypher (ed), p 62.

Accusations of madness or misanthropy have been made against Swift, who I feel was a very sad and lonely man yet one who, even in the grip of near mortal pain in later life, never lost a love of people. If it is a fault to try to make people laugh at our absurdly uptight attitude over our bodies, at our avarice, or at our hypocrisy, then I feel we need more faults of this kind, if merely to oppose the hypocrisy of those who preach the grandeur of humanity.

Aggression can arise from an unwillingness to accept or attempt to understand another's perspective, and as such hinders self-realisation. Swift's anger is of a different species to aggressive abuse, for it is imbued with a love, with hope as well as with an understanding of his fellow people, and is directed rather to the purpose of improvement and teaching than towards repulsion, which is the usual function of aggression. Swift uses comic techniques to soften the force of his invective, such as ironic praise, hyperbole and incongruity. Unrelieved aggressive abuse tends to alienate the audience, making them defensive, and Swift seeks to surmount this emotional response through the appeal to the intellect created by comic techniques.[1]

Laughter is a sweet thing, a gift and a blessing to people, for it is a means of coming to terms with bitterness or hatred. If one can laugh at a tragic experience, it is a sign of learning and understanding gained from the tragedy. Swift has conquered his anger and resentment of failures through this gift, and by writing he seeks to aid others towards this understanding. "What is to prevent one from telling truth as one laughs?"(Horace, Satires 1:i.24-5). This is an apology for satirists or jokers, who may hurt, frighten, or confuse us in

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[1] See Bullitt, ch 2, for a more in depth discussion of this point.

the process of their playing, yet it will be remembered that it is only by such means that we may arrive at knowledge or contentment.

It is the function of the comic to test our limits, to try our tolerance or credulity. This is why absurdity or satire in comedy can be threatening, because we are afraid of the unknown: it reminds us of our limits, our smallness and mortality. This threatening aspect of satire is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the critical reaction to Part Four of the Travels, which many feel to lack the comic element, simply for the reason that it threatens us and our social and bodily insecurities, and seems not to relieve this threat. As a consequence it has been labelled obscene. The irony of the 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms' is a subtle thing, which our emotional responses can prevent us from perceiving intellectually. The affinities between humans and Yahoos, while strong, are nonetheless ironic, and do not prevent Don Pedro and Mary Gulliver from rising above the mire of bestiality that the Yahoos represent. The sheer, grandiose scale of the joke that is Swift's Travels can obscure the fineness of the ironic wit that it contains at times. The cries and accusations of misanthropy, obscenity and insanity that characterise the reception of the 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms' is typical of the critical condemnation of satire.

Northrop Frye sums up this critical trend well:

> "...genius seems to have lead practically every great satirist to become what the world calls obscene. Social convention means people parading in front of each other, and the preservation of it demands that the dignity of some men and the beauty of some women should be thought of apart from excretion, copulation, and similiar embarrassments. Constant reference to these latter brings us down to a bodily democracy paralleling the democracy of the *danse macabre.* Swift... and his more unquotable poems are in the tradition of

medieval preachers who painted the repulsiveness of gluttony and lechery."[1]

Satire looks at everything; in the words of Juvenal:

"Indignation will drive me to verse, such as I - or any scribbler -
May still command. All human endeavours, men's prayers,
Fears, angers, joys and pursuits. These make
The mixed mash of my verse." (I.80-4)

A few moments of the television news is sufficient to convince anyone of the crimes and follies that we are capable of, and honesty obliges us to confront them.

It is possible to view the contemptible and contempt-filled Thersites, from Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, as an artistic expression of the logical extreme of the satiric attitude, that of unrelieved and malignant raillery. Yet Thersites is plainly not comic, for although his garb has an element of the motley and one might laugh at his initial raillery, his unrelieved malignancy means that the audience is unable to identify ultimately with his abuse. Although Thersites' operating principle of exposing corruption accords with the principle of comic exposure, any portrayal of an alternate to disease, stupidity and corruption is conspicuous by its absence. Swift's method is contrasted with this, for although he has Gulliver recite a list of flaws comparable to Thersites' catalogues of diseases and poxes, Gulliver patently wishes that it were not so, that vice were something superable. Whereas Thersites the arch-satirist seems content to abuse and rail, seemingly unaware that these very actions are vices no less than those he denigrates as integral to the human condition. Swift and Thersites do share a preoccupation with the flaws of the body, which is something only death can remove us from. Swift does posit an alternative to

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[1] Frye, p 235.

abandoning oneself to the fleshly or Dionysian aspect of ourselves, however, in the chaste and physically fastidious (except in emergencies, such as fire and necessity) Gulliver. Yet his path is one that leads to deluded loneliness.

As absurd as Gulliver's dream of reformation of the squalor and vice that humanity sometimes seems to wallow in is, his raillery is turned towards the purpose of amending them, which implies at least the possibility of the emergence of goodness in humankind. Indeed Swift's positive characters, such as the King of Brobdingnag, Glumdalclitch and Mary Gulliver attest to this potential, thereby ironically and subtly undercutting Gulliver's vision of irremediable human vices.

As an instance of the timelessness of Swift's man and monkey theme, compare this humorous passage from the science-fiction satire of Robert Anton Wilson, told from the perspective of an alien scientific report on Earth:

> "Since a great deal of primate behaviour was considered just awful, most of the domesticated primates spent most of their time trying to conceal what they were doing. Some of these primates *got caught* by other primates. All of the primates lived in dread of getting caught. Those who got caught were called *no-good shits.*"[1]

This reiterates the association of the scatological with degradation, and points out again the distance between the public and private, and Wilson's persona speculates: "This metaphor was deep in primate psychology because primates mark their territory with excretions, and sometimes threw excretions at each other when disputing over territories." This is clearly of similar ilk to the Yahoos' reaction to the intrusion of Gulliver:

> "...a Herd of at least forty came flocking about me from the next Field, howling and making odious Faces; but I ran to the Body of a Tree, and leaning my Back against it, kept them off, by waving my

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[1] Wilson, p 14.

> Hanger. Several of this cursed Brood getting hold of the Branches behind, leaped up into the Tree, from whence they began to discharge their Excrements on my Head..."(p 182)

Scatology is insulting to us for it reminds us of our animal origins: that we are still 'tainted' by the earth. Insults of this nature form a significant portion of our stock of abuses, which are a means of degrading our fellows.[1] As we meddle in such matters, we enter a grey zone between humour and misanthropy.

Swift's exposure of the avarice encountered amongst the Yahoos when they quarrel over shiny stones is an instance of the greed epitomised in a figure such as Plautus' Euclio from the Aulularia , and seems an inescapable aspect of the human character. The consuming mantra of 'money, money, money' is a timelessly amusing theme, as a comparison of excerpts from these two works will show. Firstly, from the Travels :

> "In some Fields there are certain *shining Stones* of several Colours, whereof the *Yahoos* are violently fond; and when Part of these Stones are fixed in the Earth, as it sometimes happeneth, they will dig with their Claws for whole Days to get them out, and carry them away, and hide them by Heaps in their Kennels; but still looking round with great Caution, for fear their Comrades should find out their Treasure. My Master said, he could never discover the Reason for this unnatural Appetite, or how these *Stones* could be of any use to a *Yahoo* ; but now he believed it might proceed from the same Principle of *Avarice,* which I had ascribed to Mankind." (p 212)

This is a shrewd and comic portrayal of greed, for Swift incongruously gives to the Yahoos a disconcertingly human trait, which Plautus affirms in a speech of Euclio's: "Oh dear, oh dear; my precious pot, you and the gold in your care have many enemies. But don't worry; I've decided to take you to

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[1] See Norman O. Brown's essay "The Excremental Vision" in Tuveson (ed), which is an interesting psychoanalytic examination of this aspect of Swift's work, though some of it seemed to be ironic.

the shrine of Good Faith here. You'll be safe and sound there."[1] Plautus' description of greed is also made comic, by the ridiculous way Euclio personifies his pot of gold, and yet it is clear that Swift's passage is the more vitriolic, that he threatens us the more through his association of animal imagery, such as 'claws' and 'kennels', for he thereby degrades human greed to the level of an impulse worthy of beasts. It is a test of the boundaries of satire to call those who desire and hoard wealth (which includes most of those able to do so) bestial. To laugh at such greed is surely the intent of Swift's hyperbolic description, delivered through the vehicle of Gulliver's 'truthful' narrative. Yet Gulliver's narrative, on the surface, is serious, and conceives an abhorrence of the Yahoo, as opposed to a mere sardonic amusement, and this is what moves this section of the Travels beyond comedy, for it is a denunciation of such attributes as unfunny, indeed, as things so terrible that the balm of laughter is unable to assuage or diminish them.

2.7 Tragedy and Comedy Compared.

Comic 'exposure' or 'unveiling' represents the flip-side of 'discovery' or 'anagnorisis' in tragedy, and each concerns the failure of ideals. Although the humorous perspective seeks to lighten the burden of being human, the content of comedy without cheerfulness tends towards the tragic. An excellent example of tragic content treated humorously is Moliere's Le Misanthrope , which concerns the themes of disillusionment, duplicity, isolation and hatred of one's fellow man, yet nonetheless provokes laughter from the audience.

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[1] Plautus, p32.

Aeschylus' Agamemnon , along with many other little pearls of wisdom, has the chorus deliver the grave words (though in Greek) that "Man must suffer to be wise"[1] , and it is this precept that is central to the ethos of the tragic: that self-knowledge is bought at tremendous expense in terms of pain and suffering. The moment of discovery, anagnorisis, is a moment of pain for the tragic hero. The principle of comic discovery is as simple, and as grave: man must think to be wise. With Swift, this maxim has the force of an imperative: "I have got materials toward a treatise, proving the falsity of that definition [of man as] *animal rationale* and to show it would be only *rationis capax.*"[2], and as this letter shows he was clearly intent on provoking thought and rationality: "I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion," he continues. The audience, to appreciate and learn from comedy, must contemplate the exposure of the ugly, and recognise it intellectually. The tragic and comic paths run parallel: tragedy forces a recognition of rightness or goodness through an appeal to the emotions; whereas comedy appeals to the mind, to force a rejection of the wrong or ugly. Each medium is didactic in its own way, and each seeks to teach virtue. Each path also leads to disillusionment, due to the collapse of idols and ideals.

