

An Examination of Jonathan Swift's

"A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms"

as Parable

A Research Paper

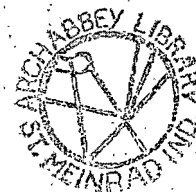
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"A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms" as Parable

What we are faced with here is a multifaceted, multilevelled, much interpreted parable which uses satire as its method. Jonathan Swift, in his fourth voyage of Gulliver's Travels, "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms," has concocted an amazing fiction which shows its reader both the vile qualities and noble virtues of man. Swift forces his reader into the self-interrogating question: Is the author taunting me with a misanthropic view of man merely to depress me as reader and perhaps reveal his innermost psyche, or is he purporting such a view to force me to seek a new awareness of the nature of man and to accept, if not re-accept, all his characteristics?

In order to delve into the central focus of the voyage, characters must be located and their qualities identified. Once this is accomplished, and their roles understood, the core of the story stands ready to be read. The only hitch in this method is that many interpretations will present themselves and claim, rightfully so, validity. The only reason I present this usually unnecessary qualification is to point out that this interpretation will be one more possibility in a long line of possibilities of which several could be simultaneously valid. The unique qualities of this look, however, will lie in the fact that I wish to present "A Voyage to the

Houyhnhnms" not as satire but ultimately as parable. Here, then, is my submission.

Jonathan Swift has given us a spectrum of qualities and characteristics of mankind. It extends from base, animalistic, human perversities and passions to a manifestation of human reason and nature at their perfection. The spectrum's ends are labeled Yahoo and Houyhnhnm respectively.

Gulliver, who in the beginning serves as representative of and for the reader, enters the spectrum of Houyhnhnmland and seeks to save himself after being cast off by mutineers. On his journey he discovers and describes the Yahoos:

Upon the whole, I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal, or one against which I naturally conceived so strong an antipathy. (p. 222)¹

Very quickly, then, it is established that the Yahoo is a contemptable and averse creature.

Swift next introduces the reader to the opposing end of the spectrum, again by way of Gulliver. What Gulliver initially sees are horses, but being the experienced observer now accustomed to expecting the unusual after three previous voyages, he reckons this:

Upon the whole, the behavior of these animals was so orderly and rational, so acute and judicious, that I at least concluded they needs magicians. (p. 224)

For Gulliver, it would seem totally irrational to accept a horse as possessing reason.

The following chapters take Gulliver, and the reader, through a myriad of revelations to a new awareness of our

race. In those chapters, Gulliver slowly loses his identity with the reader. He does not remain the allegorical representative of the reader, but becomes an individual character with a particular role to perform.² Gulliver, as character, slowly begins to believe the Yahoo to be human as he is human.

My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed in this abominal animal a perfect human figure. (p. 228)

As Gulliver moves, in reaction to his observation, towards identity with the Houyhnhnms, creatures of perfect nature and reason, he pushes his own race further toward identification with the Yahoos. This is accomplished partly through his education by the Houyhnhnm master wherein Gulliver unwittingly aids the master in paralleling the characteristics of the Houyhnhnm Yahoo with the behavior of the European Yahoo, so much so that the master and Gulliver believe them to be one and the same species and thus make the reader uncomfortable. At this point I shall begin my distinction.

Many critics point to the Yahoo and Houyhnhnm as being representative or allegorical either of man, in the case of the Yahoo, or perfect nature and reason in the case of the Houyhnhnm. Fuller descriptions of the characteristics of each are to follow, but this question must be raised: Why must we look at them as being metaphors of certain states or qualities of being rather than as characters in a certain state, or as characters possessing certain qualities or characteristics?

The Voyage can be perfectly well understood as

merely what it purports to be; namely, a marvelous or fantastic fable, literally narrated, in which the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos are not metaphors or symbols standing for general ideas, but two species of concrete beings. The moral or thesis of this fable, on this assumption, is brought home to the reader directly through the story itself.³

For our purposes, then, let us understand the characters as such, possessing qualities and characteristics rather than as metaphorical representatives of them. I make this distinction in order to posit that man will not find a metaphor for himself in either the Yahoo or the Houyhnhnm. The fact is rather that each possesses certain characteristics that man shares to various degrees, but neither is man as he is. It is through these characters and through Gulliver that Swift helps us to discover, or re-discover, man.

