# THE UNITY OF SWIFT'S 'VOYAGE TO LAPUTA':
# STRUCTURE AS MEANING IN UTOPIAN FICTION

Method is good in all things. Order governs the world. The Devil is the author of confusion.[1]

Swift's own views on the importance of order are expressed in intimate con-fidences as well as in public pronouncements and do not, on the surface, suggest any inconsistency of belief to account for a gap between preaching and practice. Thus, though he wrote some exceedingly untidy works, the purpose of these was to mock practices and attitudes which he abhorred. The reader of *A Tale of a Tub*, for instance, becomes quickly aware of the criteria by which he is to judge what is before him. This is less true in the case of *Gulliver's Travels*, and particularly the *Voyage to Laputa* over which there still hangs the critical imputation that Swift's ordering energies were flagging, in matters of structural coherence and of style as related to overall theme. This paper aims to show that, on the contrary, the *Voyage to Laputa* is as carefully structured as any other Voyage, that its placing is part of a pattern essential to the whole work, and that particular effects are achieved by particular methods which can be recognized if we examine the procedures of certain literary genres and especially the genre of utopian fiction.

## I. Structures and Genres

Some of the difficulties encountered by readers of *Gulliver's Travels* are not peculiar to Swift. The works of Rabelais, notorious for their looseness of form and apparent structural incoherence, are recognized as a source for some of Swift's material.[2] But it is perhaps more interesting that Rabelais, like Swift, provokes in the reader such a strong need, not only to discover order but for this order to contribute to the meaning of the work before him. An editor of Rabelais describes the situation thus:

Parmi les droits que l'œuvre littéraire donne au lecteur dès qu'elle se présente à lui comme telle, figure comme l'un des plus graves celui d'en organiser les parties, d'en apercevoir la forme particulière de cohérence . . . de la cohérence, il est (Dieu merci) d'autres formes que celle d'un exposé didactique ou d'une démonstration de géométrie.[3]

'La forme particulière de cohérence' is perhaps even more of a puzzle to Swift's reader than to the reader of Rabelais, since in Swift's fiction both didactic and geo-metric elements are insistently and equally to the fore. The relationship between meaning and form in *Gulliver's Travels* is almost too immediately evident, and still the search for unity and coherence continues as though there were never to be any certainty of arrival (*Dieu merci*). It is all the fault of Books I and II, which provide gratuitously a pattern so satisfyingly neat and complete as to engender in the reader certain expectations with regard to Books III and IV. These expectations are, of course, frustrated: the reader feels cheated of his 'right' to 'organize the parts',

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[1] Swift to Stella, 19 October 1710. *Jonathan Swift: Journal to Stella*, edited by Harold Williams, 2 vols (Oxford, 1948), I, 72. For some cautionary comments on the varying degrees of seriousness among Swift's formulations of his views, see C. J. Rawson, 'Order and Misrule: Eighteenth-Century Literature in the 1970's', *ELH*, 42 (1975), 471–505 (p. 482).

[2] See, in particular, W. A. Eddy, *Gulliver's Travels: A Critical Study* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1923).

[3] V. L. Saulnier, *Le Dessein de Rabelais* (Paris, 1957), p. 11.

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and from his disappointment or indignation springs a whole deluge of critical inter-
pretation. Book IV has been most frequently the focus of attention but there the
problem of what we are meant to make of Swift's Houyhnhnms has not depended
particularly on structural considerations or on relationships between the last
voyage and others. In fact the most formally coherent 'structures' arising from
discussion of Houyhnhnmland are probably the ranked forces of pro-Houyhnhnm
and anti-Houyhnhnm judgements on Swift himself.[1] The part is examined by many
critics not so much as though it were a key to the whole but as though it might
replace the whole: if you can once get the Houyhnhnms right the rest will not
really matter any more. Defeated in the attempt to form any consistent relationship
with Gulliver we give up and look instead for Swift. This makes us rather like
Laputans: 'one of their Eyes turned inward, and the other directly up to the
Zenith'.[2] Too often the one thing we avoid looking at is the fiction, as a fiction,
as a whole, with its meaning in its wholeness.

   If Book IV, however, has borne the brunt of critical attention, and has been dis-
torted sometimes in consequence, Book III has been much less fairly treated, regarded
often as a fascinating irrelevance to the rest of *Gulliver's Travels* or, worse, as a
flaw, a disappointment, an anticlimax. The opposing viewpoints reflect the degree
to which readers are prepared to take the part on its own or, on the other hand,
feel let down by an apparent failure of meaning to allow itself to be conveyed
through structure. Few modern readers would be as dismissive as Coleridge
('Laputa I would expunge altogether. It is a wretched abortion, the product of
spleen and ignorance and self-conceit').[3] Some modern work on the third Voyage has
been successful and engaging but has had the effect, while reasserting its value, of
furthering the alienation of that Voyage from the rest, making it comprehensible in
terms of the real world of Swift rather than the fictional world of Gulliver.[4] Even
those who claim to be particularly interested in unity or coherence tend to propose
schemes whereby the *Voyage to Laputa* can be related better to the outside world
than to the fiction, so that it is still cut off from narratives on either side of it. Thus
A. E. Case prevented us from shrugging off the whole episode as a mere hotch-
potch of miscellaneous satire by saying that 'the third voyage is much more unified
in purpose than has commonly been supposed'[5] and proceeded to show that that
unification was all a matter of contemporary politics, important to Swift but having
little connexion with Gulliver or his narrative. Gulliver is really the crux of the

   [1] See W. E. Yeomans, 'The Houyhnhnms as Menippean Horses', *College English*, 27 (1966), 449–54.
   [2] *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 159. Quotations are from *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, edited by Herbert
Davis, 14 vols (Oxford, 1939–55), Volume XI (revised edition, 1959).
   [3] *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, edited by Thomas M. Raysor (Cambridge, Massachusetts,
1936), p. 130. In fact, I have found that students in 1976 can be almost as dismissive, finding Book III
'boring and irrelevant' on a first reading.
   [4] See Marjorie Nicolson and Nora M. Mohler, 'The Scientific Background of Swift's *Voyage to
Laputa*' and 'Swift's "Flying Island" in the *Voyage to Laputa*', *Annals of Science*, 2 (1937), 299–334 and
405–30; Pat Rogers, 'Gulliver and the Engineers', *MLR*, 70 (1975), 260–70. There have been a number
of defenders, in recent years, of Book III as a unit necessary to the structure of *Gulliver's Travels* as a
whole. Among those closest in approach to this article are John H. Sutherland, 'A Reconsideration
of Gulliver's Third Voyage', *SP*, 54 (1957), 45–52; Clarence Tracy, 'The Unity of *Gulliver's Travels*',
*Queen's Quarterly*, 68 (1961–2), 597–609; John H. Munro, 'Book III of *Gulliver's Travels* Once More',
*English Studies*, 49 (1968), 429–36; I. D. Traldi, 'Gulliver the Educated Fool: Unity in the *Voyage
to Laputa*', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 4 (1968), 35–50; Roberta S. Borkat, 'Pride, Progress,
and Swift's Struldbruggs', *Durham University Journal* (June 1976), pp. 126–34.
   [5] *Four Essays on Gulliver's Travels* (Princeton, 1945), p. 80.

unification problem. It may well be that in Book III he 'in effect, vanishes', as Kathleen Williams says,[1] but we are not therefore at liberty to forget him or to disregard him as a central structure linking the four Voyages together. I call Gulliver a structure rather than a character: it is essential to this discussion to see him as such, and fortunately the days are over when problems of misreading arose chiefly from mistaken assumptions that *Gulliver's Travels* was a novel and Gulliver a novel-character.[2]

