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Mr. Milan Mondal, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Narajole Raj College

Chapter wise summary and critical analysis of *Gulliver's Travels*

Book IV: Chapter 1

Summary

After five months at home, Gulliver is offered and accepts the position of captain of the merchant ship. During the voyage, several of his crew become ill, and Gulliver is forced to hire new crew to continue their journey. Unfortunately, those hired are pirates who organize a mutiny on the ship and leave Gulliver on an island where he encounters a pugnacious, abominable "odious" group of animals that look and act like primates and that attack him by climbing trees and defecating on him. Their attack ends when a horse appears on the road. This horse studies Gulliver with great curiosity and is soon joined by another horse, both of which seem to converse using words which Gulliver understands as *Yahoo* and *Houyhnhnm*.

Analysis

Gulliver's narration of his fourth voyage begins much as the others have. He uses a dry and matter-of-fact tone, and he offers a great deal of nautical detail. The style is deliberately prosaic. Swift is reaffirming Gulliver's unimaginative and credulous character. We can expect Gulliver to report what happens in Houyhnhnm land just as exactly and as reliably as he does sailing dates, cargo information, and ports of call.

One other matter that might be noted before the adventure proper begins concerns the circumstances which have deposited Gulliver in the various foreign lands. Increasingly, these circumstances have become more serious. The sailors, in this section, maroon Gulliver out of treachery, malice, and ingratitude, whereas earlier he had been abandoned because of bad luck, fear, and greed. As Gulliver's mishaps become more threatening, the subject of each section becomes weightier.

Gulliver's description of the Yahoos displays one of Swift's most effective techniques: He describes the familiar in terms that are new. At first, the Yahoos seem familiar, but who, or what, they are is obscure. Then, with a jolt, Swift's



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point is obvious; the Yahoos are humans. Swift also captures the interest of his reader by posing a problem. He does not identify the Houyhnhnms as *rational* horses in this first chapter; therefore, the reader, like Gulliver, must try to solve the puzzle of who, or what, they are.

Gulliver describes the Yahoos as ". . . deformed . . . Their heads and breasts were covered with thick hair . . . but the rest of their bodies were bare . . . They had no tails and often stood on their hind feet . . ." Then he adds, "I never beheld in all my travels so disagreeable an animal." The behaviour of these animals is equally disgusting as Gulliver describes defending himself from them by drawing his sword and backing up to a tree for protection, but they then climb the tree and begin defecating on him. On the other hand, Gulliver's description of the horses, the Houyhnhnms, is almost idyllic: "The behaviour of these animals was . . . orderly and rational . . . acute and judicious." Indeed, it is a horse that rescues him from the Yahoos — not by any overt, physical action, but by simply appearing on the road — no physical action being necessary.

Book IV: Chapter 2

Summary

Gulliver, accompanied by the grey steed, walks to the grey's house where Gulliver meets several other Houyhnhnms. The grey (the master of the house) then takes Gulliver into a "court" where he observes several Yahoos eating roots and the flesh of "dogs and asses." Gulliver is placed near one of the Yahoos for comparison by the grey and his servant (a sorrel nag). Gulliver, at the same time, inspects the Yahoo standing next to him more carefully, and he realizes very quickly that the Yahoo has "a perfect human figure." As for the Houyhnhnms' reaction, the grey and his servant note that, with the exception of Gulliver's body covering (and his shorter hair and fingernails), he and the Yahoos are identical. Later Gulliver learns that his diet will consist of oats (naturally) that can be roasted, ground into flour, and mixed with milk to produce a kind of paste (an oatmeal) that he can eat. The grey also provides Gulliver with some temporary living quarters in a building near the stable.

Analysis

The contrast between the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos is extreme. The horses are clean and sweet-smelling; their diet is temperate and vegetarian. Their habits



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constitute the temperance that the eighteenth century thought characterized reasonable man, stoics, and Adam before the fall. The Yahoos, on the other hand, are human in form and feature. They are filthy and they stink. They are omnivorous but seem to prefer meat and garbage. Significantly, they eat nearly everything prohibited by the biblical and Levitical food codes. Swift uses these details to make his comparison clear: the Yahoos' diet is depraved, whereas the horses' diet is like that of Man before the Fall.

