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Article abstract

Travel provides countless opportunities for wonder. The breadth of human experience enabled by traversing new territory includes curiosity, excitement, and surprise. However, achieving this breadth may well be better left unfulfilled. Gulliver's interactions with the King of Brobdingnag in Book II of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) raise interesting questions regarding travel and its effects on the traveller. This essay argues that *Gulliver's Travels* draws upon Locke's insights into travel as an endeavour with the potential to be didactic, ultimately presenting a case against the universal benefit of embarking on a voyage. Swift's text offers little hope for the existence of the type of traveller who would be improved rather than corrupted by the experience, which suggests that wonders of travel ought to be avoided. This generates a counter-Enlightenment riposte to liberal assumptions concerning the possibility and likelihood of individual edification through pursuing the wonders of travel.

Travel as Education: Gulliver the Traveller and the Potential Corruptions of Seeking Betterment Abroad

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> *Frustra vitium vitaveris illud, si te alio pravus detorseris.* [In vain do you avoid one fault if you perversely turn aside into another.]
>
> (Horace, A *Discourse on Plain Living*[1])

Travel provides countless opportunities for wonder. The sheer breadth of human experience activated by traversing new territory includes curiosity, excitement, and surprise. However, achieving this breadth may well be better left unfulfilled. Gulliver's interactions with the King of Brobdingnag in Book II of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) raise interesting questions regarding travel and its effects, not only on the traveller, but also the traveller's homeland. If the world and the varieties of habits and customs to be found in it are relative, then travel is likely only to result in the edification of travellers as they learn and improve themselves through a wider base of experience—assessed relatively—than that available to them in their homeland. However, if this variance falls universally under the criteria of an objective moral hierarchy, then travel necessarily involves risk, as travellers could encounter malicious habits, which they may adopt to their detriment. Here I will argue that *Gulliver's Travels* draws upon John Locke's insights into travel as an endeavour in the context of a polite society with the potential to be didactic, but presents a strong case against the universal benefit of

1. Horace, "A Discourse on Plain Living," in *Satires,* ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 2017), 137.

embarking on a journey. Ultimately Swift's text offers a grim view of the existence of the type of traveller who would be improved rather than corrupted by the experience, which suggests that wonders of travel ought to be avoided.

In Book II, Chapter VII, the King of Brobdingnag delivers the following thought-provoking comment to Gulliver: "As for yourself … who have spent the greatest part of your life in travelling; I am well disposed to hope you may hitherto have escaped many vices of your country."[2] As the monarch makes this observation, he raises the question of the value of travel as a means to improve oneself—a persistent theme in European intellectual history. Despite the king's scathing rebuke of Gulliver's English virtues as vices, another theme emerges: throughout *Gulliver's Travels* there is a sense of the seemingly unlimited scope for degeneration brought about by travel and cross-cultural contact. Indeed, by the end of his travels Gulliver is a mental wreck, who imitates a horse in a pathetic attempt to demonstrate virtue and who has, furthermore, adopted a misanthropic view of humanity, which he describes as "a Lump of Deformity" (Book IV, Ch. XII, 121). Therefore, travel can be both a means of improving oneself and a path to corruption. In his international bestseller, Swift offers a fascinating satirical treatment of emergent liberal norms concerning the universal benefit of travel.

Is travel in fact a means to edify and educate oneself? Or should one remain wary of the potential corruptions that may result from travel? I contend that Swift draws upon Locke's warnings on travel in the case of the traveller who originates from questionable educational/cultural backgrounds and travels at inappropriate stages of life. This analysis culminates in the argument that Swift is skeptical of the notion that travel is inherently edifying and instead offers a conservative criticism that those who are corrupted by less than ideal societies are likely the worst candidates for travel.

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2. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Claude Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 121. Further references to *Gulliver's Travels* will be cited infra-textually, formatted by book, chapter, and page number(s) from this edition of the text.

Locke on Travel

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Locke concludes with a discussion of the merits and pitfalls of travel. Notably, he describes travel as "[t]he last part in education," which is best used "to finish the work and complete the gentleman."[3] As the bulk of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* offers advice on the education of children, travel is to be considered the final stage of a long process. For Locke, education is necessary for men to develop the character required to participate in a free society. As Nathan Tarcov notes, educated men must "be active and informed in public affairs. To this end, they know their country's history and laws and the geography, chronology, and other matters required for that purpose."[4] As such, there is considerable work to be done to develop good character prior to embarking upon a trip abroad. Furthermore, implicit in Locke's views is the idea that a gentleman's education cannot be considered complete without travel to other countries and the encounters with other societies and cultures that it facilitates. Locke does not seem to acknowledge a distinction between education and cosmopolitanism; in a sense, to be educated (and to travel) is to become cosmopolitan. While politeness took deeper root as a central value of eighteenth-century British culture, cosmopolitanism became a necessary characteristic of a gentleman and further established the importance of worldliness. Those who do not travel cannot be entirely cultivated as polite individuals who can both fulfil their own potential for moral development and participate in mutual improvement through social interactions with other well-mannered individuals.[5] A key dimension of the argument advanced here is that the edifying effects of travel are quite difficult to obtain and that, in unsuitable circumstances, rather than polishing the uncut stone into a diamond, travel is likely to further roughen it.