One of the dangers, however, of discovering that *Gulliver's Travels* is not a novel has been that of reducing it to a too simple allegorical relationship with fact. Direct equations may indeed be made between the particularities of real life and those in the fiction, but fiction can no more be confined to the concept of allegory than to the terms of the novel: it has traditional uses and forms older and wider than either of these, and to understand how Swift makes fiction serve his satirical purposes we have to turn from the local to the general, from the contemporary to the universal, remembering that Swift was an Augustan and on the side of the ancients. This obliges us to think in the conceptual terms of themes and genres and to take up suggestions made, but not exhaustively explored, by Northrop Frye and Martin Price and Robert C. Elliot[3] in order to restore the *Voyage to Laputa* to a position in which it can be seen as a contributing part, instead of an aberrant one, of *Gulliver's Travels* as a whole. The consideration of large, perhaps even vague, generalities need not lead to oversimplification: what is needed is some frame within which consistencies and apparent inconsistencies may be reconciled, whereby concrete narrative details may be linked to abstract concepts which will contain them and which will themselves stand up to close examination, so that structure and meaning may be properly united. Thematically, *Gulliver's Travels* is an attack on human pride, a satire on civilized society, an exposé of the truth about human nature as Swift saw it, and an analysis of the quality of human reason. Thematically the four Voyages are perfectly consistent: there is no individual Voyage from which any of these themes is absent, nor is the treatment of them noticeably uneven in emphasis. The themes are constant and the variations do not stray from the expression of a consistent meaning through narrative detail. In this respect the *Voyage to Laputa* has no less a part to play in the whole than any other Voyage.

The problems of coherence and unity are thus quickly identified as matters not of theme but of structure. For structure we need genre definitions, frames of reference within which to consider vital relationships between themes and forms, subjects and their appropriate modes of expression: in the reading and the criticism of all literature it is surely an agreed assumption that structure does contribute to meaning. (A comment by Quintana provides a good example of the way in which *Gulliver's Travels* can have its structure misread, and an even better one of the fact that it is in a structural sense that critics fail to justify Book III by means of its placing. For Quintana this Voyage stands as an anticlimax with the function of strengthening

[1] *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise* (Lawrence, 1958), p. 175.
[2] See Robert C. Elliott's useful discussion of genre features in *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 184 ff. However, Gulliver as a novel-character lives on to some extent in Sutherland's article, cited above.
[3] *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 305 ff.; *To the Palace of Wisdom: Studies in Order and Energy from Dryden to Blake* (Carbondale, 1970), pp. 197 ff.; Elliott, *Power of Satire*.

the climax of Book IV.[1] This suggests criteria of a kind more appropriate to a work for the theatre and is just as misleading as the old tendency to read the work as a novel.) Perhaps the structure of *Gulliver's Travels* is hard to understand just *because* it has features of a generic kind which nevertheless do not allow us to fix it firmly within any single genre. It may also be that the attempt to define any genre in terms of its structural features is itself a search after an ideal which has been pursued vainly from Aristotle onwards. Seeming structural imperfections in *Gulliver's Travels* might then illustrate, as other features do, Swift's views on such a pursuit. Unity and coherence may seem to be lacking because we fail to understand how central a part of Swift's theme the concern with structure is, and the nature of that concern.

There is certainly a relationship between structure and genre, and two genres make legitimate claims on *Gulliver's Travels*. The first is the fantastic voyage. *Gulliver's Travels* contains four of these, and they provide a patterned framework of travel away from home and back again. The repetition strengthens the pattern and there is no suggestion of divergence or flaw. The fantastic voyage has to have a traveller and/or narrator, who need not be a 'character' but who is an essential structural link and to whom the framing narrative belongs. Whatever happens to Gulliver in Book III the frame pattern of setting out and returning is not broken, and the disappearance mentioned by Kathleen Williams is virtual and temporary, not actual or permanent. The second genre is utopian fiction. This, too, has structure in the shape of an alien society, contained within boundaries, self-sufficient, and not susceptible to change. (It may, like Plato's Republic, be *threatened* by change or, like Lilliput, show signs of corruption from its original institution.) In *Gulliver's Travels* the essence of such a structure is provided four times over, as in the case of the fantastic voyage. The multiplicity of societies in Book III brings variety internally but no inconsistency in the relationship between that Book and others. The narrator figure, himself a structure, is common to both genres, may in either case be a traveller, and forms a link between the two genres. Thus the genres may be distinguished apart though often they overlap.

The fantastic voyage is thus a genre with a definable structure. So is utopian fiction. But in addition to the figure of the narrator, linking the two genres, we should consider one other form, that of language as a structure of expression which will vary with the requirements of each of these genres. The language of the fantastic voyage will be such as to persuade us of the veracity of things beyond experience or common sense, using much concrete detail of description and measurement, exact exaggeration of numbers, and so on. The language of utopian fiction will also be a structure based on the rhetoric of persuasion, a manoeuvring of comparisons between the ideal unknown and the real-and-known. If we then consider these four types of structure (voyage, utopia, narrator, and language) and the two genres (utopian fiction and fantastic voyage) it becomes evident that the features sought as aids to definition and distinction tend to overlap considerably, causing confusion and a temptation to avoid the structural issue altogether by taking refuge under the umbrella of a genre less demanding in formal terms. I refer to Menippean satire, which is a kind of 'mélange adultère de tout' but has the advantage of allowing a

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[1] *Swift: An Introduction* (London, 1962), Oxford Paperback edition, p. 161. Quintana goes right outside literature, in fact, describing this Voyage as 'like the scherzo in a traditional four-movement symphony'.

mixture of forms, modes, and structures whole or broken and varying in their degrees of compatibility, to come together in some sort of harmony of intent.[1] In this genre, though it may sound paradoxical, meaning and structure are as interdependent as in any other, for only through formlessness can certain preoccupations with form be expressed with any real force. In *Gulliver's Travels* I believe it is Swift's purpose to clarify and purify certain concepts, and that he achieves this in Book IV by means of techniques of purgation and polarization. In Book IV he presents a utopia (whether his own or Gulliver's I shall discuss in my conclusion) but the context from which the utopia emerges must be provided in Book III, where the setting is necessarily one of mixture, multiplicity, and muddle, conveyed through every available structure; those of language, of the figure of Gulliver, and of the encounter with alien societies, leaving only the essential voyage framework of the fiction intact (though even that is used for a particular kind of comment, as I shall show).

One more genre must be mentioned, because it has a bearing on the complex relationships between the other genres I have mentioned, and above all on the question of language. This is the travel book, which has an obvious connexion with the fantastic voyage and with the utopian fiction. The travel book itself is based on real experience, the fictional variants on make-believe experience. The fictions are often used for satirical purposes, to criticize real life through direct comparison with an imaginary alternative, *or* to criticize a world of illusion created by a lying narrator and sold to an equally guilty, because gullible, reading public. The satirist's work must depend for its success not only on the forms used but on the study, critical understanding, imitation, and parody of the rhetoric of persuasion. The language he uses will be not only a means of expression but a part of his theme, whether he is concerned with folly or vice, credulity or prevarication, or the interdependence between all of these. Just as utopian fiction, the fiction of ideals, can criticize both the real world and the world of illusion, so the language of such fiction can criticize both the language of factual truth and the language of illusion: between truth and deception lies metaphor. Utopian fiction is itself metaphor. It has to present the ideal in terms of fiction, to protect it from reality, and to enable it to transcend illusion. The utopian writer's concern with language, from Plato to George Orwell, from the unexpectedly poetic Myth of Er to the Appendix on Newspeak, is too evident and too important to be given adequate treatment here. But if it is possible to justify the *Voyage to Laputa* by reference to traditional literary genres, then it is also important to remember that Swift's allusions, imitations, and parodies will have as much to do with language as with any other elements of theme and structure.

