

"THE GRAND ELIXIR"

"THE GRAND ELIXIR:"
SWIFT, ANATOMY, IMMORTALITY, AND THE SELF-
REFLEXIVE TEXT

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ABSTRACT

When Swift, in "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.," imagines the fate of his works, his lament sounds suspiciously like that of the Modern Author of *A Tale of a Tub*. Swift's anxiety regarding his literary longevity extends throughout his corpus, from the *Tale* and *Gulliver's Travels* to the "Verses," indicating that this was indeed a real concern for him. Swift's attempt to avoid that fate involves his representation of the carnival-grotesque body, embodying Bakhtin's "material bodily principle" (*Rabelais and His World*, p.18), which insists on the ambivalence of the representation -- the degradation of the body enables its regeneration. By including the body, its functions, and its decay in his literature, Swift effectively creates a great deal of controversy regarding such a representation. This controversy is what keeps the works in the critical arena.

The critical arena was important to Swift. While he may have been anxious about the new criticism being propounded by the Moderns, Swift also recognized that without that arena, his works would be "sunk in the Abyss of Things" (*Tale*, p.32). For Swift, this criticism involves dialogue, and with it a form of dialogism, which, in Bakhtin's sense, allows the existence, not only of multiple worldviews,

but of multiple interpretations of texts. This multiplicity causes controversy, which generates conversation, and through that conversation, Swift hopes to attain literary immortality.

To Peter Walmsley, who, through friendship and guidance, helped save me from my own "Taylor's Hell."

*...he has given the world an unforgettable parable
by building an overpowering genius upon the
wreckage of the merely human faculties...*

William Butler Yeats, "The New Irish Library"

*But stop, stop your iron pelt of words, lest you flay
us all alive, and yourself too!*

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

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The Introduction

In a letter to Bolingbroke, Swift confesses that "I was 47 years old when I began to think of death; and the reflections upon it now begin when I wake in the morning, and end when I am going to sleep" (*Corr*, III, p.354). His writings, however, betray a concern about death that begins long before the age of forty-seven. In the early *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift's Modern Author liberally refers to his own mortality and his "strong Inclination, before I leave the World, to taste a Blessing, which we *mysterious* Writers can seldom reach, till we have got into our Graves" (*Tale*, p.185). Knowing he cannot hope for the august life Gulliver imagines for the Struldbruggs, and not relishing the idea of the corporeal consequences of extreme longevity, Swift must content himself with attempting literary immortality by ensuring that his works are complicated and controversial enough to encourage interpretation and commentary. In this way Swift diverts his readers, both supporters and detractors, from his own inevitable mortification, and therefore guarantees that his writings "*live at least as long as our Language*" (*Tale*, p.3). Swift's own claim that "the chief end I propose myself in all my labours is to vex the world rather than divert it" (*Corr*, III, p.103) emphasizes his intent to elicit reactions. In vexing

the world, Swift confounds, afflicts, distresses, agitates, and forces self- and textual examination. Clearly, it "was not only his little parson cousin whom he defied to 'explain some things'" (Guthkelch and Nichol Smith, Eds, p.xxv), in *A Tale of a Tub* and in all of his works.

One of the most pervasive ways in which Swift vexes the world is with his insistent use of scatology, the body and its decay. Critics such as Norman O. Brown, Carol Flynn, and Jae Num Lee have discussed Swift's use of scatology and the body and come to some very different conclusions. Lee, in *Swift and Scatological Satire*, insists that scatology in Swift is not satirical, but ironic and humorous. Brown's discussion in *The Excremental Vision* centers on the psychological reasons behind Swift's obsession, and finds it symptomatic of anal eroticism. Carol Flynn's argument is much more interesting in the present context. Her *The Body in Swift and Defoe* reveals a Swift who is preoccupied with ideas about the body-politic and the multitudinous poor, and consumed with a desire to gain and maintain a control over sexuality -- his own, but more importantly, that of his female friends, particularly Stella and Vanessa. Flynn also suggests that by rooting his writings in the body, Swift attempts to find a way "to fight against the instability not just of language but of the bodily process itself" (p.193). "Subject to tampering from without and from within, the unstable tongue threatens

to spoil Swift's own chance at 'Immortality' as an author" (p.190). For Flynn, Swift's use of the body is a defensive attempt to fix meaning and to "protect himself from being misinterpreted" (p.217). While this anxiety is present in Swift, it is, however, difficult to reconcile it with his challenge to his cousin to "explain some things." Swift leaves many things unexplained in his texts and his readers must satisfy themselves with conjecture. Certainly Swift is also satirizing his readers' epistemologic impulse, but this seems beside the point. The point is that for all his efforts to fix meaning, many of his writings remain *meaningful*, and Swift leaves his vexed readers to their own devices in filling these gaps with their own interpretations of exactly what he is getting at.

In forcing them to be actively involved in the works, Swift effectively engages in conversation with his readers. The process approaches Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. In his lifetime this takes the form, in part, of answering commentators by including them into subsequent editions of the texts, as with his treatment of William Wotton and the additions of the Apology and the dedicatory letter to the "Prince Posterity" in *A Tale of a Tub*. With each edition the text grows as it is dissected by readers, and new meanings are grafted both into these incisions and into the holes that are left by the author in the text. By including his answerers in the text and by promoting responses to and interpretations

of his works, Swift offers interpreters and critics a dialogic space within and, more importantly, outside of his text, where the challenge to "explain some things" becomes an explicit invitation to exercise a free play of interpretive positions.

While Swift vexes his readers by foregrounding the body in many of his works, it is in the *Tale* and the *Travels* that he most persuasively proposes the role of conversation in the generation of texts, the regeneration of the body, and in the process of interpretation. Both the Tale-teller and Gulliver appeal directly to the reader throughout their writings. The Tale-teller often points to various meanings different types of readers may conclude from his discourse, while Gulliver, in an effort to explain his inclusions of certain episodes, leaves the reader wondering more about these appeals than about the events themselves. Swift here is stimulating the readers' curiosity: there is something odd, for example, in Gulliver's feeling that he must justify his "Character in Point of Cleanliness to the World" by explicitly explaining the details regarding his difficulties in being "pressed by the Necessities of Nature" (p.13) while in Lilliput. In this context the "Necessities of Nature" are excremental, but Swift, himself, is pressed by yet another necessity: "The Time is not remote, when I/ Must by Course of Nature dye" ("Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, D.S.P.D.," ll.73-74). The

task Swift sets himself to is to create a literary corpus that will "vex the world," and in doing so, divert his readers' attention from the fact that he will become, out of necessity, a corpse (or, from posterity's point of view, from the fact that he *is* a corpse). Like his Modern Author of the *Tale*, Swift encourages his readers to engage in a form of "*Scholastick Midwifry*" (p.186), while he, in the guise of his Modern Author, pauses "till I find, by feeling the World's Pulse, and my own, that it will be of absolute Necessity for us both, to resume my Pen" (p.210).

Texts, then, are generated, as is excrement, out of bodily necessity. Swift must write, just as Gulliver must defecate, and one cannot ask either to desist. One might wish that Gulliver, or, rather, Swift, not *write* about the particulars of being pressed by necessity, but he must do this as well. When the "*Vein* is once opened" (*Tale*, p.184), the bowels are moving, and the contractions have begun, both reader and writer must get into the matter if any (re)generation is to occur. Swift fixes his writings in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the "material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" (*Rabelais and His World*, p.18) and, more specifically, the "bodily lower stratum" in order to "turn [his] subject into flesh" (p.20), to give his texts an immortal life that transcends the corporeality of their author.

Swift's literary immortality is dependant upon the matter of his texts. Throughout his works there is a concentration on the body, and, in many, of the medical examination of that body. Although the human body must decay and die (and decay further), it is imperative that when the literary corpus is "open'd" the "vital Parts [are] sound" ("Verses," ll.175-6). In the context of the *Verses*, it is Swift's "vital Parts" that are examined, but his writings must be as well. In addition, as Carol Flynn points out, "Swift has turned into 'sound' itself waiting to be delivered, that part of him most vital, most necessary, embodying needs that are translated into text itself" (*Body*, p.210). The word is made flesh and the flesh is made word, and both are operated upon by writer and reader.

"Sublime Mysteries"

The translation of body into text allows the examination of and operation upon the text. Throughout his writings, however, Swift displays a certain anxiety about such literary dissection. He defies his readers to find whatever meaning they will hidden amidst the allegories, parodies, and satires in works like the *Tale* and *Gulliver's Travels*, while at the same time, he points out that such meanings may be false. He takes his contradiction yet further by implying that his work may indeed have no worthwhile meaning beyond the surface at all. In *A Tale of a Tub*, the Modern Author presents all of these possibilities to his readers, and while this discrepancy is part of Swift's satire, it also affords the reader a glimpse of the teasing satirist himself. The remarks made upon interpretation and commentary in the *Travels* by various figures in the text give some further clues to, but by no means fix, Swift's position on criticism.

In his Apology, which he has composed in order to answer those "*two or three Treatises written expressly against*" his *Tale* (p.3), the Author expresses a concern about those "*who may have over-look'd the Authors Intention*" (p.7), and gives his reader an indication of how he intends his work to be read. He acknowledges "*that some of those Passages in this Discourse, which appear most liable*

to Objection are what they call Parodies, where the Author personates the Style and Manner of other writers, whom he has a mind to expose" (p.7). The parodies are intended to be both diverting and instructive, and the Modern points out a few authors he has impersonated and the passages in which such parodies can be found. He leaves the remainder, however, to be made obvious through his own gift for parody and exposed by the interpreting "*judicious Reader*" (p.7). The Author is also surprised and offended that "*prejudicious or ignorant Readers have ... hint[ed] at ill Meanings*" in several passages in his text, and of which he "*solemnly protests he is entirely Innocent, and never had it once in his Thoughts that any thing he said would in the least be capable of such Interpretations, which he will engage to deduce full as fairly from the most innocent Book in the World*" (p.8). Innocence is somewhat specious, however, if "*ill Meanings*" can be "*fairly*" deduced from innocent books and intentions, and intent itself becomes irrelevant in light of such deductions.

The Author further complicates his own disclaimer against the dangers of reading too much into a text -- particularly his text -- when he uses his Preface to introduce his reader "to the sublime Mysteries that ensue" (p.54), and refers to himself as a "*mysterious*" (p.185) writer. The mysteries are meant to be solved, or at least investigated, and the Author invites all readers to try their skills, because

he has "with much Felicity fitted my Pen to the Genius and Advantage of each" (p.185) class of reader --"the *Superficial*, the *Ignorant*, and the *Learned*" (p.184-85). He maintains that "the Reader truly Learned ... will here find sufficient Matter to employ his Speculations for the rest of his life" (p.185). It remains a point of debate, however, whether these speculations will indeed result in any conclusive meaning, or whether the text simply affords an exercise for the readers' critical faculties.

