

1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era

Volume 19

Article 6

2012

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Keely McCarthy

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Recommended Citation

Keely McCarthy (2012) "THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL REPRODUCTION IN GULLIVER'S TRAVELS," *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*: Vol. 19, Article 6.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/sixteenfifty/vol19/iss1/6>

THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL REPRODUCTION IN *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

Keely McCarthy

With few exceptions, critics have ignored the themes of mission, reform, and conversion in *Gulliver's Travels*. Perhaps the gap arises from the long-standing debate in Swift criticism over whether or not *religion* is treated at all in *Gulliver's Travels*.¹ But, as I show, these broad themes are woven seamlessly into the narrative, just as they are into most travel

¹ William Casement outlines this debate in "Religion, Satire, and Gulliver's Fourth Voyage," *History of European Ideas* 14:4 (1992): 531–44. For Casement, the failure to recognize the role of religion arises from a failure to go beyond direct textual reference (539). Casement argues that Part IV represents Swift's metaphysics, his religious doctrine and moral beliefs. Calhoun Winton has argued that *Gulliver's Travels* is Swift's defense of Augustinian Christianity. Margaret Thickstun argues that Part IV "is a complex satire of radical Protestantism." But Louis Landa states that "we are obviously not to conceive of the work... as concerned with doctrine," and in the collection of essays on generic influences in *Gulliver's Travels*, no one treats religious texts. Calhoun Winton, "Conversion on the Road to Houyhnhnmland," *Southern Review* 68 (1960): 20–33; Margaret Olofson Thickstun, "The Puritan Origins of Gulliver's Conversion in Houyhnhnmland," *Studies in English Literature* 37 (1997): 517; Louis Landa, "Introduction," *Gulliver's Travels* (Boston: Houghton Mufflin, 1960).

narratives of the time, from the works of explorers like Richard Hakluyt, entrepreneurs and settlers like John Smith, and missionaries such as Thomas Bray. Whether they travel to find gold, settle land, or "harvest" souls, these writers all worry over how to carry their culture into a new place and transmit it to others they meet. For some in early modern Britain, religion was an intricate part of their culture; for others it *was* their culture. Swift, always turning the expected story upside down, makes Gulliver, the traveler, abandon that culture, become the (would-be) convert. And so, at the end of his tale, Gulliver's chief concern is how to transmit virtue and the Houyhnhnm culture that fosters it.²

By making Gulliver first the typical traveler, then the figure who "goes native," and finally the reformer, Swift can examine colonial enterprises through different lenses. He mocks colonial projects that seek to "convert and civilize" and charges that missions and those who run them are corrupt tools for colonialism, motivated not by virtue but by greed. But that isn't where Swift ends Gulliver's tale. Projects to "convert and civilize" (part 4, XII, 294) are not simply criticized in *Gulliver's Travels*; they are by turns represented as intriguing, repulsive and impossible.³ These tensions and contradictions in the text are intimately tied to Swift's position as an Established Church clergyman in Ireland.⁴ On one hand, throughout his career but particularly after 1720, Swift used his skill as a satirist to inveigh against British colonialism in Ireland.⁵ On the other hand,

² See Winton, who argues, "Gulliver is a convert and he returns to the world with the marks of his conversion: a desire to impart his new-found religion to others, a disgust for those who fail to accept his faith as gospel" (30). Thickstun also argues that Swift consciously represents Gulliver as experiencing conversion in order to parody that trope in dissenting Protestant literature. In shifting focus from Gulliver as convert to Gulliver as would-be missionary, I hope to move away from readings of Gulliver's character to look instead at Swift's use of Gulliver to move through a complex set of questions about nature and culture.

³ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965). All references to *Gulliver's Travels* are to this edition. Citations include part, chapter, and page number.

⁴ Swift was a clergyman for forty years, was in Orders a total of fifty, and was Dean of St. Patrick's for thirty-two. Louis Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), xv.

⁵ Swift launched these criticisms after 1720, according to David Nokes. Prior to 1720, Swift largely identified with the English and was primarily concerned with English politics. After 1720 he turned his attention to Ireland and wrote numerous works against Ireland's colonial status (Nokes 265-66). Around 1720, with the threat of Jacobitism lessened, Whigs in England decreased their support for Ireland, and the Irish felt abandoned by their former friends in London (Ferguson 22-23). The 1720 Declaratory Act helped split Ireland and English alliances. The Act made Ireland "subordinate unto and dependent upon the imperial crown of Great Britain" and ruled that "the King, Lords and Commons of Great Britain had 'full power and authority to make law...to bind the kingdom and people of Ireland'" (Ehrenpreis 121).

Swift believed in the necessity of institutions like the Church—an instrument of English colonialist rule to keep social order, and he supported measures such as the Test Act,⁶ as his dim view of his fellow Irishmen—and women—made him continue to search for some way to reproduce the theology and culture he represented. These questions are further complicated in *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift's skepticism about the limits of human nature and whether people can convert or reform at all. Bringing out these themes of reform and conversion makes the structure of the satire more visible. Is Gulliver going native, or is he just naïve? To what extent *can* the Houyhnhnms be imitated (whether or not it is desirable)? Given his own conflicted position as well as his skepticism, it is no surprise that Swift takes up the figure of the reformer, and in particular the missionary, an agent who lives among the heathens to convert them but must walk a fine line between conqueror and savior and outcast.

✱ Swift and the Protestant Missionary Project ✱

Alexander Pope was perhaps the first reader to comment on these themes, tensions and contradictions. About four months after *Gulliver's Travels* was published, Pope wrote to Swift, "You received, I hope, some commendatory verses from a horse and a Lilliputian to Gulliver; and an heroic Epistle of Mrs. Gulliver. The bookseller would fain have printed them before the second edition of [*Gulliver's Travels*], but I would not permit it without your approbation."⁷ Swift's response has not survived, but these poems and two others were printed in the second edition of *Gulliver's Travels* (1727), suggesting that Swift did not disagree with his friend's interpretation of his work.⁸ Of particular interest to my aims here is the third poem, "To Mr.

David Nokes, *Jonathan Swift, A Hypocrite Reversed. A Critical Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Oliver Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* (United States: University of Illinois Press, 1962); Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works, and the Age. Volume Three, Dean Swift* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁶ There were previous Test Acts, but in Swift's time the debate was over whether to remove the 1704 Sacramental Test, which stated that only Anglicans could hold public office in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

⁷ Quoted in Alexander Pope, *Minor Poems*, ed. Norman Ault (London: Methuen & Company, 1964), 9.

⁸ In some copies of *Gulliver's Travels* only four poems were printed. Although the poems were published anonymously, Pope's letter, along with the marked similarities between these

Lemuel Gulliver, *The Grateful Address of the Unhappy Houyhnhnms, now in Slavery and Bondage in England*," in which Pope hyperbolically characterizes Gulliver as both a convert to Houyhnhnm ways and a reformer/missionary to his fellow Britons:

You, like the *Samian*,⁹ visit Lands unknown,
And by their wiser Morals mend your own.
Thus *Orpheus* travell'd to reform his Kind,

Came back, and tam'd the Brutes he left behind.
You went, you saw, you heard: With Virtue fraught,
Then spread those Morals which the *Houyhnhnms* taught.