Swift positions Gulliver midway — figuratively and literally — between the super-rational, innocent horses and the filthy, depraved Yahoos: Gulliver's home is midway between the stable house and the Yahoo pens. Gulliver lives an uneasy compromise with his nature. Physically, he is a Yahoo and only his clothes, thus far, prevent the horses from identifying him as a Yahoo. If the Houyhnhnms had recognized Gulliver as a Yahoo, Swift would have found it difficult to explain the way in which some of them accept Gulliver. Thus Gulliver's clothes are an excellent device for Swift. Because Gulliver's naked Yahoo-like self is hidden, Gulliver's identity is also hidden. Swift's point is that humans' basic difference from the Yahoo is largely artifice. Clothing — something artificial and extrinsic — "distinguishes" Gulliver.

Diet also places Gulliver midway between the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms. He cannot live on oats alone. He must have some meat and some variety in his diet — the paste of grain and milk, for instance. Gulliver will try with admirable determination to improve himself; he will try to change himself into a more horse-like state, but he will fail. He is, simply, more of a Yahoo than a Houyhnhnm. His diet and his physique will prevent him from ever becoming a horse.

Swift uses Gulliver's character to establish a further point. Gulliver reacts to the Yahoos with immediate and overpowering detestation. He is horrified by the Yahoos' similarity to him. He lacks the humility to see himself as a sort of Yahoo. Rather, his pride leads him to try to become a horse. Yet Swift is saying that a person is not suited to become a "horse" (a dispassionate and virtuous stoic). Such dreams are as futile as Gulliver's belief that if he thinks hard enough, he can acquire a fetlock or pastern.



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Book IV: Chapter 3

Summary

Adept at languages, Gulliver learns rather quickly to talk with the Houyhnhnms. They speak a strange language, he says, yet it is similar to High Dutch. Besides the Houyhnhnms teaching Gulliver, he teaches them. They have no books, so Gulliver shows them how to write. The Houyhnhnms are truly mystified by their visitor; he seems to be so much like a Yahoo, but he also seems to be a rational Yahoo — a combination which they believe to be impossible. Gulliver describes for the Houyhnhnms the mutiny that stranded him, and they are astonished by the notion of a "lie." Horses, they say, do not even have a word for the concept of lying. They explain further that besides *Houyhnhnm* meaning "horse," it is derived from a word meaning "perfection of nature." Gulliver's Houyhnhnm host is curious about Gulliver's modesty. After all, he reasons, why would anyone want to conceal what nature has made? When he is naked, however, Gulliver looks *very* much like a Yahoo, so Gulliver's host promises to keep his guest's clothing a secret.

Analysis

Swift continues the theological implications he began with the dietary references in the first chapter. A Germanic scholar in the Renaissance had learnedly and earnestly proved that the language Adam and Eve spoke in paradise was High Dutch. Also, Charles V is supposed to have said that he would speak to his God in Spanish, his friend in English, his mistress in French, and his horse in German. The theory that Adam and Eve spoke German was familiar to Swift's audience. Milton had joked about it before Swift.

Swift has established the distinctions between Gulliver, the horses, and the Yahoos by using physical and concrete objects. He makes his point explicit by defining *Houyhnhnm*, which means "perfection of nature." This definition establishes an important distinction. The horses are uncorrupted by passion — either base or noble. They are devoid, for example, of charity. Also, they are not subject to temptation. Like Adam, they cannot understand the use of clothing. Swift never suggests that the Houyhnhnms stand for perfected human nature; on the contrary, they manifest *innocent* human nature. What they do — and what they say and think — *is* akin to human nature, but the character of the Houyhnhnms is far from Gulliver's. They are ignorant of many things which



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most people would consider venial. They cannot, for example, understand lying — or even the necessity for lying.