Locke clearly establishes the importance of necessary conditions under which travel is edifying rather than corrupting to the individual: "his *going abroad* is to little purpose if *travel* does not somewhat open

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3. John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 158.

4. Nathan Tarcov, *Locke's Education for Liberty* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 5.

5. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 158.

his eyes, make him cautious and wary, and accustom him to look beyond the outside and, under the inoffensive guard of a civil and obliging carriage, keep himself free and safe in his conversation with strangers and all sorts of people without forfeiting their good opinion."[6] Ultimately, travel is necessary in the most favourable scenarios (as in the case of a gentleman at the culmination of an orderly liberal education), but might be damaging in the average—and certainly the worst—cases. Indeed, Locke clearly acknowledges that travel in and of itself is by no means necessarily beneficial, and in this matter, the age of the traveller is of primary importance: "I confess *travel* into foreign countries has great advantages, but the time usually chosen to send young men abroad is, I think, of all other, that which renders them least capable of reaping those advantages."[7] Locke is here responding to the tendency in late seventeenth-century England to send young gentlemen to the continent in their early teens, which he argues, denies them the opportunity to benefit from the experience. In the philosopher's view, one should travel in the following circumstances:

> When he is of age to govern himself and make observations of what he finds in other countries worthy [of] his notice and that might be of use to him after his return; and when too, being thoroughly acquainted with the laws and fashions, the natural and moral advantages and defects of his own country, he has something to exchange with those abroad from whose conversation he hoped to reap any knowledge.[8]

It is worth noting also that Locke urges the traveller to be aware of "the natural and moral advantages *and defects* of his own country."[9] Without gaining an adequate perspective on how one's society stands in comparison to others, one could fall afoul of either novelty bias—cheerily adopting all new customs one experiences—or prejudice against every new idea encountered abroad. Consequently, neither "going native" nor closed-minded jingoism are desirable for travellers, as both would deny them the benefits of the enterprise. The potential to leave behind the vices of one's homeland is not advantageous if it results in simply swapping one vice for another. Swift's travelogue, in the character of

6. Ibid., 160.
7. Ibid., 159.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid; emphasis my own.

Gulliver, intermittently features the problems of being both too open and too closed to foreign cultures.

Locke is unequivocal in expressing the danger he sees in those who would travel when overly open-minded and thus ill-prepared to engage with what they encounter abroad: "if they do bring home with them any knowledge of the places and people they have seen, it is often an admiration of the worst and vainest practices they met with abroad, retaining a relish and memory of those things wherein their liberty took its first swing rather than of what should make them better and wiser after their return."[10] The issue of the traveller pandering to futile and inadequate practices that are happily associated with the indulgence of a newly felt liberty applies primarily to voyagers of a young age. This shows Locke's understanding of the natural tendency toward wonder when the traveller undertakes new experiences. However, the liberty that comes with breaking from the established practices, institutions, and hierarchies of the originating society might also have an intoxicating effect on many adult travellers, especially those who are not appropriately educated prior to setting sail. The principle that travellers will not necessarily be able to ascertain and appropriately judge distinctions between the wheat and the chaff in what they come across applies even more broadly. As a result, opportunities for edification may well be passed up despite good intentions because of the traveller's indulgence in some or all of the lower quality customs or habits found in the host country. In essence, travellers who travel at the wrong time can return home corrupted by practices they have been insufficiently educated to understand as deviant and malicious. Therefore, appropriate age and education are vital preconditions for any traveller hoping to gain wisdom through travel.

Locke continues, warning that such problematic travellers will not take the care to "examine the designs, observe the address, and consider the arts, tempers, and inclinations of men they meet with that so they may know how to comport themselves toward them."[11] The worry here is that travellers of a certain type will not show sufficient deference to the mores of the society in which they find themselves and will behave inappropriately as a result. In other words, their sense

10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 160.

of wonder could overcome their capability to engage their new surroundings in a manner that is likely to produce educational benefit. In order to realise the beneficial aspects of travel, a certain decorum or politeness is necessary. Interaction with people of the host culture is required, and to facilitate this, adopting some local customs is essential. Poorly educated travellers would find it difficult to navigate such cultural appropriation without unwittingly adopting practices that are corrupting.

The consequence of this, of course, is that negative or poor habits and characteristics adopted by travellers when abroad will then be brought back to their home country. Richard Bourke has recently identified a similar fear of deviant behaviour in the colonies boomeranging back to the metropole in Edmund Burke's condemnation of what he saw as the despotism of Warren Hasting's running of the East India Company.[12] Amidst these necessary interactions, Locke is clear in identifying the need for travellers to maintain defenses against the possibility of corruption. Although the traveller must have "open eyes" (and, one presumes, some degree of an open mind), this clarity of vision is as much needed to "make him cautious and wary, and to … keep himself free and safe in his conversation with strangers and all sorts of people without forfeiting their good opinion."[13] The difficulty of walking this tightrope for the well-educated gentleman—let alone a naïve young person or a boorish type—should be clear.