"The moral or thesis of the fable . . . is brought home to the reader directly through the story itself." I requote this statement in order to take Crane a step further. Let us take Swift's satire, for that is his method, and consider the "Voyage" not as fable, but as parable. For it is as parable that we can sift through the characters and discover a proper awareness of man. It is necessary, then, at this point to establish what I mean when I say parable. I will provide here a brief account of John Dominic Crossan's book, The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story, Chapter II, "The Ways of Story."

To begin with, the world must be established, it must exist. This is the purpose of the story called myth. "Myth

performs the specific task of mediating irreducible opposites."⁴ In myth these opposites will be such poles as human/superhuman, mortal/immortal, male/female, legitimate/illegitimate, or good/bad. These opposite terms are very profound and fundamentally important and thus cannot stand opposed but must be mediated or reconciled. Myth also serves the function of reconciliation, but added to this, it is much more important to believe in the possibility of a solution than ever finding one in actuality. The advantage of myth, and its basic function, is to establish that possibility itself.⁵

If myth is the story which creates reconciliation, is there, then, an opposite story which creates irreconciliation? The answer according to Crossan is yes. It is the story called parable. The reconciliation of myth is the world we know, parable shows us the seams and edges of reconciliation, or of whatever has been established by myth.

Crossan quotes Frank Kermode: "Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change."⁶ Parables are fictions, not myths; they are meant to change, not reassure us. I mentioned Crossan's double function of myth: "the reconciliation of an individual contradiction and, more important, the creation of belief in the permanent possibility of reconciliation."⁷ Crossan points out that: "Parable also has a double function which opposes the double function of myth. The surface function of parable is to create contradiction within a given situation of complacent security but, even more unnervingly, to challenge the fundamental principle of

reconciliation by making us aware of the fact" that the reconciliation is of our own making.⁸ We made the world into what it is and parable reminds us that we did.

Thus myth, which must be understood to understand the complete meaning and significance of parable, and parable itself, have been briefly described. But what of satire? It is undoubtedly Swift's method, so how does it fit in? Again I turn to Crossan who turns to Henry Fielding: "A satire is a work organized so that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it." The objects may be "particular men, the institutions of men, traits presumed to be in all men, or any combination of the three."⁹ Thus, in a spectrum of story, we have myth creating world on one end and parable subverting it on the other, but immediately before we reach parable, we cross through satire which attacks the world created by myth.

It should be obvious that "Voyage to the Houyhnhnms" perfectly fits the definition given for satire. Indeed, satire is a type of story which can stand alone but I wish to re-emphasize that I see the "Voyage" acting, by way of satire, as parable. Like satire, parable is intrinsically negative. "It is in fact the dark night of story, but precisely therein and thereby can it prepare us for the experience of transcendence."¹⁰ Parable show us the limits we have created; it shows us the "we" we have become and calls for us to pass beyond our limits. Parable is indeed an unnerving experience and our immediate reaction is dislike of what we see, very

much like the Monday morning man in the mirror, ourselves at our truest. Let us turn, then, to the text for an examination.

Our first step is to establish the characters and what their characteristics are. Secondly, we will examine their roles and locate the core of the story and its meaning for us. Then we shall see how "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms" stands as parable, and what it is Swift has accomplished by writing it.

Gulliver is cast off by his mutinous crew, as mentioned, and must begin to explore the land he now inhabits for members of his own race, or at least someone who can help him. He stumbles onto a herd of what he will come to know as Yahoos. Gulliver speaks to us of the "disagreeable animal" and does so "full of contempt and aversion" (p. 222). He tries to leave the scene but is trapped by the "cursed brood" who begin "to discharge their excrements on my head" (p. 222). This begins only too well to (1) describe the filthiness of the Yahoos, and (2) begin an attack on the pride of man the purpose of which is very near the core of the story. Fortunately, Gulliver is saved by a pair of horses who "must needs be magicians." They take him home to their master where Gulliver spends the remainder of his fourth journey.