Swift thus establishes a range, or spectrum, of existence. The horses are literally innocent, having never (in theological terms) "fallen"; the Yahoos are super-sensual and depraved. The Houyhnhnms are ice-cold reason; the Yahoos are fiery sensuality. In between these extremes is Gulliver.

Book IV: Chapter 4

Summary

Gulliver and his master continue their discussion of concepts that are difficult for the master to comprehend — especially those related to lying and doing evil. Gulliver explains the role of Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos in Gulliver's country, and, of course, the master is shocked when he learns how the roles are reversed. The master observes that the Yahoos in his land are better adapted for their lives than Gulliver. The master also compares the Houyhnhnms to the Yahoos and determines that the Houyhnhnm, as an animal, is much more functional than the Yahoo.

Analysis

Here, Swift begins to contrast the natural innocence of the horses with the depravity of the European Yahoos. He repeats the discussion about lying, thereby emphasizing the Houyhnhnms' uncorrupted reason; the horses cannot understand the nature of a lie.

Swift balances the earlier discussion of clothing by discussing the Houyhnhnm vocabulary. He infers that power, law, government, and punishment (words that have no equivalent in the Houyhnhnm language) are all artificial. Like clothing, which conceals and restructures the appearance of the body, these institutions restructure a people. They are Swift's moral equivalent of the physical clothing that the European Yahoo wears.

Swift attacks the legal profession by quoting many legal terms. The Houyhnhnms have no such words; natural virtue requires no lawyers. Besides being a satiric end in itself, this fun with words prepares us for the discussion of European social institutions.



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Book IV: Chapter 5

Summary

Describing England to his master, Gulliver talks at length about the bloody wars fought for "religious reasons" — Europeans, he says, will kill over whether flesh is bread or whether blood is juice or wine. Likewise, they murder each other out of jealousy for a government post. An invading prince, Gulliver says, will conquer a country, kill half the population, and make slaves of the rest, all in the holy name of civilization. Gulliver's master comments that, although *his* Yahoos are abominable, English Yahoos are far worse because they use their reason to magnify, yet excuse, their vices.

Gulliver then turns to the subject of England's legal system. The man in the right, he explains, is always at a disadvantage because lawyers are not comfortable unless they are arguing for the wrong side. In short, lawyers are the most stupid of all Yahoos; they are enemies to knowledge and to justice.

Analysis

In this chapter, Swift uses the technique of paradox as fuel for his satire. He gives paradoxical explanations for secular war, contrasting actual motives with professed motives. Swift is saying that men use their reason to give themselves *excuses* — instead of *alternatives* — for wars. Although we are not physically dangerous, we use reason to increase our power to kill. Swift concludes that as our reason increases so, proportionately, do our vices. From the gunpowder illustration, Swift moves to a social illustration: law and lawyers. The details he gives emphasize lawyers' antipathy to right reason: They destroy reasonable conversation, fight knowledge, and use reason to exalt injustice.

Book IV: Chapter 6

Summary

Gulliver discusses money and the difference between the poor and the rich. People lust for luxury, he says, but once they have it, it breeds sicknesses. And who treats the sick? Doctors — who can "magically" predict death because they can always kill their patients. Doctors, Gulliver laments, seldom cure. Gulliver then digresses to matters of state, citing a characteristic minister. This minister



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may gain an office by prostituting his wife or daughter. Or he may betray his predecessor. Or, hypocritically, he may attack government corruption.

Analysis

Money is stigmatized in this chapter as gunpowder was in the last. It is a medium whereby people can satisfy their vices and extend their misuse of reason. Swift draws on a theory that Bernard Mandeville made popular in his *Fable of the Bees*. Mandeville held that private vices increased business; thus private vices were public virtues. In Swift's view, private vices are no excuse for money-making; they constitute a vicious circle. To him, private vices are public vices.

Diet symbolizes these public vices which are pandered to by money. Great sums of money enable people to eat so-called gourmet foods in extravagant quantities. Such a diet is not necessary; indeed, it undermines health. Simple fare is far better. Yet expensive gourmet food is a status symbol. This artificially valued, unwholesome diet is thus paralleled with the naturally unwholesome fare of the Yahoos.