Both tragedy and comedy spring from the desire for the good or beautiful, yet while tragedy presents us with a beautiful, transient image of goodness, sadly doomed to fall from its high moral ground, comedy mercilessly exposes that which lies beneath the veil of 'goodness', showing even altruism as a form of self-love. This is why Swift felt such affinity with the cynical and disillusioned Maxims of La Rochefoucauld. Hardy is quoted as saying of Meredith that "he would not, or could not - at any rate did not -

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[1] Aeschylus, p 48. (l. 177)

[2] Letters, To Pope, 29/9/1725, p 201.

when aiming to represent the 'Comic Spirit' let himself discover the tragedy that always underlies comedy if you only scratch deeply enough."[1] Comedy has a dual source, essentially: a sadness at the human condition and the desire to lessen it through laughter.

Comedy and tragedy each concern the relationship between the ideal and the actual. Comedy portrays the actual then pretends or postulates the ideal, while tragedy pretends or postulates the ideal then portrays the actual. Tragedy and comedy each occupy the field of dreams and ideals, and yet with this difference: that tragedy hopes for ideals, while comedy is resigned to their absence. Gulliver's grandiose dreams of benevolent power and wisdom, were he but an immortal Struldbrugg, exemplify the pattern of the desire for ideals thwarted, leaving us wistful and disappointed. It is both tragic, by reason of the fall of Gulliver's noble and idealistic wishes, and also comic, by the recognition of the folly and impossibility of such dreams.

Generalisations are the refuge of small minds, for the general is the solitary refuge of those unable to cope with the actual. Those concerned with the making of generalisations are commonly called philosophers, and it seems to me that one would be hard pressed to encounter a philosopher who might be characterised as happy, or at ease with the actual. Rather it seems their curse more often to be misunderstood, and thus made objects of scorn, fear and derision in their lifetimes (witness Socrates with his hemlock or Diogenes with his tub from the classical past and Nietzsche's need to divorce himself from company and society or the caricatures of Kierkegaard that appeared in local newspapers from last century). Further, they may still be misunderstood after their lives have finished, causing seemingly

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[1]Quoted in Dorothy Van Ghent's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" essay in The English Novel : Form and Function,, p 195.

interminable disputations upon the implications and import of such generalisations. It is a sad thing that seemingly the satisfaction of the intellectual desire for knowledge or wisdom is seldom achieved except at the expense of either emotional or social satisfaction. To think, and to say what one thinks honestly, all too frequently have their price.

It is sad, also, that the person who expresses emotions publicly, as opposed to the philosopher who expresses thoughts, the artist or poet, is no less prone to misunderstanding, with all its horrible consequences. The history of literature is littered liberally with innumerable instances of socially isolated individuals, of which even Swift in 'exile' is one of the less extreme examples. To have the courage to say how one feels requires, if anything, even less regard for public opinion, for we frequently shy away in fear from emotional honesty.

Mark Twain's famous essay "On the Decay of the Art of Lying"[1] is but one more confirmation of the axiom that 'the truth hurts' not only the hearer, but the speaker as well, with alarming frequency. People seem the only creatures that are capable of lying. We have the unique ability to change our accounts of our experiences, to change things that are true to us. In doing so, we create falsehood: in a sense we may change ourselves, re-write the text of ourselves. This is 'the thing which was not' that we encounter in Houyhnhnmland, and one may easily see how closely intermingled art and lying, in fact, are. Artists flee sometimes to the fictive mode, simply in order to re-write or re-create themselves and their experiences, and when we do this we may imagine how things could have been, or how we wish they were. Thus, as fictions can contain our hopes and dreams, so they can concern our

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[1] For example, Twain (3), p 204. :"None of us could *live* with a habitual truth-teller ; but thank goodness none of us has to." See also Chaucer's The Manciple's Tale.

ideals. The artist can expose themself (recalling Plath's "Lady Lazarus": "The big strip tease") and thus become vulnerable. Hopes and dreams, besides their unattainability, may be held up to ridicule.

There is a relationship between comic 'types' and the intellect. The intellect has a disposition to generalise; comedy, as the product of the intellect, tends to have a prevalence of 'types' or generalised figures rather than individuals. As it is the nature of the emotions to focus upon the particular or the individual (to use the Freudian terms: object cathexis or cathexis), so it is the nature of the intellect to focus upon patterns or generalities. Comic characters, 'types', spring from the intellect, like the birth of the Goddess of Wisdom, Athene (and also often armed), while tragic individuals are rooted in the emotions. As it is the nature of the intellect to forever seek after the pattern, to seek to understand the general, comedy concerns the general or 'types'. Do not philosophers and scientists use this faculty primarily, as a means to understanding the rule or reason underlying phenomena? Swift exemplifies this pattern, for although he is a comic writer, his natural disposition is towards the scientific, theological or philosophical disciplines, which his wit and perception cause him to reject, on account of the pedantry, narrowness and absurdity that may be found in such occupations. This is evinced by the mocking preoccupation with ethics in Brobdingnag, science in Laputa or ontology and metaphysics in Houyhnhnmland.

At the expense of simplification: feelings expressed lyrically are poetry; thoughts expressed rationally are philosophy, and as no true artist lacks the ability to think as well as feel, we find that good literature, where we find an honest expression of the artist's impressions of each of the human aspects of thought and emotion, can (and in Gulliver's Travels ' case, does) contain

both. When combined with sensitivity and perception, acute feelings almost invariably ultimately become sad or tragic, as acute thought frequently perceives the comic element in matters. Given the presence of these qualities in persons such as Chaucer, Shakespeare and Swift, it is therefore logical that their works are a sometimes awkward and uneasy fusion of the two genres.

It has long been noted that the effect of tragedy or comedy upon the audience is one that involves the release of emotional or intellectual energy, known since Aristotle as catharsis. Yet it has been overlooked that the effect of writing, the process of creation is essentially similar: that the author is able to release or purge somehow such energy through the process of writing. Indeed, the extent to which an author is able to release such energies on to the page is strongly positively correlated to the quality of the work of art: that the extent to which artists are able to honestly besmatter the page with their life-blood, their brain and soul is frequently reflected in the universality of its appeal. Ignoring technical ability for the moment, though it obviously plays a significant role, a masterpiece is often the very life-blood of an artist, and Gulliver's Travels , with A Tale of a Tub, are both Swift's masterpieces and the outpouring of his soul and thought like blood onto the page, wherein, regardless of the events of the narrative itself, his humours and dispositions are inevitably reflected due to his unflinching intellectual and emotional integrity.

The reason and mind triumphant over the body and animal in man are symbolised in the juxtaposition of the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos. And yet Swift, in a flourish of irony, has brilliantly and comically reversed the standard association of the animal with the body, such as occurs to this day, in for example, Hermann Hesse's creation of Harry Haller and his alter-ego, the wolf, in the poetic novel Steppenwolf. Rather, Swift boldly and unexpectedly

degrades the human form (the image of God, according to the dominant Judeo-Christian ideology) to equate with the symbol of the animal. The choice of the horse symbol, in the portrayal of the Houyhnhnms, is a particularly fine and amusing stroke, for the medieval and Renaissance tradition firmly allies the horse with something between our legs that should be controlled, that is to say, with our desires and lusts.[1] This is a mark of the genius of Swift: that he can suddenly upset, even capsize our expectations, that he is capable of seeing beyond the bounds of the conventional, in a supremely rational and consistent manner. Although the reversal or incongruity in the portrayals of the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos render them intrinsically comic, Swift again confounds our expectations of comedy, carefully nurtured in the first three books, by the pointed and biting nature of the fourth book, which swings the text into the bounds of satire, and ultimately tragedy. The 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms' is an artistic interpretation of a psychological conflict, between the beast in man and the 'higher' faculty of reason, known as dualism. A classic statement of the moral tradition behind this occurs in Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell where the voice of the Devil points out the 'error' of Bibles or sacred codes in saying: "That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body; & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the soul"

Horace Walpole has said insightfully that "the world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel."[2] That vice and falsehood cause suffering is undeniable; the sufferings of those near to us, our feelings and sense of empathy cause us to pity. This leads to the positive identification of tragedy: readers associates themselves with, and feel empathy for, the tragic

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[1] See, for example, from William Langland's epic satirical and philosophical poem Piers Plowman, p 211 (xvii.109). "On my capul that highte *Caro* - " [On my horse called Flesh -]

[2] Quoted in Bullitt, p 5, who discusses this matter in some depth in chapter one of Jonathan Swift and the Anatomy of Satire.

hero. Comedy and satire work upon the flip side of this process: essentially, we may laugh because the butt of comedy has vices that we affect to lack; thus, the process does not engage our emotions and sense of empathy, appealing to the intellect instead. Our intellectual and 'objective' eye can see through the menace of vice, if only we are able to distance ourselves sufficiently in an emotional sense to allow this faculty free play. Hazlitt has said, "We laugh at that in others which would be a serious matter to ourselves; because our self love is greater than our sympathy..."[1]

Comedy thus has both good and bad aspects, for it shares with tragedy the discovery of evil and the desire for good. Hazlitt, again: "Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be."[2] It is as truly cathartic as tragedy, for it seems that humanity's two principal means of purging itself of the angst of disillusionment and disappointment are through tears and laughter, which as has been pointed out, can be mingled. People may laugh as easily at moments of the tragedy of Hamlet, as they can cry at some moments in the comedy of As You Like It.