Whether *Gulliver's Travels* is utopian fiction or merely Menippean satire it clearly belongs to a canon which includes Plato's *Republic*, Lucian's *True History*, More's *Utopia*, the works of Rabelais, and Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and is commonly discussed in connexion with these works.[2] All are constructed around the concept of an ideal world, a utopia, and all were familiar reading to Swift. The first two Books

[1] See Elliott, pp. 186–7.
[2] The most valuable single essay on *Gulliver's Travels* as a utopian fiction, and one to which my own debt is too extensive for me to be able to recognize its limits, is John Traugott's 'A Voyage to Nowhere with Thomas More and Jonathan Swift: *Utopia* and *The Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*', *Sewanee Review*, 69 (1961), 534–65.

of *Gulliver's Travels* are rooted in the real world, in spite of the fantasy. The device of the telescope, on which the fantasy depends, is a real and physical aid to vision, and Swift's inversions and distortions are equally real and physical. Books III and IV are rooted in the ideal and the vision is abstract and spiritual, as are the distortions. Swift's ideal is in literature and the ancient world, and it is through these literary spectacles that he looks at present reality. He uses the conceptual terms of utopian fiction not only for the utopia of Book IV but for the dystopia of Book III, and as with Books I and II the technique by which the pair are related is that of inversion. The Houyhnhnm utopia is an indirect imitation of Plato: the Laputan dystopia is an indirect parody of Bacon. The third Voyage is the most local, contemporary, personal, and 'original' (in a sense which Swift would recognize and use as a term of condemnation), and at the same time the most imitative, the most conventional, and the most dependent of all on the authority of tradition. For all its apparent fragmentation there is one special kind of coherence in this Voyage, in that it is built on the ironic paradox that if the moderns are guilty of fragmenting the world the joke is on them because the ancients did it better. It is, in a sense, another and more sophisticated *Battle of the Books*.

## II.   *Imitations and Parodies*

Book III does not have to present us with a utopia in order to make its comments on utopianism. Plato, Lucian, Rabelais, More, and Bacon are all present, directly or indirectly as seems appropriate. More and Rabelais are not ancients, but they are on the right side, against contemporary vulgarities and firmly in the imitative tradition. Plato and Lucian represent utopian concepts from the ancient world, one describing the ideal, the other mocking the illusion. Bacon is there for an obvious reason: *New Atlantis* is the arrogant dream of a modern disguising himself as an ancient. Lastly, an episode (the whole Voyage) which is clearly fragmented can perhaps only be recognized as such by reference to concepts of unity and wholeness which are not merely utopian but more generally both Platonic and Christian. The name *Laputa* itself may suggest a dystopia or, rather, a perversion of utopia. Speculation on the process by which Swift invented names is perhaps a dubious enterprise but, since he enjoyed puns, anagrams, and near-anagrams, his reader is entitled to consider those he finds, if not to look for them. *Laputa* is a near-anagram of *utopia*. *Utopia* means *nowhere*. *Nowhere* contains an anagram of *whore*. *Laputa* means *whore*. The association of words and concepts is not so loose as to be untenable if my interpretation of Swift's use of Bacon's fantasy is accurate.

   It is perhaps not necessary here to detail every specific borrowing or parody. In the case of Rabelais this work has been done by Huntington Brown,[1] and W. A. Eddy traces links with various sources. Many details in Laputa come directly from Rabelais, for instance some of the projects in the Academy at Lagado and the carving of food into geometrical shapes; the idea of the loadstone may owe something to Rabelais's use of a similar device in his account of the military power of Messere Gaster, though I have not seen this anywhere suggested.[2] Although the

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[1] *Rabelais in English Literature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1933; London, 1967).
[2] *Le Quart Livre*, Chapter 62. Messere Gaster was a great inventor, particularly, and most ominously, of military devices. Later, and more probable, sources for Swift's loadstone are interestingly discussed by Paul J. Korshin, 'The Intellectual Context of Swift's Flying Island', *PQ*, 50 (1971), 630–46 (pp. 637–42).

projects of the Academy make fun of contemporary scientific experiments, and borrow from contemporary records, Swift's attack takes its force from the fact that he can intersperse examples from reality with examples from fiction, as though defying us to recognize the difference, and the tone and intention are those of Rabelais, mocking the same tendency to abstraction in his own day by reference, in his turn, to older sources; the point being for both Swift and Rabelais that the moderns are not even modern. ('Moderns' may seem an inappropriate term to use when speaking of Rabelais's enemies except that they, like those Swift attacked, were mostly devotees of systems of abstract reasoning who thought they could afford to forget their origins.[1]) Gulliver's encounters with the spirits of the dead, apart from Faustian echoes (his dream of power in immortality amongst the Struld-bruggs smacks of the same kind of unnaturalness and autonomous modernity), are borrowed from Lucian, and again it is a matter of tone as well as of detail, since both authors are using the traditional literary visit to the underworld for particular satiric ends. Knowing the pattern in Lucian's *True History*, the reader is better able to appreciate Swift's adaptation. For instance, where Lucian is concerned to reveal the illusory glow which history throws over all reputations indiscriminately, Swift wishes to use history in proof of a theory of degeneration. Lucian's traveller makes contact with Homer, and hears news of Plato living alone in obedience to his own laws: no revered figure is immune from ridicule. But Gulliver distinguishes between Aristotle and his commentators, and finds Thomas More among that 'Sextumvirate to which all the Ages of the World cannot add a Seventh' (p. 196). His nostalgia for '*English* Yeomen of the old Stamp' leads to a comment on the way in which their 'pure native Virtues were prostituted for a Piece of Money by their Grand-children' (pp. 201–2).

For reference to Plato in the *Voyage to Laputa* Swift uses something less direct than simple imitation or parody, and I shall discuss the use of certain imagery, as well as elements in the figure of Gulliver himself, when considering the contribution of the framework of Book III to the whole, in terms of unity and coherence. With regard to Bacon, and to More also, there are features which properly belong to an examination of the structure of language and its contribution to the meaning of the Voyage, and cannot be fully discussed here. But immediately and directly, of course, the Academy of Lagado cannot express Swift's views on the ambitions of the Royal Society without paying tribute to Bacon's advance dream of that institution: that it should, in a sense, have been founded on a fiction suits Swift's purposes very well.[2] One point is worth noting here about the relationship between fact and fantasy in the utopian fictions mentioned so far. There is a common pattern of structure whereby a formal description of the real world leads into a formal fiction of an ideal world. Plato's *Republic* finally transcends the dialogue form with the Myth of Er. More's *Utopia* begins with dialogue description of conditions in Europe before Hythlodaye is allowed to launch into his uninterrupted monologue on Utopia. Even Rabelais's untidy fiction spends three Books on the state of the real world, to the point at the beginning of Book IV where the company, led by Pantagruel, voyage off into a much stranger unknown. And if we seek a logical pairing of

[1] Compare C. J. Rawson, *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader* (London and Boston, 1973), p. 109.
[2] See J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth* (London, 1920), pp. 92 and 96.

Swift's third and fourth Voyages, in the irresistible desire to make them as balanced as Books I and II, we can do so in terms of the pattern of utopian fiction by saying that the fragmentation of Book III is indeed Swift's portrayal of actuality in all its craziness, necessarily preceding and providing the occasion for the utopian idealism of Houyhnhnmland.

In the same way Bacon's *New Atlantis* can be seen as a fantasy rendering of the theme he pursues in the *Advancement of Learning*. That earnest recommendation to his prince, of an undertaking which will bring honour to him and the nation, is spiced with an appeal to the popular imagination in the form of a glorious, if un-completed, fiction. To Swift there might well seem to be something disingenuous about Bacon's use of the power of fiction to persuade, especially when a comparison with More's *Utopia* is taken into account. More plays with this power, shows us his own vulnerability to it, and teaches us how to resist it or keep it in its place. Bacon, in his turn, has plenty to say about the easy domination of reason by imagination in the *Advancement of Learning* and Swift chose to parody Bacon's argument in *A Tale of a Tub*.[1] But Bacon, having warned us of a weakness, proceeds to exploit this weakness: there is no irony in either the *Advancement of Learning* or *New Atlantis*. In *Gulliver's Travels*, therefore, it is as though Swift is making Gulliver suffer the consequences of becoming Bacon's victim. More, like Plato himself, uses fantasy to show the otherness of the ideal; to show that it is defined by its difference from actuality. But Bacon (in what I believe to be Swift's view) dis-honestly tries to fuse the two in an attempt to make the old seem compatible with the new and the advanced and progressive compatible with the traditional. Thus, though he shows through the society of Bensalem that there may be certain fallings-off in the European practice of the Christian way of life, his qualification for entry is a mere matter of improvement on what we already are and requires no basic change in human nature of the type that would be needed for More to travel with Hythlodaye or make Gulliver acceptable to the Houyhnhnms.