Amidst the characterizations of the characters relationships are set up between them and the spectrum is established. This is done on two levels. First, it is done metaphorically by describing the homes and diet of each. Gulliver notes that the master's house is clean and sweet smelling, and the

diet of the Houyhnhnms is temperate and vegetarian. The Yahoos, however, are kept in stables which are filthy and stink. This brood is witness^{-ed} to be omnivorous but prefers meat and garbage. Gulliver, it turns out, is given a place to lodge between the house and stable; "it was but six yards from the house, and separated from the stable of the Yahoos" (p. 232). His diet is also omnivorous, but it is healthy and clean. Unlike either the Houyhnhnms or Yahoos, he requires prepared foods for his diet. Thus we have one method of expressing the spectrum.

The Houyhnhnms, however, are perplexed by this new creature. He is strange, yet oddly familiar to the horses. He is brought next to a Yahoo to allow the master a chance for a comparison. Gulliver also makes use of the chance: "My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed in this abominable animal a perfect human figure" (p. 228). The Houyhnhnms also recognize the similarity, but are confused by Gulliver's clothes "whence they had no conception" (p. 228). The master, however,

was fully convinced . . . that I was a Yahoo, but my teachableness, civility and cleanliness astonished him; which were qualities altogether so opposite to those animals . . . He was extremely anxious to know . . . how I was taught to imitate a rational creature. . . . he said it was plain I needs be a perfect Yahoo. (Pp. 233, 235).

We discover that the fact the Houyhnhnms recognized Gulliver as a Yahoo repulsed him. Gulliver observed the Yahoo as

possibly being a race of man and cringed at being identified with humans as repulsive as the Yahoos:

I hitherto concealed the secret of my dress, in order to distinguish myself as much as possible from that cursed race of Yahoos. . . . I expressed my uneasiness at his giving me the appellation of Yahoo, an odious animal for which I had so utter a hatred and contempt. (Pp. 235, 236)

While all this takes place, Gulliver is also establishing for the reader who and/or what the Houyhnhnms are. Gulliver relates:

The word Houyhnhnm, in their tongue signifies a horse, and in its etymology, the perfection of nature. (p. 234).

The Houyhnhnms are also a simple race:

their language doth not abound in variety of words, because their wants and passions are fewer than among us. . . . Power, government, war, law, punishment, and a thousand other things had no terms wherein that language could express them. (Pp. 240, 243)

Thus, by a second, direct method, the spectrum is established, this being one of characteristics. The vile Yahoos are on one end; the Houyhnhnms, simple creatures of perfect nature and reason, are on the other, while Gulliver is somewhere in-between.

It would be good to note here that the core of the story has been glimpsed at by realizing that two of the major objects of satire have been established. The problem of clothes, for example, becomes an excellent metaphor for the satirization of the artificiality of man, for "[the master] could no understand why nature should teach us to conceal

what nature had given" (p. 235). The Houyhnhnms believed "nature and reason were sufficient guides for a reasonable animal" (p. 247). Why, then, the existence of the above laundry list: power, government, war, law, and punishment? The master points out

That our institutions of government and law were plainly owing to our gross defects in reason, and by consequence, in virtue; because reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature. (p. 258-259)

All these above become props for

us as a sort of animal to whose share, by what accident [the master] could not conjecture, some small pittance of reason had fallen. (p. 258)

Man's pride is also attacked as Gulliver's hatred of the Yahoo illustrates. As Gulliver's attempts to describe the European Yahoo, the master continually draws parallels between the Yahoo of his land and the Yahoo of Gulliver's. Gulliver is finally convinced by the reason of the master, the form of the Yahoos, and by sexual assault that both Yahoos are really of one species. Gulliver reflects on the attack by a female Yahoo:

I could no longer deny that I was a real Yahoo in every limb and feature, since the females had a natural propensity to me, as one of their own species. (p. 267)

This is the turning point for Gulliver, the identification of man with the Yahoo. It is with this identification that Gulliver begins his bitter renunciation of man. He suffers under this new identity and seeks to become a Houyhnhnm by imitating them in as many ways as possible. He succeeds in

sounding like them and develops the gait of a horse, (as far as humanly possible), and does learn something of virtue from them:

I fell to imitate their gait and gesture . . . and my friends often tell me in a blunt way, that I trot like a horse; which, however, I take for a great compliment. Neither shall I disown that in speaking I am apt to fall into the voice and manner of the Houyhnhnms. . . . I had quite forgot the faculty of lying, so peculiar to all Yahoos. (Pp. 280, 289)

When Gulliver discovers from his master that he must leave the land he has grown to love, he laments: "so horrible was the idea I conceived of retruning to live in the society and under the government of the Yahoos" (p. 285).