Ultimately, Locke's macro view of education is optimistic, starting from the premise of each child possessing a mind as blank slate, open to experience and necessarily capable of independent judgement and reasonable conduct so long as it is correctly cultivated. This vision proffers that a thorough and proper education can foster a truly self-governing individual guided by reason. This path to reason or reasonableness laid out by Locke is chiefly obstructed by the common moral failings of self-interestedness (or narrow advantage), passion, and prejudice.[14] However, since humans are by nature moral and free beings, they have the capacity to overcome these obstructions to flourish fully. Notably,

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12. Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 524–25.

13. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 160.

14. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov, "Introduction" in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, cited above, xii–xiii.

ignorance is deemed to be the primary driver of prejudice. Thus, if prejudice is one of the primary obstacles to an individual's full development as a reasonable person, ignorance must be conquered. In this way, travel becomes essential in the execution of a liberal conception of education as the remedy to ignorance—and by extension—prejudice.

Locke's position is favourable to human potential in that, as Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov argue, the broad failings of morality and politics, caused as they are largely by prejudice, are predominantly shortcomings of *understanding* rather than of *character* in any meaningful sense.[15] Improvements in education, then, could substantially overcome the preponderance of ignorance that causes prejudice and most likely other related failings that challenge humans' capacity to become free and moral beings. However, travel as a necessary element of education is not to be taken lightly, as the English philosopher's recommendations clearly indicate. For Locke, travel is not arbitrary. It ought to be pursued deliberately by humans to achieve self-improvement so that they may return home more worldly and capable of contributing positively to a free society.[16]

Here I argue that in *Gulliver's Travels* Swift acknowledges an understanding and appreciation of Locke's position on this matter but nonetheless seeks to detract from the more optimistic outlook that the English thinker presents in his work. The chief point of divergence between the two authors pertains to the likelihood of extending the conditions under which large numbers of individuals will be genuinely capable of meeting the standards required for travel to be of benefit. Through his account of Gulliver's actions across four voyages, Swift both adheres to and subverts Locke's ideas regarding travel as part of an educational process. As Seamus Deane notes, unlike Robinson Crusoe's figure as *homo economicus*, discussed in numerous critical readings of Daniel Defoe's bestseller, Gulliver is a "persona whose most conspicuous consumptions will be the customs and habits of others."[17] Gulliver takes Locke's advice on being open and facilitating engagement, yet extends himself too far and runs into the philosopher's warning about lack of judgement. Gulliver sees the need to comport

15. Ibid.

16. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 160.

17. Seamus Deane, "Swift and the Anglo-Irish Intellect," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/ Iris An Dá Chultúr* 1 (1986): 18.

himself around his hosts in the required manner as part of his mission of anthropological documentation, somewhat discarding his critical filter in the process. This, of course, comes hand in hand with Gulliver's overly enthusiastic and gullible praise of English society featured throughout all but the final voyage to the Land of the Houyhnhnms. Indeed, Gulliver is guilty of several potential faults typical of the traveller identified by Locke, including even adopting some of his advice. Gulliver embodies the tensions that Locke's recommendations for travel establish: he is at once deluded, prideful, and arrogant about the supposed virtues of his originating society, yet also overly deferential and keen to imbibe all that pertains to the cultures he encounters. He is certainly a traveller beyond Locke's endorsement. Indeed, in some ways Gulliver is an exemplar of precisely why the politics of travel and education is so important.

Travel in Context: Irish Anglicanism and the Tenuousness of Civilization

The Grand Tour of Europe was a prominent means for the completion of the noble gentlemen's cultural education, and this is of course the context in which Locke wrote his advice on the topic of travel. However, in an age of religious strife between Protestants and Catholics, some of those from stern Protestant stock would question the value of encountering the relics of the ancient world if they are found in the custody of Catholic countries. James Buzard notes the influence that Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) had as guide to several generations of Englishmen on the wonders of the Roman world to be found in Italy.[18] The intrinsic value of travel in order to view these wonders is presented as an almost indispensable dimension of an appropriate and complete cultural education. However, Addison himself cautions travellers against the corruptions inherent in visiting a country in which the Catholic Church, identified resolutely as the "Whore of Babylon," is the dominant cultural influence.[19] The poten-

18. Joseph Addison, quoted in James Buzard, "The Grand Tour and After (1660–1840)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40.

19. Joseph Addison, quoted in Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature, 1764–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1.

tial positives for an Englishman travelling the continent, namely "to cultivate his historical consciousness and artistic tastes,"[20] must be held in delicate balance with the dangers of venturing into the corruptive context(s) in which much of this value is to be found. However, the seriousness of this threat could depend on the relative health of the society in question. As the eighteenth century progressed and the horrors of religious conflict receded further into memory, British Protestant visitors to Italy thought it acceptable to reduce their suspicions of Papist corruption. They could travel with a lowered guard, rather adopting a triumphalist position as they compared the grandeur of Britain to the relative decline of Rome and more generally Italy, marking their country and culture out as the true inheritors of the Roman legacy. Therefore, a corrupt culture in decline may not produce the same risk to the traveller as one that is flourishing.