This chapter is one of the most complex, but one of the most unified, in the book. Swift starts with money and luxury, linking these to health and morality. He then uses doctors to associate disease with politics. Doctors can kill their patients; and the poisons that medicine has discovered can sometimes be "useful" to politicians. Finally, he links disease and luxury to the entire nation by describing the genetic defects and venereal diseases of the nobility, who marry for political and commercial reasons.

Book IV: Chapter 7

Summary

Impressed by the virtues of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver decides to tell, freely and truthfully, as much as he can about Man. Gulliver has come to venerate the Houyhnhnms and hopes to be able to stay among them for the rest of his life. But Gulliver cannot be absolutely truthful; he extenuates people's faults and over praises their virtues. The more Gulliver tells, however, the more thoroughly he convinces his master that there are genetic and psychological links between humans and Yahoos.



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Analysis

Swift sets up a point-by-point comparison between the Houyhnhnms' Yahoos and the European Yahoos he described earlier. He makes the moral flaws of Europeans vivid, concrete, and personal in the Yahoos. Yahoos collect stones as Europeans collect money. Yahoos fight among themselves like Europeans; their motive, like the Europeans' motive, is greed. They even have tribal politicians. The Yahoos get drunk and "howl and grin, and chatter, and reel, and tumble, and then fall asleep in the dirt." They are subject to melancholy and the "spleen" — fashionable complaints of rich Englishmen. For all their faults, however, the Houyhnhnms' Yahoos are not as vicious as the European Yahoos. What flaws the Yahoos have by nature, the Europeans increase and intensify through a perversion of their reason.

Book IV: Chapter 8

Summary

Gulliver visits the Yahoos but cannot reconcile himself to their vulgarity. They eat frogs and fish and kennel in holes. They stink, cannot be housebroken, and hurl excrement at one another. When Gulliver goes swimming, he is cornered by one of the amorous females who embraces his naked body and, Gulliver says, would have sexually assaulted him had his protector, the Sorrel Nag, not saved him. In contrast to the Yahoos, the Houyhnhnms govern themselves wholly by reason. They take good care of their young, but they do it on the grounds of reason. Accordingly, they breed for strength and comeliness; no Houyhnhnm marries for either love or money. Also, there is no adultery. Once every four years, Gulliver tells us, the Houyhnhnms meet for an assembly to settle all problems. Not surprisingly, there are few or no problems that need solving.

Analysis

Houyhnhnms are a breed of moral animal, different from the Yahoos or Europeans. We have, in fact, already seen this difference in Chapters 3 through 6. Houyhnhnm society is a rational (and, metaphorically, a bloodless) utopia. It contains details taken from Plato, as well as from More; both men proposed such societies as methods of curing people's vices. Swift demonstrates, however, that these utopias are only suitable to fully rational and totally



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innocent creatures; they are only inhabitable by the type of creature who doesn't need the cure.

The rest of Book IV is spent exploring Gulliver's pride — the extraordinary and perverted pride that makes him aspire to be a horse.

Book IV: Chapter 9

Summary

Gulliver's master attends one of the Houyhnhnm assemblies, and, when he returns, he relates to Gulliver what happened. One horse, he says, contended that the filthy and vicious Yahoos should be exterminated because they are not native to the Country of the Houyhnhnms, they are instinctively hated, and they have been allowed to increase because they can be used as beasts of burden. It would be better if the Houyhnhnms had bred the useful, sweet-smelling, and hard-working donkey. Gulliver's master advanced an argument at the assembly that he borrowed from Gulliver: If Yahoos in England castrate Houyhnhnms, why couldn't the Houyhnhnms castrate the Yahoos?