Swift has his Author encourage close and learned readings in his lament that the

greatest Maim given to that general Reception which the Writings of our Society have formerly received, (next to the transitory State of of all sublunary Things,) hath been a superficial Vein among many Readers of the present Age, who will by no means be persuaded to inspect beyond the Surface and the Rind of Things. (p.66)

The Author, however, also claims to be suspicious of "that pretended Philosophy which enters into the Depth of Things, and then comes gravely back with Informations and Discoveries, that in the inside they are good for nothing" (p.173), and believes that

The two Senses, to which all Objects first address themselves, are the Sight and the Touch; These never examine farther than the Colour, the Shape, the Size,

and whatever other Qualities dwell, or are drawn by Art upon the Outward of Bodies, and then comes Reason officiously, with Tools for cutting, and opening, and mangling, and piercing, offering to demonstrate, that they are not of the same consistence quite thro'. Now, I take this to be the last Degree of perverting Nature; one of whose Eternal Laws it is, to put her best Furniture forward. And therefore, in order to save the Charges of all such expensive Anatomy for the Time to come, I do here think fit to inform the Reader, that in such Conclusions as these, Reason is certainly in the Right; and that in most Corporeal Beings, which have fallen under my Cognizance, the *Outside* hath been infinitely preferable to the *In*: Whereof I have been farther convinced from some late Experiments. (p.173)

The Author here refers to bodies, but his equation of body and text allows him to use similar methods to examine both. It is precisely this embodied text that directs the Author's own critical and creative practices. Swift's Tale-teller, consumed with his "Design of an everlasting Remembrance, and never-dying Fame" (p.123), which he hopes to affect through his writings, has, to "this End, ... dissected the Carcass of *Humane Nature*, and read many useful Lectures upon the several Parts, both *Containing* and *Contained*; till at last it *smelt* so strong, I could preserve it no longer" (p.123). The "Carcass" is dissected as are the "many useful Lectures." Body and text are both examined. The body cannot be preserved, other than to "fit up the Bones" into a skeleton,

but "having carefully cut up *Humane Nature*, I have found a very strange, new, and important Discovery; That the Publick Good of Mankind is performed by two Ways, *Instruction*, and *Diversion*" (p.124). We are certainly meant to laugh at the "new" discovery of this "Worthy *Modern*" (p.125); but it is important that while he is literally *hacking* his way through the human body, he hits upon the classical ideal of the function of literature. As a result of his discovery the Author, in this "Divine Treatise," claims to "have skilfully kneaded up both together with a *Layer of Utile* and a *Layer of Dulce*" (p.124). It is up to the reader to uncover and unwind each of these layers in the text.

The Author's experiment involving "cutting, and opening, and mangling, and piercing, and offering to demonstrate" the "Carcass of *Humane Nature*," and his subsequent 'discovery' of the function of literature, serves more to vex readers than to delight or instruct them. The importance the Author places upon his discovery calls into question his assertion that such revelations are "good for nothing" -- or perhaps it is this assertion that must be re-examined, especially considering that the Author has grounded the present work upon the importance of his discovery. In addition, he has uncovered this piece of wisdom from *inside* the human body, despite his claim that, "in most Corporeal Beings," the *outside* is preferable to the

in. The Modern Author seems confounded by insides and outsides, surfaces and depths; but couched beneath a medley of vivid metaphors, a moment of lucidity exists in which the Author advocates the use of judgement when critically examining the depths.¹ That moment is Swift's.

Wisdom is a Fox, who after long hunting, will at last cost you the Pains to dig out; 'Tis a Cheese, which by how much the richer, has the thicker, the homelier, and the coarser Coat; and whereof to a judicious Palate, the Maggots are the best. 'Tis a Sack-Posset, wherein the deeper you go, you will find it the sweeter. Wisdom is a Hen, whose Cackling we must value and consider, because it is attended with an Egg; But then, lastly, 'tis a Nut, which unless you chuse with Judgement, may cost you a Tooth, and pay you with nothing but a Worm.
(p.66)

This particular passage laments the unwillingness of readers to take the pains necessary for what the Author considers to be a proper textual analysis. Although he uses a somewhat different metaphor, he is asserting that one can no better judge a book by a superficial reading than one can by its

¹Several critics, however, believe that the Author is completely insane. In *Mind Forg'd Manacles*, Roy Porter refers to both the Author and Gulliver as ""terrifying self-blind fools" (p.246). Kathleen Williams, in "Giddy Circumstance," maintains that "the Author of the *Tale* is from beginning to end a fantastic creature, a mere bundle of unrelated qualities" (p.693). In their notes on the *Tale*, Greenberg and Piper constantly question the Author's common sense. See also Judith C. Mueller's "Writing Under Constraint: Swift's Apology for *A Tale of a Tub*," Michael DePorte's "Flinging It All Out of the Windows: The 'Digression on Madness,'" John R. Clark's "Lures, Limetwigs, and the Swiftian Swindle," and Christopher Fox's "Of Logic and Lycanthropy: Gulliver and the Faculties of the Mind."

cover. While the Author insists that "where I am not understood, it shall be concluded, that something very useful and profound is coucht underneath: And again, that whatever Word or Sentence is Printed in a different Character, shall be judged to contain something extraordinary either of *Wit* or *Sublime*" (pp.46-7), he reminds his readers that whatever conclusions are made, judgement must be used in coming to them. Swift has his Modern provoke his readers by enticing them to "dig out" the rich cheese, the maggots, the sweetest part of the sack-posset, the egg, and the nut from among his layers of *utile* and *dulce*, but he also has him display an anxiety about that very practice.

"Beyond the Surface of Things"

The dangers of injudicious interpretation are part of the point of the satire in the *Tale* itself. Swift uses the tale proper to elucidate the Author's three classes of readers: "the *Superficial*, the *Ignorant*, and the *Learned*." Each of the brothers can be loosely associated with each class of reader, and the *Tale*, as a satire on the corruptions in "*Learning*," is necessarily a morality tale on how to, and, indeed, how not to, read and interpret a text before it can be read as strictly a satire upon "*the numerous and gross Corruptions in Religion*" (p.4). While literary interpretation is of great significance to the *Tale*, it is also a concern, albeit a lesser one, in *Gulliver's Travels*. As a writer, Gulliver is directed by his readers' reaction to and consideration of his account of his experiences. He maintains that recording the truth of the events is of paramount importance to him. Gulliver's version of the truth, however, is filtered through his translation of the foreign cultures he encounters, but also through his explanation of his own culture to the inhabitants of the countries he visits and their contemplations upon this representation. Gulliver becomes yet another example of how to misinterpret, and thereby misrepresent, not texts specifically, but cultures -- and the interpretive checks and balances are provided by his various audiences, most

significantly his readers, the King of Brobdingnag, and the Master Houyhnhnm.

In the *Tale*, Peter is often described as the "Learned Brother" (p.90), and it is he who first decides that he will go "beyond the surface" of the dictates of the father's will. He convinces the brothers to search for Shoulder-knots "inclusivè, or totidem syllabis" in the document, and when this proves inconclusive, to "*make them out tertio modo, or totidem literis*" (p.83). Peter's clever manipulation of the text allows the brothers to adorn their coats, not only with Shoulder-knots, but with whatever ornament that happens to come into fashion. The problem, of course, with Peter's interpretive methods is that he goes outside of the text in question to justify the additions to the coats. According to the Author, Peter's reading of "*Aristotelis Dialectica, and especially that wonderful Piece de Interpretatione*" (p.85) has influenced his critical practice. Swift is ridiculing, not Aristotle, but both the Modern Author and Peter, because here is yet another text which they have misinterpreted as one "which has the Faculty of teaching its Readers to find out a Meaning in every Thing but it self" (p.85). Peter's sagacious logic becomes more and more specious as his desire to find justification for the addition of ornaments ultimately leads him to abandon the text altogether, and "Fashions perpetually altering in that Age, the Scholastick

Brother grew weary of searching farther Evasions, and solving everlasting Contradictions" (p.89). What Peter does not seem to realize is that, due to his exegesis of the text, he has created the contradictions by which he is now vexed. Roy Porter, in *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane*, calls the Modern Author an "obsessional theorist, utterly self-deaf and lacking the slightest trace of self-irony, spewing forth an inspired farrago of pseudo-logical nonsense to convince his audience that up is down and black is white" (p.116),² and the same description can easily be applied to Peter, signifying that he is not truly learned after all. Peter's vexation leads him, ultimately, "to comply with the [permissive] Modes of the [Modern] World" (p.89), and he and his brothers agree "unanimously, to lock up their Father's Will in a *Strong-Box* ... and trouble themselves no farther to examine it, but only refer to its Authority whenever they thought fit" (pp.89-90). In this manner the brothers become more and more superficial readers of the text, because they are, in fact, no longer reading the text at all.

Martin and Jack become increasingly dissatisfied with their brother's lack of judgement in interpreting their father's will. They do not pay the price of a tooth when they are forced to eat mutton that to their "*Eyes, and Fingers, and*

²Which, according to Gulliver, is exactly the aim of the legal profession.

Teeth, and Nose[s] ... seems to be nothing but a Crust of Bread" (p.118), but they come to understand that while Peter's philosophy may have brought him to the depth of things, he has come up with nothing. The two brothers leave Peter's house, but not before reclaiming the will from the depths of things -- that is, the cellar -- and taking "a *Copia vera*, by which they presently saw how grosly they [and the will] had been abused" (p.121).³ In their resolution to "alter whatever was already amiss, and reduce all their future measures to the strictest Obedience prescribed therein" (p.134), Martin and Jack attempt turn to a less contradictory, and more superficial reading of the will. The first task to which they set themselves is to compare "the Doctrine with the Practice" (p.134) of wearing the coats, and, discovering the difference between the two, they "reform their Vestures into the Primitive State, prescribed by their Father's *Will*" (p.135). In short, the brothers abandon Peter's specious

³Bakhtin, I suppose, might see this as just another instance of carnival inversion, where the abuse of brothers and text is ritual and necessary for their re-establishment. There is, however, little of the carnival atmosphere here -- unless, of course, we see the locking up of the will as the beginning of the carnival. The established laws being placed aside, the brothers are given/ give themselves free licence to "improve in the good Qualities of the Town: They Writ, and Railyed, and Rhymed, and Sung, and Said, and said Nothing; They Drank, and Fought, and Whor'd, and Slept, and Swore, and took Snuff" (p.74). This is not carnival in Bakhtin's sense, because these activities are not restricted by the temporality of the carnival. Swift's main point, of course, is precisely that -- this is the accepted behaviour of the rake; if behaviour of this sort was strictly confined to carnival, Swift's satire would not be quite so biting. Perhaps Swift is satirizing carnival, which -- for a certain class and gender at least -- has broken out of the bounds of carnival time, and therefore needs to be placed in check. When Martin and Jack cast out their concubines, replace their wives, and return to a more literal interpretation of the will, they effectively put an end to their carnival -- if for only a time.

learned reading, and opt for a more puritanical and literal, and thereby, superficial interpretation of the text. Having established themselves, Martin and Jack come to realize how different they are, not only from Peter, but from each other. They are individualized by the introduction of their names, and by their disparate reading strategies, which become apparent as they begin restoring their coats.