Swift uses features from Bacon's fiction and reverses their effect in the *Voyage to Laputa*. In both cases a central and mysterious institution provides scientific knowledge which brings political power. With Bacon the effects spread out benefi-cially into society without disturbing its traditional structure. In Swift's Laputa, however, knowledge without understanding spills over in the form of rumour and speculation, resulting in all kinds of nervous compulsions towards self-destruction. As, in Bacon, we see the effects before the cause, the social harmony explored before the traveller is initiated into the secrets of the College, so, in Swift, we learn of the disordered life of Laputa before we hear of the astronomer's cave and the loadstone.[2] The influence of this centre of control is everywhere felt in the neglect of practical concerns while the population broods over 'Apprehensions' which 'arise from several Changes they dread in the Celestial Bodies' (p. 164). Effect and cause work together to set society on a disaster course. In Bensalem the College and the society surrounding it are, instead, mutually supportive: harmony depends

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[1] See Brian Vickers's discussion in *The World of Jonathan Swift: Essays for the Tercentenary*, edited by Brian Vickers (Oxford, 1968), pp. 87–128 (p. 97).

[2] For reference to Baconian uses of the idea of truth hid in a mine, see Vickers, p. 93, and compare Erasmus, 'Sileni Alcibiadis': 'At semen, in quo vis est omnium, quam est res minutula, quam abdita, quam non lenocinans adspectui, quam non ostentatrix sui? Aurum et gemmas in altissimas terrae latebras abdidit natura.'

on singleness of purpose and balance of function. Swift, characteristically, makes disharmony come about through multiplication and division. The Academy at Lagado is set up *in imitation* of Laputan manners and, worse, is apparently only one among a proliferation of such imitative institutions, for 'there is not a Town of any Consequence in the Kingdom without such an Academy'. The Academy itself 'is not an entire single Building, but a Continuation of several Houses' and 'every Room hath in it one or more Projectors; and I believe I could not be in fewer than five Hundred Rooms' (p. 179). Bad enough if a Royal Society imitates Bensalem's College: worse if every ambitious aspirant believes he need recognize no limit or control over his search for knowledge ('I had myself been a Sort of Projector in my younger Days' is Gulliver's modest claim (p. 178)).

The Academy at Lagado has the same kind of unquestioned authority as the College in Bensalem. Lord Munodi hardly dares speak aloud of his doubts about the wisdom of the prevailing rules for living. Projectors in both societies have about them the aura of a priesthood or of a closed but powerful monastic order. Swift's projectors, once inside the Academy, do not seem ever to emerge. They are discovered to be ugly, dirty and smelly, and totally uninterested in each other or in the world outside, and yet their activities are the pride of their society. When, however, one of the Fathers of Salomon's House appears in public the visit is a state occasion, full of confirmatory ceremony, the streets lined by a silently reverent populace for the procession of a splendidly dressed figure, with 'an aspect as if he pitied men', who 'held up his bare hand as he went, as blessing the people' (p. 237) in a papal gesture which justifies his existence and indicates exactly the relationship between the College and society.[1] (The effect is undermined for a reader who remembers a similar street procession in *Utopia*, where the populace is far from silent and is able to make its own judgement upon any emperor's new clothes. But Bacon knows, quite as well as More does, which things need to be made religiously impressive and which things are to invite rational assessment.) Bacon carries the air of religious mystery into the College itself, with an effect in his lists of projects and achievements which suggests vague and limitless benefits. He carefully avoids any too specific application of the knowledge acquired, and thus suggests infinite potential. It is this feature which Swift picks up and uses to negative ends, for as each separate Laputan project is described in isolation and carried through to its end it becomes self-enclosed, useless, impossible, or destructive.

Bacon's favourite word is 'divers' and his favourite proof of the superiority of knowledge in the College is that it consists of things 'yet unknown to you'. Thus: 'We have also divers mechanical arts, which you have not; and stuffs made by them; as papers, linen, silks, tissues . . . excellent dyes, and many others'; 'We find also divers means, yet unknown to you, of producing light originally from divers bodies'; 'We have also furnaces of great diversities, and that keep great diversity of heats . . . these divers heats we use, as the nature of the operation which we intend requireth' (p. 243). Bacon in fact lists a wealth of available materials and processes for which the application is left open: the effect is heightened by his frequent use of such phrases as 'and the like', 'and many others', 'and divers other things' as a conclusion. This is a technique which Swift uses with different effect in other

[1] The text cited throughout is '*The Advancement of Learning*' and '*New Atlantis*', edited by Arthur Johnston (Oxford, 1974).

places,[1] but in Laputa his list of projects is always of particular natural materials turned into something else for a specific purpose but without success. Sunbeams may one day be extracted from Laputan cucumbers,[2] but Bacon's list of heat sources suggests great reserves of power far beyond immediate needs. Both authors depend for effect on large discrepancies between needs and resources, but in opposite proportions. Thus the opening irony of Chapter 6 in the *Voyage to Laputa*, on political projectors, fits Swift's satirical scheme perfectly, and is not merely an example of Gulliver's inconsistency of outlook. Properly read, the passage suggests that it is the puny capacities of those who misuse their natural resources which makes success unlikely even where the results might chance to be good. The satire is on this, and on the lack of distinction which the Laputans would make between good ends and bad: they simply do not relate beginnings to ends.

Bacon's fiction is utopian and Swift, using it here as a model to be inverted, is making his own comment on a particular kind of utopianism. In the *Voyage to Laputa* he plays on the differences between More and Bacon to show Bacon cheating on the whole utopian concept by bringing the ideal and the actual too close together, and the general pattern of events in the *Voyage to Laputa* is one whereby the same process is taken to the point of logical absurdity. All this is part of the thematic attack on pride. For Swift's purposes in the third Voyage he draws on the several models I have mentioned, but chiefly uses Bacon, as the modern betraying tradition, which is why the specific borrowings from Rabelais and the references to More and Plato are necessary as support. The utopist pride of Laputa, or of Bacon, is one in which life is treated as though it were a fiction, human nature glossed over by the powers of rhetoric and idea. In Houyhnhnmland the tables are then turned. Ideal and actual are pushed as far apart as they were formerly brought together. Human nature uncomfortably returns and the self-conscious Gulliver is unable to live in a purified fable which provides no middle ground for living because it is too formal, with the stark formality of this particular kind of fiction.[3] The punishment for being convinced by your own utopian dream is to find that it will not accommodate you. It is the use of utopian concepts which makes the later pair of Voyages as neatly complementary as the earlier ones, as soon as we see how they illustrate the relationships between form in fiction and form in life. Book III is fragmented and messy because life becomes so as a result of the pride which enthuses with false idealism about form and control and ignores the difference between life and fiction. (Swift might well have seen the rise of the novel, as a major literary form in the modern world, as fulfilment of his fears.) Plato was suitably wary of fiction and of the dangers of that state of illusion which occupies the lowest of his four levels of apprehension: he uses myth with rigorous control. More's *Utopia* is also a controlled exercise in the use of fiction, and he, like Erasmus, admired Lucian as well as

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[1] Discussed in *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader*, pp. 92 and 99.
[2] See Bonamy Dobrée, 'Swift and Science and the Placing of Book III', in *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 454–7.
[3] 'A marvelous or fantastic fable', as R. S. Crane suggests in his essay 'The Rationale of the Fourth Voyage', in *Gulliver's Travels: An Annotated Text with Critical Essays*, edited by R. A. Greenberg (New York, 1961), pp. 300–7 (p. 302).