Thus we have the characters firmly in the spectrum with Gulliver inching, as best he can, toward the Houyhnhnms. Let us, then, dip further into their characteristics and examine their roles and relationships.

The Yahoos were truly animals and creatures of filth. Every animal in Houyhnhnmland naturally abhorred the Yahoos. They were observed to be the most unteachable of all brutes with the strongest disposition to mischief, and were known to hate one another more than they did different species of animals. Yahoos were animals of greed:

For if, [said the master], you throw five Yahoos as much food as would be sufficient for fifty, they will, instead of eating peaceably, fall together by the ears, each single one impatient to have all to itself. (p. 259)

They would fight and maim one another over the carcass of a dead, diseased cow; they would also war among themselves;

there would be battles fought without any visible cause. Yahoos were also the only animals subject to disease in Houyhnhnmland, an important fact which will help to separate Gulliver from them: "I cannot but observe, that I never had one hour's sickness while I stayed in this island" (p. 231)

They were plagued by jealousy and base, vulgar passions:

Another thing [the master] wonder^{ed} at in the Yahoos was their strange disposition to nastiness and dirt, whereas there appeared to be a natural love of cleanliness in all other animals. (p. 263)

The Houyhnhnms, on the other hand,

are endowed by nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature; so their grand maxim is to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it. (p. 268)

To them, decency and civility are of the highest degrees, but they are altogether ignorant of ceremony. The two principal virtues among the Houyhnhnms are friendship and benevolence, which are not confined to particular objects, but universal to the whole race:

They will have it that nature teaches them to love the whole species, and it is reason only that maketh a distinction of persons, where there is a superior degree of virtue. (p. 269)

The young are taught temperance, industry, exercise and cleanliness. It is no wonder that Gulliver would want to imitate them, not wanting to be considered a Yahoo.

The Yahoos clearly possess elements of filth and deformity. They display uncontrolled passion and vice, both of which are pointed out by the master and paralleled with man.

The master "observed in me all the qualities of a Yahoo, only a little more civilized by some tincture of reason" (p. 273). Even the "small pittance of reason" was corrupted in the Yahoo, or so believed the master and because of him, Gulliver.

[Reason], whereof we made no other use than by its assistance to aggravate our natural corruptions, and to acquire new ones which nature had not given us. (p. 258)

To cap off the characteristics of the Yahoo, it would suffice to mention that the only word which the Houyhnhnms have to express some malady would be derived from the beast's name. Sickness among the Yahoo's would be expressed as "Hnea-Yahoo, or the Yahoo's Evil" (p. 262).

It must be made clear, however, that the Yahoo is not man, despite its appearance and, with the master's assistance, Gulliver's identification with them. True, they do possess some characteristics of man, notably the worst, and their characteristics surface in the various behaviors of man, but they do not possess one particular characteristic and it is that characteristic which sets them apart. The Yahoos do not possess reason. Gulliver is a man, he has reason. The European Yahoo and the Houyhnhnm Yahoo are thus separate beings not of the same species. Gulliver's presence in Houyhnhnmland serves to remind us of this.

Objection: What of the master's assertions that Gulliver show only some "pittance" or "tincture of reason?" Gulliver has full reason. He not only possesses one language, English, but he learns and masters another, Houyhnhnm. The Yahoos are

never noted to communicate except for some "horrible howlings" (p. 272). Language denotes a difference in kind. If more evidence is required, and at this point there should not be, it has already been noted that Gulliver never became ill and it was only the Yahoos who became ill in Houyhnhnmland. Furthermore, Gulliver takes time to tell us how he made his food and fashioned his clothes, neither of which capability belongs to the Yahoo.