Although all three brothers have agendas that affect their readings of the will, at this point in the narrative, Jack's proves to be most destructive to his critical faculties, causing him to ignore the precepts of his father's will, just as Peter has done before him. Jack's desire to divorce himself from Peter causes him to set upon his coat with "Hatred and Spight, which had a much greater Share of inciting Him, than any Regards after his Father's Commands, since these appeared at best, only Secondary and Subservient to the other" (p.137). In light of his zeal, Jack becomes an ignorant reader, and thereby interpreter, of the will. Jack is aware that his treatment of his coat does not quite live up to his father's commands, and Martin's rather more prudent methods of reducing his coat to the original serves only to further enflame Jack's temper. This temper causes Jack to "rent the *main Body* of his Coat from Top to Bottom" while attempting to strip it of "a Parcel of *Gold Lace*" (p.138). His interests cause him, not to corrupt his father's doctrine with additions

of codicils and verbal precepts, but to abuse it in practice when he tears "off the whole Piece, Cloth and all, and fl[ings] it into the Kennel" (p.139). He encourages Martin to "*do as I do, for the Love of God; Strip, Tear, Pull, Rent, Flay off all, that we may appear as unlike the rogue Peter as it is possible*" (p.139). The "extremely flegmatick and sedate" (p.139) Martin proves invulnerable to Jack's entreaties, "resolving in no Case whatsoever, that the Substance of the Stuff should suffer Injury; which he thought the best Method for serving the true Intent and Meaning of his Father's *Will*" (pp.136-37).

Martin's prudence reveals him, out of the three, as the most truly learned reader of the text. He forgoes preaching doctrine to Jack, choosing "*rather to the Advance of Unity, than Increase of Contradiction*" (p.139). Martin's judgment, however, implies a certain unavoidable inconsistency, because his moderate interpretation of the will contradicts those of his brothers. Furthermore, his comparison between doctrine and practice leads him to see that many of the additions to the coat, particularly the close embroidery, now serve "to hide or strengthen any Flaw in the Body of the Coat, contracted by the perpetual tampering of Workmen upon it" (p.136). While his Modern Author may not, Swift makes it clear that both Peter and Jack's interpretations of the will are not simply alternative and valid readings, but

misreadings of the text. Martin's 'correct' reading of the will, then, is dependant upon previous 'incorrect' readings. While Swift displays an anxiety about the fact that invalid readings are possible, he seems to admit that they are, perhaps, necessary in that they produce controversy. He advises moderation and judgement, and the implication is that such an approach is the result of a dialogic process. Texts beget questions regarding meanings, and whatever answers are arrived at pose yet more questions and answers.

The question and answer method is, as James Rembert, in his *Swift and the Dialectical Tradition*, points out, dialectic. Although Rembert draws largely from the sermons and political tracts, he grounds Swift in the dialectical tradition with evidence from the fiction and verse as well. He compares Swift's method of argument, as well as the reasoning methods of the Modern Author, the Houyhnhnms, the Brobdingnagian King, and Gulliver himself to the Aristotelian model. The King of Brobdingnag, who is "as learned a Person as any in his Dominions and had been educated in the Study of Philosophy" (p.87), and is a "Prince of excellent Understanding" (p.111), follows this model. When Gulliver has finished his "long Discourses, his Majesty in a sixth Audience consulting his notes, proposed many Doubts, Queries and Objections, upon every Article" (p.113). He plies Gulliver with question after question about his

account of government and learning in England, as does the Master Houyhnhnm. The nature of the King's questions characterize him as a moderate and judicious interpreter of Gulliver's account. His comparison of account, questions, and subsequent answers serves to point out the many flaws in Gulliver's representation and in the institutions themselves. His descriptions of government and learning are as controversial to the King and the Master Houyhnhnm as they are for Gulliver's European readers.

Dialectic uses question and answer in "the pursuit of truth" (Rembert, p.11). Dialogue is not committed to such a pursuit, and is not strictly directed by questions and answers. Both dialogue and dialectic, however, assume conversation or discourse. In Bakhtin's sense of dialogue, "everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole -- there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, p.426). The brothers and their interpretations all interact with each other to form, albeit satirically, the whole of Christianity. In the mind of the Modern Author, each interpretation is equally logical, but not in Swift's. The abuses and corruptions that result from Peter and Jack's interpretations of the will invalidate their readings and make them controversial. It is through this process of controversy, both dialectical and dialogical, that the real meaning, that is,

Martin's reading, will be revealed -- much like the "*Fox*, who after long hunting, will at last cost you the pains to dig it out," and the "*Hen*, whose cackling we must value and consider, because it is attended with an *Egg*."

Martin's coat is "reduced into the State of Innocence" (p.140), and Jack, "after as many of the *Fox's* Arguments, as he could muster up," again tries to convince Martin that "his own ragged, bobtail'd Condition" (p.141) is the better one. The association between Jack and the elusive fox calls into question the assertion that the fox, or the wisdom it represents, is worth hunting. This is further problematized when one considers that the richer cheese, "has the thicker, the homlier, and the coarser *Coat*" [my emphasis]. If Jack indeed personifies this kernel of wisdom, then it seems clear that Swift either mistrusts this wisdom, or is doubtful that such an ultimate truth can exist, at least as far as literary interpretation is concerned.

The fox turns up again in the *Tale* in the "Introduction," where the Modern Author, after the discussion of foxes, cheese, and hens, turns to a discussion of his

compleat and laborious Dissertation upon the prime Productions of our Society, which besides their beautiful Externals for the Gratification of superficial Readers, have darkly and deeply couched under them, the most finished and refined Systems of all Sciences and Arts. (p.67)

The Author acknowledges that a similar project had been entered upon by another Modern, who began his work with "the History of *Reynard the Fox*" (p.67). Unfortunately this author died before his essay was published, but he had revealed "that famous Treatise to be a compleat Body of Civil Knowledge, and the *Revelation*, or rather the *Apocalyps* of all State-Arcana" (pp.67-68). The anonymous Editor's footnote, which undermines the Author's authority, asserts that *Reynard the Fox* is not the work of a Grubean sage as the Author professes, but a work, originally in Latin, and "above an hundred Years old" (p.67). Guthkelch and Nichol Smith agree. They cite a number of translated editions, written in both prose and verse, published in the late seventeenth century. One of these, *The Most Delightful History of Reynard the Fox: in Heroic Verse ... containing Wisdom and Policies of State* (1681), by John Shurley, was seriously extolled, by its author, as a key to human nature: "if it be seriously weighed and thorowly understood, it is the only Book to study men by, and to observe the Conditions both of high and low" (Guthkelch and Nichol Smith, eds, p.68n). Swift turns this claim into satire in the *Tale*, and again Jack, and whatever glimmering of truth he represents, bears the brunt of it. *Reynard the Fox* holds the "compleat Body of Civil Knowledge," just as Peter's bread contains the essence of, it seems, all foodstuffs (p.116), and Jack's parchment

becomes "*Meat, Drink, and Cloth, ... the Philosopher's Stone, and the Universal Medicine*" (p.190). This satire encompasses those "converting Imaginations" (pp.189-90) disposed "to reduce all Things into *Types*; who can make *Shadows*, no thanks to the Sun; and then mold them into Substances, no thanks to Philosophy; whose particular Talent lies in fixing Tropes and Allegories to the *Letter*, and refining what is Literal into Figure and Mystery" (p.190). Here Swift presents a tendency that runs contrary to the goal of dialectic. The pursuit is not for truth, but for mystery, which confounds, indeed, evades the truth. The Modern Author practises such evasion, and vexed readers of the *Tale* must, dialectically and dialogically, question the text and examine the mystery in search of the meaning of the text. As Kathleen Williams points out, "every fragment of the broken truth is shattered into still smaller, scintillating pieces, and only the barest and most casually indirect hints are given to help us in the task of fitting them together into their proper shape" (p.694). The Modern Author, however, is a creation of Swift's, and the satirist is a practitioner of just those methods he is satirizing. Recalling his challenge to his cousin to "explain some things," it seems clear that Swift delighted in the evasion. Swift has left his reader with "sufficient Matter to employ his Speculations for the rest of his Life" (*Tale*, p.185),

which serves to extend not only the life of the text, but increase Swift's own literary life expectancy.

The Taylor's Hell

In both *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift uses conversation or discourse as an important theme to direct the structure of the whole, and, more importantly, as the impetus behind the initial creation of the text.⁴ He extends the motif to incorporate the reader as interpreter into the conversation. These themes are more pervasive in the *Tale* than in the *Travels*, and more insistent in the mind of the Modern Author than in *Gulliver's*. Swift gives the *Tale* the form of a commonplace-book, constructing the *Tale* as both the product of and the stimulus to conversation, literary interpretation, and the foxy nuggets of wisdom that result.

After relating his account of his fellowship with the Brobdingnagians, Gulliver is urged by his rescuing Captain to "oblige the World by putting it in Paper, and making it publick" (p.131). Although Gulliver initially rejects this idea, albeit with the promise "to take the Matter into my Thoughts" (p.131), he ultimately takes the Captain's advice and becomes an author. Discourse is an important theme in the *Travels*, where much of the information Gulliver relates has come to him through conversation with the inhabitants of the countries he visits. In addition, Gulliver appeals to his

⁴Many of the scatological poems take the form of recreated conversations as well.

readers in an effort to direct their reading and point out his intentions, but also to invite them to join in the conversation.