In keeping with his own body of work, Pope substitutes Christian references for classical ones. Pope emphasizes Gulliver's reformer and missionary aspirations. His use of the word "reform" makes reference to the reformation of manners, that, as I will discuss later, was inseparable from the discourse of this time from religious conversion.¹⁰ Pope's Houyhnhnm author points out that Gulliver is not a typical traveler or travel writer: instead of simply observing the Houyhnhnms, he plunges into their world. Nor is he a typical

verses and Pope's others, establish their authorship. Some contemporary readers thought that all or some of the poems were written by John Gay. While Gay may have read the poems before publication, copied them down for Pope, and even collaborated with Pope on one of the last two written, there is strong evidence to suggest that Pope wrote all of the poems himself, and overwhelming evidence that he wrote the first three, including the Houyhnhnm poem. See Alexander Pope, *Minor Poems*, ed. Norman Ault (London: Methuen & Company, 1964), 266-67.

⁹ "The Samian" refers to sixth-century Samian, Pythagoras, who traveled throughout his life, bringing what he learned to other places he traveled and back to Samos. He traveled to Egypt, where he was influenced by their theories, and founded a society in Italy and then in Samos, based on them, as Iamblichus relays: "he tried to use his symbolic method of teaching which was similar in all respects to the lessons he had learnt in Egypt. The Samians were not very keen on this method and treated him in a rude and improper manner." He traveled also to Crete to learn law, and attempted to bring those principals back to Samos as well.

¹⁰ The founder of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, Thomas Bray, whom I discuss in more detail below, also founded the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (the international missionary movement) and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (the domestic arm of the missionary movement). The projects worked together into the eighteenth century. The reformation of manners and the conversion to Protestantism were consistently linked through individuals like Bray, societies like these, and their methods and philosophy, which held that religion and cultural environment went hand in hand.

missionary or reformer: instead of trying to "convert and civilize" them, he learns from them. And Gulliver is not like Caesar, who proclaimed, "I came, I saw, I conquered"; instead, Gulliver "went...saw...heard," and returned home to reform England in the image of this "nobler Race." But while, on the surface, the verses praise Gulliver, they undercut him in the overblown language as well as in the poem's reference to Orpheus, who was a traveler, religious leader, and missionary (founding cults throughout Greece), but was in the end torn to pieces. And while Pythagoras, the Samian, was respected by future generations, he was largely dismissed by his contemporaries. Moreover, the fact that the Houyhnhnms who narrate the poem remain in "slavery and bondage" as domesticated horses suggests that in fact Gulliver was not so successful at spreading Houyhnhnm virtues, that the "Brutes" were not tamed. The joke is on Gulliver and the English readers, who are compared to the Maenads, destroyers of Orpheus. The verses simultaneously show *Gulliver's Travels'* critique of and proposed alternative to European colonialism, in particular missionary projects, while questioning the possibility of that alternative succeeding.

As others have pointed out, Gulliver's overt discussions and musings about colonialism make the critique clear: "If a Prince send Forces into a Nation, where the People are poor and ignorant, he may lawfully put half of them to Death and make Slaves of the rest, in order to civilize and reduce them from their barbarous Way of Living" (part 4, V, 246). Enslavement is seen as merciful and forced assimilation and conversion called virtuous, all for the benefit of power and wealth, Gulliver innocently (and Swift ironically) suggests. It is not the first critique of colonial travel: earlier in his voyages, Gulliver boasts of English exploration and conquest to the King of Brobdingnag, who inquires, "what business we had out of our own islands" (part 2, VI, 131). In his early reports of journeys, Gulliver sees no objection to travel (indeed he is part of the system of exploration and colonialization), but at the end of his travels, Gulliver comes to share the King's and the Houyhnhnms' suspicion, viewing colonial ventures as in line with natural Yahoo characteristics of greed and aggression, and aligning missionaries with conquistadors, naming them as destroyers of culture. And so even as Gulliver takes up the role of missionary to the English, he sees that his success will be limited by human reluctance and, maybe even inability, to change and by possibility of the corruption of Houyhnhnm virtues in the process of transmission.

In fact, Gulliver's speculations at the work's conclusion suggest that there may be no way to operate outside of European colonialism. Once his

countrymen locate Houyhnhnmland, Gulliver observes, they will likely want to colonize it, although he voices his doubts about "whether our Conquests in the Countries I treat of, would be as easy as those of Ferdinando Cortez over the naked Americans" (part 4, XII, 293). The Houyhnhnms, though lacking traditional military skill, would be victors by their strength: "Imagine Twenty thousand of them breaking into the midst of an European Army, confounding the Ranks, overturning the Carriages, battering the Warriors' Faces into Mummy, by terrible Yerks [kicks] from their hinder Hoofs" (part 4, XII, 293). Regardless of the Houyhnhnms' ability to defend themselves, Gulliver hopes not to encourage any incursions into their land, which would only confirm rather than alter Yahoo nature because the act of sending emissaries would, he fears, necessarily lead to the usual destruction of beings and culture. Ironically, European conduct during projects to "civilize" and bring virtue to natives of other lands, proves that rather than being the bearers of virtue, they are Yahoos and thus are the ones in need of "civilizing."¹¹ And so instead, Gulliver fantasizes about the possibility of colonialism working the other way, with Houyhnhnms coming to England as missionaries to educate the English.¹²

But instead of Proposals for conquering that magnanimous Nation, I rather wish they were in a Capacity or Disposition to send a sufficient Number of their Inhabitants for civilizing Europe, by teaching us the first Principles of Honour, Justice, Truth, Temperance, Public Spirit, Fortitude, Chastity, Friendship, Benevolence, and Fidelity. (part 4, XII, 293-94)

Gulliver's reference to "public spirit" echoes missionary discourse such as the language of Dr. Thomas Bray (1656-1730), founder of the Society for the

¹¹ In "A Project for the Advancement of Religion," Swift argues that England should reform at home first. London serves as the example to the kingdom; yet London society, says Swift, is corrupt.

¹² In his article "Chinese Utopianism and Gulliverian Narcissism in Swift's Travels," Frank Boyle argues that book four fictionalizes a then-popular idealization of Chinese Confucianism by writers such as Sir William Temple. Boyle shows how this fantasy of Houyhnhnm missionaries echoes Leibniz's wish for "missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural religion" (quoted 126). The Houyhnhnms represent natural religion, as Boyle says, that cannot be reproduced. Swift's interest in institutions, in particular the Church, gets elided if we stop with his idealization of natural religion. In *Critical Essays on Jonathan Swift*, ed. Frank Palmeri (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 117-28.

Reformation of Manners, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), and Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). Bray called for SPCK and SPG missionaries to cultivate a "missionary zeal" and "public spirit," phrases he uses interchangeably and often as if to say that public mindedness necessarily inclines one to missionary work. "Public spirit," that is, helps to promote the other virtues that Gulliver names.