Then Gulliver tells us more about the Houyhnhnms: They are a reasonable and healthy race. They understand the nature of the eclipse (the sum of their astronomy). They use only months to reckon time. They have no literature but do compose poetry which is moral and accurate. Their only word for evil is *Yahoo*. As for their houses, they build crude but clean and useful buildings. They use their hollow hooves as we use fingers and, considering this, are most adept. When Houyhnhnms die, they are buried quietly; there are no rituals and there is no mourning.

Analysis

In this chapter, Swift continues his thematic assault on humanity as represented by the Yahoos. The most obvious example relates to the general assembly's debate over the status of the Yahoos. The arguments for exterminating the Yahoos are compelling: The Yahoos are "the most filthy, noisome, and deformed animals which nature ever produced . . ." and they are "restive and indocible, mischievous and malicious." In terms of their evolution, the words used to describe the Yahoos are "degenerating by degrees." Not only this, but Gulliver tells the reader that the only reason that the Yahoos were eventually



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rounded up into herds was because the Houyhnhnms had "neglected to cultivate the breed of asses [donkeys and burros]" needed to do pulling and other basic labor tasks required in the Houyhnhnm society. In short, Yahoos are unnatural beasts and are hated by every other animal. Swift takes a slash at the philosophers of progress by suggesting that the Yahoos are simply a little further on the road to degeneration than are Europeans.

Gulliver cannot stand the Yahoos; he even suggests a method for exterminating them. Yet remember that, except for a semblance of reason and some clothing, he is very much like a Yahoo — indeed, he *is* a Yahoo. Why does he act this way? He has a fierce — and pathetic — pride, and this pride has given him disgust for his own species. He cannot bear to look at, and accept, the most squalid side of human nature. The alien, uncharitable, coldly rational horses seem far better creatures to try to emulate.

Book IV: Chapter 10

Summary

Gulliver grows more and more used to the Houyhnhnm way of life. He has a small room of his own with two chairs. He makes clothing of animal skins and shoes of Yahoo skins. He often dines on bread and honey. The conversation he listens to with the Houyhnhnms' permission is decent, moderate, polite, and virtuous. All Yahoos — native and European — seem detestable alongside the Houyhnhnms, and as best he can, Gulliver begins imitating the Houyhnhnm walk, speech, and manners.

Gulliver's attempt to become a Houyhnhnm frightens a number of the horses. They reason that Gulliver is a Yahoo — despite his clothes, his bit of reason, and the rest of his niceties — and they fear that he may organize the other Yahoos and revolt. They advise Gulliver's master to either treat his strange pet Yahoo like a Yahoo or command him to swim back to his native land. Gulliver is thunderstruck; he would prefer death. But finally he resolves to sail to an island visible from the Houyhnhnm coast. This decided, he builds a boat with the help of the sorrel servant. He covers the boat with Yahoo hides and caulks it with Yahoo fat. Then it is time for him to depart. His last request is to be allowed to kneel and kiss the hoof of his master.

Analysis

ENGLISH (CC); SEM-II: PAPER- C3T (GULLIVER'S TRAVELS)



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The reader has already seen Gulliver's pride operate to some extent in the earlier books. Gulliver identified himself with the giants in Book II, for example. Now he identifies himself with the horses. Gulliver's identification of himself with the giants produced only ludicrous results. But, in this book, his attempt to identify himself with the horses is more critical. The horses are alien to Gulliver; graphically, in their physical contrasts, they are not at all similar to him. Yet Gulliver thinks of the Yahoos as alien and animal. He makes traps of Yahoo hair. He makes shoes of Yahoo skin. He covers his boat with Yahoo skin and calicos it with Yahoo fat. Separating himself from his naturally depraved cousins, the Yahoos, Gulliver also separates himself from the European Yahoos. He is near to madness — because of pride. Swift warns us of this danger by using the phrase "devoted to destruction" when Gulliver is sent away by the Houyhnhnms. The phrase is theological, describing those with an excess of pride, who reject charity and humility.