The Modern Author of the *Tale* makes use of similar appeals, but conversation in this work gives way to commonplace when the Author confesses his reasons for becoming an author. In his "Disposure of Employments of the Brain," he uses the "*shining Hints* of the best *Modern Authors*, digested with great Reading, into [his] Book of *Common-places*" (p.209) to form the basis of his conversation. His commonplace-book must necessarily contain notable passages and quotations -- fragments of text -- that contain some version of the truth or kernel of wisdom for the Author which he intends for future use. These fragments are the "*shining Hints*," the hunted foxes, the richest cheese, the maggots, the deepest and sweetest parts of sack-possets, and the eggs -- doubtlessly with many worms thrown in besides -- which he has found in all of his reading. He attempts to incorporate these nuggets into discussion, but finds he cannot without "many Strains, and Traps, and *Ambages* to introduce" them (p.210). This "Disappointment, (to discover a Secret) I must own, gave me the first Hint of setting up for an *Author*" (p.210). However much his "great Reading" has been digested, his attempts to incorporate his reading, by way of commonplaces, remain unpalatable. Believing "many a *towardly Word*, to be wholly

neglected or despised in *Discourse*, which hath passed very smoothly, with some Consideration and Esteem, after its Preferment and Sanction in *Print*" (p.210), he turns his discourse into document.

The Author, however, rarely refers to his text as a treatise, and never as a document. He prefers to maintain the illusion of, and allusion to, conversation and discussion by continuously calling his text a discourse. When the Apology, dedications, digressions, and marginalia begin to overrun the Tale proper (which itself is reduced, by the end, to the bits and pieces -- "a few of the Heads" (p.204) -- that are left over), the work resembles the commonplace-book with which the Author began his venture into conversation. His constant references to the works of other authors, his own admission that in many passages he has adopted the style of other authors for the purpose of parody, and the very fact that the Tale proper is the work of another author -- all indicate that the *Tale* is a pastiche, a chimera.⁵ It is a literary Idol-Taylor's "Hell," into which scrap pieces of fabric are thrown, and which seems "to open, and catch at the Animals the *Idol* was creating; to prevent which, certain of his Priests hourly flung in Pieces of the uninformed Mass, or Substance,

⁵William King ridicules this when he, in *Some Remarks on the Tale of a Tub*, asserts that the "true Reasons why I do not descend to more Particulars, is, because I think the three Treatises (which by their Harmony in Dirt, may be concluded to belong to one Author) may be reduc'd to a very finall Compass, if the Common Places following were but left out" (p.8).

and sometimes whole Limbs already enlivened, which that horrid Gulph insatiably swallowed, terrible to behold" (p.76).

With the Lagadan literature machine, Swift further fragments the commonplace-book by mechanizing its creation. The projector

commanded Six and Thirty of the Lads to read the several Lines softly as they appeared upon the Frame; and where they found three or four Words together that might make Part of a Sentence, they dictated it to the four remaining Boys who were Scribes ... the Professor shewed me several Volumes in large Folio already collected, of broken Sentences, which he intended to piece together; and out of those rich Materials to give the World a compleat Body of all Arts and Sciences. (*Travels*, p.168)

The literature machine seems to be less actively insidious than the Taylor's Hell, but its function is no less frightening. When its handles are turned, the machine quite literally churns up the language, arbitrarily creating phrases that will later be pieced together. The advantage of this machine, of course, is that "the most ignorant Person at a reasonable Charge, and with a little bodily Labour, may write Books in Philosophy, Poetry, Politicks, Law, Mathematicks and Theology, without the least Assistance from Genius or Study" (pp.167-68). Gulliver is so pleased with this machine, that he promises to publicize its invention if ever he is able to

return to England. his fascination with this invention causes him to include an illustration of it in his work. Other than the maps and the portrait of the author, there are only two illustrations in the *Travels* -- the Flying Island and the literature machine -- signifying the importance Gulliver places upon both.⁶ The literature machine stands as the epitome of the commonplace and makes it wholly unnecessary to digest any "great Reading" at all. The collection of "broken Sentences" which the Projector intends to "piece together" remains similarly undigested, and one wonders how intelligible the result will be, despite Gulliver's compliments to this "illustrious Person for his great Communicativeness" (p.168).

The figure of the Idol-Taylor is an important one for the allegory of the coats, but also one which involves the theme of conversation. The various additions to the coats are explained by Wotton to be analogous to the various trappings of religion, but the Author explains them differently when he digresses from the narrative of the brothers to describe the cult of the Idol-Taylor. He says:

TO this system of Religion were tagged several Subaltern Doctrines, which were entertained with great Vogue: as particularly, the Faculties of the Mind were deduced by the Learned among them in this manner:

⁶This emphasis is, of course, lessened in later illustrated editions of the *Travels*.

Embroidery, was Sheer wit; Gold Fringe was agreeable Conversation, Gold Lace was Repartee, a huge long Periwig was Humor, and a Coat full of Powder was very good Raillery: All which required abundance of Finesse and Delicatesse to manage with Advantage, as well as strict Observance after Times and Fashions. (p.80)

The doctrine of the father's will prescribes against the addition of such conversational accoutrements, but the brothers adorn themselves with many of these things anyway. The victim of Swift's satire is not conversation as a whole, but what he considers to be *bad* conversation. In *Hints towards an Essay on Conversation*, Swift cautions his readers against "the Faults and Errors to which [Conversation] is subject" (*PW*,IV,p.87). Among these are precisely those he metaphorizes into the fashionable additions to dress. In fact, the Modern Author of the *Tale* employs many of these conversational faults and errors in his discourse, proving him to be "as unfit for Conversation as a Mad-man in Bedlam" (*PW*,IV,p.94) and establishing him as an example of a bad conversationalist in the same manner that Peter and Jack are revealed as bad interpreters of text. The Modern Author's failure at conversation and his penchant for commonplace further defines him as a cautionary figure.

The Taylor's Hell ingests pieces and limbs in the same manner as the *Tale* swallows the productions of its

answerers. Edmund Curll and William King are swallowed whole, but pieces of William Wotton remain stuck in the teeth of the ravenous maw as a satiric testament to that author's denunciation. Swift satirizes Wotton by cutting him up and feeding him into the grindstones of the Author's commonplace-book. The fact that there are answerers to the *Tale* suggests that the work itself is, perhaps, indigestible, and that critics like Wotton, however inadvertently, help to explain it. The pattern is similar to the Author's need to explain his commonplaces when he attempts to use them in conversation. The Modern seems to recognize the potential indigestibility of his work when he confesses that the *Tale* was written when the "*Author was then young, his Invention at the Height, and his Reading fresh in his Head*" (p.4), and that the manuscript of the published copy of the text had been out of his hands for several years before its publication, which made it impossible for him to do any mature editing of the text. Had he been able to do this, he seems to believe, it would not have met with the written opposition that it did -- which turns out to be beneficial, because he is given the opportunity to publish what he feels is the definitive edition of his text -- as opposed to the "*surreptitious Copy*" (p.29) being simultaneously published by the Bookseller. Even then, he does not carry out the changes he says he had intended to

make -- except of course to add the disclaimer here and there, warning the Reader that

He was then a young Gentleman much in the World, and wrote to the Tast of those who were like himself; therefore, in order to allure them, he gave Liberty to his Pen, which might not suit with maturer Years, or graver Characters, and which he could have easily corrected with a very few Blots, had he been Master of his Papers for a Year or two before their Publication. (p.4)

Here the author seems to contradict his assertion that "*our Tast [will] admit no great Alterations*" (p.3) The Author confesses that men of "*maturer Years, or graver Characters*" will not appreciate his work because they have different tastes than those of the Author in his youth. Of course the difference cannot be that great since he claims the changes could be made with "a very few Blots" -- but it would take "a Year or two" to correct the text with said blots. This contradiction is further complicated by the Author's assertion that, although he was "*without his Papers*" for a time, he "*had however a blotted Copy by him*" (p.16), suggesting that he had an already corrected version of the text in his possession.⁷ This particular remark is made in the "Apology" which was appended to the fifth edition of the *Tale*. If the Author indeed had a "blotted Copy" in his possession, one

⁷Guthkelch and Nichol Smith also regard this "blotted Copy" as a corrected text (p.xi), but make no comments upon the contradiction it implies.

wonders why he waited until this edition to disclaim the authenticity of any the previous editions.⁸

The Author's apparent insanity provides a convenient, but unsatisfactory, explanation. It is more interesting to suppose that Swift inserted this detail to suggest that the Author could have published a corrected edition sooner, but did not because he anticipated the controversy that the errors would elicit. The Author's proposal that "every Prince in *Christendom* will take seven of the *deepest Scholars* in his Dominions, and shut them up close for *seven Years*, in *seven Chambers*, with a Command to write *seven ample Commentaries* on this comprehensive Discourse" (p.185), is proof, not only that he desires to be read and interpreted, but that he is not at all anxious about the polysemic nature of his work. In fact, he knows that there can be many different readings of the *Tale*, and that when these commentaries have been completed, "whatever Difference may be found in their several Conjectures, they will be all, without the least Distortion, manifestly deduceable from the Text" (p.185). Although their intentions may have been otherwise, answerers like King, Curll, and Wotton, and indeed many others since, have accepted this invitation to experiment with

⁸Gulliver also complains that the first edition of his *Travels* is not faithful to his original manuscript. He asserts that the "very loose and uncorrect" (p.xxxiii) edition has interfered with his purpose for writing an account of his voyages, and, as a result, does not produce the reforms he intended to effect.

the meaning in the text, and their several conjectures have proved the Author's speculation to be correct.

Ingestion and digestion provide apt metaphors for critical interpretation and the understanding of texts in the mind of the Modern Author, but the metaphors also provide a hole in the text through which Swift can be seen. The satirist, in effect, inserts himself into the the Author's commonplace-book. Swift's voice, the commonplace form, and the Author's inability to digest his reading or make his own text digestible stimulates the readers' interpretive faculties. Each reader is forced to take part in the controversy over the meaning of the text, and to become one of those scholars whom the Author calls upon to comment upon the text. Commentary becomes an extension of commonplace, because the commentators must necessarily choose those passages to explicate. Swift further fractures the commonplace with his incorporation of Wotton into the text. In doing this, Swift not only acknowledges his detractor's criticism, but uses it to explain the text. Swift, however, is very careful about the points in the *Tale* he allows Wotton to elucidate. The inclusion of the set of footnotes penned by an unnamed editor performs the same function. The rest, however, is left to the speculation of the readers.