Nevertheless, the Protestant worry associated with such encounters, both near and far, did not necessarily reduce in intensity with the passage of time in the Irish context. Indeed, Swift never lost his resolute suspicion of what he perceived to be the terrible corruptions of both popery and its antithesis, freethinking Protestant dissent.[21] Swift's position as Dean of St. Patrick's in Dublin made for a very different experience than that of a clergyman of the established Church in England. As minorities (no more than one-tenth of the overall population of Ireland confessed Anglicanism in the early 1700s), Irish Anglicans often professed in sermon and tract what can only be described as a siege mentality.[22] They perceived themselves to be surrounded by an indolent, superstitious, Catholic population who, upon Rome's call, were prone to sedition at any given moment, not to mention a small but fanatical batch of dissenting Presbyterians in the north of the island.[23]

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20. Buzard, "The Grand Tour and After (1660–1840)," 40.

21. Daniel Carey, "Swift, Gulliver, and Human Nature," in *Les voyages de Gulliver: mondes lointains ou mondes proches*, ed. François Boulaire and Daniel Carey (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2002), 143–44.

22. Robert Eccleshall, "Anglican Political Thought in the Century after the Revolution of 1688," in *Political Thought in Ireland Since the Seventeenth Century*, ed. D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall, and Vincent Geoghegan (New York: Routledge, 1993), 30.

23. For a good overview of the history of such divisions in the specific context of Irish history, see Claude Rawson, *Swift's Angers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 41–43.

From the pulpit, warnings of the profound danger of an imminent return to savagery by the surrounding native Irish abounded. Ireland was seen as a kingdom on a tenuous precipice of relapsing into a state of natural barbarism should the resolve of those who held the genius of English civilization in their hands weaken.[24] Thus, an orderly education in the mould described by Locke was required, lest this already threatened grip upon civilization be further compromised when encountering other peoples and cultures.

Travel outside the pale of settlement, the small area of total British control surrounding Dublin on the central east of the country, was perceived as a dangerous gamble into a land of wild deviance, superstition, and dissenting quackery.[25] Swift travelled extensively throughout Ireland on horseback, even in ill health and advanced age,[26] and thus had significant first-hand experience of the horrifying living conditions of the rural poor.[27] Equally so, the demographic and economic growth of dissenting Protestants, including increasing Presbyterian immigrants from Scotland into Ulster, made the embattled minority status of Irish Anglicans even more severe. Thus, for Swift's Anglo-Irish class, the dangers associated with travel and the consequences of being in close proximity to deviant peoples loomed large in both reality and the collective imagination.

Swift, then, was all too aware of what cross-cultural engagement and travels amongst those unfamiliar to oneself was like, and the perceived dangers associated with this resonate in *Gulliver's Travels* where encounters with unusual peoples and customs is not to be taken lightly. Swift's counter-Enlightenment distrust of rationality, as much as his dim confidence in human nature led him to see Locke's warning relating to travel as relevant to the wider context of human affairs.[28] For Swift's Anglo-Irish class, their proximity to the native Irish population rendered a dangerous gamble travel where interactions with such degraded people and tarnished conditions may extend to them, placing

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24. Eccleshall, "Anglican Political Thought in the Century after the Revolution of 1688," 36–39.

25. This is the origin of the popular phrase "beyond the pale."

26. Joseph McMinn, *Jonathan's Travels: Swift and Ireland* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1994), 102.

27. McMinn describes Swift's vantage point in Ireland as on the frontier of the ongoing "war between barbarity and civilisation" (ibid., 82).

28. Carey, "Swift, Gulliver, and Human Nature," 153.

their custodianship of civility at risk.[29] In fact, as both John Stubbs and Ian McBride have recently pointed out, the creeping extension of poverty to the point of subsistence living to Irish Protestant parishioners in the 1720s constituted an enormous shock to Swift's generation.[30] The worry of corruption and degeneration that may come from close encounters with those of lower stock and debased habits is summed up by Stubbs as such: "The picture was muddying; it was not always possible to say who the barbarians were any more."[31] Indeed, *Gulliver's Travels* demonstrates that individuals, and perhaps even collectives, are capable of lapsing back into the barbarism from whence they likely came, and that travel can instigate this process. The depiction of the Yahoos as debased beasts in Book IV suggests as much.[32] Thus, for Swift's Anglo-Irish class, the dangers associated with travel and the likelihood of contact with highly undesirable peoples loomed large in both reality and the imagination.

Gulliver the Traveller

Gulliver's Travels has long been justifiably held as a satire of travel writing,[33] drawing upon both the genre's claim to represent truth as stranger than fiction and its wider "dubious attempt to establish the veracity of improbable observations."[34] Indeed, as Carole Fabricant

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29. Eccleshall, "Anglican Political Thought in the Century after the Revolution of 1688," 38.

30. John Stubbs, *Jonathan Swift: The Reluctant Rebel* (New York: Viking Press, 2017), 490–91; Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2009), 131–35.

31. Stubbs, *Jonathan Swift: The Reluctant Rebel*, 489; Rawson, *Swift's Angers*, 42. Rawson argues that while this was a popular point of view for Protestants in Ireland in the 1700s, it does not necessarily stand up to historical scrutiny, although Stubbs pulls no punches in describing the misery and hardship of the poor in Ireland at this time. Either way, there is no doubt that the link between poverty and barbarism was clearly set in the minds of Swift's Anglo-Irish class. Thus, it was perceptually true if not factually true.