Objections: What of the general tradition of the origin of the Yahoos?

Yahoos had not been always in that country; but many years ago two of these brutes appeared together upon a mountain; whether produced by the heat of the sun upon corrupted mud and slime, or from ooze and froth from the sea, was never known. (p. 271)

There is not any real difficulty with this, but the Houyhnhnm master, using his reason, puts together two and two. He combines Gulliver's account of his appearance on the island with the general tradition. The master suggests that the two original Yahoos were driven there after being forsaken at sea, and retiring in the mountains, they degenerated by degrees and became, in the process of time, much more savage than those of their own species in the country from where they came. (p. 272)

They lost their use of reason, the master admits that. Without reason, they are not human. The "had degenerated because their feeble human reason had been overwhelmed by an irrational nature and more adequate guides had been forgot-

ten."¹¹ If this be the reason the Yahoos possess no reason, so be it, for man's nature is not perfect and does not entail perfect reason, at least in the same way it is the nature of the Houyhnhnms to be of "perfect nature and reason."

This, then, is part of the role of the Houyhnhnms, to possess perfect nature and reason for contrast. They are not human either, but not for the same reason, obviously. Plain and simple, they stand as a separate race with their own characteristics and qualities. They do not even look human, they are horses. The fact that they are animals provides for satiric distance and contrast. Swift's satire would have failed if the Houyhnhnms had been human-like, for then there would be no problem with Gulliver identifying with them. However, like the Yahoo, they do possess some characteristics of man, or rather, unlike the Yahoos, man possesses some of the characteristics of the Houyhnhnms. Let us understand the spectrum correctly.

Many of the fine and great attributes of the Houyhnhnms have been mentioned, specifically those which would entice Gulliver to imitate them, those, which in some degree, man does possess and cherish. What has not been mentioned is what the perfection of nature carried out to its end in a race "wholly governed by reason" would be like.

For the human, this extreme would be absurd. Humans do, in fact, have as their nature many appetites and passions. The Houyhnhnm's "wants and passions are fewer than among us." Because of this, there is a certain coldness in the make-up

of these creatures. The master himself expresses a cold curiosity:

[the master] brought me into all company, and made them treat me with civility, because, as he told them privately, this would put me into a good humor and make me more diverting. (p. 236)

As creatures of reason, they lack sympathy and compassion simply because reason does not require either:

If they can avoid casualties, they die only of old age, and are buried in the obscurest of places that can be found, their friends and relations expression neither joy nor grief at their departure. (p. 275)

The fact is that a being will sooner or later die, so why not face up to it and let the event pass as a matter of due course. This is the way the Houyhnhnms reason. Furthermore, a human would laugh at the thought of a life without affections:

They have no fondness for their colts or foals, but the care they take in educating them proceeds entirely from the dictates of reason. . . . not upon account of love, but to preserve the race from degenerating [do they marry]. Courtships, love, presents, jointures, settlements, have no place in their thoughts. (Pp. 268, 269)

The absurdity of the Houyhnhnms is expressed in another way, in the condemning of the shape of Gulliver's Yahoo body. It was regarded not only as inferior to the Houyhnhnms, but to the Houyhnhnm Yahoo as well:

My nails were of no use either to my fore or hinder-feet; as to my fore-feet, he could not properly call them by that name, for he never observed me to walk upon them . . . I could not, [then], walk with any security, for if either of my hinder-feet slipped, I must

inevitably fall. He then began to find fault with other parts of my body; the flatness of my face, the prominence of my nose, my eyes placed directly in front, so that I could not look on either side without turning my head. (Pp. 240-241)

If the Houyhnhnms are absurd, so also is Gulliver.