After imagining this potential reverse mission, in which Gulliver would bring the missionaries back to England, Gulliver returns to the image of English colonization of Houyhnhnmland. He decides that it is best that the English do not travel to this land because European missions usually result in the destruction of peoples and cultures:

Ships are sent with the first Opportunity, the Natives driven out or destroyed, their Princes tortured to discover their Gold, a free License given to all acts of Inhumanity and Lust, the Earth reeking with the Blood of its inhabitants: And this execrable Crew of Butchers employed in so pious an Expedition, is a *modern Colony*¹³ sent to *convert and civilize* a a n idolatrous and barbarous People. (bold mine, part 4, XII, 294)

This horrific image of plunder conjured by Gulliver echoes Swift's other criticisms of colonialism, in *The Drapier's Letters*, "A Short View of the State of Ireland," and "The Story of the Injured Lady," for example. Here he argues against economic oppression arising from colonialism. But this passage also speaks to *cultural* oppression, which Swift treats less often. For approximately two centuries, the mantra of Protestant missionaries had been, as Cotton Mather put it, that heathens "must be civilized ere they could be Christianized."¹⁴ This view differed from Spanish and French missionaries' practices of living among the Indians, and sometimes adopting some of their customs.¹⁵

The process to "convert and civilize" entailed a whole system of cultural changes such as learning to speak, read, and write English (and abandoning

¹³ Swift's italics.

¹⁴ From *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702). See also Cotton Mather, *India Christiana* (Boston, 1721). In this report to the Commissioners for the Propagation of the Gospel, Mather writes, "The Indians are not yet improved so far into English Civility, and Industry, and Husbandry, as were to be desired, and as a due Improvement in Christianity would oblige them to" (40).

¹⁵ This is one of James Axtell's primary arguments in *Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

native languages), wearing English dress, living in permanent housing, and conforming to European gender roles and marriage laws. It was often called a "reduction" to civility, vaguely suggesting at once a leveling of one culture to make room for another, a return to a previous state, or simply a transformation.¹⁶ In a 1763 sermon preached in Cambridge, Massachusetts and then printed and widely distributed, East Anthorp explains, "Civility will prepare them to admit Religion, and Religion will prevent them from falling back into barbarism."¹⁷ There was little agreement, though, about how much cultural assimilation was necessary for conversion. And there were arguments over specific policies such as whether or not to preach in native languages, whether or not the Bible could be translated into native languages (without corrupting its meaning), and whether or not Native Americans could themselves become missionaries.¹⁸ But, however English Christian identity was defined, it was an article of faith among missionaries that it was not a matter of restrictive ontology. For if it is inherent only in some, it cannot be taught.

Swift was himself caught up in this murkiness, even after 1720 when he became more publically critical of English colonial practices in Ireland. He saw no contradiction between opposing colonialism and serving as a clergyman of the Established Church. Not only did Swift not see the Church as an arm of English oppression of the Irish, he supported the Church's active engagement in the suppression of Irish culture and the Catholic religion there. For example, he supported the suppression of Catholic clergy and opposed Toleration and the removal of the Test Act.¹⁹ And he agreed with others like Mather that Protestantism should be promoted through cultural

¹⁶ The phrase was used as early as Spenser in "A View of the Present State of Ireland" when Eudoxus muses: "But if that country of Ireland whence you lately came, be so goodly and commodious a soyle as you report, I wounder that no course is taken for the tounring therof to good uses, and reducing that salvage nation to better goverment and civillity" (1596, text cited is from Grosart, London, 1894). Axtell cites Sir Thomas Smith's use of it in 1572 when he stated that the English campaign in Ireland was to "reduce that countrey to civilitie and the maners of the English" (note 18, 350).

¹⁷ Quoted in Axtell, 218.

¹⁸ Authors who argue for the training and use of Native American missionaries include Charles Inglis (in a 1770 unpublished letter held at the John Carter Brown Library), George Berkeley ("Miscellany"), Daniel Gookin ("Historical Collection"), and, most famously, Eleazer Wheelock (in numerous letters and treatises), who founded the Indian Charity School, later to become Dartmouth College.

¹⁹ Robert Wyse Jackson, *Jonathan Swift. Dean and Pastor*, 1939 Reprint (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 49. Philip O'Regan, *Archbishop King William of Dublin (1650-1729) and the Constitution in Church and State* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 160-61.

change: Swift believed that Protestantism would spread quickly without the hindrance of Gaelic. "I am deceived," he wrote, "if anything has more contributed to prevent the Irish from being tamed than this encouragement of their language, which might be easily abolished, and become a dead one in half an age, with little expense and less trouble."²⁰ Services at St. Patrick's were not permitted in Gaelic during Swift's lifetime.²¹ Interestingly, while the Archbishop of Dublin approved of this practice, the Church of England and the Crown did not.²²

And yet, for what might seem to us today like a blindness on Swift's part, the reference in *Gulliver's Travels* to projects to "convert and civilize" directly ties British missions to colonial oppression. While Catholic missionaries had the reputation (in Britain) of overt participation in rape-and-pillage colonization, by citing English colonial policy as articulated by people as far back as Spenser as well as contemporaries like Mather, Swift's charge against attempts to "convert and civilize" does not allow English readers to distance themselves from the "execrable crew of butchers." But in case readers miss the reference, through tongue in cheek praise Swift questions the motives of the British government and the character of missionaries and settlers:

But this Description, I confess, doth by no means affect the British Nation, who may be an Example to the whole World for their Wisdom, Care, and Justice in Planting Colonies; their liberal Endowments for the Advancement of Religion and Learning; their Choice of devout and able Pastors to propagate Christianity; their Caution in stocking their Provinces with People of sober

²⁰ Quoted in Jackson 50.

²¹ Others have formulated the tension as between Swift's defense of the Irish and his vicious criticisms of them, often seeing them as not so much contradictory but oddly related. As Richard Ashe King puts it, "his hatred was but the shadow of his love" (11). That is, he wanted them to be more than they were because he loved them. This idealization of Swift as pastor, though, elides his more disparate views on colonialism. Ehrenpreis and others point out that Swift defended the Irish on economic and political fronts because he was a part of that realm. "Behind our sympathy with Swift's rage over the fate of his country must always remain the knowledge that if Ireland had enjoyed the advantages of the American colonists, Swift... might have troubled himself about the native Roman Catholics little more than a high-minded American did about the red Indians" (Ehrenpreis 114). Richard Ashe King, *Swift in Ireland* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895; Folcroft: Folcroft Press, 1969).

²² See Archbishop of Dublin's letter to Swift, November 10, 1711 and Swift to Sterne, December 29, 1711 in *Letters Written by the late Jonathan Swift, D.D., Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin and Several of his friends*, vol. III, ed. Jonathan Hawkesworth (London: R. Davis, 1998).