The most profound tragedy may be shown as ridiculous, no less than the lightest comedy can cause sadness. Do we not laugh so hard sometimes that we cry? No less do we laugh hysterically when weeping would have been more appropriate. Each response is an attempt to accommodate some trauma within our emotions or intellect, with weeping tending to reflect an emotional acceptance, and laughter an intellectual mastery over the occurrence. An excellent example of the closeness and frequent intermingling of these concepts occurs in Chaucer's tragic poem, Troilus and Criseyde,

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[1] Hazlitt, p 416.
[2] ibid, p 410.

where the hero Troilus has been betrayed in his first love, and in the immediate wrath of frenzy at this event, is slain in the Trojan War; and yet, as he ascends to heaven, he laughs. For he has reached the point of intellectual mastery over his own delusions and expectations, he has recognised the follies implicit in love and war: he has recognised that his anger and self-pity at his romantic betrayal arise from an absurdly idealistic conception of romance. He has come to realise on a rational level that love begets betrayal just as naturally as war begets death, and that his lofty craving for romantic fidelity had been no less naive than his idealistic conception of the nobility of heroism. The laughter in this instance arises then from a recognition of his delusions that he should be invulnerable to the frequently tragic effects of love and war: he has been able to master his emotional response through the faculty of his intellect, and is thus able to displace his suffering with a comic resignation, a bitter and rueful recognition of folly in himself. A similar mechanism is at work in Swift's poems such as "Cassinus and Peter" and "A Lady's Dressing Room", where the overtly pathetic theme of romantic disillusionment is belied by the blunt, earthy and comic tone of the pieces: here Swift seeks to overcome the pain of rejection and disillusionment by the use of comedy. The potential pathos has been thoughtfully softened into the comic, through the gift of humour.

Comedy might be said to be the genre of the day, where the harsh sunlight exposes human frailty, while tragedy is the genre of the night, where the twin, dark oblivions of death and madness prevail. Yet as no day is complete without night, likewise no tragedy or comedy exists in a pure form, for implicit within each is the other. The tragic is no more seperable from the comic than is Yin from Yang, in the Taoist symbol, for they form part of a unity, despite their contrasts.

Swift's mingling of the two genres may be seen in A Tale of a Tub:

> "...with Relation to the Mind or Understanding; 'tis manifest, what mighty Advantages Fiction has over Truth; and the Reason is just at our Elbow; because Imagination can build nobler Scenes, and produce more wonderful Revolutions than Fortune or Nature will be at Expence to furnish. Nor is Mankind so much to blame in his Choice, thus determining him, if we consider that the Debate meerly lies between *Things past* and *Things conceived;* and so the Question is only this; Whether Things that have Place in the *Imagination,* may not as properly be said to *Exist,* as those that are seated in the *Memory* ; which may be justly held in the Affirmative, and very much to the Advantage of the former, since this is acknowledged to be the *Womb* of Things, and the other allowed to be no more than the *Grave.*" (p 342)

This is overtly a celebration of the imaginative faculty, and yet its tone is ironic, for Swift was a person only too aware of how far our dreams exceed our abilities, and this passage hints at the sad truth that our lives consist mainly of our memories, and most of our dreams are doomed to remain unborn. It uses the comic techniques of reversal, as in the unexpected 'what mighty Advantages Fiction has over Truth', as well as an absurd reasoning, based upon the double meaning of 'concieve' as 'to think' or 'to be pregnant', and takes this to its 'logical' conclusion. It appeals first to our emotions, through the use of emotive language such as 'mighty', 'nobler' and 'wonderful', then to our intellect by the use of a slightly fallacious analogy, an ironic expression pointing to the absurdity of reason, that is, it raises our hopes, then causes our minds to reject it. This is one of the patterns characteristic of the comic.

3) The Comic Or Satiric Writer

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Proverbs xiv. 13

In this chapter, I intend to confront some of the necessary social and personal conditions for the writing of satire and comedy, as exemplified by the life and art of Swift, with reference to the seeds and fruits of the Travels.

3.1 Some thoughts on Art & Integrity.

That there is an autobiographical element in the writing of fiction shall scarcely be doubted since the age of Romanticism. And yet, while it has been Romanticism that has brought the self to the forefront of our attention, autobiography occurs in all ages to some extent, and there is an element of autobiography to be found in the Travels, which must be understood to place the work as a whole in its wider, personal context. This is not to say that the first person narrative voice should be taken to belong to Swift himself, and yet there are moments when the constantly shifting, digressive focus of the narrative zooms in on a personal aspect of the author's life, and the distance that commonly separates Swift from the persona of Gulliver becomes neglible.[1] There are times when people voice their feelings or thoughts

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[1] The autobiographical mode occurs in many of the classical satiric texts such as those of Horace, Juvenal and Petronius; and others such as Lucian and Cyrano de Bergerac use the first person voice to narrate their fantastical tales. Also of note are autobiographical works of Swift, such as "The Author Upon Himself", "Cadenus and Vanessa", "Verses on the Death of Doctor Swift, DSPD" and "The Sentiments of a Church of England Man".

nakedly, bare their innermost souls, that which is at the heart of their experience. It is at times like this when we should listen and pay attention, for it is an expression of condensed life. Good poetry and philosophy are summaries, condensations of emotion and thought, which can echo truly through the ages. Few will need to be reminded that 'brevity is the soul of wit'.

The creation of a fiction is a form of acting, the putting on of a mask, and one of the criteria that determines artistic merit is the thinness of the mask that has been donned. Joyce, speaking of his novel Ulysses, one of the unquestioned masterpieces of our time, says that "a transparent sheet separates it from madness."[1] For example, one of the criteria by which we may judge an actor's ability is if he is able to perform a role as if it were so in fact as well as fiction. If an actor is able to convince us in the theatre that, in the playing of a murderer he were actually capable of, for example, shooting someone, we should say his acting was of a high calibre, or employ some such inane pun to express a excellent performance. In literature, this is not quite so obvious, for the subject matter of literature is the nature of consciousness: of the emotions and the mind. These concepts are much more insubstantial and elusive of genuine understanding than actions, for our very thoughts evade expression, or even our own recognition, at times, and are thus infinitely more difficult to represent than mere actions. This is evinced by the modern psychoanalytic recognition of the subconscious and preconscious aspects of the mind. Still, however, the same principle that enables us to recognise skilful acting, that of realism, the performance of fiction as if it were fact applies, although in the field of literature this principle is usually psychological realism.

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[1] quoted in Derrida, p 31.

Witness, as a corollary of this, the common modern opinion of poetry, that we see the image of ourselves reflected within its words, rather than the image of the author. This is because, as members of the same species, we are of the same matter, thus artists with insight and integrity of vision, in examining themselves, will inevitably reflect something which is common to the human spirit. Audience members or readers will thus be able to relate, through the process of empathetic identification, with the fiction, seeing it both as if it were so, and as if it were happening to themselves. This is confirmed in Gulliver, the product of Swift's broodings and introspections, whose appeal has exceeded his epoch, and who is still seen by many as an 'everyman' figure,[1] akin to the morality play 'type' (and equally besieged by Vices). We can empathise with Gulliver because of the common and domestic tone of his narrative in Lilliput and Brobdingnag. This empathy is undoubtedly a necessary condition for the emotion of catharsis, that occurs when we witness instances of art. We come to realise a possibility or potential within ourselves, a ghost or an echo of ourselves in the drama that unfolds before us, and are vicariously purged, relieved that this potential has not been realised in our lives.

The mask of the fiction provides the freedom for artists to express themselves with an integrity that is denied to the common discourse, for poetry is but seldom recited in public, and even then with the warning, beware: pretend for an instant, this is art, merely a caper on a fictitious stage. The pretense of the mask is a shield which allows the artist freedom to say what they think or feel, free from the constraints of social interaction, where

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[1] See, for example, Morris Golden: "Gulliver is, of course, the final triumph of Swift's art, more substantial than the Hack or the Modest Proposer, more imaginative than the Drapier, more painfully ourselves than any other creation of his century." (p49)

it is tacitly agreed that some things remain unsaid.[1] The excuse of being 'art', no less than the excuse of being humorous, provides an ability to express oneself, a freedom absent from common interaction among people. The drunkard and the child lack the tact to recognise this, and that is why we say that there is truth in wine and children; so too with some artists, who, without the excuse of alcohol or innocence, nonetheless breach this conspiracy of silence that suffocates the voice within. Swift, as both an artist and a humorist, had the courage to breach this convention, to cry the truth as he saw it through the silence, behind the shelter of poetic or artistic licence. Thus in order to illuminate the Travels and its comical or satirical strategies, some recourse to comsidering the life and experiences of Swift is necessary.

3.2 Seeds of Experience.

Satire, like any work of art, is the organic product of its creator's imagination; and like any organism, it requires suitable external conditions, if it is to blossom forth as an object of beauty. The refrain of the satirist is Cicero's "O tempora, o mores", which is to say that corruption must be extant and visible in the artist's society, and satire springs from this corruption as naturally as flowers from fertiliser. Swift, in his early major work, A Tale of a Tub, comments upon the reasons for his adopting the medium of satire in preference to that of panegyric:

> "For, the Materials of Panegyrick being very few in Number, have long since been exhausted: For, as Health is but one Thing, and has been always the same, whereas Diseases are by thousands, besides new and daily Additions; So, all the Virtues that have been ever in

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[1] See Foucault (2), "The Order of Discourse" for a discussion of the bounds and limits of our expression, remembering Freud's 'the repressive influence of civilisation'.

Mankind, are to be counted upon a few Fingers, but his Follies and Vices are innumerable, and Time adds hourly to the Heap."(p 274)

This is an amusing summation of the satirist's focus: that the satirist looks about and sees vice and folly rampant, and virtues few and far between. It will be noted that these terms are from the language of morality and ethics, and this leads to the conclusion that the satirist works primarily in the field of morals, and that his aim and strategy are primarily to do with morality. Gulliver's Travels is a work of morality that focuses upon our vices and follies, and one need look no further than its famous catalogue of vices for affirmation of this.[1]

The satirist's strategy involves the unveiling of the vices and follies of society. It will be noted that the politican and the scholar[2] are two of the foremost figures among the stock characters of satire and comedy. Swift had had an intimate acquaintance with some of the leading politicians and intelligensia of his age for several years. This intimacy is evident beneath the translucent levels of allegory that he weaves into his works, in particular the Travels, and he dutifully reports on the follies and vices that his experiences have encompassed.