32. Notably, a Houyhnhnm myth surrounding the origins of the Yahoos tells that they were not always in the country but had appeared one day and multiplied from that point forward, perhaps suggesting a degeneration over time (Book IV, Ch. IX, 253).

33. Morgan Vanek, "The Uses of Travel: Science, Empire and Change in 18th-Century Travel Writing," *Literature Compass* 12, no. 11 (2015): 559–60.

34. Carey, "Swift, Gulliver, and Human Nature," 139.

notes, "*Gulliver's Travels* is in many ways the quintessential travel book, alternately reproducing and parodying the conventions of the genre, and forcefully demonstrating both its capabilities and its limitations as an instrument for disseminating knowledge."[35] However, it is less common to assess the book's commentary on the issue of travel itself rather than simply its impact and functioning mechanism as a satire and parody of the literary genre of travel writing. Gulliver is not just a vehicle through which Swift could amuse himself by parodying travel writing; Gulliver is *a traveller*, and it is worth investigating how he as an explorer and his experiences in this capacity match the advice for travellers imparted by Locke and examined in the previous section.

My argument is that in *Gulliver's Travels* Swift draws upon Locke's insights into travel, using the arrogance and delusion of the eponymous character to demonstrate what can happen when the wrong traveller interacts with foreign cultures. However, in a typically Swiftian manner, Gulliver's creator simultaneously invokes and subverts Locke's arguments throughout the text, and the travelogue is always just shy of endorsing the English philosopher (or any other overt political or philosophical platform or principle, for that matter). The deliberately studious objectivity of Gulliver as he apprehends each people and place on his travels, which is almost hyperbolic in its claims of anthropological documentation, recalls Locke's steady advice for the traveller who might run afoul of those who host him. Nonetheless, as we shall see, this does not necessarily serve Gulliver all that well, perhaps because he is a good example of Locke's bad traveller, coming from a questionable background and embracing a passion for the unknown as a chief impulse for his travels.

The motivation for travel, especially in a context where political, cultural, and religious difference will be pronounced and significant, is an interesting one. In *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), Swift's fellow Anglo-Irish compatriot, Laurence Sterne, enumerates three reasons for travel: "infirmity of body, / imbecility of mind, or / inevitable necessity."[36] Among the ten types of travellers listed by Sterne are the

35. Carole Fabricant, "Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 744.

36. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

"idle," "inquisitive," "splenetic," and "the delinquent and felonious."[37] Gulliver fits the category of naïve inquisition, describing his reason for travel as born of an "insatiable desire of seeing foreign countries" (Book I, Ch. VIII, 71). Also, when explaining why he opts to embark upon the seas once more after a mere two months at home following his adventures in Lilliput, Gulliver describes himself as "[h]aving been condemned by nature and fortune to an active and restless life" (Book II, Ch. II, 75). It is interesting that he is doubly condemned by nature and fortune to both an active and a restless life, not least because both deny Gulliver agency (or they create conditions where he denies his own agency). Gulliver's need to traverse the world is beyond his own rational control, or at least he presents it as such. Yet, later in the narrative, Gulliver intellectualizes this previously non-rational desire as valid, because travel is an invaluable source of education, as Locke suggested. This desire, seemingly justified by Gulliver for its own sake, combined with a pathological understanding of himself as destined for travel, does not align with Locke's criteria for a suitable traveller. This is further demonstrated when Gulliver arrogantly misrepresents Locke's idea that travel can be edifying by claiming that all those who do not travel are ignorant and prejudiced (Book II, Ch. VII, 122). The text is thus more than a stylistic satire of the genre of travel writing: it is a wider expression of how travel can contribute to an individual's edification or corruption in the right or wrong cases.

From this perspective, travel is not the final component of a carefully curated education, but instead something to satisfy one's curiosity and appetite for wonder. Any edification that may come about is treated as a happy by-product of the endeavour but not the central originating goal. The innate attractiveness of travel discussed here is particularly applicable to a self-interested, problem-solving, and crucially, proud individual such as Gulliver—the kind of person who can use his canny guile to overcome the hurdles of living outside of society or community. This type of individual, possessing what Aristotle called "cleverness" or instrumental reason (the difference between practical wisdom and cleverness was a favourite target of Swift's satire throughout his writings), seems drawn to travel partially as a means to assert

37. Ibid.

his individuality and independence from society.[38] Yet, rather than be necessarily improved by the experiences of leaving the structures of society behind to exercise and develop his cleverness, Gulliver is markedly corrupted mentally by his travels, and he ends up seeing humans as wholly vice-laden, smelly, and deformed Yahoos (Book IV, Ch. XII, 276). Thus, at the outset, the opportunity that travel provides to indulge his possible zeal for radical self-development is indeed a risky proposition given the instability inherent in leaving one's place in hierarchical organic society.[39]

It is important to note that the protagonist has already been shaped by travel by the time he embarks upon the first of the four voyages covered in *Gulliver's Travels*. In fact, we learn in short order that he has never been meaningfully embedded in English society. The quick biographical information contained in the first two pages of *Gulliver's Travels* briskly outlines that he is the third of five sons and was sent away to be educated at "Emanuel-College in Cambridge, at fourteen years old" (Book I, Ch. I, 15). Emanuel College is a noted college of Puritan character, thus marking Gulliver as a solidly dissenting Protestant. Embarking on his career as a surgeon at the young age of twenty-one, Gulliver travels to Leiden in the Netherlands, which houses another university known as much for its stern Puritanism as for its educational excellence.[40] There he studies "physick … knowing it would be useful in long voyages" (Book I, Ch. I, 15). Thus, we see that as a young man who has already travelled, Gulliver consciously seeks to develop the

38. See Norman O. Dahl, *Practical Wisdom, Aristotle, and Weakness of Will* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 63.