Lives and Conversations from this the Mother Kingdom; their strict regard to the Distribution of Justice. (part 4, XII, 294)

Swift's criticism that the British do not take enough care with their missionary projects may come in part from the fact that these projects were administered by groups, such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), which, while containing some members who were also Churchmen, was itself outside of the Church's jurisdiction. In the eighteenth century, as missions grew, the work was largely supported by groups such as the Methodists, Moravians, Presbyterians, and, later, the Baptists. And so not only were colonial enterprises essentially corrupt for Swift, they were made worse through the influence of dissenters, who were considered as existing "in a manner of no Religion: They are in that respect to be considered as almost so many Heathen Nations," as missionary leader Thomas Bray stated.²³ For Swift as well, they were enemies, not just deviants, and he grouped them with Catholics.²⁴

While there were frequent references to the desire and need for missions in Ireland and America, the Church undertook missionary work slowly. In Ireland, landowners discouraged the Church of Ireland from promoting missionary work among Irish Catholics, who provided them with cheap labor. Landowners feared that Anglicanism would introduce the Irish to notions of civil liberties and would therefore corrupt their labor pool. Beginning around 1710, the Church provided the SPG with funds to hire clergy as missionaries, but these funds were meager and the missions small. Thus, one of Swift's many ironic claims in "The Advancement of Religion" is that "among all the schemes offered to the public in this projecting age, I have observed with some displeasure, that there have never been any for the improvement of religion and morals."²⁵ There had been many propos-

²³ "A Memorial, Representing the Present State of Religion, on the Continent of North-America" (London: John Brundenell, 1701), 11.

²⁴ See Swift, "Reasons Humbly Offered to the Parliament of Ireland, for Repealing the Sacramental Test, in Favour of the Catholics, otherwise called Roman Catholics, and, by their Ill-Willers, Papists, drawn partly from Arguments as they are Catholics, and Partly from Arguments Common to them and their Brethren the Dissenters," 1733, *Irish Tracts*, 1728-1733, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964).

²⁵ "A Project for the Advancement of Religion, and the Reformation of Manners, by a Person of Quality" (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1709); "A Project for the Advancement of Religion," In *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, D.D., Writings on Religion and the Church*, vol. III, ed. Temple Scott (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), 28.

als; none met with Swift's approval. Nor is it clear that Swift was actually interested in them.²⁶

Charging that the small underfunded Church of England groups were ineffectual and the dissenter groups were dangerous, a number of individuals launched their own projects. Swift's friend and countryman, the philosopher and then Dean of Derry, later Bishop of Cloyne, Sir George Berkeley, for example, proposed a university to train Indian missionaries in Bermuda.²⁷ Though it was never built, it was chartered, and Berkeley was made president. An account of the proposal was published one year before *Gulliver's Travels*, and the University is mentioned in letters to and from Swift as early as 1723.²⁸ In them, Berkeley is represented, somewhat like Gulliver, as a hopeless visionary, a quixote. He is characterized by the Earl of Oxford as "a true philosopher and an excellent scholar, but of very visionary virtue," for his desire to quit his deanship, which paid a thousand pounds a year, for a hundred pounds a year as President of the university.²⁹ Bolingbroke jokingly proposes that he and Swift flee Europe, setting up on an island where they "will form

²⁶ According to Jackson, "Almost the only genuine effort to do anything was made by one John Richardson, who in 1711 attempted to circulate the Scriptures in Irish. Swift was patronizing and gave his assistance half-heartedly. 'I am plagued with one Richardson, an Irish Parson, and his project of printing Irish Bibles, etc. to make you Christians in that country,' he wrote to Stella in the *Journal* on April 2, 1711. 'I befriended him what I can.'" (4). See also Swift's letter to Mrs. Johnson, March 8, 1711-12 (Hawkesworth vol. 1). The only money that Swift sent overseas, Jackson tells us, "was £5 to one Father Athanasius Paulus, for the purpose of releasing Christian captives in Turkey" (49).

²⁷ Swift had once hoped to be made the Dean of Derry, but he was always passed by for this desirable position. Derry, in Ulster, was important in the history of the colonization of Ireland. England claimed it in 1600 during the Nine Years War that ended in 1603. It was reclaimed for a short time by Gaelic Ulster Chieftains but taken again by James I and renamed Londonderry. With the partition of Ireland in 1921, Derry became a border city.

²⁸ Berkeley and Swift went to Kilkenny College as boys and then to Trinity College. Having become friends in Ireland, Swift presented the younger Berkeley at English court in 1713. The two kept up a friendship even when Swift ridiculed Berkeley's missionary schemes privately. And Swift's close lady friend Esther Vanhomrigh, "Vanessa," left Berkeley £3,000, most of her estate, just as he was trying to raise money for his project. Elrington Ball speculates that Vanessa, whom Berkeley may not have ever met (Berkeley did not remember having met her; his wife said that they once did), left him this inheritance in order to annoy Swift, with whom she was arguing. Berkeley attributed the gift to Esther's regard for his Bermudas project, but Ball comments that it was probably less out of regard than "because she had heard Swift in private treat them as subjects for ridicule, and thought her encouragement of them would mortify him." See *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Elrington F. Ball (London: G Bell & Sons, Ltd. 1912), 463.

²⁹ See Ball, 26 July 1725, vol. 3.

a society more reasonable and more useful, than that of doctor Berkeley's college." And Dr. John Arbuthnott similarly joked to Swift that they should leave London for Bermuda "and get Mr. Dean Berkeley to be our manager," and Pope joked about it to Swift as well.³⁰ Writing to Lord Carteret on Berkeley's behalf, Swift, against his better judgment he says, desires Carteret to support Berkeley's scheme, for, he says, "his heart will break if his deanery be not taken from him, and left to your Excellency's disposal."³¹

Although he represents Berkeley's plans as quaintly idealistic, he does not seem to condemn them. In fact, Swift himself considered taking a much more traditional missionary position, as Bishop to Virginia, a position in which he would have had oversight over both clergy for English settlements as well as missionaries to Native Americans in the region.³² While we have no direct proof of the cause of Swift's aversion to missions, we might speculate that, like other members of the Established Church, Swift was suspicious of the notion that you could transmit faith, that you could instill grace.³³ And the zeal of the missionary was perhaps considered crass, unappealing to Swift and his set. It is sheer pride, Swift says in "Thoughts on Religion."³⁴ Moreover, it violates boundaries between persons as it involves attempting to force ideas on others: "You may force men, by interest or punishment, to say or swear they believe, and to act as if they believed: You can go no further." To avoid impinging on others, Swift counsels that everyone should "be content

³⁰ Ball, 24 July 1725, 167; Hawkesworth, 8 November 1726, 199; Ball, 3 September 1726.

³¹ Ball, 3 September 1724, 213.

³² To my knowledge, Swift was not offered the Virginia post, but perhaps was offered one in New York/New Jersey. Writing to Governor of New York and New Jersey Robert Hunter on 22 March 1708-9, Swift refers to his past desire for such a position: "I shall go for Ireland some time in summer, being not able to make my friends in the Ministry consider my merits, or their promises, enough to keep me here; so that all my hopes now terminate in my bishopric of Virginia" (Ball LVII, 145). Several years later Hunter refers to his own hope of making Swift Bishop to New York and New Jersey: "I have purchased a seat for a bishop. . . . You once upon a day gave me hopes of seeing you there" (Hawkeswerth 341). The Bishops in the colonies at this time oversaw the Anglican church activities among the colonists as well as Anglican missionary projects to Native Americans, dissenters and Africans in America.