This allegorical aspect of the Travels has been investigated extensively by many Swiftian critics.[3] Opinions differ as to the details of allegorical interpretations of the 'Voyage to Lilliput', and yet most critics assent in the recognition of this part as a series of satiric portraits of the figures involved in Swift's disillusionment with politics, mostly Walpole, Oxford and Bolingbroke, all of whom Swift was familiar with. Swift clearly perceived himself to be the victim of political machinations, regarding Queen Anne's

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1 see above, 1.7 Comic Characterisation.

2 See Aristophanes, The Clouds, for a satirical portrait of the intelligensia, or The Knights, which has as its subject politicans.

3 See, for example, Case, pp69-97 ; Ehrenpreis (2), pp93-117; Lock, pp89-123.

dislike for his literary works as a crucial factor in his failure to obtain a bishopric, and thus was Swift, at a relatively young age exposed to the species of human ugliness that is the favouritism and intrigue of realpolitick. The acrimony that surfaces in the Lilliput allegories arises out of a profoundly personal sense of resentment and injustice. From the poem "An Epistle to a Lady", Swift voices the personal origin of his satire and comedy: "Like the ever laughing Sage, / In a Jest I spend my Rage: / (Tho' it must be understood, / I would hang them if I cou'd.)"[1] (p 547-8) This is a summation of one of the strategies of Swift's writing: the harnessing of his negative emotions into a comic frame, so that the object of his ire is exposed as ridiculous, and he thereby gets revenge of a sort, by having the 'last laugh'[2]. An example of this is Swift's portrayal of politicians, such as Walpole, in miniature in the Voyage to Lilliput, emphasising the pettiness and meanness of their political aspirations.

Witness, too, the notorious passage concerning Gulliver's dousing of the fire in the Royal Palace of Lilliput, an act ironically done to try to save the tiny castle from burning to the ground. Gulliver tries to help, yet is later impeached for his 'assistance', and must flee the Kingdom, an act was probably suggested by Rabelais' character Gargantua pissing on the populace of Paris[3] yet besides this literary precedent, it remains an image of one of the most primal insults that man is capable of, and as we read this, we realise the profundity of Swift's resentment and disillusionment at the amorality of the

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[1] This alludes to Democritus, 'the laughing sage'. One might note that Erasmus and Robert Burton each use the pseudonym of 'Democritus Junior', for the Praise of Folly and The Anatomy of Melancholy respectively.

[2] This 'revenge' motif is one that is common to much satire : a fine example of it occurs in Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita. Bulgakov was a satirist whose works were suppressed under the aesthetic regime of socialist realism. Bulgakov revenges himself on the Marxist, atheistic literati of his time by exposing them as absurd, and just plain wrong, by having the Devil and his entourage play a series of outrageous 'jokes', including decapitation, upon them.

[3] Rabelais, I.xvii, p 74.

politicians and royalty of his time. While these events seem to refer to the fates of Oxford and Bolingbroke, they also reflect aspects of Swift's involvement in politics, for he too left the country, and as the anonymous author of the Drapier's Letters he too was in a sense impeached.

The remaining parts of the Travels may be rendered more accessible through recourse to the same allegorical formulae. Ehrenpreis's aligning of the King of Brobdingnag with Sir William Temple[1] is a convincing demonstration of the efficacy of this approach, for the King's and Temple's sharing of a political philosophy is surely not coincidental, considering the impact of Sir William Temple on Swift's life. This parallelism is made all the more striking by the inclusion in Part Two of Glumdalclitch, a figure recognisable as 'Stella', alias Esther Johnson, Temple's charge and Swift's friend and companion until her death. There is a palpable affection and love that pervades this section that is most clear in the paradoxical mother-child relationship of Gulliver with the giant-child Glumdalclitch, and one can feel the regret that Gulliver feels as the two are parted:

> "How often did I then wish my self with my dear *Glumdalclitch*, from whom one single Hour had so far divided me! And I may say with Truth, that in the midst of my own Misfortune, I could not forbear lamenting my poor Nurse, the Grief she would suffer for my Loss, the Displeasure of the Queen, and the Ruin of her Fortune." (p 109)

Thus may it be seen that the Travels reflects his emotional environment as well as his intellectual one, for the Journal to Stella contains many similar expressions of longing and concern. The characters are but thinly veiled.

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[1] Ehrenpreis (2), pp92-99.

3.3 'Proper words in proper places'.

Samuel Johnson, in the Idler #44 (17.2.1759), has made a typically astute observation on the nature of memory and imagination:

> "Memory is the primary and fundamental power, without which there could be no other intellectual operation. Judgement and ratiocination suppose something already known, and draw their decisions only from experience. Imagination selects ideas from the treasures of remembrance, and produces novelty only in varied combinations."

I would agree with this, for it seems that to create an entirely new story surpasses the ability of any person of letters such as Swift. It is rather, largely a question of how one fuses elements of old stories together: this is imagination as well as invention. How one looks at stories, whether one decides to laugh or cry at them, is a matter of inclination, dependent on one's humor or mood. Swift, as a primarily comic writer, chooses frequently to laugh at them.

Following the popular saying that pets resemble their owners, and speculating that this might be because time is shared together, we can conclude that we imitate and learn from those around us. Our actions and speech reflect the actions and speech of those around us. The case of the author is no different: authors primarily learn from other books, and their writing reflects the authors that they are familiar with. Given that the desire to write is born of a great deal of thought about the printed word, it seems logical to conclude that one's writing will reflect one's reading. See, for example, Montaigne's "Of Presumption": "I turne and tosse over books, but do not studie over them; what of them remaines in me, is a thing which I no

longer acknowledge to be any bodies else."[1] Our reading becomes a part of us, a plaything for our imaginations. Beckett's The Unnamable is explicit on this point: "...the words are everywhere, inside me, outside me... I'm in words, made of words, others' words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me, I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one..."[2] Our psyche is the fusion of our memories, dreams and desires; and yet our remarkable ability of mimicry means that we can imitate the memories, dreams and desires of others too. It seems a part of our nature to want 'to keep up with the Joneses', and this saying is equally applicable to our mental and material lives.[3] Our lives and words can consist of an amalgam of fragments of other peoples' lives and words, never more so than now, in the age of the mass media.

Shakespeare's evident intimacy with his source material is testament to the success of the method of being familiar with those books that you admire or wish to emulate, and it will be admitted that Shakespeare does retell his source material with an exactitude that surpasses most others, to say nothing of his additions to the original. Intertextual 'borrowing' occurs also in Swift, as, for example, in his description of the Yahoo, which seems to be inspired by a passage of Cyrano de Bergerac's Histoire Comique de la Lune.[4] Compare the two passages, first de Bergerac's:

> "I encountered two very large animals, one of which stopped in front of me while the other fled nimbly to its lair, or at least so I presumed; for some time after that I saw it returning, accompanied by more than seven or eight hundred of the same species, which

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[1] Montaigne, p 378.

[2] Beckett, p386.

[3] See, for a discussion of the relationship between our own self-image and our perception of others', Jean Jaques Rousseau's Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (1754), and his concept of *amour propre*.

[4] As with any claim of one author's influence upon another, this is a piece of speculation. The resemblance between the two may be a result of the timelessness of some comic themes and methods, or simple coincidence.

surrounded me completely. When I could observe them from close to, I discovered that they had bodies and faces like ours. This occurance reminded me of tales I had once heard from my nurse about sirens, fauns, and satyrs. From time to time they raised hootings so furious, doubtless caused by their amazement at seeing me, that I almost thought I must have turned into a monster."[1]

Swift's version is more melodramatic and menacing:

"At last I beheld several Animals in a Field, and one or two of the same Kind sitting in Trees. Their Shape was very singular, and deformed, which a little discomposed me, so that I lay down behind a Thicket to observe them better. Some of them coming forward near the Place where I lay, gave me an Opportunity of distinctly marking their Form. Their Heads and Breasts were covered with a thick Hair, some frizzled and others lank; they had Beards like Goats, and a Long Ridge of Hair down their Backs, and the fore Parts of their Legs and Feet; but the rest of their Bodies were bare, so that I might see their Skins, which were of a brown Buff Colour....The ugly Monster, when he saw me, distorted several Ways every Feature of his Visage, and stared as at an Object he had never seen before; then approaching nearer, lifted up his fore Paw, whether out of Curiosity or Mischief, I could not tell: But I drew my Hanger, and gave him a good Blow with the flat Side of it; for I durst not strike him with the Edge, fearing the Inhabitants might be provoked against me, if they should come to know, that I had killed or maimed any of their Cattle. When the Beast felt the Smart, he drew back, and roared so loud, that a Herd of at least forty came flocking about me from the next Field, howling and making odious Faces; but I ran to the Body of a Tree, and leaning my Back against it, kept them off, by waving my Hanger." (p 181-2)

Gulliver's meeting with the Yahoo is similar to the Frenchman's account, but Swift has infused it with emotion and irony that is absent from the original. The monstrosity of the naked ape he encounters is very marked and threatening, in contrast with de Bergerac, yet nonetheless Swift seems to

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[1]de Bergerac, p 42.

have been inspired by this earlier passage, and delightful touches of irony occur, in that Swift has chosen a passage in which the narrator wonders whether he himself has turned into a monster. Also, it is an irony that de Bergerac's naked apes are of the species of Socrates' daimon, and therefore philosophical rather than bestial.

It will be noticed that there exists a predominance of intertextuality in satire, and it seems that Swift, in writing the Travels has followed the advice of Kierkegaard: "According to my notion, he who would write a book does well to think a good deal about the subject on which he would write. Neither would he do ill to form acquaintance, so far as possible, with what has previously been written upon the subject."[1] In addition to the direct influence of Lucian, Thomas More, Cyrano de Bergerac and William Dampier, Swift mocks his own use of other authors by an obscure allusion in the 'Letter to his Cousin Sympson', for, in 1715, a work of Travels had come out of Grub Street under the name of 'William Symson' that consisted of a pastiche of others' travel books. Also, he uses in several of his poems forms of parody and mimicry of other poets for the purpose of satirising their attitudes. It seems a technique of the comic imagination to perceive similarities between disparate objects, and to present them in such a way that their likeness and unlikeness are retained, and thereby to create incongruity and the effect of humour.