When Gulliver says, "When I thought of my family, my friends, my countrymen or [the] human race in general, I considered them as they really were, Yahoos in shape and disposition, only a little more civilized . . .," he is, in essence, rejecting the society (including wife and family) that has produced him. He seeks admittance into "the perfection of nature," the society of the Houyhnhnms. Nevertheless, even though Gulliver recognizes several Houyhnhnm maxims, including, "*That nature is very easily satisfied*" and "*That necessity is the mother of invention*," he does not recognize a third, implied maxim (a maxim understood by Houyhnhnms, but not by Gulliver): "Once a Yahoo, always a Yahoo."

Book: Chapter 11

Summary

Gulliver sails to a nearby island where he is attacked by naked savages and forced to flee in his canoe back into the sea. Having nowhere else to go, he returns to another part of that same island. Coincidentally, a passing Portuguese ship sends a longboat to the island for water, and the sailors discover Gulliver. Gulliver trembles in fear but speaks to the sailors in their own language, with neighing intonations. He is horrified to be a prisoner of the Yahoos. Yet the captain of the ship, Pedro de Mendez, is kind. Gulliver is returned to Lisbon where Pedro de Mendez does all that he can to make Gulliver comfortable. Eventually, Don Pedro convinces Gulliver to return to his home in England.



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Gulliver is happily received by his family (for they think that he is dead), but the reunion is a disaster for Gulliver: He cannot bear the sight or smell of his Yahoo-like wife and children. It is only after some time that he can bear to eat with them. To restore his mind, he spends much time in the stable.

Analysis

In Chapter 10, Swift has shown us Gulliver's fierce pride separating him from the Yahoos. He now shows this pride separating Gulliver from his own kind of (European) Yahoo. The savages who shoot arrows at Gulliver are, morally, somewhere between the depraved Yahoos and Pedro de Mendez. Mendez is a good and charitable man. He is not a rationalist stoic or a Deist filled with theories about the exalted dignity and natural benevolence of human nature. Yet Gulliver has lost his ability to evaluate; he treats Mendez as though the captain were merely a Yahoo. Mendez is a true Christian and shows the Christian virtue of charity. But blind to common sense, Gulliver cannot believe that a Yahoo can show virtue.

Swift has now concluded his illustration on humans' basic nature. Gulliver could not make himself a horse. He is not innocent or rational. He is, by nature, a Yahoo. But, as a European Yahoo, Gulliver should use his dribble of reason to improve himself; instead, he uses his reason to magnify his worst vice: his pride. Gulliver's pride has swelled out of all proportion; he has "reasoned" himself into rejecting his species and his nature: Gulliver is virtually a madman. His attitudes when he arrives in London make him a source of derision, for Gulliver seeks to change his basic nature by thinking; reason becomes the sole guide of his life.

Book IV: Chapter 12

Summary

Gulliver swears that all he has related is truthful, and he wishes that all travellers were forced to take an oath to tell the exact and literal truth. He hopes that the example of the Houyhnhnms will do the public some good; he intends only to make people wiser and better. He apologizes for not claiming his discoveries in the name of England, but he is proud that no one can accuse him of alluding to English politics in his writings. On a personal level, Gulliver is now able to eat with his family. Sometimes, he says, he instructs them in virtue.



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Concluding, he confesses that he could be reconciled to the English Yahoos "if they would be content with those Vices and Follies only which Nature hath entitled them to . . . but when I behold a Lump of Deformity, and Diseases both in Body and Mind, smitten with *Pride*, it immediately breaks all the Measures of my patience."

Analysis

In this final chapter, Swift returns to his normal, ironic joking. Gulliver swears that he tells the truth, slashing at lying authors of other voyage books. He denies that he uses political allusions; of course, however, Swift has attacked the Whigs almost continuously in the first three books. To make the joke even clearer to his literate audience, Swift has Gulliver quote Sinon (Virgil, *Aeneid*, II, 79-80). Sinon declares that he is telling the truth; in context, he is lying wholeheartedly.

In a last view of Gulliver's home life, we watch Gulliver still trying to become a horse. The scene is ridiculous, as if it is Gulliver's final warning against pride. The book ends on a note of deep irony; Gulliver is a prime example of the very pride he condemns.