Plato because their concern was with the fight against illusion in art and super-
stition in faith.[1]

Swift of course recognizes and plays with the temptation to put life right by
means of a fiction, but the severity with which Gulliver is made the victim of
Swift's own self-indulgence shows particularly when the character emerges from the
inner fiction and makes himself ludicrous in his speeches, his expectations of
Yahoos, and his spleen at their failure. Swift also plays with similar temptations in
the reader, those 'droits d'en organiser les parties' defended by Saulnier. It is only
the expectation of perfect order which makes the reader uneasy about the structural
qualities of the third Voyage, and his expectations in this instance are not so dif-
ferent from those of Gulliver. Book III shows that if fiction can escape our ordering
compulsion we would be arrogant indeed to expect life to be more biddable. If
the temptation to order were not real there would be nothing to be gained by
Swift in using it.[2] In the end the only way we have of separating ourselves from
Gulliver and restoring everything to its rightful place and function, is by recogiz-
ing the degree to which Gulliver's Travels is a literary exercise to be judged by literary
criteria. We can then indulge our passion for order without doing any harm and
without accepting Bacon's invitation to assume control of the natural universe,
including our own nature.[3]

## III. *Departures and Returns*

Thus it is important that the 'exposé didactique' should be in the form of a 'démon-
stration de géométrie'. The framework of the purely fictional fantastic voyage need
have no quarrel with reality, because it can contain the tension which Swift
explores. The tension is that between, on the one hand, the obvious perfection and
balance in the numbers two and four, opening up possibilities and returning to a
state of self-enclosure, and, on the other, an intractability in the quality of narra-
tive material which eludes the control of form. Such tension has both moral and
aesthetic significances, and is caused by contrary impulses in the fiction which
echo those in life: one towards circularity, completeness, stasis; the other towards
movement, growth, infinite progression (or regression), and resistance to form.[4]
It is this interest in tension rather than in form for its own sake which makes the
work dynamic. Symmetry is a lure and a trap. I believe Swift means us to see this
and to find ourselves caught between two illusions so that we may recognize and
distinguish them. One illusion is that of the shape taken by each of the four Voyages,
repeating and reinforcing a complete and perfect pattern, so that the possible
pairings (Books I and II, III and IV or I and III, II and IV) create something like a

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[1] See, for instance, Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, translated by Donald B. King and
H. David Rix (Milwaukee, 1963), pp. 86–7. For Erasmus on Lucian, see *Collected Letters of Erasmus*,
Volume II, *Letters 142–297 (1501–1514)*, translated by R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson
(Toronto, 1975), Letter 193, to Christopher Urswick, 1506, and Letter 199, to René d'Illiers, 1506;
pp. 116 and 122.
[2] See Price, p. 188, on Swift and irresponsible systems of order.
[3] But see Charles Peake, 'The Coherence of *Gulliver's Travels*', in *Focus: Swift*, edited by
C. J. Rawson (London, 1971), pp. 171–95 (p. 195), on some of the traps awaiting those who try to
'order' *Gulliver's Travels*.
[4] See Emrys Jones, 'Pope and Dulness', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 54 (1968), 231–63, an
essay with an enormous grasp of ideas to do with this kind of tension, and which incidentally makes
relevant links between Lucian, More, Erasmus, and Swift in terms of utopian fiction.

formal dance, with a thematic curtsey and change of partner at measured intervals. The other illusion is that contained in the figure of Gulliver, who promenades through the four Voyages intent on his own linear progress onward, outward, and presumably upward. Swift's fiction illustrates an Augustan preoccupation with ideals which conflict and have yet to be made compatible in a resolution of stasis with progress, and this is why the concepts of utopian fiction, moved by identical impulses, are particularly useful. Plato's Republic, if it ever came into being, would begin at once to degenerate, he tells us. The myth which ensures its continuance (III.414–15) stays firmly within the fiction: the book of the *Republic* is itself a myth of the possibility of achievement. As for any lack of neatness about Swift's *Voyage to Laputa*, the apparent threat to unity may turn out to be the most important factor of all. In his essay, 'La Dissymétrie', Roger Caillois shows how a live organism must have a growth point, an unevenness, a flaw breaking its own protective symmetry, if it is to survive.[1] In Swift's fiction this growth point is Book III; his concern is for the survival, by distinction between them, of the separate forms of life and literature, even if his method reveals the unfortunate superiority of fiction to fact.

The conflicting patterns and impulses are clear in the framework structure of the four Voyages and in the relationship between this framework and the figure of Gulliver. For although the same frame is used four times, Gulliver himself imposes on it certain changes merely as a result of his belief that he is progressing (for instance the variations in the pattern of arrival home and setting out again).[2] Paradoxically it is also Gulliver's belief in progress which causes the repetition in cycles, as we shall see most particularly in the opening of Book III. Gulliver has a well developed sense of purpose and direction, his general aim in life being to improve his fortune. There is a strange confusion in the use of the word *fortune*. On the one hand it is something Gulliver seeks: he participates actively in a game of chance.[3] On the other hand it is a force in whose hands he is passive and which may be for or against him. A further confusion arises because Gulliver distinguishes throughout between his fortune and his nature. Yet finally they seem to prove one and the same thing. His nature is responsible for actions and choices in which he blames fortune; and where he thought he could take a hand in controlling his fortune he cannot eventually control his nature (which is what his fortune actually consists of). Gulliver is brought home in spite of himself: his movement forward has been as much an illusion as his idea of the extent to which he has been in control.

At the opening of Book I we hear of Gulliver's preparations for life: 'my Father now and then sending me small Sums of Money, I laid them out in learning Navigation, and other Parts of the Mathematicks, useful to those who intend to travel, as I always believed it would be some time or other my Fortune to do' (p. 19). A willed participation in the adventure of life, the knowing allowances

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[1] *La Dissymétrie* (Paris, 1973).

[2] See Joseph Horrell, 'What Gulliver knew', *Sewanee Review*, 51 (1943), 476–504. The pattern I have followed for the framework and its changing features comes mainly from this essay, and particularly Horrell's point about the cowardice of Gulliver's companions in Book II.

[3] See Price, pp. 183–4: 'Swift is always prepared to represent vice as choice', and John F. Reichert, 'Plato, Swift, and the Houyhnhnms', *PQ*, 47 (1968), 179–92: 'Capable of reason, and therefore of happiness, we choose to be irrational and unhappy. It is this in us which Swift refuses to endure' (pp. 191–2). Gulliver's emphases on the part played by fortune are a denial of responsibility.

made for the balance between what one can control and what must be left
to chance, are passed over comfortably by the reader who so far shares Gulliver's
illusions, one presumes. And fortune does play its part: Gulliver travels, gaining
'some Addition to my Fortune' (p. 20: here the dual use of the word, and some
of the implications, become evident). But fortune is also fickle: one of the voyages
'not proving very fortunate' he tries staying at home, which does not mend matters.
Fortune is already a part of the nature of other people, a finding which should
teach Gulliver enough about himself to obviate any necessity to travel, away from
crooked businessmen. The voyage which is to take him to Lilliput has the traditional
device of the disorientating storm, to separate Gulliver from his companions.
Though all trusted themselves 'to the Mercy of the Waves' it is Gulliver who
'swam as Fortune directed' him and came safe to land (p. 21). The illusion of some
generally beneficial conspiracy between Gulliver and fortune continues to the end
of this Voyage.