Do we not laugh, sometimes, after we have heard a joke, and a word from it occurs elsewhere, in different circumstances? No less do we laugh at familiar words placed in an unfamiliar context, for an incongruity has been

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[1] The Concept of Dread, p 5. For work on Swift's sources, see W A Eddy's three articles : "Cyrano de Bergerac's *Histoire Comique du Soliel*, a Source for Gulliver's Travels", "D'Ablancourt's Sequel to Lucian's *True History*, a Source for Gulliver's Travels" and "Rabelais- a Source for Gulliver's Travels"; or G McCracken's "Homerica in Gulliver's Travels", M Poll's The Sources of *Gulliver's Travels*. See also chapter 9 of W H Bonner's Captain William Dampier: Buccaneer - Author.

intentionally created. Jokes frequently involve the metamorphosis of the familiar into the absurd, and the familiar thus acquires the taint of absurdity in our memories.[1] Swift, as a comic author, plays upon the likeness of words, as may be seen in his use of classical sources in the composition of the Travels, and thus utilises the technique of intertextuality. Many comic interludes of this type are only funny when read in the context of that which they make fun of, as, for example, in parody.

Yet the process of artistic expression is not quite so simple as slight modification of previous works of art, for as with all processes it is an interactive one: our lives reflect the impact of art no less than our art reflects the impact of life, and it is through the realistic representation of this, and other dualities, that art acquires its merits. This is a part of the unique genius of the Travels, that Swift has not only utilised the principles of comic and satiric writing, he has exposed the absurdity of the satiric attitude itself. There is a level of mockery and contempt, but also one of self-mockery and self contempt in the Travels. At times the distorting mirror of satire turns inwards, and fragments of the author are exposed as ridiculous. Morris Golden observes that"...our acknowledged master of the literary alter ego, Swift builds his vision of the world upon blown up fragments of himself, photographed from misleading angles and framed to decieve the eye."[2]

Good literature, as if by nature, mimics not only life, but other literature as well. Our words are others' words: we learn language from others, as we mimic their naming of objects. So also do conversations frequently take the form of a comment and a response, which is but a variation on the original, so we may see that the satirist is not alone in his use of intertextuality.

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[1] After seeing Socrates lampooned in The Clouds, his name and beliefs thereby gained the reputation of absurdity amongst the Athenian public. From this public bias, it is a short and logical step to hemlock.
[2] p 33.

3.4 Imagination and Insanity.

The French dramatist, Saint-Evremond, has this to say of the relationship between madness and imagination: "We owe the invention of the arts to deranged imaginations; the Caprice of Painters, Poets and Musicians is only a name moderated in civility to express their madness."[1] This would be a harsh judgement, were it serious, coming from an artist, of his fellows, and it depends upon the view that madness concerns the invention or imagination of things beyond experiential confirmation, the unreal. Yet if this is so, then all are mad; for do we not all dream and hope, and thus envisage things as they are not? The world is a painful place, and suffering is an essential aspect of the human condition, for emotional or existential satisfaction lies beyond the reach of many for the entirety of their lives. Is it not then a morally harsh attitude to criticise the human animal for conforming to that primal instinct of mentally recoiling from pain? Many forms of madness arise from this moment of fugue, the flight from suffering, yet so also do many dreams and hopes. If such actions are indeed madness and self-delusion, then they are common to most people.

Swift comments on the causes of madness and its nearness to inspiration in his depiction of Jack in A Tale of a Tub:

> "A Person whose Intellectuals were overturned, and his Brain shaken out of its Natural Position; which we commonly suppose to be

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[1] quoted in Foucault, p 29. Compare this with Swift's ironical poke at Wotton in A Tale of a Tub, p 340 : "..my most ingenious Friend, Mr. *Wotton*: A Person, in appearance ordain'd for great Designs, as well as Performances; whether you consider his *Notions* or his *Looks*. Surely, no Man ever advanced into the Publick, with fitter Qualifications of Body and Mind, for the Progagation of a new Religion. Oh, had those happy Talents misapplied to vain Philosophy, been turned into their proper Channels of *Dreams* and *Visions*, where *Distortion* of Mind and Countenance, are of such Sovereign Use; the base detracting World would not then have dared to report, that something is amiss, that his Brain hath undergone an unlucky Shake..."

> a Distemper, and call by the Name of *Madness* or *Phrenzy*. For, if we take a Survey of the greatest Actions that have been performed in the World, under the Influence of Single Men; which are, *The Establishment of New Empires by Conquest: The Advance and Progress of New Schemes in Philosophy; and the contriving, as well as the propagating of New Religions*: We shall find the Authors of them all, to have been Persons, whose natural Reason hath admitted great Revolutions from their Dyet, their Education, the Prevalency of some certain Temper, together with the particular Influence of Air and Climate. Besides, there is something Individual in human Minds, that easily kindle at the accidental Approach and Collision of certain Circumstances, which tho' of paltry and mean Appearance, do often flame out into the greatest Emergencies of Life.... as the Face of Nature never produces Rain, but when it is overcast and disturbed, so Human Understanding, seated in the Brain, must be troubled and overspread by Vapours, ascending from the lower Faculties, to water the Invention, and render it fruitful."(p 336-7)

The new, unusual or idiosyncratic is always regarded with fear because of its strangeness. Accusations of madness are the fruit of that fear. Creativity and enthusiasm, no less than madness or suicide, arise from the experience of intense suffering and many troubles. As tragic recognition only ensues from tragic experience, the recognition of the ugly in the comic arts comes from the experience of ugliness. Before we can dream grand dreams, we must first wish that our painful realities are superable, which, if it is not madness, is at least a form of self-delusion. Imaginations and insanity each seek to escape the grim and weighty solidity of our experience.

We are flesh and blood, we feel, we laugh and we cry, and these factors engender vulnerability. Swift understood this well when he drew the passionless and immaculate Houyhnhnms. Few creations in literature can be further removed from the pain of being human:

"The *Houyhnhnms* have no Letters, and consequently, their Knowledge is all traditional. But there happening few Events of any Moment among a People so well united, naturally disposed to every Virtue, wholly governed by Reason, and cut off from all Commerce with other Nations; the historical Part is easily preserved without burthening their Memories. I have already observed, that they are subject to no Diseases, and therefore can have no Need of Physicians. However, they have excellent Medicines composed of Herbs, to cure accidental Bruises and Cuts in the Pastern or Frog of the Foot by sharp Stones, as well as other Maims and Hurts in the several Parts of the Body." (p223)

This is a superb comic passage, cataloguing a bland race, almost devoid of history, disputes or passions, and yet Swift, under the ironical guise of panegyric, informs us that at least they have effective herbal remedies for cuts and bruises. This is a humorous passage by virtue of its incongruous movement from the lofty to the common, from unlimited virtues to sore hooves, and it shows that any defects that the Houyhnhnms might have (Heaven forfend!) are remediable through the application of reason and some simple lessons in herb-lore. Yet it is also ambiguous, for the surface of panegyric conceals a pathetic dreariness and banality, with 'few events of any Moment', not just in the lifetime of Gulliver's generation of horses, but in the ancestral memory also. The peaceful, amiable and harmonious status quo of Houyhnhnmland is subtly shown to be a stagnant and boring purgatory, for without joy it cannot be a heaven. The reasonable is shown as drab and uninteresting. As Foucault says of madness: that it "had been sequestered and, in the fortress of confinement, bound to reason, to the rules of morality and to their monotonous nights"[1], and this last phrase is an appropriate image for

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[1] Foucault (1), p64.

the Houyhnhnms' 'reasonable' society, which surely conjures up the adjective 'monotonous', even to the level of Gulliver's diet.

This is emphasized by the irony of his description of Houyhnhnm poetry:

> "IN *Poetry* they must be allowed to excel all other Mortals; wherein the Justness of their Similes, and the minuteness, as well as Exactness of their Descriptions, are indeed inimitable. Their Verses abound very much in both of these; and usually contain either some exalted Notions of Friendship and Benevolence, or the Praises of those who were Victors in Races, and other bodily Exercises."(p 223)

It is a description of poetry devoid of passion, like Pindar on mogadon. The effective simile gains its force through the ascription of inappropriate attributes to an object, for imagination involves the fusion of disparate elements into words and images. The impression one gets is of self-indulgent, unimaginative and empty versifications.[1] Poetry concerns Eros and Atropos; certainly it is not minute and accurate description and a plenitude of unenterprising similes. Poetry is the forging into words of our desires and despairs, and the rational Houyhnhnm feels none of these: even when confronted with the death of a supposedly beloved spouse, the reaction is one of dour, apathetic carelessness, and a replacement is sought, as one would replace a part in a machine. The reasonable is shown as boring and uninspired.