"The Carcass of *Humane Nature*"

Swift's use of the commonplace form and his treatment of interpretation are inextricably linked through both language and method with the human body, its functions and its decay. The Modern Author's equation of body and text allows him to delve into the workings of the body and apply them to text. The result is a literary work that is, in itself, a grotesque body that is generated, grows, and is kept alive through criticism and interpretation. The body images in the *Tale* center around ideas of insides and outsides, consumption and evacuation, corpulence and fecundity, reflecting the materiality of human existence. These images are present throughout Swift's entire corpus, indicating that the Modern Author's concern with the fate of the body -- both human and literary -- is also Swift's. The grotesque body is one of the main themes in *Gulliver's Travels*. Gulliver is the grotesque body in the first voyage, is given a microscopic view of that body in the second, and, in the third and fourth, must come to terms with the matter of the human body -- most particularly his own.

"Having lost its tie with folk culture, and having become a literary genre," says Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, "the grotesque underwent certain changes. There was a formalization of carnival-grotesque images, which permitted

them to be used in many different ways and for various purposes" (p.34). Bakhtin counts Molière, Voltaire, Diderot, and Swift among the users of these formalized carnival-grotesque images in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bakhtin adds that, in the works of these authors,

the carnival-grotesque form exercises the same function: to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (p.34)

The carnival spirit in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Tale of a Tub*, however, is less free and liberating than Bakhtin's description of its function would suggest. Swift certainly uses many of the images Bakhtin cites in Rabelais, particularly those involving the grotesque body and its lower stratum, but their function is largely satirical. Such images are rarely truly ambivalent in the *Tale* and the *Travels*, but rather they are more often employed for the purpose of degradation and debasement. There are cases where Swift utilizes the regenerative nature of the carnival images. These, however, are often parodic, and serve to even further debase the

objects at which the parody is aimed. Scatological and other bodily images serve as a means to fuse text and body so that the subject can be turned to flesh. For Bakhtin this is a necessary act of degradation in order to enable the renascence that will, for Swift, lead to a literary immortality.

The truly ambivalent carnival images in *Gulliver's Travels* are few and far between and usually revolve around laughter. Most occur in Part Two of the work. In one of the first instances of carnival laughter the mirth is generated by the diminutive Gulliver himself, but it is directed at a man who does not take the laughter kindly. A neighbour arrives at the farmhouse to see Gulliver and is treated to the first of Gulliver's many performances while in Brobdingnag, but it is the performer who is entertained. The neighbour

who was old and dim-sighted, put on his Spectacles to behold me better, at which I could not forbear laughing very heartily, for his Eyes appeared like the Full-Moon shining into a Chamber at two Windows. Our People, who discovered the Cause of my Mirth, bore me Company in Laughing, at which the old Fellow was Fool enough to be angry and out of Countenance. (p.80)

Here the already grotesque body is made even more so, and its fellows share in the resulting mirth. Furthermore, Gulliver's designation of the "Company" as "our People" signifies that he counts himself among these grotesque bodies, and his laughter is directed as much at himself, or at

least at his own point of view, as it is at the curious old gentleman, who is regarded as a fool because he is unable to see that this laughter is not disparaging. The reader will also recall that Gulliver himself is weak-sighted and carries spectacles, which served to protect his eyes from Blefusudian arrows in the earlier voyage (p.36), and that Gulliver is aware of the irony of his present situation given his adventures in Lilliput, which even further serve him as a point of self-identification with these grotesque bodies.

Pat Rogers identifies "Gulliver's Glasses" as an indication of Gulliver's role as observer and maintains that the importance Gulliver places on his spectacles is symptomatic of his desire "to peer and peep" (Rogers, p.183). Gulliver, Rogers continues, "has been too preoccupied by watching to receive any direct impress from life" (p.183), leading him to be an inaccurate interpreter of what he observes. Furthermore, Gulliver's glasses enable him "to hide and to peer out, to avoid bodily contact" (p.187) -- an instinct which Swift shares. Rogers ends his argument here, leaving the reasons behind this avoidance unexamined. Gulliver is an observer of the body he so wishes to avoid, and ultimately to deny, but he remains almost insatiably fascinated by that body. Both his identification with the grotesque Brobdingnags and his reflections upon his interaction with the Brobdingnagian

Maids of Honour and the adolescent Yahoo girl emphasize the ambivalence of his relationship to bodies.

While in Brobdingnag, Gulliver's minute stature affords a diversion for all with whom he comes in contact, particularly for the Maids of Honour who often invite Glumdalclitch to bring him to visit, "to have the Pleasure of seeing and touching" him (p.132). It is the habit of the Maids to "strip me naked from Top to Toe, and lay me at full Length in their Bosoms" (p.102). The Author is "much disgusted" by this "because ... a very offensive Smell came from their Skins" (p.102). He understands that this is due to his acute sense of smell and assures the reader that he does not intend to be disparaging toward these ladies. These "illustrious Persons [are] no more disagreeable to their Lovers, or to each other, than People of the same Quality are with us in *England*" (p.132). The implication here is that, perhaps, Gulliver would not have minded the attentions of the Maids were it not for their odour. The Maids, however, take their actions too far in Gulliver's eyes:

For they would strip themselves to the Skin, and put on their Smocks in my Presence, while I was placed on their Toylet directly before their naked Bodies, which, I am sure, to me was very far from being a tempting Sight, or from giving me any other Motions than those of Horror and Disgust. (p.103)

At this point, Gulliver, perhaps, protests too much. Again he understands the erotic, or otherwise stimulating, possibilities in the Maids' actions, but that potential is obliterated because of his acute senses. In other words, Gulliver sees the ambivalent nature of these particular images, but his microscopic eyesight, and the protection of his glasses (whether he is wearing them here or not), allows him to focus only on the negative, debasing half of the image. One of the Maids of Honour, "a pleasant frolicsome Girl of sixteen" (p.103) attempts to force Gulliver to look again. The scene exemplifies the Bakhtinian notion of the ambivalence of the lower bodily stratum. This particular Maid

would sometimes set me astride upon one of her Nipples; with many other Tricks, wherein the Reader will excuse me for not being over particular. But I was so much displeas'd, that I entreated *Glumdalclitch* to contrive some excuse for not seeing that young Lady any more. (p.133)

The reader can only suppose what these "other Tricks" may have been, but it seems clear that Gulliver's use here is masturbatory -- he is, as Bakhtin would say, literally "thrust into the lower bodily stratum" (*Rabelais*, p.382). Whether the diminutive Gulliver is reborn or unborn is a point of interpretation, but his interaction with the reproductive organs is unquestionable, and makes the distinction between rebirth and unbirth somewhat unnecessary. What is

important here is that Gulliver again rejects this action as any kind of birth and sees only his degradation at the hands (and other body parts) of the young Maid. Oddly enough, however, Gulliver does describe the girl as "pleasant [and] frolicsome," in spite of his distaste regarding the manner in which she has used him. This suggests that Gulliver does not consider the Maid's actions to be debasing to her, but only to himself, and, perhaps, due to nothing more than the disparity of size. This type of situation presents itself yet again; this time, however, the girl is a Yahoo.

While bathing in a river, Gulliver is attacked by a young female Yahoo who is "inflamed by Desire" (p.250). He is not disgusted by the occurrence, but is "terribly frightened" by the girl's "fulsome" (p.251) embrace and is mortified by the implications: "For now 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.251). Like the Brobdingnagian Maid, the young Yahoo girl is not degraded by her own actions. On the contrary, she is elevated by them and becomes, in Gulliver's estimation, less odious: "Neither was the Hair of this Brute of a Red Colour, (which might have been some Excuse for an Appetite a little irregular), but black as a Sloe, and her Countenance did not make an Appearance altogether so hideous as the rest of the Kind; for, I think, she could not be above Eleven Years

old" (p.251). Despite his feeling that after this episode he can no longer deny his Yahoo nature, Gulliver's refuses, ultimately, to accept the fact. His final word regarding this Yahoo girl is not his similarity to her, but her more refined and, it seems, civilized appearance. Gulliver nullifies his own Yahooization, as it were, in favour of Europeanizing this Yahoo, making her a less detestable object of identification.

Gulliver's impressions of these females suggests the disparity between size and species, or degree of (de)evolution, but also between insides and outsides. Gulliver is repulsed by his microscopic view of the naked outsides of the Maids of Honour, and by the inside of the "pleasant frolicsome" Maid. When the girls undress in front of him, they remove the final layer separating their bodies from Gulliver's. His revulsion at seeing the Maids stripped of their clothing recalls the Author of the *Tale* who is further convinced that "the *Outside* is infinitely preferable to the *In*" when he sees "a Woman *flay'd*" (p.173). The Author professes that his readers "will hardly believe, how much it altered her Person for the worse" (p.173). Neither Swift nor his Author restrict such observations to women. The Author orders

the Carcass of a *Beau* to be stript in my Presence; when we were all amazed to find so many unsuspected Faults under one Suit of Cloaths: Then I laid open his

Brain, his Heart, and his Spleen; But, I plainly perceived at every Operation, that the farther we proceeded, we found the Defects encrease upon us in Number and Bulk. (pp.173-74)

Ricardo Quintana views such scenes as evidence that

the only myth genuinely embraced by Swift is the myth that there are no myths, the myth for which he found many statements, all of them variants of the single theme of the outside vs. the inside ... This moral realism, emphasizing so mordantly and so insistently the deceptive fairness of the surface in contrast with what lies inside, was with Swift a passionate belief. Its metaphorical expressions, however, are less in the nature of myths than antimyths, being in fact a kind of parody with a grim and earnest purpose. As statements they are designed to narrow, to shrink, not to enlarge. (p.97)

The aversion the Author exhibits regarding the insides of the human body certainly does not advocate a further examination of that body, but the active part he takes in ordering the carcass of the Beau to be dissected for him displays his interest in exploring deeper.⁹ When the Author probes the depths of the body, he believes that he has come

⁹As opposed to the passive viewing of the "Woman *flay'd*." In addition, while the syntax may give a clue, it is unclear here whether 'flay'd' is meant as an adjective or a verb. The reader is left wondering if the Author witnessed the woman *being* flayed, or simply saw a flayed woman. The point seems minute, but in consideration of the Author's interest in processes, it is, perhaps, an important distinction. The result of the dissection of the carcasses both of the *Beau* and of *Humane Nature* disgust the Author, but he still finds the act of dissection intriguing enough to carry out each dissection in spite of what, one suspects, he *knows* he will find.

up with nothing worthwhile, but his conclusions regarding the matter reflect his tendency, as a writer, to couch his meaning in mystery. The Author insists that

whatever Philosopher or Projector can find out an Art to solder and patch up the Flaws and Imperfections of Nature, will deserve much better of Mankind, and teach us a more useful Science, than that so much in present Esteem, of widening and exposing them (like him who held *Anatomy* to be the ultimate End of *Physick*.) (p.174)

One of the flaws and imperfections of nature that most troubles the Author and his creator is the corporeality of the body. By soldering and patching up the matter of the body, Swift is not substantively asserting the absence of myths, but necessarily creating one of his own -- the myth of his own immortal and perfect literary body. Swift hides the imperfections of his own flesh, particularly the inevitability of its death, behind the body of and within the text. In vexing his readers by his insistence on scatology and bodily decay, Swift diverts his readers from his own mortification.