³³ Little is known about Swift's personal religious sentiments. Jackson and Landa, in books about Swift's work as a clergyman, and Ehrenpreis in his biography of Swift, demonstrate that Swift worked tirelessly for the Church in a variety of capacities. He wrote much about institutional concerns, and records of his work in traditional clerical duties exist, but little is known about his personal beliefs. From the few sermons of his that survive, we see an emphasis on Christian duty and traditional Establishment values.

³⁴ See Swift, "Thoughts on Religion" (1738) *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939-74).

with the possession of his own opinion in private, without perplexing his neighbour, or disturbing the public." The process of transmitting religion also ran the risk of simplifying what Swift saw as a complex and nuanced system of thought. Finally, were the religion not simplified, Swift seemed to have doubts about whether heathens could grasp it.³⁵

✱ Gulliver's Conversion Project ✱

Whatever Swift's personal or professional reasons for not being a missionary in the colonies and for belittling Berkeley's plans, by the time he writes *Gulliver's Travels* he is both suspicious of such projects and intrigued by them, as he tries to imagine whether an alternative is possible, whether conversion of non-Christians is possible without violence and whether the moral reform of Christians is possible without persuasion from an institutional body or possible at all. Perhaps if missionaries were truly virtuous, like his Houyhnhnm hosts, their influence would be gentle, helpful, and kind, and the result would not be colonization, violence, or loss. Perhaps they could be, as Swift once imagined, like missionaries from China, who Swift thought could soften Christianity, perhaps deemphasizing Christ's divinity for a foreign audience.³⁶ Without this point of doctrine, Swift sees nothing left to dispute, since for him the rest is basic morality.³⁷

Gulliver embodies this alternative to English colonization. While Swift might agree with the King of Brobdingnag that one does not have any business "out of [one's] own islands," he suggests, through Gulliver, that there can also be a beneficial outcome if we are willing to learn from those we meet. In each

³⁵ Ehrenpreis notes that Swift's comment on the Nicene Creed was (translated by Davis), "A creed suitable for barbarians" ([Davis], xiv. 35). The tone is ironic. Swift means it is foolish for a missionary to expect uninformed barbarians to grasp and be attracted to the creed. He is not commenting on the creed itself" (69, n. 2).

³⁶ Ehrenpreis quotes Swift as paraphrasing Erasmus saying that the message of Christ's divinity is "too strong a meat for babes. Perhaps," Swift muses, "if it were now softened by the Chinese missionaries, the conversion of the infidels would be less difficult." This measure, however, would only work with Jews and Muslims, not with Christians, who are stubborn in their ways; instead, the effect [with Christians] would be devastating to 'morals and public peace'" (79).

³⁷ In "Rights of the Christian Church, etc." Swift pokes fun at the idea that "Christianity is the only true Religion." *Bickerstaff Papers and Pamphlets on the Church*, vol. 2, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

of his voyages Gulliver demonstrates this; yet until he goes native in part IV, Gulliver retains his own values and assumptions even as he encounters objections and alternatives to them. Invoking accounts of Europeans “going native,” Swift refers to their critiques, implicit and explicit, of European society.³⁸ While relatively few Native Americans educated by the British stayed among colonial society, according to James Axtell, “large numbers of Englishmen had chosen to become Indians—by running away from colonial society to join Indian society, by not trying to escape after being captured, or by electing to remain with their Indian captors when treaties of peace periodically afforded them the opportunity to return home.”³⁹ In this way, tales of going native presented readers with a cultural crisis that questioned the assumption—of missions and of British and colonial American societies in general—that there was a profound difference between culture and barbarism.

There are multiple impediments, though, to Gulliver’s desire to “go native.” First, the Houyhnhnms are suspicious of Gulliver’s identity, since they know only their island’s Yahoos and Houyhnhnms. While Gulliver’s Houyhnhnm master “found [he] had cured [him]self of some bad Habits and Dispositions, by endeavoring, as far as [his] inferior Nature was capable, to imitate the Houyhnhnms” (280), the Houyhnhnms’ Assembly states that it is an “unreasonable” thing to treat a Yahoo (Gulliver) as a Houyhnhnm. The Assembly’s finding essentially negates Gulliver’s attempt to convert. And since they deem him unable to become one of them, they

³⁸ A lack of ministers was often cited as contributing to settlers going native. For example, “A Petition of W.C. Exhibited to the High Court of Parliament now assembled, for the propagating of the Gospel in America, and the West Indies; and for the settling [*sic*] of our Plantations there; Which Petition is approved by 70 able English Divines” (1641), warns: “[A]lthough some of the reformed religion, English, Scotch, French, and Dutch, have already taken up their habitations in those parts, yet hath their going thither (as yet) been to small purpose, for the converting of those nations, either for that they have placed themselves but in the skirts of America, where there are but few natives (as those of new England), or else for want of able and conscionable Ministers (as in Virginia) they themselves are become exceeding rude, more likely to turne Heathen, then to turne others to the Christian faith” (6). Going native or turning heathen was also used to describe the abandonment of religious form. See, for example, George Berkeley, *A Proposal for the better Supplying of Churches in our Foreign Plantations, and for Converting the Savage Americans to Christianity, by a College to be erected in the Summer Islands, otherwise called The Isles of Bermuda* (London, 1725), 20–210, who charged that “many English [clergy], instead of gaining Converts, are themselves degenerated into Heathens, being Members of no Church, without Morals, without Faith, without Baptism.” Such accusations usually accompanied criticisms of the quality of clergy hired as missionaries.

³⁹ Axtell, *Invasion*, 190.

are suspicious of his presence. The Houyhnhnms worry that Gulliver "might be able to seduce" the Yahoos to revolt against the Houyhnhnms; therefore, they ask Gulliver to leave, even though, as the reader can see, Gulliver is not interested in influencing the Yahoos there—he is even more certain of their unchangeable depravity than the Houyhnhnms are of his. The dilemma of what to do with Gulliver causes tension in Houyhnhnmland, setting Gulliver's master's against the Assembly. The question that the Grand Assembly takes up is not about how to convert Gulliver, whether he should stay, or if he is a Yahoo. Having decided that he *is* a Yahoo, the question they pose is "Whether the Yahoos should be exterminated from the Face of the Earth" (part 4, IX, 271).

While they express disgust at Gulliver's descriptions of European policies, the Houyhnhnms here and in their treatment of the Yahoos as brutes, mirror European treatment of other populations.⁴⁰ This is one of the reasons that some critics see the Houyhnhnms not as ideals but as overly rational beings whom Swift critiques. Indeed, in this Swift shows that Houyhnhnms are not perfect; they cannot see the Yahoos' potential for reason even when presented with Gulliver's example. Whether the Houyhnhnms are to be taken as ideal by Swift's readers, Gulliver's desires are still absurd.⁴¹ As much as Gulliver wants to "go native" he finally cannot. On one level, Gulliver's desire to become a Houyhnhnm is funny: his project is an eccentric hobby horse (pardon the pun) that borders on lunacy from the perspectives of both the reader and Gulliver's friends in England, who see Gulliver "trot like a horse" and hear him speak (neigh) Houyhnhnm. Gulliver is satirized because he tries to *become* a horse and recommends this to others. Gulliver's concern about how to reproduce virtue and culture is undercut by two problems: first, the Houyhnhnms' culture is coextensive with their nature, and second, the nature of the Yahoos fundamentally differs from the Houyhnhnms', making it impossible for them to enter the Houyhnhnms' culture/nature. By making culture overtly tied to the Houyhnhnm's nature, Swift seems to shift the debate from the relationship between religion and culture to the relationship between nature and culture. One of the readings available at the end of

⁴⁰ Claude Rawson argues that the Yahoos echo English depictions of the Irish and at the same time represent all generic others as well as everyone else. *God, Gulliver, and Genocide: Barbarism and the European Imagination, 1492–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴¹ The absurdity is not in the Houyhnhnms as a model but in Gulliver's assumption that he can become like them. Like Claude Rawson and Northrop Frye, among others, I see the Houyhnhnms as an ideal for Swift, thought not, perhaps, for us.