The phenomena of madness and melancholia are areas of great concern to Swift, as his evident preoccupation with them in the 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms' and A Tale of a Tub demonstrates. The choice of the word 'phenomena' is a deliberate one for such situations, for the more common terms such as 'mental disease' or 'nervous disorder' carry with

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[1] One expects something akin to "The little brook flowed near / To where we played hard but fair"; although one expects the Houyhnhnms' range of phonemes would greatly facilitate the use of alliteration.

them a pejorative connotation that I am anxious to avoid. Society and psychology use such terms loosely to refer to any state of consciousness that seems to differ from that which is commonly encountered and thus conclude such states to be 'abnormal'. This I find to be a violent, egocentric and inhuman attitude, for it is a denial of human diversity, born of an arrogance and pride in one's own superiority and 'normality'. The Travels surely refutes this attitude of moral superiority, yet Swift's most lucid comment on the subject occurs at the beginning of the Argument Against Abolishing Christianity :

> "I am very sensible what a Weakness and Presumption it is to reason against the general Humor and Disposition of the World. I remember it was with great Justice, and a due Regard to the Freedom of both the Publick and the Press, forbidden upon severe Penalties to write or discourse, or lay Wagers against the *Union*, even before it was confirmed by Parliament: Because that was looked upon as a Design to oppose the Current of the People; which besides the folly of it, is a manifest Breach of the Fundamental Law, that makes this Majority of Opinion the Voice of God."(p 437)

Swift, in this passage, ironically deflates the presumption of the rightness of the majority and of its failure to adhere to the biblical axiom of "Judge not, lest ye be judged yourself" and stands up for individual freedom of thought and expression. The pointed irony of this passage is apparent, and people need look no further than their central elected government for confirmation of the folly of the majority's exercised opinions at election time. Politicians play on the credulity of the masses, and thereby gain a power over others that no person can ever be truly qualified for. The case is similiar with psychiatrists, who, armed with a socially acceptable qualification, are given license to grope around in the dark of the mind, and then gravely intone judgements of madness or mental disease. They presuppose that people

ought to act in accord a set of vague standards. This is an attitude clearly ethnocentric and egocentric, not to mention inimical of human difference. One need only read Janet Frame's An Angel at my Table to feel the inhumanity and presumption behind such labels. Difference should be celebrated rather than feared and reviled. To label someone 'mad' is an act of personal aggression that involves the dehumanising of an individual, a reaction caused by fear and a lack of understanding. In a criticism of the presumption of philosophers in A Tale of a Tub, Swift levels an accusation which psychologists and psychiatrists cannot avoid either as they play gods: "For, what Man in the natural State, or Course of Thinking, did ever concieve it in his *Power*, to reduce the Notions of all Mankind, exactly to the same Length, and Breadth and Heighth of his own?"(p 339)

Given this perspective on 'mental illness' it is unsurprising that I should find some Swift criticism, from Samuel Johnson to Aldous Huxley, repugnant,[1] not for lack of insight, but for the violence perpetrated upon the person of Swift. The stark honesty of Swift's work easily provokes the ire of the critic, unused to dealing with such frequently blunt truisms or barbed ironies. As Meredith says of people with no sense of humor: a person who is "laughter-hating, soon learns to dignify his dislike as an objection in morality."[2] To take umbrage at something meant in a comic vein is effectively not to deny the veracity of the comic accusation, it is rather to reveal that the comic razor slash has cut too deep, provoking pain or

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[1] Hunting quotes a psychoanalytic criticsm of the Travels which says the book contains "...abundant evidence of the neurotic makeup of the author and discloses in him a number of perverse trends indicative of fixation at the anal sadistic state of libidinal development. Most conspicuous among those perverse trends is that of coprophilia, although the work furnishes numerous other related neurotic characteristics accompanying the general picture of psychosexual infantilism and emotional immaturity." (p 97) Huxley, p99, says of Swift, that his "greatness lies in the intensity , the almost insane violence of that 'hatred of bowels' which is the essence of his misanthropy and which underlies the whole of his work."

[2] Sypher(ed), p4.

discomfort rather than laughter. Rather than provoking amusement or diversion, it has engendered confusion, fear or vexation.[1]

The confusion and vexation that Swift has created comes to the fore in, for example, the critic's dilemna when attempting to impose a genre on the Travels. The dialectic between the synchronic and diachronic methods of interpretation is illustrated neatly by the generic disputations whirling around the Travels, which nonetheless remains popular and untouched by this controversy, as if resting in the heart of a storm. For, by its very deliberate confounding of generic classification it refues the absolute validity of the diachronic method of literary interpretation, for the frames of simple comedy, philosophic treatise, picaresque or Menippean satire[2] are quite simply inadequate to either explain or confine it within their bounds. Gulliver's Travels is composed with generic distinctions of this kind lurking at the back of Swift's mind, which was a common approach among the Augustan satirists. Genre distinctions are sets of expectations based on previous writings, and Swift creates these expectations, then lets the reader down through the use of the unexpected, or incongruous. This generic awareness on the part of Swift, and thus also necessarily on the part of the erudite reader is an intimation that the method of sychronic interpretation is inadequate to a encompassing view of the story; that, although reader-response is a valid approach to reading the book, much of the humor and incongruity that are founded on parody, intertextuality and the general confoundment of genre throughout will be lost, and thus appreciation is diminished. The Travels is less of a story if we fail to recognise the parody of utopian writing, for example, in Lilliput, or the farcical treatment of the Philosophical

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[1] See Swift's letter to Pope of 29/9/1725 : "The chief end I propose to myself in all my labours is to vex the world rather than divert it." (Letters, p 200)

[2] See Smith (ed), passim.

Transactions. [1] Thus the dialectical approach exemplified by Socrates, Hegel or Kierkegaard in aesthetic theory is shown as a valid means of approaching the work, for appreciation of the Travels is optimised by the fusion of the diachronic and synchronic approaches, with neither able to claim utter validity in the explication of the story.

This mix of genres is intrinsically comic insofar as it is a means of creating incongruity, and yet we may see how it is threatening to the critic, whose livelihood is dependent on such fine distinctions, which may account, in part, for much of the critical antipathy towards the works of Swift, and the all too simple and frequent mistake of confusing madness and genius.

There is an internal dialectic in the Travels; the comic thesis becomes entangled with its tragic antithesis, and the result is an artful generic conundrum.[2] This is seen no more clearly than in the circumstances of Gulliver's return from Houyhnhnmland, where his attitude is an uneasy syncresis of pride and humility. His pride is as a result of his contempt for the odious 'Yahoo race', and yet it is fused with a humility which is a result of his respect for the virtuous Houyhnhnms. Further, Swift makes this curious attitude absurd through the ironical mental link that Gulliver develops between the Houyhnhnm and the common horse on the one hand, and the Yahoo and the human on the other. Gulliver's ridiculous analogising between the races of Houyhnhnmland and the denizens of England is a piece of incongruity and irony, and therefore potentially comic. Yet it is only comic if the empathy that Gulliver has built up, through his common and good

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[1] See Nicholson, M H and Mohler, N. "The Scientific Background of Swift's Voyage to Laputa." in Brady (ed), or Traugott, J. "A Voyage to Nowhere with Thomas More and Jonathan Swift : *Utopia* and *the Voyage to the Houyhnhnms.*" in Tuveson (ed)

[2] My condensed and thus incomplete schema of the genres of the Travels is as follows, with due apologies to Polonius : Lilliput, comical- fantastical- satirical ; Brobdingnag, philosophical- satirical- comical ; Laputa, tragical- comical- historical ; Houyhnhnmland, satirical- pastoral- philosophical- tragical.

humoured approach to Lilliput, Brobdingnag and Laputa is lost in Houyhnhnmland, for his delusions are near to madness, and therefore potentially tragic.

In confirmation of the dialectical nature of the Travels, one might note that it has, in common with the methods of Socrates the end or goal of exposing the presumptions behind pedantry. Indeed, one might regard the Travels as a grand reductio ad absurdum, where the common human delusion of grandeur is shown to be a whited sepulchre, fair on the surface, yet corrupt within. Irony and dialectic share the similiarity of each placing a value on their opposites.

We laugh, it seems, at our perception of an apparent evil which our intellect may dismiss as not endangering our persons. An insult against the civilised façade which we wear, which does not strike the well-spring of our emotions or arouse our sense of pathos, provokes laughter. If we judge the works of Swift as the product of a lunatic, it is because Swift has challenged our values, kicked over our sacred cows; because he has threatened us and we are not amused.

Moralising commonly springs from fear or repression: for example, Swift's moralising upon madness springs from the fear of madness and Bedlam. Joseph Warton reports in The Adventurer #109 (20/11/1753), that Swift had taken him upon a tour of Bedlam, and had described the causes and symptoms of several of the patients, at the conclusion of which the Dean is reported as saying: "'Think me not so insensible a monster as to deride the lamentable lot of those wretches we have now surveyed. If we laugh at the follies, let us at the same time pity the manifold miseries of man.'"[1] A cynic

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[1] Compare this with Foucault (1), p243. "the sight of evil is for every sensitive soul the cause of suffering, the origin of all those strong and untoward passions such as horror, hate and disgust which engender or perpetuate madness."

or pragmatist might accord with La Rochefoucauld's maxim (#264) on pity: "That pity is often feeling our own sufferings in those of others, a shrewd precaution against misfortunes that may befall us." In other words, that moralising is the wish to convince others to do unto all as we would be done by, that Swift's desire to see the insane well treated stems from his premonition and fear of impending insanity. Those who rail and moralise against Swift's misanthropy in Part Four do so simply because they wish themselves disassociated from the unappealing image of the Yahoo.

3.5 Irony and Misanthropy.

Swift's active desire to help people is easily exemplified, with reference to the manner of his life. Slurs on his character, made by from Samuel Johnson to Virginia Woolf, relate to a few isolated incidents, and to a short period of his long life in which disease had rendered him incapable. It is surely more consistent with the personality of Swift that the oft-quoted "Goodnight, I hope I shall never see you again" farewell that Swift is supposed to have resorted to on occasion, the 'fight' with Wilson, and other minor incidents supposed to demonstrate his madness and misanthropy, are the result of a very old man feeling deeply the myriad of complaints and illnesses that racked his body at what was an advanced age for the eighteenth century. To read Ehrenpreis' sad and sympathetic account of Jonathan Swift's final years, the man's love of people becomes very evident, for it is amply demonstrated by his benevolent actions as a clergyman. Ehrenpreis's record of Swift's clerical activities and various other actions, such as his stated wish to reform "the yahoo race", show us clearly that Swift certainly did not act as if he were a misanthrope or hater of people.

Although Swift's 'misanthropy' bears little or no relation to that of Timon, it does have something in common with that of Moliere's Alceste: a revulsion at human duplicity and a steadfast adherence to truth, and as we all know, the truth can hurt. The picture of the Yahoo is often criticised as a scathing portrayal of human nature, and while many critics seem content to discount its choler as the product of a diseased imagination, none seem able to deny its veracity. My initial reaction to the Yahoo was one of not appreciating being called a monkey or a repellent monster, yet being unable to deny the acusation of possessing some attributes of the Yahoo..