I fell to imitate their gait and gesture, which is now grown into an habit; and my friends often tell me in a blunt way, that I trot like a horse; which, however, I take for a great compliment. Neither shall I disown that in speaking I am apt to fall into the voice and manner of the Houyhnhnms. (p. 280)

It was mentioned earlier that Gulliver slowly loses his identity with the reader, that he does not remain the allegorical representative of the reader, but becomes an individual character with his own particular role. This is true, but it would be better to say that Gulliver loses his identity with the reader on one level to enable him to broaden and complete himself as character on another. By this he becomes both satirist and satirized; he is used in different ways at different times.¹²

Gulliver, as character, is a man, not just representative of man and as such he stands between the Yahoo and Houyhnhnm as a point of contrast. His role establishes the characters of each by serving as a point of reference. He also serves as the reminder that neither the Yahoo or Houyhnhnm is man. The reader is comfortable with Gulliver's role until he loses the reader by changing his role and in the process identifies himself with the Houyhnhnms and the rest of men with the Yahoos. It is noble to try and improve oneself,

but in doing so Gulliver rejects the Yahoos and thus man. In imitating the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver adds to his character their absurdity.

The reader is most uncomfortable with this evolution of the plot and begins to see the work as Swift's rejection of man, or his misanthropic view of man. I do not wish to enter into discussion of what Swift actually holds, what I am concerned with is why does Gulliver allow this to happen. In answering this we will begin to enter the realm of parable.

At this point, however, the door is not yet closed for Gulliver. We know that Gulliver has been the only real human in Houyhnhnmland, and thus there is partial excuse for his delusion. We may then reason that Gulliver will be fine as soon as he comes back into contact with his own race.

Unfortunately, however, the trap door is opened:

at last my detestation of the Yahoo race prevailed, and turning my canoe, I sailed and paddled together to the south, and got into the same creek whence I set out in the mornign, choosing rather to trust myself to the barbarians, than live with the European Yahoos. (p. 287)

Gulliver falls through the trap after meeting Don Pedro de Mendez:

He was a very courteous and generous person . . . I wondered to find such civilities from a Yahoo . . . At last I decided to treat him like an animal which had some little portion of reason. (p. 289)

The trap door finally closes over Gulliver when he rejects his family:

I must freely confess the sight of them

filled me only with hatred, disgust, and contempt; and the more by reflecting on the near alliance I had with them. . . . And when I began to consider that by copulating with one of the Yahoo species I had become a parent of more, it struck me with the utmost shame, confusion, and horror. (p. 292)

Gulliver has indeed rejected man. But who is this Don Pedro?

Gulliver has become so infatuated with a false and one-sided theory of human nature, Yahoo nature, that he is blind to any facts which contradict it. Don Pedro not only serves to be a contradiction and thus helps to reveal Gulliver's absurdity. His generosity and his perception of the state of Gulliver's mind are such that "[he] conjectured that my misfortunes had impaired my reason" (p. 289), and his unfailing kindness in the face of repeated rebuffs marks him as a paragon of man.

Yet Gulliver, controlled by the exalted conception of virtue he has acquired from the Houyhnhnms, and by his fixed beliefs in the utter worthlessness of all Yahoos, with whom he has come to group the human race, is unable to perceive even the most extraordinary goodness when it manifests itself in his own species.¹³ Gulliver can accept Don Pedro only as he had been previously accepted by the Houyhnhnms, as something less than he is. By the contradiction of Gulliver's view of man, as provided by Mendez, we know that Gulliver is wrong.

It is at this point that we could leave the story and call our job done. That is exactly what many critics have done at this point, they have left the story and called it a

misanthropic view of man. But I have raised the question, as well as many other critics: Why has Gulliver let this happen to himself?

Why is Gulliver so blind to his absurdity? It is the same reason the Houyhnhnms are blind to Gulliver as an animal of reason, which is pride, simple pride. The Houyhnhnms are characters of perfect nature ruled by reason. Gulliver, by all appearances is a Yahoo. Yahoos are vulgar and there is no way the Houyhnhnms are going to admit that a Yahoo is as good as they, or possessed by what they possess.

Gulliver learned to imitate the Houyhnhnms because he saw man's nature as being the Yahoo's nature and he could not accept that in himself. Gulliver made the mistake of seeing the Yahoo as man. Gulliver's pride forced him into imitation of the Houyhnhnm simply because he could not accept the seedy side of man as being part of him. He also failed to see that man possesses some of the qualities of the Houyhnhnms and that was unfortunate for him. He became so blind, that even though Pedro de Mendez contradicted his view of man, man could no longer be something good for Gulliver because man was Yahoo. This, then, the pride of man, is the cause of Gulliver's state.