Gulliver arrives home with some material gains and is thus encouraged to
travel again 'in Hopes to improve my Fortunes' (p. 80). Book II, however, opens
on a new and threatening note: 'Having been condemned by Nature and Fortune
to an active and restless Life; in two Months after my Return I again left my native
Country' (p. 83). The innate internal factor is acknowledged, though the reader
may pass over it and have no sense that the mention of 'Nature' and 'my native
Country' has any significance beyond that of conventional rhetoric. On this
occasion human nature in fact adds its contribution to that of the unsympathetic
elements in deciding Gulliver's fate. There is no viciousness but there is a natural
*cowardice* in his companions which causes Gulliver to be left alone on an alien shore.
And at the end of the Voyage there have been more losses than gains, though
we may not immediately recognize them: 'my Wife protested I should never go to
Sea any more; although my evil Destiny so ordered, that she had not Power to
hinder me' (p. 149). This is fortune being blamed where the fault is with nature. It
is, of course, not only natural for Gulliver to travel, but *perversely* natural, since it is
also natural for his wife to try to dissuade him (the criterion by which one decides
that Mrs Gulliver is *not* perverse might comfortingly suggest that harmony between
nature and reason in the reader which is supposed to be peculiar to Houyhnhnms).
Natural reason is surely on the side of Gulliver's wife: there is really no more for
Gulliver to learn by travelling.[1] But his nature begins to show that it includes a
large element of false reasoning which is to alienate him from natural sympathies.
The first two Voyages should by rights have been enough, paired opposites in so
many ways that suggest completion. Gulliver is now motivated, however, by pride
of the kind which resists education, a passion supported by false rationalization, a
refusal to recognize that he is what he is and that home is where he belongs.

The perversity is obvious in Gulliver's reasoning: 'the Thirst I had of seeing
the World, notwithstanding my past Misfortunes' is a lame excuse supported by

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[1] It is interesting to compare the relationship between Gulliver and his wife in this episode with
that between Thomas More and Dame Alice, in the reference made by Cresacre More (*The Life of
Sir Thomas More*, edited by Joseph Hunter (London, 1828), pp. 107–8) to Dame Alice as perhaps
portrayed by More (in 'his book of Comfort in Tribulation'): 'one, who would rate her husband
because he had no mind to set himself forward in the world, saying unto him: "Tillie vallie, tillie
vallie: will you sit and make goslings in the ashes; my mother hath often said unto me, it is better to
rule than to be ruled." "Now in truth," answered Sir Thomas, "that is truly said, good wife; for I
never found you yet willing to be ruled" '.

lamer, perhaps even vicious, reasons disguising secondary passions. Gulliver is persuaded (though his wife's persuasions failed) by a captain who 'had always treated me more like a Brother than an inferior Officer'; who 'made me a Visit, as I apprehended only out of Friendship' and 'plainly invited me, although with some Apologies . . . that I should have another Surgeon under me, besides our two Mates; that my Sallary should be double to the usual Pay; and that having experienced my Knowledge of Sea-affairs to be at least equal to his, he would enter into any Engagement to follow my Advice, as much as if I had Share in the Command' (p. 153). There is nothing in any of this which is defensible by reason: the very proliferation of excuses shows us how Gulliver's pride makes him susceptible to flattery, and at the same time sets the pattern for the other proliferating weaknesses of Book III. What occurs is an internal betrayal of nature by nature: Gulliver begins to stray outside his terms of reference. Events follow in the usual orderly way a pattern set by the framework introduction. Nature turns viciously against itself when an assumption of authority is not backed up by the necessary qualifications (this is even clearer in Book IV, as I shall show). Gulliver's improved status and pay do not make him able to alleviate or prevent the sickness of his sailors. The pirates who board the ship show the 'natural' viciousness of man to man, and the Dutchman who should be both a political and a religious ally (as though civilized ethics might correct the perversities of nature) proves a traitor.[1] Gulliver betrays himself first, through lack of self recognition: this failure brings a dangerous vulnerability towards recognition by others, so that betrayal from outside follows inevitably. The return home completes Gulliver's 'disappearance': he no longer dares to 'be' what he thinks he is, that is, a Christian Englishman, and is obliged to disguise himself as a heathen and a Dutchman.

It is essential to Swift's purpose that life at home goes on normally and unchanged. Mrs Gulliver and family, at the end of the third Voyage, are found simply 'in good Health', and the understatement is part of that sustaining thread of common positive values that Swift weaves into the texture of the whole book (and particularly in framework narrative), not to be ignored except by Gulliver, and reminding us of the difference between Gulliver as the utopist and Swift as the critic of utopianism. Swift writes while Gulliver travels and his armoury, unlike Gulliver's, includes imagination and the ability to use fantasy as a way back into the real world. The irony of Gulliver's situation is underlined at the beginning of Book IV: 'I continued at home with my Wife and Children about five Months in a very happy Condition, if I could have learned the Lesson of knowing when I was well. I left my poor Wife big with Child, and accepted an advantageous Offer made to me to be Captain of the *Adventure*' (p. 221).[2] Among the advantages is that of extra money (improved fortune), though it is an advantage which Gulliver himself seems to discount, on looking back. But he is now to be captain, a post for which he is qualified not by training but by his own estimation of what he has learned by experience. Ironically (though not with irony) he makes a passing

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[1] Gulliver's comment, on being 'sorry to find more Mercy in a Heathen, than in a Brother Christian' (p. 155), is a reminder, perhaps, of the main irony in More's *Utopia*, intensified in Swift's rational and benevolent horses.

[2] Kathleen M. Swaim, *A Reading of 'Gulliver's Travels'* (The Hague, 1972), manages to find significance in the names of Gulliver's successive ships, and her discussion of framework details is interesting, if somewhat strained in support of her thesis.

reference to the good and honest sailor whose fate was the result of his being 'a little too positive in his own opinions, which was the Cause of his Destruction' (p. 221). Gulliver's assumption of authority over himself and others results in mutiny, betrayal of a different kind from that in Book III. Here it is active revolt, not only in the framework events but in Gulliver himself amongst the Houyhnhnms, where he revolts against being human. As in Book III the revolt is from within. Again the outward voyage has its pattern echoed in the voyage home, and as Gulliver is imprisoned by his own rebellious crew, so he is chained in his cabin by Don Pedro's command, to prevent his doing himself some mischief.

Such parallels and pointers need to be pursued only so far as will show that Gulliver's illusion of progress (which may be seen as regression) is superimposed on the circular voyage structure; that the structure of the Voyages and the structure of Gulliver himself are consistently ordered and coherent in accordance with Swift's treatment of his theme and the terms in which he uses the fictional form; and that there is nothing irrelevant or different about the third Voyage. With regard to the structure of Gulliver there are two aspects to be considered. The Gulliver who narrates his story, who returns unhappily to the world of men, and who seeems too shifting and inconsistent to be regarded as a character is an apparently ill-constructed artefact to whom I intend, nevertheless, to give the last word. At this point I want to return to the question of Swift's use of Plato in Book III, and to the figure of Gulliver as traveller in a utopian fiction which owes so much both to Plato and to Thomas More.

I refer primarily to Gulliver's status in the last two Voyages as, first, adviser to the ship's captain, and then captain himself. One of the rare but memorable metaphors in the *Republic* is that where Plato uses the image of the ship of state, describing the qualifications needed by the captain and his relationship with his crew (VI.487–9). The subject, as in an important passage in Book I of More's *Utopia*, is that of the role of the philosopher and his usefulness to the king or, as expert on government, to his society. The practicability of the utopian dream, when the fiction is presented straightforwardly, depends on the acceptability of the dreamer as a rational political philosopher whose authority is recognized. Plato admits that such a situation is almost impossible. More argues, in the 'Dialogue of Counsel', for a pragmatic instead of an abstract philosophy which might bring hope of success. Bacon's optimism, in *New Atlantis*, seems to carry no reservations, which is why he becomes such a target for Swift's attack on pride. Swift may be asking us to follow Plato's injunction and to 'observe those who imitate [the philosophic] nature and usurp its pursuits and see what types of souls they are that thus [enter] upon a way of life which is too high for them and exceeds their powers' (VI. 491).[1] Gulliver does in a sense pretend to be a philosopher: he is regularly in a position to advise rulers, and the kind of advice he gives is based on his experience of England, as Hythlodaye's advice in *Utopia* is based on his experience of that land. Gulliver is the type of modern man that has replaced the philosopher, but not in the way that More intended Hythlodaye to be replaced. Swift's ideal of the modern man might presumably be More, whose commitments at home made him humble and pragmatic in action but firm in principle, a man aware of double standards,

[1] *The Republic*, translated by Paul Shorey, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1956), II, 31. On Gulliver as philosopher and ship's captain, see Reichert, p. 190.