Gulliver's Travels is that Swift, as for many of the missionary writers whom he is criticizing, culture and nature are the same.

This nature/culture dilemma became the greatest struggle for missionaries of the time as well. To what extent was it possible to transmit culture and religion? Most British writers, settlers and clergy of the seventeenth century assumed that Indians were racially similar to Europeans and that their savagery was a temporary state that could be remedied through education and conversation.⁴² This led them to be generally optimistic that Indians could (and would) easily assimilate to European culture and the Christian religion. While a change from this thinking begins in the seventeenth century (perhaps with John Eliot), it was during the eighteenth century that British-Americans began to see cultural differences as insurmountable, making it difficult for many colonists to see how Indians would adopt Western culture or give up their own. One way that some missionaries (like John Eliot and David Brainerd) resolved this problem was to separate religion and culture, making it possible for converts to be both culturally Indian and also Christian. However, toward the end of the eighteenth century, this solution could also look dangerously similar to notions of race in which the convert is "saved" by Christ yet culturally and racially "irredeemable." And it was abandoned in the nineteenth century in favor of full assimilation, often in "Indian schools," boarding houses for Native children to learn American ways.

So, can people change, and if so, to what extent, and is it desirable? Swift's book has no clear answers, reproducing the fluidity of these issues at the time. Gulliver aspires to become something that he cannot (a horse), and yet certainly Gulliver believes that he has changed. Yet at other times Gulliver's assumptions about what is a function of culture and what is function of nature are questioned. For example, he represents law as essentially corrupt; injustice, in Gulliver's description, is the goal of the law. Clearly Swift wishes to launch a bitter criticism of the practice of law not because it is irredeemable but because he thinks that law can and should be reformed. Likewise, Gulliver's suggestion that women are naturally coquettes can be read not so much as a critique of female nature but of a culture that rewards women for coquettish behavior. While Gulliver states that women, lawyers, politicians, soldiers, and just about everyone in London is corrupt, and while his Houyhnhnm master views such Yahoos as shrewd practitioners of their

⁴² See Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 114.

base nature, Swift, through the ironic distance he creates between Gulliver and the reader, encourages the reader to question whether vice can be reformed or is natural, whether people can change or convert.⁴³ Gulliver as convert represents both sides—he believes that he can convert but is ridiculed for thinking so.

Gulliver as *missionary* is equally ambiguous: although Gulliver professes his disgust at his Yahoo countrymen and recognizes their debased existence, he hopes to reform them. Even as he decides that Yahoos/people are not educable, Gulliver hopes that in fact they are, that it is culture and not nature that prevents them from reforming.⁴⁴ His tale is calculated to help literate English Yahoos reform by learning about the Houyhnhnms in order to be like them. Thus, although he does not literally become a missionary *within* the story (or perhaps is a failed missionary), Gulliver professes: "I write for the noblest End, to inform and instruct Mankind, over whom I may, without Breach of Modesty, pretend to some Superiority from the Advantages I received by conversing so long among the most accomplished Houyhnhnms" (293). But again the text moves away and makes us question whether such change is reasonable or possible. While his aim in writing was to teach and convert his readers to the virtues of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver observes that his proselytizing has not had this effect. In a letter to his Cousin Sympson,⁴⁵ Swift has Gulliver scoff:

I do in the next Place complain of my own great Want of Judgment, in being prevailed upon...to suffer my Travels to be published. Pray bring to your Mind how often I desired you to consider, when you insisted on the Motive of publick Good, that the Yahoos were a Species of Animals utterly incapable of Amendment by Precepts or Examples: And so it hath proved; for instead of seeing a full Stop put to all Abuses and Corruptions, at least in this little Island, as I had Reason to expect: Behold, after above six Months' Warning, I cannot

⁴³ Here I follow William Casement and the "soft" school," as he describes it, which sees Swift satirizing the type of misanthropy that the "hard" school" accuses him of (536).

⁴⁴ Here Swift satirizes, among other things, the characterization of the Irish as animals, in works like Spenser's "A view of the Present State of Ireland" and Sir John Temple's *Irish Rebellion* (1646).

⁴⁵ The letter, dated 2 April 1727, was included first in Faulkner's 1735 edition. Sympson stood in for Swift's the publisher, Benjamin Motte. See Albert J. Rivero, "Introduction." *Gulliver's Travels* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2002), 253.

learn that my Book hath produced one single Effect according to mine Intentions. (6)⁴⁶

Gulliver's definition of success—the conversion of the English—reveals his mania, which in turn is a large reason why his readers do not take him seriously (his reception as a comic figure in turn contributed to the success of Swift's book). In this letter, Gulliver suggests that while he had hoped that Yahoos could reform, they cannot: "[I]t must be owned, that seven Months were a sufficient Time to correct every Vice and Folly to which Yahoos are subject, if their Natures had been capable of the least Disposition to Virtue or Wisdom" (7). In the end, Swift leaves unanswered the question of whether or not Gulliver and others can change.

Most readers see in part IV the message that humans are irredeemable, that their nature is corrupt. As Louis Landa summarizes in his introduction to *Gulliver's Travels*, critics have long noted that the work's underlying argument that human nature is essentially corrupt is a "cardinal principle of Christian theology."⁴⁷ Whatever else readers might find in part IV, they have typically found that Calvinist message in it, supplemented by Swift's misanthropy.⁴⁸ I have argued that, while this grim view is certainly suggested by the text, human nature is not definitively renounced. As in the missionary narrative, human nature is condemned, but human deficiencies are seen as recuperable. Since their business required missionaries to believe conversion possible and religion and were transmittable, the pressing question was *how* conversion would occur. Similarly, as I have argued here, the gap between Swift's misanthropy and his commitments as a clergyman help to produce this kind of indecision in *Gulliver's Travels*.

⁴⁶ As Winton notes, Gulliver's grand expectations for his book display the same kind of pride that he finds so repulsive in other humans (32).

⁴⁷ "Introduction." In *Gulliver's Travels* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), xxii. Others who have made this point include Deane Swift, F. P. Lock, and L. J. Morrissey. See F. P. Locke, *The Politics of Gulliver's Travels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); L. J. Morrissey, *Gulliver's Progress* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978).