The process is extremely self-reflexive, yet simultaneously, attempts to avoid that reflexivity. Swift metaphorizes this impulse in the mirror of satire. "*SATYR is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own; which is the cheif Reason for that kind of Reception it meets in the World, and that so*

few are offended with it" (*Battel*, p.215), and "Satyr being leveled at all, is never resented for an offense by any, since every individual Person makes bold to understand it of others, and very wisely removes his particular Part of the Burthen upon the shoulders of the World, which are broad enough, and able to bear it" (*Tale*, p.51). When he turns his subject into flesh, Swift takes part in this deflection by casting his bodily reflection at his reader. The insistence of the image forces the reader to consider his or her own materiality, or to deny it -- or to first do one, and then the other, which is what Gulliver does over the course of the *Travels*.

Despite the difference in size, Gulliver identifies with the prodigious Brobdingnagians. This is not surprising considering his own grotesqueness in comparison to the Lilliputians. He cannot but smile at the sight of himself and the Brobdingnagian Queen reflected at full-length in a mirror. He observes that "there could be nothing more ridiculous than the Comparison: so that I really began to imagine my self dwindled many Degrees below my usual Size" (p.91). Gulliver's self-reflection is distorted by the disparity between himself and the Queen, but it is still an acceptance of his body. By shrinking his stature even further, however, he effectively debases himself. This self-debasement is one of the first steps Gulliver takes to the sense of liberation from

what Bakhtin refers to as "the prevailing point of view of the world." Gulliver likewise is given "the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists" -- an observation the Author makes himself: "I reflected what a Mortification it must prove to me to appear as inconsiderable in this Nation as one single *Lilliputian* would be among us" (p.71). His mortification at the idea of his own insignificance turns to philosophy as he begins to question his own world-view:

Undoubtedly Philosophers are in the Right when they tell us, that nothing is great or little otherwise than by Comparison: It might have pleased Fortune to let the *Lilliputians* find some Nation, where the People were as diminutive with respect to them, as they were to me. And who knows but that even this prodigious Race of Mortals might be equally overmatched in some distant Part of the World, whereof we have yet no Discovery? (p.99)

This, however, marks the end of Gulliver's philosophizing upon the matter of his own body, and his self-debasement ceases to contain any kind of regeneration in the Bakhtinian sense. His relationship to his body becomes increasingly negative until, after his encounter with the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms, he is entirely divorced from the matter of his flesh. Upon arriving in Houyhnhnm-land, Gulliver is confronted by a Yahoo who is soon joined by

others. Gulliver is filled with "Contempt and Aversion" (p.208) at the sight of these creatures and fends them off by backing himself up against a tree and brandishing his hanger. The Yahoos attack him in a method for which he is wholly unprepared:

Several of this cursed Brood getting hold of the Branches behind, leapt up into the Tree, from whence they began to discharge their Excrements on my Head: However, I escaped pretty well, by sticking close to the Stem of the Tree, but was almost stifled with the Filth, which fell about me on every Side. (p.208)

Bakhtin insists that "there is nothing grossly cynical in Rabelais' scatological images, nor in the other images of grotesque realism," which include "the slinging of dung, [and] the drenching in urine" (*Rabelais*, p.176). Many critics of Swift view his use of these images of grotesque realism as a symptom of the author's misanthropy, and therefore regard them as cynical. To Gulliver such images are shocking and offensive, and Swift plays on this notion by making Gulliver relate the particulars regarding the "Necessities of Nature." This is a particular problem in Lilliput, owing to his prodigious size. His reports of such events demonstrate an inability to view fecal matter with any kind of ambivalence. It is simply shameful and repugnant.

I had been for some Hours extremely pressed by the Necessities of Nature; which was no Wonder, it being almost two Days since I had last disburthened myself. I was under great Difficulties between Urgency and Shame. The best Expedient I could think on, was to creep into my House, which I accordingly did; and shutting the Gate after me, I went as far as the Length of my Chain would suffer; and discharged my Body of that uneasy Load. But this was the only Time I was ever guilty of so uncleanly an Action; for which I cannot but hope the candid Reader will give some Allowance, after he hath maturely and impartially considered my Case, and the Distress I was in. (p.37)

Undoubtedly the candid reader still feels that this, as well as the description of the daily ritual that follows, is a little more information than necessary to "justify [Gulliver's] Character in Point of Cleanliness to the World" (p.13). Had Gulliver not related this and other similar events, the point of his cleanliness would not be an issue. Gulliver's aversion to defecation reflects his growing abhorrence of his body, and while he recognizes that there may be some positive reasons for relating this at such length, any positivity is dependant on the negation of the act. Gulliver feels that his description of these particularities redeems him because of his repugnance regarding the matter.

A similar scene in Brobdingnag again involves the negation of the act itself and Gulliver continues to justify his relation of the event. He hopes to be excused for dwelling on

these facts, "which however insignificant they may appear to grovelling vulgar Minds, yet will certainly help a Philosopher to enlarge his Thoughts and Imagination, and imply them to the Benefit of publick as well as private Life; which was my sole Design in presenting this and other Accounts of my Travels to the World" (p.78). Gulliver's purpose may be didactic, but Swift's is certainly satirical. How, for example, does Gulliver expect these details to enlarge the "Thoughts and Imaginations" of a philosopher, and how might they be beneficially applied to public or private life? The answer may be that this point piques the curiosity of the reader and effectively affords "sufficient Matter to employ his Speculations for the rest of his Life." Of course there may also be some very practical applications involved, as Gulliver describes earlier in the text.

During his stay in Lilliput, Gulliver is awakened one night and told that her Majesty's apartment is on fire, due to "the Carelessness of a Maid of Honour, who fell asleep while she was reading a Romance" (p.39). He immediately joins the fire brigade, but owing to the small buckets and the extent of the blaze, the effort is ineffectual. Gulliver, however, has a solution:

I had the Evening before drunk plentifully of a most delicious Wine ... which is very diuretick. By the luckiest Chance in the World, I had not discharged myself of

any Part of it. The Heat I had contracted by coming very near the Flames, and by my labouring to quench them, made the Wine begin to operate by Urine; which I voided in such a Quantity, and applied so well to the proper Places, that in three Minutes the Fire was wholly extinguished, and the rest of that noble Pile, which had cost so many Ages in erecting, preserved from Destruction. (p.40)

As a result of this heroic feat, Gulliver is censured by the Empress for violating one of the laws of Lilliput -- "it is Capital in any Person, of what Quality soever, to make water in the Precincts of the Palace" (p.40) -- but is assured by the Emperor that he will be pardoned for his offense (which, ultimately, he is not), due to the great service he has done in saving the edifice.

Taken individually, many of the carnival-grotesque images in the *Travels* are devoid of their regenerative capabilities. They are negated -- not because Swift necessarily negates them, but because Gulliver does. Gulliver is nauseated by the weapons the Yahoos use against him; he is shamed by the fact that he must defecate; after urinating on the Imperial palace, he slinks away, because he knows he has done something wrong -- despite the good it has done. According to Bakhtin

Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth: it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not

merely imply hurling it into the void of non-existence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down into the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place. (*Rabelais*, p.21)

Gulliver ultimately refuses to be born again. At the end of the work he recognizes his status as a Yahoo, but, rather than embrace it, he rejects it. He hurls *himself* into "the void of non-existence." This is evident in his "Detestation of the Yahoo Race," which leads him to choose "rather to trust [him]self among ... *Barbarians*, than live with *European Yahoos*" (p.269). When he returns to England, Gulliver considers "that by copulating with one of the *Yahoo-Species*, [he] had become a Parent of more" (p.312). This realization strikes him "with the utmost Shame, Confusion, and Horror" (p.273). He spends his days in the company of his horses and keeps his "Nose well stopt with Rue, Lavender, or Tobacco-Leaves" (p.279), to prevent himself from smelling his family and other Yahoos. Gulliver lives in the negated, debased, and degraded half of the carnival-grotesque image -- without the hope of a regenerative new birth. He has retreated from the matter of his own body, but he has not entirely divorced himself from his flesh, because he is still a creature violently impressed by sensation. Sensation repulses him and he denies his body by avoiding stimulation, which includes bodily contact.

Throughout the work, Gulliver claims that he is giving the public an account of his travels so that they may be improved by it. The purpose, then, is regenerative. In the letter that opens the work, the Author complains that "instead of seeing a full Stop put to all Abuses and Corruptions, at least in this little Island, as I had Reason to expect: Behold, after above six Months Warning, I cannot learn that my Book hath produced one single Effect according to my Intentions" (p.xxxiv). One wonders that the prevailing world-view has not been affected, given that Gulliver himself gives no positive affirmation of the effects of such a change. Yes Gulliver has gained a "new outlook on the world" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.34), but it is one that looks solely upon the negative -- the rejection of the material bodily principle.

I have said that, taken individually, many of the the carnival-grotesque images in the *Travels* are mired in negation. This is not true, however, when the images are viewed in relation to each other. "Each image is subject to the meaning of the whole; each reflects a single concept of a contradictory world of becoming, even though the image may be separately presented. Through its participation in the whole, each of these images is deeply ambivalent" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.149). The work as a whole is structured on the alternation and fusion of diversion and mortification. Each voyage can be seen as a new birth that allows Gulliver to

view the world in a new way, whether he recognizes this potential or not. He virtually begins each voyage with a *tabula rasa*, carrying little or nothing from one to the other, making few valid interpretations of culture, and learning very little. One of the few elements that does persist is his increasing aversion to his flesh. Gulliver's ultimate stagnation serves to emphasize, not only the negative, but, moreover, the positive side of the grotesque images. He cuts a ridiculous figure at the end of the work precisely because the reader is aware of the potential Gulliver has not been able to grasp. This is the point of Swift's satire.