A sense of the comic is commonly born of an intellectual disillusionment with people and manners; from this disillusionment comes the emotion of sadness, and thus the life of the comedian is frequently that of a sad clown.

Laughter, as Freud has shown, can be an action of repression, and he propounds a theory of similarity between jokes and dreams.[1] Likenesses include the dream and the joke as means and expressions of wish fulfillment, using shared techniques such as condensation, fantasy, incongruity and absurdity. He comments also on the shared property of our forgetfulness of both jokes and dreams: that, unless we make an effort, they seem to slip from our minds, which are literally purged of the negative emotions aroused by the joke or dream. The comic or satiric expression can certainly be seen as a reaction against a repressed emotion, such as anger or bitterness, as if in the recognition of humor we overcome something, even if only for a moment, as in the case of hysterical laughter. The absurdity and incongruity involved in both dreams and jokes sits uneasily with our common demeanour of civilised morality and rationality, and thus seem to pass quickly from our

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[1]See Freud (1), p 134-7.

attention. This is especially appparent in a work of fiction like Gulliver's Travels, which is effectively a comic dream or fantasy, a product of the author's imagination, a wish actualised, where the vices are exposed and recognised and evil is chastised through its reduction to the level of absurdity. Swift is one of that curious breed who can neither forget or ignore the ridiculous in men and manners. The fantastic or science fiction elements of the plot of the Travels are merely a vehicle to contain the serious satiric message. The awareness of the impossibility of the dream of humankind being devoid of pride and follies pervades the work, and its irony and absurdity conceal thinly a forthrightness and bluntness that leaves readers with no illusions as to the folly of pride. One might say of Swift that there is a 'method to his madness', that there is an order behind the seeming insanity that is exposed in the Travels, for the (deceptively) simple reason of his use of irony. Kierkegaard has said of Shakespeare that he

> "has often been praised as the great master of irony, and there can scarcely be any doubt that this is correct. Shakespeare, however, in no wise allows the substantial content to evaporate in an ever more volatile sublimation, and insofar as his lyricism sometimes culminates in madness, there is in this madness nevertheless an extraordinary degree of objectivity."[1]

Likewise, Swift in his portrayal of Gulliver's misanthropy and madness at the close of the story, is very deliberate and objective in his description of all that passes, despite its personal closeness. Swift undercuts this aspect ironically with his positive portrayal of Don Pedro and Mary Gulliver, conforming to a variety of misanthropy elucidated in a letter to Alexander Pope,[2] that of loathing the crowd and loving the individual. In other words,

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1 The Concept of Irony, p 336.

2 29/9/1725 : "I have ever hated all nations, professions and communities, and all my love is toward individuals: for instance, I hate the tribe of lawyers, but I love Counsellor Such-a-one and Judge Such-a-one; so with physicians - I will not speak of my own trade - soldiers, English, Scotch, French, and the rest.

Swift professed a love of most people that he encountered, yet was constantly disappointed by aspects common to types of people, such as lawyers, scientists or politicians; this is a love of the particular rather than the universal, and it should be noted that we meet particular individuals rather than universal types. Ultimately, an unkind person might interpret the 'Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms' as a renunciation of attributes common to all mankind, yet the fact remains that Swift was noted for his benevolence, such as is demonstrated by his altruistic involvement in politics and the church. This is an aspect of Swift's comedy and satire that is crucial, for he seeks above all else to teach through the pointing out of foibles, through the command of the intellect, which sees that people do not always act well, over the passionate response to people, which is either to like them, ignoring their faults or to dislike them. Swift seeks to amend, which desire can surely rise from no other emotion than love.[1]

Swift is an acknowledged master of the ironic, and, in common with several others skilled in the use of irony, he has an intense self-awareness, a knowledge of his own limitations. To be aware of folly in others is to an extent to be aware of our own, for we are all similar. The comic is often the most self-critical. This has a long tradition, stemming from Socrates' Apology, in which he says, "I am only too conscious that I have no claim to wisdom, either great or small.... I am quite conscious of my own ignorance."[2] It has a strong English tradition, in medieval apologies, like Chaucer's Retraction:

But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas and so forth." (Letters, p200-1) Compare this with Miquel de Unamuno in The Tragic Sense of Life: "Homo sum; nihil humani a me alienum, said the Latin playwright. For my part I would rather say : Nullum hominem a me alienum puto : I am a man ; no other man do I deem a stranger....I would choose neither 'the human' nor 'humanity', neither the simple adjective nor the substantivized adjective, but the concrete substantive : man, the man of flesh and blood, the man who is born, suffers, and dies-" (p3)

[1] See "Verses on the Death of Doctor Swift, DSPD": "His Satyr points at no Defect, / But what Mortals may correct." (p 540)

[2] Plato (2), p 24.

"And if ther be any thyng that displese hem, I prey hem also that they arrette it to the defaute of myn unkonnynge and nat to my wyl, that would ful fayn have seyd bettre if I hadde had konnynge."[1] Another practitioner is Shakespeare (typically precocious, at the age of thirty-odd, with many more 'offensive' words to write), who has Robin Goodfellow deliver the words of an apology:

"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear;
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding than a dream." (A Midsummer Night's Dream , epilogue, 1-6)

Here Shakespeare points out his own infirmity, weakness and triviality, in a gentle and ironic piece of self-deprecation. As Hazlitt has said of this type of irony: "This kind of wit...where the person makes a butt of himself, and exhibits his own absurdities and foibles in the most pointed and glaring lights, runs through the character of Falstaff... it is an irony directed against oneself."[2] Swift's last words are very poignant and self-aware, even on the point of death. They accord with this tradition, in that they are a claim of ignorance, and an apology for one's work: "I am a fool."[3] It is typical of Swift that they are very blunt and to the point, as well as being delivered with impeccable timing.

We often have a somewhat higher perception of ourselves than others do, even if only because each self is the focus of the individual's attention, and on the periphery to all others; and none of us like to be reminded of our

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[1] Chaucer, p 328. The conclusion to "The Parson's Tale".
[2] Hazlitt, p 435.
[3] quoted in Ehrenpreis (1), p147, which provides a sad and sensitve account of Swift's old age.

commonness. This is why laughter can provoke bitterness in some, for involves the recognition of common faults and hence a reminder of our similarity, which offends them. It will be noted that people are wont to judge others, yet loath to be judged themselves: "All fools beneath illusions labour, / They think hell's only for their neighbour."[1] Swift lucidly sums up this theme or tendency in his Preface to The Battle of the Books : "SATYR *is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own.*"(p368)[2]

I discount accusations of madness against Swift as products of resentment at Swift's honesty, essentially self-defensive manouevres. Foucault has said:

> "Imagination is not madness....At the moment he awakes from a dream, a man can indeed observe: "I am imagining I am dead": he thereby denounces and measures the arbitrariness of imagination - he is not mad. He is mad when he posits as an affirmation of his death - when he suggests as having some value as truth - the still-neutral content of the image "I am dead".[3]

For Swift's 'the thing which is not' is not only the essence of theatre, poetry and fiction, whose province is the field of illusion, yet also that of delusion and presumption, which are justly recognised as species of madness. Yet human diversity is such that there exists no universally agreed axiomatic 'truth', and anyone's given opinion of either themselves or of events and experience differ so widely that even this definition is of vestigial use. Maybe, to use the old and worn case, concerning people convinced of their own messianic or divine attributes, it is just possible that they are indeed all unrecognised messiahs or gods, yet society seems wont to only include in

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[1] Brant, p 128.

[2] Compare this with Hazlitt's "It is only very sensible or very honest people who can laugh as freely at their own absurdities as at those of their neighbours." (p 416)

[3] Foucault (1), p 93.

these categories those prophets who are able to convince a reasonable number of gullible followers of their veracity. Yet does any number of followers intrinsically imply rightness? Hitler, a man almost universally denigrated as a lunatic, still convinced a multitude of vassals of his wisdom, and to this day maintains a following. The inclusion of a purported narrative voice in the figure of Gulliver does not necessarily preclude the possibility of delusion on Swift's part, but to believe this, one could be accurately characterised by that surely not coincidental near phoneme of 'Gulliver': gullible. Foucault, again: "Descartes sought this absolute awakening, which dismisses one by one all the forms of illusion, at the beginning of his Meditations, and found it, paradoxically, in the very awareness of the dream, the consciousness of deluded consciousness."[1] Wisdom lies largely in the recognition of folly and delusion, beginning with one's own.

3.6 Humorous Detachment.

The evident intellectual detachment demonstrated by the abundant humor of the Travels is sufficent testament to the clear-sightedness of its author. To ironise or joke on a matter is indicative of a lack of complete emotional absorption in the subject matter, and thus, although one of the central themes of the Travels is insanity, there exists this comic detachment: that the themes are treated with an intellectual dispassion. This may be contrasted with a writer like Kafka, for although his Metamorphosis is thematically comparable with the voyage to Brobdingnag (a fantastic transformation indicative of a lack of self-esteem) the passages which one laughs at in Metamorphosis are of such bleakness and emotional intensity

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[1] ibid, p 184.

that I suspect that they are unintentionally funny. That is to say, when I laugh at passages in Kafka, I suspect that beneath it is the near-hysterical cruelty that provoked laughter in the visitors to Bedlam, loath though I am to admit it. By this distinction I do not mean to imply that Swift was a genius, while Kafka was a lunatic, for in my opinion they are both the former, merely that there is a greater emotional distance between Swift and his persona of Lemuel Gulliver than between, for example, Kafka and Gregor Samsa,[1] and that this greater emotional involvement on Kafka's part means that his works tend more towards the tragic. This is evinced by the fact that Gregor is the one who undergoes the transformation in Kafka's work, whereas in Swift's, it is others who are changed, namely made bigger, smaller, dumber, or baser, until finally Gulliver realises that these transformations in others are merely the reflection of himself. Gulliver is the dispassionate observer throughout until his passions and emotions are invoked by the shock of looking inward, significantly as a result of his encounter with the amorous she-Yahoo while he is bathing, through the distorted mirror that the Yahoos present of himself. Emerson says, of comic detachment, that

> "the presence of the ideal of right and truth in all actions makes the yawning delinquencies of practice remorseful to the conscience, tragic to the interest, but droll to the intellect. The activity of our sympathies may for a time hinder our perceiving the fact intellectually, and so deriving mirth from it, but all falsehoods, all vices seen at sufficent distance, seen from the point where our moral sympathies do not interfere, become ludicrous."[2]

Each person's reaction to an artistic stimulus consists of an amalgam of emotionality and rationality, and the appreciation of the comic seems

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[1] See R M Adams, "Swift and Kafka", in Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness.