⁴⁸ In a letter to Alexander Pope, dated 29 September 1725, Swift wrote of his own misanthropy and readers' criticism of *Gulliver's Travels*: "the chief end I propose to my self in all my labors is to vex the world rather than divert it. . . I have got Materials Towards a Treatise proving the falsity of that Definition *animal rationale*; and to show it should be only *rationis capax*. Upon this great foundation of Misanthropy (though not Timons manner) The Whole building of my Travels is erected." Swift's point is that he is not a misanthrope, just a realist. Two months later Swift wrote to Pope: "I tell you after all that I do not hate Mankind; it is vous autres who hate them because you would have them reasonable Animals, and are Angry for being disappointed" (Ball, vol. 3, 262).

* The Crisis of Cultural Reproduction *

We can see in this struggle in the fact that the real crisis is not that humans might be essentially corrupt but that their institutions responsible for transmitting values are. Having staged, but not resolved, the debate over whether or not conversion is possible given human *nature*, the text moves on to worry over where this leaves *culture*. Even if change is possible, humans will not do so without cultural vehicles, systems of transmission, to help them. What conditions—in the individual and in the culture—are necessary for reform, for religious conversion and cultural assimilation to take place? The answer for most clergy, including Swift, was found in the Church. Swift's qualified belief in the institution of the Church is expressed in his "Argument Against Abolishing Christianity," an ironic defense of Christianity against the trend of religious neglect. In speculating that religion is useful "to keep the lower part of the world in awe by the fear of invisible powers," Swift at once criticizes such use of religion and seems to admire it.

But religion isn't present in Houyhnhnmland, nor is any other institution. As F. P. Locke observes, the Houyhnhnms' society fulfills Plato's point in Book IX of *Laws* that perfect beings "would need no laws to govern" them (17). But this is precisely the reason that it cannot be transmitted to anyone who is not born a Houyhnhnm. Even while Houyhnhnmland seems to offer an ideal for Gulliver, it is lacking because it does not possess a vehicle for imitation. Thus, for Gulliver, they offer no reproducible system for the dissemination of their virtues. Whether or not the Houyhnhnms are ideal (whether or not you follow a "hard" or "soft" interpretation of them), they cannot be copied by Gulliver or Swift's readers. The primary reason for this is that their virtues are natural.

Even Gulliver's reports on things like education point up the absence of reproducible systems. They have no system of education, for example. Gulliver reports on the quasi-education of the Houyhnhnm youth, but it consists of physical training rather than intellectual or social conditioning: "In educating the Youth of both Sexes, their Method is admirable, and highly deserves our Imitation. These are not suffered to taste a Grain of Oats, except upon certain Days, till Eighteen Years old; nor Milk, but very rarely" (part 4, VIII, 269). His suggestion that Europeans imitate this "education" is of course ridiculous since the diet is for a horse and not a child. It echoes theories from that time about the relationship between diet and personal development, but even in that sense the suggestion has little to do with *education*, the training of a mind. These educational activities build on what nature has al-

ready given the Houyhnhnms—speed and strength. And so even things that might be cultural, such as poetry and domestic life, are naturalized; that is, they are intricately bound up in Houyhnhnm *being*. In this way Houyhnhnm cultural institutions are more natural than cultural. This makes their example impossible for humans to reproduce.

There are two aspects of the Houyhnhnm community that resemble institutions: the advisory council and the Houyhnhnm poetic tradition. Yet there are problems with calling either of these a “system.” Unlike the bureaucratic England Gulliver describes, the ridiculous court of Lilliput, the dangerous one in Brobdingnag, or the ineffectual one in Laputa, the Houyhnhnms’ council is a democratic ideal. The council, however, is not responsible for policy, or for compelling anyone to do anything, since compulsion is unnecessary (part 4, X, 280). The council merely advises, and Houyhnhnms, being completely rational and guided by “the unerring Rules of Reason” (part 4, X, 277), comply with their advice.

Poetry is the closest thing the Houyhnhnms have to a mechanism for the transmission of values. “Their verses...usually contain either some exalted Notions of Friendship and Benevolence, or the Praises of those who were Victors in Races and other bodily Exercises” (part 4, IX, 273–74). This poetry is apparently part of an oral tradition, since Gulliver reports that “[t]he Houyhnhnms have no Letters, and consequently, their Knowledge is all Traditional” (part 4, IX, 273). By praising certain virtues in verse, Houyhnhnms convey a belief system through the generations. Yet this poetic tradition does not help Gulliver convert, perhaps because it is bound up in Houyhnhnm history, of which he can never be a part. While these institutions might reinforce Houyhnhnm values, they cannot transmit Houyhnhnmness to Gulliver; as Gulliver states of the poetry itself, it is “inimitable.”

Just as he praises the Houyhnhnms’ oral tradition, Gulliver criticizes British print culture. There is no need for print among the Houyhnhnms because, Gulliver tells us, their culture is uncluttered by variety. They have no written history because “there happening few Events of any Moment among a People so well united...wholly governed by Reason, and cut off from all Commerce with other Nations, the Historical Part is easily preserved without burthening their Memories” (part 4, IX, 273).⁴⁹ Whether or not being cut off from other nations is a cause or result of their perfection, it plays a role

⁴⁹ Gulliver’s Houyhnhnm master undermines his own statement about unity by exemplifying the one exception—he is reluctant to carry out the Houyhnhnm council’s decision to ask Gulliver to leave.

in maintaining it, as does the absence of print from Houyhnhnmland. This implies a critique of a culture that has to rely on print, schools, and other corrupt institutions. The criticism of print is borne out again in Gulliver's disgust with publishing his narrative. The very fact that Gulliver has to *publish* might indicate that English society is already irredeemable. Or perhaps they are not irredeemable but just imperfect. As Terry Castle argues, "The Houyhnhnms may be textless—and thus admirable—but they are not men and women. For humankind, Swift suggests, the text is *inevitable*. It is already here."⁵⁰

Side effects of the proliferation of publishing worry Swift as much as texts themselves. His concerns about the diffusion of cultural authority arising from print appear in other texts as well, particularly in *A Tale of a Tub*.⁵¹ For Swift, print culture makes authority difficult to locate because one does not necessarily need knowledge, experience, or a position of authority to be in print. Granting superficial authority to a mass of people, print culture seems to lessen the authority of the priest and the individual writer. Moreover, the flood of print makes it difficult for any particular text to be influential, underscoring the difficulties of transmission. And finally, print is an imperfect means of transmission because it can so easily be corrupted and misrepresented. Swift makes this point in a comic way when he has Gulliver critique his publisher for inserting material into, and omitting other material from, his manuscript. He needs to publish because print now stands as the forum for public speech and persuasion. His story has been tampered with, and Gulliver has been made to "*say the thing that was not*" (5). The text is so altered that, he says, "I do hardly know mine own work" (5). Both Gulliver the narrator and Swift the author are betrayed by the medium of cultural transmission on which they most depend. The Houyhnhnms have no need for such an imperfect medium. Within these comparisons again lies the circular culture/nature problem: On one hand, the English and the Houyhnhnms differ in their means of cultural reproduction (print v. orality); on the other hand, the difference seems to lie in the natural strengths of Houyhnhnms and the natural limitations of humans. Print is a sign of degraded nature and leads to further

⁵⁰ Terry Castle, "Why Houyhnhnms Don't Write: Swift, Satire, and the Fear of the Text," in *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Christopher Fox (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1995), 393.