39. Fanaticism of all stripes is a persistent target of Swift's ire throughout his corpus of writings. One's potential for excessive self-love—conceived in the Christian mould of pride or as more worldly conceptions of vanity or narcissism—can be taken up with an enthusiasm akin to religious devotion. The argument that one's conscience demands that one pursue travel likely struck Swift as pernicious in the same manner that religious freethinkers demanded that their endless permeations of biblical interpretation and practices be indulged regardless of the consequences for the collective at large.

40. Beyond the Netherlands' status as a resolutely Protestant country at the time, the city of "Leyden" also conjures the association of the notorious Anabaptist prophet and leader John of Leiden who contributed to the city of Münzter briefly becoming a bloody Puritan theocracy in the mid 1530s. This also summons the similarities in the Puritan origins of both Gulliver and Robinson Crusoe. See James Egan, "Crusoe's Monarchy and the Puritan Concept of the Self," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 451–60.

skillset he believes to be required for a career of even further travel. Additionally, whilst Locke would certainly not have seen it in such terms, it is significant that the clear references to Gulliver's Puritan background and education summon the philosopher's argument regarding the necessity of appropriate education for the traveller prior to travelling, lest his experiences be less than edifying, or perhaps even corrupting. As Swift would write elsewhere, education forged in the fires of dissent generated dangerous enthusiasm and fanaticism that could not be relied upon to produce a morally upstanding character.[41] The implication here is a warning that those who have a deviant or debased education will make for bad travellers.

Gulliver takes up the position of surgeon on the ship *The Swallow*, on which he travels to the Levant "and some other parts" (Book I, Ch. I, 15–16) over a three-year period. After settling in London long enough to marry, he is quickly compelled by his conscience and the failure of several of his contemporaries' businesses to return to sea once more. He sets sail once again, for a period of six years, taking positions as surgeon on two separate ships. During this time, he travels to "the *East* and *West Indies*"[42] where his leisure time when ashore is taken up "in observing the manners and dispositions of the people, as well as learning their language" (Book I, Ch. I, 15–16). All this is made possible by Gulliver's preternatural memory and gift for language acquisition. It is notable that such studious consumption of culture and language whilst travelling was consistent from his early life onward. Again, we see Swift have Gulliver negotiate the advice provided by Locke: while the literary character does dutifully take time and effort to appreciate the cultures he encounters, he may well be ill-equipped to properly understand how to distinguish virtue from vice in these experiences, therefore embracing good and bad alike in both feeling and behaviour. As *Gulliver's Travels* progresses, his reaction certainly continues in this vein.

Following these initial travels, which are but summarized in passing, Gulliver spends three years at home with his family before leaving

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41. Section VIII and the "Digression on Madness" in A *Tale of* A *Tub* contain Swift's most scathing satirical presentations of this idea. See Marcus Walsh "Swift and Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. Christopher Fox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 171–72.

42. Emphasis in original.

on *The Antelope* for the South Seas in what becomes his voyage to Lilliput (Book I, Ch. I, 16). Thus, in total, Gulliver spends two years and seven months studying in Leiden, three years travelling aboard *The Swallow*, and six years on two other ships in the East and the West Indies before our tale properly commences. As such, prior to the start of the first substantial voyage, Gulliver has already spent extensive amounts of time at sea amidst a range of foreign customs and languages. We are left to wonder how responsibly, on Locke's terms, he may have done so. We might even wonder whether or not some of the character flaws that emerge over the course of *Gulliver's Travels* may have been set in place by his Puritan background and education, and/or by the extensive travel he pursued at a young age resulting in time spent around peoples and customs of less than polite character.

Escaping Vice or Engaging Corruption?

The second of Gulliver's voyages features his interactions with the giants of Brobdingnag, a society resembling a more virtuous version of Britain. The twelvefold size differential between the Brobdingnagians and humans is equalled, seemingly, by the gulf in morality and virtue between the two peoples. In chapters six and seven of Book II, Gulliver recounts some important interactions with the King of Brobdingnag, during which he informed him of the politics and culture of England. The broad outline for the character of the virtuous Brobdingnagian king was inspired by Swift's mentor, William Temple. Gulliver proudly proffers an account of what he believes to be the chief virtues of England, only to have the king recoil at what appear to him to be vices rather than virtues. The king's arguments refer back to Temple's writings on similar topics. Included in this retort to Gulliver is a notable questioning of "what business we [England] had out of our own islands, unless upon the score of trade or treaty" (Book II, Ch. VI, 119). Of course, later the king expresses a hope that Gulliver as an individual may be bettered by his travels, but he doubts that, at a national level, England has any business sending its people to other nations, especially in a context of imperial expansion. Following the summary of all he sees wrong in what Gulliver tells him about England, the king castigates the human race in one of the book's most memorable lines: "I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives, to be the most perni-

cious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the Earth" (Book II, Ch. VII, 121). Scrambling to understand the depth of the king's disgust at his account of England's "ignorance, idleness, and vice," Gulliver reasons that:

> Great allowances should be given to a King who lives wholly secluded from the rest of the world, and must therefore altogether be unacquainted with the manners and customs that most prevail in other nations: The want of which knowledge will ever produce many prejudices, and a certain narrowness of thinking, from which we and the politer countries of Europe are so wholly exempted. And it would be hard indeed, if so remote a Prince's notions of virtue and vice were to be offered as a standard for mankind. (Book II, Ch. VII, 122)

There are multiple notable aspects to what Gulliver says here; for one, he identifies England as among "the politer countries of Europe." In doing so, he invokes the potential for a universal standard of virtue and vice for mankind.[43] Yet, he seems also to acknowledge a relativism of sorts by establishing that the circumstances in which the king finds himself—i.e., being so remote—should insulate him from the kind of critical judgement that one would level at someone else who made the same points as this monarch.

Since the king has not travelled, Gulliver reasons, his education is necessarily incomplete and he cannot thoroughly be held accountable for his deficiencies in knowledge and, as a consequence, virtue. Rawson reads this as Swift satirizing the contemporary Whig position that ignorance was the sole cause of prejudice, and that if one were to pursue travel, one would eradicate first ignorance and then prejudice as part of the same broad process.[44] Swift sought to highlight an objective morality wherein many prejudices are inherently justified, rather than merely the consequence of ignorance. As Locke has shown, travel is a key dimension of the liberal conceptualization of education that is assumed to be pivotal in eliminating prejudice. Swift's engagement with this idea is rather more conservative and skeptical. The writer also

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43. This identification and extension of a general culture was a noted goal of politeness, as part of its cosmopolitan outlook. See Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century," *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 4 (Dec. 2002): 876.

44. Claude Rawson, "Explanatory note 122," in his edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, cited above, 314.

intimates in *Gulliver's Travels* that the true fool is he who thinks that all prejudices will disappear when one has travelled and is therefore no longer ignorant—"the want of which knowledge [travel] will ever produce many prejudices, and a certain narrowness of thinking from which we and the politer countries of Europe are wholly exempted" (Book II, Ch. VII, 122). Ignorance may be universally bad, but many prejudices are worthwhile, valid, and necessary. Thinking that achieving a worldly appreciation and understanding through travel will necessarily wash one clean of all prejudice only makes sense in a truly relativistic world where no hierarchy of moral, ethical, or political concerns exists.

Gulliver's Travels satirically attacks claims that those who do not travel are necessarily insular and prone to invalid prejudices, and that those who do travel are necessarily better off than those who do not. This is why Gulliver is quick to dismiss in an arrogant fashion the Brobdingnagian king's strong refutations of his arguments in favour of England's greatness; since the king has not travelled, he cannot possibly know what he is detailing. Furthermore, Gulliver patronizingly adds that we should not hold these intellectual limitations against him as they are not his fault: "great allowances should be given to a king who lives wholly secluded from the rest of the world," as he is suffering from "the miserable effects of a confined education" (Book II, Ch. VII, 122). All the while, of course, the satirical implications are that for all his travels, Gulliver remains childishly proud of his country, no doubt to his own detriment. His assumptions regarding the edifying effects of travel render him unable to assess, in an objective manner, criticism of his country and culture by someone wiser than him: "I would hide the frailties and deformities of my political mother, and place her virtues and beauties in the most advantageous light" (Book II, Ch. VII, 122). As the king can rationally assess England based on Gulliver's skewed account, despite not having travelled himself, his reasonableness is not restricted by this lack of worldliness—even if it may not be complete in the Lockean sense. Gulliver, on the other hand, embodies a shallow form of cosmopolitanism, but it does not add to his reasonableness and it most likely even detracts from it, since his education prior to travelling was deficient.

The satire is directed at both those who would think or expect that Gulliver's prejudices should have melted away as a result of travel, and

also at those who embrace the idea that the preconceptions one possesses are necessarily bad and require exorcism. In some ways, such a notion eradicates the possibility of any judgement at all, since discriminatory choice (prudent or otherwise) implies opting for one thing over another, often without genuine reason or experience to assist the chooser in rendering the decision. Since one cannot possibly make all decisions in conditions of perfect knowledge, some amount of preconceived notions based on principles that are rationally or empirically indefensible is a natural facet of life. Beyond this, however, Gulliver's response to the king also engages Locke's idea of the limitations of education when one does not travel. Here, Gulliver's inability to give credence to the wisdom of the king derives from his misguided application of the importance of travel to education and the attainment of virtue—"it would be hard indeed, if so remote a Prince's notions of virtue and vice were to be offered as a standard for all mankind" (Book II, Ch. VII, 122). Gulliver conveys an objective display of wisdom as inherently incomplete if its proponent has not travelled. The relative importance of travel to education is thus distorted.