replacing one idealism with 'another philosophy, more practical for statesmen, which knows its stage, adapts itself to the play in hand, and performs its role neatly and appropriately'.[1]

Gulliver, as early as the end of the first Voyage, shows signs of being the same kind of irresponsible idealist as Hythlodaye, who has to be clearly distinguished from More.[2] Hythlodaye is free to travel because he has shared out his property among his relatives and feels he owes them, and society at large, no more. Similarly Gulliver travels with an easy mind, having fixed his wife in a good house at Redriff and being in no danger of leaving his family upon the Parish. But Gulliver's rise in status aboard ship fits Plato's image exactly, particularly at the opening to Book IV where Gulliver has been promoted to captain. Gulliver suffers the mutiny of sailors who bind him hand and foot, just as the sailors bind their captain in Plato's illustration. In Plato's image the perversity is in the sailors, who do not accept the authority of the captain, but in Gulliver's case the assumption of authority is as perverse as the mutiny. In Plato, More, and Swift alike the crucial question is that of who is fitted to lead whom. More, in the passage quoted above, himself uses the image of the ship, this time to argue that its captain should not abandon it in a storm because the winds will not obey him. More's captain has other things than his own advantage to consider.

That it should be a metaphor which links Plato so specifically with *Gulliver's Travels* (more generally of course he supplies the origin of the Houyhnhnm ideal) is apt. Plato does not often use metaphors, but when he does so it is in order to bridge a difficult middle ground between real-life experience and abstract philosophical argument. And the *Voyage to Laputa* is itself a metaphor for the removal of this middle ground. Ends are ludicrously out of proportion, and out of gear, with their beginnings, in the projects at Lagado. Language loses its function, of separating things by communicating between them, and idea and object are allowed to crash together. Thus a metaphor turns literal when Gulliver is obliged to lick the dust before the footstool of the king of Luggnagg. To the theme of the abuse of language belong also the schemes for doing away with nouns in favour of things, for the absorption of knowledge in the form of wafers, and the device for the exhaustive re-arrangement of words on a language frame. The flying island, too, is for ever in danger of crashing down on the mainland through abuse of the force which separates them. The return to base, like Gulliver's final return home, is likely to be painful.

## IV.   *Gulliver and Gulliver*

In the stern but aesthetically satisfying polarizations of Book IV, between Yahoos and Houyhnhnms, Gulliver is uncomfortably present, a human middle ground which does not fit the allegorical, or would-be allegorical, terms of the fiction. But in Laputa he 'in effect, vanishes'. In Laputa each structure that I have mentioned (voyage narrative, utopian society, language, and the figure of Gulliver) suffers an

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[1] *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Volume IV, *Utopia*, edited by Edward Surtz, S.J., and J. H. Hexter (New Haven and London, 1965), p. 99.
[2] See W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (second edition, Oxford, 1963) for a study which makes possible some interesting links between the figures of philosopher, traveller, and leader.

internal breakdown of the whole into its disastrously unrelated parts. The division of Gulliver, though engendered in Book III, cannot become properly evident before his 'reappearance' in Book IV. I have suggested, initially, that Gulliver separates into two. One Gulliver belongs to the internal narrative and the terms of fiction. He belongs to the tradition of the utopian philosopher/traveller and invites certain expectations which he may then seem to betray. He does have a degree of consistency and coherence, the formality of a fictional character, which may partly account for his inability to do very much in Book III. The other Gulliver, however, is a much more complex artefact, which must move in and out of the inner fiction. It (rather than 'he', perhaps) may at times be a mask of Swift himself, is inconsistent in both form and attitude, and is bound to confuse our expectations from the start (since in all but the earliest editions we read the prefatory letters before we come to the Voyage narrative and, as in the case of More's fiction, the purpose of such prefatory material is to increase confusion).

This Gulliver is also, however, the new, common, Everyman hero of the real modern world or, at his most literary, of the travel book, and is ill at ease in utopian fiction. He seeks, perhaps, to have form, but he is a creature of illusion; one of these illusions being his idea of his own progress and another being the reader's illusion that such a figure can represent any kind of wholeness and coherence and consistency. The model for the divided figure comes very probably from More's *Utopia*, as may be seen from the similarity in methods of presentation and from the ambiguities surrounding interpretations of the figures of Raphael Hythlodaye, the fictional 'More', and More the author.[1] The fragmentation of Gulliver is crucial to the whole of the *Travels* and it is the fragmented figure which belongs to the real world and which makes the ideal of Book IV so impossible and so fictionally pure. But the *Voyage to Laputa* was the last to be written and its theme of fragmentation means that it is not a collection of afterthoughts but Swift's way of tying the whole work together and of saying the most difficult things he needed to say about structure and illusions of structure. Without it the pure fable of inaccessible Houyhnhnmland would make very much less sense. Swift's final attack on human pride is directed at man's illusion that he has form and can recognize himself. Thus the last list in Gulliver's narrative is all about forms: 'a Lawyer, a Pick-pocket, a Colonel, a Fool, a Lord, a Gamester, a Politician, a Whoremunger, a Physician, an Evidence, a Suborner, an Attorney, a Traytor, or the like' (p. 296). *These* are indeed forms; they are never *men*. Men are, instead, describable only in terms of 'a Lump of Deformity, and Diseases both in Body and Mind'. As for consistency and coherence, how can we expect that of Gulliver, who is supposed to belong to the real world, when the modern world we are shown in the third Voyage is the setting appropriate to him, and one in which there is no logical sequence to events or connexion between features?

Gulliver, then, has form of a sort so long as he confines himself to the fiction; so long as the fiction is only *like* the real world; so long as metaphor does not *replace*

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[1] See Edward Surtz, S.J., Introduction to the Yale edition of *Utopia*, pp. cxxiv-cxliii; and John Traugott, 'A Voyage to Nowhere . . .'. Sutherland (cited above) discusses Gulliver as a divided or multiple character (pp. 49–52) but manages to tidy up inconsistencies because he sees Gulliver as progressing and developing through the 'novel'. Munro disagrees with Sutherland for reasons similar to my own. Most relevant on More is David M. Bevington's 'The Dialogue in *Utopia*: Two Sides to the Question', *SP*, 58 (1961), 496–509.

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reality. The Gulliver who travels in Lilliput and Brobdingnag has no real trouble
with his identity. He has enough form to be recognized, in spite of discrepancies of
size, as one of the same kind as the people among whom he moves. Recognition
is a matter of establishing the proportions rather than the nature of his needs.
In Lilliput it is a simple calculation to work out how much meat will feed him,
how much material will serve him for a shirt. And in Brobdingnag Gulliver's
mimickings of recognizable human behaviour enable him to be put on show as a
miniature man. In Laputa, however, no one is really interested in 'recognizing'
Gulliver except Lord Munodi, himself an outcast. And he has to warn Gulliver, in
effect, that to show normal human attributes is shameful. He sends his guest
quickly on to the Academy, where Gulliver is briefly popular as a potential victim
of the bellows cure for colic, and then as one worthy of mention in a scholarly
footnote on methods of codifying reality. The climax of the third Voyage is of course
the point at which Gulliver makes his greatest mistake, in fusing the ideal and the
actual, dreaming that he might be an immortal without grasping that his situation
would be that of Tithonus. But however abstract Gulliver may seek to become in
Book III, he has to remain human. And in Book IV he is at his most human of all,
which is why the fable must obviously reject him. In Book IV, for the first time,
Gulliver cannot be identified as one of the same kind with his hosts or their servants
(Swift makes his reader work hard at discounting any such possibility). It is no
longer the proportion of his needs, but their nature, which has to be discovered
with some pains. He eats like neither Houyhnhnm nor Yahoo. His clothing is
studied not because it is something apparently unfamiliar which will become
familiar as soon as the scale registers, but because clothing itself is unfamiliar.
Gulliver is examined, prodded, and wondered over by the Houyhnhnms as never
before — and then claimed by Yahoos, whom *he* did not recognize.