The reader laughs at Gulliver because he is so deeply entrenched in his abhorrence of his body and its functions. When Swift holds up the mirror of satire to his reader, he does so in a way that, as the satirist, he is not visible in the reflection. Instead he presents Gulliver, who, with all his foibles and idiosyncrasies, provides Swift with a scapegoat. Swift does not allow Gulliver the opportunity to be reborn through the carnival images because he must save that regeneration for himself. The reader wonders why Gulliver thinks that the details of his defecation may be beneficial to the public; why, despite her ill use of him, Gulliver continues to view the Maid of Honour as "pleasant [and] frolicsome"; why Gulliver sees the adolescent Yahoo as less odious than the rest of her species; why he so detests his body, and it is

Swift that will reap the benefits. The text vexes the reader who will wonder about, speculate upon, and interpret Gulliver, and in doing so will keep the *Travels* in the critical arena. Swift, as the real author of the work, and of the *Tale*, which is equally confounding, will become notoriously immortal.

"The Universal Medicine"

As a satirical work, *Gulliver's Travels* exposes the follies of men, of medicine and of science -- a function performed by the *Tale* as well. By the Tale-teller's own admission, his discourse provides a "*useful and diverting*" (p.4) satire on the corruptions in religion and learning. In his satirization of learning, science, and medicine, Swift finds the perfect way to vent his spleen -- through the body.

In the *Tale*, the satire on science and medicine includes Peter and Jack's inventions and cures. Jack's cures are composed of the parchment of the will itself and Peter's inventions are the result of his turning "*Projector* and *Virtuoso*" (p.105). Peter's many "famous Discoveries, Projects and Machines" (p.105) provide cures for as many illnesses as does Jack's "*Universal Medicine*". One of Peter's projects is his "Sovereign Remedy for the *Worms*, especially those in the *Spleen*" (p.107), and the operation is described in detail.

The Patient was to eat nothing after supper for three nights: as soon as he went to bed, he was carefully to lye on one Side, and when he grew weary, to turn upon the other: He must also duly confine his two Eyes to the same Object; and by no means break Wind at both Ends together, without manifest Occasion. These prescriptions diligently observed, the *Worms* would void

insensibly by Perspiration, ascending thro' the *Brain*.
(p.319).

His "*Whispering Office*, for the Publick Good and Ease of all such as are Hypochondriacal, or troubled with the Cholick ... In short, of all such as are in Danger of bursting with too much *Wind*," affords relief "either by Eructation, or Expiration, or Evomitation" (pp.107-8). Swift uses both Wotton and the anonymous editor to explain that by the "Sovereign Remedy for the *Worms*" and the "*Whispering Office*," the Author means to ridicule "*Penance and Absolution*" and "*Auricular Confession*" (p.107nn). Swift's satire, however, had another target as well. According to Roy Porter, in *Health for Sale: Quackery in England 1660-1850*, wind and worms, and other gastro-intestinal problems, were those most commonly 'cured' by quack physicians (pp.134-36).

The prescriptions of these two projects also recall the Academy of Projectors in Lagado, where Gulliver finds one physician attempting to find a cure for cholick.

He had a large pair of Bellows, with a long slender Muzzle of Ivory. This he conveyed eight Inches up the Anus, and drawing in the Wind, he affirmed he could make the Guts as lank as a dried Bladder. But when the Disease was more stubborn and violent, he let in the Muzzle while the Bellows was full of Wind, which discharged into the Body of the Patient; then withdrew

the Instrument to replenish it, clapping his Thumb strongly against the Orifice of the Fundament; and this being repeated three or four Times, the adventitious Wind would rush out, bringing the noxious along with it (like Water put into a Pump) and the Patient recovers. (p.165)

This particular patient, a dog, dies during the procedure and Gulliver, who had been directed to this room because he had been "complaining of a small Fit of the Cholick," leaves the physician "endeavouring to recover [the dog] by the same Operation"(p.165). Another physician is involved in an "Operation to reduce human Excrement to its original Food, by separating several Parts, removing the Tincture which it receives from the Gall, making the Odour exhale, and scumming off the Saliva" (p.164).¹⁰ These particular experiments parody the regenerative nature of the excremental image -- which Swift must initially understand if he is to parody it at all -- but are also parodies or satires of contemporary medicine and science.

Some of Swift's scatological images are satirical, but more in the spirit of carnival as Bakhtin sees it. In

¹⁰Here Swift links two carnival-grotesque images, food and excrement, something he does again in the episode involving the fire in the Lilliputian palace. Banquet and other food imagery in the work perform much the same function as do other carnival-grotesque images. In Lilliput, Gulliver is allotted enough food to feed "1728" (p.28) Lilliputians and several hundred cooks are assigned to the preparations of his meals. As a result, a daily "banquet for all the world" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p.278) occurs. In Brobdingnag, Gulliver is made "nauseous" by the eating habits of the inhabitants (p.90). The point of comparison seems to be lost on the Author. In Houyhnhnm-land, the Yahoos eat, among other things, "Ass's Flesh" (p.250), which perfectly fuses food, the lower bodily stratum, and regeneration. In his typical fashion, Gulliver is repulsed.

Houyhnhnm-land, Gulliver explains human medicinal practices to his master Houyhnhnm. All diseases, Gulliver explains, "arise from *Repletion*; from whence [doctors] conclude, that a great *Evacuation* of the Body is necessary, either through the natural Passage, or upwards at the Mouth" (p.237). Since Gulliver is a physician himself, he is familiar with the methods, but he speaks of other members of his profession in the third person, as if he does not now count himself among them -- perhaps yet another indication that he has divorced himself from any contact with the human, or Yahoo, body. The degeneration-regeneration dichotomy is apparent in his remarks, but his tone is ultimately disparaging:

For Nature (as the Physicians allege) having intended the superior anterior Orifice only for the *Intromission* of Solids and Liquids, and the inferior Posterior for Ejection; these Artists ingeniously considering that in all Diseases Nature is forced out of her Seat; therefore to replace her in it, the Body must be treated in a Manner directly contrary, by interchanging the Use of each Orifice; forcing Solids and Liquids in at the *Anus*, and making Evacuations at the Mouth. (p.238)

Gulliver apparently considers these operations to be as fruitless as those practised by the Lagadan physicians in the Academy.

The satire on learning in both the *Tale* and the *Travels* includes an attack on the Modern tendency "to become *Scholars* and *Wits*, without the *Fatigue of Reading* or of *Thinking*" (*Tale*, pp.144-45). Swift provides the *perfect* formula when he has his Author describe the work of a "great *Philosopher*" (p.125), whose method "was by a certain curious *Receipt*, a *Nostrum*, which after his untimely *Death*, I found among his *Papers*" (p.126). The Modern provides the recipe which ends with the prescription:

This you keep in a Glass Viol Hermetically sealed, for one and twenty Days. Then you begin your Catholick Treatise, taking every Morning fasting, (first shaking the Viol) three Drops of this Elixir, snuffing it strongly up your Nose. It will dilate it self about the Brain (where there is any) in fourteen Minutes, and you immediately perceive in your Head an infinite Number of Abstracts, Summaries, Compendiums, Extracts, Collections, Medulla's, Excerpta quædam's, Florilegia's and the like, all disposed into great Order, and reducible upon Paper. (pp.126-27)

Gulliver finds a professor experimenting with a similar method of transmitting knowledge in the Academy of Projectors in Lagado.

The Proposition and Demonstration were fairly written on a thin Wafer, with Ink composed of a Cephalick Tincture. This the Student was to swallow upon a fasting Stomach, and for three Days following eat

nothing but Bread and Water. As the Wafer digested, the Tincture mounted to his Brain, bearing the Proposition along with it.(p.170)

Swift presents both recipes as nostrums and their effectiveness necessarily remains suspect. The Lagadan projector cannot get his students to digest the wafer because the "Bolus is so nauseous" (p.170) and one cannot help but wonder if the great Philosopher's "untimely Death" is not the result of the taste of his own medicine.

The object of medicine, however, is to *cure* bodily ills, and the Author of the *Tale* maintains that his discourse will provide the same function. The Modern Author claims that he has written his work to appeal to all kinds of readers. The "*Superficial* Reader will be strangely provoked to *Laughter*, which clears the Breast and the Lungs, is Soverain against the *Spleen*, and the most innocent of all *Diureticks*" (p.185). Similarly, the "*Ignorant* Reader (between whom and the former, the Distinction is extreamly nice) will find himself disposed to *Stare*; which is an admirable Remedy for ill Eyes, serves to raise and enliven the Spirits, and wonderfully helps *Perspiration*" (p.185). The Modern Author touts his work as an elixir of sorts, making curative claims similar to those made in the rhetoric of quack medicine.¹¹

¹¹For a detailed and fascinating account of quackery in the period see Roy Porter's *Health for Sale*.

The Author's "great Work" in the field of literature is complemented by his dabbings in medicine, just as Gulliver's observations of the bodies he encounters, and the text that results, are directed by his profession as a doctor. The Modern Author can take his pulse to divine when he should write and can dissect the "Carcass of *Humane Nature*" to determine the function of literature. Literary criticism and medical operation are performed by the same acts of "Exantlation" and "Incision" (p.67). For Swift's Author literary corpus *is* human body, and the metaphor serves to strengthen his notion that texts, like bodies, can be administered to and doctored "for the Universal Improvement of Mankind." Gulliver also makes such remedial claims, insisting that, when writing the account of his travels, his "sole Intention was the PUBLICK GOOD" (p.276). The Modern, convinced of the power of his text, promises that "the Judicious Reader will find nothing neglected here, that can be of Use upon any Emergency of Life" (p.129), thereby infinitely increasing the curative properties of the work.

This claim, of course, is similar to Jack's resolution to make use of his father's will "in the most necessary, as well as the most paltry Occasions of Life" (p.361), as well as to many of Peter's projects which are medical in nature. Jack's interpretive faculties allow him to read and use the text in whatever means he sees fit, and in any given situation.

Interpretation turns medicinal when the physical document itself becomes the "*Universal Medicine*," a cure-all in the interpreter's hands. "He would lap a Piece of it about a sore Toe, or when he had Fits, burn two Inches under his Nose; or if any Thing lay heavy on his Stomach, scrape off, and swallow as much of the Powder as would lie on a silver Penny, they were all infallible Remedies" (pp.190-91).