Gulliver himself has travelled the world for much of his life and is nonetheless shown to be a fool in this interaction with the king, most notably in his depiction of the vices of England as virtues (Book II, Ch. VII, 115–21). We might even wonder if the king's lack of travel and his firm integration into the fabric of his own society are a source of wisdom rather than of ignorance. Undoubtedly, Locke would maintain that the king, given his existing education and beliefs, is an entirely appropriate candidate for travel. Perhaps so, but it is nevertheless apparent that Gulliver has plainly not been edified by his travels thus far, and in the face of just and virtuous criticisms of his homeland's "heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments" (Book II, Ch. VII, 120), he uses the king's lack of travel as a basis to dismiss his view. On the other hand, the text also suggests that lack of travel is no excuse for genuine absence of virtue or possession of ignorance. The character of Gulliver clearly demonstrates in this section that travel in and of itself is not an indicator of education or virtue, even though it can contribute to edification in the right circumstances.

The key tension here resides in the idea that Gulliver, stemming from a society that the Brobdingnagian king expertly identifies as

perfectly nefarious—"the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, and ambition could produce" (Book II, Ch. VII, 121)—might be improved by spending time away from it. Can one be removed from a state of vice induced by a corrupted background through travelling to other places and encountering other cultures? The king hopes that Gulliver's travels will wash him clean of "the many vices of [his] country" (Book II, Ch. VII, 122), but as the text progresses, it shows a degeneration of the protagonist's sanity to the point where he is delusional and ireful at the conclusion of the narrative. I argue that Swift implicitly suggests that whilst the commentary on the follies of contemporary Britain espoused by the king is largely his own, simply leaving this society to gaily traverse the world is unlikely to provide the edification that the monarch hopes for Gulliver. Merely trading the known vices of one's homeland for unknown vices found elsewhere means that travel is no guarantee to bettering oneself.

As an example of such a traveller who does not progress in the course of his educational journey, Gulliver is rendered worse rather than better by his voyages, as shown by his miserable final state in the book, where he is left wondering if he might possibly "habituate [him] self by time to tolerate the sight of a human creature" (Book IV, Ch. XII, 276). Not only does he fail to escape the vices fostered into him by his country in general (and perhaps his Puritan background more specifically), but these flaws—most notably his pride—become accentuated as the travelogue progresses. The final words of the book, suitably, are Gulliver's deluded invitation to "those who have any tincture of this absurd vice [pride], that they will not presume to appear in my sight" (Book IV, Ch. XII, 277). Gulliver's journey exemplifies the dangers that can befall those inappropriately educated and unsuited to travel, who may have a mind overly open to embrace new ideas in a relativistic manner yet pridefully mistaken as to the merits of their own society. Swift establishes this tension between the relativism of experience found in the world and an objective universalist approach to virtue, vice, edification, and corruption.[45] Uncritically swapping the

45. Gulliver acknowledges the possibility of the king being held up as "standard for all mankind" (Book II, Ch. VII, 122).

habits of one bad society for another is not a path to redemption, as the Brobdingnagian king wishes will be the case for Gulliver.[46]

Conclusion

Gulliver's Travels features a recognition of Locke's argument that travel may well be a vital element in one's education by edifying and elevating in notable and profound ways that are inaccessible within the boundaries of a traveller's originating society. However, it posits that travellers who cannot adequately draw upon these benefits might require insulation and protection from the corruptions it could unleash in them. Those who are insufficiently educated to understand virtue and vice in the society to which they belong should thus avoid (or perhaps be denied) opportunities to travel. Locke suggests that education is a careful step-by-step process, and that travel is among the finishing stages of the endeavour. The possible benefits of travel are not available to all in practical terms, although everyone does possess the latent capacity to be edified by such experiences. Swift's preference for a traditional organic hierarchical community where order sprang from natural law[47] makes it so that *Gulliver's Travels* generates a profound contrast to the emerging liberal notions of individuality and travel.

The realisation of a pure education being completed by enriching travel is unlikely. If that were possible, however, it does not imply that the traveller would return home entirely devoid of prejudice, nor would this be desirable in the first place. Since most individuals will be travelling with an incomplete or imperfect education, we should be wary of the consequences of such disorderly licentiousness, as it is not probable that the results will be spontaneously positive instead of damaging.

As the Brobdingnagian king shows us, it is possible to be a meaningfully reasonable person without having travelled, even if one's

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46. I would suggest it is significant that this is a hope rather than a belief or conviction in the king's view. We can reasonably assume that the king, as arguably the single wisest character in the text, is skeptical of Gulliver escaping vice through travel, expressing this hope good-naturedly rather than realistically expecting it to be realized.

47. Warren Montag, *The Unthinkable Swift: The Spontaneous Philosophy of a Church of England Man* (London: Verso, 1994), 144; Ian Higgins, "Jonathan's Swift's Political Confession," in *Politics and Literature in the Age of Swift: English and Irish Perspectives*, ed. Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11.

potential as a completed gentleman will not be met. One should be careful not to see the shallow experience of worldliness as a panacea to facile ignorance and a guaranteed path to the flourishing of our rational nature. The ignorance that a parochial existence brings about may ultimately be more desirable than superficial worldliness masquerading as enlightenment that would be found in travellers who have seen the world but have taken all the wrong lessons from their experiences. Pursuing wonder through travel for its own sake is a serious risk and thus should only be considered as part of an orderly educational process.