Who, then, is the Gulliver outside the narrative? He introduces himself as a
Yahoo, a term which means nothing to us but which picks up disagreeable con-
notations. Gulliver himself is disagreeable and splenetic; he also contradicts
himself on more or less every point he raises in complaint. Richard Sympson, on
the other hand, gives his cousin the most sober and respectable of references. The
effect is to confuse the reader and to make him suspend judgement. Only a reader
familiar with the utopian tradition and with More's *Utopia* (More's own letter
about his lack of time and skill for literary pursuits, and his friends' letters on the
veracity of the fiction), able to make an ultra-rapid association between the two
fictions, might take both figures and both presentations with a pinch of salt and
consider the claims made on either hand as comments on fictional persuasion
and the sale of illusion. Normally, however, the reader begins the narrative in a
state of mind already disorientated sufficiently to be obliged to take Gulliver as he
comes: he is simply not in a position to judge. He is, of course, wooed by the
'plain and simple' style and the sober pace which leads him from suspension
of judgement to suspension of disbelief, totally preoccupied with details of
sensuous experiences up to the beginning of the satire in Chapter 3. The satire,
from here on, *can* be read as Gulliver's own, since we have knowledge of a mature
and disillusioned author outside the narrative. But then how does one take the
'naive' Gulliver who praises his 'dear native land' and its customs from time to
time? This, assuming that Gulliver is the author of the book, means that he is
capable of satiric attacks upon his own younger self, and might therefore be

capable in addition of satire against the splenetic image we have just been relying on as 'Gulliver the satirist'. In which case we must then trust ourselves to Richard Sympson's presentation as being that of the true Gulliver: we have come full circle to see that behind the plain man is a satirist and behind the satirist is another plain man.

However, we know in fact that Swift, and not Gulliver, is the author. So behind the second plain man is a second satirist (and behind the second satirist, of course, a third plain man, and behind him a third satirist mocking the plain man who is 'the real Swift'?). It might seem that we should be able to keep all these separate people clear in our heads, and thus work out what kind of an artefact the inconsistent Gulliver really is. But if anything is to be grasped from Swift's devious games it is that all these levels are equally present all the time, and that it is only Gulliver's illusion that they take over and cancel each other out in some sort of sequential progress towards maturity, or perfection. The task, then, is to find the line that divides Gulliver from Swift. For the primary plain man is someone who fails to learn from experience and the primary satirist thinks he had nothing to learn because he knew it all from the beginning and was never under any kind of illusion. Evidently the final level of Gulliver, as distinct from Swift, must be that of the splenetic letter-writer, whose satire is itself the product of illusion. Behind him is the real author who, in order to make a satire out of this kind of illusioned man, must surely himself be at base (if one can ever be sure that one has reached base) a straight man without illusions.

That Gulliver's illusioned state is the final one is confirmed by the fact that the tone of the last stage of the narrative, in the concluding paragraphs of Book IV, is exactly the same as that of the letter to Sympson. The features of the illusion and its tone of expression are absolutism in ideals and demands, matched in the same person by equally absolute rejection and defeatism. This figure is one who puts his faith in time and in progress ('it must be owned, that seven Months were a sufficient Time to correct every Vice and Folly to which *Yahoos* are subject') and in the same breath has no hope of improvement in a permanent situation ('if their Natures had been capable of the least Disposition to Virtue or Wisdom') (p. 7).[1] 'I wrote for their Amendment', but 'I have now done with all such visionary Schemes for ever' (p. 8). Above all, however, it was the fresh *corruption* by contact with fellow Yahoos which made Gulliver seek to reform the Yahoo race (and further degrees of corruption still which made him then give up the idea as impossible?). Gulliver's illusion is to see time as sequential and linear, each moment cut off from the last. In the same way each level of himself is cut off from the others. An example of this (recognizable as one of those points at which the reader has to decide how far he has felt *with* Gulliver and how far he may dissociate himself *from* Gulliver) occurs at the beginning of Chapter 11 of the *Voyage to Laputa*. For Gulliver is not always waiting in the wings, in Book III, and in the episodes at Luggnagg and among the Struldbruggs he is more than usually central to the action. Gulliver's involvement, on both occasions, shows him what happens when something essentially unreal (a figure of speech, or immortal life), becomes real. Immediately after an episode where Gulliver has been at his most vulnerable, deeply disturbed by the encounter

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[1] Compare Gulliver's attitudes here with those of Thomas More, as narrator emerging from fiction to fact, at the end of *Utopia*.

with the Struldbruggs and the shock of learning that distinction between dream and reality which is an essential lesson in all utopian fiction (a lesson he forgets in Houyhnhnmland just *because* his responses are so rarely determined by memory of past experience), comes this passage:

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: And if I am deceived, my Excuse must be, that it is necessary for Travellers, who describe the same Country, very often to agree in dwelling on the same Particulars, without deserving the Censure of having borrowed or transcribed from those who wrote before them. (p. 215)[1]

All Gulliver is doing, quite independently of Swift, is making that rapid switch from character to author, from experiencing self to editing self, which he is entitled to, in the circumstances. But his coolness and distance are unsettling. It is as though Gulliver himself is not conscious of his separate selves and does not feel the relationship between them; as though there is no whole to contain and organize the parts. The fragmentation of Gulliver, and our dissatisfaction with it, shows up the strength of the general desire that he *should* have consistent form, that the accumulation of experience *should* express its meaning in some organized structure or pattern, in life as in fiction. The fragmentation of the *Voyage to Laputa* is in some ways very rightly discussed in terms of the real world instead of those of literature. As the rest of *Gulliver's Travels* provides a context for it, and *is* a whole containing and ordering its parts, so the third Voyage also 'contains' the rest and is a context for the fiction. It was written last and then placed before the utopia of Book IV. In the same way, Thomas More wrote his utopian vision before coming home to fill in the real-life background out of which that vision arose. In both works the utopian vision is experienced by an idealist, Hythlodaye or Gulliver, who is not the author, and who has not come to terms with the distinction between ideal and actual, time and the timeless.

In so far as Houyhnhnmland is Gulliver's utopia, then, it can never accommodate him. In so far as it is Swift's it keeps its validity by rejecting Gulliver and remaining fabulous and unreal. But Swift is part Gulliver, as More is part Hythlodaye. There is an inevitable mixture of admiration and scorn in the rejection by the author of his fictional character. Or is it really rejection? It may be that we are failing Swift when we try to separate Gulliver from him and ourselves from Gulliver. Perhaps we have no right to do so, and perhaps this fact is a source of our discomfort. Are we really entitled to laugh so easily at Gulliver's 'strange Tone in speaking, which resembled the Neighing of a Horse', or to condemn the inhumanity with which he avoids his wife and finds solace in the stable? The sobriety required, if we are to refrain from laughing, is not that of 'there, but for the grace of God ...', but of a recognition that somewhere beneath the surface of this ridiculous figure is another, whose preoccupations are almost identical, and who deserves nothing less than serious admiration.[2]

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[1] Swift is presumably making a joking reference here to his own sources in, for instance, Lucian and Rabelais, to the common mockery of travellers' tales, and to his own use of Gulliver.

[2] See Reichert, pp. 188–90, and Malcolm M. Kelsall, '*Iterum* Houyhnhnm: Swift's Sextumvirate and the Horses', *Essays in Criticism*, 19 (1969), 35–45, on Houyhnhnm life as a serious ideal and on the ambiguous nature of Gulliver's madness.

The man whose mind is truly fixed on eternal realities has no leisure to turn his eyes down-
ward upon the petty affairs of men, and so engaging in strife with them to be filled with
envy and hate, but he fixes his gaze upon the things of the eternal and unchanging order,
and seeing that they neither wrong nor are wronged by one another, but all abide in har-
mony as reason bids, he will endeavour to imitate them and, as far as may be, to fashion
himself in their likeness and assimilate himself to them. Or do you think it possible not to
imitate the things to which anyone attaches himself with admiration? (*Republic*, vi.500)

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