⁵¹ The topic is taken up by a number of Swift's contemporaries, such as Pope in *The Dunciad*. See Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678–1730*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 6, where McDowell argues that Swift and Pope are concerned in particular with the proliferation of women writers (usually dissenting) and others of "diverse oppositional communities."

degradation. The differences signify to Gulliver not only the perfection of the Houyhnhnms but the corruption of his own society.

Other parts of *Gulliver's Travels* provide more examples of breakdowns in cultural transmission and the corruption of the systems on which transmissions depends. In Luggnagg (part III), for example, Gulliver learns about a group of immortals called *Struldbruggs*, whose role is usually interpreted as Swift's critique of vain attempts at immortality.⁵² While this conventional message is present, the larger issue is that these *Struldbruggs* are responsible for a crisis in cultural cohesion. Gulliver says he has inserted the *Struldbruggs* into his tale as a curiosity, a requirement of the travel narrative he is trying to tell: "I Thought this Account of the *Struldbruggs* might be some Entertainment to the Reader, because it seems to be a little out of the common Way, at least, I do not remember to have met the like in any Book of Travels that hath come to my Hands" (part 3, XI, 214). But the *Struldbruggs* raise deeper concerns, about cultural reproduction, in particular.

At first, Gulliver is delighted to learn that immortality is possible; but having speculated about the wonderfully democratic opportunity in *Struldbrugg* status ("Happy Nation where every Child hath at least a chance for being immortal!"), Gulliver learns that in fact the *Struldbruggs* present serious problems to Luggnaggian society. Having grown old, they are infirm and unable to care for themselves or be of use to others; they are merely financial burdens. They often lose their memories; they are not respected; they have no authority; and since they are unable to keep up with Luggnaggian culture and language, which is "always upon the flux" (already a problem for cultural continuity), they are "like Foreigners in their own Country" (part 3, X, 213). One of the greatest difficulties is their failure to have kept up with the culture around them. From another time, their language is different, their manners out of date.⁵³

These beings, who are "like foreigners," should be the ideal bearers (not obstacles) of culture. Gulliver expects them to be like the clergy he earlier describes for the King of Brobdingnag—educators and moral guides who provide continuity between generations. Celebrating this image he opines, "Happy People who enjoy so many living Examples of ancient Virtue, and have Masters ready to instruct them in the Wisdom of all former Ages!" (part 3, X, 208). He also imagines the *Struldbruggs* to be like the ideal traveler,

⁵² See, for example, Martin Kallich, *The Other End of the Egg: Religious Satire in Gulliver's Travels* (Bridgeport: Conference on British Studies, 1970).

⁵³ For a related argument about language, see Jonathan Swift, "Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue" 1712.

who objectively records history and discoveries. However, the situation of these immortals ends up looking very different from what Gulliver first imagines; they turn out to resemble more closely the clergy, as Swift and others report they are viewed by most people of eighteenth-century Britain. Their material support is grudgingly paid, they are viewed as out-of-touch with present society, and they have no cultural authority.⁵⁴ In fact, these figures from the past threaten to consume the resources of the present and future, while still remaining unintelligible, of little value to the society.

The Struldbruggs are also in some sense the most "native"—being the oldest citizens—but in this paralyzed position between old and new, native and foreigner, they are unable to change or "convert" to the culture of each new age. The problem is not only the Struldbruggs and their memory loss. Cultural cohesion is difficult in a society "always upon the flux." Rapid cultural change is a worry for the conservative Swift. In Luggnagg Swift imagines this problem exaggerated. Not only are the Luggnaggians not interested in preserving what is fixed, they resent the past (represented by the Struldbruggs). In his letter to his cousin Sympson,⁵⁵ Gulliver describes himself, having returned from his trip and published his narrative, as being in the position of the Struldbruggs. He tells Sympson that some "sea-Yahoos" have complained that his nautical language is not authentic; yet this turns out to be more of a generational problem:

I have since found that the Sea-Yahoos are apt, like the Land ones, to become new-fangled in their Words; which the latter change every Year, insomuch, as I remember upon each Return to mine own Country, their old Dialect was so altered that I could hardly understand the new. And I observe, when any Yahoo comes from London out of Curiosity to visit me at mine own House, we neither of us are able to deliver our Conceptions in a Manner intelligible to the other. (Letter, 29)

Like Luggnagg, Britain, and London in particular, is in "constant flux" so that common culture, common language even, cannot be maintained. Gulliver seems to suggest that this is further reason that his narrative has

⁵⁴ See, for example, Jonathan Swift, "An Argument To prove that the Abolishing of Christianity in England, May as now stand, be attended with some Inconveniences, and perhaps not produce those many good Effects proposed thereby," (1708) *Jonathan Swift*, ed. Angus Ross and David Woolley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁵⁵ Sympson is the pseudonym that Swift used for his publisher.

not "produced one single Effect" (Letter, 28). The linguistic and cultural gaps between Struldbruggs and other Luggnaggians make cultural transmission impossible in both directions—the Struldbruggs can neither teach nor learn. The missionary would seem to support a more traditional maintenance of culture, but instead, as Swift shows, he produces cultural crisis in the society he tries to convert, and, without a vital system for transmission, he risks transmitting a corrupt version of his culture.

The text ends by questioning the missionary narrative's basic tenets and by arguing that the missionary project is not an acceptable model for the transfer of culture. At the end of *Gulliver's Travels* we learn that true missionary work is problematic because it is driven by greed. But we also learn that conversion to a culture may not be possible because of the corruption of the systems of cultural production. *Gulliver's Travels* reviles missionary work (the export of culture), but the book also criticizes existing institutions, such as the Court, for reproducing a corrupt culture *within* England. This corrupt English culture is what needs fixing first, Swift argues in several texts, such as "A Project for the Advancement of Religion." London, as an example to the kingdom, should be the most virtuous, not the least; the Court should be a model for the People. Likewise, the army, as a symbol of the nation, should be praised; instead, "It is observed abroad, that no race of mortals hath so little sense of religion, as the English soldiers" (Letter, 29). But while human institutions are flawed, as demonstrated also in each of the court scenes in *Gulliver's Travels*, they are, for Swift, necessary, and persons operating outside of them are suspect. For readers today, Swift's position as an Anglican minister in Ireland likely seems to contradict his anticolonial stances, and his support of Church and Crown makes his motives suspect. I hope to have offered a way to read *Gulliver's Travels* in the context of colonialism, recognizing both the contradictions and the consistencies of Swift's positions, as he worked for reform yet remained suspicious of most means of doing so. Although Swift may "have long given up all hopes of Church or Christianity," as he famously stated, his actions and words elsewhere revealed that he at least saw the Church as the best option available.⁵⁶ The necessity of such institutions is brought home by the human-like Yahoos who, without institutions, are basically animals. And yet *Gulliver's Travels* leaves us without a viable system or institution for cultural reproduction and reform. This absence reflects Swift's difficulty in reconciling the need for institutions with his distrust of them.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Louis Landa, *Swift in Ireland*, xvi.