The matter of the text restores both the flesh of the body and the frame of the mind, but reading and interpreting texts are not the only methods of recovery. The Modern Author claims that if

it were not for a *rainy Day*, a *drunken Vigil*, a *Fit of the Spleen*, a *Course of Physick*, a *sleepy Sunday*, an *ill Run at Dice*, a *long Taylor's Bill*, a *Beggar's Purse*, a *factious Head*, a *hot Sun*, *costive Dyet*, *Want of Books*, and a *just Contempt of Learning*. But for these Events, I say, and some Others too long to recite, (especially a *prudent Neglect of taking Brimstone inwardly*,) I doubt, the Number of *Authors*, and of *Writings* would dwindle away to a Degree most woeful to behold. (p.183)

Modern writers, then, write out of financial and physical necessity, and writing provides as much a remedy to ill-health (and ill-wealth) as does ingesting the product of the activity. The Modern claims that his own "Work was begun, continued, and ended, under a long Course of Physick, and a great want of Money" (p.44), conditions identical to those

under which, he claims, most writings are generated. The Author also suggests that whatever "Reader desires to have a thorow Comprehension of an Author's Thoughts, cannot take a better Method than by putting himself in into the Circumstances and Postures of Life, that the Writer was in, upon every important Passage as it flow'd from his Pen" (p.44). It is important that the Author was ill while he was writing the *Tale*. When he suggests that the readers put themselves into the same circumstance, he is also providing them with the medication that will cure their illnesses, because, Swift's satire makes clear, the medical profession will not.

The Author continues in his role as cause and cure when he begins "The Introduction" to the *Tale* with the vivid observation that "WHOEVER hath an Ambition to be heard in a Crowd, must press, and squeeze, and thrust, and climb with indefatigable Pains, till he has exalted himself to a certain Degree of Altitude above them" (p.55). Modern authors, then, must not only write as a remedy for bodily ills, but must inflict pain upon themselves and others in order to be read. The vast body of other writers is not unknown to Swift, for he knows that the house of "Fame ... is so full that there is no room for above one or two at most, in an age through the whole World" (*Corr* III, p.355). But this does not stop Swift from attempting to "press, and squeeze, and

thrust" himself into that house through his writings. As Flynn points out, "writing for Swift is not only a physical act, but an act of physical aggression" (*Body*, p.199). The very composition of the ink spent in *The Battel of the Books* signifies not only this aggression, but also physic, as it is made "of two Ingredients, which are *Gall* and *Copperas*" (p.221). Swift claims that these two ingredients serve to "*Suit* in some Degree, as well as to *Foment* the Genius of the Combatants" (p.221), suggesting both the caustic and medicinal properties of the ink.

In context, Swift wrote *The Battel of the Books* as a weapon in the war between the Ancients and Moderns. In 1690, William Temple revives the controversy and begins a pamphlet war with his *An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, but "he was for all practical purposes summoning a ghost" (Starkman, p.12). "Swift wages a battle for the Ancients, when, for the most part, the Moderns had already effectively won that war" (Starkman, p.3). The initial controversy is dead and the war has already been lost, but the battle wages anyway, and is kept alive through additional controversy and through the writing of pamphlets -- pamphlets written in "*Gall* and *Copperas*," the latter used in both ink and medicine. In this war, Swift had an example of a life restored through texts generated by controversy. It is not a human life of course, but rather the cause that is reborn.

The restorative nature of the text, the Author of the *Tale* hopes, will serve him yet further. His cause is his own mortality, a subject he returns to often throughout the work. The Author's eagerness to taste the fame that results from his labours indicates an anxiety, not only regarding his own mortality, but that of his "Words; which are also Bodies of much Weight and Gravity" (p.60). "Books, like Men their Authors," he tells Prince Posterity, "have no more than one Way of coming into the World, but there are ten Thousand to go out of it, and return no more" (p.36).

The Author ties together the themes of literature, mortality, and digestion when he claims that the "Conclusion of a Treatise, resembles the Conclusion of a Human Life, which hath sometimes been compared to the End of a Feast; where few are satisfied to depart, *ut plenus vita conviva*" (p.208). Although the Modern claims here to want to "contribute to the *Repose* of Mankind" (p.208), he concludes his work with only a pause until he deems it necessary to begin writing again. In pausing to feel his pulse, the Author enters into a medical examination of his body and of his reasons for writing. His promise to resume his pen forestalls a conclusion to the *Tale*. If his treatise does not end, then perhaps neither will his life. The Modern professes "*Immortality* to be a great and powerful Goddess" (p.34). Both Swift and his Modern, however, know that physical

immortality is impossible, and that "in vain we offer up to her our Devotions and our Sacrifices" (p.34). The Modern Author's complaint that, when he goes in search of the "immortal Productions" (p.33) of his pen at the Bookseller's, he enquires "in vain, the *Memorial of them was lost among Men, their Place was no more to be found*" (pp.34-35) save, perhaps, in "a *Jakes, or an Oven*" (p.36). Swift's lament, in the "Verses," upon the fate of his own works is quite similar:

Some Country Squire to *Lintot* goes,
 Enquires for *Swift* in Verse and Prose:
 Says *Lintot*, I have heard the Name:
 He dy'd a Year ago. The same.
 He searcheth all his shop in vain;
 Sir you may find them in *Duck-lane*:
 I sent them with a load of Books,
 Last *Monday* to the Pastry-cooks.
 To fancy they could live a Year! (ll.253-261)

Swift, through his Modern Author, wonders "whether it be possible for any mortal Ink and Paper of this Generation to make a suitable Resistance" (p.32) to the ravages of time and changing tastes. The Author suggests that the only way this is possible is to supplicate, not the Goddess "*Immortality*," but the Goddess Criticism. In *The Battel of the Books*, she is "a malignant Deity" -- the incestuous child of "*Pride*" and "*Ignorance*" (p.240) -- who comes to the aid of her "*devout Worshippers, the Moderns*" (p.241). Throughout

the *Tale*, but especially in "A Digression concerning Critics," the critics themselves are both deified and defied. This reflects Swift's anxiety concerning literary criticism. He understands that criticism and controversy are necessary for the longevity of his works, yet he remains disturbed by the fact that critics are "a greater Nuisance to Mankind, than any of those Monsters they subdued" (p.94). Out of fear of criticism, "*the Learned ... took Warning of their own Accord, to lop the Luxuriant, the Rotten, the Dead, the Sapless, and the Overgrown Branches from their Works*" (p.98). This is exactly, however, what Swift does not allow his Author to do, leaving him, therefore, to the devices of the "*Discoverer[s] and Collector[s] of Writers Faults*" (p.95). These critics will, in turn, reduce the Author to his flaws, and collect them in what is, in effect, a commonplace-book.

"The Conclusion of a Treatise"

I am now trying an Experiment very frequent among Modern Authors; which is, to *write upon Nothing*; When the Subject is utterly exhausted, to let the Pen still move on; by some called the Ghost of Wit, delighting to walk on after the Death of its Body. And to say the Truth, there seems to be no Part of Knowledge in fewer Hands, than That of Discerning *when to have Done*. By the Time that an Author has writ out a Book, he and his Readers are become old Acquaintance, and grow very loth to part: So that I have sometimes known it to be in Writing, as in Visiting, where the Ceremony of taking Leave, has employ'd more Time than the whole Conversation before. (*Tale*, p.208)

When Swift, through his Modern Author, invokes the "Ghost of Wit," he effectively calls upon the Goddess Immortality to enable him to "walk on after the Death of [his] Body." Swift's desire for literary immortality is reflected in the images around which he constructs his satires. The grotesque body enlivens the *Tale*, shapes the *Travels*, and allows Swift an "inventive freedom" that goes beyond the purpose of a mere trope. In many ways, Swift, the literary figure, *is* the grotesque body which expands with each new edition and with each commentary. The *Tale* swells, as does the *Travels*, with each telling -- whether it be the Modern Author's, Gulliver's, Swift's, Wotton's, Ehrenpreis', or Flynn's version. The interaction among *Travels*, *Tale*, digressions,

marginalia, dedicatory letters, answers, commentaries, keys, and tables serves to keep the works in the critical arena -- that carnival space that both makes and breaks a work of literature.

Literary criticism is a dialectical and dialogical practice, because author, text, and interpreter(s) come together in a discursive space. All three pose questions and suggest answers in a potentially never-ending process. For Swift the object is not to grab hold of the fox's tail/tale -- to fix meaning in any definitive sense -- but to be aware of that process: to hunt, to dig, to "chuse with Judgement." Judicious readers are necessarily aware of the need for the ongoing practice of question and answer: this is precisely the method Swift advocated.

Swift's preoccupation with the matter of the body reflects that self-awareness. When Gulliver rejects his body, he demonstrates a lack of self-reflexivity that is epitomized in his unwillingness to look in a mirror during his visits to Brobdingnag, "because the Comparison gave me so despicable a Conceit of my self" (p.131), and to Houyhnhnmland, where when "I happened to behold the Reflection of my own Form in a Lake or Fountain, I turned away my Face in Horror and detestation of my self" (p.262).

When Gulliver imagines himself a Struldbrug, he ignores the matter of the body, assuming that immortality

necessarily negates that matter, makes it ineffectual and inconsequential in the shadow of the immortal power of the mind. When Swift exposes Gulliver's erroneous assumptions, he reasserts the body, but it is a body wasted by eternal death. Gulliver, once he has witnessed the Strudbrugg reality, observes

long Life to be the universal Desire and Wish of Mankind. That whoever had one Foot in the Grave, was sure to hold back the other as strongly as he could. That the oldest had still Hopes of living one Day longer, and looked on Death as the greatest Evil, from which Nature always prompted him to retreat; only in this Island of *Luggnagg*, the Appetite for living was not so eager, from the continual Example of the *Struldbruggs* before their Eyes. (p.195)

Swift gives his reader the "continual example" of, not just the Struldbruggs, but of the matter of every body. By presenting the body, its functions, and its decay so pervasively in his works, Swift is creating *putrefiction* -- literature that putrifies, and is about putrefaction.

The body and its decay was a real concern for Swift. He suffered from Ménière's disease, the symptoms of which undoubtedly increased his awareness of his body. The presence of the ever-growing population of Dublin's poor insisted that Swift was not the only one in decay. The changing face of the literary, scientific, and medical worlds

emphasized for Swift the evanescence of all that surrounded him. Despite all this, however, Swift could not follow the example of the people of Luggnagg. Gulliver, in his illusive musings about immortality, longs to "see the Discovery of ... the *universal Medicine*" (p.194). Jack has found that medicine, and so has Swift. It is the "Ghost of Wit." It is literature, for, as Swift writes in a letter to John Gay, "The World is wider to a Poet than to any other Man, and new follies and Vices will never be wanting any more than new fashions. Je donne au diable the wrong Notion that *Matter* is exhausted" (*Corr III*, p.36).

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¹²All citations for *Gulliver's Travels* are from this edition.

¹³All citations for *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battel of the Books* are from this edition.