[2] quoted in Bullitt, p 5.

dependent upon allowing the rational or thoughtful faculty primacy, while detaching oneself emotionally from the spectacle.

3.7 Comedy and Melancholia.

Concurring with Watkin's sensitive discussion of Swift and Johnson in Perilous Balance , I intend to attempt to demonstrate that Swift was prone to the state of mind known by the amorphic title of 'melancholy', for this realisation is of primary significance as we seek to understand Gulliver and Swift. Swift was a man profoundly influenced by the fear of death: "When I was of your age, I thought every day of death, but now every minute."[1] The comic is primarily the product of the intellect, which has the property of perceiving categories and patterns, the ultimate pattern being that of death and decay. So the comic author, no less than the tragedian, must confront Atropos at some point: "Intelligence is a dreadful matter. It tends toward death in the way that memory tends to stability."[2] The recognition of death is beyond the pale of the comic, and yet this does not dissuade Swift from contemplating its bounds, for example in the Struldbruggs or the Verses on the Death of Dr Swift , which are morbid yet sympathetic musings on the pains of extinction. If, then, the pallid face of Death should not appear among the dramatis personae of comedy, Swift blithely transcends this rule, for he is possessed of courage and honesty enough to allow the spectral figure frequent appearances throughout the body of his work, as is evinced for example, by the threat of execution that confronts Gulliver in Lilliput or the graphic

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[1] Letters, p297. To Alexander Pope, 1/5/1733. For a discussion of Swift's letters to Pope, see P Harth's "Swift's Self-Image as a Satirist", pp113-31 in Real / Vienken (eds).

[2] Unamuno, p100.

descriptions of the effect of gunpowder, or the beheading in Brobdingnag. The intellect must at once recognise our commonalty and the ubiquity of death; and death is a matter that will not dissolve in the face of laughter, for it is irremediable and irrevocable. The comedian flirts with tragic dooms and fates when he meddles with matters of death, exceeding the limits of the comic subject.

I regard Swift as 'normal' given the nature of his life and genius, despite the fact of his apparent sadness. It is a terrible thing to conceive a revulsion of a person merely for their admittance of unhappiness, not only because it demonstrates lack of understanding, but chiefly because it reveals a lack of sympathy with the all-too-human condition of sadness. It has been my experience that such an emotion is beyond the ability of the individual to control, for it seems self-evident that contentment should be preferable to this.

It is true that none of us consciously chooses to become insane, rather, as with Lear's madness, it seems commonly born out of the trauma of intense suffering. The unreason of madness has its genesis in the inability of the intellect to apprehend, and thus it flees like an animal before a threat. Shakespeare has voiced the inability of the human mind to cope with the contemplation of matters such as death, as for example Swift was wont to: "We fools of nature / So horridly to shake our disposition / With thoughts beyond the reach of our souls." (Hamlet, i. iv. 35-7) It is the nature of the intellect to attempt to discern patterns, to comprehend the general, whereas the emotions have the quality of focusing upon the particular. And what else is at the heart of all patterns than the inescapable law that all that lives dies and before it dies it rots slowly and inexorably away before your eyes until the point of dissolution is reached. Decay is the ultimate pattern, thus the

intellect is helplessly attracted to it, and none can look upon the void of oblivion unshaken.

That Swift is a melancholic is easy to demonstrate, both with reference to the Travels and to his life. Two outstanding discourses on this subject are Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy and Freud's excellent short article "Mourning and Melancholia", each of which, provides what amounts to an accurate character portrait of Swift in many respects. Freud's starting point of his discussion of melancholia amounts to a tally of some of the more apparent symptoms:

> "a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment."[1]

This is an accurate description of Gulliver, returned from Houyhnhnmland, unable to stand his own reflection, feeling unable to talk to anyone save his horses, yet also relevant to Swift himself.

Watkins has pointed out the fact that, from a young age, Swift was wont to quote the lines of Job: "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived."[2] This is an action indicative of a lack of self regard, and powerful self reviling. It implies that the evils of life far outweigh the goods, that the individual must witness this cruel doom to the end, and is impotent to alter its course.

As regards Swift's capacity to love, the Journal to Stella is affirmation in itself that he could indeed love, and yet the facts that he never married, nor could he bear to be present at Stella's death tell us that he was all too acutely aware of the pains of loving, and was fearful and mistrustful of this capacity

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[1] Freud (2), p153.
[2] Watkins, p 23-4.

within himself. As if Swift's preoccupation with death and madness was not sufficent support for the suggestion that Swift was prone to melancholia, these attributes clearly make it a plausible hypothesis.

Robert Burton's treatment of melancholy in The Anatomy of Melancholy is one of the most exhaustive and learned dissertations upon this vast subject (although it must be noted that his frequent suggestions of phlebotomy as a means of purging ill humors is no longer in accord with the current medical and psychiatric vogue, and subsequently this advice should not be taken too literally by the melancholic); and is useful both as commentary upon the fantastical element in the Travels, and provides a commentary upon the vision of humanity that emerges in Houyhnhnmland. At this point, however, I will focus upon his description of the symptoms of melancholy, and demonstrate their relevance to some of the details of Gulliver's 'experiences'.

In describing melancholics, Burton asserts:

> "Humorous they are beyond all measure, sometimes profusely laughing, extraordinary, and then again weeping without a cause... groaning, sighing, pensive, sad, almost distracted...they feign many absurdities, void of reason....He is a giant, a dwarf, as strong as a hundred men, a lord, duke, prince, etc."[1]

Here is a terse account of Swift's imaginative triumph in the Voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag, showing the similarities between Gulliver's experiences and the suffering and delusions of melancholy. Delusions and dreams come from a despondency, caused by wishes unfulfilled and desires unsatisfied. To wish or imagine oneself to be big implies a profound dissatisfaction with being 'normal' sized, with attendant emotions of difference from one's fellows and the sense of isolation that such feelings of

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[1] Burton, p 143.

difference entail. To desire physical enormity is a folly of pride, a delusion of grandeur, the physical analogue of comic delusions of grandeur that occur for example in Gogol's "Diary of a Madman", who proudly imagines himself the King of Spain, and assumes such asylum practices as the shaving of the head and the 'water treatment' to be a part and parcel of elaborate royal initiation rites. Yet Swift realises the foolishness of pride, and Gulliver's development from a comic to a tragic figure through his experience in Houyhnhnmland demonstrates that this imagination is intended in part ironically, to illuminate this human folly. Thus, Swift recognises the nearness to madness of such dreams, and uses Gulliver's 'objective' tone and irony to distance himself emotionally from them.

Conclusion : Beyond Comedy.

"But Abraham was greater than all, great by reason of his power whose strength is impotence, great by reason of his wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by reason of his hope whose form is madness, great by reason of the love which is hatred of oneself." Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling .[1]

Gulliver moves beyond the comic, a threshold already threatened in Houyhnhnmland, at the moment of his tragic discovery of his commonalty; his revulsion for men and manners is turned inwards, and finds expression in self-loathing and self-hatred. This is Swift's genius expressing itself: Gulliver has swung through the spectrum from a figure of empathy, whom we identify with, to a figure who is comic that we may laugh at, to an extremely sad and tragic figure whom we pity. This is a metamorphosis more startling and thought-provoking than any relative physical transformation that he has undergone, for it causes the audience to examine its own feelings, after the fashion of good poetry. He changes Gulliver from a figure of fun into a figure of pity, extending the concept of the comic to its logical and tragical conclusion. Swift sums this up in a letter to Pope (20/4/1731): "The common saying of life being a farce is true in every sense but the most important one, for it is a ridiculous tragedy, which is the worst kind of composition." Thus does Swift refute Aristotle's claim that the ridiculous or comic concerns "some form of error or ugliness that is not painful or injurious; the comic mask, for example, is ugly and distorted but causes no

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[1] Kierkegaard (1), p 31.

pain."[1] He is aware that there are no such forms, that all ugliness and folly cause pain to someone, and that we commonly laugh merely when the victim is not ourselves, which attribute is itself tragic. "'Everything human is pathetic. The secret source of humour itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humour in heaven."[2]

Swift presents us with the 'logical' extremes of the Apollonian and Dionysian archetypes of human potential[3] in Houyhnhnmland. The Houyhnhnm is a symbol of reason and virtue, of agape and Apollo, whereas the Yahoo represents the primacy of the desires and vices, of Dionysus. Gulliver, caught between the two, chooses the side of the rational Houyhnhnm, and yet at best, he is a hollow and proud mockery of the rational animal. While he politely refrains from saying the 'thing which is not', he attempts feebly to become something that he is not, nor can ever be. He aspires beyond his abilities, and this is both sad and ridiculous. The contradiction between his dream and his behaviour contains absurdity in so far as his affectation of equine characteristics is unnatural and therefore a species of the ugly, arising from delusion.

Swift, I believe, hoped for some good to come from the confusion and vexation that he created, and thereby help to amend the flaws inherent in man. Thus he had the strength and will to struggle against the fatalistic complacency that chokes our potential, which strains hopelessly towards an ideal that lingers just out of our reach, like a ghost. In the Travels, Swift's comedy provokes amusement, his satire provokes 'thoughtful laughter', and yet ultimately he draws pity and sympathy from the audience with his

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1 Aristotle, p 37.
2 Mark Twain, quoted in Gibson, p 176.
3 See Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy for the classical discussion of these concepts.

poignant ending. But these are mere fragments: Swift was a genius as well as an individual, unique, who was not bound by categories.

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