The Yahoo in man has been attacked, the pride of man has been attacked, and the artificiality of man has been attacked. "A satire is a work so organized that it ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it." The objects may be "particular men, the institutions of man, traits

presumed to be in all men, or any combination of the three."¹⁴ This is the success of satire. But the reader is still not, and should not be satisfied with just this in the "Voyage." If he accepts this, he, too, participates in a misanthropic view.

Let us now discuss the relevance of parable. Swift's satire has done more than attack the world, it has vexed the world by shocking it violently, but wittily out of its complacency with itself.¹⁵ It has created a contradiction, Gulliver accepting only the Yahoo's nature as man's nature and not seeing man's share in some of the characteristics of the Houyhnhnms. It has also challenged our view of the world by making us realize that we have created it and certain parts are indeed artificial supports since we do not live "wholly governed" by reason. "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms" has fulfilled the dual role of parable:

The surface function of parable is to create contradiction within a given situation of complacent security but, even more unnervingly, to challenge the fundamental principle of reconciliation by making us aware of the fact that we made up the reconciliation.¹⁶

We are forced, then, to re-examine man, re-accept, if we have not previously accepted, the full nature of man which includes the Yahoo in us, and pledge ourselves to a new awareness of ourselves as man. We must see the world we live in as the world we made.

As parable, Swift is suggesting to us not only what man is, but what he is not. The Yahoo/Houyhnhnm contrasts,

revealed by Gulliver, are the vehicles through which he seeks his definition. The metaphoric parallels he draws show more than what man is or is not, they also show ^{why he is} what he is. The reason for man's slavery to vices and passions, as opposed to reason and perfect nature, is shown to lie in his foolish pride.¹⁷ Slavery and blindness, the blindness of the Houyhnhnms to recognize Gulliver as different and the blindness of Gulliver to recognize the absurdity of the Houyhnhnms, is a result of man's pride.

By understanding the characters as characters, and not sidetracking ourselves by problems of characters as metaphor, we can now see Swift's satire as a parable. It reveals to us the world we have created and the sins we have fallen victim to. As parable we can gain a fuller insight to the core of our story.

We apprehend and respond to the moral simply by following that story and drawing such inferences from it concerning ourselves as it is calculated to produce in us.¹⁸

Many have understood the core of the story without any knowledge of parable. But I have wished to show how it is the message of Swift is brought home to the reader. With the knowledge of parable, the task of reaching into the story can be much more exciting. "Voyage" has caused us to reach and re-discover man. "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms" is indeed a successful parable.

FOOTNOTES

¹Jonathan Swift, "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms," Gulliver's Travels (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972). References in my text are to this edition.

²John B. Moore, "The Role of Gulliver," Modern Philology, XXV, (May 1928), 469-480, rpt. in Milton P. Foster, ed., A Casebook of Gulliver among the Houyhnhnms (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1961), p. 96.

³R. S. Crane, "The Rational of the Fourth Voyage," Gulliver's Travels: An annotated Text with Critical Essays, ed., R. A. Greenburg, (W. W. Norton, 1961), pp. 300-307, rpt. in Richard Gravil, ed., Gulliver's Travels: A Casebook, (London: MacMillan, 1974), p.151.

⁴John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story (Niles, Illinois: Argus Communications, 1975), p. 51.

⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁶Ibid., p. 56.

⁷Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁹Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 60.

¹¹Kathleen Williams, "Gulliver's Voyage to the Houyhnhnms," A Journal of English Literary History (ELH), XVIII, (1951), pp. 275-286, rpt. in Milton P. Foster, ed., A Casebook of Gulliver among the Houyhnhnms (London: MacMillan, 1974), p. 194.

¹²Ronald Paulson, The Fictions of Satire (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 182.

¹³Arthur E. Case, Four Essays on Gulliver's Travels (Glouster, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), p. 121.

¹⁴Crossan, p. 58.

¹⁵Crane, p. 155.

¹⁶Crossan, p. 57.

¹⁷Paulson, p. 180.

¹⁸Crane, p. 151.

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